

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

**To fulfil the law: evangelism, legal  
activism, and public Christianity in  
contemporary England**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the London  
School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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## Abstract

This thesis contributes to the ethnographic corpus by charting the contested place of ‘public’ Christianity in contemporary England, which I explore through the rise of conservative Christian political activism and Christian interest litigation in the English courts. Based on twenty-two months of dual-sited fieldwork split between a Christian lobby group and a conservative evangelical church, it is unique in putting the experiences of religious activists at the legal coalface in direct conversation with (one subsection of) the conservative Christian community they appeal to for spiritual and financial support.

I attend to the values, desires and goals of those seeking to live out their faith in a context they paint as hostile to its manifestation. I argue that, despite the apparently innovative legal forms through which these values and desires are articulated, the primary motivations of those involved are far from novel. Rather, they reflect historic and abiding concerns within evangelical Christianity: an abhorrence of sin; Christ’s offer of freedom from it; and the duty to tell others of this possibility.

Equally longstanding, however, are tensions over how best to discharge these missionary obligations. Thus, this work is also an exploration of the evangelistic anxieties experienced by the members of one church community in their efforts to do so, and of their creative navigation of the competing moral commitments around which their lives are structured. I argue that their theoretical value monism – in which the many goals they seek to achieve can be subsumed under the ideal of submission to God’s Word – takes on particular contours as it is challenged by the value pluralism dominant in twenty-first century London. While Christian activists view high-profile legal cases as vehicles through which to (re)evangelise the nation, I show that evangelicals on the ground are deeply ambivalent about the impact of this ‘legal theology’.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADF	Alliance Defending Freedom
BA	British Airways
BLF	Blackstone Legal Fellowship
BPAS	British Pregnancy Advisory Service
CBR	Center for Bio-Ethical Reform
CIT	Core Issues Trust
CLC	Christian Legal Centre
CU	Christian Union
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECU	Evangelical Christian Union
HRA	Human Rights Act
LCF	Lawyers' Christian Fellowship
LFYS	Leading from Your Strengths
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender
PC	Police Constable
RCJ	Royal Courts of Justice
SOCE	Sexual Orientation Change Efforts
TfL	Transport for London
UCCF	Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party



## Introduction: Palm Fronds and Public Squares

“Now look, look, if I can manifest my faith publicly with a *donkey*, seriously, what do the rest of you want to do?”

So asked Anirban Roy, a parishioner of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, to a packed lecture hall at the University of York. It was July 2012, and Mr Roy was one of almost five hundred delegates at a meeting of the Church of England’s General Synod, the governing association of England’s established church. A tricameral organisation made up of the Houses of Bishops, Clergy, and Laity, Synod meets at least twice yearly to debate and amend ecclesiastical legislation. The Canons and Measures it passes have the effect of state law.<sup>1</sup> Mr Roy, a lay member, had stood to speak to a Private Member’s Motion that had been put forward by the Reverend Stephen Trott, a conservative evangelical member of the House of Clergy. Although a temperate summer’s evening – the perfect weather for a stroll around the University’s campus lake – the entry of the St Martin’s donkey into discussion signalled that the debate on Motion GS1859A was about to heat up.

The innocuously titled Motion read:

That this Synod express its conviction that it is the calling of Christians to order and govern our lives in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, and to manifest our faith in public life as well as in private, giving expression to our beliefs in the written and spoken word, and in practical acts of service to the local community and to the nation (Church of England, 2012).

On the face of it, GS1895A was uncontroversial. Many members of Synod welcomed Rev Trott’s intervention, agreeing that the Church should, in the words of one supporter, “share [Jesus] forth in the public square”. Others questioned the necessity of a church body affirming its commitment to living in light of Holy Scripture. One speaker referred to it as “an apple pie Motion”, the sort of thing that no one – *well, no one who was a member of the Church of England’s General Synod* - could sensibly argue against.

And yet, argue they did. Introducing the Motion, the Rev Trott spoke of “very determined attempts to drive the Church out of the public square, which it has occupied since the seventh century.” By his reckoning, Christians were no longer “permitted to manifest our faith or to live and work according to our conscience as Christians, because to do so is increasingly, and mistakenly, classed by Government and by the courts as ‘discriminatory’.” He deemed the Motion necessary on the basis that, if passed, those who faced challenges in their efforts to live “according to [their] conscience as Christians” could

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to Royal and Parliamentary assent (see Morris, 2009: 40-43; Doe, 1996: 12-22).

point to it as evidence of the inherently public-facing nature of their faith. For Anirban Roy, however, Rev Trott's analysis did not ring true. Why, he wondered, did some members of the established Church view themselves as "persecuted minorities"? From where had this defensive attitude come? It was the sense of "victimhood" underpinning the Motion that led him to counter:

I go to St Martin-in-the-Fields. We know all about the public square. We are in Trafalgar Square in the middle of London. I wonder if I might give an example of how, as a Church, we are able to manifest our faith in public life. Now look, on Palm Sunday, the ten o'clock congregation at St Martin's takes to the streets. And we are able to manifest our faith publicly by marching round Trafalgar Square, singing hymns and waving palm fronds. And do you know what, we do that with the Salvation Army brass band and a donkey. Now look, look, if I can manifest my faith publicly with a *donkey*, seriously, what do the rest of you want to do?

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What indeed?

Notwithstanding the comic intent behind Mr Roy's rhetorical flourish, nor the whoops of appreciative laughter with which it was met, the question he raised was a serious one. After all, Rev Trott was not alone in his fears. Many members of Synod were equally concerned by what he framed as a creeping pressure to "hide away any evidence of our faith while at work or in public and only practise it, as they used to say, as consenting adults in private." Too often, it seemed, the Christian faith was approached as a problem to be managed, not a gift to be shared. And yet, the setting in which these fears were voiced – a meeting of the legally established, taxpayer-funded, legislation-passing state Church – seemed to complicate, if not contradict, any suggestion that Christianity had been ousted from public life. More so even than the paschal perambulations of the St Martin's donkey, the spirited debates, interminable disagreements, and uncomfortable stalemates for which this biannual gathering had become known were evidence not only of Christianity's ongoing role in the life of the nation, but of its highly contested nature.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis offers an ethnographic account of the disputed place of 'public' Christianity in twenty-first century England. It focuses on those addressed by Mr Roy's question, that is, those Christians who actively experience and/or discursively construct English public life as hostile to manifestations of their faith. Among English Christians – and particularly, as I outline below, among certain groupings of conservative Protestants –

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<sup>2</sup> Anglican priest Giles Fraser (2013), writing in *The Guardian*, seemed to echo the thoughts of many when he put it thus: 'Dante's vision of hell was colourful, of course. But for the real deal, look no further than the General Synod of the Church of England.'

this view has fairly widespread purchase. A 2011 survey of self-identified Christians carried out by Premier Christian Media Trust, for example, found that while only 12% of respondents had experienced discrimination on account of their Christian faith, 63% had ‘observed [the] marginalisation’ of Christianity in British public life (Christians in Parliament, 2012: 44), while a 2012 report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission refers to the ‘Christian “marginalisation” narrative’ as being ‘exceptionally high profile in contemporary public and media debate’ (Donald et al, 2012: 111-2). Indeed, so prominent had this narrative become by 2011 that Christians in Parliament, an All-Party Parliamentary group of Christian politicians, launched a fact-finding inquiry framed around the question: ‘Are Christians marginalised in the UK?’ The inquiry, published under the title *Clearing the Ground*, was prompted by the fact that ‘recent high profile [legal] cases have demonstrated how Christian believers have increasingly found themselves in conflict with some elements of the UK’s new legal landscape’ (Christians in Parliament, 2012: 9). It identified extensive media coverage of these cases as a key factor in the ‘widespread perception [among Christians] that they are being marginalised’ (ibid: 23).

The cases to which the *Clearing the Ground* report refers are part of a growing body of religious interest litigation in the United Kingdom. Over the past two decades, increasing numbers of Britons, including a growing number of Christians, have taken to the courts to enforce what are framed as ‘religious rights’ under both European and domestic legislation (Horne, 2008). These cases, which typically involve Christians who have been penalised for seeking faith-based exemptions from their conditions of employment - Christian registrars who claim a conscientious objection to registering the marriages or civil partnerships of same-sex couples, for example, or employees who ask for exceptions to be made to uniform policies that forbid the visible wearing of jewellery, including crosses and crucifixes - often captivate the public imagination, highlighting the uneasy truce between law and religion in a country which maintains an established Church but is wary of those looking to ‘do God’ in public (Engelke, 2013: xvii-xix). With religion seen ‘to cross the line between believing and essence’ (Sherwood, 2012: 52), English courts struggle to determine what, exactly, their obligation to protect these ‘religious rights’ might reasonably involve: the recognition of a distinctive communal identity; the broadcasting of belief; exemptions from the state’s quotidian regulation of family life? Judges dabble in theology as they seek to define and police ‘legal religion’ (Sullivan, 2005), attempting to disentangle the holding of commitments that are seen to be, in the words of the aptly titled Lord Justice Laws, ‘necessarily subjective’<sup>3</sup> from their objective impact on everyday life.

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<sup>3</sup> *McFarlane v Relate*, at [23]. It is worth noting that Laws LJ is a Christian. His reflection on the ‘subjective’ nature of religious belief does not preclude that belief being true.

Taking these cases, the debates they spark, and the narrative of which they are a part as its objects of ethnographic inquiry, the thesis explores what Winnifred Fallers Sullivan et al (2011: 16) call the ‘awkward incapacity of secular law’ to engage with religion as it is ‘lived’, that is, as religion that is ‘always religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships’ (Orsi, 2010: xxxviii). Drawing on dual-sited fieldwork carried out at a Christian lobby group and a conservative evangelical church, I attend to the values, desires and goals of those seeking to live out their faith in a context they paint as hostile to its manifestation. I argue that, despite the apparently innovative legal forms through which these values and desires are articulated, the primary motivations of those involved are far from novel. Rather, they reflect historic and abiding concerns within evangelical Christianity: an abhorrence of sin; Christ’s offer of freedom from it; and the duty to tell others of this possibility. In other words, for today’s Christian lobbyists and legal activists, modern law may be instrumentalised in the fulfilment of an ancient Commission: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ (Matthew 28:16). Equally longstanding, however, are tensions over how best to discharge these missionary obligations. Thus, the thesis is also an exploration of the evangelistic anxieties experienced by those seeking to ‘live, pray, hope in a hostile world’,<sup>4</sup> and of their creative navigation of the competing moral commitments around which their lives are structured.

The dual-sited nature of my research reflects the contested nature and multiple avenues of action available to contemporary evangelicals looking to spread the Word, with my activist and church-based interlocutors modelling different, if intersecting, strategies of public engagement. Those chapters that focus primarily on Christian activism are based on the work of Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre (CLC), a dual lobby group and legal aid centre where I carried out six months of fieldwork from July to December 2012. These chapters suggest that the law can function as an evangelistic vehicle, a bureaucratic means of broadcasting the Gospel message to a nation that is (seen to be) careening away from the Christian values that (are thought to have) previously infused civil law, civil society, and civilian life. For those at Christian Concern, law emerges as ‘a space of resistance as well as regulation, possibility as well as prohibition, subversion as well as sanction’ (Coombe, 1998: 25). Thus, what we might call the ‘instrumental publicness’ (Warner, 2002: 30) of a legal case or political campaign can become a site for interior reflection upon the necessity of a personal relationship with a Creator God; a public crusade to change private convictions.

Equally, the thesis is an account of those who already hold these Christian convictions, who sometimes struggle to express them in such a way that they are accessible to those lacking an evangelical hermeneutic. This struggle is the primary ethnographic

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<sup>4</sup> This was the theme of a convention I attended during fieldwork, as discussed in Chapter One.

concern of those chapters focusing on the members of Christ Church, a conservative evangelical church community located in Greater London, where I carried out sixteen months of fieldwork between January 2013 and April 2014. For those at Christ Church, the evangelical experience is equally one of joy and contentment – the result of one’s sure and certain knowledge of salvation – and anxiety and guilt – the result of a conviction that countless others, including those to whom one may be intimately connected through kinship or friendship, do not share one’s heavenly eternal destiny. The desire to help others on their journey to faith, combined with the belief that evangelism may be viewed as an unwelcome intrusion into the lives of non-Christians, colours their understanding of the legal cases and campaigns run by Christian activists. I argue that these evangelicals are ambivalent about the ‘theologico-lawfare’ undertaken by organisations like the CLC (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 203), caught, as they are, between a desire to support their fellow believers in their efforts to live faithful Christian lives and a suspicion that the legalisation of their faith might have a negative impact on the spread of the Gospel.

### **On legal theology: Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre**

While Lord Justice Laws, quoted above, presumes a distinction between the ‘necessarily subjective’ faith of a religious claimant and the objective reality of statutory law, anthropology’s theoretical and ethnographic record suggests that law and religion – in so far as one can define or distinguish either – are often interlinked. For Émile Durkheim (2008 [1912]: 62), for example, law and morality were ‘born from religion, have long been confused with it, and remain imbued with its spirit’. In this understanding, both legal and religious norms are reflective of the values of the moral community, and thus form the basis of social solidarity and stability.<sup>5</sup> Given the discipline’s early interest in this presumed stability (and the law’s role in ensuring it), it is, perhaps, unsurprising that many of the classic texts in the anthropology of law ascribe legal weight to the religious, the spiritual, and the magical. Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1970 [1926]: 82; 86) *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, for example, speaks of black magic as being both ‘an instrument of crime’ and a ‘genuine legal force’, while Karl Llewellyn and Edward Hoebel’s *The Cheyenne Way* (1978), which stresses the religious elements of dispute resolution, features a chapter titled ‘Homicide and the Supernatural’. And what is true of the Trobriand Islanders and the Cheyenne is equally true of the modern nation state. As John Comaroff (2009: 195) puts it, ‘modern secular law, born of the separation of *lex naturae* from *lex dei*, has always had the

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<sup>5</sup> See James Laidlaw’s (2002; 2014) recent work for a critique of Durkheim’s emphasis on the relationship between morality and social stability, the legacy of which, he claims, has been the collapse of the moral into the social (and thus the inhibition of the development of an anthropology of ethics).

quality of a fetish', appearing as 'an abstraction made real, ascribed a life force of its own, and attributed the mythic, numinous capacity to configure relations and transactions in its own image.' Indeed, even the promotion of an ostensibly neutral, 'secular' law as a "one size fits all" approach to managing diversity in multicultural states can be seen to draw its power from the universalism of salvific religion: "In Christ there is," in the words of the Apostle Paul, "neither Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28)' (Sullivan et al, 2011: 3).

But while it is clear that religion and law have always been 'mutually involved' (ibid: 2), it is also true that the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries have seen an increase in religious groups and individuals 'resorting to lawfare' to 'protect', 'extend', or 'challenge' their place in what are otherwise described as 'secular' societies (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 198). With political claims increasingly formed in terms of identity, religious communities appear ever more willing – or ever more obliged - to deploy 'legal theology' in their search for state recognition of their distinctive lifeways (or what might be called, in liberal parlance, the 'tolerance' of their difference). Others go beyond this quest for mere recognition. For some, recourse to the law is a means of transforming the world: 'Legality is the secular instrument by which civil society is to be remade in the image of the sacred' (ibid: 202). In other words, if the Durkheimian threads connecting legality and morality have frayed or come undone, perhaps the strategic use of the law could repair the social fabric.

This is the position of Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre (CLC), sister organisations which form the first of my two field sites. Together, they are a paradigmatic example of what has become known as 'public religion', evidence of the ways in which religious conviction can be critical in 'the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public... between legality and morality, between individual and society' (Casanova, 1994: 6). This public religion – and its accompanying 'religious publicity' (Engelke, 2013) - challenges 'long-settled assumptions' about the properly functioning liberal order, prompting an 'existential crisis' that manifests in the anxiety and disdain with which Christian Concern's activism is often met (Sullivan et al, 2011: 1).

Christian Concern and the CLC were founded in 2008 by Andrea Minichiello Williams (hereafter, simply Andrea), a qualified barrister and former Director of Public Policy for the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (LCF),<sup>6</sup> and Pastor Ade Omooba, an evangelical minister with over twenty years of experience in social activism, particularly in the areas of racial justice and youth work.<sup>7</sup> Based on a belief that Britain is in the process of

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<sup>6</sup> The LCF was founded in 1852 to support Christian lawyers in their efforts to live Christlike lives.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea and Pastor Ade had first joined forces in their opposition to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, which they believed could have been used to prevent Christians from criticising other religions. Andrea was agitating against the then Bill from within the LCF, while Pastor Ade was working to mobilise black-majority churches in opposition to it.

abandoning its traditional Christian heritage, Christian Concern and the CLC exist, in the words of their website, ‘to be a strong Christian voice in the public sphere, arguing passionately for the truth of the Gospel and defending the historic freedoms that we have enjoyed in this nation for so long’ (Christian Concern, n.d.). They are run from shared offices in Wimpole Street, in Central London’s fashionable Marylebone.<sup>8</sup> Together, they have a combined total of approximately twenty full and part-time staff (plus a number of temporary interns and volunteers), with perhaps seven to ten staff members present in the office on any given day. In terms of division of labour, the CLC is the arm of the organisation that litigates the Christian interest cases, while Christian Concern is primarily concerned with lobbying, political campaigning, and church outreach events. In practice, however, and in terms of both staff and policy interests, there is a great deal of overlap between the two. As such, the thesis tends to refer to them somewhat interchangeably. Both campaign on a variety of policy areas deemed of interest to Christians (by which they usually mean theologically conservative Protestants). This includes sexual ethics, ‘life’ issues (including abortion, embryology, and assisted suicide), religious freedom, and what is referred to as ‘the challenge of Islam’. They have a number of high-profile advocates and supporters, including Baroness Caroline Cox of the House of Lords; Nadine Dorries and Fiona Bruce, both elected Members of Parliament; and Michael Nazir-Ali, former Bishop of Rochester.

It was at Wimpole Street that I spent the majority of my six months of fieldwork at Christian Concern, where participant observation took the shape of an internship carried out from July to December 2012. During this time, I undertook light legal research; compiled initial draft responses to government consultations on issues ranging from internet pornography to the use of mitochondrial replacement therapy; drafted news pieces for the Christian Concern website (a task at which I was usually found wanting: none of my pieces were posted without heavy editing); put together countless information packs to be distributed at Christian Concern speaking engagements; and participated in demonstrations, prayer rallies, and Christian conferences. It was as a guest of Andrea that I was able to attend the July 2012 meeting of the General Synod, during which Motion GS1895A was so hotly debated.<sup>9</sup> I got to know my colleagues over the innumerable cups of tea and coffee that punctuate the workday in any London office. Outside of business hours, I accompanied them to church, socialised over shared meals, and attended weddings and birthday parties. I was also present at a number of court hearings with the CLC team. This took me from the

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<sup>8</sup> That they can afford this address is due to their relationship with their landlords, a firm of Christian solicitors from whom they rent at below market rate.

<sup>9</sup> Although not a member of an Anglican church, Andrea is an elected member of the Church’s House of Laity.

sparkling glass facade of Strasbourg's European Court of Human Rights, to the Gothic grandeur of London's Royal Courts of Justice, to the squat, humble concrete of Brighton Magistrates' Court. While my internship, and thus the most intensive period of fieldwork among my activist interlocutors, ended in December 2012, I continued to return to the office over the following months to conduct interviews, meet CLC clients, and catch up with friends.

Andrea – an impeccably well-groomed brunette - is the Chief Executive Officer, public face, and primary directive force behind both Christian Concern and the CLC. Both were born from her Public Policy work at the LCF, from which she had been running Christian interest cases from as early as 2004. When her colleagues expressed concern that the cases were politically polarising, thereby undermining the LCF's primary function as a Fellowship (not to mention risking its charitable status), Andrea founded the CLC as an independent body. It has since become the UK's premier Christian liberties legal fund.<sup>10</sup> It provides advice and representation to a wide variety of Christian claimants, including those who have been asked to remove Christian symbols, those who have been disciplined for praying or witnessing at work, and those who have expressed conscientious objections to working with homosexual customers or clients. Many of their cases are argued under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA), which is the domestic equivalent of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and which protects the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Unlike not-for-profit legal centres that rely on government funding and are feeling the neoliberal squeeze (see James & Killick, 2010), the CLC tends to be principled rather than pragmatic in its willingness to litigate, prioritising the pursuit of justice over likely outcome. It is perhaps this result-blind ethos that explains the Centre's track-record. Despite recent successes in employment tribunals, it has historically lost most of its cases (although it still, in the opinion of many staff members, "wins the argument").

The staff and clients of the CLC are ethnically diverse and represent a range of church backgrounds. Most, however, attend either conservative evangelical or Pentecostal churches. (Andrea, who is the daughter of an Italian father and an English mother, attends an independent conservative evangelical church in Surrey, where she lives with her husband and four children). Regardless of church affiliation, all of the staff members and clients with whom I had contact identify, so far as I am aware, as Bible-believing Protestants. While they support the Catholic Church's official opposition to, for example, abortion, none of their high-profile cases have involved Catholic or Orthodox claimants,<sup>11</sup> and they do not

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<sup>10</sup> The Christian Institute, a campaign group with a similar set of concerns and lobbying interests, has also funded a number of high-profile cases. However, neither its caseload nor its ability to capture the media's attention can match that of the CLC.

<sup>11</sup> For an example of a Christian interest case featuring Catholic claimants, see the 'Scottish midwives' case, *Greater Glasgow Health Board v Doogan*.



recognise the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as a Christian church. In other words, ‘by defining themselves simply as Christians, [the staff] reference a very specific theological belief system’, one which privileges Reformed notions of personal salvation and the centrality of the Bible (Erzen, 2006: 56). ‘Christian’, then, can be an exclusionary term (see Cannell, 2005; 2006, on the boundaries ascribed ‘Christianity’ in academia; Day, 2011, on debates over ‘nominalism’ in the contemporary United Kingdom; and Gordon, 2002, for an historic example focusing on nineteenth-century American law’s exclusion of Mormonism from normative Christianity). Local ecologies of conflict exist between churches that endorse Christian Concern’s conservative worldview and those that do not. This conflict cuts both ways: just as those opposed to the trappings of ‘Christendom’ reject the public activism of their conservative peers (see Bartley, 2006), the CLC often critiques the liberal wing of the Anglican Church.

Due to the political nature of the work they undertake, neither Christian Concern nor the CLC is eligible for charitable status under UK law. Nor, however, do they operate as ‘for profit’ businesses, and both rely on donations to fund their work. Their legal services are offered free of charge to their clients, and the two bodies (and their charitable arm, Faith, Truth & Hope Ltd) have an annual turnover of over one million pounds. While they do occasionally receive exceptionally large one-off gifts – in an interview with the think-tank Theos, Andrea acknowledged that they had ‘very [occasionally]’ received cheques of up to £50,000 (Walton et al, 2013: 56) – the majority of their funding comes in the form of the small donations I saw trickling through the letterbox during my fieldwork: a standing order for £5 a month; a one-off gift of £20.

Christian Concern also receives some funding from the United States, including from para-church organisations. Among these is Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a multi-million dollar organisation based in Scottsdale, Arizona, which has pioneered the use of strategic Christian interest litigation in its efforts to counter ‘threats’ to religious liberty: ‘As secular forces chip away at our nation’s Judeo-Christian roots, religious freedom is increasingly threatened’ (Alliance Defending Freedom, n.d.). Paul Diamond, the CLC’s Standing Counsel, is an ADF Allied Attorney (as, indeed, is Andrea). Speakers from ADF are always present at the Wilberforce Academy, Christian Concern’s annual youth leadership conference, which is loosely based on ADF’s own Blackstone Legal Fellowship (BLF).<sup>12</sup> This relationship has led to accusations that they are part of an emergent US-style ‘Religious Right’ (see the report by Walton et al, 2013).

While Christian Concern is one of the most high-profile Christian organisations operating in the UK, it is difficult to determine its level of support among the country’s

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<sup>12</sup> The BLF is a summer internship programme for aspiring Christian lawyers.

Christian community. One measure used at the office during my time there was the number of people on its e-mailing list, which was then estimated at approximately 35,000 (their website now states a figure of 43,000). Those on this list receive Christian Concern's weekly news digest, 'Christian Weekly News', as well as occasional updates and prayer requests relating to ongoing cases and campaigns.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the exact figures, what is certain is that Christian Concern draws support from across the social, racial, and geographical spectrum. They receive spiritual and financial assistance from all four countries in the United Kingdom; from the leafy Home Counties and the inner city; from conservative Anglicans, Baptists, charismatics, independent evangelicals, and Pentecostals; from Asian-, black-, and white-majority churches; from the students and young professionals who attend their annual youth conference to the retirees who tend to dominate their demonstrations. What unites this diverse group of Christians is a deep commitment to (a conservative reading of) the Bible, a general feeling that they are living in an environment increasingly hostile to its expression, and a corresponding desire to challenge this hostility. It was from among this constituency that I sought to find a second set of interlocutors, in the form of a conservative church congregation.

### **A lighthouse in London**

While preparing to undertake this project, I had become interested in the ways in which everyday acts infused with Christian meaning, such as a nurse's unwillingness to remove a crucifix she had long worn on the wards, could take on the sort of media profile and legal significance common to the Christian interest cases. For this reason, I was keen to complement my research at the legal coalface with fieldwork at a conservative church, where I could observe and discuss these everyday acts with those for whom they remained, well, everyday. This seemed to speak to a gap in the ethnographic literature, which, despite containing numerous accounts of doctrinally varied English Christianities (see, for example, Jenkins, 1999, on the life of an English country parish; Daswani, 2010, on continuity and transformation among Ghanaian Pentecostal migrants in London; Strhan, 2012, on the experience of moral fragmentation among middle-class conservative evangelicals) and accounts of Christian engagement with the democratic process, the law, and identity politics (see Engelke, 2013, on 'Bible advocacy' in Parliament; Harding, 2001, on the rhetoric of the Moral Majority; Greenhouse, 1989, on conflict avoidance among American Baptists; Crapanzano, 2000, on the rise of literalism in American law and religion; Erzen, 2006, on the Christian 'ex-gay' movement) offered little insight into the relationship between

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<sup>13</sup> Presence on a mailing list is not necessarily an indication of support.

Christian activists and the conservative churches that might be thought of as their natural allies.

Given Christian Concern's diverse supporter base, I did not limit my search to any particular denomination. My only criteria were that the church members identified as conservative, evangelical, Bible-believing Protestants. Finding a willing church, however, proved more difficult than I had anticipated. Of the four I approached, three were wary of hosting a researcher.<sup>14</sup> (The fourth, by contrast, had already been the subject of an ethnographic study). By December 2012, after almost six months at Christian Concern, I was no closer to finding a church base. Yet the more time I spent with lobbyists and lawyers, the more convinced I became that the 'concrete fact of theo-legality' (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 210) – that is, the strategic use of the law to remake the world in a religious register – would be best contextualised by reference to the experiences of Christians who were not personally invested in legal activism, with the reflections of evangelicals 'on the ground' reinserting quotidian Christianity into what might otherwise become an account of political rhetoric and legal discourse. Dual-sited fieldwork also appealed for theoretical reasons. Case studies have long been viewed as an essential methodology in legal anthropology, underscoring the idea that one will learn more about dispute resolution from its practice than its theory (for a classic explanation of the case method, see Gluckman, 1967). Yet cases also risk '[shifting] attention away from routine compliance with law', highlighting 'conflict' over 'concord' (Conley & O'Barr, 1993: 49). In other words, although we may appreciate the honesty behind Malinowski's (1970 [1926]: 71) admission that it 'lies in the nature of scientific interest, which is but refined curiosity, that it turns more readily to the extraordinary and sensational than to the normal and matter-of-course', it seemed equally important to attend to the concerns of those evangelicals whose confrontation with these sensational forms came not from personal experience, but from the morning papers or the evening news.

It is for this reason that I am grateful to Lucy, a Christian solicitor with close social ties to the staff of the Christian Legal Centre (albeit not a staff member herself). Lucy's interest in my project ultimately led me to her home church, which I refer to throughout the thesis as Christ Church. I first visited Christ Church on a Sunday evening in December 2012, after which Lucy and I had dinner at a nearby Indian restaurant. Over plates of mango and coconut chicken, we discussed the place of Christianity in the United Kingdom. Lucy appreciated the opportunity to put into words concerns she'd long held, but had never systematically articulated. She later introduced me to her church friends, with whom I began to meet before Sunday services at a local cafe. I was soon doing fieldwork by default.

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<sup>14</sup> That this unwillingness was ethnographically interesting in and of itself – proof of a slightly embattled feeling among certain sections of the conservative Christian community – was of little comfort.

Eventually, and having received permission from one of the Christ Church staff team – an affable trainee minister named James, who cheerily responded to my request by telling me to “fill [my] boots” – this de facto field site became de jure.

Founded in the late nineteenth-century, Christ Church is a large, conservative evangelical, Bible-believing Anglican church in Greater London.<sup>15</sup> It is what is sometimes called a ‘lighthouse church’; its reputation for sound, unswervingly conservative teaching means smaller evangelical churches look to it to lead the way on issues of doctrinal controversy. The vast majority of its approximately five hundred members are white British (although, as one might expect from cosmopolitan London, it has sizeable minorities from as far afield as Australia, Japan, South Africa, and the United States). It has a wealthy, well-heeled, and overwhelmingly middle-class congregation. Many church members work in medicine, law, finance, teaching, and Christian ministry. Most are educated to degree level, and it is assumed that a child graduating from the church youth group at age eighteen will attend university (and a prestigious one at that). The church’s noticeably middle-class culture was something its congregants often referenced, both easily - Lucy, for example, joked that although she was “not posh enough” to have grown up writing thank you cards, she had now adjusted to Christ Church’s “thank you card culture” – and uneasily, with many members worrying that conservative evangelicalism, despite its aspirations to the universal, was really a middle-class sport.

During my sixteen months at Christ Church, I attended morning and evening services every Sunday; joined a women’s Bible study group; attended the monthly prayer meeting; took an evangelistic course; volunteered on the coffee rota (every service is followed by tea and coffee, which is made by volunteers in the church kitchen and served in the church lounge); and undertook one-on-one Bible studies with two Christian women (a nurse in her fifties, and a lawyer in her twenties). I ate at the communal meal that follows the evening service, sometimes helping the volunteer cooks in the kitchen (where my culinary ineptitude limited my role to that of sous chef). I also attended one-off events: April’s Annual General Meeting; the autumn weekend away; missionary suppers; December’s evangelistic carol services. Indeed, it was only after spending a Saturday morning cleaning the church toilets as part of its annual Spring Clean that I began to think of myself as part of the community. Because many members live within easy reach of the church by foot, car or bus, I moved within walking distance in April 2013. This greatly facilitated my church-based social life, enabling me more easily to attend Sunday lunches, to host and be hosted for dinner, and to meet friends for Saturday morning coffees and post-work drinks. Following the lead of my Christian friends, I undertook some evangelical decorating, writing

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout the thesis, I use the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible, which is Christ Church’s preferred translation, for Bible citations.

out my favourite Bible passages and adorning my walls, wardrobes, and cupboard doors with the Word.

I had initially assumed that my church-based data would be somewhat secondary, acting as a supplement to that gathered at Christian Concern. However, I soon found myself captivated by my evangelical friends' efforts not only to live faithful Christian lives, but to explain the values that motivated these efforts to those who would otherwise reduce their faith in God to an emotional crutch or intellectual failing (see Taylor, 2007: 589; Cannell, 2014). The CLC's cases and campaigns proved a useful lens through which to investigate these struggles, as my church friends' longing to see the nation evangelised means they are highly sensitive to debates over how their faith 'can and should' go public (Engelke, 2013: xix). The thesis' account of their somewhat ambivalent responses to Christian legal activism and its resultant publicity – the result of a tension between agreeing with the theological absolutes attested to by Andrea and her team, and a fear that such inflexibility might be off-putting to the non-Christians they hope to evangelise – is, I believe, unique in putting the work of Christian activists in direct conversation with the experiences of (one subsection of) the wider Christian community these activists hope to represent.

This conversation was facilitated by a surprising number of informal connections between my two field sites. In addition to Lucy, I learned that Andrew, Christian Concern's campaigns manager, was good friends with Luke, the Christ Church minister. During my fieldwork, both attended the second Global Anglican Futures Conference (a conference of conservative Anglican bishops, ministers, and Christian activists, founded to uphold conservative doctrine in the face of a perceived liberalism in the wider Anglican Communion), which was held in Nairobi in autumn 2013. Theologically, Christ Church is doctrinally identical to the conservative evangelical church where Andrea had worshipped in her twenties. Andrea described her time at this church - another Anglican lighthouse, which I will refer to as St George's - as being "very formative". It was here that she "really got real, strong, Biblical foundations like never before". Carol, the nurse with whom I undertook regular Bible studies, had also been at St George's during this time. She remembered Andrea well, as did Hannah, a Christ Church member who served with the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (the organisation from which Andrea had initially run the Christian interest cases). Perhaps the most interesting link was provided by Kate and Jim, a Christ Church couple who had been involved in one of the CLC's earliest cases, and whose experience is recounted in Chapter Three. These connections cemented my interest in my church friends' highly nuanced, ambivalent, and shifting evaluations of Christian Concern's brand of public religion, a use of legal theology that remained somewhat foreign – and, more specifically, somewhat *American* - to their middle-class, English sensibilities.

## **Evangelical activism at home and abroad**

Christian Concern is often spoken of in terms of its perceived importation of an ‘American’ approach to public engagement.<sup>16</sup> The Theos report cited above, for example, deems the CLC’s ‘swift recourse to legal action... a carbon copy of the way [American] organisations like the ADF operate’ (Walton et al, 2013: 57; for a media account alleging similar, see Doward & Wheeler, 2011). However, it is important to recall that English evangelicals have a long history of involvement in social reform. Indeed, historian David Bebbington (1989: 3) designates ‘activism’, that is, ‘the expression of the gospel in effort’, as one of four defining traits of post-eighteenth-century evangelicalism (the others being conversionism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism). One of my central arguments is that not only do today’s Christian activists view themselves as the legitimate descendants of this activist tradition – Andrea once gifted me a copy of *Shaftesbury: The Great Reformer* (Turnbull, 2010), a biography of the nineteenth-century evangelical politician, in hopes of helping me understand the motivation behind Christian Concern’s work - but that their campaigning is a manifestation of English evangelicalism’s long-running interest in the state’s regulation of sin. For my activist interlocutors, legislation that is “permissive” of sinful behaviour is, quite simply, “bad law.” To Andrea’s mind, the CLC’s cases are “the culmination” of these bad laws, laws that undermine Britain’s historic Christian foundation and the freedoms that flow from it. It is for this reason that, as with the political lobbying of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelicals, including the anti-slavery, anti-child labour, and anti-ritualism campaigns of William Wilberforce and Lord Shaftesbury (Bebbington, 1989: 99), Christian Concern’s most high-profile public policy initiatives are framed in terms of the sins to which they are opposed: anti-abortion; anti-same-sex marriage; anti-embryonic stem-cell research.

English evangelical activism, then, is well established. Yet there *is* an element of American inspiration in the way these longstanding reformist goals are now pursued. The CLC’s willingness to argue freedom of religion test cases, for example, mirrors the strategic litigation of their US counterparts. Given the very different ideologies of ‘freedom of religion’ in the UK and US (see Sullivan, 2006), this is, perhaps, somewhat surprising. In the United Kingdom, the history of religious liberty is deeply bound up in the establishment of the Church of England. Over the past two centuries, the English legal system’s approach to religion has been one of ‘discrimination’ (in that the established church was recognised at the expense of other Christian denominations), then of ‘non-discrimination’ (in which multiple religions were ‘tolerated’), and finally of ‘anti-discrimination’, in that the

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<sup>16</sup> ‘American’, in this sense, connotes the polarised rhetoric and perceived litigiousness of the ‘Religious Right’. The association of ‘American’ with unwelcome forms of Christianity is not limited to the UK. The Swedish press, for example, has been highly critical of ‘the political conservatism, unabashed prosperity theology and outright Americanism’ of Swedish branches of the charismatic Word of Life church (Coleman, 2011: 438).

incorporation of the ECHR into domestic law has resulted in the creation of a positive obligation on the part of the state to ensure freedom of religion (Sandberg, 2011: 157-158; see also Hill et al, 2011; Morris, 2009: 17-22). This move from negative liberty to positive right, set within the context of an established, law-making Christian church, is fundamentally different from the US context, in which religion is constructed as ‘antinomian’, that which is ‘not law’ (Sullivan, 2009: 1182). American religion is ‘radically disestablished’ (ibid: 1185).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is the ostensibly private nature of American Christianity that is often thought to explain its public force, whereas England’s established church is thought to temper its political aspirations (Casanova, 1994: 55-6). Thus, while it is true that the category of ‘religion’ - much critiqued by scholars thereof (Asad, 1993; Smith, 1998; Amesbury, 2014) – has increasingly broad ‘political and legal implications’, even in polities lacking the United States’ myth of religio-legal exceptionalism (Sullivan, 1998: 444), it is not immediately obvious why Christian activists in England would adopt the legal strategy of their American peers.

Part of the explanation for this may lie in Andrea’s personal testimony, which blends her conversion narrative with English legal history and American-inspired public engagement.<sup>18</sup> In a rhetorical move that echoes her own genealogy of Christian activism as much as it does Britain’s changing attitudes to sexuality and family life, Andrea’s ‘State of the Nation’ address – her default presentation for church groups interested in the work of Christian Concern, which lays out the moral depravity of twenty-first century Britain before asking the audience to stand up against it – begins by painting the passage of the Abortion Act 1967 as the crossing of a national moral boundary.<sup>19</sup> Much like the United States Supreme Court’s decision in the case of *Roe v Wade* (1973), which, by ruling state abortion bans unconstitutional, crystallised the issues around which individuals and churches in the United States could unite into a Christian pro-life movement, the Abortion Act is held up as a symbol of ‘the eclipse of the Judeo-Christian consensus as the moral and legal basis of Western society’ (Harding, 2001: 192).

The Christian Right’s coalescence around *Roe v Wade* meant that, by the 1980s, most conservative Protestants in the United States ‘were convinced that a strict pro-life position was both God’s word and the traditional Christian position’ (ibid: 190).<sup>20</sup> By

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<sup>17</sup> Although, as Sullivan (1998; 2005; 2009) shows, the expansive ‘protections’ offered religion in the United States are themselves of relatively recent origin.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea’s testimony, as recounted here, comes from a mix of emic sources, including a taped interview and the numerous presentations that I attended throughout my fieldwork.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Concern posits the 1960s as the decade in which British Christianity was significantly undermined. Interestingly, this is also the position of historian Callum Brown (2009: 179), who attributes the ‘death of Christian Britain’ to the social changes of the sexual revolution, particularly the ‘discursive death of pious femininity’.

<sup>20</sup> This is a fairly recent association. By contrast to the preacher-led movements of the late twentieth-century, mid-nineteenth-century campaigns to criminalise abortion were organised by the newly

contrast to their American counterparts, however, conservative Protestants in Britain have never conflated pro-life convictions with ‘the very heart of what it [means] to be a born again Christian’ (ibid: 194). Media interest in the religious regulation of fertility has traditionally focused on those Christians who take their cues from the Vatican rather than Lambeth Palace (Cannell, 1990: 681). Yet the conflation of Christianity and what Susan Harding calls ‘the Pro-Life Gospel’ forms an important part of Andrea’s activist testimony. As Thomas Blom Hansen (2009: 14) puts it, political convictions ‘do not come easily,’ but ‘have to be lodged in a biography and a self-narrative in which conviction arrives as the final element’ or ‘turning point’. For Andrea, this ‘turning point’ came when she and her husband moved to Atlanta, Georgia in the mid-1990s. She describes herself as having come to America with all of the “‘prejudices,’ in inverted commas, of a Brit going to the States”. But she quickly warmed to Atlanta’s “blue skies and sunshine and ‘have a nice day,’ big smiles, painted nails, and big hair.” Although not every Georgian had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the entire state seemed to have been “infused” with Christian language: “‘You be blessed now, have a blessed day,’ you know, there was a sense in which the language was infused with Christian values and Truths. And it felt good for the community.”

It was at an Atlanta megachurch that Andrea first met Karen Black, a pro-life campaigner, who was then looking for volunteers to offer ‘sidewalk counselling’ outside local abortion clinics.<sup>21</sup> Although Andrea had always felt that abortion was wrong, the thought of praying outside a clinic made her uncomfortable. Still, she decided to sign up and find out more: “I found myself listening... and before I knew it I found myself down on a sidewalk in Atlanta. And actually, that day, I saw women turn away from the clinic.” It was this experience that prompted her to reconsider her bias against Christianised direct action: “[women] were saved and their babies were saved.”

Andrea speaks of her time in America as a time of preparation for her work with Christian Concern. Not only had she seen the physical fruits of Christian activism, but the common grace evident in Georgia’s Biblically-infused language made the paucity of this grace in England all the more apparent. The contrast between the blue sky thinking of Atlanta and the grey realities of the church in London proved difficult to adjust to:

Those two years had had the most profound effect on me. In America, I mean, the church, it was big, you know, there was no such thing as ‘we can’t do [that]’. I got back and it felt a bit flat [*laughs*]. The sky was grey again and everything felt a bit

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minted American Medical Association, which, by linking the availability of abortion to population decline and degeneracy, sought to reduce competition from midwives, local healers, and abortionists (Ginsburg, 1989: 24-27).

<sup>21</sup> Sidewalk counselling is a form of non-violent activism in which volunteers attempt to persuade those entering abortion clinics to rethink their decision to terminate a pregnancy.



flat, and I thought ‘where’s the energy? What are we going to do?’ And I was probably quite unbearable, but I found it quite hard to recover.

This lack of “energy” on the part of the English church might be better understood as an aversion to contentious politics. Overcoming this aversion is particularly difficult in England, where notions of reserve and restraint continue to be positively associated - albeit in a self-conscious, ironic way - with middle-class manners (Jones, 2003: 466; Engelke, 2013: 115). Andrea is, of course, cognisant of this barrier. Her testimony begins by positioning her former self on the side of the divide that finds sidewalk counselling to be in poor taste. Indeed, she describes her initial decision to volunteer with Karen Black as having been “unBritish”, in that it required her to shed her reserve and insert herself into a stranger’s life. But the Rubicon from discomfort to urgency was crossed when she saw those strangers’ lives “saved”. By recounting the successes she experienced on that Atlanta sidewalk, Andrea invites her listeners to make this conceptual leap with her, raising up godly men and women to fight against sin-normalising laws. For those who lack this politically convicting ‘turning point’, however, ambivalence remains.

#### **‘Biblical values’**

In addition to viewing Christian Concern’s brand of theo-legality as a novel expression of a longstanding reformist tradition, this thesis is an exploration of the tensions and contestations with which my interlocutors, and particularly those at Christ Church, struggle in their efforts to be effective witnesses for Christ. These struggles, I suggest, result from the conflicting values to which contemporary evangelicals must attend in the modern metropolis. Writing of recent philosophical work on ‘values’, that is, ‘those things defined as good within a society or social group’, Joel Robbins (2013: 100) suggests that this area is dominated by the distinction between monism and pluralism. While monist philosophers argue that ‘the values of a society work smoothly with one another’, such that the pursuit of one ought not conflict with the pursuit of another, pluralists assert, in the oft-quoted words of Isaiah Berlin, that ‘if the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – and of tragedy – can never be wholly eliminated from human life’ (quoted *ibid*). Robbins posits that ‘actually existing societies’ may contain ‘both monist and pluralist tendencies’, and encourages anthropologists to treat this relationship as an empirical, ethnographic question: ‘What is the range of variation we can expect to find between more pluralist and more monist social worlds?’ (*ibid*: 99; 105).

There is a sense in which those at both Christian Concern and Christ Church can be framed as value monists. From an emic, theological perspective, my interlocutors understand

the many values they recognise as expressions of the ultimate value of submission to God's Word, which they see as a blueprint for human life (and, through its explication of the plan of salvation, human death). As is implicit throughout my ethnography (and as I explore directly in Chapter Seven), their ultimate goal is to submit to what are spoken of as "God's standards", as revealed in the Bible. Submission to God's Word encompasses a range of actions and obligations, including evangelising non-Christians, reflecting the grace of God in one's interactions with others, deepening one's relationship with Christ, and publicly professing one's Biblical beliefs. In theological theory, none of these actions are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the successful attainment of one ought to reinforce the attainment of another. Submitting to Matthew 28:19 by "professing Christ", for instance, is both a form of evangelism and a means of developing one's relationship with Him.<sup>22</sup> In practice, however, my friends' efforts to achieve these goals simultaneously could result in the appearance of fissures between them. How, for example, could a time-strapped Christian undertake the requisite prayer, reflection, and in-depth Bible study necessary to deepen their relationship with God, while still finding time to evangelise non-Christians in a meaningful, relational way? How could a conscience-stricken Christian act as a positive witness for Christ, while simultaneously standing firm on a "countercultural" moral issue that seemed to render Him repugnant to outsiders? How could one maintain the norms of polite, middle-class sociality – norms deeply saturated in value-loaded notions of "British reserve" – while publicly declaring a message that is, by definition, thought to give offence?<sup>23</sup> Following Michael Lambek (2008: 137), I argue that the sheer multiplicity of goals in play works to 'relativize ostensibly absolute values,' such that 'any adherence to or advocating of an absolute value like truth or justice must be qualified in and through lived practice'. As, perhaps, with all religious experience, which is inevitably shaped by the competing 'personal, familial, communal, political, [and] cosmic' considerations that order human life (Orsi, 2010: lxxv), lived evangelicalism requires the constant navigation of varying moral commitments as Christians strive to be in, but not of, this fallen world.

As such, this work is a contribution to the anthropological study of 'the articulation, dynamics and dialectics of relative and absolute value – the forces that pry them apart, as well as pull them together or transform one into the other, in any given socio-historical context and practical circumstance' (Lambek, 2008: 138), what Robbins (2013: 99), building on the work of Louis Dumont (1980; 1996), calls the 'configurations' of monist and pluralist tendencies (cf. Graeber, 2001; 2013). I understand my interlocutors' efforts to balance competing value commitments to be an expression of what has been framed as 'ordinary ethics', in which 'ethical experience [is understood as] an irreducible component of the

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 28:19 lays out the Great Commission: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...'

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 5:11 suggests that there is an 'offence in the cross'.

politics and pragmatics of ordinary life' (Keane, 2010: 65; see contributions to Lambek, 2010). While much anthropological analysis is, quite rightly, concerned to shed light on the ways in which 'structure, power and interest' determine the life courses of our interlocutors, it is also true that human beings are everywhere interested in what they deem to be 'right or good', with their own and others' evaluations of what constitutes (and whether or not they are living) a 'good life' (Lambek, 2010: 1-6; cf. Laidlaw, 2002; 2014). We are concerned with how best to live in the moment, how best to anticipate the future, and how best to reconcile ourselves to the past.

Values and ethics intersect, then, in the realm of action, as ethical behaviour is appraised according to its realisation (or, indeed, undermining) of what is good. For my interlocutors, 'the good' is achieved through submission to the Bible. As Andrea often put it, the Word is "good and true and beautiful," and society's surrender to it would foster goodness, truth, and beauty. Yet the simplicity of this message was often complicated by non-Christians' responses to it, which - on those occasions when they moved beyond the apathetic - seemed to suggest that the Bible's moral framework might be bad, or false, or unattractive. Or, indeed, simply irrelevant; *of interest to you, perhaps, but not to me*. Members of both field sites are faced with this challenge. Their varying responses to it form the ethnographic core of what follows.

Thus, despite the certainty with which evangelicalism – and, indeed, the law – is often associated, I stress the roles of doubt and ambivalence at work in my interlocutors' evaluations of their own and others' efforts at living good Christian lives. In particular, I highlight the hesitancy and uncertainty that emerges as they seek to spread the Gospel, thereby bringing others into a liminal category that blends establishment religiosity with self-identification as an evangelical 'exile'.<sup>24</sup> This ambivalence is furthered by the context in which my interlocutors live. Notwithstanding their monist emphasis on submission to the Word, London's evangelicals are also the knowing inhabitants of a multicultural metropolis with a decidedly pluralist (they would say "relativist") account of value reckoning. For many Londoners, my Christian friends' desire to submit to the Word is one which risks undermining their own deeply held, universalising commitments (cf. Strhan, 2012; 2015; 2016). In this pluralist narrative, different values, and particularly 'freedom of religion' and various forms of 'equality' (of men and women; of dominant and non-normative sexualities; of majority religion, minority religion, and non-religion), may appear equally desirable, and yet mutually exclusive (see Clucas & Sharpe, 2013).<sup>25</sup> Perhaps in an effort to avoid Berlin's tragedy of conflict, English law tends to approach these potentially opposed values not with

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Peter 2:11 refers to Christians as 'sojourners and exiles'.

<sup>25</sup> As Robbins (2013: 100-1) notes, the tension between 'liberty' and 'equality' is a classic example for value pluralists.

the rhetoric of competition (in which one outranks another), but in terms of their having to be ‘balanced’, an imprecise and yet ‘talismanic form of legal language’ that has come to dominate discussions of rights and values in European and American courts (Bomhoff, 2013: 1). One way in which this ‘balance’ is conceptually struck, it seems, is through an understanding of religion as spatially interior. Both physical and theoretical, this spatialisation renders religion a phenomenon to be protected or accommodated under the guise of ‘conscience’ (Weiner, n.d.), or in terms of what Cécile Laborde (2012) calls an ‘egalitarian’ approach, in which ‘religious freedom’ is merely a subset of a broader right to pursue ‘meaning’ or ‘the good’. Such an approach to religious liberty – and one that is evident in Article 9 of the HRA, which protects freedom of thought and conscience absolutely, but their ‘manifestation’ only in certain circumstances – seems to affirm an abstract right to religious liberty even as it upholds the liberal orthodoxy that religion both ‘is and ought to remain a private affair’ (Casanova, 1994: 55).

As will be clear from the above, the CLC’s activist stance repudiates this liberal conceit. They see their work as part of the re-evangelisation of the public sphere, and long to see the nation converted and reformed.<sup>26</sup> Legal theology, and particularly the instrumentalisation of the right to freedom of religion, is critical to achieving this goal. For the members of Christ Church, however, the idea of this abstract right has little weight. Under the human rights regime, they understand their religious liberties not to be ‘balanced’, but to be ‘trumped’ by competing interests (see Donald et al, 2012: 82-3). As such, my research suggests that English law’s replacement of the ‘passive accommodation’ of freedom of religion as a negative liberty with the more robust ‘prescriptive regulation’ of a positive right (Sandberg, 2011: 181) is experienced by some conservative evangelical Protestants as a *dilution* of their religious liberty. Under the human rights regime, Christianity’s establishment appears to offer little of the protection it once did (cf. Sullivan, 2006, on English law’s pre-HRA approach to religion as a category). From this emic perspective, then, even those religious adherents who subscribe to an interiorised, immaterial, conscience-based approach to the religious life – what Sullivan (2005: 7) calls the ‘small “p”’ protestant definition of much ‘legal religion’, and one which owes a genealogical debt to the kind of Reformed Protestantism practiced at Christ Church - have little faith in the state’s ability to protect their religious worlds.

### **Thesis outline**

Chapter One explores what I call conservative Christianity’s “hostile world” thesis, which posits Christians as the increasingly “countercultural” inhabitants of a de-Christianising,

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<sup>26</sup> What this reformation might look like in practice, however, is far from clear.

“hostile” state. This view both unites and differentiates my two field sites. While both groups agree that Britain’s “Christian heritage” – a somewhat nebulous concept, but one in which those aspects of socio-political life deemed positive are thought to be the result of the country’s ‘home’ Scriptures (Sherwood, 2012: 6) – is being dismantled or rejected, their responses to this process differ. For the members of Christ Church, the hostility they (expect to) face is thought to be inevitable, and the appropriate response to it ought to be one of positive witness. For the staff of Christian Concern, by contrast, ungodly legislation is met with an urgent theology of activism, in which Christians must “stand” for Truth regardless of either personal cost or practical outcome.

In Chapter Two, I build on Matthew Engelke’s (2013) concept of ‘religious publicity’ to explore the vehicles by which Christianity ‘goes public’ in contemporary England. I argue that, from the perspective of Christian activists, legal cases are a useful technology for generating the publicity necessary to “expose” the inequity and hypocrisy of secular law. Focusing on a case involving a countercultural view of sexuality, I show how the law is used to publicise an otherwise marginalised Christian position. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to my friends at Christ Church to suggest that the *rejection* of religious publicity is of equal academic import as its generation. Contrasting emic notions of “British reserve” with the behaviour of street preachers who have fallen foul of public order law, I argue that my conservative evangelical interlocutors are uncomfortable with various forms of religious publicity-seeking, which they worry will be off-putting to the reserved Britons they hope to evangelise.

Lambek (2010: 2) suggests that “[w]e may find the wellsprings of ethical insight... in the shared criteria we use to make ourselves intelligible to one another, in “what we say when.”” Chapter Three applies this insight to my interlocutors’ use of words and the Word, which I explore through the lens of what I call ‘communicative doubt’. Beginning with a discussion of the importance of the Bible in both field sites, I turn to the arguments raised by conservative Christian activists in their campaign to prevent the passage of the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013. I argue that there is a sense in which neither ‘religious’ nor ‘secular’ arguments are thought to be an appropriate means of convincing those lacking a Biblical hermeneutic, for what is needed is the intervention of a speaking God. I then discuss the ambivalence experienced by two Christ Church members, Kate and Jim, who had been involved in one of the CLC’s earliest cases. Five years on, they remained unsure of the case’s impact on their Christian witness, and expressed an ongoing doubt as to whether or not it communicated the Good News they’d hoped to share.

Chapter Four uses two of the CLC’s cases, *Chaplin* and *Playfoot*, to examine the ways in which theological categories are read and misread by the law. I argue that both sets of interlocutors understood these cases, which involved claimants seeking exemptions from

uniform policies banning jewellery, in terms of an archetypically Protestant distinction between grace and law (that is, between salvation by faith and salvation by works). For the staff of Christian Concern, these cases functioned as proof of the legal system's discriminatory approach to Christianity. By virtue of its antinomian approach to religious dress – that is, because Protestants are not *required* to wear certain clothes to achieve salvation – the courts felt justified in denying these claimants the right to wear religious jewellery. For the members of Christ Church, however, the cases were problematic precisely because they seemed to imply that one *needed* to wear a cross or crucifix to be a Christian, thereby conflating grace and law and misrepresenting the faith to outsiders. I suggest that the court's failure to appreciate the role of materiality in maintaining even that most Protestant of virtues – sincerity, or the alignment of thought, word and deed (Keane, 2002; 2007) – is evidence of the problematic nature of 'legal religion' (Sullivan, 2005), in which the law, by policing the legitimate limits of religious belief and behaviour, defines it out of recognition.

Chapter Five focuses on the language of rights as it is deployed at Christ Church. Although Christianity and human rights are sometimes genealogically linked (Wolterstorff, 1987; 2008; Asad, 2000; 2003), I suggest that, for my Christ Church interlocutors, one is thought to undermine the other. Drawing on Robbins' (2004) analysis of the conflict of values between Melanesian relationalism and Christian individualism experienced by Papua New Guinean converts to Pentecostalism, I invert these two paramount values to suggest that, for the members of Christ Church, it is *Christianity* that is viewed as relational, while human rights are dismissed as problematically individualistic. For these Christians, whose primary goal is to spread the Gospel, evangelism that is "relational" is the most effective kind of Christian witness. The perceived egocentrism of the rights-based claims pursued by those involved in Christian legal activism, however, is thought to undermine this relationality. For this reason, Christ Churchites encourage one another to "forgo" their rights for the sake of the Gospel: "the Gospel is more important than rights."

Rights are also the focus of Chapter Six. This chapter argues that by framing their cases as conflicts of rights, the CLC hopes to undermine the universalism of human rights discourse, in which 'it is possible to claim that a human rights violation anywhere is of the same epistemological order and of the same moral, political, or legal significance as a human rights violation elsewhere' (Riles, 2006: 54). By constructing themselves as a marginalised counterpublic whose rights are frequently 'trumped', they hope to convince their fellow Britons that a society built upon the logic of competing rights cannot hope to deliver human flourishing. By contrast, only a society based on the foundational Truths of the Bible can achieve the utopian vision sought after by rights proponents. The chapter concludes by returning to the doubts of my Christ Church interlocutors. I suggest that, although the CLC has been successful in highlighting the inconsistency of human rights

idealism, the use of rights-based claims to undermine a rights-based system leaves them open to the charge that they are reinforcing the very system they hope to challenge.

Chapter Seven turns to the relationship between judgment, freedom, and submission. I argue that, for both sets of interlocutors, God's judgment of unbelievers is the result of their distorted understanding of freedom, in which human autonomy is valued above the eternal wisdom of the Creator God. In this (mis)understanding, freedom is understood as negative liberty or the absence of constraint (Berlin, 1966). Yet it leads, in the end, to slavery, sin and death. By contrast, true, positive freedom requires one's submission to God's "good pattern" for life, as laid out in (a conservative Protestant interpretation of) the Bible. Using the examples of submissive womanhood and submission to Biblically-based law, I suggest that the relationship between freedom, submission and judgment applies at both the individual and the corporate level. I conclude by returning to themes introduced in Chapter One, linking the salvation of individual souls to that of the nation, and stressing the moral imperative of evangelising those hurtling towards disaster.

### **Ethical considerations: a note to readers at Christ Church and Christian Concern**

It is now almost cliché to refer to conservative Christians as being, in Harding's (1991) terms, anthropology's 'repugnant cultural others'. Yet this does not change the fact that my research continues to be met with surprise or suspicion from friends and colleagues, who, during seminars and conferences, either critique me for being too "sympathetic" to my interlocutors, or phrase their questions in such a way as to ascertain whether I, too, accept the capital-T Truth claims they make. This is, perhaps, an occupational hazard of my being 'almost' native, and thus somewhat indistinguishable from many of my interlocutors.<sup>27</sup> Or perhaps, as Robbins (2003: 192) suggests, it is because 'Christians... appear at once too similar to anthropologists to be worthy of study and too meaningfully different to be easily made sense of by the use of standard anthropological tools.' This interplay of similarity and difference – the fact that both Christianity and anthropology make claims 'concerning the bases of knowledge or the importance of tolerance', but come to very different conclusions about them – renders the task of familiarising the exotic, and exoticising the familiar, particularly challenging.

As it happens, there were instances in the field where I felt acutely uncomfortable on account of my physical proximity to those espousing very different ethical commitments to my own. There is no denying the anxiety produced by what remain, in the terminology used

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<sup>27</sup> As a white, middle-class, lapsed Irish Catholic, I have much in common with the white, middle-class, practicing English Protestants with whom I was primarily in dialogue. This was especially so at Christ Church, where the congregation is largely homogeneous in terms of ethnic, social, and economic background. The staff and clients of Christian Concern, by contrast, represent a much more diverse constituency, which is referenced throughout the thesis as relevant.

above, conflicts of value. And this ‘problem of belief’, as Engelke (2002) puts it, was equally discomfiting for my interlocutors. As time went on, it became apparent that, to some activist friends, my lack of faith posed a serious impediment to my ability to understand Christian Concern’s work. But surely ‘[w]e do not have to agree on the moral value of any particular practice to understand that it is constituted as a moral practice, that it is virtuous from someone’s perspective or relative to someone’s world’ (Lambek, 2008: 134). While I do not deny that my interlocutors and I approach many of the topics on which the thesis focuses from very different vantage points, I submit that the anthropologist ‘ought to be able to locate something in the sphere or domain of the moral, as having an ethical quality, without [themselves] thereby necessarily either placing a value judgment on it or, conversely, cautiously refusing to do so’ (ibid).

I take this opportunity, then, both to thank my informants and to explicitly state that my purpose is neither to cast aspersions on nor to rescue our differences of opinion. Barring those instances where disagreements led to ethnographic insight, I do not focus on them in what follows. As Yvonne Sherwood (2012: 5) puts it of an approach to Biblical studies that seeks neither to valorise nor demystify the Bible, ‘[t]o explore blasphemy and profanation is, by definition, to be interested in and invested in the sacred and, relatedly, questions of proximity and distance, fidelity and faith.’ It was impossible to undertake this research without this ‘investment in the sacred’, and I hope and trust that my interlocutors will take my findings in the spirit of ‘proximity and distance, fidelity and faith’ with which they were written.



