

# Criminalising Christian behaviour

## *Legally enforced political correctness*



Our obedience to God takes precedence if the law of the land requires us to disobey him.

**T**his edition of *Triple Helix* highlights three possible changes in British Law that could lead to Christians receiving criminal convictions.

The first involves Lord Joffe's *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill* (p4), which requires doctors who are not willing to authorise euthanasia to refer to other doctors who are; a move most Christian doctors would view as complicity in intentional killing.

The second involves the *Racial and Religious Hatred Bill* currently traversing the House of Lords, which some fear could put Christians behind bars for seven years, simply for preaching the Gospel (p15).

The third relates to a proposed revision of the General Medical Council's guidance for doctors, *Good Medical Practice*, which could well be interpreted by the courts as giving doctors a legal obligation to refer abortion requests to 'sympathetic' colleagues. This comes together with calls for doctors to report to the GMC colleagues claiming the protection of the conscientious objection clause in the 1967 *Abortion Act* (p7).

Given the biblical teaching that God institutes human authorities<sup>1</sup> and expects us to obey them,<sup>2</sup> how ought we to respond?

Part of being a good citizen involves exercising our democratic right to ensure that unjust laws are kept off the statute books. The absence of a conscientious objection clause in Lord Joffe's draft euthanasia bill has already been widely criticised and as a result is expected to be rectified when the revised bill appears in late October/early November. The GMC's proposed revision of *Good Medical Practice* is still out for consultation<sup>3</sup> and I would encourage Christian doctors to make submissions by the closing date of 30 November. The *Racial and Religious Hatred Bill* has still to be passed by the House of Lords; and as I write this there is still time for protest and amendment.

But if laws that discriminate against Christians are passed, and obeying such laws involves disobeying God, then Scripture is clear that there is a place for civil disobedience. When the King of Egypt ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all male Hebrew children they refused to do so and God commended and rewarded them.<sup>4</sup> Rahab the harlot similarly refused to co-operate with the king

of Jericho in handing over the innocent Israelite spies and was later praised for her faith.<sup>5</sup> The prospect of death did not stop Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refusing to bow down to the image of the king or Daniel persisting with public prayer.<sup>6</sup> When Peter and John were commanded by the Jewish authorities not to preach the Gospel they replied, 'We must obey God rather than men'.<sup>7</sup> So whilst recognising that we have an obligation to obey the governing authorities God has instituted, nonetheless our obedience to him takes precedence if the law of the land requires us to disobey him. It is striking that these biblical examples include refusals to participate in shedding innocent blood or to refrain from preaching.

Daniel and his three friends were rescued miraculously from their respective predicaments; but there is of course no guarantee that God will turn things in our favour if we are in a situation of having to disobey the law. The long list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 contains those who were delivered from the consequences of civil disobedience but also those who paid the price. And paying the price through facing discipline, job-loss, a fine or imprisonment may be what God requires us to do.

I expect that in coming days we will increasingly be calling on Christian colleagues to support us, and Christian lawyers to advise and protect us in such circumstances. We will no doubt win some battles and lose others – but regardless we have the confidence that we follow in the footsteps of a Saviour who in facing everything the greatest Empire on earth could throw at him, willingly carried the cross and emerged ultimately victorious.

*'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'* (Matthew 5:10-12)

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### references

1. Daniel 4:25; Romans 13:1
2. Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14
3. *Good Medical Practice Review - Consultation*. [www.gmc-uk.org/gmp\\_consultation/index.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/gmp_consultation/index.asp)
4. Exodus 1:15-22
5. Joshua 2:1-14; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25
6. Daniel 4:6-8, 6:1-10
7. Acts 5:29