

Christian doctors under pressure



Economic and political changes, increasing health needs and a growing hostility to Christian faith and values add up to one thing: doctors, and especially Christian doctors, are under pressure.

Like most issues of *Triple Helix*, this one covers a broad range of topics but pressure is the unifying theme. Tim Lyttle, in his Rendle Short lecture speaks of the pressure to perform in an atmosphere of NHS debt and distress. His prescription is an avalanche of compassion. Naomi Pritchard describes the pressures on junior doctors posed by relocation, career choices and the disintegration of the team system. Mark Pickering and Jane Bates address the pressures of medical service in hard places, in prison and the developing world, whilst Elizabeth Procter addresses the pressure of facing depression and Robin Fisher describes the unusual route, through the army, by which God led him to a career in medicine.

Then there are the pressures brought by the increasing secularisation of society. Helen Barratt describes the tyranny of the 'new tolerance' leading to marginalisation of Christianity, and three of our news reviews deal with areas where Christian values are under threat – abortion, euthanasia and faith sharing in the consultation.

Earlier this year Christians in Parliament, an official All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), chaired by Gary Streeter MP, launched an inquiry called 'Clearing the Ground', which was tasked with considering the question: 'Are Christians marginalised in the UK?'

The inquiry was facilitated by the Evangelical Alliance¹ and the report was published in February 2012.² I gave both written and oral evidence³ to the inquiry on behalf of CMF.

The inquiry's main conclusion was that 'Christians in the UK face problems in living out their faith and these problems have been mostly caused and exacerbated by social, cultural and legal changes over the past decade.'

With the rise of secular humanism and, in particular, the 'new atheism', there is in British society generally a loss of historically held belief in: the existence of a transcendent communicating God incarnate in Jesus Christ, biblical authority and biblical ethics; combined with an active agenda to impose an alternative secular world-view through our laws, institutions and media.

This is leading to an erosion of laws that were based on a biblical worldview and to some loss of Christian freedoms.

Conflicts arise when Christians are prevented

from sharing, expressing or manifesting their beliefs, required to perform tasks or conform in ways which go against their beliefs, excluded from consultation or decision-making or advisory roles or prevented from meeting on public or institutional premises for worship and prayer.

The most influential recent laws have been the Equality Acts 2006 and 2010 which outlaw discrimination on grounds of religion and belief and sexual orientation although the Abortion Act 1967 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 also still exert influence.

Guidelines based on these laws by the DH, NHS trusts and professional bodies like the GMC and BMA also have an impact on how legal policy is interpreted and implemented and sometimes mean that public bodies over interpret the laws when they come to apply them in specific situations. All this adds up to an increasing number of complaints against Christian doctors on the front line.

Secularism has impacted art and entertainment, government, science, business, media, the judiciary and education and all of these 'mountains of culture' have an influence on medicine and healthcare. In parallel with this the formation of new oppositional activist groups and the strengthening of existing ones advocating euthanasia, abortion and gay rights mean that we are fighting a number of public policy battles simultaneously on a variety of fronts, and we are seeing more examples of Christians being targeted or made the subject of vexatious complaints.

None of this should surprise us. Jesus promised us that, along with the joy and satisfaction of loving and serving him, we would face tribulation in this world.⁴ We should expect opposition, difficulty and pressure. But he also assured us that he was building his church and that the gates of Hell would not prevail against it.⁵ Our future security is certain. A new heaven and new earth is coming.

So let's take the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit and all God's armour⁶ as we stand together amidst pressures old and new. Let's continue to practise Christ-centred medicine and Christ-centred compassion as we minister together to our colleagues and patients. Our vision is that in every workplace, church, locality, foundation school, medical school, deanery and specialty there will be Christian doctors actively witnessing to Jesus Christ by their words and deeds. Let's work together to make it a reality.

Peter Saunders is CMF Chief Executive

references

1. bit.ly/MV1ISz
2. bit.ly/JKNkOk
3. bit.ly/LTurSK
4. John 16:1-4
5. Matthew 16:18
6. Ephesians 6:10-20