# Chapter One: Confronting a Hostile World

*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (John 15:18)*

## **I.I Laura and the lions' den**

One Saturday morning in mid-October, I travelled to Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, to attend the London Women's Convention, an annual Christian conference run by an evangelical women's group. I had been invited by Leah, a lawyer in her twenties, who was attending the conference with a number of Christian friends. Built in the first decade of the twentieth century in the elaborate Viennese Baroque style, Methodist Central Hall is central London's largest conference venue. We arrived to find it packed with casually-dressed women, who ranged in age from teenaged students to the retired. Old friends greeted each other with warm embraces, and new friends were introduced: *X and I met at our school's Christian Union; Oh, then you must know So-and-so? We used to run a Christian camp together!* As we took our seats in Central Hall's main auditorium, it buzzed with the laughter and conversation of the assembled crowd. All were looking forward to gaining a Biblical foothold on this year's Convention theme: 'Live, pray, hope in a hostile world.'

No sooner had we sat down than the conference began. After an introductory prayer acknowledging God's sovereignty over the nation, we stood to sing a number of up-tempo worship songs. As the band played, some attendees raised their hands and danced where they stood. Others swayed gently to the music. All sang enthusiastically. We were in fine voice; the building reverberated with the sound of hundreds of women singing, our songs of praise reaching up to fill the Hall's ornate domed ceiling.

After this time of worship, Laura, the Convention's main speaker, took the stage. Laura would be speaking on the Book of Daniel. A Jewish exile in pagan Babylon, Daniel is one of the great heroes of the Old Testament. In perhaps one of the most famous of the Biblical narratives, Daniel's refusal to compromise his faith results in his being handed what ought to be a certain death sentence: a night in the lions' den. For centuries, Daniel's miraculous protection during this trial has been read as evidence that, even in the face of persecution, God will not abandon those who honour Him and keep His commandments (Moss, 2012: 38-39). Laura explained why she had chosen Daniel for this year's conference:

I think we all know the Book of Daniel. Lots of people are teaching it at the moment, I think because it is becoming increasingly relevant for us in Britain, and we'll be thinking about that through the talks. [My husband and I get a weekly email from Christian Concern, and week after week more and more stories are

coming through of Christians who are in the firing line for their faith.<sup>28</sup> I think it's going to become more and more common for us, so I think the Book of Daniel really girds our lives. I think it gives us such a fantastic example of God's people living in a hostile world.

She defined the national context in which she spoke as one of “escalating hostility” towards Christians and Christian values: “the historic validity of scripture, Christ Himself, moral absolutes, Christian lifestyle: everything is under assault”.

From her position on the podium at Methodist Central Hall, Laura was physically surrounded by the trappings of what might be thought of, and what was certainly still described, as a ‘Christian country’.<sup>29</sup> Nestled in London’s political district, Central Hall is just a stone’s throw away from the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, both tangible proof of the ways in which Christianity is ‘literally incorporated’ into the physical and political architecture of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Engelke, 2013: 103). What, then, did it mean for her to say that the Book of Daniel was “becoming increasingly relevant” for Christians in Britain, including the approximately two thousand women who would hear her preach over the course of the Convention?

This chapter sketches the social and thematic context of the dissertation through an examination of the ways in which evangelical Christians construct themselves as the inhabitants of a hostile world, while calling attention to the contested nature of this narrative and the heterogeneous responses it evokes among those who identify as Christian. It begins with a discussion of the work of Christian Concern and the CLC. This section explains the temporal framing of Christian Concern’s worldview in terms of a culturally fundamentalist vision of Britain’s religious heritage, in which perceived attacks on those cultural structures and assumptions that form ‘the “givens” of life’ result in apocalyptic warnings of a destabilised, disorderly, and increasingly bleak future (Mathews & De Hart, 1990: 243).

I then explore how the hostile world thesis is received by conservative Christians who are not formally involved in religious lobbying or legal activism. Drawing on fieldwork carried out at Christ Church, I show that although my church friends agree that Britain is an increasingly hostile world, this does not necessarily translate into political activism. While Christian Concern’s public statements often focus on Britain’s status as a (formerly) Christian country, stressing their surprise at the rapidity with which Britain has ‘turned her back on Jesus and embraced alternative ideas such as secular liberal humanism, moral relativism and sexual licence’ (Christian Concern, n.d.), the congregation at Christ Church

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to conjuring images of both unfair dismissal and violent persecution, the phrase ‘in the firing line’ echoes the title of a Christian Concern publication. Written by former client Dr Richard Scott (2013), *Christians in the Firing Line* gives a summary of thirteen CLC cases.

<sup>29</sup> In a 2011 speech, for example, Prime Minister David Cameron stated: ‘Britain is a Christian country and we should not be afraid to say so’ (see Butt, 2011).

tend to view this transformation as inevitable: in a fallen world, it is to be expected that true Christianity is unpopular. Because they understand the increasing hostility they expect to face as the norm for Christians, both historically and in the contemporary moment, it is Britain's ostensibly Christian *past* – rather than its apparently secular or multi-faith present – which ought to be thought of as unusual.

This suggests a potential tension in Christian Concern's stated project. Given that Jesus warned those who followed Him that they would be reviled - 'because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you' (John 15:19) - we might wonder what Christian activists seek to achieve in their public-facing work. This chapter's third section discusses this apparent paradox. I argue that, for Christian activists, success cannot be measured in terms of cases won or laws changed. Rather, their theology of activism rejects a focus on the results of cases and campaigns in favour of an emphasis on the immediate necessity of "standing", regardless of the worldly outcome of this stand. By displacing attention from the long to the short term, I suggest that this rhetorical strategy offers a Biblical justification for what Christian Concern's opponents would see as failures or defeats, even as it remains always open to the possibility of divine intervention and radical social change. This urgent theology can account for both worldly success and worldly failure, thereby accommodating the variety of theological positions represented by Christian Concern's staff and supporters.

In the conclusion, I reflect on the contested nature of the hostile world thesis within Britain's Christian community, and particularly among members of Christ Church's own denomination, the established Church of England.<sup>30</sup> I suggest that there are multiple avenues of response available to those who see themselves as the inhabitants of an unwelcoming world. This introduces a number of themes that run throughout the following chapters, all of which are contained in what is, for Christians, a question that is both eternally relevant and of relevance for eternity: how does one best respond to a hostile world?

## **I.II Truth under attack**

Christian Concern presents Christianity as coming under attack on two fronts. First, Christian principles are seen to be under threat from "permissive" legislation,<sup>31</sup> such as the Abortion Act 1967, the Equality Act 2010, and the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013, which are seen to be contrary to God's will. Second, Christian people are thought to be

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<sup>30</sup> The Church of England is an extremely broad church, with homosexuality and the role of women among the most divisive issues in contemporary Anglicanism (see Dormor & Morris, 2007; Stringer, 2004; Bagilhole, 2003; Furlong, 1998). Christ Church is conservative on both issues. Some members voiced the possibility that their long-term identification with the established Church would come to an end if it continued to liberalise.

<sup>31</sup> "Permissive legislation" is that which permits, rather than restricts, sinful behaviour.

under attack from the various lobbies, interest groups, and employers who are opposed to the public expression of Christian principles and penalise those who attempt to “live them out”. Although both fronts bleed into each other, it is this distinction - between principles and people – that explains the difference between Christian Concern and the CLC. Christian Concern, as a lobby group, exists to campaign against laws that undermine God’s design for human flourishing, whereas the CLC exists to defend those who, by refusing to compromise their Biblical faith, have fallen foul of these laws. These cases are thought to be the logical result of the increasing number of holes in Britain’s previously Christian social fabric, holes which have come about through intentional ripping – Acts of Parliament pushed through by intolerant secularists, say, or the result of a small but vociferous LGBT lobby – and through unintentional fraying, such as the general public’s perceived religious illiteracy, or the increasing purchase of a multicultural relativism that posits Christianity as just one faith among many.

This was explained to me by Andrea Williams, CEO of Christian Concern and the CLC, on an unseasonably cold day in May 2013. The Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill was then going through Parliament, and Christian Concern was at the forefront of the conservative Christian community’s opposition to its passage. They had spent the past few months organising prayer rallies outside the Houses of Parliament, sending regular prayer requests and updates to their mailing list, and lobbying MPs to vote against the Bill. As such, Andrea’s schedule – which was full at the best of times – had been pushed to breaking point, and the Bill was at the forefront of her mind. When I asked her what she saw as Christian Concern’s *raison d’être*, her answer included a reference to same-sex marriage:

It’s a campaign organisation which seeks to proclaim Christ in the public sphere, in law, media and politics, and particularly where Truth is under attack. And nothing could be more evident of that than this week, where we see the first building block for society, marriage, being undermined at the heart of our Parliamentary system.

By ‘Truth’, Andrea is referring to the tenets of reformed evangelicalism, a socially conservative theology that stresses the depravity of humankind, the necessity of trusting in Christ’s substitutionary death for salvation, and the inerrancy of the Bible. Although every generation of Christians will be asked to defend Biblical Truth – “I think at any moment in history, Gospel Truth is under attack in a particular sphere” - the example that sprang most readily to Andrea’s mind in the Spring of 2013 was the God-given institution of marriage, then “under attack” from its proposed extension to homosexual couples. This threat to marriage could not be seen in a vacuum. Rather, because the Bible provides a holistic approach to moral living, challenges to God’s plan for marriage are linked to the many policy areas in which His “blueprint” or “good pattern” for society is under attack, including

the sanctity of life, the exclusivity of Jesus Christ (that is, the belief that faith in Christ is the only way to achieve salvation), and freedom to proclaim the Gospel.

Andrea believes that previous generations of Britons underwrote the UK's legal and parliamentary systems with Christian values. She credits Britain's historic "flourishing" – including the development of parliamentary democracy and the common law, and their exportation through the British Empire<sup>32</sup> - to this Christian heritage, the result of God "prospering" those who keep His commands. This understanding of the relationship between faith and law presumes the Bible and liberal democracy to be not just compatible, but genealogically linked. As with 'vernacular theology', which may not be 'totally accountable... by academic standards' (Elisha, 2008: 167-8), this vernacular history ought to be taken as a cultural product in and of itself, rather than as a coherent historiography. It is a reading that is, perhaps of necessity, somewhat messy and incomplete, with the historic failure of the ostensibly Christian past to actually achieve universal human flourishing accounted for by the inevitable presence of sin in every age. At the risk of caricature, for example, William Wilberforce's campaign against the slave trade was happily claimed as the fruit of his Christian faith, while those eighteenth-century Christians who looked to Scripture to justify human chattel are seen to have misunderstood the Bible, to have been caught up in sin, or to prove the distinction between professed and true Christian conversion. In this way, the potential (if always contested) justifications for violence, authoritarianism, and inequality present in the Bible are displaced onto Protestant England's religious Others, with the 'home' Scriptures purged of these disruptive associations (Sherwood, 2012: 6). The majority of Andrea's staff agrees that Britain's institutions of law, politics and justice have been positively shaped by their Christian roots.<sup>33</sup> Andrew, Christian Concern's campaigns

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<sup>32</sup> Although the British Empire was not a frequent topic of conversation at Christian Concern, Andrea sometimes spoke of Britain's Christianity-infused political and legal structures as having been "copied" the world over. The distinction between copying and colonial enforcement was not dwelt on. The idea that Christianity might lead to the civilising of otherwise barbaric Others is, of course, an old one, but one which gained a particular salience during the Age of Empire. An 1813 copy of the *Missionary Register*, for example, justifies colonialism by juxtaposing the formerly pagan state of Britain – 'Your own ancestors, in this very Island, once worshipped dumb idols' - with its contemporary status as a Christian country, in which 'civil and religious liberty have grown up under the benign influence of the Gospel' (cited in Sugirtharajah, 2001 : 62). Two hundred years later, Andrea's comments seemed to echo this understanding of the relationship between Bible preaching, morality, and civil liberty.

<sup>33</sup> The only staff member who was openly sceptical about this narrative – at least in conversation with me - was Jake, a British-Nigerian film-maker. When asked whether Britain was, at least historically, a Christian nation, he explained:

I mean, it's difficult to answer this without sounding [and] being African, being black. I feel Christianity was used in some [ways] to achieve an agenda beyond Christianity, and so I'd say that generally the English man wants to rule, and he will use anything he can. Now, that sounds very much like something you wouldn't hear coming from someone coming from Christian Concern, but you asked me a straight question so I answered you as straight as I could.

director, felt that a country could self-consciously identify with “the person of Jesus Christ” through its constitution and legal framework. Similarly, Maria, a CLC lawyer, explained that although “some people would like us to forget that Britain does have a Judeo-Christian heritage”, it was from this heritage that “we’ve got all our freedoms”, which are “based on what God says and how that’s been brought into society hundreds of years ago.” Carrie and Louise, who worked, respectively, in events management and finance, felt that the principles of the welfare state were also those of the Bible.<sup>34</sup>

If, as the British and Foreign Bible Society declared at the 1851 Great Exhibition, the Bible was ‘the Book by which England has become great’ (Zemka, 1997: 208), then its rejection of the Word suggests that God will no longer prosper the nation. Rather, He will allow it to suffer the consequence of its disobedience, including progressive immorality and social breakdown (see Chapter Seven). This pessimistic message was often expressed in presentations to church groups and Christian organisations. One sunny Saturday morning in July 2012, for example, Andrea was the guest speaker at a north London Christian women’s group. The meeting, which took place in the dining room of a local hotel, began with the assembled women sharing that culinary staple of the British Isles: a cooked breakfast, complete with bacon, sausages, scrambled eggs, toast, and tea. After breakfast, Andrea, dressed in a multi-coloured floral dress and her trademark high heels, got up to speak. It was just a few weeks until London would host the 2012 Summer Olympics, and she began by saying that she “loved our nation” and was looking forward to supporting Britain’s athletes in their various sporting endeavours. Yet she stood before us with “a heavy heart for our nation.” “What made Great Britain great?” she asked rhetorically. Great Britain was great, she ventured, because “our laws, our society” were “founded on Christ”. Unfortunately, this was no longer the case. The results were “bad laws” and the “breakdown of families.”

Frequent references to the apocalyptic moral consequences of religious decline suggest a culturally fundamentalist relationship with this Christian past.<sup>35</sup> Writing of the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed amendment to the US

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<sup>34</sup> CLC employees represent a variety of political viewpoints, as do British Christians in general (see Walton et al, 2013). As a general rule, however, they are sceptical of the leading parties (the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats), none of which are thought to be interested in protecting the UK’s Christian heritage. This can lead to either protest or pragmatic voting. In the 2015 general election, for example, one former staff member voted Conservative on the grounds that the Tory party, with its emphasis on small government and ‘Big Society’, was more likely to support local churches’ voluntary work than the other parties. Others refused to vote Conservative in protest at the party’s introduction of same-sex marriage.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Cultural fundamentalism’ is distinct from ‘Christian fundamentalism’. The term ‘fundamentalist’ masks a complicated religious history of theological and denominational struggle in the context of early twentieth-century American Christianity (Harding, 2001). Because ‘Christian fundamentalism’ is so often used in a pejorative sense, I do not use it to refer to my friends at either Christian Concern or Christ Church. That being said, members of both fieldsites are broadly in agreement with the authors of *The Fundamentals*, the series of essays from which fundamentalism draws its name (see Packer, 1977).

Constitution that would have prohibited discrimination ‘on account of sex’, Donald Mathews and Jane De Hart (1990: 177) define cultural fundamentalism in terms of a ‘moral imagination’ that rejects ‘the flexibility of cultural forms’, preferring instead to view these forms as natural and fixed. Although cultural fundamentalism does not require ‘a transcendent religious commitment’, the fixity of contested norms – the immutability of distinct gender roles, for example – are often explained by reference to their having been ordained by God (ibid: 177-9; also Erzen, 2006; Harding, 2001; Griffith, 2000). As Mathews and De Hart note, an absolute emphasis on traditional values as the key to a well-ordered society renders perceived diversions from these ahistorical norms anomalous, disruptive, even threatening; the very same sentiments expressed by those who worry that “permissive” legislation has resulted in a hostile world for Christian principles and Christian people. And, as with those who warned that the adoption of the ERA would result in families torn apart, femininity destroyed, and the foundations of society fatally weakened, Christian Concern warns of the dire consequences of rejecting the eternal Truth of the Christian faith. As Andrew once put it: “I fear for what our children will inherit if this tide is not reversed.”

This framing of the world, which views historicist understandings of social change as an exercise in moral relativism, has resulted in a Janus-like temporal orientation for Christian activists. Many Christians operate within a temporality that posits their heavenly eternal destiny as being of more pressing concern than their mundane present. The Urapmin Baptists among whom Joel Robbins (2004: 164) carried out fieldwork, for example, are ‘forever pitched forward, placing their best attention on the future’. Susan Harding (2001: 231) has explored the ways in which American fundamentalist preachers encourage their congregations to view contemporary political events as ‘signs of the times’ that point towards the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, enabling a move from resigned pessimism to social activism (see section four of this chapter for further discussion of Harding’s work; cf. Thompson, 2005, and Webster, 2013, for examples of British Christians seeking out ‘signs of the times’). Noting this tendency towards the eschatological, Jane Guyer (2007) has suggested that American evangelicals ‘evacuate’ the ‘near future’ of meaning, focusing instead on the immediate and the long term (that is, the Second Coming). For Guyer (ibid: 414), the evangelical near future is a ‘hiatus’ or ‘gap’, the intelligibility of which is ‘in abeyance’. That Christian Concern feels compelled to respond to perceived anti-Christian hostility in the immediate moment (as opposed to adopting a more reflective strategy of public engagement) suggests their inhabitation of a similar temporality, one in which what matters most are the Christian’s actions in the present and the final reckoning at the end of

time.<sup>36</sup> By contrast to Guyer's (ibid: 411) account, however, the relative lack of attention paid the near future does not necessarily mean it is '[privatised]'. Were the near future given much thought, I believe it too would be a site for public evangelism and the moral reformation of an obstinate nation (cf. Engelke, 2013: 29-30; Webster, 2013: 10). Still, the sense of tangible urgency with which my interlocutors approach their activism marks them out as particular kinds of Christian subjects, those whose understanding of divine judgment renders the 'near future' considerations of respectability and social status subordinate to standing for Christ in-the-immediate-moment and making it to heaven on Judgment Day (see discussion of Harding below).

Even as they look forward to the Second Coming, however, the members of Christian Concern also orient themselves in relation to the past. Their focus on the fact that society is, to quote Marilyn Strathern (1997: 39-41) on 'values' traditional and modern, '*going somewhere*' has led them to conclude that 'back to tradition may be the best way forward'. Indeed, the speed with which society is 'going somewhere' is particularly troubling, for without intervention, the logical end point of these legislative and cultural assaults is presumed to be nothing less than outright persecution: 'I believe Christians are seeing the beginnings of persecution in the UK because, as a nation, we have forgotten our history, our heritage and our Christian foundations' (Williams, 2011c). This prompts the sense of urgency evident in Christian Concern's public engagement, an urgency borne of both a forward-looking 'impulse to revitalise' and a 'yearning to return' to an imagined past (Griffith, 2000: 31). Such a past appears, from the outside, to be equal parts concrete and nebulous; a concept strongly felt, yet difficult to define.

The temporal qualification in the above quote – in which Andrea, writing in the Law Society Gazette, suggests that British Christians are seeing '*the beginnings*' of persecution - is significant. It is important to note that although the staff of the CLC view themselves and their clients as living in a hostile world, they do not equate this to the situation facing Christians in, for example, North Korea, Somalia, or Iraq. The differences in scale and severity are readily acknowledged. Yet the two are seen to share, as Andrew put it to me, a "subtle continuity." This is often missed in media accounts and editorials dismissive of Christian Concern's brand of activism. In an opinion piece decrying the persecution of Christians worldwide, for example, religious correspondent Paul Vallely (2014) critiqued those who used the language of persecution to describe such 'trivial' issues as 'receptionists being banned from wearing religious jewellery': 'Adopting the rhetoric of persecution on such matters obscures the very real persecution of Christians being killed or driven from

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<sup>36</sup> When discussing eschatological comparisons, it is worth bearing in mind that 'both the evangelical and the secular milieu in Britain are less influenced by apocalyptic tradition than their equivalents in the United States' (Thompson, 2005: 173).



their homes elsewhere in the globe.’ But as Andrew argued during a slot on Sunday Morning Live, a religion and ethics programme produced by the BBC, the two were comparable to early and late stage cancer. Yes, one was much more serious, but shouldn’t the early stage disease be treated too, *before things got worse?* To Andrew’s co-panellists on Sunday Morning Live, this comparison was rejected as offensive to those Christians undergoing – for want of a better word – ‘real’ persecution (see British Humanist Association, 2012). But from the perspective of Christian Concern, ‘real’ persecution doesn’t emerge, fully formed and wielding a sword, out of the ether. Rather, it starts with small acts of opposition: with losing one’s job for wearing a Christian symbol; with the refusal to accommodate a conscientious objection.

This idea was brought out most strikingly during a conversation with Jake, Christian Concern’s film producer. In addition to his work with Christian Concern, Jake, who holds both Nigerian and British passports, is an activist in his own right. He runs campaigns to raise awareness of sectarian violence in Central and Northern Nigeria, where the church he had once pastored had been repeatedly, violently, and often fatally attacked by Islamic militants. A tall, broad man with a neat, clipped beard, Jake had a knack for disarming me with his candour. In one of our very first conversations, which took place on a sunny summer’s day at a sparsely attended anti-abortion protest in Westminster, he told me that he had never seen an image of an aborted foetus until he began working with Christian Concern. This was surprising, he explained, as a pregnancy for which he had been responsible had ended in an abortion. Although initially taken aback by the easy familiarity with which Jake recounted this episode to someone who was, at this point, a near stranger, I soon came to learn how strongly he valued honesty and openness in his relationships. Throughout my time at Christian Concern, his responses to my frequent questions often began by reminding me that he had to be “real”, he had to “speak [his] mind”, and was I sure that I wanted a “very, very honest” answer?

In one of the most disconcerting interviews I carried out during my fieldwork, I hesitantly asked Jake whether he “really” thought the horrific things he had seen in Nigeria could happen in England. His answer was devastating in its conviction: “I don’t think it will happen. I *know* it will happen.” It was, he explained, only a matter of time. To those who doubted the possibility of escalation, he offered his own experience:

A friend of mine came from another part of [Nigeria] to visit us, and he said ‘in a short while, they are going to attack you people here.’ And I was like ‘forget it. I’ve been living here for many years. All my landlords have been Muslims. This is the most peaceful place. It would never happen.’ In less than a year, we were attacked.

Jake was speaking specifically of the risk of what Christian Concern calls “radical Islam”. What’s important for our purposes, however, is the gradual intensification of the violence he described. He disproved the assertions of those opponents of Christian activism who supposed that, if Christians in the UK knew the ‘reality’ of persecution, they would not approve of the ‘trivial’ cases handled by the CLC. After all, it was a reality he knew all too well. He had seen his neighbours cut down in the street. He could recount, in truly harrowing detail, the experience of weaving his car through the bodies of his fellow believers. He had seen his congregation murdered and turned into murderers. But it “did not start that way. It started just with ‘oh, well, you can’t have your church here, you know, you have to go down the road.’” It had started with “a little here, a little there.” To return to Andrew’s imagery, it had once been an early stage disease; but, left untreated, it had developed into a life-threatening cancer.

In this hostile world, Christian activists see themselves as spiritual paramedics. But having been warned that they will always be persecuted for their faith, is their care curative or palliative? Before considering their theology of activism, I now turn to the congregation of Christ Church in an effort to enhance our understanding of Britain’s Christian past, its hostile present, and the meaning of persecution.

### **I.III On “unfair things”**

Throughout my Christ Church tenure, I spent a great deal of time studying the Bible under the tutelage of Carol, a Christian nurse in her fifties. Carol, who lives just minutes from the church, is a slim woman with curly, greying hair, and a warm, ready smile. Although all of my Christ Church friends were extremely generous with their time, trust, and knowledge, Carol was, perhaps, exceptionally charitable in this regard. We had first met at ‘Christianity Explored’, a five week course for curious non-Christians interested in learning about the Christian faith, where Carol had been one of the course leaders (see Chapter Four). Having taken an immediate interest in my project (and my salvation), she would often invite me to her flat to discuss life, the universe, and everything over a cup of tea and a specially selected Bible passage. As a member of a Christian nursing and midwifery association with a particular interest in students, she was used to conducting one-on-one Bible studies with people in my demographic, that is, women in their twenties. Different in form from either the formal, expository preaching the congregation received from the pulpit, or the more egalitarian, discussion-based ethos of my women’s Bible study group (see Chapter Five), Carol’s well-honed one-on-one approach was almost Socratic in method, with each guided question – *What is the Apostle Paul writing about in these passages? What sort of evidence does he use? Why might this be surprising?* – placing me, gently but unequivocally, in the role of a novice under instruction. And although I certainly began as one, I like to think that

Carol's unparalleled generosity was not in vain; I learnt as much theology sitting in her comfortable living room as I did in the church pews a few doors down.

One afternoon in the summer of 2013, I arrived at Carol's flat to find her casually dressed in tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt, hard at work in her small kitchen. She was, as she often did, baking in honour of my visit. Today's treats were homemade chocolate biscuits sandwiched together with buttercream icing. Over the noise of an electric whisk beating together butter and cocoa powder, Carol told me that she had recently given a presentation on Psalm 23 to a group of Christian health professionals. Psalm 23 is one of the best known, and best loved, psalms in the Bible, beginning with the famous words 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' Although the older Christians in the audience had all known the verses, many of them by heart, it had seemed remarkably unfamiliar to the student nurses present. Carol had found this very surprising. She recalled it as "the Psalm of my childhood", the stock Psalm of school assemblies. That her younger colleagues did not have this relationship with it was indicative, she reflected sadly, of the "erosion" of Britain's Christian heritage.

The results of this "erosion", however, were not limited to young nurses' inability to recite the Psalms. Having made our biscuits, we retired to Carol's living room to continue our conversation. Up until the 1950s, she explained, many British people had accepted the moral strictures laid out in the Bible. Most people, whether or not they had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, "*were* living 'moral lives,' in inverted commas." Now, however, the majority of people seemed to have adopted an attitude which said "no, we don't give a stuff about Christianity", and there was increasing pressure on Christians not to speak about their beliefs. Some of the nursing students she worked with, for example, had even asked whether or not it was legal for them to share their faith with their patients. Given this explicitly anti-Christian climate, she thought that "ultimately, it could easily be that I will know people who will be imprisoned for their faith".

From my position in one of her comfortable leather armchairs, with the smell of freshly baked chocolate biscuits still wafting through the air and the sound of the birds chirping on her leafy, suburban street coming through the open windows, the thought of Carol or her co-congregants being imprisoned for their faith seemed a fairly remote possibility. Expressing my surprise, I asked her to elaborate. She explained that "there are unfair things happening", particularly in secular workplaces. While most of the Christians being "caught out" at work were "caught on technicalities rather than actually 'we don't like you because you're a Christian,'" the real issue seemed to be that they had shown "their faith" at work. As with the incremental process described by Andrew and Jake, the fact that "unfair things" were already happening was taken as evidence that things would, most likely, get worse.

Carol was not alone in this belief. One wintery afternoon in January, I interviewed James, a Christ Church curate (assistant minister), at a high street coffee shop. A tall, slim man who is always keen to share a joke, James' comic stylings are much loved by the church family. His voice usually bubbles with energy, enthusiasm and good humour. As we discussed the Christian discrimination cases, however, he became more serious. Pausing to sip a decaf cappuccino, he told me that although he didn't take a particular interest in the cases, he read about them when they surfaced in the press. In a matter-of-fact tone he continued:

It's going to become more common. As our society becomes less and less [Christian], Christians who do believe in Truth and the right to express their faith will increasingly [rub] up against the laws of the land, and I'm sure some of us will go to prison within the next few years for being Christians.

James linked the likelihood of his incarceration to wider society becoming "less and less" Christian.<sup>37</sup> In his Christian ontology, identity, belief, and practice are infrangible, such that those going to prison "for being Christians" would be doing so because they could not separate a Christian belief from its implementation. These musings on future persecution identify the tension in what Sullivan (2005: 4) calls "'legal' religion". By affirming the protection of religious belief while limiting the right to 'manifest' those beliefs, the legal religion of English law posits a distinction between principle and practice that is wholly at odds with the desires of those seeking to cultivate and express what James Laidlaw (2014: 150-5), using the terminology of Bernard Williams (1993), frames as a 'moral incapacity' to disobey divine commands (cf. Mahmood, 2005).<sup>38</sup> Andrea, for example, would often say that the courts' interpretation of equality law meant that Christians "could not" be registrars or sex therapists, as the law now required them to treat homosexual couples as morally equivalent to heterosexual couples. The language of (in)ability – "could not" – rather than personal preference – "would not" – is of critical importance here. As we shall see throughout the thesis, it is the law's refusal to appreciate the force of this incapacity that causes the CLC and its clients such difficulty – an issue that is particularly ironic in light of the fact that, by defining religion in belief-centric terms, this legal religion owes a

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<sup>37</sup> Census data suggests that many Britons continue to identify with the label 'Christian' (Office for National Statistics, 2012; see Day & Lee, 2014, on 'making sense of surveys and censuses'). Given decreasing church attendance and low levels of belief in a personal God, this has led to suggestions that Britons 'believe without belonging' (Davie, 1994), or that their use of the term 'Christian' indexes kinship and relationality, thus indicating that they 'believe in belonging' (Day, 2009; 2011). In this account, 'nominal' Christianity is not an 'empty' category, but a 'social, performative act' (2011: 174). Although I agree with Day's analysis from an academic perspective, throughout the thesis I adopt the emic understanding of my informants, for whom the term 'Christian' is reserved for those trusting in Christ for salvation.

<sup>38</sup> I develop this argument in Chapter Seven.

genealogical debt to Reformed Christianity (Sullivan, 2005: 7; Asad, 1993: 28). Indeed, disputes over the meaning of religious liberty often play a critical role in the construction of legally recognisable religion through their marking of certain practices as anathema to notions of ‘public morality’, notions which, in both the UK and the US, appear both secular and ‘indelibly Protestant’ (Gordon, 2002: 135; cf. Sullivan, 2005).

But whereas Andrea expressed surprise at the speed with which the law had been severed from its ostensibly Christian roots, stating in a *Daily Mail* comment piece that ‘I never imagined that my skills as a lawyer would be used to defend Christians for following their faith in 21st Century Britain’ (Williams, 2011b), the members of Christ Church expressed no such surprise. Indeed, they seemed almost resigned. Carol, after explaining that imprisonment might be the logical end point of a scenario in which Christians were already losing their jobs, suggested that reformed evangelicals were “coming out of a period that’s probably been *abnormal* for Christians, and the norm is for people to not like us.”

A similar view was expressed by Leah, the lawyer with whom I attended the London Women’s Convention, and with whom I was also studying the Bible one-on-one. A petite brunette, Leah is a committed member of the church family. In addition to co-leading a students’ and young graduates’ Bible study group, she is a member of a prayer triplet (a three person accountability and prayer request group), and is a regular fixture at the communal meal served after the Sunday evening service. Leah tries to live for Christ during her every waking moment. While exercising at the local swimming pool, for example, she goes through the alphabet praying for her colleagues, friends, and family: one letter, one name, one lap’s worth of prayers. Apart from losing some non-Christian friends at school, Leah hadn’t experienced any hostility on account of her Christianity. However, rather than putting this down to the inoffensiveness of her faith, or to her cheerful disposition and good relationships with friends and co-workers, she framed it in terms of a personal failing. Perhaps, she ventured, the reason she hadn’t received much flak was because she was not being “distinctive” or “bold enough”, at least not “yet”:

The Bible warns us on numerous occasions, there will be persecution and there will be trouble. You see it now, you know, people who are losing their jobs because they stand up for what they believe in. So I think I would not be surprised to face opposition in the future, and indeed actually I think I’d see it as a sign that I was going in the right direction. Obviously it wouldn’t be pleasant, but I would think ‘yeah, this is what we’ve been warned in the Bible that we probably will experience.’

James, for his part, stated that it was “no surprise” that Bible-believing, conservative Christians were in the minority in Britain: “throughout the Bible, Christians have always

been a small number.” For those at Christ Church, the preferred response to this hostility was to continue to evangelise, readying oneself for the coming trials while pointing others towards God; a time to be ‘endured by waiting’ as God’s ultimate plan came to fruition (Guyer, 2007: 415).

Of course, it is important not to overstate my interlocutors’ concern with the threat of persecution, nor to dehistoricise their understanding of Christian Britain. It was sometimes pointed out to me that the eighteenth-century England of the Wesley brothers was even less “godly” than the England of our current day. Further, references to the imminence of state-backed persecution were often tempered by the recognition that, when compared with the situation facing contemporary Christian martyrs, the members of Christ Church were living in an age of unparalleled religious liberty. During a session with my women’s Bible study group, Catherine, the group’s amateur church historian, remarked that she would not find it surprising if evangelical ministers began to be arrested under hate speech legislation. Perhaps, she mused, it would happen within the decade. Kristen, who had recently joined the church, volunteered that these arrests were already happening. She offered as proof the case of Tony Miano (see Chapter Two), a CLC client who had been arrested in southwest London after members of the public complained about his street preaching. (Kristen had read about Mr Miano in the newsletter of another church). Catherine agreed: “we’re getting to a stage where Biblical Christianity will be ghettoised.” Yet when it came time to close the study with a prayer, the group prayed in thanks that Christians in Britain could practice their faith freely, while so many others risked life and limb simply by attending church.

All this points to the somewhat liminal experience, from an emic perspective, of identifying as a conservative Anglican: ongoing membership of the established Church, but a feeling of marginality within it; a sense that although the Church’s more liberal elements might tolerate the conservatives in their midst, the majority of one’s establishment brethren are not *really* one’s brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps this is the inevitable result of Christianity’s emphasis on sacrifice and martyrdom (Moss, 2012), even when legally established. Or perhaps it is a commentary on England’s long history of intra-Christian – and intra-Protestant - dispute since the Reformation. Social historian Callum Brown (2009: 99), for example, notes the prominence given the trope of the ‘hero-victim’ dissenter in eighteenth-century evangelical narratives (a trope that remains relevant today). But regardless of its theological underpinning, there was a sense in which the freedom currently extended to British evangelicals seemed, as Carol put it, “*abnormal*” for (true) Christians. As one church member explained from the pulpit while leading prayers on the International Day

of Prayer for the Persecuted Church,<sup>39</sup> the persecution facing Christian brothers and sisters abroad should not come as a surprise, for the Bible tells us that “anyone desiring to live a godly life will be persecuted”. The Bible’s frequent references to persecution raise questions as to the rationale behind the work of Christian Concern and the CLC, for if God’s Word predicts persecution, what could political lobbying and legal activism actually achieve? Rather than expressing surprise that Christians in twenty-first century Britain needed legal defence, one could just as easily argue – as Carol, Leah and James seemed to suggest - that this was exactly the sort of situation Andrea ought to have expected.

In fact, this *was* how many of the Christian activists I met understood the responses they sometimes received from non-Christians. To take but one example, in the summer of 2012 I attended a small demonstration organised by the Core Issues Trust (CIT), a Christian ministry that aims to help ex-gay individuals develop their heterosexual potential, which was held in central London outside the British Library. The Library was hosting a conference run by Stonewall, the UK’s premier lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights charity, on how to combat homophobic bullying in schools. From CIT’s perspective, Stonewall’s anti-bullying platform was merely an attempt to “normalise” homosexuality, and they were protesting for this reason (see Chapter Two for further discussion of CIT). Throughout the demonstration, those wearing the Trust’s distinctive red t-shirts, which bore the slogan GAY FEELINGS CAN CHANGE. GET OVER IT!, were subject to abuse from passersby, many of whom found this message abhorrent. As a fieldworker and Christian Concern intern (albeit one who had declined to wear the t-shirt), I was also on the receiving end of this hostility. I had never before had a stranger tell me that I was “disgusting” and “should be ashamed”. I found it to be a distressing experience, one which required a number of deep, steady breaths and repeated reminders of the importance of participant observation in anthropology’s methodological toolbox. In marked contrast to my reaction, however, when I asked one of the demonstrators how she felt the protest had gone, she explained that Christians rejoice when they are persecuted. She was not surprised that she had heard “nasty words” from non-Christians. Even the Apostle Paul, she reminded me, had once persecuted those who professed Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Andrea herself expressed the inevitability of persecution in conversations with other Christians (although she is less likely to reference it in conversations with the non-Christian press, with whom, as we have already seen, she stresses her surprise at the

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<sup>39</sup> The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is an ecumenical initiative encouraging churches to focus on the needs of persecuted Christians worldwide.

<sup>40</sup> As we shall see below, however, the theoretical knowledge that one ought to rejoice when persecuted does not mean that hurtful remarks do not need to be ‘theologised’ in practice.

situation facing her fellow believers). In her 2013 Christmas message, which was sent to Christian Concern's supporters by email, she said:

We at Christian Concern and all of you, our supporters, are simply not ashamed of [Jesus], not ashamed of everything that He stands for, even though... it's often very difficult to speak of Him, to speak of the Truth that He proclaims, to speak for everything that is good. I sometimes ask myself why, how can it be so hard? But if He Himself was born to die a death where He faced a false trial, where His very own religious leaders rejected Him, then why are we to be surprised? (Christian Concern, 2013).

Further, there is some support for this perspective in the CLC's track record. CLC lawyers readily admit that they rarely win their cases. When coupled with their portrayal of themselves as the guardians of the values of Britain's recently Christian past, this low success rate might lend itself to an analysis of Christian campaigners as reactionaries engaged in increasingly desperate efforts to reverse social change. Brown (2009: 229), for example, in a postscript to *The Death of Christian Britain*, writes of the 'new vigour' of conservative Christian activists in terms of a 'backlash' against their faith's 'increasing irrelevance'. For Brown, these campaigners have responded to his titular death by 'trying to roll back the reforms of the 1960s'; a task, he suggests, that their 'absence of significant popular membership' has rendered particularly difficult to achieve, and one with which he has little sympathy (ibid).

Yet the work of Christian Concern is more than defensive or reactionary. Their campaigns and cases, whether or not they are framed in the negative language of the 'anti-', are also run with an eye to the positive. These initiatives are not only critiques of the status quo, but trailers for an alternative vision of human flourishing that emphasises the transcendent Truth of the Bible. Prompted in equal measure by an aversion to sin, a desire to combat perceived injustice, and a passion to spread the Gospel, they seek nothing less than the transformation of the nation. Their cultural fundamentalism expresses a longing for what is both a 'once and future' Christian nation (Griffith, 2000: 31), and a return to an idealised past that is also a revolution into a flourishing future. That they are both conservative and radical underpins the following section, which aims to complicate the notion of success underlying Christian activism.

#### **I.IV An "Ezekiel season"**

Christian Concern's working week is book-ended by two staff gatherings: Monday morning prayers, and Friday evening drinks. Monday prayers, which are equal parts staff meeting and Bible study, are usually held in the office's main boardroom. The boardroom is a bright, airy



space from whose large windows one can enjoy the Edwardian and Georgian architecture of Marylebone's Wimpole Street, perhaps allowing oneself the indulgence of imagining the worlds inhabited by some of the Street's famous former residents: the London of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, say, or *Pygmalion's* Professor Henry Higgins. Staff members drift into the room in ones and twos, taking their seats around the boardroom's large table and helping themselves to the tea, coffee, grapes, and biscuits that have been brought up by Grace, Andrea's personal assistant. The meeting begins with the reading of a Bible passage and a reflection on that passage, usually – but not exclusively – delivered by Pastor Ade Omooba, one of Christian Concern's co-founders. This is followed by a discussion about the previous and coming weeks, which may include debriefing sessions on recent events and speaking engagements, updates on a particular fundraising initiative or campaign, and a focus on upcoming deadlines, conferences and cases. Prayer requests, which can relate to matters both personal and professional, are then taken. The meeting ends after a time of prayer, during which, heads bowed towards the large table around which they are gathered, those present pray aloud in response to the requests they have just heard: *thank You, Lord, for every penny this organisation receives, and let us be good stewards of it; may Your design for marriage be upheld in this nation; please comfort X, whose father died last week.*

One week in October, the prayer meeting began with a reading from Joshua 6, which recounts the fall of Jericho. In this Old Testament narrative, Joshua, a military hero, brings down the city of Jericho by following unusual instructions from God: his army is to circle the city walls in silence for six days, before shouting and playing their trumpets on the seventh. Jumping from one Old Testament hero to another, Pastor Ade, who was leading the study, declared that Britain was in an "Ezekiel season". Ezekiel, one of the great prophets, was sent by God to warn the Israelites that, unless they turned from their rebellious, sinful ways, they would be destroyed. Ade pointed out that although God told Ezekiel that the Israelites would not listen to him, He also told him that "you need to go and talk to them anyway," to warn them they were heading for crisis. Christian Concern, he suggested, was in a similar position. "That's why it feels like an Ezekiel season. We're speaking to those who don't listen, but we need to proclaim and believe in our vision." Encouraging us to both pray and act on this vision of Christian revival – "prayer without action will not work, action without prayer will not work" – Pastor Ade closed the study by reminding us of the necessity of speaking out, regardless of its outcome: "This nation needs us, it needs more of us."

One morning a few weeks later, the prayer meeting focused on the meaning of victory. Our Bible reading had come from Acts 5:17-42, in which the Sanhedrin, or counsel of Jewish elders, orders Jesus' disciples to be flogged for preaching the Gospel. In spite of the flogging, the apostles rejoice 'that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the

name [of Jesus]' (Acts 5:41). Ade pointed out that although the apostles had not been killed for their preaching, they had still been found guilty by the Sanhedrin. "That doesn't sound like victory." Yet they had rejoiced. "So I pause and ask myself, what does victory look like?" Victory, Ade continued, had to be defined in relation to Truth. It was for this reason that the apostles had rejoiced in their pain, for although they were imprisoned, tried, and found guilty, their commitment to speaking the Truth rendered them victorious in God's eyes. Similarly, Christian Concern's "true victory" lay in standing for Truth, not success in the courts. After all, "even if we win, the best the courts can do is endorse the Truth. They don't define it." Rather than becoming frustrated with losses in the courts, Ade encouraged us to remember that "our victory is in standing, whether in court or in the public square."

Encouragements to stand for Truth in a hostile world are typical of the weekly prayer meeting. Bible studies often likened Britain to the rebellious nation of Israel, home to an obstinate people who had hardened their hearts to the Truth. Christian activists, by contrast, were painted as prophetic voices in the wilderness, destined to be unwelcome in their hometowns. Highlighting the urgency of the nation's "needs", they stressed that Christian Concern's stand was a necessary, compassionate, and loving response to a nation spiralling into disarray. Further, by offering Biblical justifications for the frequent frustrations suffered by Christian Concern in their public work, Pastor Ade's studies reminded his listeners that God's economy was not their own. That their campaigns and cases did not yield worldly victories did not mean that they had been unsuccessful. A subtle lesson in the humility with which the divine ought to be approached, they channelled a very different model of functionality or rationality than that associated with secular, bureaucratic law, in which law is a 'means to an end' (Riles, 2006: 59; cf. Weber, 1967 [1918]: 144-5). By contrast, Ade emphasised the importance of following God even in the face of adversity or mockery, and even when the results weren't forthcoming; for just as Joshua had been called to circle the walls of Jericho, and as Ezekiel had been called to preach to those who rejected him, so Christian Concern was called to speak Truth to a rebellious nation.

Pastor Ade's definition of "true victory" is markedly different from that assumed by Brown (2009: 229) in the quote above, in which success is thought to be measured by Christian activists' ability to 'roll back the reforms of the 1960s'. By contrast, Ade locates victory not in ends, but in means. As Andrea put it during the interview in which she declared marriage under attack, "do you not take a case because you're going to lose? No!" You take a case, she explained, because it's the right thing to do; because justice demands that the Truth be spoken; and because someone has to defend those who speak it. Indeed, it is not even that Christian activists are victorious *in spite* of their failing to win legislative change or court approval. Rather, it is the very act of standing that constitutes their success. The fact that Parliament and the courts refuse to "endorse" the Truth places Christian

Concern in an ancient, prophetic narrative in which their victory is assured not only in the present moment, but in the future, when the Truth will – as it inevitably must – win out. Within this Ezekiel season, God’s Word is both always already true and always coming true, and Christian activists – like Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles - are simultaneously ‘temporary victims and the ultimate heroes of history’ (Harding, 2001: 238).

Of course, the frequency with which Christian Concern staff and clients remind each other that “true victory” lies in “standing” rather than winning suggests that their losses in the courts are not only personally frustrating, but demand theological justification. After all, in addition to its references to the inevitability of persecution, the Bible also states that ‘for those who love God all things work together for good’ (Romans 8:28). But this does not render these explanations insincere, any more than it renders their occasional campaigning successes theologically obscure. Biblical and historic precedent can account for both wins and losses. Just as God will sometimes give a nation up to its sins, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1 (see Chapter Seven), He will sometimes intervene and reverse this judgment, as He did in the time of the Judges. Or, indeed, as He did in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, when the faith of evangelical politicians had a lasting impact on the nation. Regardless of whether God chooses to intervene, the hostile world inhabited by the staff of Christian Concern and the CLC is one they are called to pray for, to evangelise, and to call to repentance: “This nation needs us, it needs more of us.”

To say that the world must be engaged regardless of outcome is not to render outcome unimportant. Rather, it is to recognise that the vernacular theology on which this engagement is based is both pragmatic and urgent, such that the necessity of offering an immediate response may take precedence over a theologically airtight explanation of the long-term impact of this involvement. This is important because of the diversity of theological positions represented by Christian Concern’s staff and supporters. Theology, and particularly eschatology, may influence the Christian’s approach to social reform. Bebbington (1989: 62), for example, suggests that the evangelical activism of the eighteenth century, including that of William Wilberforce, was made possible by the ascension of postmillennial theology, which posits that the Second Coming of Christ will follow a thousand year period of peace (the millennium). Within this theology, godly men and women were encouraged to work towards the millennium by preaching the Gospel and enabling the gradual improvement of society – an idea that gelled well with both Enlightenment ideals of progress and evangelical reform movements.

Postmillennialism can be contrasted with premillennialism, in which, because Jesus will return to earth before the millennium of peace, human history is thought to become increasingly bleak until the Second Coming, which ushers in a time of Tribulation. Harding (2001: 240-245) describes conservative American Christians’ retreat from ‘fundamentalist

exile' in terms of a theological shift in this premillennial perspective. By positing the existence of a 'pre-Tribulation tribulation', religious leaders like Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye suggested that, in spite of the ultimately regressive trajectory of human history, Christians in the 1980s should engage in moral reform so as to positively impact the nation before its final demise. While the story of humanity was ultimately one of decline, the 1970s and 1980s represented a window of opportunity for American Christians to insert themselves into the Biblical narrative, winning souls for God's Kingdom in the moments before the last of the last days. It was this opening up of the end times that rendered Christian political activism – which previously would have amounted to polishing brass on a sinking ship – a legitimate, nay, *necessary* use of time and resources.

Christian Concern's activist rationale has much in common with the Baptists studied by Harding, particularly in terms of the presumed relationship between evangelism and religious freedom. As we shall see in Chapter Three, they present their work as enabling the continued spread of the Gospel, which would otherwise be threatened by, for example, the regulation of offensive speech. This bears a conceptual debt to Jerry Falwell's 'signature innovation' in 1980s Bible prophecy, in which he suggested that Christians must mobilise politically to safeguard the freedoms of speech and assembly that enabled them to evangelise in the first place. In other words, and as my friends at Christian Concern would surely agree, 'in order to do the only thing Bible prophecy prescribed [Christians] to do in the end-times, namely, spread the gospel to the four corners of the world, Christians must do more than that' (ibid: 244).

Yet unlike the Christian Right of the 1980s, which was composed, Harding (ibid: 245) writes, of those who 'believed, consciously or unconsciously, in dispensational Bible prophecy',<sup>41</sup> and for whom the ultimate trajectory of human history remained one of depravity and deterioration, the range of eschatological opinion at Christian Concern requires a theological justification that can accommodate both long-term success *and* long-term decline. After all, although eschatology was rarely discussed at the Christian Concern offices (indeed, the staff couldn't say for sure where their colleagues stood on the end times), diversity did exist. For example, while Maria's work in discrimination law seemed to have confirmed a pessimistic view of human history, in which the nation appeared to be on an inevitable downward slide, John, a postmillennial Calvinist who worked in finance and data entry, described himself as being pessimistic in the short term only: Europe was in a religious slump at present, but he expected the world to be largely Christianised by the time

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<sup>41</sup> Harding recognises the theological diversity that may have existed among those subscribing to dispensational premillennialism in the 1980s, but argues that, regardless of this internal diversity, the idea of a 'pre-Tribulation tribulation' acted as an overarching framework for the work of the Christian Right throughout this period.

of Christ's return.<sup>42</sup> John thought the Second Coming would not be for many centuries. He would sometimes tease (in his words, "troll") Maria about this, for she insisted that Christ could return at any moment. No doubt an equally great range of opinion exists among Christian Concern's supporters, who encompass not only optimistic postmillennialists like John, but pessimistic premillennialists and amillennialists (and those who have simply never given the matter much thought).

I suggest that it is the urgent theology outlined above that enables the members of these diverse Christian communities to continue to view Christian Concern's work as essential, Biblical, and mandated by God. This theology emphasises both the necessity of Christian intervention in a hostile world and God's absolute power to alter a nation's destiny. By rejecting the profane logic that measures achievement in courtroom wins, instead defining victory as the act of standing, it taps into a prophetic Biblical tradition that reinterprets worldly failure as spiritual success. Yet this foregrounding of engagement-in-the-moment always leaves open the possibility of divine intervention, however unlikely it might currently appear. God has wrought miracles before. He can certainly do so again. That Britain is a hostile world now, then, does not mean it will stay that way forever; *but even if it does*, working to counter this hostility is never in vain. In this imagining, even failed prophets are symbols of hope, evidence of a faithful God reaching out to a faithless people.

As such, I argue that Christian activists simultaneously inhabit two latent forms, embodying both the prophetic voice that is destined to be maligned, and the successful moral campaigner, whose work may forever change the face of the nation. They are the prophet Ezekiel; they are also William Wilberforce. It is this latency, this pessimistic-optimism, that accounts for the equally radical and reactionary elements of the cultural fundamentalism discussed above, in which activists seek a nation that both was and will be Christian. As Andrea once put it: "Are we a nation in the process of turning our back on Jesus Christ? One thousand percent yes. Am I hoping that we'll turn back still? Yes."

#### **I.V Conclusion: chameleons and china shops**

'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you' (1 Peter 4:12). So wrote the Apostle Peter to the suffering Christians of Asia Minor, reminding the fledgling church of the inevitability of persecution and the joy of suffering for Christ's sake.<sup>43</sup> With its 'full-fledged ideology of martyrdom' (Moss, 2012: 1) – including various theologies relating to the martyrdom of

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<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that everyone would be Christian – although John thinks that many more would be - but that national law would largely reflect Biblical morality.

<sup>43</sup> As with many of the canonical letters, the authorship of 1 Peter is contested. However, because my interlocutors accept the apostolic authority of these letters, I have adopted their emic understanding of authorship throughout the dissertation.

God Himself – Christianity’s origin story is one of thriving under threat. The danger of the lions’ den is ever present, just as the Bible warns it will be. As was sometimes said at Christ Church, *God doesn’t hide the small print*.

If the hostility British Christians expect to face links them to Daniel’s trials in pagan Babylon, it also connects their nation to the rebellious people of Israel. Like Israel, Britain had been chosen and blessed by God. Despite its small size, Andrea told me, it had commanded “the respect of the world”, creating “systems that have been stable and democratic and free, not coercive, truly free”. But as with its Old Testament forebear, Britain had chosen to reject and deny this privileged relationship with the divine; the very same relationship without which, as Andrea saw it, its stability, democracy, and freedom could never have emerged: “And over and over again in the Bible we see that where nations trust in God, the God of the Bible, they flourish, and when they turn their back on Him they become unstable.” Indeed, the very foundations of society seemed to have been fatally compromised, as the fundamental, eternal structures of which it was composed – ‘the “givens” of life’ (Mathews & De Hart, 1990: 243) – increasingly came “under attack”. Men called evil good and good evil, and the nation careened towards catastrophe. For the inhabitants of this hostile world, such apocalyptic warnings represent not ‘the edge of sanity’, but the inevitable result of God’s rejection (ibid: 178).

Of course, not all British Christians accept the hostile world thesis. As was suggested in the Introduction, many deny what one speaker at General Synod called “the growing mythology of slights apparently done to Christians”, instead highlighting Christianity’s privileged place in national life (Church of England, 2012). These Christians reject cultural fundamentalism, arguing that believers cannot piggyback on heritage or history – a history they acknowledge to have involved both justice and injustice - but must prove the relevance of their faith ‘after Christendom’ (Bartley, 2006). Even among those who agree that “unfair things are happening” to Christians, as many of my friends at Christ Church do, there is a range of opinion on how one ought to respond to this hostility. Distinguishing those situations where one ought to turn the other cheek, as Christ did on the cross, from those where one ought to insist on one’s rights, as the Apostle Paul did when threatened with flogging, is a constant struggle. Indeed, it is the contested nature of this question that forms the ethnographic core of the following chapters.

With this in mind, it is useful to return to Laura, the speaker at the London Women’s Convention. The bulk of the Convention’s programme was devoted to Laura’s three blocks of “teaching”, that is, Bible-based talks offering practical advice for Christian living. Laura proved an engaging speaker, peppering her talks with anecdotes drawn from her own imperfect efforts to live, pray and hope in a hostile world. Reflecting on how best to live in such a world, she asked her audience to consider three “wrong responses” to this challenge.

The first was to become a “hermit”: “The hermit is a Christian who retreats into a Christian ghetto. The only people they meet with and hang out with are Christian people,” meaning they are never called upon to “defend God’s glory.” The second was to become a “chameleon”, a “secret believer” who “shuts up, blends in, and avoids speaking out because it’s just too uncomfortable.” Finally, she announced to peals of laughter, “there is the bull in a china shop”. This sort of Christian “endeavours to defend God’s glory, confronting the culture head on, but actually in the process they’re rude, arrogant, contentious, and actually dishonouring in the way they try and defend the Truth.”

None of these three caricatures, Laura reminded us, reflected a positive vision of Christian living; but all of us, she suspected, could identify with at least one. By contrast, the right way to live in a hostile world was to be found in the words of the Apostle Peter. The text of 1 Peter 2:10-12 flashed up on a projector screen at the back of the hall. Laura read the verses aloud, emphasising a single word:

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live *such* good lives among the pagans that, though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits.

This was how Daniel had lived in pagan Babylon, and this was how Christians were called to live now.

Whether or not they attended the Convention, members of both my field sites were, in their different ways, seeking to live as Peter advised. As part of their surrender to God’s Word, they strived to live “*such* good lives” – such Biblically grounded lives - that He might be glorified through them. Through submission to these Biblical ideals, they sought to become ever better witnesses for Christ. Yet they also struggled with the temptation to be hermits, chameleons, or bulls, suggesting that the goal of submission could conflict with the other values they held. A Christ Church apprentice named Chris, for example, risked sliding into hermitage when he explained that, unlike the visiting anthropologist, he hadn’t brought a non-Christian friend to the church’s much promoted Open Day, something the minister had been encouraging the congregation to do for a number of weeks. His excuse, he sheepishly explained, was that he didn’t really know any non-Christians. After all, he worked in a church; *where would he meet them?* For others, the temptation was not to be a hermit, but a chameleon. Many church members echoed Leah’s fear, recounted above, that they were not “bold” or “distinctive” enough in their faith. Of course, such a charge could never be levelled at Andrea, who, after taking a ‘Leading from Your Strengths – Ministry Insights’ (LFYS) personality test (a Christian version of the Myers-Briggs test), jokingly



announced to the office that she had scored “ten out of ten for aggressiveness” in decision-making.<sup>44</sup> Being a chameleon was something she had, in Williams’ (1993) and Laidlaw’s (2014) terms, developed a moral incapacity to achieve (cf. Hansen, 2009: 27). Yet she also knew that her urgent, prophetic style risked her being dismissed as the proverbial bull.

Keeping these three tendencies - and the competing values they represent - in check can, I suggest, become a source of what Robbins (2004) calls ‘moral torment’, as my interlocutors struggle to discharge their obligations to both God and the unsaved. After all, none of Laura’s caricatures had got it entirely wrong. By contrast, each seemed to represent ‘the realisation of single values in full form’ (Robbins, 2015: 18): removal from secular taint on the part of the hermit; maintaining good relations with evangelistic prospects on the part of the chameleon; a refusal to compromise on the part of the bull. All, in this sense, represented aspects of Biblical submission, the ideal around which both sets of interlocutors’ theoretical value monism is structured. But it is on the question of which manifestation of submission (or which Biblical value) to prioritise, perhaps, that the members of my two field sites sometimes diverged.

This is particularly true in relation to the Biblical duty to evangelise. Christian Concern certainly sees its ministry as evangelistic, particularly in terms of the relationship between legal activism and the freedom to preach the Gospel. Pastor Ade once prayed that Christian Concern would “continue to be an evangelistic, soul-winning organisation”. He even suggested that this commitment to evangelism was the reason it faced such hostility in its public-facing work: “That’s why we’re under attack, because we’re evangelistic and the devil doesn’t like that.” But while it does hope to be “a soul-winning organisation”, it is equally a prophetic voice. It speaks Truth to those who do not want to hear it. And it sometimes seemed that this Truth was spoken particularly loudly on those controversial subjects where the views of conservative Christians are, as I experienced at the Core Issues Trust protest, thought particularly abhorrent by their non-Christian neighbours.

The members of Christ Church tend towards the same conservative positions on these contentious subjects as Christian Concern, and many were pleased, at least in an abstract sense, that a Biblical perspective on these issues found its way into public debate through the work of Christian organisations. In practice, however, some worried that the perceived aggressiveness or offensiveness of prophetic speech – its potential bulliness - risked unsettling their own evangelistic efforts. For those who had decided that the appropriate response to a hostile world was one of individual witness through words and deeds, Christian Concern’s frequent calls to national repentance could appear evangelistically ineffective. As one conservative evangelical woman, who happened to know

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<sup>44</sup> The survey opposed ‘aggressive’ with ‘reflective’ (as opposed to gentle).



Andrea well, put it, “society’s *clearly* decided where it wants to go on [these issues]... Why not focus efforts on actually talking to people about Jesus?”

Of course, from the perspective of those working at Christian Concern, speaking of “God’s good pattern” for human flourishing *is* “talking to people about Jesus”. Lest I be accused of obfuscation as regards the many similarities between my two sets of interlocutors - it was a source of some amusement among my Christian Concern colleagues when the results of my own LFYS personality test suggested a tendency to ‘avoid accountability by overstating the complexity of the situation’<sup>45</sup> – it is important to remember that they are united in their commitment to spreading Gospel Truth. Indeed, they acknowledge this shared commitment even when their opinions on evangelistic strategies diverge. The differences of approach that the following chapters document are primarily those: differences of approach, not conviction. But for evangelicals who take seriously the task of bringing glory to God in an unwelcoming world, determining the *right* approach – negotiating between belligerence and blending in – can be an ethically loaded question, one that is confronted daily in their interactions with those who remain ‘of’ this hostile world. My LFYS test results notwithstanding, it is a sense of the complexity of these negotiations that the following pages hope to convey, beginning in Chapter Two with a focus on Biblical publicity.

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew’s response was: “An anthropologist? Surely not!”

## Chapter Two: Publicity and Preaching

*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19-20)*

### II.I The last English martyr

‘I would like to pose a question: who was the last English martyr?’ So asked Paul Diamond (2013), barrister and standing counsel to the Christian Legal Centre, in an article published online in *The Telegraph* in January 2013. The provocatively titled piece – ‘Christians’ rights: Martyred on a cross of liberal secularism’ – made the case that England’s last martyr had not lived and died in some distant past, a bygone era in which England’s green and pleasant lands were gripped by religious war, civil unrest, and Reformation zeal. Rather, England’s last martyr ‘was arguably a 69-year-old street preacher named Harry Hammond,’ and his alleged martyrdom had begun in the autumn of 2001.

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Mr Hammond had travelled to a pedestrianized area in Bournemouth city centre with the aim of preaching to shoppers and passersby. Having arrived at his chosen preaching spot he unveiled a placard, which read ‘Jesus Gives Peace, Jesus is Alive, Stop Immorality, Stop Homosexuality, Stop Lesbianism, Jesus is Lord.’ He was soon confronted by thirty to forty members of the public, many of whom took umbrage at his message. They were ‘angry,’ ‘aggressive,’ ‘personally insulted,’ ‘disgusted,’ ‘upset,’ and ‘shocked’.<sup>46</sup> They shouted at Mr Hammond and tried to remove his sign. One passerby poured water on him. Two police officers arrived and asked Mr Hammond to take down his placard, which he refused to do. After discussing the issue with the crowd, they arrested him for breach of the peace under the Public Order Act 1986.<sup>47</sup> He was later convicted, fined £300, and ordered to pay £395 in costs. Shortly after his conviction, Mr Hammond died. This, in Mr Diamond’s view, made him ‘the last English martyr.’

