

The Christian Institute and the truth

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By Terry Sanderson, NSS President.

The Christian Institute seems to have abandoned its crude homophobic campaigning and relaunched itself as a slick propaganda machine, working hard to create the impression that Christians in Britain are being persecuted and discriminated against on an unprecedented scale. They uncover cases on what seems like a daily basis of Christians being denied employment rights, services and participation in public life. Their purpose is to win special privileges in all areas of life for those who declare themselves to be Christian.

The CI is aided enthusiastically in this push by the *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* which take up the CI's stories uncritically. Shock-horror headlines feed the perception that "secularists" are feeding poor Christians to the "politically correct" lions.

Seeing an opportunity to shore up their waning power, the bishops wade in with enthusiasm, reinforcing the perception that it's next to impossible to be a Christian in Britain today (forget that the churches have a third of the publically-funded education system under its belt, 26 of its bishops in the House of Lords, hundreds of millions of pounds in public funding and apparently an open door at Downing Street, we're talking *real* disadvantage here).

The propaganda push is succeeding. If you look at the Christian Institute's website (and the unquestioning reproduction of it in the *Telegraph* and *Mail*) you will certainly come away thinking that Christians are having a hard time of it these days. But propaganda is propaganda. It isn't the truth. And none of the stories that the Christian Institute are pumping out stand up to much scrutiny.

Take the case of the poor school receptionist whose child was scolded and told off by her teacher because she talked about Jesus. Her distraught mother naturally sent out an email to her "trusted church friends" asking them to pray for her heartbroken kiddy.

Somehow that email fell into the hands of the terrible headteacher at the school at which she worked and she was given a stiff talking to about it. How awful! How unjust! Poor woman! Poor persecuted Christian, and poor innocent child.

[Read the original Christian Institute version of the story here](#)

The *Telegraph*, *Express* and the *Mail* lapped it up and reproduced the Christian Institute's version of the tale with gusto, accompanying it with the usual misleading headlines. There was outrage throughout the land. Right-wing columnists fulminated, editorials were written lamenting the rise of 'diversity and equality' and, because of it, the hounding of these pious souls, radio phone-ins were awash with righteous indignation.

The only trouble was that, as we suspected at the outset, there was rather more to the story than the Christian Institute had led us to believe it was.

It turns out that the little girl was actually telling her playmates that if they didn't believe in Jesus

they were going to hell. This frightened some of them and so the teacher took the little evangelist gently aside and asked her not to say it. There was no “telling off”, no punishment, no order that she never refer to Jesus again on school property, just a request that she should not frighten her class mates.

The mother was distraught at all this. She felt it necessary to send emails to her trusted colleagues asking them to pray for her. One of those trusted friends was the wife of a school governor, who subsequently passed it to the headteacher. The email wasn't just a request to pray, but was also highly uncomplimentary about the school and some of its teachers.

The question then arose: had this woman used her privileged position as a school employee to denigrate her employer and co-workers in an untruthful fashion? Was the headteacher, in fact, right to accuse her of professional misconduct?

Local parents, who are nearer to the truth of this, have [showed overwhelming support](#) for the headteacher in this case.

I expect we will not know the full truth of this tale until it comes to court – if it ever does. In the meantime, the Christian Institute's version is accepted as the authentic version.

And as the papers retail these stories, they inevitably list the other examples of “Christian persecution” that have gone before. Remember that poor lady at BA, Nadia Eweida, who was persecuted into the ground because she wanted to wear a cross on her uniform? Even the Archbishop of Canterbury said it was a disgrace.

Except the Employment Tribunal kicked out every one of her claims of discrimination and said in its judgment that she was a nuisance to her employer and a bigot to her co-workers.

[Read a very different version of the Eweida saga here](#)

Then there was Lillian Ladele, the registrar with Islington Council who was, apparently, threatened with the sack because her Christian conscience would not permit her to carry out civil partnerships for same-sex couples – even though this was her job. It was presented as an attack on her rights as a Christian.

Once again, when all the facts came out at the employment tribunal, Ladele lost the case. What she was actually demanding was an exemption from the same terms of employment that all the other registrars in Islington have to abide by.

Similarly with the “praying nurse” Caroline Petrie – hers was not a case of discrimination. It was a case of her insisting that the rules (contained in a Health Service code of practice) shouldn't apply to her in the same way as they did to her colleagues because – well, she's a Christian and therefore special.

Then we have the Coronation Street cross scandal. The story was widely circulated that in an episode of Coronation Street that featured a church wedding, a cross had been covered up in one scene so that non-Christians would not be offended. The usual uproar ensued. “Christianity is being screened out of British life” etc etc.

Nobody noticed a small [letter](#) in the *The Times* from the producers of *Coronation Street* making it clear that the cross was covered up only for technical reasons. Why would they bother to film in a church if they were trying to obscure Christianity? This did not stop the *Daily Express* repeating [the lies](#) about this incident this week.

In nearly all these cases of claimed discrimination against Christians, it turns out that, in fact, it's Christians discriminating against other people.

Seeing an opportunity, the bishops were [soon on the case](#), making the most of the [propaganda coup](#) they had been handed by the Christian Institute.

We have to assume that the bishops are either dupes who will believe anything that the Christian Institute tells them or they are just as happy as the Christian Institute to mislead in order to further their push for special privileges.

Neither of them seems be able to make a convincing case without leaving out key facts.

But worse than this is the fact that the [propaganda is being used](#) to convince employers and their representative groups that there is a real and growing problem of religious discrimination at work. The "rising number of cases of religious discrimination claims being heard in employment tribunals" has caused the Chartered Management Institute to issue guidance to its members to ensure that they do not "directly or indirectly discriminate against staff holding particular beliefs".

Nobody wants unfair discrimination at work on any grounds, but we need to remember that discrimination can work both ways. If you positively discriminate in favour of a particular group (which is what these Christians want) then you are giving them privileges that impact negatively on their co-workers.

That is where this propaganda campaign will have its most profound impact.

See also:

[Here's the Christian Institute's latest perceived threat to Christianity](#)

[The latest paranoid spoutings of the Archbishop of York](#)

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