For those who disagreed with his conviction, the alleged martyrdom of Harry Hammond raised serious questions about the state’s response to so-called offensive speech. Those who shared Mr Hammond’s views on homosexuality, such as his lawyer, argued that the case was indicative of the state of the British courts, which were ‘intent on removing the Judeo-Christian foundation of our laws... replacing them with a secular, liberal worldview which dispenses tolerance to all those who agree with it and relentless hostility, or even persecution, to those who do not’ (Diamond, 2013). Those who disagreed with Mr Hammond’s stance on homosexuality, such as human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell (2007), argued that open debate was preferable to this ‘outrageous infringement of free

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<sup>46</sup> *Hammond v DPP* at [5].

<sup>47</sup> See Gordon (2002) for a nineteenth-century example of the policing of religion through public order law.

speech’: ‘His prejudice needed to be rebutted, but not by making him a criminal and a martyr.’

The truisms that are recycled through the freedom of expression case law - those oft-repeated assurances that protection is available ‘not only to information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive, or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb’<sup>48</sup> - are of foundational importance to the clients and staff of the CLC. But the issues raised by *Hammond v DPP* go beyond the law’s determining of the dividing line between speech that is inoffensive or offensive, reasonable or unreasonable, protected or policed. Mr Hammond’s literal entry into Bournemouth’s marketplace of ideas (and consumer goods) prompts questions not only about the state’s policing of religious speech, but about the reception of this speech by non-state actors, including other Christians. What sort of rationale underlay Mr Hammond’s chosen preaching strategy, which he knew would likely cause offence to passersby, and what did his fellow evangelicals think of this approach? Or, to phrase the issue slightly differently: ‘What, in any given place and time, are the legitimate and legitimating forms of [Biblical] proclamation?’ (Engelke, 2013: xix).

In a recent ethnography of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Matthew Engelke (ibid) provides an example of Christianity’s tendency towards religious extroversion in its historic specificity through an analysis of the Society’s attempts to generate ‘Biblical publicity’. His processual emphasis encourages anthropologists to attend not only to the fact of what Jose Casanova (1994) famously called ‘public religion’, but to the ways and means by which those practices, performances, and institutions we think of as ‘religious’ actually *go public* in the contemporary moment. Following Engelke, this chapter approaches the contours of mission through the lens of publicity. As I show below, ‘going public’ implies dynamism and contestation. I argue that although the generation of religious publicity has particular relevance to organisations that exist to speak ‘of Jesus Christ in public life,’<sup>49</sup> it is also important to evangelicals on the ground, including the members of Christ Church. Given their emphasis on the value of submission to the Bible, my interlocutors take seriously Jesus’ oft-voiced command to preach His Word, to which they seek to submit as the only authoritative guide to right living: ‘a lamp to my feet and a light to my path’ (Psalm 119:105). But in a world in which some people regard the Bible’s moral strictures as, to quote Hammond’s accusers, ‘[disgusting]’, ‘[insulting]’, and ‘[shocking]’ – or even as plain ‘bunk’ (Luhmann, 2012b: 319) – finding an accessible way of explaining opinions held on the basis of Biblical authority can be somewhat difficult. It is for this reason that Engelke’s normative distinction between the possible and the desirable – between the ‘can’ and the ‘should’ – is of critical importance. Thus, while it is clearly valuable to attend to the aims

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. at [15].

<sup>49</sup> One of Christian Concern’s taglines is ‘Standing and speaking for Jesus Christ in public life.’

and interests of those who actively generate religious publicity, I advance Engelke's argument by suggesting that it is equally important to examine the ways in which this publicity might be challenged, countered, or even rejected by those conservative Christians in whose name it is ostensibly being sought.

While Engelke uses 'Biblical publicity' to refer to the work of an organisation that seeks to make the Bible heard 'without note or comment', my own use of the term has a slightly different scope. Unlike Bible Society, those at Christian Concern are keen to promote a particular reading of the Bible and the values it is thought to contain. As such, I use 'Biblical publicity' to refer to the ways in which evangelical campaigners seek to gain an audience not only for the Bible itself, but for what they deem to be the "orthodox Christian" position on or view of the contested issues toward which they direct their lobbying, such as abortion, euthanasia, and religious freedom. Biblical publicity, in this sense, is not aimed at producing what Engelke would call 'ambient faith'. It is not an 'open invitation to the onlooker to fill in the blank' (ibid: 45), a chance for its audience to reflect on what might, perhaps, be the spiritual dimension of their existence. Rather, it is unashamedly and explicitly "Christian". The issue, however, is just how explicit – both in terms of an overtly Biblical agenda and in terms of the graphic language and imagery with which it can be laid out - this message ought to be.

The chapter begins with an examination of the ways in which Christian Concern generates and takes advantage of the conditions that allow religion to 'go public'. Somewhat paradoxically, this publicity occurs in a context they frame as increasingly hostile to (and censorious of) conservative Christianity. Using a high-profile case that exemplifies the interlinking of religious publicity and legal theology, I suggest that Christian Concern treats the law as a technology enabling the public articulation of otherwise controversial viewpoints. In the second half of the chapter, I expand the notion of publicity by focusing on the subject of street preaching, in which loudspeakers, sandwich boards, and even the unamplified voice are critical broadcast media. Drawing on local notions of British reserve, I argue that my Christ Church interlocutors' responses to this form of public religion reveal a complicated understanding of the potential pros and cons of such publicity, wherein British evangelicals are keen to speak of Jesus in the public sphere even as they are unwilling to transgress the class-based boundaries that circumscribe such preaching.

## **II.II Publicity and subjectivity**

While there is more than one way for religion to 'go public' - and, indeed, while different publicities may have very different textures, resonances, and outcomes (see this Chapter's conclusion) - the kind of publicity courted by Christian Concern typically involves 'the use of media, an instrumental publicness associated most with advertising and public relations'

(Warner, 2002: 30).<sup>50</sup> If the media of the twentieth-century public sphere were ‘newspapers and magazines, radio and TV’ (Habermas, 1974: 49), publicity in the twenty-first includes online forms of mass communication and social networking. In addition to maintaining Twitter and Facebook accounts, Christian Concern spokespeople regularly appear on TV and radio news programmes, and its press releases are often quoted by national newspapers. From Andrea’s perspective, media coverage is an essential part of the success of their cases, whatever their eventual outcome. Without the newspaper headlines, she fears, the challenges faced by her clients would never come to light: “The publicity and exposing [it is] actually really important. It would be terrible to do these cases behind closed doors and no one to see the injustice.” And “exposing” the cases is a goal in which the group usually succeeds. Indeed, a 2013 report by Theos, the public theology think tank, titled ‘Is there a ‘Religious Right’ emerging in Britain?’, argues that the ‘major success’ of Christian Concern is ‘its ability to command the media agenda’ (Walton et al, 2013: 54).

A December 2013 email bulletin demonstrates this well. The bulletin was a round-up of the activities, campaigns and cases that had taken place over the year 2013. Its message was framed in terms of Christian Concern’s presence in the public sphere, with each paragraph tagline beginning ‘Getting the message out’: ‘Getting the message out in public’; ‘Getting the message out in the media’; ‘Getting the message out in the courts’. The email proudly proclaimed:

During 2013, in local, national and international media, we’ve had representatives appear over 45 times on television, over 100 times on radio and our cases or comments have been reported over 100 times in the printed press, including six front pages of national newspapers. This is in addition to the influence our work has had on many other media commentators!<sup>51</sup>

Christian Concern is not the only evangelical organisation concerned with numbers. As Engelke (2010: 818) has argued of nineteenth-century Bible Society fundraising literature, quantifying the results of one’s work is a powerful means of demonstrating not only an organisation’s ‘corporate discipline’ (that is, its careful stewarding of scarce resources), but its evangelistic impact. While the Society measured this in terms of Bibles distributed, each of which might translate to an individual soul saved, Christian Concern quantifies its success in terms of public witness and self-assessed “influence”. But how does such a small organisation actually generate this kind of media coverage? The following section tracks the

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<sup>50</sup> Although this chapter deals with ‘publicity’ rather than the public sphere or the publics to which Christian Concern addresses itself (which I discuss in Chapters Three and Six), I will provisionally define the public sphere as the ‘domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed’ (Habermas, 1974: 49), as this is how Christian Concern understands the term.

<sup>51</sup> Received 14<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

public profile of one of the CLC's cases, *Core Issues Trust v Transport for London*, as an example of the instrumentalisation of a wide variety of media in pursuit of theo-legal ends.

On a cold, overcast morning in late February 2013 I made my way to the Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ). The ornate frontage of the neo-Gothic Royal Courts, replete with intricate arches and sky-scraping spires, is matched only by its elaborate interior, which abounds with stained glass windows, drawings and oil paintings of lawyers of note, and even a small museum of legal dress. Barristers pull their robes over exquisitely tailored suits and dresses as they stride purposefully through the Court's winding corridors, black robes fanning out in their wake. Within the Royal Courts, Biblical patriarchs rub shoulders with the heroes of England's legal history. Statues of Jesus, King Solomon, and King Alfred perch atop its outer pinnacles, where they stand guard over one thousand rooms and more than three miles of corridor. To the casual observer, the building functions as such a concrete manifestation of the state's commitment to justice that one might never know it had been built on the site of what was, in the mid-nineteenth-century, an overcrowded Victorian slum.

One often sees media representatives milling around outside the Courts. With the RCJ's imposing frontage forming their backdrop, they film, smoke, and chat among themselves as they wait for a judgment to be delivered or an interviewee to emerge from inside. This morning was no exception. As I approached, I saw Jake, Christian Concern's cameraman and video producer, filming an interview with Dr Mike Davidson, the claimant in today's case. They were standing beside two cameramen from Sky News, who had interviewed Dr Davidson earlier that morning. Not wanting to interrupt Jake at his work, I spoke to Sam, a Christian Concern intern. A recent advertising graduate with floppy, blond hair and thick-rimmed, stylish glasses, Sam had left university unsure of whether to go into "secular" or "Christian" advertising work. He was working part-time as what he called a "social media intern" for Christian Concern while considering his options. (He had previously been interning at a secular advertising agency, where his skills had been put to use on a campaign to sell luxury cars). Sam explained that today's case was very important for the CLC. His job, as social media intern, was to keep their supporters updated via Twitter.

Leaving Sam and Jake to finish filming, I cleared security and went downstairs to Court 22, where the case was being heard. In the corridor outside the courtroom I found Maria, a CLC lawyer. We were soon joined by Mike. Dr Mike Davidson is a middle-aged, portly, mild-mannered man with greying hair and a South African accent. A trainee psychodramatist with a doctorate in education, my meetings with Mike always left me with the impression that his every softly-spoken word had gone through a careful process of internal vetting. Mike was present in his capacity as founder and director of the Core Issues Trust (CIT), a Belfast-based non-profit Christian ministry. CIT seeks to support Christians

who want to ‘move away’ from unwanted same-sex attraction. It works on the understanding that although people with homosexual desires do not ‘choose’ these desires, they are free to choose whether or not to act on them. Mike believes that these attractions can be managed (and, in some individuals, changed) through therapy and counselling, which he refers to as Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE). It is more commonly referred to as ‘ex-gay’, ‘reparative’, or ‘conversion’ therapy.<sup>52</sup> As we talked, Maria received a call from LBC Radio (a well-known London radio station), who were hoping to interview Mike on air. He had been interviewed on LBC before and had found the host to be quite “confrontational”; still, he agreed to return to the programme. While Maria and Mike set up the interview, I entered the courtroom and waited for the hearing to begin.

The case revolved around CIT’s request for judicial review of a decision of Transport for London (TfL), the government body responsible for managing London’s transport infrastructure. TfL had refused to run a CIT advertisement on the side of London buses. The proposed advertisement, which featured black and white lettering on a red background, had read:

NOT GAY! EX-GAY, POST-GAY AND PROUD. GET OVER IT!

It was conceived, both in terms of its message and its design, as a direct response to an advertisement placed by Stonewall, a prominent LGBT rights advocacy charity, which had been running on London buses for some time. The Stonewall advertisement read:

SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY. GET OVER IT!

TfL’s decision was that the CIT ads were ‘contrary to [their] Advertising Policy’<sup>53</sup>. Under 3(1) of this Policy, TfL will not approve advertisements which are ‘likely to cause widespread or serious offence to members of the public’, or where ‘[t]he advertisement contains images or messages which relate to matters of public controversy and sensitivity.’<sup>54</sup> CIT argued that the decision, which had been taken in the lead up to London’s 2012 Mayoral elections, had been politically motivated. Mike believed that the incumbent mayor, Boris Johnson, had seen the ads as a liability to his campaign for a second term in office.

As is often the case (even when litigation involves such incendiary issues as sexuality, freedom of expression, and political intrigue), the first hour of the hearing was

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<sup>52</sup> Mike disagrees with the use of terminology that implies a smooth conversion from homosexuality to heterosexuality. As such, I do not refer to ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapy, but do use the label ‘ex-gay’ (a term Mike uses).

<sup>53</sup> *CIT v TfL* at [4].

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* at [49].

spent discussing a technicality.<sup>55</sup> There was then a short recess, during which time I chatted with Maria, Sam, and Jake. We discussed a text message that Andrea had sent Sam, the social media intern, which she wanted him to tweet. It read: “Boris Johnson thinks it’s ok to say on London buses ‘Some people are gay. Get over it.’ but bans ‘Ex gay. Get over it.’ How can that be fair?” Jake asked Sam if he could see the text; after all, as their film producer, and the man behind their weekly video news programme, he needed to know how the case was being “marketed.” I laughed at his use of the language of marketing, which I associated more with the branding strategies of slick advertising firms – the kind of people who could be said to ‘speak McKinsey’ (Mazzarella, 2010: 2) – than with a Christian non-profit. He responded by turning to me and saying: “It’s all marketing, you know that! It’s all about the marketing.”

Although I was caught off guard by Jake’s willingness to deploy the language of marketing, the interweaving of religious and commercial logics is hardly unusual in the history of Christian activism and evangelism (Bebbington, 1989: 77; Engelke, 2010: 816; J. Comaroff, 2009: 17-23). Today’s Christians indulge in a rich material culture of faith-inspired merchandise, including Christian books, toys, and t-shirts, which is both advertised to them and advertises their faith to others (for historic and contemporary examples from American Protestantism, Catholicism, and Mormonism, see McDannell, 1995). Many of these objects are purchased from specifically Christian retailers, who have few theological qualms about ‘branding’ Christianity through the use of what are seen to be unambiguously Christian symbols: ‘The name “Jesus”, a biblical text, a cross or fish, these are the equivalent of Nike or Kellogg or Benetton’ (ibid: 260). In this sense, the ‘marketing’ of faith is a central aspect of the work of Christian Concern, whose ‘Not Ashamed’ campaign, which encourages Christians to be vocal about their faith, comes with its own material culture of t-shirts, baseball caps, badges, and wristbands.<sup>56</sup> These items, all of which are available for purchase from their website or from their stands at Christian festivals, are intended both to signal one’s belief and to spark conversations with non-Christians. A similar evangelistic drive is evident in Christian media, from catchy Christian rock music to children’s television series *Veggie Tales*, in which animated vegetables sing and dance their way through the stories of the Bible. Whether or not *Veggie Tales’* Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber actually lead non-Christian children into relationship with Jesus, its fusion of ancient

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<sup>55</sup> Given that the ads had actually been placed by another organisation, Anglican Mainstream (a lobby group with which Christian Concern has strong ties), on behalf of CIT, the question arose as to whether Dr Davidson had standing to take the case, and the court broke for recess to allow TfL to decide whether or not they would continue to contest the issue. As this ‘may seem to be the kind of question that only a lawyer could love’ (Sullivan, 2010: 92), I will not dwell on it except to say that, in the interest of disposing of the case in the most timely manner possible, TfL decided against.

<sup>56</sup> Connected to the idea of public broadcast, it is worth noting that the ‘Not Ashamed’ logo is a cross contained within a speech bubble.



Biblical narrative with the familiar format of a children's commercial television show - and its associated merchandise - is just one example of Christianity's use of the market as a means of '[r]eaching out to others, the core of evangelism' (Warren, 2005: 69).

Nor is this blend of commercial logic and evangelistic intent a twenty-first-century phenomenon. As historian Frank Lambert (1990: 813) notes of George Whitefield, the eighteenth-century open-air preacher often credited with sparking America's Great Awakening:

[B]y applying means from the world of commerce to publicize his meetings, Whitefield generated large, enthusiastic crowds... Whitefield prepared remote auditors to receive the spoken word through advance publicity, especially that of newspaper advertising. And he employed a commercial vocabulary to convey the necessity of the New Birth to his listeners who themselves thought in categories of market exchange.

Whitefield remains an inspiration for today's open-air preachers (some of whom we will meet in the following section), and for English evangelicals more generally (including those at Christ Church). Christ's expulsion of the moneylenders from the temple, then, does not negate the fact that evangelism can be spurred on by those who 'speak McKinsey' for religious ends.

Given this history of religious promotion, what does it mean to say that a legal case is "all about the marketing"? CIT's message was twofold: first, that there exists a subset of the British populace who are ex-gay, and who desire to move away from homosexual behaviour; second, that this fact often comes under attack from LGBT lobbyists like Stonewall, who should 'get over it' and accept the choices of ex-gay individuals. Core Issues' ad was conceived as a direct response to Stonewall's original campaign ('SOME PEOPLE ARE GAY. GET OVER IT!'), the identity politics of which defined Mike according to a characteristic he experienced as disjunctive to his sense of self: his same-sex attraction. Ex-gay Christians<sup>57</sup> reject this reductive approach to what are inevitably complex inner lives. As those who seek to define themselves primarily through their relationship with Jesus (as opposed to their relationships with friends, family, or conjugal partners), their ex-gay identity is as much a signifier of their ongoing process of Christian conversion as it is a reference to their desired conversion from homosexuality to heterosexuality (Erzen, 2006). Drawing on Janet Dolgin's use of Henry Maine's classic thesis that the law moves 'from status to contract', Marilyn Strathern's (1997: 42-45) analysis of the role of choice in new reproductive technologies suggests that modern law appeals to both 'status' and 'contract' –

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<sup>57</sup>Although not all ex-gay people are Christian, CIT is an explicitly Christian ministry. As such, I have limited my discussion of ex-gay subjectivity to those who identify as Christian.

ascription and election – in its determining of identity. For Mike, however, the status he had been ascribed directly contradicted that which he had chosen. The positioning of homosexuality as innate and unchangeable – something that some people just “are” – conflicted with his desire for (and experience of) sexual flux, and was seen as an attempt to undermine his decision to emphasise his relationship with Christ over his sexual urges. He explained this to me as we chatted outside Court 22 on the second day of the hearing. I had asked him if he’d had a chance to look over the defence’s skeleton arguments, which would be presented in court that afternoon. His answer was brief and to the point: “Yes, and they claim I don’t exist.” His somewhat awkwardly phrased ad – ‘NOT GAY! EX-GAY, POST-GAY AND PROUD. GET OVER IT!’ - was his way of expressing, in block capitals and bold colours, that he, too, had the right to choose his identity.

Mike’s intention had been to highlight the existence of ex-gay people, not to denigrate those who were comfortable identifying as gay. Yet his ad was taken by many Londoners, including Mayor Boris Johnson, as the ‘clearly offensive [suggestion] that being gay is an illness that someone recovers from’ (quoted in Booth et al, 2012). Mrs Justice Lang, the presiding judge, recognised the parallel with Stonewall’s ads; although she ruled against CIT, her judgment acknowledged that the originals had been ‘highly offensive to fundamentalist Christians and other religious groups whose religious belief is that homosexuality is contrary to God’s teachings.’<sup>58</sup> From the perspective of those who opposed Mike’s message, TfL’s differential treatment of the ads placed by Stonewall and CIT was justified by framing religion as a choice. The law appeared unwilling to read harm into the disrespect of a position that was taken to be freely held (see Mahmood, 2009: 73). By contrast to the ‘lifestyle choice’ of religion, sexuality was presented as ‘given and not chosen’ (Plant, 2013: 13);<sup>59</sup> less a ‘habitual sin’, more a ‘singular nature’ (Foucault, 1978: 43). But for people like Mike, Stonewall’s ads were offensive precisely because of their perceived assault on identity. They too were experienced as an attack on selfhood: a reduction of interiority to unwanted same-sex attraction, and a rendering of one’s relationship with Jesus, which prevents Christian ex-gays from accepting a “gay” identity, as something to be “[gotten] over”.

In the years preceding Mike’s case, SOCE had come under increased scrutiny from commentators and lawmakers in the UK.<sup>60</sup> While space forbids an examination of the medicalization of sexuality (Foucault, 1978), the desire to change one’s sexual orientation is

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<sup>58</sup> *CIT v TfL* at [135].

<sup>59</sup> Paragraph [141] cites some of the letters of complaint received by TfL.

<sup>60</sup> In 2009, another SOCE-practitioner (and fellow CLC client), Lesley Pilkington, had been the subject of an undercover investigation by gay activist and *Independent* journalist Patrick Strudwick (see Strudwick, 2010). Strudwick’s complaint to her professional body, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, led to her losing her accreditation.

often pathologised as an illness in itself, understood by medical professionals as the result of internalised homophobia.<sup>61</sup> Yet subjectivity ‘is not just the outcome of social control or the unconscious; it also provides the ground for subjects to think through their circumstances and to feel through their contradictions... to inwardly endure experiences that would otherwise be outwardly unbearable’ (Biehl et al, 2007: 14). For people like Mike, identifying as ex-gay is a means of reconciling evangelical Christianity with the experience of unwanted sexual desires, which can then be seen as just one of a range of sins in an area in which all human beings, gay or straight, fall short. In Tanya Erzen’s (2006: 19) terms, it is a way to ‘bridge the divide’ between one’s sexual and religious identities. Given this, to think of the banners as ‘advertisements’ (which was how they were described in court, and how I have described them for consistency) is, perhaps, to misunderstand their intent. On the second day of the hearing, Mike told me that the case had never been about “advertising” a service. The press were wrong, he thought, to suggest that the ads had been placed in the hope of drumming up business for the therapy he offered: “‘gay cure’, as they insist on calling it.” He was not seeking “clients” (a term he prefers to “patients”). He was simply looking to publicly articulate an alternative vision of human sexuality.

It was, of course, the publicness of this articulation that rendered it problematic for the court. (Justice Lang declared advertising on buses to be ‘extremely intrusive’.<sup>62</sup>) And yet, by preventing the commuting public from seeing CIT’s ad on London buses, TfL created a new viewing public for the Trust’s message: those who would see the case discussed on television, hear about it on the radio, read about it in the papers, and engage with it through the blogosphere. Throughout its time in court the case was covered by a number of British media outlets, including *The Guardian* (Malik, 2013) and *The Independent* (Silcocks, 2013), and the RCJ’s assortment of Biblical and legal giants formed the backdrop of many of the press photos that would come to illustrate the case. In this way, the legal process itself functioned as one of Michael Warner’s (2002: 30) instrumental media.

The case also offered Andrea, as one of the lawyers involved, numerous opportunities to express her belief that “mainstream Christians” were being gagged by a tyrannous elite, represented here by Boris Johnson. It was this aspect that was most heavily emphasised – Jake might say “marketed” - by the CLC, which had long argued that “orthodox Christian views” were subject to censorship in the public sphere. As their weekly email bulletin, Christian Weekly News, explained, *CIT v TfL* was “a key freedom of expression case... particularly important because of its implications for free speech and

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<sup>61</sup> It is worth remembering how quickly British psychiatry’s attitude to homosexuality has changed. The ‘treatment’ of (usually male) homosexuality through the use of invasive aversion therapies is part of the profession’s very recent past (see King & Bartlett, 1999; Smith et al, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> *CIT v TFL* at [129].

debate around the issue of homosexuality.”<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, Mike lost his case. CIT’s call for judicial review was dismissed. The very act of taking it, however, had gained him a hearing in a court much more important than Justice Lang’s: that of public opinion. That the law offers this opportunity to publicise the Christian message is, I submit, one of the defining rationales behind Christian Concern’s brand of ‘legal theology’. Won or lost, a case is a seed broadcast (see Engelke, 2013: xx). And a seed broadcast is, potentially, a world transformed. As was often said at Wimpole Street (and as was stressed at the Wilberforce Academy, Christian Concern’s annual youth conference), “changed people change culture.” Thus, it is through imagining strategic litigation as a form of evangelism that Christian Concern attempts to remake the secular world in (one reading of) the Bible’s image, with ‘liberal jurisprudence [redeployed] against itself in order to transform it’ (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 208).

### **II.III Reserved speech**

As the email bulletin highlighting Christian Concern’s ability to ‘[get] the message out in public’ suggests, it is as much the *fact* of their media appearances as it is what is communicated through them that allows Christian Concern to justify its existence to its supporters. While lobby groups are directly involved in creating the conditions necessary for religious publicity, Christians on the ground must respond to this publicity as part of their everyday lives when, for example, cases like Mike’s come up in conversation with non-Christian friends and family members. In this section, I discuss my Christ Church interlocutors’ understanding of street preaching as an example of how they respond to religious publicity. Street preaching, of course, involves a different kind of publicity than that generated by news coverage of legal cases. While both use media that amplify or extend the reach of their message, there is clearly a difference between the loudspeakers, tracts, and placards associated with public preaching and editorial coverage in *The Times*. However, I believe my expansive use of the term ‘publicity’ is justified not only by street preaching’s status as a classic example of the ‘going public’ of religion, but because the controversy it generates can lead to publicity of the kind referenced above. This controversy, I suggest, requires us to take account of the ways in which religious publicity might be rejected, dismissed, or critiqued by other religious actors. In particular, I argue that my Christ Church interlocutors’ commitment to British reserve can put them at odds with the sort of publicity drummed up by their fellow conservative Christians, suggesting an ambivalent understanding of public (and publicised) faith.

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<sup>63</sup> Received 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

In July 2013, I visited Brian, a teacher at a prestigious public school, at his house in the suburbs. London was then experiencing a heat wave, and he answered the door wearing shorts and flip-flops. Armed with cups of tea, we headed to the living room, where his toddler son apparently reigned supreme: toys, baby clothes, and children's books, including *Where the Wild Things Are* and *The Jesus Bible Storybook*, were strewn across the floor. Brian told me that although a Christian "ought to be just absolutely destroyed" by the death of a non-Christian friend or family member, it was hard to know how to encourage non-Christians to look into Christ's claims for themselves. Laughing, he suggested that standing in his local train station with a billboard would probably not be an effective way of bringing people to faith. I asked if he had ever tried it. Brian told me that although he had never done it himself, he had seen others do it, "and I think the effect is mostly they look just completely mad." Although he could imagine a street preacher who spoke "lovingly and conscionably and reasonably and sensitively... I think most people who I've seen have been 'the end of the world is nigh' [types]". They had been, in his words, "a bit wacko."

As an English evangelical, Brian is the spiritual descendant of such famous open-air preachers as George Whitefield and John Wesley, both of whom – but especially Whitefield<sup>64</sup> – are held up as Christian exemplars at Christ Church. He is not a "submarine" or "undercover" Christian, the sort of person who worshipped God on Sundays but whose daily life showed a convenient willingness to forget Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations. He was personally invested in evangelising his friends and students. In fact, we had first met at an evangelistic event, where he had brought along a non-Christian colleague to hear the Gospel message. Yet his views on street preaching were not atypical. Lucy, for example, said that although she could "definitely see why you'd want to do it", it was not likely to meet with much success. Leah agreed, adding that the typical street preacher's style "isn't perhaps as helpful as it might be. I mean, I've walked past and heard people speaking and whilst I agree with what they're saying, the way it's presented actually doesn't come across in a particularly helpful way". Kay, who hoped to become a missionary to Japan, put it more bluntly: "I don't think people want to be shouted at."

These comments sprang to mind as I trawled Christian Concern's Facebook page in September 2013. Christian Concern had posted a video clip with the title 'Christian preacher arrested for second time in a week'. The video showed an Australian preacher, the Rev Josh Williamson, preaching in the town of Perth, Scotland (see video posted by Joe's WebPresence, 2014). It appeared to have been filmed by two of his friends. In the video, he preaches on the divinity of Jesus. He is approached by the police, who tell him that they have had a complaint about the volume of his preaching. They ask him to lower his voice,

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<sup>64</sup> Although the members of Christ Church have no doubt that Wesley was saved, they are concerned that his Arminianism renders his theology slightly suspect.

but explain that they are happy for him to preach at a “proper level”. Throughout the encounter, he is asked to stop filming, which he refuses to do “for legal reasons”: “The Christian Legal Centre, Andrea Williams, has said it needs to be recorded for legal purposes due to a current legal action against Police Scotland.” After refusing to lower his voice, he is detained for breaching the peace. As he is ushered into the police car, he announces to the gathered crowd (some of whom cheer at his arrest): “This is what happens when you preach the Gospel of Christ... Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, and I get detained for it.”

Christian Concern’s Facebook page functions as a space for likeminded conservative Christians (and the occasional non-Christian, who may be looking to engage in discussion or may be looking to heckle and insult) to engage on the issues of the day, and the video quickly sparked a debate about the legitimacy of street preaching as a Gospel strategy. The first person to comment had written: “Arrested for shouting, not preaching!” Another agreed: “Sounded like shouting. I need to ask the question. Is this really an effective way of communicating the Gospel?” Others stood up for Rev Williamson, arguing that “It’s not the only way, but it was good enough for Jesus: “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” John 7:37”. One comment suggested that the real issue was one of free speech: “the issue of whether or not this is teh [sic] best way to spread the gospel is irrelevant... we have a situation where street preaching, even when you’re not saying anything they can find fault with, is making you worthy of arrest”. Many, however, remained critical of his behaviour. One man wrote:

As a Christian, I am saddened by this story. Why do some Christians try so hard to prove that they are being persecuted? Why does he want to make Christians look stupid and why does he want a confrontation with the police? This does nothing to spread the love of Christ.

Although the majority of the people who commented on Christian Concern’s video seemed to share the Rev Williamson’s evangelical beliefs, they questioned his chosen strategy, which they seemed to think was, for want of a better word, a little *too* public: too loud, too confrontational, and too geared towards causing a scene. Its ‘publicness’ was criticised on two levels. First, although almost everyone agreed with the substance of his message, many commenters were critical of the volume with which he had been preaching; he was accused of “shouting”, not “preaching”. Second, his reaction to his arrest – which was to have it filmed, and then allow this film to be publicised via Christian Concern – was deemed unhelpful to the cause of Christ. Some noted his somewhat antagonistic approach to the police officers who asked him to lower his voice, which made it seem like he was

“courting arrest”. One even suggested that Rev Williamson was involved in that most cynical instrumentalisation of media, the publicity stunt:

OK my take on this is that this is a set up by Josh Williamson. I have no argument with the fact that he should be allowed to preach, none at all, however he was far to [sic] well prepared for this happening for it to be anything else than a set up. Christianity is under attack, no question, but I think that a set up like this does us no favours at all, sorry just my opinion!!

A critical element of religious publicity is the reception and evaluation of publicity-grabbing acts by fellow believers. Writing of a series of controversial visions of the Virgin Mary in the Basque Country in the 1930s, William Christian (1996: 401) suggests that among the seers’ supporters ‘there was a constant, intensive weeding out [of visions and visionaries], the elimination of cultural material that did not fit.’ Wittingly or unwittingly, he argues, ‘every person who went to see the visions or merely read a newspaper about them was doing this kind of evaluating and rewarding’ (ibid). While the contexts are very different, those commenting on Christian Concern’s Facebook page appear to be involved in a similar evaluative exercise. Although broadly accepting of Christian Concern’s narrative, they seek to determine the line between marginalisation and persecution by distinguishing moral martyrs from mere malcontents. Given the ubiquity of camera-phones and the rise of social media, these determinations are not only increasingly likely to take place online, but to involve the deconstruction of photographic and video material presented as ‘evidence’ of the truth of one’s claims.<sup>65</sup>

In a useful review of the variety of media deployed by human rights activists, Meg McLagan (2003) discusses a documentary film called *Seeing is Believing: Handicams, Human Rights, and the News*, which focuses on the increasing use of hand-held video cameras as a means of documenting human rights abuses (see also Niezen, 2010: 50-7 on the power of humanitarian ‘witnessing’). Its narrative arc is provided by Joey, a Filipino activist who trains members of indigenous communities to use cameras to record their interactions with outside authorities and land owners, with whom they are in dispute over land claims. McLagan (ibid: 607) argues that ‘[a]t the heart of this film is a theory of truth and transparency that is premised on two things: (1) the authenticity of experience (I was there, I witnessed it, therefore it is true), and (2) a commitment to the gathering and display of visible evidence.’ Although the twin logics underlying the recording of amateur video evidence are those of truth and transparency, ‘[t]he truth status of moving images has always

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<sup>65</sup> See Tarlo (2010: 108-110) for an account of a similar online debate among Muslims from Norway, Egypt, and the UK about the right of British students to wear Islamic dress in preference of their school uniforms.

depended on critical contextualisation' (ibid). There is little doubt that, for Rev Williamson and his legal team, the video clip posted on Christian Concern's Facebook page was an example of the 'authenticity' of his experience, which he glossed as persecution on account of the Gospel. Yet for many of the evangelicals who commented on the video, the recording was experienced as its near inversion. Instead of being taken as evidence of the authenticity of Rev Williamson's status as a persecuted Gospel preacher – "Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, and I get detained for it" – it was taken by some commenters as evidence that he was, intentionally or unintentionally, a confrontational Gospel *liability*: "Is this really an effective way of communicating the Gospel?" Further, the video opened him to accusations that he was unaware of the cultural mores of his listeners. In the words of one commenter, "Maybe this Aussie doesn't understand his audience, unlike the apostle Paul who knew the people he was speaking to and how to appeal to them."

National and class-based sensibilities are critical to my Christ Church friends' evaluation of religious publicity. Among these south-east English, middle-class Christians, Britishness<sup>66</sup> is positively correlated with "reserve", that is, a disinclination towards emotionally demonstrative behaviour.<sup>67</sup> Although the idea of British reserve is, in many ways, a national cliché, epitomised in the resurrection (and commercialisation) of the World War II phrase 'Keep Calm and Carry On' (Engelke 2013: 114), there is still a sense in which abandoning one's reserve means one will be seen as either confrontational – the kind of person who is "shouting", not "preaching" - or "wacko" – "the end of the world is nigh" – by default. British reserve is often contrasted with what is seen as the emotional excess of citizens of other nations, and particularly the United States. As Gary Streeter, a Conservative politician and evangelical Christian, told Engelke (ibid: 115), "[The British] are understated. Americans are horribly over the top and invade your personal space all the time in that grotesque American way – yuck!" Perhaps it is for this reason that the two most highly publicised cases of Christians arrested for open-air preaching in Britain during the time of my fieldwork did not actually involve British Christians. Rather, they involved an Australian, the Rev Josh Williamson, and an American friend of his, a former Los Angeles deputy sheriff named Tony Miano. Both received legal advice – and a lot of publicity - from the CLC.

Yet the association of Britishness with reserve is not necessarily a positive one. In fact, many of my evangelical friends worried that it hampered them in their evangelism efforts. James, a Christ Church curate, once gave a sermon which explicitly encouraged his

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<sup>66</sup> Most members of Christ Church are English. However, perhaps in an attempt at inclusivity, they are more likely to speak of "British reserve" than "English reserve."

<sup>67</sup> This notion of British reserve may also be particularly Anglican. Writing of debates over women priests, Ian Jones (2003: 466) suggests that proponents of women's ordination were dismissed as 'pushy' and 'strident', and thus in conflict 'with traditional Anglican good manners'.



listeners to transgress the upper-middle-class social norms inhibiting them from sharing the Gospel with their peers, who included:

[The person at the] next desk, the next house on the street, the next friend on the squash ladder at the squash club. Friends, we must throw off our British reserve if we're a British person here this morning... Us British people have a serious problem, and it's called our reserve. We need to throw those off. We must press beyond the fringe.

Similarly, David, a barrister, told me that he had a more “reserved” approach to evangelism than his South African wife, who had grown up in a context where people were more “direct” about their faith. I interviewed David at his central London chambers, which were charmingly disorganised: law reports and Civil Procedure codes jostled for space with, among other things, pictures drawn by his young daughter (he was particularly fond of one which showed recognisably human figures; it was, he proudly announced, her first non-abstract work), and a large blow-up fish, which was slowly deflating in the corner of his office (something to do, he explained vaguely, with a patent case he was working on). Among the clutter were some leaflets advertising the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship, a fellowship which aims to equip Christian lawyers to be effective witnesses for Christ at work (and the body from which Andrea had originally run the Christian interest cases). Spotting them, I asked if they were useful in his attempts at evangelism. He explained that, as a middle-class Englishman, he didn’t think evangelism was his “gift”. Even if it were, he continued, “it might not be a gift that goes down well with British people, if you know what I mean”. The typical Brit’s “reserved” attitude was problematic for both evangeliser and evangelised, in that it led to a sort of “double whammy”: “People don’t want to talk about it and they don’t tell you they don’t want to talk about it.”

Thus, British evangelicals experience a tension between this “we don’t want to talk about it’ kind of [attitude]” and the fact that they ought to be doing just that with the person at “the next desk, the next house on the street, the next friend on the squash ladder at the squash club”. In theory, then, one might imagine that evangelicals like Brian would be supportive of street preachers. After all, these are people who have managed to rid themselves of James’ maligned British reserve. In fact, the church was, officially, supportive of street evangelism. July 2013 saw the Christ Church congregation praying for a team of visiting missionaries who had come to London to evangelise those flocking to the capital for the summer’s sporting events, including the Wimbledon Tennis Championships. One of these visiting missionaries was California-resident Tony Miano, who would be, like his friend Josh Williamson, arrested for breach of the peace (and, unlike Rev Williamson, for his allegedly homophobic language). And yet, when actually presented with the kind of

publicity courted and created by these street preachers, the congregation seemed unsure of the evangelistic benefit of these men, whom they glossed, in Brian's words, as potential "wackos".

There are, however, some places where public preaching is seen to be legitimate. One such culturally appropriate venue is Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park. Carol, the former nurse with whom I had regular one-on-one Bible studies, had a friend who used to preach at Speakers' Corner. She often used to go along to hear him. He regularly engaged with competing Muslim preachers, and together they would publicly debate the truth claims of Islam and Christianity. On one such occasion, she noticed a Muslim man becoming increasingly agitated and angry as her friend preached. She asked him why listening to someone speak about Jesus was making him so angry. This sparked a confrontation which culminated in him telling her (she affected a masculine baritone): "Lady, you're going to hell." After "[squeaking]" in shock at being so addressed, she told him that, actually, if he didn't turn to Jesus, it was *him* who would be going to hell. She felt a deep sense of "calm" after speaking these words.

Carol's experience of calm shows that there are times when publicly preaching to strangers is not only culturally acceptable, but evangelistically correct. The members of Christ Church, then, have a complicated relationship with the Biblical publicity generated by the likes of Harry Hammond, Josh Williamson, and Tony Miano. The very act of entering the marketplace of ideas in this way is seen to be transgressive, resulting in street preachers being associated with those who "look just completely mad" as they "shout" at passersby. The publicity generated when their preaching results in arrest, as happened with Rev Williamson, can be criticised as a "set up", an unwise publicity stunt that ultimately detracts from the message of the Gospel. At the same time, the members of Christ Church express a desire to throw off their English reserve, which they see as at least partly responsible for their lack of evangelistic success. As noted in the Introduction, this is but one example of the conflicting cultural values which characterise contemporary Christianities (Elisha, 2008): the evangelical ideal, which dictates that one publicly proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all and sundry, and class-based notions of reserve, which rejects public preaching as the equivalent of making a scene. It was one thing, as James had encouraged, to "press beyond the fringe." It was quite another, however, to end up on the fringes.

#### **II.IV Conclusion: publicity, wanted and unwanted**

This chapter has presented an ethnographic account of both the generation and contestation of religious publicity. Religious publicity, which emerges through the instrumentalisation of media as varied as advertisements, newspapers, television, and even courts of law, creates an audience for Christian Concern's conservative evangelical reading of the Bible and its

“values”. I have argued that the publicity associated with controversial legal challenges renders the law a remarkably successful vehicle through which to reach this audience. Indeed, in a context in which conservative Christian viewpoints are sometimes read as too offensive to publicise through, for example, bus advertisements, legal cases have become an important resource for Christian activists. Further, Christian Concern’s presence in the nation’s newspapers, television programmes, and radio talk shows seems to result in increased access to these media, thereby ‘providing a platform’ for further publicity (Walton et al, 2013: 55).

Yet evangelicals ‘on the ground’ have a complicated relationship with this publicity. I suggest that my Christ Church friends’ responses to particular instances of publicity, such as that generated by contentious street preaching, are a microcosm of their ambivalence towards Christian activism more broadly. There is a sense in which the preaching style of such Christians as Harry Hammond, Josh Williamson, and Tony Miano is seen to be *too* public to be effective, as it lacks the relationality necessary for a fruitful Gospel encounter (see Chapter Five). Although keen to have Britain “re-evangelised”, entering the public sphere in the manner favoured by open-air preachers can be seen to transgress my informants’ understanding of culturally appropriate behaviour, while the publicity resulting from the arrest of street preachers risks being seen as an unhelpful distraction from the Gospel message. As I argue throughout the thesis, this tension is, perhaps, most fruitfully approached by acknowledging the value conflicts to which my interlocutors are subject as they seek to submit to the Word and evangelise the world; conflicts which lead to their agreeing with an action in principle, but fearing its outcome in practice.

The issue of Biblical publicity raises questions about the kind of public profile Christian Concern seeks, and how this might differentiate them from other publicly-facing religious organisations. Theos, the public theology think tank founded by Bible Society, makes for an interesting comparison in this regard. Both organisations are keen to generate media coverage, and both argue that religious belief has a legitimate place in public debate. Both want to be seen as credible sources of information, and both seek to have their work referenced in the media; just as Theos wants its research cited by the press, Christian Concern wants its legal cases to be referenced as evidence of what they see as the marginalisation of Christianity in British public life. However, unlike Theos, who worry that ‘short term and opportunistic media exposure could never be enough to establish their long-term credibility’ (Engelke, 2013: 164), Christian Concern typically views all media coverage as an opportunity to speak of Jesus Christ in public life. They are usually happy to offer a comment on almost any issue brought to their attention, and they do not discriminate between, for example, coverage in the broadsheets, such as *The Times*, and coverage in the more widely read tabloid press.

And yet, there are some occasions when publicity had decidedly unwelcome results. In December 2013, Andrea travelled to Kingston, Jamaica to speak at a conference organised by the Jamaica Coalition for a Healthy Society. The conference, titled ‘International law and the welfare of the family: the impact of the secular worldview on children,’ focused on opposing the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Jamaica, whose colonial era ‘buggery laws’ are notoriously punitive to men who have sex with men. The conference made headlines in the UK when Andrea’s remarks were published by social entertainment website BuzzFeed. Lester Feder (2013), the BuzzFeed journalist who covered the event, reported:

“Might it be that Jamaica says to the United States of America, says to Europe, ‘Enough! You cannot come in and attack our families. We will not accept aid or promotion tied to an agenda that is against God and destroys our families,’” [Andrea Minichiello Williams] said...

She made the case that it is a “big lie” that homosexuality is inborn, arguing instead it is caused by environmental factors like “the lack of the father” and “sometimes a level of abuse.” She illustrated her point with the case of 19-year-old British diver Tom Daley and his reported relationship with American screenwriter Dustin Lance Black. [Daley’s father, Robert Daley, had died of a brain tumour in 2011, when his son was 17 years old.]

...“They hate the line of homosexuality being linked to pedophilia [sic]. They try to cut that off, so you can’t speak about it,” she said. “So I say to you in Jamaica: Speak about it. Speak about it.”

She took issue with the notion that advancing such arguments in opposition to expanding legal rights for LGBT people was hate speech. On the contrary, she said, “We say these things because we’re loving, we’re compassionate, we’re kind, because we care for our children.... It is not compassion and kind to have laws that lead people [to engage] in their sins [that] lead to the obliteration of life, the obliteration of culture, and the obliteration of family.”

Feder’s report was later picked up by, among others, *The Times* (Gledhill, 2013), *The Independent* (Merrill, 2013), and *The Daily Mail* (Parry, 2013). This prompted the Bishop of Chichester (the diocese where Andrea had been elected to the General Synod) to condemn her comments, saying they ‘have no sanction in the Church of England or the diocese of Chichester. Insofar as such comments incite homophobia, they should be rejected as offensive and unacceptable’ (Chichester Observer, 2013).

Andrea declined to comment on Feder’s report, either to confirm, deny, or give context to the words attributed to her. Given Christian Concern’s reputation for engaging with the media on any and all subjects, from the Girl Guides’ oath to presumed consent for

organ donation, this refusal to comment seemed somewhat out of character. Changing Attitude (2013), an Anglican organisation which works to promote the inclusion of LGBT Christians within the Anglican Communion, described her silence as ‘highly uncharacteristic’, and took it as proof that she had ‘blown the gaff about the true intentions of conservative evangelical Christian activists: to recriminalise homosexuals. She has spoken the truth which they did not want made public. She has let the cat out of the bag’.

Even those right-leaning media outlets which were usually sympathetic to Andrea’s worldview, such as *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, which the Theos’ report quoted above suggested had developed a ‘symbiotic’ relationship with Christian Concern, proved fickle. The headline of *The Daily Mail*’s article declared her speech ‘outrageous’: “Tom Daley turned gay because his father died”: Christian charity founder’s outrageous comments during speech where she urged Jamaica to ‘keep gay sex illegal’ (Parry, 2013). The capriciousness of the press left Andrea with a difficult choice: to clarify her remarks in the knowledge that they would probably be taken out of the theological framework of sin and redemption in which she would, no doubt, have preferred to situate them, or to refuse to comment in the hope that the issue would eventually die down. Given the difficulty of explaining complex theological issues in a thirty second sound bite, it was, perhaps, inevitable that she chose the latter.

Andrea once told me “I don’t fear man. So I don’t fear the government [*laughs*], I don’t fear the legal profession, and I don’t fear society’s view of me. I don’t fear the media because I only fear God.” Despite this avowed fearlessness, her unwillingness to comment on Feder’s report of her speech suggests the tightrope walked by publicly-facing evangelicals, who are both keen to speak Biblical Truths and aware that they are often misunderstood by non-Christians. As the portion of her speech cited above notes, Andrea felt that her opposition to what she would call “homosexual practice” was both compassionate and loving. After all, she understands God’s standards as being for humankind’s good, which is why she not only seeks to submit to them herself but feels an obligation to encourage others to do likewise. To borrow a metaphor from Brian, the friend who suggested that street preachers sometimes looked “mad”, evangelicals understand Biblical prohibitions to have a similar purpose to the instructions he gave his toddler son: “don’t run in the road, don’t climb on the desk next to an open window, don’t stick your fingers in a plug, don’t touch Mummy’s cup of tea”. The Bible’s ‘thou shalt not’s are for our safety and protection. But in a context where even the conservative press deemed her remarks ‘outrageous’, Andrea knew that any attempt to explain this position would inevitably fail.

Engelke’s question of how one ‘can’ and ‘should’ generate publicity in Jesus’ name is not restricted to twenty-first-century Christians. Indeed, even the celebrated George

Whitefield, the eighteenth-century itinerant minister still referenced by preachers like Tony Miano and Josh Williamson, was the subject of controversy in his day. As Lambert (1990: 821) notes, the press coverage dealing with his revival featured heated debates between his supporters and detractors: 'The disputes centred on whether Whitefield's "enthusiasm" was acceptable behaviour for an Anglican minister.' This question of Spirit-driven, theological enthusiasm is as germane to discussions of evangelicalism in the twenty-first-century as it was in the eighteenth, and it is for this reason, I have argued, that ethnographic accounts of religious publicity must examine the ways in which publicity is challenged or undercut by its generators' co-religionists. Further, the fact that Harry Hammond's ill-fated sign, Mike Davidson's controversial advertisement, and Andrea Williams' speech in Kingston all relate to conservative Christian approaches to homosexuality is not immaterial. It is on issues like sexuality that Christians find it most difficult to express their beliefs in a manner accessible to non-Christians, whose pluralism might recognise the value of religious liberty even as it contests my interlocutors' monist desire to submit to the Bible's approach to gender and sexuality. This is the subject of the following chapter, which examines the communicative doubt conservative evangelicals experience as they seek to speak 'Christianly' to an increasingly unchurched world.

## Chapter Three: Communicative Doubt

*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth;  
keep watch over the door of my lips! (Psalm 141:3)*

### III.I Weddings and third wheels

Throughout my time at Christ Church, I was often asked what I found most “surprising” or “different” about the lives of my Christian interlocutors. It was a question I found difficult to answer; although it was asked partly out of cross-cultural curiosity, an anthropological yearning to have the familiar rendered strange by an outsider, I also knew that my new friends were looking for confirmation that they were living the kind of distinctive lives in which the work of the Holy Spirit within them was both visible and attractive to non-Christians (see Chapter Four). It was with some trepidation, then, that I sought to answer Isabel, a bubbly maths graduate in her early twenties, when she asked me what I found most “unusual” about evangelicals. It was a Tuesday evening in November, and Isabel and I were sitting around my small kitchen table with Stephen, her husband, and Will, both of whom were Bible college students and church apprentices. We had just finished dinner, and although my guests would not let me top up their wine glasses, we had settled into an amicable postprandial discussion about church life.

Deciding to focus on the particular rather than the general, I told my guests that I had recently attended the wedding of a Christian friend named Carrie, whom I’d met through Christian Concern. It had been a large wedding – never one to cut corners, Carrie had had ten bridesmaids, two flower girls, and approaching three hundred guests – and had been seen as an explicit “Gospel opportunity” by the bride and groom. After the ceremony, the couple’s friends and family had crowded into the church’s adjacent lounge for a celebratory afternoon tea. We happily indulged in the homemade spread (many of the guests had contributed cakes, biscuits, and other sweet treats to the celebration) while the groom, Rob, stood to make a speech. As with most wedding toasts, it was an ode to his new bride. Unlike any wedding toast I’d ever heard, however, it was also an ode to Jesus Christ. Rob explained that his love for his new wife was grounded in the fact that “she loves Jesus”. Carrie, for her part, echoed this in her own toast, telling the assembled crowd that the only thing better than having married Rob was having a relationship with her Saviour. Even the best man’s speech – typically a vehicle for crude jokes and embarrassing anecdotes - had focused on Rob’s growth as a Christian. As I explained to Isabel, Stephen, and Will, I had been surprised that the toasts focused so much on God and so little on the couple themselves.

Isabel nodded; she knew exactly what I meant. Like Carrie and Rob, she and Stephen had also seen their wedding as an evangelistic opportunity. Unlike Carrie and Rob,

however, they had worried that too heavy an emphasis on Jesus might be confusing or off-putting for their non-Christian friends. For this reason, they had sought to make their references to God as “accessible” as possible to the unchurched. Perhaps inevitably, some things still seemed to have been lost in translation. One non-Christian uncle, for example, did not understand why they had vowed to love one another “until death do us part or Christ returns”. Isabel laughed heartily as she recounted a friend’s reaction to Stephen’s speech, in which he had explained that he knew Isabel loved Jesus more than she loved him. This friend, unfamiliar with Christian things, had spent the rest of the evening in a state of utter confusion; *if Stephen knew Isabel loved someone else, why on earth was he marrying her?*

Isabel’s efforts to render her wedding ceremony “accessible” to non-Christians while keeping Jesus at its core is but one example of the difficulties evangelicals face as they seek to introduce others to their faith without evoking incomprehension, apathy, or even hostility. Building on what has been said in relation to Biblical publicity, I now turn to the aesthetics of evangelical speech in what my interlocutors imagine to be a rapidly de-Christianising country. As studies of global Christianities have shown, speech – words spoken, written, sung, and even left unsaid – is central to Christian practice (Harding, 2001; Crapanzano, 2000; Coleman, 2006), so much so that Christian ritual efficacy ‘often depends heavily on the manipulation of words’ (Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006: 6). For conservative evangelicals, the primacy of words is shaped through their understanding of the Bible as being both an historical document, one whose cultural context must be understood so as to appreciate the import of a particular passage, and a body of divine revelation that is inspired by God, perfect in its totality, and coherent in its message. It is through the words of the Bible that these Christians meet with the Word made flesh, and it is incumbent on them to speak these words to non-believers in the hope that they too will be born again. But if speech is an ethical act with potentially eternal consequences, the use of which must be justifiable to oneself and others (Lambek, 2010; Keane, 2010), how does one gauge the success of communication with those who do not have access to the evangelical hermeneutic?

This chapter explores this question through the twin frames of doubt and ambiguity. In so doing, I hope not only to highlight the ‘contingencies, ambivalences and variations in people’s engagements with truth claims’ that are, according to Mathijs Pelkmans (2013: 11), all too often edited out of the ethnographic record, but to suggest that lived ambiguity might play a productive role in my interlocutors’ grace-based theology. It presents two case studies which foreground the experience of what I call ‘communicative doubt’. In the first section, I discuss the language used in relation to (then) proposed changes in marriage law as an example of the difficulties faced by religiously motivated social reformers as they seek to enter the public sphere. These difficulties are not, of course, limited to conservative



Christians.<sup>68</sup> But in a context in which the use of ‘theological language in the political realm’ has been rendered almost ‘inconceivable’ (Asad, 2009: 57), I suggest that the doubt, hesitation, and ambivalence my informants express in relation to the use of both ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ speech is indicative of the central tension at the heart of evangelical activism.<sup>69</sup> The staff of Christian Concern agitate for (their understanding of) a Biblical approach to gender, sexuality and family life on the basis that following God’s “blueprint” or “pattern for life” will benefit all people, Christian and non-Christian alike. Yet they also believe that meaningful socio-political change cannot be wrought without Christian conversion. If campaigning success requires a virtuous circle of conversion and social change, these activists face a double-bind; for if religious language is ‘inconceivable’, they must campaign using secular reasoning. But although they worry that Biblical arguments will be unconvincing to non-Christians, they are equally wary of denuding their speech of the transcendental force necessary for conversion. These are anxieties, I suggest, for which there is no easy remedy.

In the second section, I focus on one Christ Church couple, Kate and Jim, and their experience of Christian speech in a setting some conservative evangelicals identify as hostile to their faith: the secular university.<sup>70</sup> Kate and Jim provide a useful intersection between my two field sites, as they are both Christ Church members and former clients of the Christian Legal Centre. They had found themselves involved with the CLC as a result of their membership of the University of Exeter’s Christian Union (CU), which was accused of discriminating against Christians of non-evangelical persuasion by the university’s Students’ Guild. Jim and Kate were marked by a profound ambivalence towards their experience in the public eye. This section attends to the communicative doubt occasioned by the recognition that standing up for a principle might have undesirable effects in practice. It concludes by asking whether or not it is possible to speak of ambivalence in terms of meaning, and suggests that the ambiguity, hesitancy, and doubt expressed in relation to ‘speaking of Jesus Christ in public life’ can be seen as part of evangelical Christianity’s theological rejection of religious legalism.

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<sup>68</sup> As I discuss in Chapter Six, both the normative ideal of the public sphere as a site for reasoned discourse and its contemporary manifestations tend to be founded upon the exclusion of many voices, including women, the non-proprietary, and sexual, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities (see contributions to Calhoun, 1992).

<sup>69</sup> ‘Secular’ is, of course, a contested term (see Casanova, 1994; Asad, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Cannell, 2010). I use it here in an admittedly simplistic sense to indicate arguments that do not appeal to divine law.

<sup>70</sup> Although it is primarily in relation to American Christians that one hears of conflicts between secular education and Christianity (a recent example is the 2014 evangelistic film *God’s Not Dead*), this narrative is gaining traction among English evangelicals. This being said, many of the university-educated Christians I met credited their student days with maturing a childhood faith.

### III.II Words and the Word

Written, spoken, and sung words are central to Christian practice. This is, perhaps, particularly so among conservative evangelicals, who view the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible as containing the inerrant Word of God. Although the members of Christ Church understand the Bible to have been penned by human authors, they also view it as “God breathed”, the inspired result of divine intervention. It is regarded as the ultimate authority in all matters, both spiritual and mundane. This means that, as Luke put it during a sermon on the book of Leviticus (part of the Old Testament Holiness Code which, despite its ancient genus, enjoyed a surprisingly high media profile during my fieldwork on account of its condemnation of same-sex relations), the fact that something is written in the Bible ought to be “a good enough reason” for the Christian to accept it as true: “If God says something, it’s true. We don’t have to question Him.” Reading the Old and New Testaments are equated to spending time with God Himself. Christian friends spoke of “meeting with Jesus” in the pages of what were often well-thumbed, highlighted, and annotated Bibles. It was patiently explained to me that my ‘red letter’ Bible, in which the words of Jesus are printed in a contrasting colour to the rest of the text, was theologically suspect; the *entire* Bible was the Word of God, and although some passages might be weightier than others, all might as well be red (and, more importantly, *read*). As was preached during a sermon on Christ’s return, “[When Jesus returns, we] will need our Bibles no more. But for now, until that day dawns, we need our Bibles. We need the inspired Word of God.”

To say that the members of Christ Church view the Bible as the ultimate authority to which they want to submit is not, of course, to say that they are unthinking in their approach to Scripture. Many church members devote a great deal of time and energy to determining the meaning and application of Bible verses, both through individual and group Bible study and through the use of Bible companions (‘Explore’ Bible notes were particularly popular), prayer diaries, and theological commentaries.<sup>71</sup> The church encourages the academic study of Biblical hermeneutics and is affiliated with a local Bible college, from which it hosts church apprentices – including Will and Stephen, the dinner guests introduced at the beginning of this chapter - during the course of their study. Sunday sermons typically involve a detailed deconstruction of the passage under discussion, complete with Biblical cross-references, historical overviews, and occasional forays into the etymology of Ancient Greek words. The many Bible studies I undertook, both as part of my women’s Bible study group and “one-on-one” with individual Christians, always began with a prayer that we would *really* hear, understand, and take on board the Truths that God wanted to communicate to us through His Word. These prayers are necessary not only because an

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<sup>71</sup> Some church members took this study more seriously than others.

uninspired student risks misinterpretation – or, rather, misunderstanding (Greenhouse, 1989: 81) - but because Bible passages resonate differently depending on the “circumstances” of the reader, which might refer to one’s “age and stage” (for example, one’s employment or marital status), one’s maturity as a Christian, or one’s ongoing battle with a particular sin.

Even when approached literally, then, understanding the Bible is thought to require training, discipline, and effort. The point I would like to make here, however, is that the evangelical tendency to locate the Truth of the Bible in the divine inspiration of its human authors sits uneasily with an ideology of public debate that purports to evaluate claims according to their merits, not their makers. As Engelke (2013: xxii) puts it, the English chattering classes have retained a ‘lasting commitment’ to the idea that ‘public things’ ought to be free of ““personal agendas””, including religious conviction. As such, the evangelical emphasis on divine personality – the fact that, as Luke put it, an idea’s presence in the Bible ought to be “a good enough reason” to accept it as true - troubles the bourgeois ideal of the public sphere, in which private people make ‘public use of their reason’ without reference to the received wisdom of traditional authorities (Habermas, 2002: 27-36). Nor can it be easily accommodated by what Jürgen Habermas posits as the public sphere’s degenerate contemporary form, in which public debate is reduced to the negotiation of special interest groups, bureaucracies, and political parties, and their subsequent manipulation of public opinion (ibid: 179). If anything, my interlocutors’ emphasis on absolute Truth suggests a desire to return to Habermas’ idealised – and much critiqued - bourgeois archetype, in which public debate is deployed not to seek concessions but ‘to discover laws immanent to... society’ (Calhoun, 1992: 16). But while eighteenth-century public intellectuals might have preferred to uncover these laws through rational-critical debate, my Christian friends believe them to be readily accessible in the divinely inspired text of the Bible.<sup>72</sup>

The belief that the Bible contains laws for human behaviour, combined with the conservative evangelical assertion that it is both possible and desirable to interpret these laws according to the will of God, has led to a profusion of temporal vocabulary relating to what my interlocutors would gloss as “Biblical clarity.” Church members speak of the Bible as containing “timeless Truths” for all of humanity, Truths that are “eternally” relevant to the lives of both Christians and non-Christians. They are also aware, however, that their insistence on the infinite applicability of the Bible marks them out as *behind the times*, *stuck in the past*, or simply *old fashioned* (cf. Strhan, 2012: 117; Clements, 2015: 29; Clucas & Sharpe, 2013: 168-170). For some commentators, this temporal disjunction is not only

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<sup>72</sup> Which is not to say that these positions are necessarily incompatible. As Bebbington (1989: 47-74) notes, Enlightenment-era English evangelicals associated Christianity with the rational and reasonable. Evangelical epistemology was ‘permeated by Enlightenment influences’ (ibid: 57), particularly in relation to the knowledge of God that could be gained through reason, logic, and the evidence of the senses.

historic, but personal, with Christians understood to be perpetually immature; childishly unable, in Charles Taylor's (2007: 589) words, to 'face the void'. As Fenella Cannell (2014), drawing on Taylor, has observed, this Nietzschean intellectual inheritance is evident in the pronouncements of prominent atheist spokespeople, such as Richard Dawkins, who view religious belief as 'evidence of ignorance, credulousness, [and/or] emotional weakness'. Perhaps as a result of the popularisation of this view through such antitheistic bestsellers as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2007), many church members had come across non-Christians who viewed their Christianity as a sort of "crutch" or safety blanket, something "needed" by the Christian but not – heaven forbid!- by their mature, secular counterparts.

Indeed, throughout the course of my fieldwork, accusations of temporal inertia were levelled at conservative Christians not only by atheists and sceptics, but by those who might otherwise be thought to endorse my friends' 'old fashioned' values. Over a post-school run coffee one weekday morning, Bethany, the minister's wife, and I discussed comments made by the Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, in relation to the Church of England's (then ongoing) debate over the appointment of women bishops. Although both liberal and conservative wings of the Church agreed that women would, eventually, join the episcopate, legislating for this eventuality had proved a complicated process, both in terms of theology and practicalities (see Rees, 2014; Clucas & Sharpe, 2013; Adam, 2014). Conservative evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics sought guarantees that they could remain within the Anglican Communion without being subject to the authority of a woman bishop, while liberal Anglicans had begun to reject inclusive legislation on the grounds that it was unworkable in practice (and unpalatable in theory). In the autumn of 2012, following another round of failed discussions, Cameron waded into the fray, directing the Church to 'get with the programme' on gender equality (quoted in Wintour & Davies, 2012). Bethany had been deeply disappointed by these remarks. Conservative evangelicals, she explained, were not natural contrarians, holding to what others saw as outdated views with the intention of dividing the Church. They were simply seeking to submit to Scripture. Cameron's invitation to 'get with the programme' amounted to an invitation to ignore the unchanging Word of God. To Bethany, it was the height of hubris.

Nor was this the only area where such hubris was on display. In 2012-13, one particularly prominent dispute centred on the nature of marriage. For many conservative Christians, heterosexual marriage is a sacred covenant with theological implications, an institution stretching back to Creation and pointing forward to the union of Christ and the Church. For my interlocutors, same-sex marriage is a contradiction in terms. (Once, while filing literature related to gay marriage at the Christian Concern offices, I made a number of labels that said 'SSM' – same-sex marriage – and attached them to the outside of the plastic boxes I had just filled. A few days later, I noticed that someone had altered the labels so that

they now read ‘SS‘M’’.). When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government launched a consultation on the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples in the spring of 2012, it was conservative Christians, including members of both of my field sites, who spearheaded the opposition. Christian Concern was a founding member of the Coalition for Marriage (C4M), a not-for-profit company established to campaign against the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill. At the church level, members of Christ Church were among the almost 670,000 people who signed a C4M petition protesting marriage’s ‘redefinition’,<sup>73</sup> and the congregation were encouraged to write to their Members of Parliament to register their opposition to the Bill. Indeed, the church website even provided a template letter to print, sign and send.

Given the overwhelmingly evangelical make-up of the C4M’s governing board,<sup>74</sup> it is fair to extrapolate that its founding members’ opposition to same-sex marriage was grounded in the Biblical belief that ‘a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24). In an effort to make the campaign more accessible to non-Christians, however, C4M used non-religious language to argue that same-sex marriage would be detrimental for British society as a whole. Although the campaign appealed to an essentialised understanding of marriage - ‘Throughout history and in virtually all human societies marriage has always been the union of a man and a woman’ – this essentialism was not rooted in the words of Genesis. Rather, C4M used the language of civil rights (‘Civil partnerships already provide all the legal benefits of marriage so there’s no need to redefine marriage’), free speech (‘People should not feel pressurised to go along with same-sex marriage just because of political correctness. They should be free to express their views’), and the slippery slope of unforeseen consequences (‘If marriage is redefined once, what is to stop it being redefined to allow polygamy?’) to argue against extending marriage rights to gay couples. This strategy worked well; Britons of ‘all faiths and none’ were undoubtedly among the hundreds of thousands who voiced their opposition to same-sex marriage by signing the petition. But what did this ‘strategic secularism’ (Engelke, 2009) mean for those signatories who held the covenant relationship between husband and wife to be not only society’s building block, not only a guarantee of freedom of conscience, and not only a bulwark against polygamy, but a reflection of the union of Christ and His bride?

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<sup>73</sup> The petition read: ‘I support the legal definition of marriage which is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. I oppose any attempt to redefine it.’

<sup>74</sup> Although the C4M marketed itself as ‘an umbrella group of individuals and organisations in the UK... of all faiths and none’, it was overwhelmingly evangelical in its leadership. Directors included Colin Hart of the Christian Institute, Dr Don Horrocks of the Evangelical Alliance, Andrea Williams of Christian Concern and the CLC, and Nola Leach of Christian Action Research & Education.

The tension between secular accessibility and Biblical clarity was brought out during my very first week of fieldwork, when I joined Andrea and two CLC clients at the Church of England's General Synod (see Introduction). Also in our party was Adam, an American law student completing a Blackstone Legal Fellowship summer internship, who was spending his six week placement period at the CLC.<sup>75</sup> An Arizona native, Adam is tall, slim, and polite to a fault; the result of Christian home-schooling, he was, my colleagues and I agreed, a credit to his mother. He was also impeccably turned out. During his six weeks in London, he was never without a sharp suit, crisp shirt, and tasteful tie, and his dark blond hair was always flawlessly coiffed. Although he identified as an evangelical Protestant, Adam had chosen to study law at the University of Notre Dame – a Catholic university – because he wanted to be able to talk about the Biblical roots of American law “without people thinking I'm crazy, and I thought they'd be more open to that.”

Adam and I had come to York primarily to see a debate on the place of Christianity in public life. However, Andrea invited us to extend our stay so as to attend an event organised by Anglican Mainstream, a theologically conservative organisation which exists ‘to re-state and support traditional understandings of marriage, the family and human sexuality in the face of erosion of these values in church and society’ (Anglican Mainstream, n.d.), at which a Christian life peer I will call Lord Jameson would be giving a short speech on same-sex marriage. The Anglican Mainstream meeting came after what had been a disappointing morning for Synod's conservative contingent. While the previous evening's debate on Christianity in public life had been a success, the morning session on women bishops - in which an amendment to give greater protection to parishes opposed to women in church leadership had failed - had been deeply frustrating for complementarians.<sup>76</sup> The mood lightened considerably, however, when his Lordship joked that it was a pleasure to be associated with “the fringes” of Synod. His presentation defined marriage as an institution that centred on the production and welfare of children. Taking his cue from Prime Minister Cameron's assertion that same-sex marriage ought to be celebrated as an expression of ‘commitment,’ he argued that commitment was not the only necessary ingredient of a marriage. There already existed various classes of people in loving, committed relationships who were unable to marry. For example, although Mr Cameron was, no doubt, committed to his children, he could not marry them. In Lord Jameson's understanding, same-sex couples fell into a similar legal category.

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<sup>75</sup> The Blackstone Legal Fellowship, on which Christian Concern's Wilberforce Academy is loosely based, is a nine week training and internship programme for Christian law students. It is a ministry of the US-based Alliance Defending Freedom.

<sup>76</sup> Complementarianism teaches that although men and women have equal value, they have different roles in church and family life.

Following the speech, there was a short question and answer session. The first question came from a man who said that, as a Christian with a “Biblical worldview”, he agreed with his Lordship that same-sex couples were ineligible for marriage. However, how could he convince those *without* this Biblical worldview? Lord Jameson answered that this had been the point of his talk, which had explained that there already existed certain categories of people who were prohibited from marrying. Andrea then spoke. She announced that she had just received a letter from Theresa May, the Home Secretary, in response to the first 500,000 signatures on the Coalition for Marriage petition. The letter said that the government would not prevent people getting married unless there were very strong reasons to do so, “and being gay, lesbian, [or] bisexual isn’t one of them.” Building on the previous question, she asked how Christians should respond to this logic. Another audience member asked a similar question, phrased in terms of convincing those who lacked a “Judeo-Christian worldview” of the folly of same-sex marriage. In response to each of these questions, Lord Jameson repeated the core of his argument: marriage is about the production and welfare of children, and there will always be categories of people, including those in loving, committed relationships, who are ineligible to enter into it. But it seemed that, even to an audience who already held this view, his argument was found somewhat lacking.

On the afternoon train back to London, I asked Adam what he had thought of the Anglican Mainstream meeting. He told me that he had been disappointed by the question and answer session, in which Lord Jameson had seemed to “deflect” the legitimate questions he’d been asked. Adam suggested that, by removing any reference to the Bible, Jameson was trying to be inoffensive, “trying not to step on anyone’s toes.” I found this a surprising point to make, and told Adam that many people would find a comparison between same-sex relationships and incest - both of which fell into his categories of ineligibility - to be very offensive indeed. Adam clarified that, by focusing on the legal system, Lord Jameson had avoided talking about “moral absolutes.” Christians, he continued, believe in absolutes, and these absolutes are found in the Bible. A Christian’s beliefs about marriage, the family, and sexuality should flow directly from these Biblical Truths. However, if you *don’t* believe in moral absolutes, then it’s difficult to explain the heterosexual exclusivity of marriage. To Adam’s mind, to discuss same-sex marriage without reference to the Bible’s stance on sexual morality was to hollow out the argument. To secularise it - to make it about legal categories, to “deflect” references to moral absolutes, to “[try] not to step on anyone’s toes” - was to miss the point.

I initially took Adam’s disappointment with Lord Jameson’s deflections to be indicative of what Webb Keane (2007: 202) posits as an archetypically Protestant concern with ‘sincerity as a moral norm’, in which the Christian’s thoughts, words, and deeds ought to be a true reflection of her subjectivity. Adam, I supposed, was uncomfortable with what

he saw as a disingenuous disjuncture between reasons given and thoughts ‘really’ held. Writing of the controversy surrounding the decision of Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* to publish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, Talal Asad (2009: 40) posits that European commentators had difficulty grasping the Islamic understanding of blasphemy - which punishes not the fact of disbelief, but the risk that one will ‘[seduce]’ others into this ‘false commitment’ through its public promulgation - on account of their Biblically-inflected understanding of truth and interiority. Contra Christianity, which requires the disciplining of sinful thoughts through, for example, the act of confession, Islamic jurisprudence considers (dis)belief itself to be inscrutable (cf. Robbins, 2004). Asad suggests that Islam’s emphasis on the social consequences of the blasphemer’s *words*, as opposed to the blasphemer’s incorrect *belief*, troubles the secularised Christian assumption that because coerced belief is ‘insincere’, its public pronouncement must be ‘irrational’ (Asad, 2009: 45). Perhaps, I thought, Adam associated the secularisation required by Lord Jameson’s desire “not to step on anyone’s toes” with the irrationality of articulating a belief not held.

On further reflection, however, I came to see that Adam’s critique extended beyond the risk of insincerity. While Asad’s Islamic jurists fear the pernicious social effects of seduction into falsehood, Adam seemed to worry that the use of secular logic might deprive non-Christians of the opportunity to submit to ultimate Truth. Lord Jameson’s words appeared, if anything, to be *insufficiently* seductive. After all, Adam held that non-Biblical arguments against same-sex marriage reflected valid concerns. These arguments – that gay marriage would turn a child-centred institution into an adult-centred one; that it might be used to limit freedom of speech; that if gender was declared irrelevant to marriage, so too might age, number of participants, or the fact of consanguinity between them - made intuitive sense to him. Yet he also thought these arguments were unlikely to win over those who had not yet accepted the Bible’s moral absolutes. His disappointment in Lord Jameson’s ability to answer the questions asked of him suggests that Christian campaigners operate within a catch-22 situation, one in which religious language is thought inadequate to convince outsiders, but in which secular arguments, by failing to reference Biblical absolutes, are deemed equally insufficient. Adam’s firm belief in the rightness of a particular moral proposition, even one rooted in a holy text, did not negate the experience of uncertainty as he sought to communicate that position to others. Indeed, the argument’s ultimate rooting in the Truth of the Bible seemed to have rendered it particularly ambiguous: did mentioning the Bible risk putting off non-Christians, who might consider it *outdated* prejudice? Or did failing to mention it mean those same non-Christians would be denied its *timeless* Truth?

In this context, the truism that public speech ‘creates awkward conditions for the presence of God’ (Engelke, 2013: xxii) bears repeating. My interlocutors are aware that,



regardless of whether one imagines the public sphere as a site for reasoned debate or negotiated settlements, their inability to yield on matters of Biblical clarity risks leaving them unintelligible to those lacking a conservative evangelical theology. This, I suggest, is part of the challenge of inhabiting what Tanya Luhrmann (2012a) calls a ‘double register’ of certainty and scepticism. Conservative evangelicalism suggests a ‘closed’ system of Truth, one in which revelation is final and unassailable, and which takes as its starting point ‘the Bible’s account of itself’ (Packer, 1977: 130). Yet these Christians are also members of an ‘open’ society, one in which everything is vulnerable to revision. Religious logic might ‘reinforce authority by offering it an apparently transcendental position from which to speak’, but Christians are equally likely to find that decontextualised Bible verses cast doubts upon their ‘sources, intentions and sincerity’, rendering them ‘problematic, even morally troubling’ (Keane, 2007: 15). Religious speech, in other words, risked being seen as ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas, 2003).

The three questions asked of Lord Jameson highlighted this difficulty by seeming to challenge and accept the norms of secular public speech in equal measure. By rooting the reason for their opposition to same-sex marriage in the divine authorship of the Bible, the audience had implied that Lord Jameson’s secularised account had somehow missed the point. And yet, by recognising that alternative arguments might be required for those who lacked a “Biblical worldview”, they also suggested that their religious language was, to some extent, unconvincing. Taylor (2011: 49) suggests that efforts to remove religious speech from public life are often premised upon a perceived ‘epistemic distinction’ between ‘secular reason’ and the ‘special languages’ of faith. In this ideology, religious logic is seen to be ‘epistemically fragile’, unlikely to convince those who do not already subscribe to it. For Lord Jameson’s audience, however, the epistemic distinction between the claims of the secular and the divine was less to do with the inclusivity (or otherwise) of religious or secular speech, and more to do with the ontological transformation that allows fallen hearts and minds to understand the obvious Truth of a religious position. In this understanding, the truly universal is not the ‘common language’ of the secular. Rather, it is the Biblical law written on the hearts of all men and women, including those who currently deny it.

Despite the dogmatic certainty with which evangelicals are often associated by outsiders (Engelke, 2013: 28), ethnographic accounts of lived evangelicalism record periods of doubt and flux, during which believers struggle to feel the presence of God (Strhan, 2012; Crapanzano, 2000). This doubt may take a particular form in plural, multi-faith societies, in which, by contrast to their brothers and sisters in what Luhrmann (2012a: 377) calls ‘never

secular' societies,<sup>77</sup> Christians are confronted with questions not only as to the specifics of their faith – how one knows which God or gods to trust, for example, or how one can know that it is God, and not the devil, to whom one is speaking – but with doubts as to His very existence. Although Luhrmann's American Vineyard Christians and my English interlocutors both see themselves as the inhabitants of sceptical worlds, the prominence of hell in conservative evangelical theology renders their experience of this double register somewhat different. Unlike the Vineyard's experiential evangelicalism, in which hell has apparently been side-lined, my interlocutors must not only grapple with whether or not their faith 'sounds crazy' to outsiders, but feel compelled to engage with these outsiders in the hope of impacting their eternal destiny.

And one's eternal destiny has an impact in the here and now. Indeed, according to many of the campaigners I met through Christian Concern, real social change would probably need to be preceded by mass conversion. This understanding of the relationship between conversion and social change was expressed most clearly by Maria, a CLC solicitor, in the extended quote below. A slight brunette with fashionable blue-framed glasses, Maria had come to the CLC via the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, the organisation from which the CLC had emerged. This made her, along with Andrea, their longest serving member of staff. One Sunday afternoon, as we sat drinking herbal tea together in a south London teashop, Maria outlined Christian Concern's *raison d'être*:

The real reason why we do this work, as much as we want the nation to be changed, we know that ultimately the only way people and this nation will be changed is by the Gospel saving them. For example, changing the law on abortion. Someone is not going to wake up one day and say 'oh, I see the light, abortion is actually murdering a child' unless they're saved and they understand that God creates life and God takes life away. So they may have some kind of moral inclination that it's not a great thing to do, but [without God they might not understand why.]

Of all the things that we do, what we want most of all is that people would see that the only way that people can have a happy and fulfilling life is by knowing their Creator God, by being saved and building the right relationship with Him. And everything flows from that. But while we're in a nation where not many people are good Christians, I think the next best thing we can do is to preserve the freedoms which give people the opportunity to speak about the Gospel and to fight those cases where Christians have been maligned, discriminated against et cetera because they stood up for their faith.

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<sup>77</sup> I do not use 'never secular' to imply that doubt does not exist outside of 'the open, pluralistic, science-oriented societies we call the "West"' (Luhrmann, 2012a: 372), but to highlight the fact that my informants are almost always in contact with those who not only doubt the possibility of the divine, but view Christianity as being, as one friend was told, "intellectually preposterous".

Maria's comments reflect longstanding concerns among Christian reformers. Indeed, her words echo those of the eighteenth-century evangelical campaigners who made up William Wilberforce's influential Clapham Sect: "Christ the lawgiver", declares [Clapham Sect member Henry] Venn, "will always speak in vain, without Christ the saviour is first known" (quoted in Bebbington, 1989: 63). Yet this virtuous circle represents a central tension at the heart of Christian campaigning. If conversion is essential but the use of religious language in public debate is 'inconceivable' (Asad, 2009: 57), then neither religious nor secular logic is enough to convince non-Christian others of the Truth of Biblically-motivated socio-political positions. It was for this reason that Adam, although he found non-Biblical arguments against same-sex marriage to be valid, sensible, and accurate, *still* thought they were unlikely to convince non-believers. For evangelical observers, then, the kind of doubt that takes prominence in public policy debates is communicative, highlighting the conflicts of value between accessibility and doctrinal purity. It reflects an anxiety about the point at which one draws the line between, on the one hand, using secular arguments to promote God's "blueprint" for living and, on the other, unashamedly proclaiming the Gospel, even if doing so risks undermining one's credibility in the public sphere. In such instances, the Bible seems to function as an index of both moral certitude and relational ambiguity, as Christians find themselves struggling to explain the transcendent to those who, with disappointing frequency, seem to lack 'ears to hear' (Matthew 11:15).

As these reflections reveal, 'doubt is not simply a lonely internal state' (Bloch, 2013: 54). Rather, doubt can be a relational experience prompted by the difficulty of moving between secular and religious registers, and heightened by the eternal consequences of failing to do so in a convincing way. Like Asad's blasphemy, then, a Christian's ambivalent response to either religious or secular language requires us to attend to the sorts of anxieties underlying their responsibility to the community. In Chapters Four and Five, this issue is discussed in relation to the ways in which the Gospel ought to be conveyed. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I discuss this responsibility from a different angle, one which moves from the micro-level of the individual Christian's duty to graciously evangelise their friends, colleagues, and neighbours to the macro-level at which Christians seek to ensure their continued freedom to spread the faith outside of these intimate, relational spheres. I focus on the doubts occasioned when effective evangelism seems to come into conflict with Andrea and Maria's efforts to "preserve the freedoms which give people the opportunity to speak about the Gospel", and suggest that this conflict is indicative of the different goals or evangelistic visions of the various parties involved in Christian interest litigation.

### III.III “That absurd case”

Sunday evening services at Christ Church are relaxed affairs. Or, more accurately, they are as relaxed as a Christ Church service gets; although the minister will have removed his tie, an evening service’s prayers are equally heartfelt, its sermon equally academic, and its call to repentance equally urgent. It was to such a service that I headed one evening in November 2013, to hear Greg, a tall, slim, floppy-haired curate, speaking on the tricky subject of church discipline. Greg began his sermon with a story of two sisters, Charity and Clarity. Charity and Clarity divided public opinion. Many people preferred Charity. Charity was “accepting”, whereas Clarity was “discriminating”; Charity was “warm”, whereas Clarity was “cold”; “Charity said ‘come in’, whilst Clarity said ‘technically, you shouldn’t be here.’” Others, however, preferred Clarity. Clarity was “effective”, while Charity got nothing done; Clarity was a “realist”, while Charity was an “idealist”; Charity *meant* well, but Clarity *did* well.

The apparent incompatibility of these two virtues, Greg continued, was often implied in discussions of Christianity:

These days, few would question the legitimacy of religious charity, but religious clarity? Well, many say that’s impossible. In fact, that’s evil. Those who draw clear lines between right and wrong, in and out, saved and lost, they’re narrow minded bigots, blatant transgressors of their supposed Lord’s command to love. Perhaps you remember that absurd case of the Exeter and Birmingham Christian Unions a couple of years back. They got kicked out of their Student Unions because these CUs were requiring people to sign a declaration of faith, thereby excluding membership from those who were of other faiths. And it seems obvious [that members of a Christian Union would sign a declaration of faith], doesn’t it, but that, apparently, was appalling.

Greg was referring to a number of disputes between local chapters of the University and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) and their university Guilds or Student Unions, disputes which had made headlines between 2006 and 2008.<sup>78</sup> UCCF is ‘the most influential and most popular umbrella organisation representing Christians in British universities’ (Guest et al, 2013: 209). It is unashamedly evangelistic, teaching its members to view the university campus as a potential ‘mission field’ (ibid: 218). Conservative in its theology, it is known among my informants as a Biblically sound organisation, one whose Doctrinal Basis, which affirms that the Bible ‘is the inspired and infallible Word of God’ and ‘the supreme authority in all matters of belief and behaviour’, was one they would readily sign up to.

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<sup>78</sup> In addition to disputes over CU membership at Exeter, Birmingham, and Heriot-Watt, the University of Edinburgh’s CU was accused of discriminating against LGBT students when it sought to run ‘Pure’, a Christian course on sexuality.

Which was, as it happened, just as well: many university CUs required their members to do just that.

Unfortunately for UCCF, not all self-identified Christians proved willing to do so. In 2006, an Orthodox Christian student at the University of Exeter complained that his Orthodox theology rendered him ineligible for membership. As a result of his complaint, the Students' Guild temporarily disaffiliated the Christian Union, claiming that its Doctrinal Basis discriminated against those of non-evangelical persuasion. The situation quickly escalated. The CU's bank account was frozen. It was no longer allowed to host events on University property. Lawyers were instructed, public debates were held, and mediation attempts failed. The CU protested that their right to freedom of religion was being curtailed; the Guild countered that student organisations must be open to all. Following a University-wide vote, the CU was required, against its wishes, to rebrand itself as the *Evangelical* Christian Union (ECU). It was the sort of story that caused the 'small c' conservatives at my evangelical church to exasperatedly roll their eyes or sadly shake their heads; *what was the world coming to when an 'equal opportunities' policy mandated that a non-Christian could apply to lead the Christian Union?*<sup>79</sup>

As always, my ears pricked up at Greg's mention of what I knew to be a CLC case.<sup>80</sup> Generally speaking, though, the spate of cases involving university Christian Unions were not ones I often thought about. They rarely came up in conversation with church members, and although the CU controversies had garnered a significant amount of media attention at the time, the Exeter dispute had never actually reached a courtroom. Less than a week later, however, I was to find myself puzzling over the strange case of the Exeter ECU. The Friday after Greg's sermon, I was part of a group of volunteers who had offered to help out at the youth group's annual Guy Fawkes' Night fireworks display. The event was hosted by a mature Christian couple who had volunteered their large (and, due to the inclement November weather, waterlogged) garden for the occasion. The gathering was, of course, evangelistic in nature. Regular members of the 11-14 youth group had been encouraged to invite non-Christian friends along for an evening of fun, fireworks, finger food - and a short talk on John 3:16. While the men among us busied themselves outside, hauling garden furniture into a makeshift barrier between the sodden grass and the patio, the women, myself included, retreated to the kitchen to cook hotdogs and hamburgers for the teenagers.

As I applied myself to the task of frying onions with which to garnish the food, I began chatting with Kate, a fellow kitchen volunteer. Kate's good humour and "servant-

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<sup>79</sup> From the perspective of those who sought to convince the CU to change its membership policy, the issue was not one of discriminating against non-Christians but of discriminating against *non-evangelical* Christians, including Orthodox, Catholic, Mormon, and 'mainline' Protestant Christians.

<sup>80</sup> The case was initially run from the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (the body out of which the CLC eventually grew), but was managed by Andrea from the beginning.

heartedness” were immediately obvious. Not only was she wearing the sort of jumper by which it was impossible to remain uncheered on a wet November evening (a red knitted number replete with smiling penguins), she was slicing hotdog and hamburger buns with an enthusiasm I had never before seen applied to a bag of bread rolls. Our conversation followed the pattern that such conversations usually took. I learned that she, like me, was in her mid-twenties; that she worked for the National Trust; and that she attended church with her husband, Jim, who was out in the swampy garden trying to spark the fireworks. She learned that I was an anthropology student; that I lived within walking distance of the church; and that I was interested in evangelical legal activism. Having given a broad outline of my research, I asked if she had any interest in the Christian discrimination cases. *Actually*, she replied, *yes. My husband and I were involved in one.* As it turned out, Jim and Kate had been President and Vice-President, respectively, of the Exeter ECU during their final year of university. Yet their difficulties with the Guild were not something they discussed with their church friends. It was for this reason that, despite voicing my interest in Christian legal activism to every church member I met, no one had ever directed them to me.

Why was this the case? Of the ten CLC clients I met at Christian Concern, of whom I was able to conduct interviews with seven, almost all viewed their CLC experience as an important part of their Christian journey. Even more so than testimonies - the ‘spiritual life stories’ or narrative ‘creations’ that play such a key role conservative Christian culture (Lawless, 1991: 58; cf. Crapanzano, 2000; Harding, 2001; Erzen, 2006) - their accounts often read like narratives of vocation to the religious life, reflecting a sense of having been ‘chosen’ for a particular mission or task. Like the young Catholic nuns studied by Rebecca Lester (2005: 227), these clients had learned ‘to incorporate into their daily experience a new story of who they are and what their purpose is that reorders and restructures their understandings of their own personal histories’. Lesley Pilkington, for example, who had come to the CLC after providing ex-gay therapy to an undercover journalist,<sup>81</sup> told me that God had used her life experience prior to the case as a time of preparation, “strengthening me for that time of trial”: “I felt at the time, it just wasn’t random, it just wasn’t... [From] the beginning, I felt that it had been planned by God.” Others went further still. Gary McFarlane, who had lost his job as a relationships counsellor after expressing a possible conscientious objection to offering psychosexual therapy to same-sex couples, saw his case as the result of a prayer he had once prayed: “I said ‘Lord, I want my life to count. I want to make a significant impact upon this earth before I die. Amen.’” Nor was Gary the only CLC client who viewed his legal difficulties as an answered prayer. Dr Richard Scott, who had been disciplined by the General Medical Council for encouraging a depressed patient to turn

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<sup>81</sup> The journalist, Patrick Strudwick (2010), had posed as an unhappily homosexual Christian seeking to move away from same-sex attraction.

to Jesus, explained his case as the result of what he jokingly called “a dangerous prayer”, one in which he too had asked to be “significant.”

Kate and Jim offered a different perspective. A number of months after our first meeting, they invited me to their home to discuss the case over tea and chocolate biscuits. (The biscuits, I was told, were a last minute addition to our spread, an uncharacteristically empty kitchen cupboard having necessitated an early morning run to the shop). Sitting in their bright front room, the spring sunshine pouring in through the large windows, Kate explained that she and Jim had “inherited” the ECU/Guild controversy from their Committee predecessors. It was in their first year at university that a discrimination complaint had been made, and it was in response to their disciplining by the Guild that the ECU Executive Committee had sought legal advice from the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship (the body out of which Andrea was then running the Christian interest cases). The advice they received was that, in the context of a belief-based organisation, their disaffiliation from the Guild violated their human rights. As Jim explained:

I think [the Committee] were in a position where either they had to let it lie or they had to file legal papers within a certain amount of time, and they went with filing the legal papers, which sort of kicked off a massive storm, as you can imagine. And then we were sort of brought back in [to the Guild]. We were told ‘okay, well, you can come back in,’ but it was always very, very clear that we were contravening Guild laws and they could kick us out at any point.

“From then on”, he continued, “it would sort of simmer along, and every year there would be a spike where it was brought up and it reared its ugly head, and then it would go back down.”

The issue reached breaking point in their final year at Exeter, when Jim was ECU President and Kate was Vice-President. The Guild issued an ultimatum. The ECU, in consultation with their lawyers, responded by presenting the Guild with “a paper which kind of backed up, legally, where we thought we stood”. This plan, unfortunately, backfired: “They really didn’t like the fact that we had this legal element to it”. The Guild stopped communicating. Jim, who “just wanted the issue to be gone”, agreed to a University-wide debate on whether faith-based organisations ought to be allowed to require their members to sign a statement of belief. Then began what the couple described as a “hate campaign” against the ECU.

Although they received support from churches around the country, Kate and Jim remembered this as a distressing time. The Guild’s attacks felt personal. Jim, who had initially seen the debate as a chance to have a productive discussion, quickly realised that “we wouldn’t be going to win, we’d be going to explain ourselves”. As expected, his motion

to allow faith-based societies to restrict membership on the basis of belief failed to pass. Still, he received surprisingly positive feedback from non-Christians on his performance; given that “people were sort of expecting me to be like a far-right Nazi”, he was pleased to hear that “it was the clearest way the problem had been communicated”. After the debate, the ECU had little appetite to keep fighting. They dropped the campaign to reinstate their belief-based membership policy, and the issue faded from campus prominence. “I think it was time,” Kate explained. “It had been three years.”

Coming under public attack is not unusual for those involved in Christian interest cases. Lesley, for example, had been humiliated and embarrassed by the newspaper articles written about her, which she felt were “mocking, and misrepresenting, and distorting.” But while Lesley viewed her case as having been “orchestrated” by God, with even her abuse understood as a lesson about the spiritual state of the nation, Jim and Kate expressed a profound ambivalence about their roles in the ECU controversy. With the benefit of hindsight, Jim said:

Looking back at it, it was actually a really difficult time, wasn't it, in terms of working out what was the right thing to do as well, because you're in this position where you're thinking well, actually, is this going to [help communicate the Gospel?] Like, our mission here, or the idea of the CU, is to help people to communicate the Gospel, and is this in the background going to help? But then you're also in a position where you're thinking well, if you just sort of whimper out and just leave the Guild, then that is kind of conceding, you know, it's basically saying Christians don't have a place in any sphere of life, for whatever reason, and it's accepting that maybe you should be marginalised or that that's okay, you know?

If Luhmann's ethnography speaks of the challenges of inhabiting an epistemological double register of faith and doubt, Jim's comments suggest the difficulty of straddling another divide, that of principles and particulars. By this I mean that Jim identified a conflict between his principled commitment to ensuring the continued spread of the Gospel through the maintenance of laws and institutions friendly towards it, and his personal duty to witness to those in his sphere of influence. On the one hand, he was unwilling to forfeit the Biblical clarity that required Christians to acknowledge the difference between, as Greg's sermon had it, “right and wrong, in and out, saved and lost”, particularly if making such a concession now would result in the increasing marginalisation of Christians in the future. He knew that he was called to work towards a world in which Christians could lead ‘peaceful and quiet [lives], godly and dignified in every way’ (1 Timothy 2:2). On the other hand, he worried that, in this *particular* instance, framing the dispute as an insurmountable divide between the Guild and the ECU might just do more



harm than good, particularly when the ECU was publicly perceived as being “totally against” equality.

The university setting was an ideal context for this ratcheting up of rhetoric. As Ruth Sheldon (2013: 142) has argued in relation to students’ political engagement with Israel-Palestine, campus conflicts challenge the Enlightenment ideal of the university as a site for ‘universal practical reason’ by subjecting it to the affective force of historical, familial, and personal circumstances. In recounting the controversy surrounding a public lecture given by a Palestinian journalist, she argues that the circulation of well-worn tropes regarding contested public speech – accusations that the Palestine Society were endorsing anti-Semitic hate speech, for example, while the Israel Society had embraced the ‘censoring oppression of the Zionist lobby’ (ibid: 144) – functioned to bring students into the debate not as passive spectators, but as ‘*active participants*’ in an ongoing political struggle. Similarly, the parties to the Exeter ECU controversy, in which ‘religious freedom’ was repeatedly constructed as a threat to ‘equality,’ seemed to take on a metonymic quality, with students encouraged to align themselves with one or other of these apparently incompatible values. This polarisation led to the juxtaposition between ‘religion’ and ‘equality’ being extended far beyond the UCCF’s Doctrinal Basis. Despite their having nothing to do with the initial dispute (which was, at heart, an intra-religious debate focused on the ostensibly exclusionary nature of the evangelical-inflected Doctrinal Basis, which proved a theological bar to other self-identified Christians), the ECU was also accused of sexism, homophobia, and racism. The ECU was portrayed as being, in Jim’s words, “against equal opportunities of *any* type”. Such a reputation was, they knew, unlikely to win converts for Christ.

As such, Jim’s communicative doubt suggests a tension between the desirability of enforcing a principle, and its evangelistic impact in practice. Speaking of his meetings and phone calls with Andrea and Paul Diamond, Standing Counsel to the CLC, who were then advising the ECU, he said:

[Andrea] was kind of ‘bigger picture’ in terms of Christian rights in the UK, and... my impression is that she would fight any battle, you know, in terms of that, because she didn’t want to lose ground, as it were. [That] was my impression, that she’d fight tooth and nail and that she’d go for it in a legal way. Whereas I think our ideal would have been to be able to sit down and talk with the Guild and come up with some sort of solution. But equally, how realistic would that have been? I don’t know.

Anthropological studies of dispute resolution suggest that ‘there is a positive relationship between disputants’ efforts to preserve their relationships with each other and their attempts to minimize the confrontative aspects of their interaction’ (Greenhouse, 1989: 116). Jim

associated the legalisation of the ECU's language with the diminished possibility of a mediated solution. He spoke of the submission of legal papers as "[kicking] off a massive storm", and pointed out that "[the Guild] really didn't like the fact that we had this legal element to it". These statements acknowledge that language 'expresses ethical commitments that have become completely embedded in everyday life' (Das, 2012: 136), with the divergence of Andrea and Jim's preferred modes of speech – the formal, adversarial language of the court versus the informal, conciliatory language of mediation – highlighting a tension between the ethical commitments they held. To borrow the temporal terms used by Veena Das in her account of quotidian ethics, this tension reminds us of the ambiguous relationship between the 'actual everyday' and one's ability, through ethical conduct, to influence the 'eventual everyday' (ibid: 134). Andrea's legal language reflected her fear that the 'eventual everyday' would be one in which Christian freedoms had been diminished beyond the point of no return. Jim, on the other hand, wondered whether a conciliatory ethic in the 'actual everyday' might bear a more fruitful eventuality.

Kate was able to point to one positive offshoot of what had otherwise been, in her words, an "almost traumatic" experience. The publicity surrounding the debate meant that the ECU's annual mission week – seven days of student-friendly evangelistic outreach – was extremely well attended. From this perspective, the ultimate success or failure of the case might be realised years hence, when a former student who had attended their mission week understood what it *really* meant to claim the exclusivity of Christ. Conversion, after all, can be a slow process. Yet even on this level, Jim remained doubtful. To be sure, the dispute had given him many chances to speak about the ECU. But given that he saw the ECU's role as one of introducing students to Jesus, discussions about membership policies and Guild politics were ultimately conversations about which he "couldn't give a toss".

But if the couple's reflections on their experience do not lend themselves particularly well to notions of success, nor can they be dismissed as failure. Although neither Jim nor Kate could be sure that 'legalising' the dispute had been the correct path to take, *nor could they be sure it hadn't*. Indeed, the very fact of their having to articulate and grapple with the difficulty of the decision showed it to have occurred in the context of a 'conceptual gap', a space in which multiple justifications might be valid (Keane, 2010: 79). Jim was unwilling to come down on either side: "I'd go through it again if it was the right thing, but it's very fifty-fifty, for me, whether that was the right thing to do or not. I have no idea." Five years later, what remained was ambivalence. Had they been right to assert, on principle, that the ECU ought to be able to determine its own membership policy? Had they been wrong, in terms of their own personal witness, to distract from the Gospel? They simply couldn't say. Having been tasked with the ethical act of 'discerning when to follow one's commitments and when to depart from them' (Lambek, 2010: 28), their struggle to resolve

principles and particulars was a poignant reminder of the conflict Greg, the curate, had highlighted the week before I met Kate: they were torn between Clarity and Charity, and couldn't be sure which sister's lead ought to have been followed.

That Kate and Jim expressed doubt, hesitation, and ambivalence in relation to the case, however, does not negate their having a meaningful orientation towards it. Rather, Kate and Jim's experience draws attention to the important fact that, for the conservative evangelicals at Christ Church, there are many situations in which there simply isn't a 'Christian' or 'unchristian' way of doing things. I argue that their unwillingness to resolve the case as a success or failure can be approached in terms of their theology, which emphasises the saving power of grace and the uselessness of religious law. As I show in Chapter Four, emic evangelical theology rejects rule following, box ticking, and religious "legalism". The Bible, although the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong, is not to be approached as a moribund rulebook; less a 'legal code', it is more a 'system of knowledge' (Greenhouse, 1989: 118). From this perspective, experiencing occasional doubts as to the rightness or wrongness of one's actions suggests a spiritually sensitive disciple, one who is seeking to make godly decisions and who is always "thinking Gospel." As such, the lack of resolution experienced by Kate and Jim can be said to have a meaningful quality, as it reorients its participants to the grace of God. In a context in which Christians understand themselves to be morally fragmented beings, the ever-imperfect foil of their coherent, integrated, and ever-perfect God, the ambiguity experienced by Jim and Kate is made meaningful by the recognition that although they cannot know whether their choices in this instance were correct, nor do they necessarily need to; *they can't, but God can*. Or, as Engelke (2006: 68) puts it in relation to the failed responses of Zimbabwean Friday Apostolics to the words of their charismatic prophets, '[t]here can be order... in the unknown; clarity in what is unclear'.

And what of the difference between Kate and Jim's experience and those of Lesley, Gary, and Richard, all of whom deemed their CLC cases to have been ordained by God? Part of the explanation must be the circumstances in which the case arose. Although they were deeply involved in the dispute's final escalation, Kate and Jim saw themselves as the "inheritors" of the case, not its instigators. The fact that the participants in the ECU/Guild dispute had become associated with larger values – freedom versus equality – meant that, at the time, they "had this feeling that being part of the Guild was absolutely everything". But it also meant that, when they left the fishbowl of what they called "studentville", Kate and Jim achieved the sort of distance that other clients, perhaps, have been unable to attain. Although they certainly suffered during the lead up to the debate, they did not take this harm with them when they left university. Unlike those clients whose unwillingness to concede a principle had cost them their livelihoods (or resulted in their names being dragged through

the national press), perhaps Kate and Jim can afford the ambivalence they continue to experience.

This somewhat reductive approach to certainty, however, is not the only possible explanation. That Kate and Jim were unable to reconcile principle and practice in this instance does not mean that others in their situation would be rendered equally ambivalent, particularly if those others have a different understanding of the actual everyday's relationship to the eventual. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2011, 2012) has recently urged, anthropologists must attend to the differences in personality, experience and sheer will that allow some members of disenfranchised groups to 'endure' while others, tragically, are ground down by the realities of late liberalism. While the circumstances of my interlocutors are, of course, radically different from those of Povinelli's Australian Aboriginal friends, the commitment that both groups show to living in a way that could be categorised as 'otherwise' suggests that the concepts of will and endurance may have some purchase for clients like Lesley, Gary and Richard. Indeed, if they did experience doubt as to their cases, perhaps this doubt actually provided 'the energy needed to produce conviction and decisiveness' (Pelkmans, 2013: 15). Given the comparatively brief time I spent with the clients I met through the CLC (and due to my desire to avoid uninformed psychologising), I can only hint at this possibility here; but I would suggest that, in a theological context in which the Christian's choice to take legal action is neither inherently wrong nor inherently right, a client's 'will to be otherwise' (Povinelli, 2012) may indeed play a role in managing, if not quashing, ambivalence, doubt, and uncertainty.

### **III.IV Conclusion: doubt and the divine**

Religious doubt is sometimes approached as 'a torture which the believer needs to endure so as to get over it and accept – without question, on the basis of authority – the truth of revealed religion' (Bloch, 2013: 43). Yet 'lived doubt' goes beyond the demons wrestled on a dark night of the soul. If doubt is a 'torture' to be endured, a question of theology, ontology, and empiricism, it is also an action to be taken, an experience that prompts the practical question: 'what to do?' (Pelkmans, 2013: 2). Or, as my evangelical friends might put it, 'what to say, and how best to say it?'

This chapter has explored the ways in which conservative Christians express doubt and ambivalence in speaking 'Christianly' in public life. In recounting the communicative doubt expressed by Adam, the dapper American law student, I have sought to explain the difficulty my interlocutors associate with efforts to convince non-Christians of the truth of policy positions that are experienced as being at once common sense – *marriage, as an institution oriented towards the production and welfare of children, can only be contracted between men and women* – and divinely revealed – *which is why God made it so*. Within this

framework, Christian representations of the family are ‘beyond ideology’ (Cannell, 1990: 668), such that ‘the sacred cosmos cannot be separated from cultural patterns’ (Mathews & De Hart, 1990: 179). But as the inhabitants of a double register of scepticism and certainty, they are also aware that what is common sense in one context is contestable in another. The expression of doubt, even as to creedal or Biblical statements that are ostensibly accepted as ‘literal’ – such as the belief that God’s Word, once spoken, ‘shall not return to [Him] empty’ (Isaiah, 55:11) – signals what Abby Day (2010: 28) calls the ‘performativity’ of belief, that is, its ‘social and relational location’ and the communicative difficulty that this relationality may prompt. Evangelicals must mobilise non-religious arguments to convince their opponents of the correctness of Biblically-informed opinions, even as they suggest that only conversion will enable true comprehension of the moral point of view. From within this virtuous feedback loop, neither religious nor secular language is thought entirely convincing. Christians are still called to speak, as Bethany once put it, “graciously and wisely”, but what is really required is divine intervention from a speaking God.

As it happened, many of my Christian friends had experienced this sort of dramatic intervention,<sup>82</sup> ranging from the jarring words that prompted Lucy to begin her search for Truth – “the words were ‘something is *deeply* wrong with your life, something is missing from your life’” – to Dominic opening the Bible to Romans 5:8 – “and the verse says ‘God showed His love for you in this, that while you were still sinners Christ died for you’” – on the day of his conversion. Sitting on the platform at York Railway Station, waiting for our train to London, Adam told me that he too had been addressed by the divine. We had been discussing my own spiritual journey, and Adam, seeking, perhaps, to encourage me, explained why he had never doubted his faith. A childhood experience in which God had spoken directly to him meant he could never doubt His existence. Yet the fact that God had spoken to him was, Adam knew, a bit like conservative Biblical exegesis: it required an inductive interpretation to be properly understood. After all, although he described both hearing and feeling God’s voice, “it’s not like anyone else in the room would have heard Him.” By addressing Adam personally, God had become both more real and more private (Luhmann, 2012b: 313). The temporality Adam longed for me to inhabit as I approached the words of the Bible, then, was neither one of timeless Truth nor outdated prejudice. Rather, it was a radical rupture in space and time, the same sort of ‘discontinuity’ (Robbins, 2007) that he had experienced when God Himself had broken into the everyday and Adam had heard His voice. While awaiting this possibility for his non-Christian friends, perhaps all he could really do was seek to maintain the channels that allowed Christians to evangelise,

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<sup>82</sup> Supernatural intervention often involves a touch of the dramatic, regardless of context. However, I would argue that this is especially so among white, middle-class Londoners, where public references to this sort of experience risk one being labelled, in Tony Blair’s words, ‘a nutter’ (see BBC, 2007).

so that, if God did choose to speak, the hearer would know by Whom they were being addressed.

Yet tensions sometimes emerged between the actions taken to protect the freedom to evangelise and the actual impact these actions might have on a Christian's Gospel witness, as evidenced by Kate and Jim's reflections on the contrast between principle and practice. This contrast suggests that, in addition to inhabiting Luhrmann's double epistemic register of faith and doubt, my conservative friends must also navigate a temporal divide, one in which the language an individual Christian uses in the 'actual everyday' might have an impact, either positive or negative, on the 'eventual everyday' faced by Christians throughout the nation. That this tension seems to be an organising principle of evangelical activism, however, need not be read as failure or incoherence. Rather, I have argued that the ambiguity expressed by clients like Kate and Jim is indicative of evangelical Christianity's rejection of religious laws, rules, and prescriptions.

Pelkmans (2013: 15) writes that it is difficult to imagine people 'resting in doubt', which he describes as being 'always on the move'. Unresolved doubt, he suggests, can only be tolerated under certain circumstances, in which it ceases to be the focus of attention, is reinterpreted, or is denied (ibid: 20). I have argued that what makes Kate and Jim's ongoing ambivalence bearable is that they rest not in doubt, but in Jesus. Their doubts as to the case were neither denied nor resolved – indeed, Jim implied that resolution was impossible - but reflected the theological truism that while God is coherent, complete, and omniscient, humans are incoherent, hesitant, and fallible. In what Pelkmans might class as a 'reinterpretation' of doubt, the distance between their human ambivalence and the complete coherence of God means Kate and Jim can live with the fact that the 'meaningful attitude' provided by a religious experience – whether a ritual, a prophet, or even a legal case - 'will never provide all the "answers", and ... it is not necessarily supposed to' (Engelke, 2006: 78).

Writing of early twentieth-century Catholic Spain, Christian (1996: 393) argues that the Church's unwillingness to categorise dead parishioners as definitively saved or damned served a social purpose, '[directing] behaviour by establishing rewards and disincentives with indulgences and jubilees in much the way modern states use tax codes.' The threat of damnation maintained the ethical order even as its uncertainty left hope for the grieving relatives of known sinners. Flexibility, then – ambiguity by another name – can be productive. And what is true of the Church may also be true of the law. Although courts are typically associated with the desire to move beyond reasonable doubt, there is a certain benefit to keeping legal controversies murky. Many lawyers, and certainly those at the CLC, believe that the rule of law cannot deliver justice unless it is "clarified", that is, unless a judgment has been made on an otherwise ambiguous situation. Andrew, Christian Concern's

campaigns manager, thought that “clarity tends to help confidence,” as legal clarity would allow Christians on the ground to know where they stood in relation to public expressions of faith. But by bringing an action, demanding a resolution, and thereby setting a precedent, the CLC’s cases also have the potential to reify the issue, limiting the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. Doubt may ‘[push] for a resolution’ (Pelkmans, 2013: 13), but resolution pushes against the flexibility of the common law. As legal scholar Maleiha Malik (pers. comm.) has suggested, it is for this reason that English judges seem so frustrated by the CLC’s cases, particularly those that pit religious rights against those relating to sexual orientation (see Chapter Six). They are unwelcome precisely because, in the move ‘from ethos to rules’ (Plant, 2013: 11), the space for compromise in untested areas of law becomes ever smaller.

Lest the above be read as ‘resolving’ ambiguity, however, this chapter must end by recognising the continuing discomfort that doubt causes for those for whom salvation requires firm belief. This brings us back to Isabel, Stephen, and Will, the dinner guests who asked what I found most “unusual” about the members of Christ Church. As noted above, I was often uncomfortably aware that questions centring on Christian distinctiveness required me to evaluate my new friends’ ability to live in such a way that the indwelt presence of the Holy Spirit was visible and attractive to non-Christians. Questions about what was most “unusual”, “different” or “surprising” about Christians functioned as subtle references to my own status as someone who was, in the words of the church, “not *yet*” Christian, “out” rather than “in”. My friends’ distinctiveness ought to have sparked in me an openness to the Gospel, a desire to understand the cause of their attractive, grace-fuelled lives. From within this framing, my continuing membership among “the lost” challenged them to ever greater efforts to reflect the grace of God to me before it was too late; forcing me, as Carol once put it, with a heartbreakingly pained expression on her face and the beginnings of tears in her eyes, to grapple with the fact that *as things currently stood, she would not be seeing me in heaven*. To offer Isabel a fuller and, perhaps, more honest answer to the question she asked that Tuesday evening, what really struck me as being surprising – and, indeed, touching – about my evangelical friends was the way in which I, and my own ongoing *doubt*, seemed to function as a measure of their (in)ability to meet the standards they set themselves; standards which, as we will see in the following chapter, were nothing short of divine.

## Chapter Four: Grace and Law

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. (Matthew 5:17)*

### IV.I Evangelical spelling

“M-E-R-?”

James, Christ Church’s ever cheerful curate, was holding an impromptu spelling bee. It was a cool, fresh evening in April 2013, and I was one of sixteen guests at the first session of Christianity Explored. Christianity Explored is an informal, five week course for curious non-Christians who are interested in finding out more about Jesus, which Christ Church tries to run at least once a term.<sup>83</sup> Held over five consecutive Monday evenings, each session begins with the course attendees sharing a glass of wine, beer or juice and a home-cooked meal in the church lounge. After the meal, a Christ Church staff member gives a short talk about one aspect of the Christian faith (such as the person of Jesus Christ, sin, or the importance of the cross). This is followed by a half hour of discussion and question time, during which the guests can ask any questions they might have about Christianity.<sup>84</sup>

On this particular evening, I was sitting at a table with seven others, four of whom were members of Christ Church, and three of whom, like myself, were ‘exploring’. Of the three other explorers, two – Joe and Susan – had been invited by friends who were already church members, and one, Rose, had come along after hearing the course plugged during a Sunday service she’d happened to attend. The evening’s talk having been given, and our dinner – chicken in a mushroom sauce, which had been cooked by volunteers from the congregation – having been served, we were now ready to settle into the discussion portion of the evening. James, who was chairing the conversation at our table, was trying to explain what he saw as Christianity’s defining characteristic. All religions, he told us, are based on words which begin with the same three letters: “M-E-R.” In every religion apart from Christianity, the word is – he spelled it out - “M-E-R-I-T.” Muslims and Catholics, for example, believe that they will get to heaven by performing meritorious actions. They die hoping against hope that these good deeds will outweigh a lifetime’s worth of sin. Other religions, then, ask people to try to “climb a ladder up to God.” In Christianity, however, the word is: “M-E-R-?” “Mercy?” offered Rose. Joe, Susan and I murmured approvingly in her

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<sup>83</sup> Reflecting the congregational demographic, the church calendar is divided up according to independent (private) school academic terms.

<sup>84</sup> Christianity Explored is a conservative evangelical version of the Alpha course, popularised by Anglican Nicky Gumbel in the 1990s. It differs from Alpha in giving greater prominence to sin and judgment in its teaching (Warner, 2007: 133).



direction; Rose was fast becoming James' star pupil. James beamed at her: "Thanks for coming, Rose!"

James' spelling test was one of the many times I heard my evangelical friends pose an absolute distinction between Christianity, which they understand to be grounded in God's mercy, and all other religions, the salvific logic of which they understand to be based upon merit. Founded on the Reformation doctrine of salvation by faith alone, this theology posits humankind as unable to earn their way to God through the performance of religious ritual or the purchasing of indulgences. Humankind's absolute depravity means that the "debt" of sin cannot be "paid for" by one's own actions. The slate can only be wiped clean by Jesus' redemptive death on the cross, which allows God to forgive and treat as sinless those who trust in His Son. In this understanding, Christians live under "grace" – the unconditional and undeserved gift of forgiveness and salvation – as opposed to "law", that is, the strict moral, civil, and juridical code of Old Testament Judaism, the inevitable breaking of which required the Israelites, both individually and corporately, to make regular atoning sacrifices. Evangelicals understand the death of Jesus to have been a "once and for all" sacrifice that fulfilled the Old Testament law (Matthew 5: 17-18). For this reason, Christians see themselves as having a level of freedom unparalleled in other religions, for they do not have to keep prescriptive laws relating to rules of dress (such as headscarves or turbans); dietary restrictions (such as kosher or halal food); charitable obligations (such as good works or zakat); and ritual responsibilities (such as Islam's five daily prayers).

The distinction between religions of grace and religions of law has profound consequences for how my interlocutors frame their efforts to live moral, God-fearing lives. While other religions are seen to encourage moral (or, indeed, immoral) behaviour as an attempt to "earn" one's way into heaven, they understand the Christian's desire to live a good life to be a result of the gratitude they feel for the grace they have received. In other words, they see their good works as being motivated *by*, as opposed to an attempt to *achieve*, the gift of salvation: 'In free Christian self-consciousness the will of God is done spontaneously, not because of the demands of the law' (Rendtorff, 1988: 40). But if Christian salvation is dependent on the gift of grace, and does not depend on the performance of (or refusal to perform) meritorious (or sinful) works, then what did the clients of the Christian Legal Centre mean when they argued that their right to freedom of religion had been violated by employers who asked them to perform, or cease their performance of, various actions? If Christianity was not, as I was often told, about "following rules" or "keeping laws", then why did these clients argue that it was impermissible or undesirable for a Christian to perform a civil partnership, work on a Sunday, or remove a Christian symbol? As I came to understand the distinction between New Testament grace and Old Testament law, I began to notice the ways in which this

rhetorical device was deployed in discussions of the cases taken by the CLC, both by the members of Christ Church and by the CLC staff themselves.

In this chapter, I focus on the categories of grace and law as they were applied to two CLC cases, *Chaplin v Royal Devon & Exeter NHS Foundation Trust*<sup>85</sup> and *Playfoot v Millais School Governing Body*. These cases, which concerned restrictions on the wearing of a nurse's crucifix necklace and a schoolgirl's 'purity ring' (a ring symbolising the wearer's commitment to chastity before marriage), were the subject of grace/law discussions not only at the CLC and in the Christ Church lounge, but in the courts that sought to determine what sort of restrictions could legitimately be placed on the wearing of religious jewellery by adherents of a faith that constructs itself as having no legalistic dress code. In different ways, Christianity's – for want of a better word – 'lawlessness' rendered *Chaplin* and *Playfoot* problematic for all parties involved. From the perspective of the staff of the CLC, Christianity was treated unfairly by the English courts because it was not a law-based religion. By contrast to Islam and Sikhism, Christianity's very lack of formal dress code allowed the opposing counsel to argue that the wearing of religious attire was not a 'generally recognised practice' of the Christian faith, and therefore did not merit legal protection. From the perspective of the members of Christ Church, however, the cases were problematic precisely because the claimants involved risked painting Christianity as a religion that 'required' the wearing of religious symbols. By positing the removal of a cross or purity ring as a violation of the Christian faith, they could be read as suggesting that these items were, in fact, *necessary* for salvation. As such, some members of Christ Church worried that the clients in *Playfoot* and *Chaplin* risked portraying Christianity as a religion not of New Testament grace, but of Old Testament law. Drawing a distinction between interior conviction and exterior symbols, they critiqued the cases on the basis that "wearing a cross doesn't make you a Christian."

Writing of the curious lack of attention paid to the concept of 'grace' in anthropology, Julian Pitt-Rivers (1992: 215) asks: 'surely the anthropology of religion can no more ignore Western theology than the anthropology of law can ignore Western jurisprudence?' Taking up this call, I focus on this theological category not only to show its centrality in the lives of my interlocutors, but as part of the thesis' broader efforts to bring together the anthropologies of religion and law (and, indeed, theology and jurisprudence). After all, despite their particular association with the Protestant Reformation, debates over the proper relationship between 'tradition or law', 'grace and revelation', and subject and object can arise in many different contexts (Keane, 2007: 130). In addition to reflecting on these cases as one example of Protestant Christianity's ongoing struggle to determine the

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<sup>85</sup> See also *Eweida & Others v UK*.

‘proper relations’ between religious objects and agentive subjects (ibid: 4), then, this chapter also provides ethnographic evidence of the difficulty of disentangling the religious from the legal, particularly when religion itself – and regardless of evangelicals’ protestations to the contrary – functions as ‘analogous’ to law, providing ‘an ever-replenishing supply of lawlike norms and narratives that govern human life’ (Sullivan et al, 2011: 3).

#### **IV.II Merit and mercy**

Louis Armstrong sings *What a Wonderful World* as bombs fall on a Vietnamese village. American troops trundle through the jungle while Vietnamese civilians are rounded up and shot. Journalists and protestors are beaten. A toddler runs from a burning building. A bloody flip flop lies abandoned in the street.

It was the second week of Christianity Explored, and James had opened the evening’s talk by dimming the lights and projecting a clip from the 1987 Hollywood film *Good Morning Vietnam* onto a screen at the back of the church lounge. The clip began with a shot of the actor Robin Williams, who plays a Saigon-based DJ for the US Armed Forces Radio Service, dedicating *What a Wonderful World* to the US soldiers stationed in Vietnam. While Satchmo sings of the beauty of ‘trees of green/red roses too,’ the camera cuts from Williams’ DJ booth to the montage of violence described above. When the two minute video clip had finished, James, semi-casual in a pink and white checked shirt, turned up the lights and began to speak. “Louis Armstrong is right,” he said. “It’s a wonderful world.” And yet, as the video showed, there’s an awful lot of bad in it. We seem “hell bent” on destroying one another. “What has happened to this wonderful world that we live in?” The answer, he suggested, ought to be familiar to us, because it’s a condition - “a spiritual heart disease” – common to us all. “The Bible has a word for this universal condition, and we all know what it is. It’s sin.”

As James’ talk that evening highlighted, conservative evangelical theology posits the natural orientation of all people, saved and unsaved, as one of “sin”, which evangelicals understand as rebellion against God. Although God made the world ‘good’ – indeed, Genesis 1:31 declares it ‘very good’ – it was soon corrupted by man’s desire for self-mastery. Sin enters the world through the actions of Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3).<sup>86</sup> This initial disobedience is representative of humankind’s Original Sin, summarised in the Church of England’s 39 Articles (its defining doctrinal statements) as ‘the fault and corruption which is found in the

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<sup>86</sup> There is some debate about evolution versus Creation at Christ Church. The position of Luke, the minister, is that one need only accept what the Scriptures specify. As he takes Genesis to refer to Adam and Eve as literal, as opposed to allegorical, figures, Luke believes that the text does ask all Christians to accept a literal Adam and Eve.

nature of every person who is naturally descended from Adam' (Church Society, 1994: 207). In this understanding, to be a 'sinner' is not just to perform immoral actions. Rather, sin is an ontological state: 'In his own nature he is predisposed to evil... In every person born into this world there is found this predisposition which rightly deserves God's anger and condemnation' (ibid).<sup>87</sup> That spring evening, the usually upbeat James soberly warned us that the result of this "proud declaration of autonomy away from God" was that all men and women – including those sitting in this very room - were burdened with a "debt" of sin they could never repay. This debt would, by default, result in their – in *our* - spending eternity in what Jesus refers to as "the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43).

Yet God has found a way to dispense both justice and mercy to the irredeemably sinful inhabitants of His once wonderful world. He has decreed that the punishment due every sinner can fall in one of two places: on the individual sinner in hell, or on the body of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, the only human being ever to have lived without sin, offered Himself up as a "once and for all" atoning sacrifice, thereby fulfilling the sacrificial law of the Old Testament and rendering unnecessary its legalistic system of atonement. During what my informants referred to as the great "transaction" of the cross, Jesus takes on the sinner's sin, and the sinner takes on Jesus' glory. It is also at this moment that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the believer, thereby enabling them, through a process of sanctification, to become more and more like Jesus – that is, less and less sinful - with each passing day.

Given that grace is 'the key to salvation' (Pitt-Rivers, 1992: 222), the distinction between salvation by law and salvation by grace is critical in the construction of Christian believers as individuals who are assured of their fate after death. By accepting that they are sinners who cannot save themselves, and by trusting in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the only suitable atonement for their sins, Christians no longer have to worry that the weight of a lifetime of sin will tip the scales on Judgment Day, resulting in their spending an eternity in hell rather than heaven. As such, it can be an attractive doctrine to those who are religious "seekers", such as Rose, Joe, and Susan.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Bebbington (1989: 21-22) argues that the

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<sup>87</sup> This is not the only way to conceptualise sin. Birgit Meyer (1999: 102), for example, has shown how twentieth-century Ghanaian Pentecostal converts understand sin, like evil, as originating primarily from malign spirits and the devil, and thus as something to be 'endured' rather than committed.

<sup>88</sup> As Max Weber (2005 [1905]) famously suggested, the desire for assurance of one's salvation can be a source of great mental stress. Weber argued that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination led some Protestant groups in sixteenth-century Europe and America to search themselves for signs that they were among the saved. Although concerns over one's election lasted into the eighteenth-century (and still, no doubt, affect Christians today), Bebbington (1989: 46) suggests that the doubt experienced so intensely in Weber's account has been less crippling in post-eighteenth-century theology: 'There was still self-examination with a view to discovering the marks of a real change made by the Spirit of God. Now, however, the process was, as it were, non-recurrent: it was expected that the verdict would be favourable.'

doctrine of justification by faith alone was ‘the motor of expansion’ of the English evangelical revival of the mid-eighteenth-century: ‘Christ had done all that was needed to achieve salvation. It remained only for men and women to accept forgiveness at his hands.’ But the grace that enables faith is important throughout the Christian life, not only at the moment of conversion. This is because Christians ought to live lives motivated by the gratitude they feel for the grace they have received.<sup>89</sup>

This approach is typified by Diana, a primary school teacher in her thirties. One Sunday afternoon in January 2013, Diana and I met at a café near the church before attending the evening service together. As I was still relatively new to what my evangelical friends would refer to as “Christian things”, I asked Diana if she could explain to me how Christianity impacted her life. Sipping a cup of mint tea, she explained that she tried to live “as a response to what has been done for me”: “Christianity isn’t about following laws, it’s not about following rules, it’s about realising what has been done for you and then living a life motivated in gratitude of that.” Diana’s desire to live in “response” to “what has been done for [her]” is a reflection of her construction of herself as innately sinful, and thus in need of something to be “done”. Throughout our conversation, she positioned Jesus’ atoning death, the death which had bought her salvation, as an act deserving of eternal gratitude. When I asked her if she had ever made sacrifices for her faith, she suggested that although she had probably lost “status” in the eyes of some of her non-Christian friends and colleagues – she had been patronised by those who interpreted her faith as a “crutch” to lean on, and she sometimes wondered if her non-Christian friends reduced her “to the status of a child” because she had never had a sexual relationship (Diana, who is single, believes in abstinence before marriage) - she understood herself more in terms of privilege than of sacrifice. After all, “what could I possibly sacrifice compared to what’s been done for me?”

Given this desire to inculcate a sense of gratitude, the members of Christ Church are wary of treating the religious activities they undertake – including their daily “quiet time” (a time of individual Bible reading and prayer), their presence at the monthly prayer meeting, and their various “serving” commitments, such as teaching Sunday School, cooking for Christianity Explored, or running a Christian summer camp – in a legalistic manner, that is, as duties to be performed rather than services gratefully offered. They are keen that others see them as recipients of grace rather than doers of law, and they worry that the biggest misunderstanding their non-Christian friends have as regards their faith is the idea that salvation can be achieved through being kind, charitable, or living a good life rather than through trusting in Christ alone. In the words of Leah, a Christian solicitor and good friend of Diana’s: “one of the things I hate, actually is if someone just says ‘oh, Leah, she’s really

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<sup>89</sup> As Pitt-Rivers (1992: 216) notes, ‘grace’ is explicitly linked to ‘thanks’ in the romance languages (*merci, gracias, grazie*), whereas the English ‘gratitude’ is reserved for ‘more formal occasions’.

nice.” As an inherently sinful being, she simply couldn’t accept herself as “nice.” More importantly, however, she didn’t want non-Christians to link the idea of “niceness” to her faith: “I don’t want you to think I’m ‘nice,’ I want you to think Jesus is amazing, and the way to salvation.”

One way in which Christ Churchites seek to show others that “Jesus is amazing” is to live in what Luke, the minister, once referred to as a “grace-fuelled” manner. As noted above, the spiritual transaction of the cross involves not only the imputation of Jesus’ righteousness onto the now redeemed sinner, but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within that sinner. As James explained during a sermon on the Book of Jonah, “God’s grace never leaves us where it finds us,” but begins a process of internal transformation that ought to be noticeable to outsiders. For some converts, and particularly those who had not been raised in evangelical homes, the difference made by the Spirit’s indwelling was immediately obvious. Bethany, the minister’s wife, became a Christian at the age of fifteen. A slim, well-turned out woman with thick auburn hair, a ready smile, and an infectious laugh, we got to know each other through a women’s Bible study group. Brought up in a Catholic home, Bethany had first become interested in Protestant Christianity when an evangelical friend invited her along to her church’s youth group. She was then attending an all-girls school, and as the teenage “party scene” kicked in, she began to question the friendships she’d long cherished: “why does this person who I’ve been friends with for ten years now suddenly, you know, have a greater loyalty to some boy she met two weeks ago?” She had been immediately impressed by the Christian friendships she saw between the boys and girls at the youth group, which were radically different from the relationships she had seen between her non-Christian friends. It was on a countryside retreat organised by the group that she accepted Jesus and received the gift of grace: “I remember praying a prayer, sitting on a big bale of hay, and really very immediately feeling quite a change.” She sensed “the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as I prayed that prayer, and it was a very definite change.”

For Bethany, then, it was an objective *outworking* of grace – the loving way the Christian teens at the youth group treated one another – that first sparked her interest in Christianity, because she saw the Holy Spirit working in them. She then experienced this grace subjectively when she accepted Jesus and felt “a very definite change”, “a sense of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” Similarly, Jim, the former CLC client whom we met in the previous chapter, had become a Christian after attending a well-known charismatic Anglican church as a teenager. The “lifestyle” of the Christian teens “challenged” him:

I could see that these people’s lives matched [the Bible] a lot more than I thought it would be possible for them to match. So that kind of interested me and got me into

a position where I sort of thought ‘well, I need to either rule this out or I need to think about accepting it.’

Although he didn’t yet understand it, it was the indwelt Holy Spirit that allowed his new friends’ lives to “match” the Bible so closely. As with Bethany, then, it was the visible presence of the Spirit in his Christian friends that convinced Jim that Christianity might be, as the course put it, worth ‘exploring.’

For others, the sanctification process sparked by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling might be less dramatic. During one of our regular Bible studies, Carol, a former nurse, told me of a colleague, Kitty, who had recently become a Christian. Kitty was short-tempered, had a poor bedside manner, and was often late to work. Her behaviour frustrated her colleagues, one of whom once told Carol that if Kitty could behave this way and still be a Christian, clearly Christianity wasn’t good for much. Carol had responded by asking her colleague what Kitty had been like *before* she became a Christian. Wasn’t it true that she had been even more short-tempered, even less polite, and even less punctual? Her colleague had had to admit that yes, this was true; Kitty was bad now, but she had been worse before.

The point of the above is that although it is faith, sparked by God’s grace, that saves the Christian, the result of this grace – the sanctifying work of the indwelt Holy Spirit - ought to be visible to what Luke referred to as the “watching world”. Christians, Luke explained, are people who are “in Christ”, just as the Spirit is in them. Their Christlikeness ought to be both noticeable and attractive to non-Christians, who will then wonder how it was possible that anyone could be so kind, gentle, and content. By demonstrating the power of the Spirit to change one for the better, living “in response” to the grace one has received is a form of evangelism. Grace-filled people ought to be gracious people, and it is this which must be kept in mind as we consider the impact of cases like *Chaplin* and *Playfoot*.

#### **IV.III Festivals and postcards**

One morning in July 2012, I attended a training session for the staff and volunteers who would be ‘exhibiting’ for Christian Concern at a number of festivals taking place over the summer months.<sup>90</sup> Throughout the months of July and August, the Christian Concern team would be exhibiting at three Christian festivals, each of which had a slightly different demographic: the Keswick Convention, which is aimed at older, more conservative Christians; New Wine, which is family-oriented; and Soul Survivor, a broader, more eclectic festival aimed at Christians in their teens and twenties, which spans the theological spectrum from conservative evangelical to charismatic Catholic. The interactive workshop, which was

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<sup>90</sup> Of the ten trainees, three were staff, four were former Wilberforce Academy delegates, one was a regular volunteer, one was a former CLC client, and one was an anthropologist.

held in the office's large boardroom, had been organised by the Christian Concern events team, then comprised of Annabelle, an energetic twenty-year-old who had met Andrea through the youth group Andrea's daughters attended, and Carrie, a marketing graduate who had previously worked for a number of Christian organisations, including Bible Society, the Evangelical Alliance, and the African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance.

The training session was held just months before two of the CLC's cases (those of Gary McFarlane, a relationship counsellor who lost his job after voicing a possible conscientious objection to offering psycho-sexual therapy to same-sex couples, and Shirley Chaplin, who was removed from frontline nursing after refusing to take off the crucifix necklace she had worn since her confirmation) went before the European Court. One of the goals of the session was to help the volunteers become familiar with the CLC's literature, much of which related to the cases of Gary and Shirley. Carrie stressed how important it was to know this literature well: "Next to your Bible, this info pack should be beside your bed. You should know it inside out." Being involved in these cutting edge cases, Carrie told us, was Christian Concern's "USP", or unique selling point, and this was what might inspire festival attendees to start supporting their ministry.<sup>91</sup> Andrea, who had popped in to see how the session was going, agreed. We had been discussing how to encourage festival-goers to sign up to the Christian Concern mailing list (Carrie, ever the marketing graduate, had spent the morning repeating the mantra "data, data, data!"), and Andrea told us to stress the importance of the European cases, which many festival-goers would have read about in the papers or seen on the news.

Annabelle then asked Andrea if she could give the trainees any advice on how to respond to difficult questions about the cases. The four cases going to Europe (in addition to those of Gary and Shirley, the Court would also hear the cases of Lillian Ladele, a registrar for Islington Borough Council who had resigned after being refused an exemption from registering civil unions, and Nadia Eweida, a British Airways check-in clerk who had breached BA's uniform policy by refusing to remove a cross necklace) had been the focus of a great deal of media attention as they progressed through the courts. While much of this was supportive of the Christian claimants – particularly the two cross cases, and particularly in the conservative press (see Petre & Constable, 2010; Hargey, 2010; Carey, 2012) - some was critical. What should we say, Annabelle asked, to people who ask: "Wasn't nurse Chaplin told to take off her cross because of health and safety?" Andrea responded with her customary passion, advising us to explain that it was visibility, not health and safety, which was the real reason behind the cross ban:

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<sup>91</sup> 'Support' can be both financial and spiritual.



Let me tell you about these cases from the perspective of someone who lived them. The thing is, health and safety was never an issue at the start of Shirley's case. Her case was about visibility, not safety. We have emails to show it was about visibility. Then a few weeks into the case, they started to talk about health and safety, so we tried to mitigate those issues. She didn't want to take off the chain, but we offered that she could wear a magnetic clasp, so that, if a patient pulled it, it would fall away easily, but that wasn't accepted... All this while letting Muslim women wear hijabs pinned with a brooch!

Andrea's response hints at the competing and contested discourses surrounding Shirley's case, which included not just the visibility of Christian symbols in public spaces, but multiculturalism, the alleged privileging of non-Christian religions, and the supposed excesses of Britain's 'health and safety' culture. The case had arisen in 2007 when the hospital trust for which she worked as a geriatrics nurse, the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust, amended their uniform policy to prevent the wearing of dangling jewellery, including all necklaces.<sup>92</sup> Shirley had worn her crucifix throughout her nursing career without incident. She saw it as a manifestation of her faith and was unwilling to remove it. After a number of failed attempts at compromise, she was moved to a non-clinical role, but sought to return to frontline nursing. Relying on the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, she complained of both direct and indirect discrimination, and a violation of her right to freedom of religion. The Employment Tribunal that heard her case found against her on all counts, stating that there was no evidence that the policy had been applied in a discriminatory fashion,<sup>93</sup> that she could not prove herself to be part of a plurality of persons disadvantaged by the policy (indirect discrimination will only be found where multiple 'persons' are disadvantaged on account of belief), and that, even if discrimination had been found, this would have been justified by the hospital's pursuit of health and safety.

Shirley's case followed in the wake of the very public dispute between British Airways and Nadia Eweida. Ms Eweida, a Coptic Christian, had alleged that Christians were discriminated against by BA's uniform policy, which forbade the wearing of visible jewellery unless it was a 'mandatory' requirement of the employee's faith. Having lost her case at an Employment Tribunal, an Employment Appeal Tribunal, and the Court of Appeal, she applied to the European Court of Human Rights, where her case was later joined with Shirley's, Gary's, and Lillian Ladele's. Although the reasoning behind the various rulings

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<sup>92</sup> This was in compliance with new guidelines released by the Department of Health.

<sup>93</sup> Sikh staff members had been asked to remove *kara* bracelets, and although two Muslim doctors wore *hijab*, these were close-fitting sports *hijab* that did not require a brooch to pin them in place.

need not concern us here,<sup>94</sup> from the perspective of Shirley and her legal team, the *Eweida* decision was frustrating because of the tribunal's frequent references to Ms Eweida's desire to wear a cross being a 'personal choice', not a practice of religion:

[No practicing Christian], including the claimant, gave evidence that they considered visible display of the cross to be a requirement of the Christian faith... [The] decision to wear the cross visibly was a personal choice, not a requirement of scripture or of the Christian religion.<sup>95</sup>

This was repeated in *Chaplin*: 'The evidence we have is that there is no mandatory requirement of the Christian faith that a Christian should wear a crucifix... It is, as we understand it, a matter of personal choice'.<sup>96</sup> A similar point had been made in one of the CLC's earliest cases, that of Lydia Playfoot. Ms Playfoot, who was sixteen when her case came before the High Court, argued that her school, which forbade the wearing of jewellery, had violated her right to freedom of religion by preventing her from wearing a purity ring.<sup>97</sup> Much like the uniform policy objected to by Ms Eweida, the school made exceptions for those who believed their religion required them to wear certain items. The Court found against her, stating that Ms Playfoot 'was under no obligation, by reason of her belief, to wear the ring; nor does she suggest that she was so obliged.'<sup>98</sup>

These judgments give some indication of English law's 'legal religion', that is, religion as it is conceptualised and regulated by the courts. Writing of legal religion in the United States, Sullivan (2005: 6) notes that although popular conceptions of religious freedom emphasise the right of the individual to, in the words of one judge, "have whatever beliefs we choose to have", the actual protections offered by the Constitution's First Amendment tend to be limited to religious observances with institutional backing. This somewhat paradoxical situation results from the practical application of America's ideology of religious freedom, in which the conceptual privileging of a 'small p' protestant understanding of religion (in which religion is approached as a set of private, voluntary, individually held beliefs) sits alongside the law's authority to determine the legitimacy of these beliefs (ibid: 7-8). Given that judges must separate the sufficiently from the insufficiently religious, it is, perhaps, inevitable that they defer to the authority of religious

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<sup>94</sup> Much of the decision focused on how many individuals needed to be impacted by the policy before they constituted 'persons' for the purpose of indirect discrimination.

<sup>95</sup> *Eweida v British Airways Plc* at [8].

<sup>96</sup> *Chaplin* at [17].

<sup>97</sup> As with many CLC cases, Ms Playfoot's was highly controversial. Her parents were both involved in the Silver Ring Thing movement. A school spokesperson suggested that the case was less about religious freedom than it was free publicity: "I do wonder whether this action is brought more for the purpose of generating publicity for the Silver Ring Thing movement in the UK than for any practical outcome for Lydia, who leaves my school this month in any event" (quoted in Topping, 2007).

<sup>98</sup> *Playfoot* at [23].

professionals and sacred texts in their deliberations; albeit supplemented with ‘what they learned in Sunday School or their college world religions course’ (Sullivan, 2006: 923). After all, to declare every idiosyncratic act worthy of First Amendment protection would be to declare a religious free for all: ‘a victory for anarchy’ (Sullivan, 2005: 84). Ostensibly ‘free’ religion, then, remains an ‘unsolved problem’, the result of ‘an attempt to disestablish religion legally while at the same time to confine it to a very limited scope in peoples’ lives’ (Sullivan, 1996b: 134).

A similar approach to religious legitimacy is clearly at work in the judgments quoted above, with the ‘personal choice’ to wear a religious symbol dismissed as insufficiently religious to engage the protections of Article 9 of the UK’s Human Rights Act (and the ECHR, on which this legislation is based). While this emphasis on institutional support is somewhat surprising in the American context, where religion is, in theory, ‘radically disestablished’ (Sullivan, 2009: 1185), it is, perhaps, less so in the United Kingdom. Indeed, it may be that England’s history of church establishment led the courts to adopt this particularly legalistic, authority-based approach. Sullivan (1996a: 207) writes that American courts, by regarding ‘a disestablished Protestant church as the model of what religion is’, are ‘unprepared to deal with those who frankly think disestablishment was a mistake.’ Here we see that English law, at least under its recently domesticated human rights regime, appears equally resistant to those who think establishment, by failing to make good on the promise of privilege it implies, *no longer goes far enough*.

From the perspective of the CLC, England’s legal religion discriminated against Christians by including symbols linked to religions of law, but excluding those related to religions of grace. In actual fact, the English courts have not been at all willing to protect religious dress in situations involving uniforms, regardless of the religion in question or the ostensibly mandatory nature of the religious object.<sup>99</sup> That an act is deemed to fall within the scope of Article 9 – that is, that it is recognised as being ‘religious’ - is no guarantee that it will not be restricted. In practice, then, Article 9’s legal religion is just as protestant-inflected as the First Amendment: the right to *believe* may be absolute, but the right to *manifest* belief is heavily curtailed (see Peroni, 2014; McIvor, 2015). For those involved in *Eweida*, *Chaplin* and *Playfoot*, however, the fact that the policies complained of featured an inbuilt imbalance – in which ‘mandatory’ symbols were treated as exceptional – was seen to penalise Christianity on account of its grace-based freedom.

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<sup>99</sup> See *R (Begum) v Denbigh High School*; *R (X) v Head Teacher of Y School*. See Tarlo (2010: 104-110) for an anthropological discussion of the *Begum* case, and Bowen (2008) for an account of similar cases in France. In one of the few cases where the right to wear a religious symbol was protected, this was done under race discrimination law: *R (Watkins Singh) v Governing Body of Aberdare Girls’ High School*.

Further, the Conservative-led Coalition government's approach to the cross cases was felt to be both disingenuous and inconsistent. In the months preceding the case, Christian Concern started a postcard campaign to highlight this inconsistency. They encouraged their supporters to send three postcards about the case, one to Prime Minister David Cameron, one to their local MP, and one to a member of the House of Lords. Under a banner title - **WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT REALLY BELIEVE ABOUT SHIRLEY'S CROSS?** – the postcard was divided into two halves. On the left hand side was an extract from the government's submission to the European Court, which read:

In neither case is there any suggestion that the wearing of a visible cross or Crucifix was a generally recognised form of practicing the Christian faith... Where the individual in question is free to resign and seek employment elsewhere or practice their religion unfettered outside their employment, that is sufficient to guarantee their Article 9 rights in domestic law...

On the right were remarks made by Prime Minister Cameron in response to a question he had been asked at Prime Minister's Question Time, which read:

I fully support the right of people to wear religious symbols at work; I think it is a vital religious freedom. If it turns out that the law has the intention [of banning the cross] as has come out in this case, we will change the law and make it clear that people can wear religious emblems at work.

The back of the postcards read:

Dear Prime Minister,

Whilst I welcome your declaration in the House of Commons (11th July 2012) of your support for the wearing of the cross I am concerned that this stands in sharp contrast to the Government's official submission to the court. Shirley Chaplin had worn her confirmation cross for nearly thirty years in frontline nursing before being told to remove it, despite the fact that accommodation was made for those of other religions. Her case will be heard at the European Court of Human Rights on 4th September. In spite of your statement, the UK Government is opposing her.

**Please ensure that the Government changes its position and supports Shirley's freedom to wear the cross.**

With Shirley's case fast approaching, the postcard initiative was strongly pushed at the summer festivals. It had the double benefit, Annabelle thought, of raising awareness of the case and allowing Christian Concern's supporters to feel that they "owned" a political campaign. Throughout the summer months, festival volunteers would return to the Christian

Concern offices with their suitcases heavy with signed postcards, for which Christian Concern paid the postage and dispatched in staggered bundles.

One Tuesday morning in August 2012, I arrived at the office to find Annabelle sitting on the floor of the reception, surrounded by the various merchandise and literature that had been brought back from the festivals, and working her way through what looked like hundreds of Shirley postcards. Joining her on the floor, I began to help sift through the cards to find those which had been partially left blank. (Because many of the people who had signed the postcards didn't know the name of their MP, the staff had to work this out based on their address details. We spent many August mornings Googling postcodes to find out which MPs served Christian Concern's new supporters). As the morning advanced, so too did the piles of literature, t-shirts, mailing list sign-up sheets, Coalition for Marriage petitions, and Shirley postcards piling up around us.

That afternoon, we were joined by Louise. Louise usually worked in Christian Concern's finance department, but had spent the past few weeks exhibiting at the Keswick and New Wine festivals. A mother of three, Louise was used to light chaos, but even she was taken aback by the devastation we had wrought in a formerly tidy office. As she helped us return the reception area to a state of normalcy, she explained that the Shirley postcards had been particularly useful in engaging the festival-goers she'd met, because they "show how insane the government's position is. I can't believe they're saying wearing a cross isn't a practice of the Christian faith." Louise and I had had conversations about theology before, and, keen to demonstrate what I had learnt, I challenged her: "but it's not, really, is it?" After all, I said, Christianity isn't practiced through wearing a symbol, but through maintaining a relationship with God. "Well," she replied, "you can't say that the cross doesn't have significance." It wasn't the same as "any piece of jewellery": "Some people say 'people wear crosses as fashion items', and that's true, but just because some people wear scarves as fashion items it doesn't mean that burqas have no religious significance." Pausing to reflect, she articulated the issue in grace/law, or faith/works, terms: "They've jumped on the fact that it's salvation by faith rather than works." Highlighting the inherent imbalance in a policy which protected only religious requirements, she concluded: "if there's a no jewellery policy, it needs to be across the board. You can't have exceptions for some faiths but not Christians." In other words, it wasn't the uniform policy that was unacceptable to her. It was the fact that it did not extend to religions of law.

Louise's position was echoed, in part, by Shirley herself. In September 2012, I accompanied Shirley, Gary, and a team from the CLC to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. I found Shirley, then in her late fifties, immediately likeable, combining a quiet reflectiveness with a surprising sense of humour. She had taken her case not because she wanted to get involved in a legal challenge – on the contrary, she had found

the whole process very stressful, hated doing media appearances, and joked that Maria, her CLC solicitor, might have to step in and do her interviews if she “[happened] to wake up with a very sore throat tomorrow” – but because she felt a duty to stand up for her faith. Given her dislike of the limelight, Shirley did not seem the most obvious choice of poster girl for politicised Christianity. A naturally shy woman, I often wondered what she thought of the fact that thousands of postcards bearing her image had been sent to the Prime Minister.

The day before the hearing, Shirley, Maria and I decided to explore Strasbourg on foot. As we walked over one of the city’s medieval stone bridges, the conversation turned to Shirley’s case. Noting the apparent contradiction in David Cameron’s position, which seemed to differ from that of the government’s legal submissions, Shirley asked: “but how can some religious symbols be protected as rights, like Sikh turbans, but not crosses?” Playing devil’s advocate, I pointed out that the government’s arguments posited a distinction between mandatory and optional religious dress. Shirley and Maria argued that this was both unfair and difficult to enforce. After all, Maria said, it would be extraordinary if only mandatory religious practices were protected. Echoing Sullivan’s critique, Maria wondered how, exactly, the Court would propose to determine them.

As it happened, Maria was right. The European Court rejected the UK government’s submissions on the cross cases, stating that a manifestation of religion could be protected so long as there was a ‘sufficiently close and direct nexus between the act and the underlying belief’. The claimants’ belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection more than met this requirement. As BA did not have a weighty legitimate aim in the restriction of Ms Eweida’s right to wear a cross, she won her case. However, the hospital’s legitimate aim, the protection of health and safety, meant that although the Court found an interference with Shirley’s Article 9 rights, they did not find a violation. This was a profound disappointment for everyone at 70 Wimpole Street, who vowed to keep fighting for justice for Shirley.

#### **IV.IV “Jesus certainly never wore a cross”**

Despite sharing much theological ground with the various conservative Christianities expressed by the staff of the CLC, the members of Christ Church had a different, and significantly less supportive, take on *Chaplin* and *Playfoot*. The discomfort they felt about the jewellery cases was brought home to me through a number of conversations with Hannah, a charity lawyer in her thirties, who had been worshipping at Christ Church for seven years. I was repeatedly directed to Hannah throughout my time at Christ Church – *you’re interested in Christians and the law? Oh, you must meet Hannah!* – and, in August 2013, we met for an interview at the Salvation Army’s central London headquarters. Located between St Paul’s Cathedral and the Millennium Bridge, the SA HQ is a large, glass-fronted

building, the transparent walls of which are adorned with quotes from the Bible. As we sipped coffee in the building's basement café, Hannah explained that she knew of Andrea through her work at the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, where Andrea had been a Public Policy Officer before she left to found the CLC. Andrea's relationship with the LCF was a complicated one – depending on who you asked, she had either chosen to go, been asked to leave, or been pushed out – and, as Hannah was an active member of the LCF, she was both wary of portraying Andrea unfairly and uncomfortable with what she saw as Christian Concern's defensive “ghetto mentality”.

Hannah worried that the CLC's pursuit of test cases could result in negative outcomes for the individuals involved, and thought that, in some cases, mediation would have brokered a better solution for the claimant. Shirley's was one such case. Given that the law was always likely to find in favour of the hospital, surely Shirley's lawyers should have encouraged her to accept one of the compromises offered, such as wearing her cross on her identity badge and only removing it when undertaking close clinical work?<sup>100</sup> Besides, Hannah mused:

I think it's slightly surprising that they've taken issues around, you know, being able to wear a cross in public. It's not a key [issue], it's not a requirement of Christian faith, and then I think that gives, I don't know, a misleading view to the wider public as well, [because] you're taking something which is fairly incidental and making it a really big issue.

This was also the opinion of Jenny, a friend of Hannah's from the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, who worshipped at an evangelical Anglican church in southwest London. She had met her husband, also a lawyer, through the LCF, and when we met at a café in October 2013 she was pregnant with their second child. As we queued to order our drinks, I explained that the case that had first interested me in Christian activism was that of Lydia Playfoot. Jenny remembered the case well. She had been “saddened” by it, not because of the alleged infringement on Ms Playfoot's rights, but because of the way it had been pursued. Her former church minister, she explained, had lived in the area where Ms Playfoot had gone to school, and had built up a “brilliant relationship” with the school in question over a number of years. He had regularly been invited to contribute to Religious Education classes and host assemblies at Easter and Christmas. With the support of the administration, he had had many opportunities to explain the Gospel to the students. After

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<sup>100</sup> The CLC maintains that Shirley would have accepted a compromise, but that no acceptable one was ever offered. Hannah, however, who knew one of the lawyers (a fellow Christian, and the mother of one of Christ Church's former staff members) who had been involved on the side of the hospital, said that the general feeling from the hospital administration was that Shirley's representation had been “quite unreasonable” in their demands.

Ms Playfoot's case, however, this relationship was terminated. Although her former minister had not been involved in the case, he was no longer invited back to hold assemblies or teach RE lessons. As far as she knew, no other Christians were either. Jenny felt this was a great shame, particularly because wearing a purity ring had "no impact" on one's ability to follow Jesus:

Andrea was totally oblivious to the damage that she caused in Christian relationships that had been built up over a number of years to fight a battle that was lost and has, in my view, absolutely no impact on the Christian faith... There's no suggestion at all anywhere in the Bible that anybody needs to wear anything like that.

Jenny was also dismissive of the cross cases: "Jesus certainly never wore a cross and none of His followers did, and so I don't see why we need to get worked up about external signs which have never been part of our faith." When I asked whether Christians were treated less favourably than members of other religions, who were allowed to wear headscarves and *kara* bracelets, she responded by explaining the difference between Christianity and other religious traditions in terms of law and grace: "it is a fundamental part of Islam and Sikhism to carry certain things and to cover certain parts of your body up, because they're not free under grace like we are". For that reason, she continued, "I genuinely think there is a difference."

Hannah and Jenny seemed to be making two points. First, both women appropriated the language of the English courts, arguing that wearing a cross or purity ring was not a requirement of Christian faith, and nor did it have any impact on one's ability to practice it. As Jenny pithily observed, "it wasn't as though Lydia's school was saying 'you have to sleep around to come to this school,' you know." She differentiated the kind of injury or harm done someone whose faith required them to wear a religious symbol from that experienced by the claimants in *Playfoot*, *Chaplin*, and *Eweida*. In Hannah's opinion, the wearing of a cross was "incidental", and not a matter worthy of serious debate. The fact that it had gone to Europe was, she thought, "bizarre" and "disproportionate." In a case like Shirley's (and it's important to remember that Hannah did not feel this way about all of the Christian discrimination cases, but only about those where she deemed the subject matter trivial), she wondered whether Christian Concern's agenda had led them to pursue a path that was not necessarily the most helpful for the claimant involved. Their analyses suggest an acceptance of the 'protestant' approach to religion noted above, in which embodied, material, sensory religion appears less "true" – in Hannah's words, more "incidental" – than religion in its interiorised, conscience-centric form (Sullivan, 2005: 8; Weiner, n.d.).



Second, they worried that the pursuit of these cases either might have, or had actually had, a negative impact on Gospel witness. Hannah wondered, for example, whether focusing on religious symbols might mislead the public, who could end up thinking that this “incidental” issue was critical to Christianity. As with the understanding that religion is primarily a matter of interior belief, this reflects an anxiety often associated with (although not exclusive to) Reformed Christianity, in which the (mis)attribution of agency to objects may prove a stumbling block to salvation (Keane, 2007: 188). Remember that many Christ Churchites worry that the greatest misunderstanding of their faith is that it is about law rather than grace. They fear that, in a context marked by both increasing religious pluralism and rising religious illiteracy, non-Christians might think that Christianity is interchangeable with any other faith; that it is about externals rather than internals; that it is concerned with the following of rules and repeating of rituals rather than a relationship with a Saviour God. With cases like *Chaplin* and *Playfoot* seeming to suggest that Christians were as concerned with symbolic trinkets as they were with saving grace, how could potential converts understand what was different about Christianity, that is, its emphasis on faith, not works? One way to ensure that non-Christians understand this difference, of course, is to preach the Gospel. Yet Jenny’s tale of her former minister posited a direct link between the *Playfoot* case and the termination of Gospel preaching at Millais School. The friendly relationship between local Christians and the school administrators had taken years to build up, but it had been quickly destroyed by Ms Playfoot’s legal team’s apparent unwillingness to compromise – an unwillingness, one might say, to reflect grace, which, in Pitt-Rivers’ (1992: 241) terms, ‘is closer to God than the ambition to succeed’.

As Christian lawyers, Hannah and Jenny had a more detailed understanding of the CLC’s cases than most of the people I met through Christ Church connections. Yet they were not the only ones who questioned the benefit of taking cases involving symbols. Almost every person with whom I discussed these cases made reference to the fact that Christians did not *need* to wear a cross. Further, some congregants worried that by asserting their rights in the courts, rather than demonstrating a Christlike, forgiving attitude to their employers, the Christians involved in these cases might be failing to adequately express their gratitude for the grace that they had received. We will explore this idea in greater depth in the following chapter, which focuses on the use of rights-based language at Christ Church. For now, however, I will merely highlight that some congregants thought a better approach would be to do your job *so* well and be *so* conscientious, caring, and loving in your attitude to others – in other words, to live such a grace-fuelled life - that your colleagues couldn’t help but notice the grace of God working within you. As with the Christian teens who had had such a strong impact on Bethany and Jim, letting your colleagues see the work of the

Holy Spirit in you was thought to be a much better advertisement for Christianity than a piece of jewellery or a litigious attitude (cf. Greenhouse, 1989).

This was the opinion of Carol, the former nurse with whom I had regular Bible studies. Carol was a keen advocate of sharing your faith in the workplace, and thought it was a great shame that the state was, as she understood it, clamping down on Christian medics who wanted to tell their patients about Jesus. However, she was also concerned that the Gospel be communicated in a loving, gracious way. With a wry smile, she explained that telling a patient she went to church on Sunday was one thing; refusing to give them a sponge bath until they professed faith was quite another. Sitting in an armchair in her airy living room on a summer's afternoon, she questioned whether the cross cases had any Gospel impact:

Wearing a cross or not, yes, you could argue it's a flag to let everybody know what you believe, but actually it's by your behaviour, it's actually the way that you conduct yourself, how you care for people, how you speak, how you work - are you hardworking, are you gracious... It's those kinds of things that are going to, quite often, be a flag up, and actually it's at that point that quite often conversations [about faith] can come up quite naturally, because of your good lives.

In Carol's view, it is not asserting your rights but living a Christlike life in response to the grace you've received that will show you to be a Christian and will open up conversations about faith, thereby giving you a chance to tell your colleagues about Jesus.

Intriguingly, concern about the impact of the cross cases is not limited to conservative evangelicals. Liberal Christians, including speakers at the Synod debate discussed in the Introduction, also suggested that the insistence on wearing a cross might damage one's efforts at evangelism. Speaking at Synod, the Ven. Jan McFarlane, the Archdeacon of Norwich, said:

If there are uniform rules banning the wearing of jewellery, then why should Christians be exempt? I am not wearing a cross today. It does not make me any less of a Christian. In fact I could argue that it may even have the opposite effect; it could mean that I am not actively putting off somebody who may otherwise be frightened of talking to me, for fear that I may be pushing religion down their throat (Church of England, 2012).

Although both identify as Anglican, Archdeacon McFarlane is theologically distant from my church friends. One of the first women Archdeacons in the Church of England, she is a strong proponent of women bishops. By contrast, the members of Christ Church sometimes wondered if the inclusion of women in the episcopate would be what finally forced them to

break with the established church. For our purposes, however, what is interesting is not that Archdeacon McFarlane and many members of the congregation of Christ Church agree about the cross cases, but that the members of Christ Church do *not* agree with the staff of the CLC, with whom, theologically, they share much more common ground. After all, they do not oppose all of the Centre's cases. Many are sympathetic to claimants with a conscientious objection to service provision for homosexuals, including registrars unwilling to perform civil partnerships. Many supported at least two of the four cases that went to Europe, those of registrar Lillian Ladele and Relate therapist Gary McFarlane. Yet they dismissed the cross cases on the basis of a soteriological principle: that salvation is 'received', not 'achieved' (Bebbington, 1989: 6); and that wearing a cross didn't make you a Christian.

#### **IV.V Conclusion: icons, grace and (mis)reading the law**

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Shirley and I sat in the public gallery of the European Court of Human Rights to hear Paul Diamond, the CLC's standing counsel, and James Eadie, counsel for the United Kingdom, present their arguments to the seven judges who would decide Shirley's case. After their submissions, I asked Shirley how it had felt to have her name bandied about in court. It was strange, she said, to hear the events she'd lived through discussed from an outsider's perspective: "I suppose there's their version, there's my version, and there's the truth." As Shirley recognised, the way a case is understood is inevitably shaped by the technology of law, including its transmission and dissemination through law reports, newspapers, and online media. The words written in a legal judgment or spoken at an international court may bear little relation to the experience of the person to whom they refer, and the actual reasoning behind a court's decision may not feature in public discussions of the case. Legal technicalities may, intentionally or otherwise, end up being 'misread' by the reporters covering high profile disputes, leading outsiders to lose confidence in the legal system's ability to adequately dispense justice (see Donald et al, 2012: 114, on 'the perils of quoting selectively from complex legal judgments'; also Nobles and Schiff, 2004, on media reporting of miscarriages of justice).

Regardless of the potential difference between the hospital's version, Shirley's version, and "the truth", her case came to be understood in very different ways by my two sets of interlocutors. For both, however, law and grace were important discursive categories. For the staff of the CLC, it was seen as proof that Christian symbols were policed in a way in which the material culture of other religions was not. Christianity's lack of Scriptural dress code – barring what one evangelical woman described to me, in earthy language, as not dressing "as a slut" – meant that Shirley was repeatedly faced with claims that wearing a religious symbol was not a practice of Christianity, and did not, therefore, merit protection

under the European Convention. By the lights of England's legal religion, Christians seemed to be being penalised because Jesus, in fulfilling the law, had freed them from it.

As noted above, the European Court overruled this approach. The Court stated that the wearing of a cross *did* qualify for protection under the Convention – that is, it did constitute a ‘manifestation’ of religion - but that this manifestation could be prevented in the interests of health and safety without violating a claimant’s Article 9 rights. It was for this reason that Nadia Eweida, the BA check-in clerk, won her case, whereas Shirley lost hers. Yet those at the CLC never accepted this distinction. Even after the Court’s ruling, they maintained that the issue was one of visibility, not health and safety. In May 2013, four months after the judgment had been released and five months after I had finished fieldwork at Christian Concern, I returned to Wimpole Street to conduct an interview. While I waited for my interviewee, I chatted with Louise, the festival exhibitor who had found the Shirley postcards so useful in revealing the disingenuousness of the government’s position. Around her neck was a gold cross. I had never known Louise to wear a cross, and asked if it was something she had recently started doing. She explained that she had worn a cross when she was younger, but when her children were little, one of them had grabbed it and pulled, breaking the chain. Once you have kids, she laughed, you learn that you can’t wear anything they can grab. How funny, I said; isn’t that the argument that the hospital made about Shirley’s cross? Hadn’t they been worried that it might be pulled by a disturbed or confused patient? Well, Louise said, no one was hurt when my cross broke. Besides, Shirley had offered to wear hers on a magnetic chain, which meant it would have come away easily if pulled. *And one more thing*, she said, smiling: *just because a bee might fly in, it doesn’t mean you should never open the window.*

My friends at Christ Church saw things differently. If the claimants in *Eweida*, *Chaplin*, and *Playfoot* had wanted to manifest their faith, they thought, it made more sense for them to live, in Carol’s words, “good lives” – what I have called, following Luke, “grace-fuelled” lives - than to fight a legal battle over something trivial. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the members of Christ Church were dismissive of the potential religious significance of crosses and rings. As Reformed Protestants, they are part of an iconoclastic tradition with a suspicion of religious objects, a tradition ‘much invoked’ in Protestant discourse and discussions thereof (Meyer, 2010: 748; cf. Engelke, 2007). Luke’s sermons often reminded us that the human heart is, glossing the Reformer John Calvin (1863 [1536]), “a factory of idols”. Their semiotic ideology, or governing narrative of how signs, language, and objects function (or ought to function) in the world, stresses the boundary between ‘agentive subject and mere object’ (Keane, 2007: 77).

I would occasionally hear hints of this in discussions of the cases. Mark, for example, after repeating what I had begun to think of an evangelical mantra - “as a Christian,

you don't *need* to wear a cross" – stated: "and you certainly don't want people to idolise the cross. We often make an idol of it." Mark had grown up in a Catholic home, and had become an evangelical at university. Given his religious genealogy, he was, perhaps, particularly attuned to accusations of idolatry, and was keen that I – a fellow cradle Catholic – understood the difference between the salvific possibilities of internal conviction and the window dressing of ritual symbols. (As Keane [ibid: 186] notes of Dutch Calvinist missionaries in Indonesia, both ancestor worshippers and Roman Catholics were thought to 'confuse or conflate exterior and interior'). To that extent, debates over crosses and purity rings are just one example of the tension inherent in a semiotic ideology in which belief ought to be distinct from material practice, but in which the goal of 'purification' – defined, in Latourian terms, as the effort to distinguish human from nonhuman, or subject from object - cannot ever be fully realised (ibid: 7).

On the whole, however, physical religious objects were not the sort of idols that most troubled my Christ Church interlocutors. Although concerned with idolatry, they didn't think its temptations would come to them in the form of the Catholic material culture that had so upset their iconoclastic forebears, those English Reformers who had 'smashed the statues, whitewashed the churches and denounced the Pope and the Mass' (Duffy, 2005: xiv). The lack of support for those seeking to enforce the right to wear religious jewellery was generally understood in terms of their being unnecessary or misleading, but not spiritually dangerous. Christ Churchites are significantly more worried about the idolatrous fetishisation of achievement, financial security, and the pursuit of "happiness" over "holiness" than they are about mistakenly attributing moral agency to statues, icons, or jewellery.

By contrast, at least one staff member at the CLC, Maria, *was* wary of the attribution of moral agency to religious objects. On the day after Shirley's hearing, Maria, Shirley and I visited the Cathedral of Our Lady of Strasbourg. An immense sandstone building, the Cathedral is an ornate merging of Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Its pink exterior swarms with gargoyles and flying buttresses, while its interior houses tapestries, stained glass, ornate baptismal fonts, and statues of Jesus, Mary, and the saints. It is, to put it mildly, a Calvinist nightmare, and Maria, who attends a Reformed Evangelical Baptist church, was sceptical of its spiritual legitimacy. I knew that Maria was wary of idolatry (she had recently returned from a mission trip to Sri Lanka, where she had been particularly disturbed by a non-Christian taxi-driver who had stopped at a small shrine, put some money in a jar, and touched an idol), and I asked her what she thought of the decor. As we surveyed a large stone cross, upon which an almost unblemished Jesus hung as though sleeping, she told me that it didn't reflect the Biblical narrative: first, Jesus looked far too white to have been born in Palestine; and second, the Bible says He was beaten so badly that His face was

unrecognisable. The Bible tells us that no one can imagine God, and yet the human tendency is to anthropomorphize Him. That's why my church doesn't have any pictures or statues in it, she explained. What, not even a crucifix? I asked. She smiled: "Not even."

Maria, then, was exactly the sort of Christian who might have been most suspicious of Shirley's cross. Yet she had been involved in Shirley's case almost from the beginning, and fervently supported her in it. I want to suggest that by portraying the case in terms of the legal system's apparent privileging of religions of law over religions of grace, the staff of the CLC were able to reconcile their handling of a case that, for many conservative Protestants, might have worked to trouble these very distinctions. Instead of a potential idol – the kind that Maria's church would not display on its walls – Shirley's crucifix became a matter of principle. By stressing that the case was about the discrepancy in the treatment of religious objects, the CLC could simultaneously argue that Christians were saved through faith and did not 'need' to wear crosses or purity rings, but that restrictions on their ability to do so were a violation of their religious freedom. Thus, they could distance Christianity from what were seen to be more 'legalistic' religions while also seeking to partake in the privileges afforded them.

As has been noted above, my evangelical friends do not accept what Luke called the "modern myth" that all religions are similar. They strongly differentiate Christianity's grace-based narrative from their law-based (and often caricatured) renderings of other religious practices. Yet the desire to draw others to Christ through living "good lives" does not greatly differ from the strategies of other religious groups that seek converts or reverts. Reform movements in Islam, for example, also emphasise personal faith and piety, detailed knowledge of the scriptures, and becoming 'born again' (Mahmood, 2005; Janson, 2013; Hirschkind, 2006), and as one reader of Keane's (2002: 68) work on Protestantism and modernity astutely quipped, 'We are *all* Protestants now.' In this context, it is interesting to compare Shirley's desire to visibly wear a cross with the reasons given by members of other religions for their adoption of religious dress.

In a study of Somali Muslim women in London, Giulia Liberatore (2013) found that young Muslims saw their conduct as a means of endearing their faith to others. On one occasion, Liberatore attended a lecture by a Muslim speaker, Sheikh Babikir, 'during which he spoke, amongst other things, about how Muslims should avoid creating barriers with non-Muslims' (ibid: 113). Instead, European Muslims were encouraged to demonstrate their faith through their manners. Following the talk, Layla, one of Liberatore's interlocutors, said: "I think he's completely right about being a Muslim through manners – through the person you are, not through a uniform. That's the universal aspect of Islam, it's what unites all cultures." Layla felt that doing *da'wa*, or raising awareness of Islam, was best achieved through good character. Although she wore a headscarf, she hoped that her friends and co-workers would

see past it to her inner sense of modesty, focusing ‘less on her exterior appearance, and more on her virtues and interior dimensions of self’ (ibid: 112).

Layla’s belief that modesty was better demonstrated by manners than dress bears some similarity to Hannah, Jenny, and Carol’s belief that Christians ought to be recognisable through their grace-fuelled demeanour, not their religious jewellery. However, this was not the only approach to religious dress that Liberatore found in the field. While Layla hoped that her non-Muslim friends would recognise her good moral character almost in spite of the fact that she wore *hijab*, Ifrah believed that her external dress could cement her internal convictions. When she decided to wear the *jilbaab* – a long, loose dress that covers the head and shoulders – Ifrah explained her decision, in part, in terms of her external clothing strengthening her faith (ibid: 117). The objectification of modesty in the *jilbaab* would, she thought, result in increased religious self-discipline as she went about her everyday life.

Although I am not sure she would appreciate the comparison (particularly as she felt that Muslim veils were given preferential treatment over Christian crosses at her hospital trust), there is a sense in which Shirley’s rationale mirrors Ifrah’s. She had no doubt that it was her faith in Jesus, and not the cross around her neck, that ensured her salvation. However, she also understood her crucifix as enabling her to keep her external actions consistent with this internal faith. Her crucifix created a sense of accountability: “if others know I am a Christian because they see the cross on my necklace, I tend to focus more on my actions and words to keep them as consistent as possible with the requirements of my Christian faith.” In this sense, then, her use of a physical object – the kind of object which has long troubled Reformed Christianity’s semiotic ideology – allowed her to pursue that most Protestant of religious aims: sincerity, or the alignment of belief, speech, and character (Keane, 2007: 211). Her crucifix was a physical ‘anchor’ by which to locate her faith (Sullivan, 1998: 450-1), and her commitment to it was based on her desire to keep her actions consistent with the grace she had received. This is a subject to which we return in the following Chapter, wherein I contrast the logic of grace with the application of human rights.

## Chapter Five: Rights and Relationships

*Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:11-12)*

### **V.I Do Christians have rights?**

“Do Christians have rights?” So asked Luke, the Christ Church minister, as he stood to preach one Sunday morning. London was in the last throes of a heat wave, and the Victorian church building was uncomfortably warm. Despite the best efforts of a whirring air conditioner, the congregation – particularly those, like me, who had walked to church – was unusually restless. We had spent the first half of the service fanning ourselves with the hymnals and prayer books stacked in the pews, occasionally ducking out to grab a glass of water from the small kitchen in the church lounge. As always, however, when the minister rose to preach, the congregation gave him their full attention. Pew Bibles were opened, and pens and notebooks were fished out of bags and pockets. (Anthropologists are not the only visitors to Bible-believing churches who fill notebook after notebook with sermon notes. On any given Sunday, about a quarter to a third of those sitting in Christ Church’s pews jot things down during the service). Standing at the pulpit in a suit and tie, his open Bible in his hand, Luke continued:

Do Christians have rights? Many of us would instinctively answer ‘yes’ to that question. After all, in our ever more litigious society, everyone else seems to have rights. Women’s rights, gay rights, animal rights, children’s rights, students’ rights, and so we could go on... [But] some Christians would say we don’t have any rights. I mean, that’s the whole point, isn’t it? When we become Christians, we give up our rights to rights... So, which is it? Do Christians have rights or no rights?

As Luke’s sermon hook indicates, one need not be an evangelical lawyer to be the kind of Christian who is concerned with the meaning and applicability of ‘rights’. Indeed, the question ‘do Christians have rights’ has been asked since the very beginnings of Christianity, when the Apostle Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Corinth: ‘If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?’ (1 Corinthians 9:11-12). Nor were discussions of rights limited to Sunday sermons or exhortations “from the front”, that is, from the church minister. In fact, the kinds of rights a Christian could or should rely on were the subject of many conversations among the Christ Church laity,<sup>101</sup> who see

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<sup>101</sup> As an anthropologist interested in both Christianity and human rights law, I was more likely than the average visitor to hear discussions of religious rights. I certainly initiated many conversations on



themselves as the inhabitants of a rapidly de-Christianising country and fully expect their civil liberties, which are understood to be Christian in origin, to be eroded as a result. Yet this threat to civil liberty, this apparent dilution of “freedom of - ,” was rarely discussed in the language of Britain’s current human rights framework. By contrast to an ideology of rights in which individual, positive entitlements are enforced against an overbearing state, the members of Christ Church tended to speak of ‘rights’ in consequentialist terms, evaluating their use in terms of their perceived impact on the spread of the Gospel. For those who are always hoping to welcome others into the Kingdom, the claim to rights - so often thought of in terms of Marx’s ‘egoistic man, man as a member of civil society that is an individual withdrawn into himself... and separated from the community’ (quoted in Sharma, 2006: 78), or critiqued as evidence of the West’s focus on the individual as ‘the centre of the moral universe’ (Wolterstorff, 2008: 3) - was usually discussed relationally.

Much like the human rights project, Protestant Christianity is often understood in terms of its individualism (although cf. Cannell, 2013, for an example of ‘collective’ Protestant salvation). Ernst Troeltsch (1991 [1925]: 184), for example, writes that Protestantism posits God’s grace as ‘seeking out the individual’: ‘The idea of a God who judges the individual, who follows the development of each and intervenes in the destiny of each, runs throughout the entire Bible’ (ibid: 218). This individualism has had an impact beyond theology. In Louis Dumont’s (1996: 94) analysis, Christianity’s emphasis on the individual in relation to God was a key contributor to the emergence of the ‘essentially non-social moral being’ as the carrier of modern society’s ‘paramount values’, although he notes that the ‘outworldly’ individualism of early Christianity took many centuries to develop into its contemporary ‘inworldly’ form (ibid: 95; cf. Mauss, 1996 [1938]; Shanahan, 1992: Chapters 3 and 5; Weber, 2005 [1905]). Indeed, because of the relationship between Christianity and the development of individualism in the industrialised world, there is a sense in which the grounding of human rights in bounded individuals could be said to have its roots in Christianity (Rendtorff, 1988: 42-5; Freeman, 2004: 387-9), even if the rights deemed to flow from being created in God’s image have been inconsistently applied to those outside of Christendom (Sharma, 2006: 185).

As such, one might imagine that the individualism of rights discourse and the individualism of evangelical Christianity were easy bedfellows. And yet, as Dumont knew, although salvation is individual, the practice of Christianity is profoundly relational: ‘Christians meet in Christ, whose members they are’ (Dumont, 1996: 86). Indeed, Christian conversion results in a radical breaking down of the boundaries of the individual, because it is at this point that those who are “in Christ” – an inherently relational term – become

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the subject. However, the fact that a number of sermons dealt with these very questions leads me to believe that the desire to get rights ‘right’ was not imposed from outside.

indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Further, this relationality is not limited to the believer's relationship with God, or even the believer's relationships with other believers. Rather, there is a sense in which evangelical Christians are to be both their brothers' keepers and their *potential* brothers' keepers. In other words, they are to be concerned both with "the Christian walk" of their fellow believers, whom they are to support, love, and keep from falling into sin, and with the salvation of their "not yet" Christian friends, family, and colleagues, whom they have a duty to evangelise.

In the previous chapter, we saw how members of both Christian Concern and Christ Church use the theological categories of law and grace when discussing the Christian discrimination cases. This chapter engages this argument from another angle, and explores the evangelistic import of living a grace-fuelled life through an examination of rights discourse at Christ Church. I argue that my church friends understand the answer to Luke's question - "Do Christians have rights?" - not to be "yes" or "no", but to require another question altogether: regardless of whether or not one can be said to "have rights", what is the result of insisting on them? The issue was not one of establishing a Christian's possession of or entitlement to individual rights, but of seeking to determine their impact on one's relationships with others (both Christian and non-Christian). In other words, discussions of rights-based legal cases often involved an outcome-based evaluation of the acceptability or desirability of their use; a Gospel-shaped consequentialism, perhaps. I argue that this consequentialism, which, at first glance, might be thought to come into conflict with the Christian belief in moral absolutes, is evidence of the lack of faith that my Christ Church informants have in the state's ability to protect their religious liberty through codified human rights. This suggests that the legal system's alleged transition from a negative to a positive interpretation of religious freedom – that is, the difference between refusing to interfere and positively enforcing – is, in practice, understood by evangelical Christians to represent a *lessening* of their freedom of religion.

Building on what has been said about the presumed evangelistic impact of living a gracious life, this chapter explores rights discourse through the prism of 'relational evangelism', that is, an approach to spreading the Gospel that emphasises the importance of a pre-existing friendship with the person being evangelised. Relational, in this sense, is both an emic and an etic term; although my Christ Church friends referred to "friendship evangelism" rather than "relational evangelism", the word "relational" was sometimes used to evaluate their interactions with others.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while I use it as an analytic foil for local

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<sup>102</sup> The language of 'relational evangelism' is also used in some Christian literature. James Bielo (2009: 116), in his account of American evangelical Bible studies, connects the idea of relational evangelism to the growth of large, seeker-friendly churches, such as Willow Creek Community Church. The term is also used by Rob Warner (2007) in his study of post-1960s English evangelicalism to describe guest services, wedding preparation courses, and other forms of church

critiques of individualism, I believe it is a concept my interlocutors would easily recognise. I begin with an overview of the place of relational evangelism in the overall outreach strategy of the church. Drawing on data gathered from sermons and Bible studies, I develop the previous chapter's argument to show that the relational evangelism encouraged at Christ Church is the logical follow on from the duty to live a grace-fuelled life. This is because it is through developing meaningful relationships with non-Christians that one is able, in theory at least, to explain the grace that they are seeing. I suggest that this pressure to build up relationships as a form of evangelism leads to a desire to get one's relationships 'right', striking a balance between Gospel talk and other forms of grace-based witness.

In the second section, I argue that this relational focus colours my Christ Church informants' understanding and critique of rights-based language. Drawing on Joel Robbins' (2004: 290-311) application of Dumont's terminology of 'paramount values', in which Robbins analyses the clash between the values of Christian individualism and Melanesian relationalism in Urapmin Christian conversion, I show that claims to 'rights' are evaluated on the basis of their impact on one's relationships with others.<sup>103</sup> Unlike in the Urapmin example, however, it is Christianity which carries a relational value, whereas it is rights discourse that is seen to be problematically individualistic. These consequentialist evaluations foster an understanding of the 'true Christian' as someone who, following the example of Jesus on the cross, seeks to forgo his or her rights in the hope of bringing others to salvation. Such an ethic of sacrificial love is seen to be countercultural in a world which is imagined as increasingly individualistic, self-centred, and litigious.

Yet this does not negate the fact that Christianity remains, in terms of salvation, highly individualistic. In the conclusion, we return to the tension that has run through Christian thinking since the time of Paul, that between 'the individual considered all by himself in relation to God and the individual as being related to God only insofar as he participates in the life of other individuals' (Smith, 1968: 255). I conclude that this tension explains, in part, the ambivalent response that my conservative evangelical interlocutors have to the Christian discrimination cases pursued by the CLC. While the claimants were sometimes the recipients of both sympathy and admiration, with Christ Church members praising their courage in standing up for individual conscience, they were also the subjects of disapproval, and were criticised for being seen to value their 'rights' above the needs of

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outreach. Unlike in Warner's use, however, which does not require a pre-existing relationship between proselytiser and proselytised, my use of the term is premised upon an existing friendship.

<sup>103</sup> Drawing on *New Melanesian Ethnography*, Mark Mosko (2010: 217) discusses a similar phenomenon in terms of the dividuality of Christian personhood, arguing that 'Christianity... involves elicitive detachments and attachments among dividual persons (converts, God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Devil, etc)'. However, given that my interlocutors tend to evaluate actions on the basis of their impact on relationships with others – and because they do, in fact, identify with 'the bounded, possessive individual of Western ideology' (ibid: 219) – I prefer the term 'relational' to dividual.

others. This ambivalence is evidence of the competing values and ethical commitments that *'enter into and exist within the very contours of evangelical thought and practice'* (Elisha, 2008: 183, emphasis in original), values that are sometimes compatible, and sometimes incompatible, with pluralist London's dominant moral framework.

## **V.II Relational evangelism and grace-fuelled living**

In evangelical theology, the unit of salvation is not the family or the church, but the individual Christian. Salvation, in other words, 'cannot be shared' (Robbins, 2004: 299). The Gospel message, on the other hand, both can and should be shared, and my evangelical friends see it as their Christian duty to engage with non-believers in the hope of welcoming them into the Kingdom.<sup>104</sup> As was argued in the previous chapter, one way that the members of Christ Church hope to achieve this is through the visible work of the Holy Spirit in them, which ought to encourage their non-Christian friends, family members, and colleagues to wonder at the cause of their distinctively grace-fuelled lives. However, for such an approach to bear fruit, it is not enough for a Christian to demonstrate God's grace to their fellow believers (although this, of course, is always expected). Nor is it enough to live a gracious life in the hope that non-Christian strangers will find it appealing (although this would be very much welcomed). Rather, the congregation was encouraged to develop trusting, meaningful friendships with non-Christians in the hope that these relationships would lead to "Gospel opportunities", that is, naturally arising openings to share Jesus' message of forgiveness and eternal life. In this section, I argue that the evangelistic impact of living a grace-fuelled life is married to the idea of developing meaningful relationships with non-Christians as the core of Christ Church's evangelism strategy, and stress that an understanding of this strategy is necessary before we can understand the church's approach to rights-based litigation.

One of the settings where I heard frequent reference to the importance (and the difficulty) of developing meaningful friendships with non-Christians was during meetings with my women's Bible study group, which I joined in the autumn of 2013. By this point in my fieldwork, I had already been studying the Bible 'one-on-one' with Carol, a nurse in her fifties, and Leah, a lawyer in her twenties. However, given that it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the Bible for my interlocutors,<sup>105</sup> who view it as the foundation of their faith, I was always eager to increase my exposure to Scripture. Further, Bible study

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<sup>104</sup> This engagement is not inevitable. Some Anabaptist groups, including the Amish, practice separation from a sinful world, following 2 Corinthians 6:17: 'Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord'.

<sup>105</sup> By 'the importance of the Bible', I do not mean the physical object. Bibles were frequently annotated, highlighted, and dog-eared (if not dog bitten: Anne, who often drove me home from church, once recounted in fits of laughter how her dog had recently torn one of her Bibles to pieces).

groups are, in a sense, the backbone of evangelical life, a ‘vital social institution’ consisting of opportunities not only for in-depth, close text analysis of Biblical passages but the building of strong, supportive friendships, the development of accountability networks, and the sharing of prayer requests (Bielo, 2009: 10). As James Bielo (ibid: 11) puts it, ‘what happens in Bible study’ ought not to ‘stay in Bible study’, but should ‘[inform] the logic and decision making of participants as they leave the group setting to be mothers, fathers, spouses, bosses, workers, and citizens’. Group studies provide, as Greenhouse (1989: 82) puts it, ‘two bonds’: ‘one that ties the individual to what is believed to be the authentic word of God and a second that ties believers to what becomes an epistemological community, their fellow Christians.’

The group I was welcomed into certainly displayed all of these characteristics. One of several such groups that met in the church building on Monday mornings, my group of eight was made up of women in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Our meetings began in the church lounge, where the thirty or so women who were part of a Monday morning Bible study group would collect cups of tea or coffee from volunteers in the church kitchen before spending a few minutes chatting about the previous and coming weeks. We were then read the church notices - *please keep praying for those coming to Christianity Explored; we need more volunteers for Mums ‘n’ Tots; does anyone have a spare buggy they could lend to X and Y, our mission partners in Cambodia, who will be visiting London in July?* – before breaking up into our study groups. My group met in one of the small crèches<sup>106</sup> at the back of the church, where we would sit around a collapsible table on orange plastic chairs, a small plug-in blow heater directed at our feet (the location of the crèche was such that it rarely got much sunlight, and could therefore be quite chilly; as the autumn progressed, we found that many of the layers of clothing that one might normally remove upon entering a building – scarves and coats, for example – were reappropriated as blankets draped over our laps). Most of us brought Bibles from home, but some borrowed them from the church pews. Despite the majority of Christ Church members being English, my group was surprisingly international, with members from South Africa, Australia, and the United States (although all, barring Kristen, the American, had lived in England for many years). With the exception of me, all of the group members had children, who ranged in age from Kristen’s three under-fives to Catherine’s two grown sons. While some had chosen (and had the resources to choose) to stay at home with their children,<sup>107</sup> others were in paid part-time employment in fields including finance, special needs teaching, and university lecturing.

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<sup>106</sup> Christ Church was going through something of a baby boom, and had a number of crèches available for parents to leave their children during Sunday services and Bible studies.

<sup>107</sup> Groups that meet on Monday mornings are made up of mothers with young children, the retired, or those working part-time outside the home. As far as I am aware, I did not meet any stay-at-home fathers at Christ Church, but equivalent men’s groups meet for Bible studies at 6.30am on weekday

Although they always began with a chance to socialise over a cup of tea, our Monday morning Bible studies were not entirely informal affairs. They required – in theory at least, if not always in practice - advance preparation,<sup>108</sup> and as one might expect from a church where services seemed to have more in common with academic lectures than effervescent assemblies, this preparation was text-based. We spent autumn 2013 working our way through 1 Timothy, a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the leader of the church at Ephesus. At the beginning of term, each of us had been given a soft-backed A5 booklet, the rosebud yellow cover of which read ‘Studies in 1 Timothy’. Inside the booklet were questions relevant to each of the Bible passages we would be studying. The first question for our study on 1 Timothy 1:1-7, for example, was ‘By what authority does Paul write this letter? Why is this important?’ These questions were designed to encourage us to think through and engage with the text, and under each of the questions (of which there were seven to nine per study) was a space to write down our answers. In addition to these booklets, our group leader, Georgina, would sometimes quote to us from *Teaching 1 Timothy*, a paperback Bible commentary by Church of England minister Angus MacLeay (2012).

We were not the only group using these resources. In fact, for the first time at Christ Church, all of the small groups – men’s groups, women’s groups, mixed-gender home groups, and student groups – were studying the same book of the Bible. Written to encourage Timothy in his leadership, it contains a number of verses that are controversial within the Church of England, including the requirement that women ‘learn quietly with all submissiveness’ and do not ‘teach or... exercise authority over’ men (1 Timothy 2:11-12), as well as condemning homosexual practice (1 Timothy 1: 10). Given the debates over gender and sexuality then consuming the Church (see contributions to Dormor & Morris, 2007), 1 Timothy was both timely and challenging. But although these particular verses were, of course, the subject of much discussion, the theme we returned to week by week was neither gender nor sexuality, but the importance of living grace-fuelled Christian lives as a means of attracting others to the church, and the development of the kind of relationships with non-Christians that would allow one to explain why Christians could live in such a distinctive, attractive way. After all, it was one thing for outsiders to be impressed by a Christian’s loving relationships, forgiving attitude, or hardworking lifestyle, but quite another for them to understand that this was the result not of the Christian’s own efforts but of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them.

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mornings. Women in full-time employment outside the home tend to meet in mixed-gender house groups on weekday evenings.

<sup>108</sup> Carving out time to prepare was easier for me, as a childless student, than it was for those who were running a home, raising children, looking after elderly parents, etc.

The connection between these two elements – living a gracious life in the hope of piquing a non-Christian’s interest in the Gospel, and cultivating the kind of relationships with non-Christians that would allow you to explain it - was brought out during a study we undertook one morning in November. We were looking at 1 Timothy 6:1-2, in which Paul asks those ‘who are under a yoke as bondservants’ to honour their masters, as this will bring glory to God. Question six of our study guide read ‘What is at stake in the way we behave at work?’ Catherine, a tall blond woman with a slight South African accent, answered: “It’s obviously God’s good name.” Non-Christians will look at the lives of those professing to be Christian, and if they don’t see any evidence of the work of God, they’ll judge the Gospel accordingly. Christians, she continued, must both “behave well and be observed to behave well”. Linda, who worked part-time in London’s financial district, agreed: “I’ve always been told to remember that my boss is God.” Not only was she representing God, and therefore under an obligation to demonstrate His grace to those around her, but she was also accountable to Him, and ought to keep her words and actions consistent with her Christian faith. Everyone agreed that this was important to remember, because it focused on the need to work well even when one’s colleagues weren’t looking. Catherine laughed and suggested that we were to be as consistent as the gentleman who used a butter knife even when dining alone.

Up until this point in the study, the kind of evangelism under discussion was of the type reviewed in the previous chapter: sparking a non-Christian’s interest through demonstrating the grace of God in you, or living a distinctively grace-fuelled life to show that Christianity ‘works’.<sup>109</sup> However, the group then moved on to a discussion of explicit evangelism. Kristen, who had recently moved to London with her husband and children from the American Midwest, suggested that “you must be willing to incorporate your faith into your work.” This, she thought, included being able to talk about the role it plays in your life: “talk about your weekend; say you went to church on Sunday.” Catherine agreed that one shouldn’t “hide” one’s Christianity. After a short pause, she asked the group: “Do you think people should try to evangelise at work in more overt ways?” Kristen was the first to respond. After acknowledging that her nationality meant her evangelising sensibilities might be slightly different to those of her English sisters, she explained that yes, she did think Christians should evangelise in the office. However, she stressed, this had to be “friendship evangelism”. She differentiated friendship evangelism from the kind of evangelism where there was no pre-existing relationship between the speaker and the hearer. “Handing out pamphlets outside your work” was not “honouring God”, but developing real relationships

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<sup>109</sup> This is only one way in which a Christian might demonstrate that their faith ‘works’. In the Zambian copper belt, for example, it is the prosperity of Christians that is seen to prove the truth of the faith (Haynes, 2012).

of trust and friendship - the kind that would allow your non-Christian friends to notice your distinctiveness, and then allow you to explain its cause - was.

This conversation suggests a very similar approach to evangelism as that advocated by Carol in the previous chapter, in which the Christian's loving, hardworking, gracious approach to life ought to be a "flag up" to their beliefs, thereby allowing evangelistic conversations to arise "quite naturally, because of your good lives". But as Kristen pointed out in our Bible study, these conversations were unlikely to occur without a pre-existing relational base. After all, a stranger with whom one had little meaningful contact was unlikely to notice one's grace-fuelled demeanour. Even if they did, they might mistakenly attribute it not to the grace of God but to the kind of legalistic, rule-keeping religion from which evangelicals try to distance themselves. It was for this reason that Kristen connected the grace-fuelled living spoken of by Catherine and Linda – the kind of consistent, using-a-butter-knife-even-when-dining-alone behaviour that could only be achieved by the grace of God – to relational evangelism.

Although a relative newcomer to Christ Church, Kristen was not its only proponent of "friendship evangelism". In fact, I was often told that evangelism was more likely to be successful if the person being evangelised had a pre-existing relationship with the evangeliser. This was one of the reasons that Kay, a former geography teacher who was then studying Japanese at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in the hope of moving to Japan as a missionary, doubted that street preaching was an effective way of growing the Kingdom: "I don't think it's very relational." Her own approach, by contrast, was to build up friendships, first with Japanese people living in London and then with the locals in Sapporo, Hokkaido, "the most unreached part of Japan." Similarly, Jim and Kate, the couple who had been involved with the CLC as a result of their positions on the Executive Committee of the University of Exeter's Evangelical Christian Union (see Chapter Three), told me that although it was important for Christian students to invite their non-Christian friends to evangelistic events, it was "pointless" to do so unless one had the kind of relationship with them that would allow for a meaningful conversation about the Gospel afterwards. In advance of their annual CU mission weeks, they told their members that it was "more important" for them to spend time strengthening their friendships with the non-Christian friends they hoped to invite along than to attend every meeting in the lead up to the event.

James, the curate, expounded a similar strategy during a sermon on Matthew 18:1-6. In these verses, Jesus tells His disciples that they must humble themselves like little children before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. James' message for the church was that because the Kingdom was for "nobodies", Christians were not to set up artificial barriers that



might prevent others from accepting Jesus or joining the church family.<sup>110</sup> Rather, they were to be welcoming, and one way to gauge how welcoming they were was to ask: “How much time do we regularly give to those currently outside the Kingdom of God?” Christ Church was then gearing up for a nation-wide mission drive, ‘A Passion for Life,’ which was scheduled to take place in the week before Easter. Although this mission week was then six months away, James told the congregation that they ought to be “investing” in their relationships with non-Christians now:

We need to know people if we’re to have any chance of welcoming them into God’s Kingdom... We have to be investing in friendships now in order to have any chance of being able to share the Gospel with people in the future. How much time do we *really* give to those who are currently outside the Kingdom of God?

James stressed that Christians ought to have a “genuine” (as opposed to “superficial”) interest in their non-Christian friends. It was this kind of relationship – the sort where you knew about a friend’s financial troubles, or ill health, or messy love life, or recent bereavement – that would allow you not only to demonstrate God’s love in practical ways, but to share the Gospel with them.

James’ question was no mere rhetorical device. Indeed, it was the kind of question with which many of his listeners were already struggling. This is partly to do with their tacit acceptance of secular norms of privacy and class-based assessments of what constitutes polite conversation (cf. Strhan, 2012: 126). It was for this reason that Georgina, who led our Bible study, found it easier to witness to relative strangers than she did to those in her immediate social circle. After all, the social cost involved in offending a stranger or social other by explaining that he or she was, by nature, deserving of hell was easier to deal with than alienating a cherished friend – or even a socially significant acquaintance - with the same message. But it was also understood in terms of their own sinfulness. The conflict between wanting to see one’s non-Christian friends saved and not wanting to offend them with the message that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3: 23) was internalised as a source of shame for many of my evangelical interlocutors. Diana expressed a common concern when she said: “I don’t know any Christian that would say that they evangelise as much as they could do. I definitely don’t think I do.” Many church members could recount examples when they knew they ought to have shared the Gospel

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<sup>110</sup> Christ Church is a wealthy congregation. The association of conservative evangelicalism with the upper and middle classes is not a recent phenomenon; as early as the 1851 census, evangelical Christianity proved more popular among the wealthy than the working class (Bebbington, 1989: 110). During my time at Christ Church, the staff team worried that a “Christ Church type” had developed, and that the proliferation of this type – public school, elite university, steady job – had led to a church culture that excluded those from less privileged backgrounds. This was something they hoped to change.

with a named friend, but had failed to do so. Even Kristen, the American who had advocated “friendship evangelism” in the workplace, once told us of an old school friend with whom she had been reluctant to speak about Jesus. Although they had been friends throughout school and university, it took her ten years to broach the subject of the Gospel. Afterwards, he had asked her why, if her faith was so important to her, she’d waited so long to share it with him. “I was ashamed”, she said, when he me asked that, because I didn’t have an answer. Years later, his question still weighed heavy on her heart.

Further, as the church well knew, the Christian’s desire to cultivate non-Christian friendships in the hope of creating Gospel opportunities could be interpreted as tokenistic or insincere by outsiders. Church members were aware, as James pointed out, that no one wanted to be thought of as a “project”: “You see, Biblical evangelism, friends, is sharing the Gospel with *people*. It’s not about drawing boxes on a piece of paper or seeing people in our office as projects.” Relational evangelism, then, is lauded in theory but difficult in practice. The desire to see one’s non-Christian friends coming to Christ, but the worry that one might alienate them in the process, meant that getting one’s relationships ‘right’ was a source of great concern at Christ Church. Did spending time with a non-Christian friend in the hope of later inviting them to your CU’s mission week mean you saw that person as a “project”? If a friend turned down one evangelistic advance, how long did you have to wait before making another? And – most guilt-inducing of all - at what point did your concern not to alienate your non-Christian friends become an excuse not to boldly proclaim the Gospel? In the following section, I argue that Christ Church’s emphasis on developing good relationships with others as a means of both demonstrating God’s grace and creating opportunities for the exposition of that grace plays a key role in their evaluation of the concept of rights, as reliance on these rights may have an impact, whether positive or negative, on the relationships that ought to be giving rise to Gospel opportunities.

### **V.III Rights forgone**

Although evangelical Protestantism posits salvation as an individual matter, even bounded individuals exist in webs of relationship to one another. This can create a tension between Christian individualism, on the one hand, and one’s obligation to kith and kin on the other. Such a tension is explored by Joel Robbins in his study of Christian conversion among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea. Drawing on Dumont’s (1996: 94) terminology of ‘paramount values’, the values that structure how the various elements of a society relate to one another, Robbins (2004: 292) argues that Melanesian people are neither individualist nor holist (the two values analysed by Dumont) but ‘relationalist’. By this he means that Urapmin society is structured neither in terms of individuals nor around social wholes, but in terms of relationships between people. The clash between the Urapmin’s newly adopted

Christian individualism, which condemns the expression of the individual will as a failure to subjugate the self to God, and their traditional morality, which evaluates wilful acts on the basis of their effect on existing relationships, is a cause of great discontent among Urapmin converts (ibid: 293-4). In this section, I argue that a similar clash of values can be detected in my evangelical friends' discussion of rights. As with the Urapmin, this clash can primarily be understood as a conflict between the values of individualism and relationalism. However, whereas Urapmin relational sociality is challenged by Christian *individualism*, I argue that my informants see the individualism of rights discourse as a potential threat to Christian *relationalism*. Further, while the Urapmin learned to interpret all wilful actions as sinful regardless of their outcomes, the Christ Church ministry team encourage an explicitly consequentialist approach to standing on one's rights. This consequentialist approach, which evaluates the desirability of insisting on one's rights on the basis of their relational impact (as opposed to one's inherent entitlement to so insist) suggests that although they refer to themselves as having the 'right' to undertake certain actions, the idea of a 'human right' to freedom of religion – that is, a pre-existing, inviolable privilege guaranteed by the state – has little purchase for church members. Rather, the 'rights' to which they referred were more likely to be understood in terms of Christianised negative liberties, which they were encouraged to forgo in the interests of others.

This was most evident in a number of sermons preached throughout summer 2013, during which Luke, the minister, asked the question with which this chapter began: "Do Christians have rights?" Christ Church sermons, which are expository in style and typically last about twenty-five to thirty minutes, are usually delivered as part of a "series" devoted to a certain Biblical book. This approach had the benefit, I was often told, of making sure that the whole Bible was "faithfully preached": if ministers went through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, they were unable to skip or gloss over its more uncomfortable, challenging, or confusing portions. Christ Church sermons typically involve a detailed, close-text analysis of the verses in question, a call to repentance for listeners who are not yet Christian, and an "application" - that is, practical advice on how to apply the passage to one's own life and worship - for those who are.<sup>111</sup>

The sermons discussed in the following section were part of a series preached by Luke on the book of 1 Corinthians. This series was aimed at helping the congregation develop a framework for Biblically-based decision making. On many matters, of course, the Bible was seen to give direct and easily applicable guidance about one's life choices. As regards sexual morality, for example, there was thought to be little room for interpretation: passages from Genesis, the Gospels, and the Epistles were all taken to confirm that the only

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<sup>111</sup> This style has been popular in conservative churches in England since the 1930s (Bebbington, 1989: 261).

legitimate place for sexual expression was within a lifelong, heterosexual marriage.<sup>112</sup> Yet there are some areas of life where the Bible is less specific. How should a Christian decide, for example, whether or not it was acceptable for them to attend a particular party? How could they determine whether or not it was alright for them to see a particular film? “There’s no chapter or verse in the Bible that I can take you to to help you make those decisions, and yet our lives are full of decisions like that, aren’t they?” Luke hoped to use 1 Corinthians to give the congregation a set of principles that they might apply in order to determine the acceptability of the choices they made on a daily basis.

Luke is an animated, enthusiastic, Biblically-grounded evangelical preacher. He has little time for props or pictures; all he needs are his sermon notes, his pulpit, and his open Bible. As such, it was a mark of the importance of the issues we were dealing with that the sermon series on 1 Corinthians involved Luke projecting an image onto the screen that hung at the back of the church, which was usually reserved for song lyrics, church notices, and the Bible verse taught during the Children’s Spot.<sup>113</sup> The image in question was a flow-chart, which laid out a number of questions a Christian ought to ask themselves before making a decision. The first thing a Christian ought to do, Luke told us, was to establish whether the Bible allowed them to make the choice in question. This was, unsurprisingly, the most important question to ask. If the Bible marked something out as a sin – theft, fornication, drunkenness – then the Christian could not, in good conscience, engage in that behaviour. If, on the other hand, the Bible did allow it, the Christian could move on to the second question, which was whether or not their conscience allowed it. Too often, Luke said, this is where we stop: if the Bible allows it, and if our conscience allows it, we go ahead and do it. But 1 Corinthians teaches us to ask three more questions. (Of the three questions Luke listed on his flow-chart, this section examines the first two. We will return to the third in the conclusion).

The first of the three additional questions, which we looked at during a sermon on 1 Corinthians 8, was “what is the effect of this decision on other Christians?” In the text in question, the Apostle Paul is writing to the Corinthian church about the acceptability of their eating food offered to idols. The letter explains that, as monotheists, Christians know that the idols to which meat is sacrificed are not real. Therefore, Christians are free to eat this meat: ‘We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do’ (1 Corinthians 8:8). Yet the fact that they are free to do so does not mean that they *ought* to. Weaker Christians - perhaps those who had only recently converted, or who had been deeply involved in the worship of idols before their conversion – might see stronger Christians eating meat offered to idols and become confused, compromised, or led back into idol worship as a result. ‘Therefore,’ Paul

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<sup>112</sup> Although they took this to be self-evident, it should be noted that this interpretation is contested, including by many within their own denomination (see Dormor & Morris, 2007; Clucas, 2012).

<sup>113</sup> The 11am service features a short Bible-teaching session aimed at children.

writes, ‘if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble’ (1 Corinthians 8:13). Luke illustrated this principle with an example he thought more applicable to middle-class Londoners:

Take Josephine. Josephine’s been an alcoholic for many years, and she’s been wonderfully liberated from her alcoholism by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And she comes to church and she comes to take communion, but the only wine that’s being distributed at the Lord’s Supper is alcoholic, and she can’t go near alcohol without causing her to stumble. And every communion service is a struggle for her inwardly... Are Christians free to drink wine? Absolutely. In our Lord’s Supper, yes, at home, yes. But what would be the loving thing of that church leadership to do? Surely it would be to find some way of serving non-alcoholic wine, so that Josephine, and possibly others, would not be caused to stumble.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike the sorts of actions which would be met with a “no” when subjected to Luke’s first question, “Does the Bible allow it?”, which were deemed unacceptable by virtue of their inherently sinful nature, the validity of the actions of a Christian in a situation like the one imagined above were approached from a Gospel-shaped, consequentialist perspective. It’s tempting, Luke noted, to ask “am I allowed to do this as a Christian?”; but a better question, he thought, was “is this a loving thing to do as a Christian?” Christian freedom, in other words, ought to be understood relationally.

A similar approach was evident in the next of the questions on Luke’s flow-chart: “how does this further the Gospel?” This was the subject of a sermon on 1 Corinthians 9, in which Paul tells the Corinthians that as a full-time Christian worker, he has the right to receive a salary from those he preaches to: ‘those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel’ (1 Corinthians 9:14). And yet, so concerned was he that people heard the Good News that he was willing to forgo this right to payment. With this in mind, Luke argued, Christians should be “regularly forgoing” their rights in the hope of welcoming others into Christ’s Kingdom. Luke asked us to think about the ‘rights’ we held so dear - “the right to a Sunday evening, the right to watch cricket on Sunday morning, the right to time with friends, the right to a holiday, the right to respectability and everyone thinking well of us”<sup>115</sup> – and to compare them with what Paul had given up. He concluded with a prayer for forgiveness for those times “when we have stood on our rights when we should have forgone them, and when we have not shared Christ’s concern and love for lost men and women”.

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<sup>114</sup> By contrast to some branches of Anglicanism, Christ Churchites view the Lord’s Supper as purely symbolic, and thus feel little need to treat the bread or wine with reverence. Uneaten bread, for example, is disposed of along with tea bags and coffee grounds in the church’s kitchen.

<sup>115</sup> These ‘rights’, of course, reflect middle-class pastimes and leisure activities outside the reach of many Britons.

In the above sermon, Luke explicitly linked the denial of oneself for the sake of others with the spread of the Gospel. When faced with a decision, Christians should always “think Gospel”, prioritising the salvation of others over their own rights. Indeed, standing on one’s rights when they should have been waived was seen as a failure to share “Christ’s concern and love for lost men and women”, as such an approach revealed the Christian in question to be more concerned with themselves than with the eternal fate of others. This was, Luke reminded us, not the behaviour of a true Christian:

You see, as long as defending our rights is the lodestar that orders our priorities, I’m not sure we’re really Christians. Because of all people, we Christians know the ultimate example of someone abandoning their rights. And it’s not supremely Paul. It’s the Lord Jesus Christ.

He hoped that we would all have “that same willingness to let go of our rights, that same desire to do whatever we can to win whoever we can, that same preparedness to inconvenience ourselves so that others can hear of this great Saviour.”

Although framed by Luke in terms of ‘rights’, the above examples are not, of course, the same kinds of ‘rights’ as those handled by the Christian Legal Centre. Luke’s focus was less on legally codified rights than on actions to which a Christian might feel entitled to take by virtue of their apparent acceptability within a Biblical framework (and, of course, the law of the land). They were not so much ‘rights’ as negative liberties, in that they are freedoms not curtailed by the Bible or the state (Berlin, 1966). Yet a similar logic was applied to some of the cases argued by the CLC under human rights legislation. A few months after Luke’s series on 1 Corinthians, James gave a sermon on Matthew 17:24-27. In these verses, Jesus is asked if He will pay the temple tax, a tax required of all Jewish men for the upkeep of the temple. Jesus explains that although He is exempt from this tax, just as a prince is exempt from the taxes of the king, He will pay it so as ‘not to give offence’ (Matthew 17:27). James preached that Jesus was giving a pattern for Christians to follow in their own lives: “Jesus limits His freedom to serve a larger purpose... He limits His freedom for the sake of the lost”:

Christian people, we are free people. Free from sin, free from the burden of the law, free from guilt, free from what people think of us. It’s liberating. Yet the challenge, to each and every one of us here this evening, is how we exercise that freedom for the greater good of the Gospel.

James continued: “You see, I’m free to wear a cross at work, but I might choose not to for the offence that it causes. That could be an example of [forgoing our] Gospel freedom for the sake of the Gospel.”

As we have already seen, the members of Christ Church are wary of Christians who seek to enforce their right to wear religious symbols at work. James' choice of example, then, was hardly surprising. For our purposes, however, what is interesting about this application was its explicitly relationalist bent. A few months after he gave this sermon, James and I sat down for an interview at a high street coffee shop a few minutes' walk from Christ Church. I asked him if he could explain the sort of situation he had in mind when he suggested that wearing a cross might limit the spread of the Gospel. Taking out his Bible (as my interviewees often did), he re-read Matthew 17 before continuing. Imagine you're trying to win your Muslim colleague for the Kingdom, but "a big sticking point" for them is the crucifixion. Your colleague thinks that if Jesus were the Son of God, it would be absurd for Him to have been crucified. In that instance, James explained, wearing a cross around your neck might actually act as a "barrier" between you and your colleague. You would still be free to wear it, but really, why would you? "I've got the right for many things, but I want to deny that right, the rights that I have, for the sake of other people."

Another example of this principle related to Christians who sought to enforce a right not to work on Sundays. This issue had been the subject of one of the CLC's recent cases, *Mba v London Borough of Merton*, the appeal of which had been lost about a month before James and I sat down for our interview. In this case, Celestina Mba, a children's care home worker, argued that she had been discriminated against by Merton Council, which had sought to enforce her contractual obligation to work Sunday shifts.<sup>116</sup> The case had received widespread press coverage (see BBC 2013; Bowcott, 2013; Legge & Withnall, 2013), and it was perhaps for this reason that the following hypothetical came so easily to James' mind:

If you're working for a firm that says you need to work shift work on a Sunday, to [then] assert your right to not work on a Sunday, well, you knew that when you signed up for that company. Is it possible to find another place of work? Because that's going to be an offence. That's going to really hack off your manager and maybe your other colleagues, as they're having to work the roster so that you have Sunday off. That's not going to do the Gospel any favours. It's just going to make you look like a really difficult person.

He went on to argue that those who insisted on their rights in a belligerent way – to be "provocative" or to "cause a stink" – were not promoting the Gospel, but damaging its reputation. Unlike the ideal Christian employee discussed by my Bible study group, who knew that her ultimate boss was God and that she ought to represent Him well, Christians who "cause[d] a stink" were neither living an attractive, gracious life nor building up solid

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<sup>116</sup> From Mrs Mba's perspective, this contractual duty had been overridden by an informal agreement with the Council, which she understood to have agreed to accommodate her desire not to work on Sundays. From the Council's perspective, however, this accommodation had been a temporary concession, not a binding agreement. The tribunal found for the Council.

relationships with their non-Christian colleagues. Instead, they were placing their individual desires ahead of the salvation of others, mirroring the selfishness of the unconverted (cf. Greenhouse, 1989: 115-118).

Recall from Chapter One that James believes British Christians are coming under increasing pressure at work, and that they ought not to be surprised by state-backed persecution in the future. He even wondered whether evangelical preachers like him might end up in prison for proclaiming the Gospel. Yet he did not feel that rights-based claims were an appropriate way to counter this trend. Instead, he worried that standing on one's rights meant one was buying into the individualistic logic of what Luke labelled "our ever more litigious society," in which "everyone is insisting on their rights" to the detriment of others. James' and Luke's aversion to this sort of litigation stems, I suggest, from the tension between the values of individualism, here imagined as a selfish, stubborn attempt to enforce one's rights at the expense of one's colleagues, and Christian relationalism, portrayed in terms of building meaningful friendships with non-Christians and denying one's rights for the sake of others. Rights-denying relationalism was to be preferred to rights-insisting individualism. Luke's advice to his congregation, as it so often was, was to look to Jesus as the perfect model of this rights-denying attitude: "Jesus loved you enough to put aside His rights in order to die for you, and trusting in Him you and I are called to be like Him, putting aside our rights". By positing Jesus as the truly virtuous Man to whom all Christians should aspire, Luke's approach seemed to incorporate an evangelical consequentialism under a broader ethical framework of divine emulation (see Elisha, 2008: 168, on Jesus as a model of 'active compassion' in evangelical social activism; Robbins, 2015, on the power of cultural exemplars).

Now, in light of the emphasis on grace that we saw in the previous chapter, Luke's flow-chart approach to Christian living might seem surprising. The following of a checklist seems to advocate exactly the kind of legalistic morality that an evangelical Christian ought to reject. Further, evaluating the acceptability of one's actions on the basis of their potential consequences seems to grate against the Christian understanding of moral absolutes. It is for this reason that we must remember that these relational, consequentialist questions – what is the effect of this on other Christians, and what is the effect of this on the spread of the Gospel – were ultimately secondary; they were the questions one was to ask once one had already determined that an action was not discouraged or forbidden by the Bible. Indeed, Luke himself recognised the risk of legalism inherent in this approach. "The Pharisee in us," he acknowledged, always seeks out rules and regulations to follow. He tried to guard against this by stressing that the flow-chart ought to be approached lovingly, not legalistically. He was offering principles, not mandates.



Yet the sheer flexibility of a religion that rejects rules and regulations can sometimes leave the faithful crying out for guidance, for conventions to be given or virtuous models to aspire to. Robbins (2004) writes that the Urapmin, by abandoning the complex regime of taboo observance that they practiced before their conversion to Christianity, now inhabit a world of moral discontent. Although they are pleased to live in ‘free time’, in which they are no longer bound by ritual law, the loss of the ritual system has meant that they are now unable to understand themselves as moral subjects. Unlike the taboo system, which provided ‘a very workable framework for regulating the will’ (ibid: 221), Christian sin is so all-encompassing that any expression of wilful behaviour is seen to threaten their very salvation. Ironically, this led one pastor, a Bible college graduate named Kiki, to encourage his congregation to be as self-controlled as someone living under the strictest of the Urapmin taboo regimes: ‘the image of someone following a stringent version of its taboos’, Robbins (ibid) writes, was ‘the most compelling model [Kiki could] find for a life of moral rectitude’. In other words, ‘it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man reflect itself in his emotional life only as a pleasant experience’ (Simmel on freedom and isolation, cited in Strhan, 2012: 52). Luke’s flow-chart, I suggest, indexes a similar tension between freedom and its use. By laying out a step-by-step approach to the decision-making process and encouraging a relationalist, consequentialist ethic, it functioned to curb the excessive freedom associated with ‘free time’, reminding the Christian that although he or she had been liberated from the power of sin, this liberation entailed relational responsibilities.

In addition to elaborating the somewhat paradoxical relationship between Christian freedom and the strict moral code adhered to by my informants, in which grace both liberates one from the law and gives one a deep desire to keep it, the ministry team’s tips for ethical decision making also tell us something about the Christ Church congregation’s approach to ‘rights’ per se. As regards the Christian discrimination cases, it was in relation to those situations where one would have to answer ‘no’ to the first or second of Luke’s questions – does the Bible allow it, does my conscience allow it – that support for Christian claimants was most strongly expressed. This was most evident in relation to cases involving service provision to homosexuals, which are thought to violate both the laws of the Bible and the individual Christian’s conscience (see Weiner, n.d., on the increasing identification of ‘religion’ with ‘conscience’ in debates over workplace accommodation). In particular, great sympathy was expressed for “conscientious objectors” such as Peter and Hazelmary Bull,<sup>117</sup> B&B owners who would not let double bedrooms out to couples who were not in (heterosexual) marriages.<sup>118</sup> Yet even where my interlocutors felt a great deal of compassion for the people involved, they were not spoken of as the victims of human rights violations.

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<sup>117</sup> See *Hall & Preddy v Bull & Bull*.

<sup>118</sup> This case was handled by the Christian Institute.

Rather, they were seen as the early casualties of the dismantling of Britain's "Christian heritage", from which its traditional civil liberties were thought to flow.

This was brought out during a conversation with Leah and Lucy, two Christian solicitors, with whom I met one summer's morning to discuss a number of real and hypothetical legal cases over iced coffee drinks. Both women had come armed with their Bibles (Lucy's, which was hot pink and decorated with Christian fish stickers, was particularly memorable) and made frequent reference to them throughout the morning. The first case we discussed was that of Lillian Ladele, a registrar who had resigned when her employer, Islington Borough Council, refused to accommodate her objection to registering same-sex civil partnerships.<sup>119</sup> Ms Ladele had been a registrar for a number of years before civil partnerships were introduced, and therefore could not have known that she would be expected to perform them. As such, both Lucy and Leah were extremely sympathetic to her case. As far as they were concerned, she had been right to politely refuse to facilitate the formation of civil partnerships; as Bible-believing Christians, they would have done the same.

But although they expressed disappointment at the fact that Islington Council had not agreed to accommodate Ms Ladele's religious beliefs, the very fact of the court's decision meant that they no longer expected to be able to rely on conscientious objection as a 'right'. Her case had clarified the law, and although they disagreed with it, they accepted that the judgment represented the "conventional wisdom" of an "increasingly secular" Britain. As with professions that would require the Christian to go against his or her conscience in any other way, for example, through exaggeration or lying (Lucy gave the example of being an estate agent, which she thought would require dishonesty), being a registrar had simply been added to the growing list of jobs which Bible-believing Christians, in good conscience, would no longer choose to apply for. Although "a lot of these cases focus on issues that are very controversial, like homosexuality", Lucy argued that there were "a really wide range of issues" that might prevent her taking any particular job: "These things make the headlines, but I couldn't take a job even as an estate agent." She explained this inability to take a job as an estate agent or a registrar not as an infringement of an inviolable 'right' to work in these professions, but as a choice she simply would not make. In the terminology of Luke's flow-chart, this was because it was forbidden by both the Bible and her conscience. Leah agreed:

I think if you're actively choosing not to apply for a job because you don't feel, because of your faith or your conscience, that you can do it, then I don't think I would see that as discrimination against me, because it's my choice.

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<sup>119</sup> See *Ladele v London Borough of Islington*.

To repeat, this is not to say that Leah or Lucy agreed with the tribunals that found against Christians seeking to be exempt from workplace duties on the grounds of conscience. On the contrary, they thought it both unfair and disproportionate that Christian registrars could not be accommodated, and that Christian B&B owners were no longer able to set their own guest policies. In an ideal world, they would prefer Christians to be able to work in all (legal) professions (all the better for relational evangelism). What is important for my argument, however, is that the language used was that of resignation, sadness, and disappointment at the way things were going, not outrage or indignation at an inviolable right denied. While the CLC publicises the Christian interest cases in an effort to cultivate what Ronald Niezen (2010) refers to as the ‘indignation’ associated with rights-based activism, particularly among conservative Christians, my church friends – who form, we can safely assume, a part of this target audience – have accepted them as the inevitable result of secularisation. If indignation suggests the possibility of real reform, resignation suggests an acceptance of the inevitability of the status quo: ‘One does not fight what one cannot change’ (Greenhouse, 1989: 208).

In other words, the idea of an enforceable ‘right’ to freedom of religion, as an entitlement owed the individual by the state, had little purchase for the members of Christ Church. While human rights instruments posit these rights as existing independently of their recognition or violation, my informants saw them as having been brought into being through these very instruments. This suggests that the move towards codifying freedom of religion as a ‘positive legal right’, as opposed to the traditional common law approach of respecting religious freedom as a ‘negative accommodation’ (Hill et al, 2011: 25), has actually come to be understood by conservative evangelicals as a weakening of their religious liberty. Indeed, one could argue that it is due to their lack of faith in the human rights project that the members of Christ Church could take the consequentialist approach to rights outlined above, in which – so long as it did not violate the Biblical law - the rightness or wrongness of a Christian’s decision to rely on their rights was evaluated not according to their inherent entitlement to do so, but according to its impact on the Christian’s Gospel-spreading relationships with others. In this context, it made sense for Luke to argue that “the Gospel is more important than rights.”

#### **V.IV Conclusion: paramount values and religious liberties**

For conservative evangelicals living in the metropolis, London is a ‘lost city in need of redemption’ (Strhan, 2012: 43), characterised by greed, self-interest, and anomie.<sup>120</sup> Its inhabitants are variously portrayed as selfish, alienated, and profoundly lonely. James worried that people lacked genuine friendship “in this day and age”; Jane bemoaned the ubiquity of corruption in the modern city; and Dominic expressed concern that, despite the privilege surrounding us in this well-heeled part of London, even those who had no material wants suffered from isolation and loneliness.<sup>121</sup> Intercessory prayers, which always included prayers for the world, for the government, and for Christ Church itself, featured petitions for both selfless righteousness and relational succour: that those in positions of authority would do what was right, not what was personally expedient; that London’s isolated, lonely souls would find eternal companionship with Christ.

In a world in which “everyone is insisting on their rights”, the members of Christ Church are encouraged to go against the grain, prioritising their Gospel relationships over and above their own desires and freedoms. This is understood to be as countercultural as giving up one’s time to teach Sunday School, arguing for the exclusivity of Christ, or saving one’s first kiss for one’s wedding day. By deflecting attention from one’s own needs on to the needs of others, both grace-fuelled living and relational evangelism encouraged the Christian to, as Luke would say, “think Gospel.” Yet the relational element of “thinking Gospel” was not always easy, particularly as Christianity itself views the person as an individual-in-relation-to-God (Dumont on Troeltsch, 1996: 96). The emphasis on relationships was never an attempt to deny or challenge the individual nature of salvation: ‘[t]o say that the individual is incomplete without the community is not to demand a transcendence of individuality but, rather, to point out the error of atomic existence’ (Smith, 1968: 256). That the individual-in-relation-to-God remained in tension with the individual-in-relation-to-others was most clearly articulated by Naomi. An optician in her twenties, Naomi is both naturally friendly and exceptionally eager to evangelise. She would often approach me if she noticed me sitting alone at church, and seemed particularly keen to help me find God during my research. However, it was not just me that Naomi hoped to help on

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<sup>120</sup> The association of the non-Christian world with greed and selfishness is not limited to urban, English, or twenty-first century Christians. Greenhouse’s (1989) study of suburban Georgian Baptists also notes a presumed association between litigiousness, selfishness, and non-Christians. Nor is it necessarily Christian. Intriguingly, David Engel (2011: 255) has recently noted a tendency among Thai Buddhists in Lanna for the customary law of injuries, which had previously been governed by reference to local spirits, to give way to a Buddhist conception of legal compensation as ‘counterproductive, materialistic, and selfish’.

<sup>121</sup> The association of London with individualism is not always negatively marked. For the libertarian activists among whom Adam Reed (2015: 184) carried out fieldwork, it was the city’s ‘general sense of indifference and absence of community or fellow feeling’ that allowed for the expression of free, purposeful lives.

the journey to faith. She was deeply conscious of her duty to share the Gospel with everyone she met, and experienced real frustration when she felt that this was not possible or appropriate.

Naomi and I were sitting together on the Sunday evening when James gave the sermon summarised above, in which he challenged his listeners to re-evaluate “how much time [they] *really* give to those who are currently outside the Kingdom of God”. We continued sitting in the pew long after the service had finished, chatting and drinking the cups of tea that had been brought to us by volunteers on the coffee rota. Naomi explained that she was already following James’ advice about investing in relationships. She had built up strong friendships with her non-Christian colleagues, and had had many Gospel conversations as a result. But she only worked closely with three people, she told me, and that just didn’t seem like very many. “If this is true” – and she was convinced that it was – then telling three people just wasn’t enough. She ought to be telling *everybody*. She sighed in frustration as she repeated the core point of James’ sermon: that she should spend more time serving those who weren’t yet Christians. But how, she asked, was she supposed to do that? She volunteered with the church youth group on Fridays, attended church twice on Sundays, went to a Bible study group on Wednesdays, and worked full time, often on Saturdays. Although she tried to see her non-Christian friends during the week, something had to give. Should she leave her Bible study group?, she wondered aloud. But if she were to do that, what about her own spiritual growth? Wouldn’t her relationship with God suffer as a result?

Naomi was not the only Christian who worried about striking a balance between, as Girish Daswani (2011: 275) puts it of Ghanaian Pentecostals, her ‘individual aims’ and her ‘moral obligations to others’, and the sort of bind she felt herself to be in was not unknown to the Christ Church leadership team. It is in this context that we return to the final question on Luke’s flow-chart. As noted above, after determining that an action is neither forbidden by the Bible nor the individual’s conscience, the Christian was encouraged to ask three more questions. “Chapter 8 made us ask: what is the effect of this decision on other Christians? Chapter 9 made us ask: how does this further the Gospel?” The third question, which Luke examined in relation to 1 Corinthians 10, was: “how will this decision affect my spiritual life? In the Christian race, will this decision slow me down or speed me up?” Luke reminded the congregation that it was important they safeguard their own relationship with God. Winning someone for the Kingdom at the expense of one’s own holiness was to be avoided. (A somewhat extreme example, given me by James, was that although he wanted to win sex workers for the Kingdom, this was not a licence to solicit prostitutes). Individual sanctification remained at the core of the Christian walk. In the words of Will, a Bible college student and church apprentice in his twenties: “being a Christian is fundamentally

something for an individual... It is something that's done in community, but it is an individual thing". For Naomi at least, the tension between individualism and relationalism was never fully resolved. She felt herself to be at a crossroads, and continued to debate the relative merits of leaving her Bible study group, cutting down on her church service, or even quitting her job, so that she could more fully devote herself to evangelism without compromising her own spiritual growth.

Nor was the tension between individualism and relationalism fully resolved at the level of the Christian discrimination cases. Robbins (2004: 291) writes that paramount values do not only structure the relations between different elements of a society, but 'determine what cultural form something has to take in order even to be eligible to be reckoned as good'. For many members of Christ Church, the claimants in the legal cases appeared to be the subjects of ambivalence precisely because they created a conflict between two paramount values, making it difficult for them to be 'reckoned as good'. They were simultaneously admired for standing up for their Biblical values and chastised for failing to do so in a relational, winsome way. Kate, for example, whose complicated evaluation of her own role in the Exeter Christian Union case was examined in Chapter Three, found that she sometimes thought the clients were "brilliant" for "standing up" for Christianity – a positive evaluation rooted in individualism - but sometimes thought the cases went "too far" and were ultimately "detrimental" to Christian witness – a negative evaluation rooted in relationalism. Even James, who gave such short shrift to the Christians he thought were putting their needs before those of the Gospel by insisting on the right to wear a cross or have Sundays off, was much more sympathetic to claimants who were asked to act against their individual consciences. Yet in a context in which "God's agenda" was increasingly seen to come into conflict with "the government's agenda", deciding whether the Gospel was better served by forgoing one's rights and resigning quietly or insisting on them through a highly publicised court case was difficult to determine.

This ambivalence, I suggest, also points towards a lack of confidence in 'rights' per se. Given that my informants understood Britain's tradition of civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, assembly, and religion, to be at least partly rooted in its "Christian heritage" – a somewhat vague concept that variously encompassed tolerance of difference, concern for others, and a high valuation of human dignity – it was of little surprise to them that, as the state moved away from its ostensibly Christian foundations, these liberties would increasingly come under threat. The state's embrace of the human rights project was not seen to be an adequate substitute for Christian tolerance. If anything, human rights' reflection of what Leah called the "conventional wisdom" of universalising approaches to sexuality and gender was seen to further undermine it. As such, even in cases where the Christ Church community supported the stance taken by a Christian claimant, the idea of the

‘right’ to freedom of religion as a pre-existing entitlement was rarely given much weight. When the language of rights was used, as it was in Luke’s sermons, it was usually in the context of Christianised discussions of negative liberty, not positive human rights. Its purpose was to remind the congregation that although they were free from the constraints of religious law, they ought to use this freedom, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in a God-glorifying way.

From this perspective, the legal system’s move from recognising religious freedom as a negative civil liberty to enforcing it as a positive human right appears to be understood, at an emic level, as a *decrease* in religious liberty. By contrast to the context-negation of human rights rhetoric, in which ‘it is possible to claim that a human rights violation anywhere is of the same epistemological order and of the same moral, political, or legal significance as a human rights violation elsewhere’ (Riles, 2006: 54), it is the very lack of efficacy ascribed to notions of state-backed freedom of religion that encouraged my church informants to adopt a context-specific ethic of consequentialism when evaluating rights-based claims. Yet for activists who believe that Christians are marginalised on account of their faith, the codification of a human right to freedom of religion ought to be one of the greatest tools in their legal arsenal. Further, while the members of Christ Church worried about the relational impact of the Christian discrimination cases, the claimants who seek to enforce their religious rights in the courts may be doing so precisely because of their concern for other Christians, who might also be suffering for their faith but lack the capacity, energy, or support to pursue a test case. This raises the subject of Chapter Six, in which I discuss the meaning of rights from the perspective of the Christian Legal Centre.

## Chapter Six: Human Rights and Broken Cisterns

*And God said, 'Let there be rights; and there were rights' (Genesis 1:3, adapted by Sherwood, 2012: 303).*

### VI.I Polonius' poor advice

Conway Hall, the headquarters of the UK's oldest established freethought organisation, might seem an unusual institution to host a speaker from Christian Concern. Nevertheless, it was to this bastion of secular humanism that I accompanied Carrie, the Christian Concern events manager, one evening in September 2012. We were there to watch a debate in which Andrea would discuss 'Freedom of speech, anti-abortion protestors and women: rights and limits'. This debate, which had been organised by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), Britain's largest abortion provider, had proved exceptionally timely; while Andrea went over her debate notes, the Christian Legal Centre team was busily polishing their arguments for the following morning, when they would represent two such anti-abortion protestors in criminal court. Andy Stephenson and Kathryn Sloane, members of pro-life group Abort67, had been arrested under the Public Order Act after displaying large, graphic images of aborted fetuses outside one of BPAS' Brighton clinics. Their upcoming trial threw into sharp relief the issues to be discussed, reminding the three hundred person audience that although this particular debate was academic, the growth of groups like Abort67 meant it was being played out up and down the country with increasing frequency. Indeed, the subject of the debate - the 'rights and limits' of people like Andy and Kathryn, who sought, in their words, not to protest abortion but to "expose" it - would soon be determined by law.

Having arrived with plenty of time to spare, Carrie and I took a quick tour of the venue. Conway Hall's main auditorium resembles a cross between a small theatre and an old-fashioned school assembly hall. Its wooden floors, wall panels, and stage are ringed by an angular wooden balcony. Above the stage, topping its wooden framing, is Polonius' oft-quoted dictum: 'TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE'.<sup>122</sup> As we surveyed the room, Carrie wondered aloud about the quote. Having determined that it did not come from the Bible, she announced it to be "a very humanist statement." I asked what she meant; weren't Christians to be true to themselves? The issue, she explained, was that asserting that one ought to be true to oneself begged the question: "who *are* you?" Extending her index fingers and curling her middle, ring, and little fingers into her palms, she pointed two finger guns at me. "A mass murderer can say they're being true to themselves, and then: bang bang!"

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<sup>122</sup> For an account of this phrase from the perspective of the British Humanist Association, see Engelke (2014).



Although Carrie's finger gun example was intended as a joke, her rejection of Polonius' maxim indexes very real concerns about the contested nature of goodness, morality, and capital 't' Truth. Indeed, it cuts to the heart of the topic of this chapter, my activist friends' understanding of the legal system's move towards a culture of rights. As with the congregation of Christ Church, who worried that to insist on one's rights was to succumb to a problematically individualistic ethos and who hoped to live out a relational Christian alternative, the staff of the CLC understand rights-based claims to rely on an atomistic logic that prioritises the perceived needs and wants of the individual over the pursuit of society's common good. More than this, however, they worry that the human rights project elevates the fallen morality of created men and women over the limitless wisdom of their Creator God. By pursuing human happiness and wellbeing in this life as its ultimate goal, the doctrine of human rights is seen to recklessly disregard the possibility of an eternal future, rejecting Biblical commands as an unacceptable restriction on human autonomy. It is seen as a philosophy in which sin is relativised and rewarded, with, for example, murder and sexual immorality rebranded as expressions of the sinner's 'right' to choice, privacy, or self-fulfilment. As such, the British legal system's embrace of the logic of rights was seen to pander to the worst excesses of those who took Polonius at his word: it encouraged depraved humans to be 'true' to their fallen selves, permitting rather than restricting sinful behaviour.

Despite these concerns, the CLC often couches its arguments in the language of rights, primarily Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention (as articulated in the Human Rights Act 1998), which protect the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression. This is, in part, the necessary result of the British legal system's transition from recognising negative civil liberties to enforcing positive human rights (Hill et al, 2011; Sandberg, 2011). As Andrea put it, "You can only operate with the laws that you've currently got." But the CLC seems to use the language of human rights even when alternative, and perhaps less risky,<sup>123</sup> legal strategies are available to them.<sup>124</sup> This suggests that they pursue rights-based claims for reasons that go beyond the necessity of operating within "the laws that you've currently got".

This chapter takes the Centre's human rights claims and rights-based discourse as its objects of ethnographic enquiry. Positing these cases not only as individual grievances but as aspects of 'a long process of social relations' (Gluckman, 1961: 11), I argue that the CLC continues to pursue its cases under human rights law precisely because it wants to point out

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<sup>123</sup> Article 9's interiorised definition of religion, which guarantees freedom of belief but offers only qualified protection to its manifestation, makes proving a violation particularly difficult (Peroni, 2014; McIvor, 2015).

<sup>124</sup> In at least one case, an alternative legal strategy was actually pointed out by the presiding judge. See Justice Lang at paragraphs [67] and [80] of *Core Issues v TFL*.

the flaws that a rights-based legal system embodies. Although Christian activists view the human rights project's high valuation of the human as a secularised version of Christian thinking, they find its current expression in English law both undesirable and unworkable. Unlike Christianity, which is thought to pursue the good of all, the human rights project is accused of prioritising the individual's desires over the building up of common values, focusing instead on personal entitlements and denying one's obligations to the community. In this way, the staff of the CLC echo the critique of postliberal theologian Stanley Hauerwas (1987: 238), who argued some years ago that '[c]ontemporary political theory has tended to concentrate on the language of rights, not because we have a vision of the good community, but because we do not'. While advocates of inherent rights posit them as existing regardless of context - suggesting, as we saw in the previous chapter, that 'a human rights violation anywhere is of the same epistemological order and of the same moral, political, or legal significance as a human rights violation elsewhere' (Riles, 2006: 54) - my activist interlocutors argue that the legal system's embrace of rights discourse has actually resulted in some citizens, namely conservative Christians, having their allegedly inviolable rights 'trumped' by the competing claims of others.

Having tackled the apparent disjunction between the CLC's expressed disagreement with the human rights project and their willingness to argue their legal cases using the language of the European Convention, I then argue that the use of rights-based language is part of an attempt to both undermine human rights doctrine and to encourage others to embrace a Christian alternative. Focusing on two of the CLC's cases, *Johns v Derby City Council* and *R v Stephenson & Sloane*, I suggest that the CLC instrumentalises the language of rights to establish conservative Christians as the members of a self-identified 'counterpublic', highlighting their subordinate status and '[marking themselves off]' from an allegedly dominant political elite (Warner, 2002: 119). This counterpublic discourse seeks to awaken its hearers to the logical inconsistencies of a doctrine that posits people as the bearers of universal rights while simultaneously restricting the freedoms of those who disagree with what the Centre terms the 'prevailing politically correct orthodoxy' (Williams, 2011a).<sup>125</sup>

As such, although I do not argue that the Centre takes rights-based cases with the intention of losing them, I do suggest that there is a benefit to their frequent losses. Losses can be presented as proof that the human rights framework does not work on its own terms, as it cannot reconcile the apparently mutually exclusive claims of, for example, the right to

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<sup>125</sup> In discussing their claims to 'counterpublic' status, it is worth remembering that my interlocutors distinguish themselves not only from non-Christians and the non-religious, but from liberal Christians (some of whom they doubt are Christian at all). This is also true of my friends at Christ Church, who, despite identifying as members of the established Church, often feel marginalised within it.

freedom of religion and the right to non-discrimination. Further, because the Centre's cases are always presented in the language of marginalisation, rights-based claims can contribute to a critique of rights even when these cases actually result in *victory* for the Christian claimants involved. In other words, counterpublic language ensures that the Centre can cast doubts on a rights-based system's ability to safeguard civil liberties even when an alternative reading might suggest that this system actually protects the rights of this particular counterpublic.

From the conservative Christian theological perspective, then, the British legal system's embrace of rights discourse is taken as further proof of its renunciation of God and elevation of the fallen individual; but from the pragmatic perspective of Christian lawyers and activists seeking to challenge public opinion, its use is both a necessary compromise and a chance to reveal its internal inconsistency. Taking this critique seriously, and contra those theorists, such as Talal Asad (2000; 2003), who frame rights as an inevitable tool of state violence, I suggest that the CLC provides evidence of the ways in which rights can be instrumentalised to challenge the state to confront its own inconsistencies (Casanova, 2006). Yet a critique that relies on the tools of the object under criticism will always have complicated outcomes. In the conclusion, I reflect upon the uncertain impact of such a critique, and acknowledge that, from some angles – including the perspective of some members of Christ Church - it never quite manages to achieve exteriority to the legal framework it hopes to undermine.

## **VI.II On human rights**

Since the United Nations' 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), rights-based discourse has acquired prominence as an 'ethical lingua franca' (Tasioulas, 2007: 75), even approaching the title of 'sole approved discourse of resistance' for marginalised groups (Rajagopal, quoted in Riles, 2006: 56). Yet despite the UDHR's confident assertion that human rights are the 'highest aspiration' of the people of the world, there is little philosophical or practical consensus as to the ultimate foundations of international human rights law (Freeman, 2004: 376). One oft-voiced explanation for the historic emergence of the belief that men (and, occasionally, women) are endowed with certain rights by virtue of their humanity is that it is the fruit of centuries of Christian thought. This is the position of theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff (1987: 221), who argues that modern notions of rights derive from the Bible's '[d]eep and pervasive... insistence that human beings occupy a special place among earthlings in God's eye', as well as their

resulting moral obligations to others made in God's image (see also Wolterstorff, 2008; Freeman, 2004; Pojman, 1991).<sup>126</sup>

While Wolterstorff is an advocate of rights, this understanding of their origin is not limited to those who embrace the human rights project. Asad (2000), for example, has argued that the 'universal values' expressed in terms of human rights have 'specifically Christian roots', emerging, as they do, out of Latin Christendom's understanding of natural law. His genealogy posits rights as relying on a particular construction of 'the human' as sovereign and independent, possessing rights 'independently of social and political institutions' (Asad, 2003: 130).<sup>127</sup> This understanding suggests a duality in which an individual can suffer both as a '*national of a particular state*' and as a '*human being*' (ibid: 129). Paradoxically, human rights are concerned only with the suffering of the abstract human being, yet human rights law is meaningless unless enforced by state actors on behalf of citizens. Invoking Hannah Arendt's assertion that human rights depend on national rights – when faced with stateless, persecuted, victimised bodies, Arendt wrote, the world 'found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human' (quoted ibid: 143) – Asad argues that '*sacredness* in the modern secular state is attributed not to real living persons but precisely to "the human" conceptualised abstractly, or imagined in a state of nature'. While the abstract human is the bearer of rights, the '*real person*', or citizen, may be subject to the institutional violence of national and international law, albeit with the suffering this violence causes understood as '*collateral damage*' rather than a violation of an innate right (ibid: 128). As such, one might wonder what kind of 'justice' human rights can achieve.

As we will see below, it is precisely this relationship between state-backed norms and human rights law that the members of the CLC find frustrating. They reject the association of justice with the rule of law when that law, in their eyes, permits sinful behaviour (and restricts godly behaviour) in the name of rights. Yet they also complicate the narrative that sees human rights discourse as Christianity's secular successor. By contrast to this genealogy, my interlocutors stress an assumed distance between Christian Britain's tradition of "tolerance" and the contemporary application of human rights law. Although they willingly ascribed Christian origins to both negative civil liberties and (certain understandings of) positive rights, these were usually distinguished from Britain's post-Human Rights Act "agenda". Andrea, for example, believes that civil liberties such as freedom of speech, worship and association are Christian in origin, and she associates the alleged dismantling of Britain's Christian framework with the corresponding erosion of

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<sup>126</sup> Yvonne Sherwood (2012: 323) posits the popularity of this position as the cultural triumph of the 'Liberal Bible' of John Locke, in which the opening verses of Genesis are understood, contra Sir Robert Filmer's 'Monarchical/Patriarchal Bible', not to justify absolute monarchy but to refute it.

<sup>127</sup> To use the Dumontian (1996: 94) terms of the previous chapter, we might say that the human here conceived is an extreme form of the 'essentially non-social' being.

these liberties. She understands the European Convention to have been “infused” with Christian values prior to its drafting. However, she also worries that the “Christian backdrop”, in her words, that lies behind human rights’ “recognition of human dignity” has been “hijacked by an equality and diversity type approach”.

From Andrea’s perspective, this hijacking has undermined the law’s structural unity, as the secularisation of contemporary rights discourse means that the English courts do not recognise the Bible as a higher power to which to appeal when applying the law (Freeman, 2004: 386-91; see also McCrea, 2010: 53-56, for an overview of the EU Constitutional Treaty drafters’ debates on whether or not to incorporate a reference to the Christian God into the Treaty, and Morsink, 1999: 281-90, for a similar account in relation to the UDHR). She sees the various Articles of the Convention as protecting not one unifying vision of the good, but a number of discrete, individual rights, some of which are ultimately irreconcilable. Without access to God, a ‘God-substitute’ such as Reason or Nature (Freeman, 1994: 498; Morsink, 1999: 282), or a guiding principle to which to appeal in the case of conflicting rights, the pitting of one right against another has led some conservative Christians to understand certain ‘rights’ as being more willingly violated than others. These rights-sceptics associate human rights with an ‘anti-moral agenda’ (Carey, 2011).

During a presentation at a conference called ‘Setting Love in Order: Protecting the freedoms to believe, to exist and to change when homosexual feelings are unwanted’, Andrea spoke of the “confusion of rights language” that had resulted from this failure to define and pursue the United Kingdom’s common good. The conference had been organised by the Core Issues Trust, whose ill-fated bus campaign we explored in Chapter Two. Andrea was one of a number of speakers invited to address the sixty or so delegates, a mix of conservative Christian activists, ex-gay therapists, liberal Christians opposed to ex-gay therapy, journalists, and one Labour politician. Her presentation focused on the potential consequences of the Counsellors and Psychotherapists (Regulation) Bill, a Private Members’ Bill put forward by Labour politician Geraint Davies, which sought to regulate the provision of psychotherapy (and which was generally understood as an attempt to stop the public funding of ex-gay ministries). Standing in the Emmanuel Centre<sup>128</sup> in a candyfloss pink suit and matching lipstick, Andrea combined the passionate oratory of an evangelical preacher with the aesthetics of Jackie O. Arguing that Britain’s constitutional freedoms, which she dated to the Magna Carta<sup>129</sup>, were undone by laws such as that put forward by Mr Davies, she said:

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<sup>128</sup> The Emmanuel Centre is a Christian conference centre in Westminster.

<sup>129</sup> The Magna Carta, or ‘Great Charter’, is a 1215 document that sets out the applicability of the law to all people, including the monarch.

Note that the Magna Carta is not really framed in the language of ‘rights’ ... [A]nd human rights, of course, are actually very confusing, because actually what we need as a society, and what the Magna Carta set down in constitutional terms, was an idea of the common good, of what is good, [which was] founded deeply in the precepts and the principles that are rooted in the Bible, in Christianity.

The embrace of rights, she explained, had led to a situation where “there are competing rights and no idea of what the common good is”, with Bible-believing Christians punished as a result.

Why, then, did the CLC continue to mount challenges framed in the language of rights? Their complicated relationship with rights was summed up by Andrew, the Christian Concern campaign manager, at a presentation he gave at a Baptist church in Surrey in September 2012. The talk, titled ‘The Marginalisation of Christianity in Britain Today’, was delivered just two weeks after our return from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, where the CLC had argued the cases of Shirley Chaplin and Gary McFarlane on the basis of their Article 9 rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. As such, the pros and cons of seeking to enforce one’s rights in the courts were fresh in his mind.

After Andrew’s presentation, which focused on Britain’s recent departure, as he saw it, from traditional Christian values, the floor was opened up to questions or comments. Most, although certainly not all, of those present appeared to be over the age of sixty,<sup>130</sup> and one of the first comments came from a retired social worker. He told us that in the council where he had previously worked, a room had been made available for a Muslim colleague to pray in, but no such concessions had been made for Christians. Andrew responded by pointing out that legalistic religions like Islam were often given preferential treatment, and he explained that this disparity had been one of their arguments in Strasbourg (see Chapter Four). However, he then stated that the decision to seek to enforce one’s rights was “complex”. This was because Christians:

Don’t want to be quick to kind of assert our rights, because we don’t think that’s generally a good [thing], it doesn’t tend to lead to a cohesive society. But I think in some of these cases we need to recognise that and to highlight it, because it shows really that the current approach isn’t working, it’s not even working on its own terms, where it preaches fairness but actually doesn’t seem to reflect that in practice.

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<sup>130</sup> This is neither typical nor atypical of a Christian Concern event. At this particular church, most attendees appeared to be sixty-plus and white British (although some Coptic Christians were also present). However, Christian Concern speakers are also invited to church youth groups, black majority churches, Asian majority churches, etc, and they are as likely to visit churches that meet in community centres as they are nineteenth-century redbricks. In terms of its denominational, age, class, and ethnic make-up, Christian Concern’s support base is extremely broad.

Andrew's response to the retired social worker, though brief, crystallised the theological and legal rationale behind the CLC's reliance on rights-based claims. In the language of the previous two chapters, he began by distinguishing Christianity as a religion of grace rather than law. Second, he recognised that asserting one's rights was not particularly relational. Yet he then advocated doing precisely that. His answer draws attention to the instrumental potential of human rights law, not primarily in terms of its ability to right a wrong or wring justice from inequity – to insist upon the equal treatment of Christian and Muslim employees, for example – but to flag up injustice as evidence of the conceptual bankruptcy of a framework that “preaches fairness but actually doesn't seem to reflect that in practice.”

Andrew encouraged this small, aging pocket of the Kingdom to go against their Christian disinclination to “cry discrimination” by highlighting the benefit of using rights-based language to reveal its own inconsistencies. Like Asad, Andrew recognised that human rights law can be deployed as part of the state's attempt at civilising minority groups, those who reject the norms of their (often colonial) state authorities. But by contrast to Asad's (2003: 158) account, which can be accused of reifying rights as instruments of only ‘the most powerful nation-states’, Andrew suggested that rights discourse could be used to reveal and challenge the inconsistencies of those same state-backed socio-legal norms. In the following section, we will examine *Johns v Derby City Council* and *R v Stephenson & Sloane* as concrete examples of this approach.

### **VI.III Rights and rhetoric**

Conway Hall fell silent as Andrea, the evening's second speaker, took to the lectern. Her presentation followed that of Ann Furedi, BPAS' chief executive, who had argued that although she found no words to be “unsayable” and no images “unshowable”, the right to freedom of speech was “not some kind of charter that allows you to say anything you want, at any time you want, in any place you want.” After thanking the debate organisers for her invitation to speak, Andrea said:

I was... heartened when Ann Furedi said that nothing should be unsayable and no image unshowable, because in a sense I wanted to go to the very heart of what has caused this debate this evening, of why we're here this evening on the eve of the trial of Andy Stephenson and Kathryn Sloane in Brighton Magistrates' Court, charged under the Public Order Act... So, what are the abortion images that Abort67, that Kathryn Sloane and Andy Stephenson are showing? Let's look at them now, shall we? (Christian Concern, 2012).

Andrea pressed ‘play’. Vague murmurings of disapproval – at Andrea from the pro-choice side, at the act of abortion itself from the pro-life side - swept the room as a screen mounted

on the stage began to play a video of a surgical abortion to the three hundred person audience. The video clip, which lasted about a minute and a half, was bloody and graphic. Footsteps at the back of the hall indicated someone leaving the room for its duration. When the clip had finished, Andrea used the screen to show some of the still images used by Andy and Kathryn in their anti-abortion protests, one of which showed dismembered foetal remains, including a foot, on top of coins.<sup>131</sup> Indicating the images – and echoing, perhaps, Asad’s point that sacredness applies not to particular human tissue, but only to ‘the human’ as an abstract category - she continued: “Ann Furedi talks of the right of autonomy for the woman, of the right of choice. But what about the right of that seven week embryo? The right of that little foot?”

Andrea’s decision to spend a portion of her allocated speaking time standing in silence while the audience watched the removal of a dismembered foetus from an anonymous woman’s vagina proves a useful starting point for an exploration of the use of rights-based language to undermine a rights-based framework. Of the four speakers (two of whom were pro-choice and two of whom were pro-life), Andrea’s was the only presentation later accused of deviating from the topic of the debate; whatever her intentions, her video was taken as an attempt to condemn abortion itself rather than as a springboard for a discussion of the ‘rights and limits’ of pro-life protestors (see the report by journalist Sarah Ditum, 2012, a participant on the pro-choice side). However, from Andrea’s perspective, she had shown the video in an attempt to “bring integrity” to a debate that, by focusing on the rights of (born) women and ignoring those of their (pre-born) babies, she felt to be “intellectually dishonest” (quoted *ibid*). Her video sought to show that the evening’s emphasis on rights was representative of the pro-choice constituency’s unwillingness to engage with the real issues at stake.

Attempts to reveal the underlying deceit of the language of rights are not limited to public debates. In fact, accusations of intellectual dishonesty are implicit in many of the arguments put forward by the CLC in their cases, which aim to show that Britain’s alleged commitment to protecting its Christian citizens’ right to religious freedom manifests as little more than lip service. In the following section, I chart the CLC’s efforts to reveal this intellectual dishonesty and “bring integrity” through the case of *Johns v Derby City Council*, which came before the High Court in November 2010,<sup>132</sup> and the Stephenson/Sloane case, which was argued in Brighton Magistrates’ Court in September 2012. I argue that the CLC used these cases to highlight the internal contradictions of a rights-based framework that

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<sup>131</sup> The coins suggested a link to the alleged profiteering of what Abort67 calls “the abortion industry” (although it should be noted that BPAS is a not-for-profit registered charity).

<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to meet Mr and Mrs Johns, who had returned to Jamaica by the time I began my fieldwork.



requires the courts to protect competing, and perhaps mutually exclusive, rights. I further argue that the use of the language of conflicting and differentially applied rights are prime examples of the way in which the CLC constructs conservative Christians as the members of a marginalised counterpublic whose interests are quashed by those of others.

As the circumstances in which the *Johns* case arose are quite unusual, I summarise them here in some detail. In 2007, Eunice and Owen Johns, Jamaican-born Derby residents and members of the Church of the God of Prophecy, applied to Derbyshire Council for approval as short-term foster carers, a position they had previously held without complaint. In the intervening years, however, the regulations governing fostering had changed. In accordance with the Council's fostering guidelines, the application process for prospective foster carers now required them to comment on their ability to support a child who was unsure of their sexuality or identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. According to the social worker who interviewed them, 'both Eunice and Owen expressed strong views on homosexuality, stating that it is "against God's laws and morals"', and when asked how he would support a child who was lesbian or gay, Mr Johns told the interviewer that he would "gently turn them round".<sup>133</sup>

This left the Council staff in something of a bind. On the one hand, they felt unable to approve foster carers whose views on homosexuality seemed to breach the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. On the other hand, they were equally bound by the Equality Act 2006, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion. The application stalled, and the Johns, represented by the CLC, instituted judicial review proceedings against the Council. As no decision had actually been made on the Johns' suitability as foster parents, both parties agreed to make a joint application for declaratory relief, asking the High Court to provide an answer to the following question:

How is the Local Authority as a Fostering Agency required to balance the obligations owed under the Equality Act 2006 (not to directly or indirectly discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief), the obligations under the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 (not to discriminate directly or indirectly based on sexual orientation), the Human Rights Act 1998, the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Derby City Council's Fostering Policy when deciding whether to approve prospective foster carers as carers for its looked-after children. Within that balancing exercise does the Local Authority have a duty to treat the welfare of such looked-after children as its paramount consideration?<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *Johns* at [6-7].

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid* at [26-8].

The question's reference to the Council's having to perform a 'balancing exercise' reflected the by then well-established trope that the duty not to discriminate on grounds of religion or belief and the duty not to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation were diametrically opposed. The impact of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 on adoption and fostering agencies with a religious ethos had taken on an almost iconic status as an example of the tension produced by a system that sought to reconcile both the right to freedom of religion and the right to non-discrimination, an issue deemed especially inflammatory in relation to the welfare of looked-after children (Stychin, 2009: 19). For many conservative commentators, particularly (but not exclusively) those who identified as Christian, the requirement that homosexual and heterosexual couples be treated as legally equivalent by religious adoption agencies and foster parents was understood as an example of religious rights being 'trumped' (Donald et al, 2012: 82-3), with the duty to 'balance' competing rights seen as proof that the relationship between sexual orientation, religion, and the law was actually in a state of *imbalance* (Stychin, 2009: 34).

Indeed, the apparently irreconcilable conflict between these two competing rights was stressed in the CLC's submissions to the High Court. Paul Diamond, Standing Counsel to the CLC, asserted that '[t]he advancement of same sex rights is beginning to be seen as a threat to religious liberty'.<sup>135</sup> He argued that to prioritise the right to non-discrimination over the right to freedom of religion was to issue 'a blanket denial on all prospective Christian foster parents in the United Kingdom', providing local councils with an 'irrebuttable presumption that no Christian (or faith adherent) can provide a suitable home to a child in need of a temporary placement'.<sup>136</sup> Further, Mr Diamond submitted that refusing to recognise the validity of the Johns' position would force Christians '*into the closet*'.<sup>137</sup> He was concerned not only to point out the conflict of rights that had been codified by the various statutory instruments identifying both religion and sexual orientation as protected characteristics, but to use this to paint Christians as a marginalised group at risk of '*second class*' citizen status. In other words, it was not just that individual rights could come into conflict with each other; it was that this would inevitably result in one right being deemed more important, and thus more deserving of protection, than another.

The judges who heard the case, Lord Justice Munby and Mr Justice Bateson, were unimpressed with what they later described as Mr Diamond's 'extravagant rhetoric'.<sup>138</sup> Critiquing his submissions as a 'travesty of the reality',<sup>139</sup> and claiming that parts of his

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid at [33].

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid; emphasis in original.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid at [32].

<sup>139</sup> Ibid at [34].

argument were simply ‘utterly unarguable’,<sup>140</sup> they dismissed the question put before them as too vague to answer. Their strongly worded judgment was interpreted as a stinging rebuke to the parties involved, and, in particular, to Mr Diamond himself. Nor were Justices Munby and Bateson alone in their opinion of the case. Well known legal commentator and journalist Joshua Rozenberg (2011), for example, wrote that Mr Diamond’s performance proved the paradox that ‘it is never a good idea for an advocate to be committed to his or her cause’, further stating that Christian campaign groups ‘should avoid using tendentious arguments in support of claims which are unwinnable’. Even fellow Christians wondered what the CLC had hoped to achieve with the case. One conservative evangelical barrister told me that taking *Johns* had been a strategically unwise decision, while a report by the cross-party group Christians in Parliament (2012: 44-5) criticised the CLC’s reporting of the judgment as misleading. More unforgiving still was Anglican Bishop Alan Wilson (2011), who argued that ‘the customary paranoia of rightwing newspaper op-eds sounds silly in court’.

Yet in spite of these less than positive responses from the legal and religious establishment, there is a sense in which *Johns* ought to be seen as a success. Although the judges declined to rule on the Council’s non-decision and refused to give leave to pursue judicial review, they did state that:

While as between the protected rights concerning religion and sexual orientation there is no hierarchy of rights, there may, as this case shows, be a tension between equality provisions concerning religious discrimination and those concerning sexual orientation. Where this is so, Standard 7 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the Statutory Guidance indicate that it must be taken into account and in this limited sense the equality provisions concerning sexual orientation should take precedence.

From the perspective of those who had argued the case, this statement proved what they had been saying all along: that in a rights-based society which protects discrete, conflicting rights, some rights would take precedence over others. Following the case, the CLC set about exposing the intellectual dishonesty of a judgment which could deny the existence of a ‘hierarchy of rights’ while simultaneously indicating that, in some cases at least, provisions relating to sexuality ‘should take precedence’. In an opinion piece titled ‘Permanent Exclusion and the Johns’ (Williams, 2011a), published on the Christian Concern website, it was the above section of the judgment that allowed Andrea to write:

I hope that the highlighting of the issue in the press will shatter the misconception that the Equality Act means equality for all. Some are very much more equal than

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid at [106].

others. We are currently living in ‘Animal Farm’ days; “All animals are equal, *but some animals are more equal than others*”.

By pitting two protected rights against each other, the CLC had, one might argue, called the human rights project’s bluff. Although no order had actually been made by the court, the CLC could present the judgment as evidence that the context-negation of human rights advocates, in which all rights are presented as being innately held and of equal worth, was mere – and perhaps even extravagant – rhetoric. Some rights would always prove more violable than others. The only question was which value system would be used to decide between them. As the article went on to say, ‘Judges and politicians want to restrict participation in public life to those who subscribe to their values, yet their values appear to be little more than whatever the prevailing politically correct orthodoxy is; fleeting, malleable and unsustainable’ (Williams, 2011a). From this perspective, *Johns* was not a case lost. It was an argument vindicated. It showed that the human rights framework did not work on its own terms; proof that, as Andrew might have said, it “preaches fairness but actually doesn’t seem to reflect that in practice.”<sup>141</sup>

In Mr Diamond’s submissions and in Andrea’s article, conservative Christians are both objectively presented as being and subjectively encouraged to identify with a maligned, marginalised group. These references to perceived oppression ‘[provide] the impetus for the development of a self-consciously oppositional identity’ in relation to what is taken to be an otherwise marginalising public sphere (Felski, 1989: 167), indicating one’s membership in a particular kind of public. Literary critic Michael Warner (2002: 67) defines a ‘public’ as a social form brought into being through circulating discourse, a conglomeration of strangers that exists ‘*by virtue of being addressed*’.<sup>142</sup> As was stressed in Chapter Three, the ideology of the bourgeois public sphere requires this address to be grounded in ‘rational-critical’ discourse, the convincingly disembodied reason of anonymous written texts and their unknown audience of readers. In this imagining, ‘[t]he public is thought... to require persuasion rather than poesis’ (ibid: 115). Some publics, however, are defined through their opposition to the ideological dominance of discourse that presents itself as representing ‘*the public*’. These counterpublics are constituted not only through rational-critical dialogue, but through their appeal to alternative forms of address and engagement, such as the passionate and emotionally stimulating Quranic language of Egyptian reformist preachers (Hirschkind, 2006: 122) or the critique of heteronormativity offered by the comportment of lesbians and gay men (Warner, 2002: 51-2). It is such a counterpublic that the legal arguments and opinion pieces cited above invoke, constituting, as they do, a form of discourse in which

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<sup>141</sup> For an account arguing that the current equality framework privileges religious rights over sexual orientation, see Clucas (2012).

<sup>142</sup> Emphasis in original.

conservative Christians are understood to be defined by their marginal relationship to the dominant public sphere.

Indeed, in Mr Diamond's analysis, Christians are more than simply marginal. They are the victims of an intolerant and ethically bankrupt state which seeks to 'use its coercive powers to de-legitimise Christian belief'.<sup>143</sup> In his portrayal of the situation, Christians suffer the kind of assault on personal integrity that Axel Honneth (1992: 191), in a tripartite account of forms of personal disrespect, describes in terms of a structural exclusion from state benefits,<sup>144</sup> an exclusion premised upon the belief that the injured party lacks 'the same degree of moral accountability as other members of society'. This perceived lack of moral accountability is evident in Mr Diamond's assertion that the Council viewed Christians as second class citizens, those who were not 'fit and proper persons' to foster vulnerable children. These assertions were dismissed by the High Court as unable to satisfy the evidentiary requirements of the law. But by rejecting the norms of dominant public discourse, opting instead to express themselves in forms alien to the preferred rational-critical language of the public sphere in general and the legal system in particular – submitting, instead, claims couched in 'extravagant rhetoric', legally inadmissible assertions such as 'I believe' (see Rozenberg, 2011), and even emotionally arresting videos and images – the textual and photographic record of the CLC's cases, publications, and public pronouncements constitute a body of discourse that simultaneously draws upon and brings into being their counterpublic status. That this discourse is excluded from the court sheds light on the ideology of a legal system that defines religious 'passion' as 'inimical to reason', thereby subjecting it to restraint by secular authorities (Asad, 2003: 67). Cases like *Johns* reveal that in law, as in religion, 'the demand for evidence can be the prerogative of power' (Keane, 2008: 116), with certain kinds of proofs and truth claims – and particularly those couched in the words 'I believe' – quite literally ruled out of court (Sullivan, 2005).

To be sure, to be a member of a conservative Christian counterpublic in twenty-first century Britain is to adopt a subaltern identification by choice, at least in part.<sup>145</sup> The assumed social stigma attached to conservative Christian visions of gender or sexuality is taken on knowingly, particularly given Jesus' warnings about the inevitability of

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<sup>143</sup> *Johns* at [33].

<sup>144</sup> Mr Diamond's submission questioned whether Christians 'can partake in the grant of 'benefits' by the State.'

<sup>145</sup> It must be remembered that Eunice and Owen Johns, who came to England from Jamaica, have also been assigned counterpublic membership on account of factors that are not of their choosing. Indeed, a number of claimants in high-profile Christian discrimination cases, such as Gary McFarlane and Lillian Ladele, are migrants and/or members of minority ethnic groups. As with feminist counterpublics (Felski, 1989: 168-9), groups that construct themselves as being marginal will always include some members who are more marginal than others.

persecution: ‘If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you’ (John 15: 20).<sup>146</sup> Yet the CLC’s counterpublic discourse is more than just ‘the expression of subaltern culture’ (Warner, 2002: 121). This is because, as with any public discourse, counterpublic speech requires the speaker to open their words up to ‘indefinite others’ (ibid). Feminist counterpublics, for example, generate ‘a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women’ while also seeking ‘to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims’ (Felski, 1989: 168; also Fraser, 1995: 293). It is precisely by speaking into this space of unknown discursive circulation that Christian activists hope to convince wider society of the validity of their understanding of the good, even as they simultaneously construct themselves as a marginalised group that exists in opposition to dominant publics.

Can we conclude, then, that the CLC makes what Rozenberg calls ‘tendentious arguments’ while pursuing ‘unwinnable’ claims because it actually hopes to *lose* these cases, thereby vindicating its narrative of marginalisation? Such an analysis is, I believe, unsatisfactory. Although they often *anticipate* loss in the courts, and although they view success primarily in terms of pleasing God (as opposed to courtroom victories), the staff and clients of the CLC firmly believe in both the moral and legal force of their arguments. The fact that God’s economy trumps a judge’s ruling does not mean that this ruling is unimportant. Wins are celebrated and losses mourned, not only because they have a real impact on clients whom the staff has come to know and respect but because they represent months of hard work and hours of fervent prayer. As such, it would be misleading to suggest that rights-based cases are taken with loss as their goal.

But although it would be inaccurate to say that the CLC takes its cases with the specific intention of losing them, it must be recognised that there *is* a benefit to these losses, as they allow the CLC’s staff and supporters to argue that the current approach to rights *does not work on its own terms*. It is hoped that publicising this through the legal system will achieve three interlocking aims. First, it reveals the intellectual dishonesty of the rights-based system, which ought to spark conversations about its lack of foundation or guiding principle. Second, it gives non-Christians a chance to hear a Christian alternative to, for example, universalising understandings of sexuality and gender. Third, it cultivates ‘indignation’ (Niezen, 2010) and encourages other conservative Christians to ‘awake’ and ‘arise’ (Ephesians 5: 14), rallying to the call of Christ and joining Christian Concern as it seeks to put Christ at the heart of the nation. From this perspective, the potential discomfort a client might feel when they “cry discrimination” can be justified as part of a broader strategy of opening up the possibilities for the articulation of an evangelical alternative. As

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<sup>146</sup> Although it is worth remembering that some Christians will reject a ‘choice-model’ understanding of their faith as much as they might reject ‘an essentialising view of sexuality’ (Rivers, 2012: 390).

such, legal activism is part of a two-pronged reform strategy: first, reveal the problems with the current system; second, offer a Christian solution.

Further, the portrayal of conservative Christians as the members of a maligned counterpublic means that the Centre's staff and clients can present their cases as evidence of the law's failure to practice what it preaches even when these cases actually result in victory for the Christians involved, when an alternative reading would suggest that the law had 'balanced' potentially conflicting rights in their favour. It is in relation to this phenomenon that we return to the case of Andy and Kathryn, the Abort67 members who had been arrested under the Public Order Act for displaying graphic abortion images.<sup>147</sup> Founded in 2008, Abort67 is the brainchild of Andy Stephenson, a small, bespectacled man with dark, wispy hair and a permanent five o'clock shadow. A West Sussex resident, Andy formed the group after seeing pictures of aborted fetuses shortly after viewing ultrasound images of his own unborn daughter. Abort67 is the UK branch of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR), a U.S.-based pro-life campaign group, from which they receive advice, resources, and the graphic pictures used in their demonstrations. Named after the Abortion Act 1967, which provides a defence, under certain conditions, to the crime of procuring a miscarriage under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, it presents itself as a public education project that seeks to "expose" abortion.<sup>148</sup> Andy believes that legislative change is dependent upon changing public opinion, and it is for this reason that he displays his banner images, some of which are over eight foot in length, outside abortion clinics, colleges, universities, and government buildings: "Every time we take these pictures out, people's minds are changed about what abortion is."

Although anti-abortion sentiment has existed in the UK since the passing of the 1967 Act (and, of course, before), by the late nineteen-nineties the existence of a largely pro-choice electorate meant that medical ethicist and lawyer Sally Sheldon (1997: 2) could write that 'those who continue to kick against [the status quo] – be they pro- or anti-choice activists – are cast as marginal extremists', with attempts to export the more 'violent' tactics of American organisations such as Operation Rescue deemed 'largely unsuccessful'. By the time of Andy and Kathryn's trial, however, this account seemed somewhat out of date. Abort67's confrontational approach – the group prioritises "unborn lives" over "born

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<sup>147</sup> Andy had been arrested under section 5 of the Public Order Act in June 2011 after refusing to remove a particularly graphic banner from an Abort67 demonstration. He was also charged, along with colleague Kathryn Sloane, with obstructing a police officer under section 19 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. A CBR newsletter later referred to Andy and Kathryn as having 'forced' the arrest in an effort 'to set up a test case in which to establish the right to expose the horror of abortion' (Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, 2012).

<sup>148</sup> Abort67 is not affiliated to any church. Andy, however, is an evangelical Christian. Andy's church, Jubilee Community Church, Worthing, has been the target of counter-protests by an opposing group, Brighton Pro-Choice.

feelings” – and explicit link to the California-based CBR had led to its being associated with attempts to (re)politicise the issue of abortion in a way reminiscent of America’s abortion ‘culture wars’ (see Ginsburg, 1989), with increasingly polarised rhetoric mobilised by both pro-choice and pro-life advocates as a result (as highlighted by the press; see Kinchen, 2012; Quinn, 2012; 2011). Andy and Kathryn’s June 2011 arrests were seen as part of this increasing tension.

The case was heard in one of Brighton Magistrates’ Court’s modest courtrooms. It was a far cry from the gleaming glass and steel of the European Court of Human Rights, where the CLC had argued the cases of Shirley Chaplin and Gary McFarlane just weeks earlier. Courtroom number two’s public gallery consists of two rows of wooden benches upholstered in leather the colour of pea soup, the former occupants of which have scrawled messages in the soft wooden railing separating the gallery from the courtroom proper. Sitting amidst the ghosts of previous spectators – ‘Carina + Beth woz ere 03’, ‘Dawn H. 21.9.91’ – I watched the CLC team use the language of rights to reinforce the conservative counterpublic in a different way than they had done in *Johns*. While *Johns* had suggested that the right to freedom of religion was trumped by the rights of sexual minorities, this case argued that the right to free speech did not seem to apply to Christian groups, with other organisations – such as anti-Zionists and animal rights activists – apparently given free rein to use graphic images in their protests.

The assertion that Christians were treated less favourably than others when it came to enforcing their rights was made particularly forcefully by Paul Diamond during his cross-examination of one of the arresting Police Constables (PCs), whom I will call PC Thompson. Mr Diamond suggested that PC Thompson had made the decision to remove the banner based not on the criteria of the Public Order Act, which requires the expression under consideration to be insulting, abusive, or threatening, and to have caused harassment, alarm, or distress as a result, but on the basis of her own personal dislike of the image. There’s nothing more frightening, he told the judge, than the “personal predilection” of a police officer arbitrarily determining the limits of free speech. Having apparently lost none of the rhetorical flair for which he was chastened in *Johns*, he suggested that PC Thompson had acted as though she were in “Putin’s Russia.”<sup>149</sup> *Were other campaign groups harassed in the way that Abort67 had been?*, he asked. *Were the graphic images used by pro-Palestine campaigners subject to the same level of scrutiny as the graphic images used by Abort67?* Producing an A4 image of the mutilated bodies of deceased Palestinian children, which had apparently been used at an anti-Zionist rally, Mr Diamond placed the photograph into PC Thompson’s hands. As she began to cry, the judge called a short recess.

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<sup>149</sup> A remark which the judgment records as being “uncalled for”.



Nor were photographs of these broken bodies the only images submitted as evidence in the Abort67 trial. Throughout the case, the CLC argued that Abort67's pictures were no more graphic than many of the images exposed to the general public through newspapers, television news reports, and government campaigns. Indeed, Andy had compiled some of these graphic, bloody, and otherwise disturbing images into a book, a copy of which was given to the judge. The defence went through the images one by one: a front-page newspaper article about the death of Muammar Gaddafi illustrated with a picture of his corpse; a *Time* magazine cover depicting a woman whose nose and ears had been cut off by the Taliban; images of cancerous lungs and diseased hearts taken from government-sponsored anti-smoking campaigns. This evidence suggested that it was not all graphic or bloody images that were policed. It was only graphic or bloody images that threatened what Andrea's article had called 'the prevailing politically correct orthodoxy' (cf. Asad, 2003).

These counterpublic submissions both challenged the otherwise staid discourse of the court and confirmed Andy's membership in a group that existed, at least partially, outside of this normative order. Indeed, it is precisely because they are seen to challenge the pro-choice majority that Abort67 seeks to display their images. As with the image that reduced PC Thompson to tears, the pictures ask the observer to recognise the foetus as a 'sympathy-deserving suffering human', thereby obliging them to act on its behalf (Allen, 2009: 162). During questioning, Andy explained that although he knew the images were disturbing, they were part of an opinion-changing strategy that had been used by social reformers since at least the eighteenth century. Citing the graphic images used by evangelicals William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson in their campaign against the slave trade, he argued that Abort67 was consciously following in the footsteps of a long line of social campaigners who had now lost their subaltern status. In the case of slavery, the opinion of a maligned minority, which had upset and disturbed the Britons of the day with their graphic portrayal of the unconscionability of the slave trade, had now become the opinion of the public at large.

Both Andy and Kathryn were acquitted. Here, then, we see the pragmatic benefit of 'legal theology' (J. L. Comaroff, 2009), in which secular legal structures are used towards Christian ends. Activists like Andy and Kathryn feel justified in standing on their rights because it is through doing so that they can, in Biblical terms, 'Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins' (Isaiah 58:1). In this sense, they are following in the footsteps not only of Wilberforce, but of the Apostle Paul, who used his rights as a Roman citizen to enable his preaching (Acts 22:22-28). These historical comparators help cement the narrative of marginalisation that brings into being the Centre's counterpublic status. While other readings of their victory might suggest that the law, in this case at least, *did* work on its own

terms – that although the police had been wrong to arrest Andy and Kathryn, the courts had rectified this injustice by finding them not guilty – the references to eighteenth-century social reformers allied Abort67 with an historic counterpublic, confirming their emic understanding of themselves as maligned but righteous crusaders who had been unfairly detained for speaking truth – or Truth - to power.

Finally, by invoking a counterpublic that had now lost its minority status, the case offered a concrete example of the ways in which the views of a counterpublic could become those of society at large. For many of the evangelical activists I met during my fieldwork, reformers like William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson have an iconic status as Christians whose faith inspired them to change society for the better, even when their reformist causes made them unpopular in their day (a status they also hold for American activists: see Minnery, 2001: 112-6; Colson, 2007: 106-121). As I was told by Louise, one of Christian Concern’s finance officers, Wilberforce is such an important figure in evangelical activism because he is proof that no matter how deeply integrated an evil is into the political, economic, and social system of the day, sustained activism by godly men and women can eventually end its practice: *no matter how bleak things appear, God can always turn things around*. This understanding of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade is, of course, almost offensively white-washed. For all I heard about the importance of Wilberforce and Clarkson during my time with evangelical activists, I never heard mention of the role of slave-led revolts against British colonists, nor their impact on the political economy of the slave trade. However, the near apotheosis of Wilberforce is important precisely because of what he is thought to say about the relationship between an unpopular position and that of the dominant public. His invocation both highlighted the virtue of Andy and Kathryn’s actions and critiqued the inequity of the current legal framework, which had appeared to oppose them. All this in spite of the fact that, in this case at least, their rights had actually been upheld.

The ethnographic record shows that conservative Christian activists are not the only members of human rights ‘cultures’ who regard rights discourse with a dose of scepticism. Tobias Kelly (2011: 728), for example, claims that ‘[d]oubt marked the corridors and meeting rooms of [the United Nations building in] Geneva’, while Annelise Riles (2006: 55) writes that many of the elite academics, bureaucrats, and human rights activists among whom she carried out research displayed ‘a profound and sophisticated scepticism about various aspects of the human rights regime – its theoretical claims, its institutional practices, and its archetypal subjectivities.’ And yet, this did not stop them from “‘doing” human rights work’ in its various guises: teaching academic courses on rights; serving as expert witnesses; training others in human rights technologies; producing human rights documents (ibid: 56). What is one to make of this apparent contradiction? In Riles’ analysis, human rights must be

understood as an area of legal knowledge in which the dominant understanding of the law, particularly among the U.S. trained lawyers and activists among whom she worked, is a technocratic, instrumentalist one: ‘The phrase “law is a means to an end” or “law is an instrument” appears hundreds of times in the canonical texts of modern U.S. jurisprudence’ (ibid: 59). Given that they must adopt this instrumentalist approach in their day jobs as lawyers, legal academics, and bureaucrats, her informants’ critique of the claims of so-called human rights ““true believers”” are ultimately ineffective, as they are made by those whose own daily lives lead them to see such critique as ‘leisurely nonaction, as opposed to professional, up-to-the-minute instrumental action’ (ibid: 55-61). In other words, their ‘critique of legal tools’ was easily transformed into ‘a tool of legal critique’ (ibid: 61).

Riles’ analysis suggests that it is particularly difficult to challenge the human rights project using the tools of elite critical lawyers, bureaucrats, and scholars: ‘critique and irony’. This chapter has asked how such a challenge might fare when mounted by a very different set of critical lawyers with very different conceptual problems with the human rights project. Although one reading of their use of human rights language might see it ‘as an instance of unwitting accommodation to the cunning of secular liberal reason’ (Casanova, 2006: 27), I want to suggest that these test cases can and do contribute to a meaningful critique of rights discourse by revealing the inequity of the law as a site for public discourse. *Johns*, for example, upset the norms of privacy and publicity that regulate sexuality and religion in the United Kingdom, revealing that the domestication and privatisation of both faith and sex – characteristics which the bourgeois public sphere might want to see bracketed during the public use of one’s reason (Habermas, 2002: 36; Calhoun, 1992: 13) – works to bolster the exclusionary practices of public space. As with the queer and feminist counterpublics studied by Warner (2002), Fraser (1995), and Felski (1989), which show that patriarchal heteronormativity is perpetuated through the refusal to recognise that the personal is political, cases that pit these ostensibly private rights against each other show them to have an inevitably public component in which some rights – and, therefore, the groups to which those rights adhere – can be portrayed as being ‘more equal than others’ (Williams, 2011a).

As noted above, Asad (2003: 138) is undoubtedly correct to highlight the problematic relationship between state norms and human rights, in which ‘an unresolved tension [remains] between the invocation of “universal humanity” and the power of political authorities charged with maintaining the law’. In his analysis, rights become ‘floating signifiers’ to be attached and detached according to the needs of powerful states and capitalist expansion (ibid: 158), with particularly devastating effects on the (often non-Western, non-Christian) people to whom state violence is eventually displaced. In the words of José Casanova (2006: 28), this is a ‘stark picture of the secular, liberal democracy, and the

human rights regime, all blurred into an undifferentiated totality of Western modernity'. But as Casanova has argued in relation to the Catholic Church's embrace of universal rights, and as my data supports, rights discourse does not only serve to legitimise the norms of the state. Rather, cases like *Johns* show a religious tradition 'confronting' secular law, challenging it to face its 'own obscurantist, ideological, and unauthentic claims' (Casanova, 1994: 234). These cases destabilise understandings of modernity in which public law and private morality are, for ideological reasons, held separate (Casanova, 2006: 27). The legal establishment's rubbishing of *Johns* notwithstanding, I would argue that the fact that it was heard at all suggests that it is the context-negation of human rights theory, and not – or at least not only - the overwrought language of Mr Diamond that has been revealed as 'extravagant rhetoric'.

#### **VI.IV Conclusion: rootless rights**

Does it matter that 'human rights doctrine either is not or cannot be theoretically founded' (Freeman, 1994: 500)? For those who believe human rights to have their origins in the intellectual legacy of Christianity, it just might. Wolterstorff (2008), for example, suggests that secularisation might lead to a lessening in the moral force of rights-based theories of justice, as the widespread adoption of a non-theological anthropology might lead to a dereliction of the duties we owe one another as the loved creations of a loving, relational God. Contra rights critics, Wolterstorff (ibid: 389) argues that inherent rights are not individualistic or selfish per se – indeed, he understands rights, as duties owed in relationship, to have an inbuilt sociality (ibid: 4) - but become so only through their misuse: 'We twist the culture of rights to our malign impulses'. Were we to forget their divine sociality, rights might indeed find themselves at risk, with 'secular advocates of equal rights' as foolish as 'children who see beautiful flowers, grab them, break them at their stems, and try to transplant them without their roots' (Pojman, 1991: 496).

For the staff of the CLC, there is some truth in this assessment. If the European Convention's recognition of human dignity is thought to flow from Europe's Christian heritage (however loosely defined), then one might suspect that the lessening of the moral force of Christianity might result in the lessening of the moral weight attached to human rights. However, this narrative is complicated by the way these 'broken flowers' are understood to have been replanted in secular soil. In a reworking of Wolterstorff's suggestion that a societal decrease in belief in the Biblical God might go hand in hand with a general decrease in those who agitate for justice on the basis of inherent rights, Andrea and her team seem to see the human rights project as representing, if not actually *enabling*, Britain's increasing rejection of what they deem to be Biblical values. In this way, the Convention is simultaneously posited as the result of Europe's somewhat ill-defined

Christian heritage - an instrument “infused” with Christian values – and a sign of its departure from these Biblical beliefs.

Indeed, the staff of the Centre might go further still. As Andrea put it to a church group in 2009, Britain’s embrace of the human rights project not only challenges Biblical beliefs, but erodes the protections they ought to enjoy in law:

I was called to the Bar in 1988, and it is astonishing to see how [Britain’s Christian foundations] have been eroded that rapidly. And what is the core philosophy at the heart of the law that has eroded those freedoms? It is the philosophy of human rights. The philosophy of human rights is founded on humanist principles, the idea that human conduct should be based on natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural knowledge, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end to all thought and action (Christian Concern, 2009).

Here, then, we return to the issue highlighted by Carrie at the beginning of this chapter, the question of Truth (and who defines it). In the above quotation, the legal system’s embrace of rights shows Britain to have entered a world in which the limited knowledge of the created is prioritised over and above the limitless wisdom of the Creator, where fleeting pleasures are chosen over lasting glory. In this world, rights are representative of the rejection of Jesus Christ and all that flows from Him - goodness, joy, and stability – and the priority this rejection attaches to individualism, selfishness, and the empty gratification of the here and now. In Biblical terms, the embrace of a rights-based legal system shows Britain to have committed the ‘two evils’ of Jeremiah 2:13: it has forsaken God, ‘the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for [itself], broken cisterns that can hold no water’.

I once asked Andrew whether or not the CLC’s use of human rights law amounted to, as I put it then, “having your cake and eating it too”. He responded by reminding me that having a law to which one could not appeal was tantamount to having no law at all (confirming, as Andrea had done, that one must work within the limits of the legal framework). But there was more to it legal theology than that. As he went on to explain, “there’s something in rights”, even when one is “trying to redefine or prompt people to rethink how they conceive rights”. It is this ‘something’ that this chapter has hoped to explore. After all, despite their criticism of legal human rights, the staff and clients of the CLC believe that all people have innate rights as a result of their being made in the image of God. Their worry, however, is that society has embraced a rights-based system without understanding the origin of these rights or the responsibilities that might accompany them. Rather than grounding them in a notion of the common good based on the teachings of the Bible, rights had become individual, fragmented, and mutually exclusive. Christian activists do not doubt that many of the people involved in secular rights activism are seeking to

improve a fallen world. It is simply that, without the fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

It is for this very reason that the Centre instrumentalises the language of rights in their legal arguments. To put it another way, constructing rights as if they were, as Carl Stychin (2009: 34) puts it, a ‘zero sum game’ is part of Christian Concern’s mission to show that only a society built upon the Truths of the Bible is capable of delivering the kinds of goods that many secular proponents of human rights might identify as underlying their own vision of a flourishing society: the pursuit of the common good grounded in a recognition of the dignity of the human being. As such, and whether an individual case is won or lost, counterpublic language always works to supply the Centre with further evidence of the marginal status of conservative Christians in twenty-first century Britain, thus proving, from their perspective, that a rights-based society fails to practice the equality of rights it preaches.

Ambiguity, however, remains. Warner (2002: 63) argues that counterpublics are inevitably ‘damaged forms of publicness’, distorted by virtue of their relationship of subordination to dominant public discourse. The idea of a ‘damaged’ form of publicity has some purchase here, for as we have seen in previous chapters, the problem with using rights to undermine rights is that, in the end, it is rights talk – and not God talk – that takes centre stage. When Christian activists respond in kind to the rights-based agenda they hope to counter, these activists might end up reinforcing the structures they wish to contest. The *Abort67* case, for example, ensured that Andy and Kathryn’s right to “expose” abortion was upheld. But it also risked them being seen to have bought into the individualist, atomistic culture they sought to challenge, the very problem highlighted by Luke and James in the previous chapter. In other words, as Sally Engle Merry (2009: 267) puts it in the context of culturally ‘translating’ rights-based anti-domestic violence initiatives, ‘resonance is a costly choice’.

To return to the counterpublics of gender and sexuality mentioned above, one might see in the CLC’s use of human rights language the same problems that some feminists and queer theorists have with campaigns that seek to ‘normalise’ queer lifeways – that by adopting the terminology and structures of already existing institutions, particularly those which are already problematic, the possibility of radically restructuring human relationships was either lost or made ‘harder than ever to articulate’ (Warner, 1999: 93). As such, although I have argued that they use rights claims in an effort to undermine the fragmenting impact of a rights-based system, others – including, as we saw in the previous chapter, my church friends – might see in them the difficulty experienced by Riles’ elite rights critics, who, though seeking to challenge the structures of rights discourse, ultimately reproduced it.

Whether the reader follows my etic analysis, in which the CLC's use of rights can be seen as a meaningful critique, or the emic approach of the rights-wary evangelicals outlined in the previous chapter, in which activists might be undermining their own evangelistic goals, it is worth stressing that the CLC's concern with human rights remains a collective concern, another facet of the value of relationalism. In the end, what matters is not the wording of the European Convention or the results of their cases, but the universal applicability of divine Truth. Carrie, the Christian Concern events manager who found Conway Hall's interior decor to be somewhat lacking, offers a useful reflection on this issue. The concept of Truth was of great importance to Carrie, who had attended charismatic evangelical West Indian-majority churches since the age of five. It was at church that she first learned that her strange nocturnal encounters – the especially vivid nightmares, the creatures she saw moving in her room, the out-of-body experiences in which she saw her body resting motionless in bed even as she felt herself “just flying, flying around” – were the result of demonic activity, and it was only through her relationship with Jesus that she was able to recognise and overcome these demonic forces. A decade later, it was her Christian faith that enabled her to identify and resist the subtle nudging of the devil when he encouraged her, as she sat on the bus to school, to take her own life. This prompted Carrie, then a teenager whose faith had become “a nominal thing”, to recommit herself to Jesus, declaring: “I'm going to follow You Lord, I'm not going to treat this as a nominal thing... I can't afford to.”

From Carrie's perspective, then, the world contains good and evil, Truth and falsity, God's Word and the devil's promptings, and it was essential that one be able to distinguish between the two. A philosophy that elevated the individual fulfilment of created men and women over the divine law of their Creator failed to do this, and it was ultimately its perceived rejection of Christian Truth that underlay Carrie's opposition to the human rights project. Sitting on a crowded London Overground train on our way home from the BPAS debate, Carrie and I continued chatting about the implications of Abort67's protests. Competing rights, however, were not how Carrie framed the issue. Wistfully, she turned to me and said: “Wouldn't it be wonderful if we lived in a world where no one had abortions? ... We've gone away from [God's] original plan, and we've created our own understanding of right and wrong. And that's scary.”

## Chapter Seven: On Judgment

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*  
(Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14).

### VII.I Sheep from goats

On the second Wednesday of every month, Christ Church holds its monthly prayer meeting. The meeting begins with “fellowship”, that is, with the church family sharing a meal. Men and women,<sup>150</sup> many of whom will be wearing the formal clothes that mark them as having come straight from work, congregate in the church lounge from 7pm. Dropping £2.50 into a small bowl, they collect a plate of food from the volunteer cooks in the church kitchen before sitting at one of the collapsible tables that have been set up in the lounge. With prayers set to begin at 8pm, the meal is often a rushed affair; church apprentices hover over latecomers with j-cloths and bottles of cleaning fluid, urging them to finish eating and let them wipe down and fold away the plastic tables. Unlike Sunday services, which take place in the church proper (that is, in the obviously ecclesiastical heart of the building, complete with its wooden pews, whitewashed walls, and stained glass windows), the monthly prayer meeting takes place in the lounge, the walls of which are decorated with pictures of the church’s children’s groups, information about the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad, and a graph that charts, in pinks and purples, the nation’s declining church attendance from 1980 to 2010. It is here that one will find the small Christian bookstall and the doors leading to the toddler and baby crèches, and it is here that the congregation sits on stackable plastic chairs during the monthly prayer gathering.

One Wednesday evening in the autumn of 2013, the meeting began with a short sermon given by Chris, a Bible college student in his early twenties. Chris, who is fresh faced, blond haired, and of slim build, explained that we would be focusing on the “glorious and yet devastating reality” contained in three words that we often said, but less often dwelt on: “Your Kingdom come.” Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we pray for God’s Kingdom to come; but do we know what we are praying for? Chris read aloud from Matthew 25, which describes the final judgment of the world:

Before [King Jesus] will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ ...

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<sup>150</sup> Children do not attend the prayer meeting, and the parents of young children are often absent due to childcare responsibilities. Attendance tends to peak at about ninety to one hundred.



Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' (Matthew 25:32-34; 41).

For "believers", Chris explained, this was a wonderful Truth. "We deserved prison, but before we were born, God prepared paradise." We should live our lives in anticipation of this last judgment. "But not everybody is preparing for that day." On that day, all evil and sin will be judged and destroyed, "and that includes the judgment of unbelievers... Every time we pray 'Your Kingdom come' on a Sunday, we're praying that this day would come." It was, Chris confessed, an almost "unbearable" thought.

While many in emergent evangelical circles are increasingly rejecting the 'threat of a fiery damnation' (Luhmann, 2012b: 105), hell remains a "devastating reality" for my conservative evangelical friends. As phrased in an oft-sung hymn, it is the 'hope of heaven or the fear of hell' (Townsend, 2009) that prompts their desire to evangelise. Indeed, it was for this very reason that Chris invoked Judgment Day on that cold November evening, reminding his listeners that the only difference between the saved and the damned was that the saved had heard and accepted the Gospel, which can "snatch unbelievers out of hell". And although hell was certainly not the most preached subject at Christ Church, it did receive a significant amount of airtime, with Luke, the minister, arguing that it was the believer's "responsibility" to warn non-Christians of the judgment to come: "this requirement to sound this warning is not mine alone. With love, with gentleness, with sensitivity, we need to speak, not only of God's kindness, but of God's judgment on those who refuse His kindness."

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that Christians are concerned with their and others' eternal destinies (although cf. Cannell, 1999). But while the judgment of individual souls is of critical importance, these are not the only judgments made by God. Nations, too, can be judged - and judged harshly - for their failure to submit to God's Word. It is the relationship between submission and judgment - both individual and corporate - that is the subject of this chapter. I argue that, for my interlocutors, the righteous judgment that assigns an individual to hell is the ultimate result of a distorted understanding of freedom, one that valorises individual autonomy even as it leads to a slavish relationship with the world, the flesh and the devil. By contrast, evangelicals construct true freedom as submission to God's "good pattern" for living, through which one can be liberated from the bonds of sin and death.

The chapter begins with an explanation of the conservative evangelical doctrine of hell, which presents the judgment of sin as a manifestation of God's justice or righteousness. I argue that the repentance necessary for salvation can best be understood as the cultivation

of an attitude of submission to the Word of God. As I have argued throughout the thesis, submission to Biblical authority is the ultimate value to which my interlocutors – who I frame as being, in theory, value monists - orient themselves. This subjectivity of submission is constructed in emic terms as being at odds with the emphasis on individual autonomy dominant in secular London.

I then present two examples of the relationship between freedom and submission. The first of these, which focuses on the doctrine of women's submission in church and family life, uses one church member's changing appreciation of male headship to explore the ways in which submission is constructed as a means of living as one has been "designed". In this Biblicised vision of positive liberty (Berlin, 1966), fulfilment comes from realising one's divinely ordained role in the created order. While this first example outlines the perceived benefits of submission, my second focuses on the results of a failure to do so. Shifting the ethnographic focus back to my activist interlocutors, I draw on three conversations held over the course of one day to suggest that the eventual judgment of individual nonbelievers is related to the corporate judgment of the nation, which has opened itself up to attack through its rejection of Biblical principles. As such, the refusal to accept "God's good design" for men and women risks judgment on two temporal axes, one immediate and one eternal. I conclude by stressing that although "judgment" has multiple resonances for conservative Christians, it is God's ability to judge individual souls that remains the source of greatest anxiety for those who view their efforts at evangelism as inevitably imperfect and incomplete.

## **VII.II Deadly weapons**

To understand how conservative evangelicals conceive of the righteousness of God's judgment, I now turn to a church service that took place in the summer of 2013. The 11am service that morning was less well attended than usual; it being August, many of the families that usually filled the church on Sunday mornings had taken advantage of the school holidays to leave London for a week or two. Still, a sizeable number of children dutifully trotted to the front of the church when Josh, a solidly built man in his mid-twenties, called them forward. Josh, like Chris, is a Bible college student and church apprentice. He had been tasked that morning with leading the Children's Spot, a five minute Bible teaching session exclusive to the 11 o'clock service, which takes place before the children are sent to their various Sunday School classes. The Children's Spot involves the interactive exposition of a Bible verse, which is explained through jokes, pictures, and props. Although it is clearly aimed at younger members of the congregation, with those coming forward usually aged between three and eight, it was often the adults who laughed longest at the skits and games (particularly when they evoked theologically questionable responses from the children).

Josh was due to teach an extract from Psalm 7:12-13: 'If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.' Producing a plastic bag, he asked the children to guess what was inside. It was an easy question for experts seasoned by years of Sunday School teaching and its attendant props, and the children quickly deduced that it contained a (toy) bow and arrow. Holding them up for our examination, Josh asked: "isn't it surprising that God says... He's prepared His deadly weapons? I think it's very surprising." Why would God do such a thing? "Is He nasty? Is He a monster?" Josh explained that God had prepared His deadly weapons because he was "just", and His justice required Him to punish sin. He was *so* good, *so* just, and *so* righteous that He simply couldn't bear to let sin go unpunished. "It's a frightening thought," Josh continued, "and it's meant to be." Still holding the contents of the bag aloft, he asked his audience how they would respond if someone approached them holding a bow and arrow, poised to shoot. "You'd say, 'don't shoot!'" It was this plea, Josh suggested, that was at the heart of repentance, and therefore at the core of Christian conversion. We all deserve to be punished for our sin – *we all deserve to suffer God's deadly weapons* - but if we repent and believe in Jesus, He will lower His bow.

As Josh explained that August morning, God's ontological incapacity to tolerate sin means that hell is the rightful penalty due an unrepentant sinner. Indeed, it is a sentence so righteous that even the damned accept its legitimacy: those in hell feel regret, but no sense of injustice. But while this particular Children's Spot defined repentance primarily in immediate, negative terms – a once-and-for-all act that functioned as a sort of 'get out of hell free' card - it is equally an ongoing, positive aspiration. Repentance can refer to both the moment of Christian conversion and to the daily struggle to cultivate a sense of self defined by one's submission to God's will (see Erzen, 2006, for an interesting account of the way in which 'falls' or lapses are built into conversion). As understood in this context, submission is the means by which life is lived to the fullest, for fulfilment can only ever be achieved by living according to God's Word.<sup>151</sup> This is so even when His Word is difficult to understand or accept. In fact, this is so *especially* when His Word is difficult to accept, for men and women, even those who have been born again in Jesus Christ, are naturally sinful beings.

Although framed in terms of obedience to a divine law that is, on occasion, painful to live out, the submissive ideal evident at Christ Church is equally bound up with the pursuit of a certain understanding of freedom. Freedom is, in this sense, positive, the relevant question being 'not 'What am I free to do or be?', but 'By whom am I ruled?' or 'Who is to say what I am, and what I am not, to be or do?'" (Berlin, 1966: 15). Efforts to

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<sup>151</sup> This does not mean, of course, that the Bible should be approached as a "rule-book". Submission to the Word is an attitude that ought to impact one's entire life, not only those areas where direct commandments are given.

submit to God's Word reflect a desire to be one's most Christlike self, the potential self who has mastered the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. To this end, church members encourage one another to "sit under the authority of Scripture" as a means of liberating themselves from the sin to which they were previously enslaved. In the words of *Grill a Christian* (Carswell, 2011: 108), an evangelistic booklet I was lent and encouraged to read by Lucy, the answer to the question 'Doesn't Christianity take away my freedom?' was that 'True freedom is found in God'. The 'true freedom' one could find in God was often juxtaposed with the counterfeit freedom promoted by the false teachers and deceptive ideologies of this sinful age, which, by suggesting that human beings were capable of determining right from wrong without divine input, framed God's authority as a threat to human autonomy. Yet the so-called liberation they offered always seemed to manifest as slavery to the sinful desires of fallen men and women; and as Josh's bow and arrow powerfully reminded us, the wages of sin were death.

This framing of freedom is not, of course, unique to conservative evangelicals. It is a feature of ethical self-fashioning among diverse religious groups, Abrahamic and otherwise (Laidlaw, 2014: 154; see Laidlaw, 2002, for an example of Jain self-fashioning). But to remain, for the moment, within the Christian tradition, the paradoxical ideal of freedom through submission is beautifully captured in the vocation narrative of Abby, a nineteen year old Catholic postulant, recorded in Rebecca Lester's (2005: 218) ethnography of a Mexican convent:

Yes, I'm here inside a convent, and perhaps I should think, 'No! I'm incarcerated!' But it's something, I don't know. People on the outside view it differently. They think, 'how can you stand being incarcerated?' I'm not incarcerated! I feel *free*. *Free*. Absolutely free. There are so many things I've let go of, worldly things that were weighing me down. And now I feel so *light*, as we say. Free.

As with the question in Lucy's book, which acknowledged that, for those looking in on the Christian life, submission to God's standards might seem restrictive, Abby rejected the assumption that her freedom was best guaranteed outside of the nunnery. Instead, she viewed her acceptance of its strict rules as a chance to live as she had been called by God. Her physical restriction, then, enabled her spiritual liberation, with the convent walls setting her free to embrace her true identity as a Bride (and, indeed, daughter and mother) of Christ; a vocation marked out for her 'since *the dawn of creation*' (ibid: 208; italics in original). Similarly, sermons at Christ Church often stressed the joyful liberation that Christians could experience in "being who you are": forgiven children of God, those who had been freed from the power of sin and the terrible wages it earned. As James once said, "true freedom, no matter what we see on our television screens or read in the papers, comes only in

submission to Christ, God's King." He urged those who had not yet submitted to Christ's rule not to tarry, for the Bible warned that "a violent conquest will have to be imposed" against those who refused to acknowledge His Lordship.

Church members often reminded each other, in words attributed to the influential evangelical preacher John Stott, that one must *abhor one's sin* before one could *adore one's Saviour*. Naomi, the relationally-minded optician introduced in Chapter Five, offers a useful example of both the initial recognition of one's inherent sinfulness and the commitment, renewed daily, to repent of it through submission to the Word. Having grown up in a Christian home, she had memorised John 3:16 as a child: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'. Still, it was only at the age of seven that she "really" understood the Gospel message. This moment of revelation came when her mother set a plate of Fig Rolls – biscuits filled with sweet fig paste - before Naomi and her sister, telling the girls they could each have two. Naomi soon reached for a third. When she later denied this act of disobedience, her sister was punished in her stead. It was at this moment that Naomi finally understood what she'd been hearing for years: she was, by her very nature, "a sinner", and she needed to repent before it was too late. Ever since that day, Naomi had tried to live a life of submission to the legitimate authorities in her life: her parents; her pastors; but most of all, her Bible.

When I once expressed to her my belief that the Bible was the work of human, rather than divine, authorship, Naomi responded with great surprise: "*really?*" Seeking to explain her utter confidence in its transcendent nature, she recounted how, for a brief spell at university, she had tried to ignore the authority of the Word.<sup>152</sup> She began to live "as if" God weren't there. But this thought experiment left her feeling empty. It confirmed that the Bible's commands functioned not to limit her freedom, but to liberate her from the power of sin. From Naomi's perspective, the speed with which her peace returned when she resubmitted herself to God's authority (as expressed in His Word) proved that the Scriptures could not have been the work of human minds alone.

As such, conservative evangelicals are keen to cultivate what might be termed a subjectivity of submission, one in which selfhood is defined, ideally, by willing deference *to* and increasing identification *with* both the letter and spirit of God's Word. Rejecting the 'individualistic... conception of man' associated with negative liberty (Berlin, 1966: 12), Christians seek not only to follow (what they take to be) Biblical commands, but to be men and women whose goals and desires, through the supernatural impact of the Spirit and a growing awareness of the depth of one's own natural depravity, come progressively into line

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<sup>152</sup> Narratives of attempting to live "as if" God weren't there are common in the testimonies of those who have been raised in Christian homes. These stories reinforce the significance of making a personal choice for Christ.

with them. They seek to cultivate an inability to act against God's Word such that what might once have been the outcome of a process of deliberation – a reflection upon whether or not one's character allowed one to perform a certain behaviour – becomes internalised as 'plain (almost physical) incapacity' (Laidlaw, 2014: 153). Such an ethical project presupposes the existence of 'reflective freedom' (that is, the ability to step back and evaluate second-order volitions) even as it deploys this freedom in such a way that, if successful, it would cease to exist in the future (ibid: 177).

In practice, of course, this level of complete identification with God's Word is never actually reached. The successful avoidance of sin, on those occasions when it is achieved, tends to remain at the level of the Christian's conscious decision-making process. As the corporate recitation of a prayer of confession at the beginning of every church service shows, developing a genuine inability to go against God's Word is thought impossible even in theory, with the members of Christ Church rejecting a belief in absolute sanctification in favour of a more Puritan vision of the elect's ongoing, albeit imperfect, progress in the Christian walk (Bebbington, 1989: 60-1).<sup>153</sup> But the fact of its impossibility did not negate the constant push to 'be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). Indeed, one of the most popular books sold by the church bookstall in the spring of 2013 was the American theologian Kevin DeYoung's *The Hole in Our Holiness* (2012), which accuses reformed evangelicals of being so wary of charges of legalism that they are at risk of ignoring God's demands for purity: 'There is nothing un-Protestant about stressing the need for personal holiness... [Don't] be so scared of works-righteousness that you make pale what the Bible writes in bold colours' (ibid: 29-30). By DeYoung's reckoning – and, indeed, as Laidlaw's (2014: 169-178) comparative accounts of reformist Islam in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Egypt confirm - the inevitability of failure is no excuse to give up on perfection.<sup>154</sup> Rather, an orientation of ongoing repentance is encouraged as a necessary component in pursuit of absolute submission to God's Word.

### **VII.III God's good design**

Friends at Christ Church often accused secular society of "blurring" the divinely ordained difference between men and women. Although the disavowal of gendered distinctiveness was seen to have been crystallised by the introduction of same-sex marriage (sometimes called "genderless marriage" by conservative Christians), this latest instantiation of the

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<sup>153</sup> Christ Churchites have a complex relationship to the Calvinist notion of election, wherein the 'elect' are predestined to heaven while others are predestined to hell. The church preaches single, as opposed to double, predestination: that is, while some are predestined for heaven, no one is predestined for hell. Lay explanations of this, however, were often vague.

<sup>154</sup> I once asked James why anyone would bother trying not to sin when a) it was impossible and b) one had already been forgiven by God. He responded by saying that this was the sort of question he usually expected from children in Sunday School.

rejection of complementarity was not without precedent. Indeed, the upending of “God’s good design” was not even without precedent within their denomination, the Church of England, which was then struggling to reconcile its conservative and liberal wings on the inclusion of women in the episcopate. Sermons available on the Christ Church website, which stores audio files dating back to the 1980s, indicate that conservative evangelicals’ understanding of sexual difference has been a subject of concern since at least the early 1990s (and likely some time before), when the General Synod voted to ordain women as priests amid much intra-Anglican ‘divisiveness and bitterness’ (Bagilhole, 2003: 374; cf. Furlong, 1998; Jones, 2004), a result of the fact that there is ‘no one theology of the priesthood that could be claimed by all Anglicans’ (Stringer, 2004: 66). Then, as now, the Christ Church leadership presented the doctrine of complementarity – in which men and women are equal in value but distinct in role – as one against which sinful people will naturally want to “kick”. Both historic and contemporary sermons dealing with Biblical womanhood<sup>155</sup> are often prefaced with the caveat that although the Bible’s position on gender might be difficult for some to accept, it remains the unchanging Word of God.<sup>156</sup> The minister at the pulpit was merely seeking to “sit under the authority of Scripture”, and he had to assume that his congregation sought to do likewise.

But just what did “sitting under” mean to – and require of - the hundreds of women who attend Christ Church on a Sunday, study the Bible together in small groups throughout the week, and download sermons to listen to as they commute to work on the Underground, make packed lunches for their children, and jog around the local park? Luke, the church minister, once tackled this question while preaching on the Apostle Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthian church. Luke argued that the language of women’s submission and male headship, though somewhat “shocking” to twenty-first century ears, could not be reduced to the cultural context in which Paul was writing. Rather, Paul’s anchoring of women’s submission in the Creation story – ‘For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man’ (1 Corinthians 11:8-9) - suggested that he was speaking a “timeless truth, principles that are true for every culture in every age”. That woman was created ‘for’ man demonstrated, as an evangelical apologetic of the same name put it, that they were *Different by Design* (Sandom, 2012). This difference was to be reflected in church and family life, in which women were called to submit to the

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<sup>155</sup> Although Biblical masculinity was referenced from the pulpit, it was clear that sermons touching on gender were primarily aimed at the exposition of a conservative approach to women’s roles in church and family life. It may be that Biblical manhood is the subject of frequent conversation among men’s Bible study groups, but I simply do not have data on this.

<sup>156</sup> Space precludes a review of the vast literature on the place of women in Christianity. For a brief sampling drawn from a range of historic periods and church traditions, however, see Warner (1976); Bynum (1988); Lawless (1991; 2003); Furlong (1998); Griffith (2000); Lester (2005); and Day (2008).

legitimate, God-given authority of their ministers and husbands: “God has designed women to be under the authority of men” (cf. Griffith, 2000).<sup>157</sup>

For many informants, to make reference to the different roles of men and women was to make reference to the Fall.<sup>158</sup> God’s assignation of male and female reflected something of His character, with the marriage relationship, in particular, symbolising the future union of Christ and His Bride (the universal church). Yet the presence of sin in every age meant that men would always seek to abuse their headship, while women would always seek to usurp it. That sin had transformed what ought to function as a reflection of God’s love for His people into a ‘battle of the sexes’ is one of the core arguments of Carrie Sandom’s *Different by Design* (2012), the book referenced by Luke in the sermon quoted above, which Carol and I decided to read together in addition to the regular Bible studies we undertook in her comfortable London flat. Carol worried that my (mis)understanding of wifely submission, among other Biblical doctrines, had led to my “putting God in the dock”, perhaps even working to harden my heart to the Gospel. As such, although she felt that I might make more progress in my understanding of the Christian faith if I were to focus on the “bigger picture” – that is, the salvation offered me through Christ’s death and resurrection - rather than the rationale behind, say, the Levitical take on menstruating women, she was also keen that I understood that the Bible’s approach to womanhood, when properly understood, could not be dismissed as oppressive. If anything, she explained, it liberated women, freeing them to live as God had intended.

This understanding of the distinctive roles of men and women in church life was not one she had always held quite so strongly. Before joining Christ Church, Carol had worked at a large, independent church outside of London. As a member of the church staff team (although not, it should be noted, in the capacity of an ordained minister or preacher), she had sometimes led services of up to four hundred people. It was something she thought she’d done rather well, and it had been somewhat “jarring” to learn that women were not permitted to undertake similar leadership roles at Christ Church.<sup>159</sup> Rather than rejecting this message out of hand, however, she began to seriously study the Bible’s take on gender and submission. As she read her Bible and her commentaries, it was the doctrine of the Trinity that enabled her not only to come to terms with the differences men and women were to reflect in church life, but to see these differences in a positive light. After all, the members

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<sup>157</sup> Unmarried women are called to submit not only to the minister, but to other male authority figures in the church.

<sup>158</sup> This association of disordered femininity with social breakdown is not limited to those who identify with the label ‘Christian’. Abby Day (2008), for example, has shown how both ‘anthropocentric’ and ‘theocentric’ Britons locate the idea of social brokenness in changing women’s roles.

<sup>159</sup> Although women may read from the Bible and lead intercessory prayers at Christ Church, only men may “lead” church services.



of the Trinity are equally divine, yet they exist in a hierarchical relationship to one another, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit submitting, willingly and lovingly, to the Father.<sup>160</sup> Ideally, the relationship between Christian men and women should reflect a similar pattern, mirroring the equality and diversity of the tripartite Godhead. Taking the Trinity as her new starting point, Carol decided that the more women tried to kick against the way they had been made – the more they seemed to say, as she saw it, “I want to be a man” – the less they were “living in a way that reflects God”.

Carol had now come to feel that she was at her best when she embodied the role of the “helper”, the word the Bible uses to describe Eve’s relationship to Adam (Genesis 2:18). But being a helper did not render her second rate. She was one of a number of women who directed me to passages in the Bible where God Himself was described as Israel’s helper. “We instinctively gulp a bit,” she admitted, “but *He* doesn’t think it’s derogatory!” With both men and women made in God’s image, women who lived as helpers reflected His character as much as men who lived as leaders; God wasn’t either/or, but both/and. It was this nurturing, caring aspect of His character that influenced her reading of a particularly difficult verse for childless evangelical women, including herself: ‘Yet [women] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control’ (1 Timothy 2:15). Read literally, she admitted, she was “sunk”. She had never borne a child. Read as a call for women to embrace their distinctive roles as nurturers and helpmates, however – characteristics epitomised, she thought, by the act of bearing and caring for children – it was an encouragement to point others to God by living as she had been ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14). It *mattered* that God had made her a woman. She was made to take on “the female aspect” of His character. “And I’m most fulfilled when I do that. I can be gentle. I don’t have to be a man or live in a man’s world.”

Carol described her growing acceptance of the doctrine of male headship in terms of submission not only to her Bible, but to her physiology, explicitly linking the fact of her sexed body with her desire to nurture the students with whom she led Bible studies (and to whom she related as “spiritual children”).<sup>161</sup> But although this gendered notion of care implies that women’s submission within family life reflects a biological prerogative - “we’re wired up to live that way, and that’s how we flourish” – it’s important to note that she did not apply this logic to the Bible’s prohibitions on women in positions of church leadership. By contrast, it was perfectly possible for her to hear a sermon and think that she, or a woman

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<sup>160</sup> This focus on the Trinity may be a fairly recent apologetic tool. Griffith’s (2000: 184-5) analysis of a charismatic women’s organisation in America charts their movement away from a focus on self-sacrifice to an increasing emphasis upon the Trinity as a model of loving submission for evangelical women to emulate. I cannot speak as to whether a similar shift has occurred in English evangelicalism, but can confirm that references to the simultaneous equality and hierarchy present in the Trinity were common at Christ Church.

<sup>161</sup> Carol is a nurse who often leads Bible studies with medical students.

friend, could have said it better. Unlike women's distinctive role in reproduction, she saw no physical reason why any particular woman might be less able to preach than any particular man. *But maybe this*, she reflected, *was precisely the point*. She concluded that one's response to these difficult passages – that is, whether one balked at the idea of submission, or sought to faithfully live out its implications in one's daily life – depended on one's first principles. If she believed that the God of the Bible had created her, then she had to accept that He knew best how she should live. To think otherwise was to be like a fish that thought it could live outside of water. *Well, no, that wasn't quite right*; it was more like “being a whale and saying you don't need to live in the ocean, you can live in a river.” It might be physically possible, but it wasn't ideal. And regardless of the whale's misguided preference, it certainly wouldn't offer liberation.

Writing of women's participation in grassroots piety movements in Cairo, Saba Mahmood (2005: 133) argues that the performance of ritual prayer can be seen as both the ends and means of piety, in that it is both the fulfilment of a religious obligation and a way of creating and reinforcing the desire to discharge this obligation in the first place. While bearing in mind Laidlaw's account of the distinction between moral and physical incapacity (that is, while acknowledging that the Christian may sometimes have to make do with a conscious, rather than instinctive, decision to submit to God's Word), Carol's shifting understanding of gendered submission implies a similar logic to Mahmood's informants' pursuit of piety. Her musings suggest that although women should submit to God's Word as an end in and of itself, deciding to adopt an attitude of submission ‘is also one of the means by which [the desire to submit] is cultivated and gradually made realisable’ (ibid). Reflecting on the passage cited by Luke in his sermon on 1 Corinthians, Carol explained: “Paul is saying ‘don't try to be like a man, because that's going against God's ordained order.’” The Corinthian women's Creator God knew best what would fulfil them, “which these women might realise if they actually sat under God's authority.” In this reading, it was the Corinthian women's failure to accept their God-given role as helpers that had led to their dissatisfaction with this role in the first place. By grasping at an authority that was not theirs to exercise, they were not only causing conflict in the local church, but undermined their own interests, contributing to the relational disarray that threatened their emotional and spiritual wellbeing. As Sandom (2012: 84) puts it of the current age: ‘By asserting our independence... we have launched ourselves headlong along the road of broken relationships, pain, compromise, abuse, manipulation and chaos’.

Laidlaw (2014: 138) notes that the ‘Western liberal’ vision of freedom used by Mahmood as a foil for her pious interlocutors is somewhat simplistic, for ‘there is no single liberal conception of freedom’ (ibid: 142). Both the positive freedom aimed at by my (and, one could argue, Mahmood's) interlocutors and the negative freedom they oppose, for

example, are born of the liberal tradition (Berlin, 1966). As my data confirms, then, concepts of freedom are ‘always already highly contested’ (Laidlaw, 2014: 29), including in ‘Western liberal’ settings. Indeed, Carol’s belief that one will be most fulfilled when living as one has been designed implies a critique of the universalising approach to gender against which Christ Church defines its position as “countercultural.” The assertion that she did not “have to be a man or live in a man’s world” reflects a concern that, rather than offering equality to women, contemporary (liberal) efforts to deny the distinctiveness of sex had actually made ‘male-defined standards the measure of [women’s] life and work’, thereby discounting values typically read as feminine (Mathews & de Hart, 1990: 152; Ginsburg, 1989: 126-9). Carol even spoke of the relief of not having to “compete” with men in terms intriguingly similar to the language she used when explaining her inability to live a life good enough to earn her salvation, thereby necessitating her utter reliance on Jesus as her Saviour. In this status-obsessed, achievement-accruing world, she explained, it was liberating to feel free to fail. Consistent with the grace-based, works-denying evangelical theology that Christ Church teaches, then, ‘the power of submission’ is to be found in the freedom that comes from acknowledging one’s limitations and offering them up to a sovereign God, thereby growing in relationship with Him (Griffith, 2000: 184). In the words of one evangelical women’s self-help book, “Submission never imprisons you. It liberates you, giving you the freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authority” (Cooper, quoted *ibid*: 179).

Of course, my interlocutors were always quick to point out that submission to male authority was not an excuse for abuse. Historically, they suggested, the church had tolerated misogyny for far too long.<sup>162</sup> As with Lester’s (2005: 259) Catholic nuns, who sought to embrace a ‘third way’ in which they were neither American feminists – women who were “‘like men’” - nor ‘traditional’ Mexican women – “‘We don’t have to be subservient, not studying, making tortillas all day’” – gender talk at Christ Church often focused on the ways in which women’s submission ought to be a reflection of an alternative model of male-female interaction, one that rejected both the denial of difference and the ranking of persons as first or second rate. With happy Christian families thought to be a particularly good advertisement for the Gospel, demonstrating this Christian alternative to what is constructed as a “watching world” requires effort on the part of both men and women. Husbands and wives ‘are both accountable to Christ and must both submit to *His* standards’ (Sandom, 2012: 137). As Leah, a single lawyer in her twenties, pointed out, the Bible commands

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<sup>162</sup> In perhaps the only time I heard the Protestant Reformation mentioned in a negative light, a sermon delivered by a former minister suggested that the closure of women’s religious orders after the sacking of the abbeys had resulted in the church wrongly denying the importance of godly women’s religious capacities.

husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Given that this sort of love was “completely self-sacrificial”, she wondered whether women might have it easier than men. It was something she tried to keep in mind as she looked “for a godly guy who will be able to encourage me and always point me to Jesus, and who I respect and feel I could submit to within a marriage”.

By viewing women’s submission and male headship as the guarantee of both personal fulfilment and harmonious family life, and in seeking to demonstrate the reality of these benefits to a sceptical world, conservative evangelical women can be seen as advocates for the promotion of an alternative social order. Although less likely to see themselves as part of a global ‘movement’, they are, in this sense, not unlike those Muslim women who view the adoption of the veil and the internalisation of what outsiders view as restrictive, submissive norms of comportment as a way of actively engaging with secular society, thereby aiding its transformation into a social order that is both modern and godly (Mahmood, 2005; Brenner, 1996). But if the positive freedom of living as one has been designed is the carrot associated with women’s submission, this doctrine is not without a stick. Just as following God’s good pattern will lead to human flourishing, to ignore it is to court disaster. By virtue of its being framed in terms of Creation, the fraught history of the ‘battle of the sexes’ – in which women ‘have had a natural ‘fallen’ tendency to manipulate and control men’, and men ‘have had a natural ‘fallen’ tendency to either abdicate responsibility... or else to dominate women abusively’ – is positioned as one of the first and most enduring consequences of humanity’s ‘rebellion’ against God (Sandom, 2012: 78-9). The ‘serious consequences’ of Eve’s initial rejection of God’s Word are both apparent in the here and now – ‘broken relationships, pain, compromise, abuse, manipulation and chaos’ – and are a foretaste of the consequences to come, as Adam’s transmission of Original Sin to all humankind requires the judgment (and, potentially, the eternal punishment) of all those who fail to meet God’s perfect standards (ibid: 83-4).

This logic is remarkably similar to that noted by Day (2008) in her study of the gendered nature of belief narratives among both ‘anthropocentric’ and ‘theocentric’ residents of Yorkshire. Among those who had had experience of the supernatural, Day (ibid: 270) found that ‘women’s submission’ was often seen as ‘the mechanism used to effect supernatural protection.’ The association between submission and protection chimes with popular anti-feminist tropes in which women, ‘by exercising their personal independence and power’, neglect their domestic responsibilities and ‘[produce] a fallen world’. While women’s submission is crucial to the production and protection of an ordered world in the domestic context, however, my interlocutors would extend this argument – in theory at least – to all persons, Christian or non-Christian, woman or man, young or old, in public and private. For these Christians, divine protection requires collective submission. In the

following section, I recount a number of conversations held over the course of a single day at Christian Concern to explore the results of inverting God's created order on a national scale, focusing on the removal of His protective hand from a nation He is deemed to have previously blessed.

#### **VII.IV Serpents and pits**

One morning in December 2012, I arrived at the Christian Concern offices to find Louise, who worked in finance and data, reading up on the 2011 census, the results of which had just been released. According to the Office of National Statistics, 59% of the population of England and Wales had responded to the question 'What is your religion?' by identifying themselves as 'Christian'; a majority of those surveyed, to be sure, but a significant drop from the 72% who had self-identified as such a decade earlier.<sup>163</sup> As I hovered in the doorway to Louise's office, stirring milk into my instant coffee (the finance division was then based beside the small staff kitchen, which meant that the soundtrack to Louise's weekdays was one of clinking cups, humming microwaves, and bubbling kettles), she explained that she had mixed feelings about the results. On the one hand, it was a good thing for people to identify with Christianity, even if they seemed to think it was more about tradition than salvation. The fact that Christianity retained some cultural purchase meant that non-Christian parents, for example, still wanted to get their children baptised. If this led to Gospel opportunities for evangelical ministers, then the country's Christian heritage might result in people "giving their lives to Jesus Christ."

But there was a flipside to this cultural coin. Louise was troubled by the fact that Knowsley, a borough in Merseyside, North West England, had been deemed Britain's 'most Christian' local authority. At almost 81%, the percentage of borough residents who self-identified as Christian was exceptionally high. Louise, herself a northerner, knew Knowsley quite well – her parents lived nearby – and if 81% of the people who lived there thought they were Christian, that was a problem: "getting baptised, married and buried in a church isn't a saving faith in Jesus Christ." The very same Christian traditions that offered Gospel opportunities, then, also risked giving non-Christians a false sense of their eternal security. There would be many who had been baptised as babies, for example, who would not make it to heaven. Still, she reflected, it was all in the Lord's hands; "I suppose only God knows who belongs to Him and who doesn't."

Later that morning, Louise and I joined our colleagues in the office's main boardroom for the weekly staff-meeting-cum-Bible-study. It was the day on which Maria Miller MP, then Minister for Women and Equalities, was due to address Parliament on the

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<sup>163</sup> Census data are available from the Office for National Statistics (2012).

results of the government's consultation on same-sex marriage.<sup>164</sup> As such, the meeting's agenda was especially full. In addition to learning from the Bible, debriefing each other on cases and campaigns, and sharing prayer requests, the staff team had decided to extend the prayer meeting into lunch so that we could listen to the speech as a group. We began our time together with a Bible study focused on John 9, in which Jesus heals a blind man. Pastor Ade, who was leading the study, reminded us that although this man had been healed of physical blindness, Jesus had also given sight to those of us sitting around the table: *all of us were once blind to the message of salvation, but God has opened our eyes*. Yet there were many whose spiritual eyes remained closed. It was for this reason that the nation was facing the "ridiculous" situation symbolised by the consultation on same-sex marriage, with Parliament seeking to pass "legislation that does not align with Truth."

An hour or so later, a laptop was brought into the boardroom and balanced, somewhat precariously, on an otherwise disused mantelpiece at the back of the room. Trays of shop-bought sandwiches were passed around the table, and a hush descended as Andrew, Christian Concern's campaigns manager, pressed 'play' on a live stream of Maria Miller's speech. My colleagues and I had been closely following the same-sex marriage debate for months, and Miller's sound-bite-laden address was one with which we were already achingly familiar. When we stopped the video feed, Pastor Ade repeated that the decision to legalise "something that is false" would have devastating consequences in the future. Ten, twenty, fifty years down the line, what we knew to be abnormal would be viewed as normal. *We might know the Truth, but what about our children and grandchildren? They're the ones who will pay the price*. Those sitting around the table murmured their agreement. Bowing her head and beginning to pray aloud, Maria, a CLC solicitor, acknowledged how deeply it must grieve God to see His creations "shaking their fists" at His good design. She prayed that these misguided "plans of man" would fail.

After the prayer meeting, I spent a quiet afternoon in the office basement with Carrie, Christian Concern's events manager. Carrie had taken it upon herself to count and categorise the various Christian Concern literature housed in the clear plastic boxes that were lined up against the basement wall, the inventory for which was well out of date. Although stocktaking did not rate as the most intellectually stimulating of activities, it did have the benefit of an immediate return for one's effort; a rare occurrence for those used to running campaigns and cases that took months, if not years, to come to fruition. Besides, there was a certain pleasure to be had in putting in order something that had previously been in disarray. But while the chaos of the literature boxes was relatively simple to conquer, other forms of disorder were less easy to overcome.

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<sup>164</sup> It was the source of great frustration that this 'consultation' dealt not with *whether* to legislate for same-sex marriage, but *how* to do so.

It was this sort of disorder that we found ourselves discussing later that evening in my south London flat. Sitting on the sofa after dinner, Carrie told me that she had been “given” a verse by the Lord during the morning’s prayer meeting. This often happened when she prayed or read her Bible; she would feel “a quickening or a check”, as if the Holy Spirit were “just kind of tapping me and saying, you know, ‘look there’ and you kind of think ‘oh’, and you look there and then there’s a Word that really resonates with you.” The verse she’d been given came from Ecclesiastes 10:8: ‘He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall’. She explained to me the verse’s significance:

[I]t’s basically saying that when the protection of something that’s been sealed is broken, it allows anything, things that are deadly, to come in and attack. And I remember thinking that because we’ve opened so many doors through our legislation and through our attitude about certain things, it kind of opens a door, and then one door opens up another door and before you know it, it’s like a big hole that is so difficult to get out of.

Any nation that “goes against God”, she thought, opened itself “up to attack”: “When you come away from [God’s leadership], you get into risky waters where anything can happen and you’re going to be defenceless against it”. By way of solution, what the country needed was “people submitted to God’s law and bringing that law. It’s the only way... God’s law was meant to make society run in a harmonious way, but because it’s not [being followed], that’s why you have all these issues”.

That one day in December could involve these three different reflections on Britain’s Christian heritage, its movement away from God’s law, and the negative consequences of so doing is evidence of Christian activists’ anxieties regarding the (un)saved state of the nation. As was argued in Chapter Three, the relationship between conversion and social change means that Louise’s commentary on the inhabitants of Knowsley – her worry that, despite identifying as Christian, the majority of the borough did not have “a saving faith in Jesus Christ” – is bound up with both Pastor Ade’s sadness over the passing of legislation that “does not align with Truth” and Carrie’s fear that this sort of legislation functioned to remove the nation from God’s spiritual protectorate. In other words, while a citizen’s refusal to submit to God’s law is, primarily, a tragedy for that individual, it is also a contributing factor in the nation opening itself up to judgment on a corporate scale.

This tendency to treat groups as ‘responsible moral units’ is not a modern phenomenon (Christian, 1996: 394). In Catholic Europe, for example, ‘saints [have historically] addressed towns, cities, and nations as moral bodies,’ sometimes punishing them for immorality (ibid). Nor is this limited to traditionally group-focused Catholic countries. Indeed, Christian Concern’s fears for the nation reflect an historic preoccupation

with collective judgment in English Protestantism. Eighteenth-century evangelical campaigners expected God's judgment 'on nations as well as individuals if they persisted in corporate sins like tolerating the slave trade' (Bebbington, 1989: 61). Divine displeasure might be read in the sudden and dramatic calamities that befell individuals who opposed the Gospel – Bebbington (*ibid*) cites the graphic example of a town crier who, having prevented his fellow townspeople from listening to an evangelical preacher, 'immediately started to bleed copiously from the nostrils, became a lunatic and soon afterwards died' – or in national catastrophes or natural disasters that seemed beyond the range of normalcy.

One possible contemporary manifestation of dramatic judgment occurred during the winter of 2013-14, which saw the south of England battered by weeks of storms. The resultant flooding prompted David Silvester, a councillor for the controversial, far-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), to publicly blame the weather on the government's introduction of same-sex marriage: 'The scriptures make it abundantly clear that a Christian nation that abandons its faith and acts contrary to the Gospel (and in naked breach of a coronation oath) will be beset by natural disasters such as storms, disease, pestilence and war' (quoted in Malnick, 2014). Perhaps because they were taken as the views of a fringe-ridden minority, Silvester's views were given little serious critique. They were, however, gleefully mocked. A Twitter account, @UkipWeather, began posting such updates as: 'Temperatures will plummet as a result of a man in Cumbria enthusiastically browsing through a home furnishings catalogue' (19<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2014), while a Facebook campaign led to The Weather Girls' 'It's Raining Men' re-entering the UK charts for the first time in thirty years. The members of Christ Church, however, could not dismiss his comments quite so glibly. Naomi, for example, couldn't help but notice that the floods had bypassed the Republic of Ireland, which had passed fewer morally questionable laws than the United Kingdom. And Bethany, although wary of reading providence into something she couldn't be sure of, pointed out that "the God of the Bible does seem to be a God who uses natural disasters... Natural disasters - like a drought or whatever - *are* related to His judgment or His blessing in a nation." Although neither woman voiced the opinion with any degree of certainty, both ventured that the weather might be a divine "warning", a call to repentance before it was too late.

But God's judgment need not make itself felt with such urgency. Rather, it might be evident in the slow process of moral decline that inevitably resulted from a nation's rejection of His law. The 'fruit' of turning from God 'can be seen in widespread family breakdown, immorality and social disintegration' (Christian Concern, n.d.). These negative relational consequences are a form of passive judgment in which the nation is condemned to suffer simply by being left to its own devices. For members of both my field sites, the Biblical precedent for this form of judgment was to be found in the Apostle Paul's letter to the



Romans, in which Paul writes that those who refuse to acknowledge the Lord may be given up to their ‘dishonourable passions’ and left to wallow in their sin (Romans 1:26). Although most frequently invoked in discussions of sexual immorality (the letter speaks of men and women exchanging ‘natural relations for those that are contrary to nature’), this principle is also seen to have a more general applicability. Danielle, the church’s women’s worker, explained that Britain would have to face the “consequences” of moving away from God’s Word: “I mean, if you look at Romans 1, it tells us that, in effect, the way that God will punish us, if that’s the right word, is to allow society to be handed over to what it wants.” Like the proverbial river-bound whale, however, getting what “we deserve” – what “we asked for” - would leave us neither satiated nor liberated.

Of course, my informants were also keen to put the same message in more upbeat terms. They stressed the positive freedom that came from submitting to God, ‘the realisation of one’s true self as one’s conduct converges towards an authoritatively sanctioned ideal’ (Laidlaw, 2014: 155). In the emic rhetoric of DeYoung (2012: 112): ‘belonging to Christ means freedom, not slavery. Don’t think of Christianity as *having* to do what a peevish God wants. Think of it as now being *able* to do what a good God demands.’ Importantly, then, the positive and negative motivations for submission to God’s Word contained in the popular hymn - the ‘hope of heaven or the fear of hell’ (Townsend, 2009) – are not only about one’s eternal destiny, but have an impact in the current age. Submission to God’s Word in the here and now would free the Christian to live well, just as the failure to submit would ultimately lead to the shackles of sin.

And if these things mattered on an individual scale, they also had sweeping implications at the national. The idea that Britain is, was, or might yet be a Christian nation is at the core of Christian Concern’s public rhetoric. As Andrea put it to me, God may deal with individuals, “but He also talks about nations. And so there’s a picture of an individual coming to Christ but there’s also a picture of where a nation chooses to place her belief.” Were the nation to put its belief (back) in the Bible, Andrea was convinced, the results would be joyous:

He knows what makes us happy! He knows what’s good for our flourishing. And so contending for [Biblically-infused] laws is a good thing to do. It’s not about doing it in any selfish manner. It’s because I believe it’s going to be good for my children and my grandchildren, and that society will be a happier, safer, *freer*, more tolerant place to be.

It is worth noting a possible inconsistency here. Campaigning for Biblically-infused laws implies a rejection of negative liberty, in that the changes Andrea seeks would restrict the sphere of action over which her fellows have autonomy (Berlin, 1966: 7). Yet the CLC also

agitates for the tolerance and accommodation of countercultural Christian beliefs and practices, suggesting that the area in which citizens are free to act without interference should, if anything, be expanded. Perhaps this discrepancy can be explained, as was argued in the previous chapter in relation to human rights, as the instrumentalisation of extant law towards its own undermining. Or perhaps, in an ideal future, the corporate internalisation of God's Word would mean that most Britons would be incapable of making the immoral choices enabled by even the most 'negative' (that is, unconstrained) legal system. Christian Britain is, in this sense, a 'permanent possibility': a vision not only of how society ought to be, but of what it 'possibly still might be like' (Graeber, 2001: 87). Either way, and regardless of the permanence of its possibility, this "happier, safer, *freer*, more tolerant place to be" did not appear to be the direction in which the nation was heading. The nation, it seemed, had dug itself a pit. It stood on its edge, and only time would tell if it had fallen in.

#### **VII.V Conclusion: facing a task unfinished**

This chapter has used the doctrine of judgment as a springboard from which to explore my interlocutors' multivalent notions of freedom and submission. While the assignation of an unrepentant sinner to hell is the ultimate judgment of a righteous God, I have argued that in addition to the eternal register with which salvation or damnation must be viewed, God's judgment also operates at the level of the mundane and the everyday. As the result of a failure to submit to the Bible's pattern for human life, this passive judgment can be seen in the relational strain a married couple might experience when a man tries to "abdicate responsibility" for the running of his family, or when a wife tries to "usurp" the authority of her husband. At a corporate level, judgment is evident in the outworking of "ridiculous" legislation that "does not align with Truth", the long-term effects of which, although certain to be devastating, can now only be guessed at. That these results are often referred to in somewhat vague, nebulous terms - what *would* happen in ten, twenty, or fifty years? What *did* it mean for the nation to be in "risky waters where anything can happen"? - does not lessen their import for conservative Christian activists and their supporters. Whether a storm is just a storm is difficult to say, but what's certain is that God is in control.

Within this theological framing, judgment is seen to be closely connected to society's adoption of a false notion of freedom. By assuming that freedom is to be found in the most expansive, unconstrained answer to the question 'What am I free to do or be?' (Berlin, 1966: 15), this (mis)understanding valorises individual autonomy and posits the legitimate ends towards which one may orient one's life as being plural rather than singular. In the somewhat rough and ready philosophical terms I have been using, this negative understanding of liberty is contrasted with what I have framed as the positive ideal of freedom through submission to divine will, which evaluates decisions according to 'a single

objectively good form of life' (Laidlaw, 2014: 144). This 'objectively good form of life' requires the cultivation of a subjectivity of submission, an orientation to the world in which one's thoughts and deeds are brought progressively into line with the absolute standards of the Word of God. With submission to God's standards framed as their ultimate value, my informants flatly deny the multicultural relativism that suggests that what is good and true for you may not be good and true for me, rejecting it as 'a dangerous delusion, a slippery slope to meaninglessness' (J. Comaroff, 2009: 19). This chapter has hoped to shed some light upon the strength of feeling with which they express the necessity of distinguishing moral absolutes, for when the consequences of doing so are eternal, the dangers involved in misattributions of meaning are very real indeed.

As Lambek (2010: 11) has pointed out, ethical action always involves 'the exercise of practical judgment'. On a human level, the evaluation of one's own and others' practical judgment, especially as it relates to the evangelisation of non-Christians, has been an implicit theme throughout this thesis. But in addition to practical judgment, the fact of *divine* judgment – and, particularly, the fact that this judgment is eternal – has important consequences for those human judgments that occur in mortal time. For campaigners and activists, the relationship between freedom, submission and judgment is detailed not only in the Bible, but in the experiences of those who, by submitting to God's Word, find themselves *unable to submit* to the dictates of liberal pluralism (Asad, 2009: 46). These Christians may then be subject to a form of worldly, temporal assessment, in which courts and tribunals pass literal judgment on them. As I have argued throughout the thesis, the actual content of these judgments – that is, whether an individual case is won or lost – is somewhat secondary to the fact of "standing" for Christ in the public sphere. But when the religious convictions that render one morally incapable of performing certain actions – recall from Chapter One that, as far as Andrea is concerned, a believer simply *cannot* be a marriage registrar if this involves the registering of same-sex unions – are parsed through a legal system that has the power to define those convictions into nonexistence, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that conservative Christians have begun to posit themselves as the victims of what theologian Don Carson (2013) calls *The Intolerance of Tolerance*.<sup>165</sup> Despite (c)aiming to protect religious freedom while avoiding theological debate, the courts' ability to pass qualitative judgment on religious action appears to contain within it the very seeds of that freedom's impossibility (Sullivan, 2005).

In the end, though, it is God's judgment of individual souls – and not the law's judgment of individual Christians – that is of the greatest importance. To reinforce this point, it is useful to return to the prayer meeting with which this chapter began. It is because of the

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<sup>165</sup> This book was brought to my attention by Luke during our very first meeting.

reality of hell that the church meets together month by month, a task facilitated by the circulation of double-sided information sheets containing prayer requests sent in by the many missionaries, both national and international, supported by Christ Church.<sup>166</sup> The information contained on these sheets, which is updated monthly, is detailed and specific. Named missionaries, usually accompanied by a small black and white photograph and a blurb about their location and mission project,<sup>167</sup> ask their fellow believers to join them in giving praise for positive developments – *thank You for the success of last week’s mums ‘n’ tots meeting, which was attended by three non-Christian women* – and to pray for those areas in which they faced ongoing difficulties – *please pray for X, who once showed interest in the Gospel but has since stopped coming to church; pray that despite my loneliness, I take comfort in God as I preach His Word*. Those present pray their way through these sheets, and bring them home to guide their prayer intentions throughout the month. Almost all of these prayers, as with the one with which Chris, head bowed, ended the evening’s sermon, are directed towards the salvation of non-Christians: “Our Father in heaven, Your Kingdom come, both on the last day and now in the hearts of unbelievers.”

But what of those occasions when the Kingdom did not come? The happy Christian families thought to be produced by submissive wives and godly husbands may be promoted as evidence that following the Bible “works”, but the Gospel could also ‘set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’ (Matthew 10:35). During the prayer meeting in which Chris preached on Judgment Day, one particular prayer request caught my eye. It had come from Jeremy, a missionary in the United Kingdom. Jeremy’s father had recently died, and he sought the prayers of the community to comfort him in his grief. When a Christian dies, the church is commanded not to grieve as those ‘who have no hope’, for they will see their brother or sister again in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13). But Jeremy’s father had not been a Christian. Barring a deathbed conversion, heaven was not where he would be. In words I found particularly poignant, Jeremy’s prayer request spoke of the pain he felt when well-meaning, but misguided, friends told him that his father was in the presence of God: *false comfort*, he wrote, *is no comfort at all*. With conservative evangelical theology having rendered ‘care for the dead’ doctrinally impossible to administer, the judgment of Jeremy’s father seemed to represent a kinship ‘breach’ that was impossible to overcome (Cannell, 2011: 472).

I never met Jeremy in person, and am unaware of the deaths of any other non-Christian intimates that may have occurred during my time in the field. For this reason, I am

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<sup>166</sup> Approximately half of Christ Church’s income goes to its “mission partners”.

<sup>167</sup> Missionaries based in countries deemed particularly hostile to the Gospel are referred to by their initials only. It is a generally recognised truth, however, that those represented by photograph are more likely to receive prayer.

unable to comment on the possible coping mechanisms that my interlocutors might use to handle the fact that, according to their own theology, an unrepentant loved one was likely separated from them forever. Human experience suggests that such mechanisms must exist; as Christian (1996: 393) puts it of the ‘emotional and moral logic’ of the ‘uncertainty’ inherent in the Catholic doctrine of purgatory (a doctrine specifically denounced from the Christ Church pulpit), the ‘despair of a living relative at the sure condemnation of a loved one would be too much to bear’. Although officially lacking the benefit of this ‘uncertainty’, perhaps the comfort gleaned from the possibility of a silent but genuine deathbed conversion would be less likely to be dismissed as “false.” What *is* certain, however, is that these eternal stakes place the obligation to evangelise at the core of my interlocutors’ Christian experience. They are, in the words of another oft-sung hymn, ‘facing a task unfinished’:

*Facing a task unfinished  
That drives us to our knees  
A need that, undiminished  
Rebukes our slothful ease  
We, who rejoice to know Thee  
Renew before Thy throne  
The solemn pledge we owe Thee  
To go and make Thee known...  
With none to heed their crying  
For life, and love, and light  
Unnumbered souls are dying  
And pass into the night (Houghton, 1930).*

## Conclusion: Tears and Trajectories

On Christmas Day, 2012, Lucy found herself in tears.

Lucy, the charity lawyer who had first introduced me to Christ Church, was spending the holiday with her parents and sisters. They had just finished their Christmas lunch and were sitting down together in front of the television to watch Queen Elizabeth II deliver the Royal Christmas Message. A tradition dating back to 1932, the monarch's festive speech is something of an institution; Lucy called it the "hallmark" of the British Christmas. Still, it wasn't something they always managed to watch together as a family. It was for this reason that Lucy, when she heard the content of the speech, was especially pleased that they had done so this year:

This is the time of year when we remember that God sent His only Son 'to serve, not to be served.' He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ. It is my prayer this Christmas Day that His example and teaching will continue to bring people together, to give the best of themselves in the service of others.

The carol, 'In the Bleak Midwinter', ends by asking a question of all of us who know the Christmas story, of how God gave Himself to us in humble service: 'What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part.' The carol gives the answer: 'Yet what I can, I give Him - give my heart.'

I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

So unused was she to hearing the name of her Saviour on television in an evangelistic context – popular programming, in her experience, tended to feature the words 'Jesus Christ' only in their capacity as profanity - that Lucy, an evangelical sitting among the non-Christian relatives with whom she longed to share the Gospel, was moved to tears.<sup>168</sup>

This thesis began by relating a debate held at the Church of England's General Synod, in which a member of the House of Laity asked his fellow Anglicans: "if I can manifest my faith publicly with a *donkey*, seriously, what do the rest of you want to do?" The absurdity of the speaker's illustration – the Palm Sunday procession of a donkey around Nelson's Column, that most literal and iconic example of the public square – and the exasperation, albeit good-humoured, with which he expressed it, suggested that anyone who felt unable to "manifest [their] faith publicly" must be unreasonable, unhinged, or otherwise beyond the pale. For conservative evangelicals like Lucy, however, the question he raised was no mere rhetorical device. Her tears, recounted to me the following January, were an

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<sup>168</sup> As head of the Church of England, it is not particularly surprising that the Queen would mention Jesus in her Christmas speech. However, many members of Christ Church feel that her Christmas messages have become increasingly evangelistic in recent years; a trend they strongly endorse.

expression of the almost paradoxical context in which English evangelical Protestants feel themselves to live. Protestant Christianity, after all, is - or *remains* - at the heart of national life. The Queen, whose Coronation Oath requires her to ‘maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel’, is a potent symbol of the interlinking of church and state. But the nation’s sympathy for Christian symbolism is no substitute for salvation, and the trappings of Christendom are meaningless without acknowledgement of the Kingdom (Engelke, 2013: 104-5).

For people like Lucy, English Christianity appears increasingly, but perplexingly, spatialised: defined and protected as a pre-social, pre-political ‘identitarian core’ (Sherwood, 2012: 55), an internal (and preferably private) essence, but one that is acceptable, even desirable, when deployed in public rituals of nation-building or the affirmation of tradition.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps public ‘manifestations’ were only tolerable when they were assumed to *diverge* from private convictions, when references to Christianity were thought to index cultural heritage rather than converted hearts? Perhaps Lucy’s conservative religiosity, unlike that of the St Martin’s donkey, had not been ‘properly disciplined to fit liberal constraints’ (Amesbury, 2014: 3)? In this context, the strange blend of publicity and privacy represented by the Queen’s Christmas Message - in which a national figurehead broadcasted public religion into her family home - was particularly meaningful for Lucy, whose efforts at witnessing within this quintessentially private space had met with little success. (Indeed, her non-Christian sister had once threatened to pull out of a family holiday unless Lucy agreed not to mention Jesus for its duration). With evangelisation in the private sphere having proved so relationally unsettling that she was now reliant on public figures to proselytise those closest to her, Lucy’s Christmas story belies the incredulity of the Synod speaker, highlighting the complexity of expressing an evangelical identity in a nation that is variously portrayed as Christian, de-Christianising, and anti-Christian all at once.

By focusing on the lived experiences of a group of publicly-facing Christian campaigners and a conservative evangelical church community, this thesis has sought to provide an ethnographic account of this complexity and its articulation in contemporary England. I have argued that my interlocutors’ evangelical experience is defined by the struggle to manage competing principles and moral commitments as they strive to live out a faith that is at once relational, missional, and uncompromising, by efforts to navigate the tensions that arise as a result of the ‘coexisting and conflicting layers of meaning’ of which lived evangelicalism is made up (Elisha, 2008: 182). In particular, I have argued that although active evangelism is central to the construction of the ideal Christian subject, it is

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<sup>169</sup> It is worth pointing out that not all British Christians are troubled by the spatialisation of religion. The ‘cathedral Anglicans’ among whom Fenella Cannell (pers. comm.) has done research, for example, may actually appreciate this spatialised quality.

an activity with which English conservative evangelicals have diverse associations. The universal scope of the Great Commission challenges the relational depth thought necessary to prompt “Gospel opportunities” with one’s non-Christian intimates, raising questions as to the appropriate nature, content, and desirability of public witness. These are questions, as Engelke (2013: xix) puts it, of the ‘legitimate and legitimating forms of proclamation’ through which religion goes public in the contemporary world. Throughout this study, I have built on Engelke’s notion of religious publicity by focusing on the ways in which this publicity might be challenged, countered, and otherwise complicated by the conservative Christians in whose name it is sometimes pursued. In my interlocutors’ reflections on these grey, ambivalent spaces, where different forms of legalised proclamation can appear legitimate and illegitimate at once, what comes to the fore is rarely either the straightforward embrace or the outright rejection of public Christianity or muscular evangelism. Rather, what emerges is a searching consideration of their Gospel-spreading obligations as responsible Christian subjects.

While the impact of religiously-inspired ethical subjectivity has been of longstanding interest to anthropologists, not least thanks to the influence of Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism* (2002 [1904-5]), recent ethnographic approaches to the values motivating human thought, speech and action have focused on their everyday negotiation, stressing that a range of potentially competing orientations may be at play in both mundane and sacral realms of life (Robbins, 2004; 2013; 2015; Keane, 2010; Lambek, 2008; 2010). I have used religious lobbying and legal activism as a springboard from which to investigate conservative evangelical strategies for navigating these competing concerns. This legal context itself is ambivalent, as English law transitions from regulating religion as establishment privilege to universal right, from defence of *the faith* to defence of *faiths*.<sup>170</sup> By setting this navigation against the rise, rhetoric, and results of legal theology, in which the law ‘is the secular instrument by which civil society is to be remade in the image of the sacred’ (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 202), the thesis has approached the quotidian negotiation of evangelical values in a context my interlocutors construct as “hostile” to the expression of their moral commitments.

Despite a largely shared theology and set of social concerns, the members of Christian Concern/Christian Legal Centre and Christ Church appear to have come to different conclusions – or inconclusions – as to how one ought to manifest one’s Christianity in public life. On one level, I have suggested, both sets of interlocutors are united by their shared commitment to God’s Word, to which they seek to submit their thoughts, desires, and

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<sup>170</sup> Prince Charles, heir to the British monarchy, caused controversy by suggesting that he would prefer the title ‘Defender of Faith’ to ‘Defender of the Faith’ when he ascends the throne. He later claimed that he had been misinterpreted, and would retain the original title (Walters & Owen, 2015).



actions; ultimately, their very selves. Yet the range of strategies available to them as they attempt to achieve this goal, and their often ambivalent responses to fellow evangelicals' best efforts to do likewise, undermine this conceptual unity. In the complicated reality of the everyday, the desire to both *live out* and *live up to* God's Word results in the emergence of tensions between, for example, one's Christian duty to publicly proclaim the Gospel and one's class-based internalisation of what constitutes appropriately reserved behaviour; between the desire to use Christian language in the hope of convicting one's non-Christian listeners, and the worry that this language will be incomprehensible to unsaved ears; between the explication of grace, and the maintenance of God's law; between individual salvation and one's relational obligations to others; between longing to see a principle upheld, and concern that upholding it may have negative implications in practice. In other words, as Lambek (2008: 137) argues, 'any adherence to or advocating of an absolute value like truth or justice must be qualified in and through lived practice', requiring the recognition of additional values and virtues in the deployment of one's own (and the assessment of others' use of) 'situational judgment'. But when, my interlocutors might ask, does pragmatic qualification become problematic compromise? With the Christian's every action bearing a potential soteriological weight, the line between the two can have eternal significance. For this reason, it remains exceptionally difficult to draw.

It is on account of this soteriological weight, I have argued, that the members of Christ Church feel a special burden in their interactions with others. This relational burden is made manifest in several ways. It is evident in the efforts they go to to render theological Truths accessible to non-Christians, efforts that can be both great – such as the temporal and financial expense involved in cooking dinner and providing drinks for those who attend Christianity Explored, the five week evangelistic course the church runs at least once a term – and small, such as the minister announcing, during services attended by non-Christians, the pages on which the verses he will be preaching from can be found in the pew Bibles (by contrast, no page numbers are announced at the monthly prayer meeting, when it is assumed that those present will know their Obadiah from their Hosea). It can also be seen in their oft-voiced fears that non-believers, inured to the specificity of Christian theology through the promulgation of a religious pluralism in which all "faiths" are essentially one, misunderstand the nature of Biblical salvation. As we have seen, the fear that Christian theology is distorted by efforts to render it intelligible to the law underlies my Christ Church informants' critique of those cases that are seen to blur the theological distinction between salvation by grace and salvation by law, such as those focusing on a legalistic adherence to the Sabbath or those involving the visible display of external, symbolic markers of difference.

These concerns, I suggest, amount to a form of corporate anxiety on the part of my conservative evangelical interlocutors, who are weekly pressed from the pulpit to counter the

salvific illiteracy of the non-Christians in their lives. This shared anxiety focuses on the individual's obligation to encourage other individual souls to develop a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In positive terms, as one church apprentice put it, the wish to introduce others to Jesus was simply a much more intense version of the desire to tell people about a great pub you've just discovered. *Good things*, he explained, *are worth sharing*. But the issue was more often expressed negatively. With heaven and hell hanging in the balance, failing to tell someone about Jesus was like letting them walk into a disaster that you could not only see coming, but had a means of preventing; that a Christian who didn't evangelise was as selfish as someone who had found the cure for cancer, only to keep it to themselves.

In other words, the Maussian gift of salvation imposes evangelistic obligations that are experienced as both the least one can do and yet an impossible duty to discharge, an example of 'the gap between one's moral ambitions and the conditions of existence that reinforce and simultaneously threaten to undermine them at every turn' (Elisha, 2008: 155; cf. Parry, 1986). The awareness that they are constantly falling short of God's standards means conservative evangelicals are often left with an abiding doubt as to both the quality and quantity of their evangelistic endeavours. And with unabashed proselytisation sometimes thought to *undermine* the Gospel, this doubt is particularly difficult for reserved, middle-class conservative evangelicals to quell. For this reason, as Diana put it, "I don't know any Christian that would say that they evangelise as much as they could do." Of course, this is not to say that the members of Christ Church view themselves as personally responsible for the salvation or damnation of others. An individual Christian might be involved in the conversion of another, but it is God who saves, and the failure of His human instrument to play their part well does not limit His ability to do so. In practice, however, the impossibility of ever fully meeting their Gospel duties while still maintaining their own spiritual growth leads to the sort of guilt stirred up in Naomi when she pictured non-Christians being led to hell on Judgment Day: *why didn't you tell us, Naomi? Why didn't you tell us?*

In addition to providing an account of the relational anxieties and value conflicts faced by contemporary English evangelicals in their efforts to spread the Gospel to a nation deemed antagonistic to it, I have also sought to contribute to the ethnographic corpus through the elucidation of the relationship between conservative Christian campaign groups, on the one hand, and the conservative Christian community/ies to which they appeal for spiritual and financial support on the other. Anthropologists have provided incisive analyses of Christian organisations, ranging, for example, from Jerry Falwell's use of prophetic language as leader of the United States' Moral Majority (Harding, 2001), to the production of 'Biblical publicity' by the British and Foreign Bible Society in England (Engelke, 2013), to the divergent worldviews of Californian headquartered officials and local staff in a

Christian aid organisation in Zimbabwe (Bornstein, 2006). Further, the burgeoning anthropology of Christianity has provided a wealth of ethnographically rich and geographically diverse accounts of Christian communities worldwide, many focused on answering Cannell's (2006: 1) oft-quoted question: 'What difference does Christianity make?' (For a brief overview of the development of this subfield, see Robbins, 2003; Bialecki et al, 2008; Jenkins, 2012; and debates covered in the recent *Current Anthropology* supplement on Christianity, particularly Robbins, 2014. For a small sampling of ethnographic work in this area, see contributions to Cannell, 2006, and Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006). This body of literature includes ethnographies focused on conservative churches in countries noted for their apparent secularity, such as Sweden (Coleman, 2000; 2006; 2011) and the United Kingdom (Strhan, 2012; 2015). While the existence of contentious Christian activism is often referenced as part of the background noise against which these communities construct themselves – Greenhouse (1989), for example, documents how Georgian Baptists reject secular society's 'culture of litigation' on the basis of a Christian ethos, while Strhan (2016: 164) argues that conservative Anglicans can be critical of Christian activists who "spend their time being angry about the world behaving like the world", and Harding (2010: 15), in her more recent work, focuses on conservative 'transevangicals' who reject the 'bipolar, us/them, culture war [rhetoric]' of the US Religious Right - rarely are the two analysed coterminously. I have sought to bring these two strands together, putting the experience of Christian campaigners and legal activists into conversation with those of one conservative evangelical church community.

As was stressed in the Introduction, there are many informal links, both personal and theological, between Christian Concern and Christ Church. With its conservative doctrine and full church coffers, Christ Church represents an ideal source of both spiritual and financial support for an organisation like Christian Concern, which must, after all, devote a considerable amount of energy to the solicitation of donations from like-minded Christians to continue operating. I have argued, however, that the relationship between conservative evangelicals 'on the ground' and campaigners at the legal coalface is one of complexity. Indeed, it is one of the core contentions of this thesis that even the most conservative of English evangelical Christians may respond with ambivalence to the legalisation of their faith. Church members support evangelical-fronted political campaign groups, such as the Coalition for Marriage, of which Christian Concern was a founding member. Further, they critique the "absurd" behaviour of those represented as secular authorities. Yet they also express doubts as to the efficacy and ethics of Christian interest case law. While some cases are critiqued according to the specifics of conservative evangelical doctrine – such as the Protestant iconoclasm suggested by the statement that wearing a cross does not "make" one a Christian – others, and particularly those relating to issues framed in terms of conscience,

are less clear cut. Responses to these cases often suggested agreement with a claimant in principle, but wariness over the practical outcome of their stance in terms of mission; an example, perhaps, of my interlocutors' theoretical value monism being shaped by the value plural realities of lived experience.

This conflict between principle and practice, I argue, is one of a number of tensions at the heart of evangelical life. Indeed, this tension can be said to be constitutive of evangelical identity and experience in twenty-first century London, which is constructed by my informants as a place of social fragmentation and moral relativism. (I myself was often taken as – and taken to task for expressing – a paradigmatic example of this perceived relativism, with my methodological agnosticism rejected outright). By contrast, conservative evangelicals view “God’s standards”, as expressed in His Word, as absolute. In other words, the members of both Christian Concern and Christ Church can be seen to inculcate and express a monist understanding of the good (Robbins, 2013), one in which submission to the Scriptures is the ultimate aim. Questions as to the boundaries of this aim, however, emerge as one of the greatest differences of approach between my two field sites.

In an essay subtitled ‘The Political Theology of Conviction’, Thomas Blom Hansen (2009: 5) argues that despite anthropological critiques of disembodied notions of ‘belief’, the idea of ‘conviction’ – that is, the ‘dramatic interior life’ articulated by political and religious activists – has become a ‘global model of interiority’, a means by which activists the world over frame their identity in terms of deep-seated beliefs and the moment they came to ‘embrace’ them. Such conviction, he argues, is genealogically rooted in two ethical models. He posits the ‘ethics of sincerity’ as beginning to emerge in Europe from the sixteenth-century onwards, a time when the proliferation of Protestant sects, increasing geographic mobility, and changing social hierarchies led to a concern with authenticity and credibility. The second, which he calls an ‘ethics of consequence’, emerged from the late eighteenth-century onwards as revolutionary groups, such as the Jacobins, sought ‘the coming utopia’ (ibid: 14). From within a revolutionary ethics of consequence, the important factor is not merely an individual’s sincerity, but their commitment to the ‘larger vision of transformation’ of society (ibid: 16).

Without wanting to stretch the analogy, perhaps this distinction illuminates the differences of approach evident in my two field sites. Although the members of both Christian Concern and Christ Church are people of conviction, their conviction is evidenced in different ways. At Christian Concern, where an ethics of consequence is emphasised, the ‘test of conviction’ is ‘the ability to break norms, to run risks, and to strategize’ (ibid: 26), to support one’s convicting cause over and above one’s family, friends, or reputation. For these evangelical campaigners, “permissive” legislation, such as that legalising abortion or providing for same-sex marriage, is challenged on what are understood (in emic terms) to be

socially motivated, compassionate grounds. After all, the rejection of God's Word is thought to have negative consequences both at a micro level – for example, in the heartache and relational dysfunction caused to individual men and women by abortion or “homosexual practice” – and at a macro level, with society's moral foundations increasingly eroded by the law's encouragement of such sins as infanticide and sexual licence. Faced with the propinquity of permissive legislation and sinful acts, Christian activists are motivated by what I have referred to as an urgent theology, one in which engagement is prioritised over reflection. Their activism is a first line of defence; it is necessitated by the escalating immorality unfolding before their eyes. Regardless of whether history remembers them as rejected prophets or courageous moral reformers, they are compelled to take a stand for Christ and His Word.

As conservative Christians living in a world deemed hostile to the Gospel, the members of Christ Church share these worries. But in spite of their frequent critiques of a relativist approach to life's “big questions”, they are also influenced by an individualising mindset that questions the believer's right to impose God's standards on a disbelieving world. In their self-other interactions, their points of reference include not only the perceived absolutes of the Bible and the traditional evangelical desire to combat sin in all its forms, but socially mandated responses to pluralism that stress inclusivity, respect for personal autonomy, and the tolerance of different lifeways. Like those at Christian Concern, my church friends long to see God's Word upheld in the nation, and they desire – or desire *to* desire - to speak this Word to the non-Christians in their lives. Yet they find themselves hampered by the risk of relational discomfort inherent in submitting non-Christians to a Word that outsiders often dismiss as anachronistic, unpleasant, or both. At Christ Church, then, where the ethics of sincerity reigns, the test of conviction is one of “being yourself”, even when challenged (Hansen, 2009: 26). As Strhan (2012; 2015) has also argued of conservative Anglicans in London's financial district, this leads to a situation in which the Christian's efforts to reflect the moral coherence of God Himself requires the pursuit of a consistency that is impossible for mere mortals to attain.

I suggest, therefore, that what we might see as these evangelicals' theoretical value monism – in which submission to God's will is the goal under which all other values ought to be subsumed - develops particular contours as it is challenged by, and defined against, the apparently pluralist understandings of equality, freedom, and submission dominant in the lost city of London. Although this tends to emerge in the contemporary moment in relation to particular controversies, such as my interlocutors' self-identified countercultural takes on gender relations, sexual equality, and religious pluralism, today's question of positive Christian witness versus resolutely standing for Christian Truth is just one manifestation of an ancient challenge. Such is the divide evangelicals must straddle as they seek to be ‘all

things to all people' (1 Corinthians 9:22) while never diluting the standards set them by God. It is the different interpretations of this dividing line that explains the rationale behind the sometimes divergent approaches taken by both sets of interlocutors, particularly in relation to 'theo-legality' (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 210) and its impact on Christian witness. Whether and when to 'legalise' religion remains problematic to both: 'While it may be a human characteristic to divide the world into the sacred and the profane, it is not easy to see how it would be possible to legislate such distinctions in a pluralist society' (Sullivan, 1996a: 209).

It is important to stress the specificity of this account. Although the work of Strhan on St John's, a church that draws its congregation from a similar socio-economic and theologically inclined pool as Christ Church, suggests that these ambivalent responses may be common to London's primarily white, middle-class conservative evangelical community, it is by no means clear that they would be held by the members of, for example, churches with greater ethnic diversity; churches catering primarily to immigrant communities; churches whose members are primarily low-paid; or churches with an alternative theology, such as an explicitly Dominionist approach to political engagement. Given the theological and social spread of Christian Concern's support base, this diversity may prove a fruitful direction for further research. Ethnographic investigation of different churches' responses to Christian Concern would greatly enhance our understanding of both conservative Christianity and Christian activism in contemporary England, shedding light, for example, on the possible relationship between economic and racial exclusion and the appeal of the rhetoric of marginalisation, or possible variances between members of non-established congregations and their Church of England counterparts.

While recognising the class- and race-based privileges and particularities of Christ Church, however, the reflections of both staff and clients of the CLC do suggest that ambivalence as to Christianised legal theology spans England's denominational spectrum. Staff members who worshipped at Anglican, Baptist, and low evangelical churches all knew of fellow church members – and, in at least two cases, family members – who questioned the confrontational strategy of organisations like Christian Concern and the CLC (even as they might strongly sympathise with their aims), while some clients found the greatest challenge in coping with their cases to be the mixed responses they received from other Christians. Recognising this diversity of opinion proves a useful corrective to sociological accounts of conservative Christianity that view it as a reactionary response to changing values, in which the march of secularisation is seen to result in 'increasing commitment from decreasing numbers' (Brown, 2009: 198; see also Bruce, 2012: Chapter Seven). My research complicates these homogenising 'liberal stereotypes of conservative evangelical otherness' (Strhan, 2016: 174), showing that a firm commitment to conservative values does not negate complex individual evaluations of public Christianity, nor varying degrees of agreement

with or acquiescence to the secular norms of public discourse often presented as hostile to their faith.

Along with stressing the heterogeneity of a group often spoken of in terms of a presumed shared zealotry, I have also sought to complicate the idea that Christian activism in the United Kingdom ought to be understood as a ‘backlash’ against its own ‘irrelevance’ (Brown, 2009: 229). According to this paradigm, the rise of conservative Christianity is presented as proof of (one understanding of) the secularisation thesis, in which religion has become extraneous to the life of the nation and conservative Christians, having lost their previous ‘social power’, are mobilising against this change (Bruce, 2012: 138). In addition to its popularity among secularisation theorists, a version of this position is sometimes expressed by professing Christians, particularly those who identify as theologically liberal, who worry that those at the Christian Legal Centre have confused the dismantling of historic privilege with the beginnings of persecution (see Bartley, 2006; and liberal Christian responses in Donald et al, 2012). It is certainly true that Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre decry the passing of what is referred to as Britain’s Christian heritage. They fear, in Durkheimian fashion, that the loss of a shared Christian metanarrative will result in the fragmenting of society; or, worse still, in its usurpation by a competing, and less desirable, “worldview” (typical examples being secularism or Islam). In this sense, their goals *are* defensive, in that they view themselves as mobilising to “protect” this heritage. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce their activism to a purely reactionary desire to return to an idealised Christian past. That nineteenth-century law used to reflect Christian Concern’s preferred understanding of marriage, for example, does not mean that all nineteenth-century Britons had a saving faith in Jesus. Thus, although references to an ahistoric Christian Britain are a key part of the lexicon of Christian activism, my research suggests that their campaigns and cases are also strongly future-oriented. As I have argued in relation to their critique of rights-based language, these initiatives reveal a desire for what Griffith (2000: 31), writing of the United States, describes as a ‘once and future’ Christian nation in which individual recognition of the Truth of the Bible leads to corporate human flourishing. Rather than a knee-jerk reaction to Christianity’s decreasing cultural privilege, this alternative vision of human flourishing is, at least from an emic perspective, equal parts restitutionary and revolutionary.

Attempts to distinguish the reactionary from the radical remain complex, and raise interesting questions for further research. One area in which narratives of Christian pasts and presents could be further explored is in relation to the law. A primary aim of the thesis, albeit one that is largely implicit, has been to give an emic account of one aspect of contemporary legal history. This is English law’s transition from framing religious freedom as a negative liberty – that is, as the law’s ‘protection’ of religion from state encroachment –

to one in which it is seen as a positive right requiring state intervention and enforcement. As Sullivan (e.g. 2005) has shown in her various analyses of the First Amendment of the US Constitution, contemporary ideas of religious freedom, despite their representation as the primordial foundation upon which the United States was built, are the result of fairly recent political machinations. Ethnographic work following Sullivan's lead highlights the ways in which 'religious liberty' is produced in everyday life, such that, for example, religiously motivated 'conscientious objections' may be brought into being by the law's efforts to protect them (Weiner, n.d.). Recognising that religious liberty is always a socially constituted phenomenon, one which shifts according to the legal-historical moment, this thesis is an ethnographic account of a transitional point in legal history, in which the law's preference for establishment Anglicanism gives way to a universal 'right' to religious freedom.

In a 1993 lecture, then Master of the Rolls Sir Thomas Bingham (later Lord Chief Justice and senior law lord) suggested that the incorporation of the European Convention into domestic law would 'help reinvigorate the faith, which our eighteenth and nineteenth century forebears would not for one instant have doubted, that [liberty and justice] were fields in which Britain was the world's teacher, not its pupil' (Bingham, 1993: 400). A few years later, Lord Bingham had his wish: the European Convention was incorporated into UK law as the Human Rights Act 1998. UK residents no longer had to appeal to Europe to argue rights-based claims. For my activist interlocutors, however, there did not appear to be any necessary connection between nineteenth-century notions of justice, which they would associate with negative liberty, and the "equality and diversity" agenda that Andrea believes has "hijacked" the human rights project. As was suggested in Chapters Five and Six, it is perhaps for this reason that conservative evangelicals seem to be experiencing the legal system's move towards a more robust, positive understanding of human rights as a *weakening* of their actual ability to freely express their faith. Given that my interlocutors at both Christian Concern and Christ Church view this liberty as having emerged from Britain's Christian heritage (an admittedly nebulous concept, and one which glosses over the fact that the law's approach to religion has historically been one of discrimination not only against non-Christians, but against those who were considered the wrong kind of Christians), the demise of religious freedom is thought to accompany the perceived decrease in the influence of Christianity. Contra the hopes of Lord Bingham, the law's new emphasis on rights has done little to 'reinvigorate' conservative evangelicals' 'faith' in its ability to dispense justice. Rather, as Leah and Lucy, both solicitors who worshipped at Christ Church, had it, the state's reflection of the "popular cultural view of things" meant the law now failed to secure justice for those who took an opposing view.



Yet Christian activists continue to put forward rights-based claims. I have presented this strategy as both pragmatic – the idea that one must work within the law as it stands - and prophetic – an attempt to reveal the underlying incoherence of a system that seeks to protect competing rights without a comprehensive vision of the good, with dire predictions of what is to come. This prophetic element, as Timothy Jenkins (2013: 15) might have it, is more about telling ‘what is the case’ than telling ‘what will be’ (cf. Thompson, 2005: 9). It is a commentary on a system deemed unsatisfactory in its current guise. I have argued that this allows the Christian Legal Centre to present conservative Christians as a marginalised counterpublic, the views of which are deemed beyond the pale of liberal tolerance. In this way, Andrea and her team use the weight of the law against itself, highlighting its inconsistency so as to spark calls for reform. The range of theologies represented by the supporters of Christian Concern, which include various eschatologies and understandings of the state of the world during the End Times, means that the staff and clients of Christian Concern and the CLC do not appear to have an official position on what will be the ultimate outcome of their work. As noted above, they feel compelled to take action regardless of worldly success or failure, often reminding themselves and their supporters of the fact that “God’s economy” is not the world’s. The immediacy of this urgent theology, in which the actual goals of activism are held in temporal abeyance, can account for both success and defeat in the courts. On the one hand, God is known to favour the blameless, granting victory to those who uphold His laws. On the other, as Candida Moss (2012: 163) puts it in her account of ancient Christian martyrdom, ‘martyrdom authenticates mission’. A client’s willing sacrifice of reputation, relationships, and financial remuneration can prove the righteousness of their endeavour.

This use of the courts is a novel, and apparently imported, strategy. Yet it indexes a global trend. Religious populations worldwide are increasingly likely to use ‘jural ways and means in order to construct and represent themselves’ (J. L. Comaroff, 2009: 197). And the legal regulation of religion is transnational. Tracing this diffusion – and its critics – has been a theme throughout this work. As noted in the Introduction, Andrea’s first taste of confrontational activism came from her involvement with Karen Black’s anti-abortion sidewalk counselling movement in Georgia, USA. This pivotal moment forms an important part of the testimony she delivers to church groups and Christian conferences, a rhetorical device used to convince others to cross the Rubicon from English reserve to evangelical revival. The very necessity of this rhetorical move suggests that her style of activism is not one with which her English listeners will readily identify. But in spite the novel, legalised form it takes, I have argued that Christian Concern’s particular brand of legal theology reflects longstanding concerns within evangelical Christianity. This is evident in terms of its unwillingness to tolerate or participate in what are framed as national sins, and in the

perceived ethical imperative to proclaim God's Word to what is framed as a "lost" and "hurting" nation. Legal cases and political campaigns, then, can be seen as evangelistic vehicles; a modern, bureaucratic solution to the problem of salvation in an age of secular routinisation (Weber, 1967 [1918]; cf. Cannell, 2005, on spiritual bureaucracy).

As we have seen, however, Andrea's mission is no easy task. Given the historically specific and markedly different relations of church and state in England and America, an Americanised legal theology requires translation for an English audience. Like the eighteenth-century open-air preachers to whom the Christian Legal Centre compares its clients, Christian Concern is sometimes accused of fostering an 'enthusiasm' foreign to the Christianity of the English establishment (cf. Lambert, 1990). This was evident in the words of Hannah, a solicitor, Christ Church member, and affiliate of the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship, who once critiqued Christian Concern's brand of activism precisely because she was wary of the importation of America's "culture wars". For Hannah, there was little to be gained from fighting cases which were, in her opinion, lost from the outset; particularly when those involved in the cases, whether due to poor legal advice or a principled unwillingness to compromise, rarely had the opportunity to express a positive vision of Christianity during their time in the public eye. To quote, once again, Greenhouse's (1989: 208) litigation-shy Baptists, many members of Christ Church seem to agree that one ought not to fight 'what one cannot change'. With Britain seen to be careening away from its Christian past, perhaps the Kingdom was best served not by theo-legal activism, but by the personal holiness and attractive, distinctive lives of God's people on earth.

As I conclude, however, it is important to stress the subtlety of this position. That God's people are obliged to provide a positive Christian witness even in a hostile world, and that they ought to rejoice in doing so, does not negate the sadness with which they may respond to this perceived hostility. While writing this conclusion, I contacted Lucy to let her know that I would be closing my thesis by quoting the Queen's 2012 Christmas speech, which had moved her so greatly. I mentioned that I would be framing her experience in terms of what I saw as a conceptual paradox: that Christianity could be both "at the heart of national life" even as its public proclamation was unusual enough to bring her to tears. Gently correcting my interpretation, Lucy clarified:

I wouldn't say that Christianity is at the heart of national life. I fear it is anything but. It is at the heart of everything we've historically built our national life upon, but the nation seems to be turning away from that - morally in any event - at every opportunity and at an astonishing rate.

"That", she explained, "also brings a tear to my eye."

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