

Secular humanism undermines Christian freedom



Andrew Sibley

Speaker/Writer

Justice in modern democratic states is in a sorry state, with the passing of an increasing number of targeted laws that effectively control the speech, beliefs, and conscience of Christians. This arises from the ethos of secular humanism, which seeks to remove the Christian voice from public life.

Traditionalist Christians face sanctions for their belief. Recently, an elderly pastor, Clive Johnston, 78, was found guilty in Northern Ireland for preaching in the wrong place; that is, within an abortion buffer zone.¹ Päivi Räsänen, a Christian Democrat member of the Finnish parliament, was found guilty and fined by Finland's supreme court for inciting hatred after claims she made about homosexuality in a 2004 pamphlet.² Biblical creationists have also seen evidence for the design of life excluded from science lessons of English schools.³

In seeking to remove Christian faith from public life, secular humanists have embraced legalism to defend some rights. The liberalisation of laws around sexual ethics has expanded freedom for certain groups. But other laws are passed which seek to control speech or criminalise private thought—e.g., the proposed bans on conversion therapy,

which may include prayer, preaching, and responsible Christian counselling. Under the threat of legal sanctions, Christian believers are feeling the pressure to remain silent. This is despite the supposed protection afforded by the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 9) regarding religion, thought, and conscience.

The advance of humanism

For centuries the laws in Britain and Europe generally were grounded upon a biblical legal understanding. However, as Christian influence has declined in recent years, secular humanism has advanced, together with the restrictions upon the Christian voice in public life. By changing traditional Christian laws, spiritual principles and wisdom have been lost and new laws are required to control behaviour. Wrongful behaviour that any spiritually-minded Christian would recognise as inappropriate then need to be challenged by imposing new laws. Yet, such targeted rules would be unnecessary in a high-respect, God-fearing society.

Without God, the influence of secular humanism leads society towards practical atheism, and the darkness of authoritarian legalism, especially impacting Christians. Secular humanists, have the ear of many politicians on all sides of the political divide.⁴ Ironically, people are often attracted to humanism because they think Christianity is too restrictive, yet secular humanism actually leads to much greater control over people's lives.

Licence to sin

The modern world brings tension between licentiousness and legalism. The media often encourage people to view sexual activity as unbounded and consequence-free. But political

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activists also seek to shame those who hold to traditional moral standards, and to control their behaviour.

People are caught in a minefield of confusion;

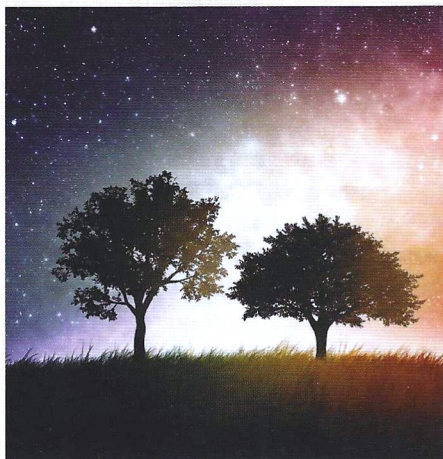
they are encouraged to think they are sexually free, but also threatened with legal sanctions for misunderstanding that freedom, or failing to navigate the moral maze. As a result, there is growing distrust in society, especially between young men and women. In the desire for a utopian society without God, new laws are required to control conduct. Where there is dissent, there is also the suppression of speech. But laws and censorship do nothing to change the human heart.

Yale law professor Arthur Leff described this mental conflict in a 1979 lecture *Unspeakable Ethics, Unnatural Law*.⁵ People in modern secular society wish to be both “perfectly ruled and perfectly free” to “discover the right and the good” while shaping society for selfish ends. Berkeley law professor Philip Johnson, in an article titled *Nihilism and the end of law*, called it the modernist impasse, showing that the tension is damaging to social cohesion.⁶ The secular elite draft laws for people to follow but often act as though they are exempt: ‘Laws for thee, but not for me.’ For instance, consider how many politicians have been caught in financial or sexual scandals? Professor Leff sought a moral standard that all could accept as good and unbiased, but he wouldn't recognise the place of God. Sadly, neither do most of our leaders today.

Saved by the grace of God

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul noted that, without Christ, people are caught between the burden of law on one side and the destructive

consequences of sin on the other. He wrote about understanding the law of Moses in the context of divine grace, forgiveness, mercy, and a life lived by faith in Christ. Believers are no longer under the law, but neither are we lawless. Through Christ, a believer can be both morally righteous and free, without being legalistic. The law becomes written on a believer's heart, so that it is not a heavy yoke.



Paul alludes to the Edenic symbolism of the two historic trees: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the fruit of the latter tree (Genesis 2:16–17). But the serpent deceived Eve, Adam wilfully followed suit (Genesis 3:6; 1 Timothy 2:14), and we have all been subject to the temptation of sin ever since.

For Paul, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolically alludes to the law. The law itself is good (Romans 7:12), but it is powerless in the face of the frailty of human flesh (Romans 8:2). Furthermore, the law enables the knowledge of sin, which leads to temptation (Romans 3:20, 7:7). As Paul said, “For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (Romans 7:11). Paul’s response was that of many of us: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

But he rejoiced that, through Christ, there is another law at work, the law of the Spirit of life. Here, Eden’s tree of life points symbolically to Christ: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1–2). The Holy Spirit writes the law on a believer’s heart, giving him/her the desire to do good. This is the grace of God that spiritually enables the Christian believer to live a just life, as Paul stated: “the righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17).

Summary

As modern democratic nations have moved away from Christianity, they have become more legalistic. But laws in themselves do not deal with the growing distrust and chaos, nor

the weakness of human flesh. Many people are ill-equipped to understand the complex and conflicted social messaging of the modern world. Ironically, the desire to remove divine principles was for purposes of greater equality and freedom, but society has become less free, less respectful, less equal, and more confused as a result. New laws are passed to control people who have forgotten how to love or respect in a Christ-like manner. These laws are also used to coerce Christians against sharing the Gospel message.

The Christian message is firmly grounded upon the Creation/Fall teaching of Genesis. It calls for people and society to be transformed by God’s grace; a grace that truly enables people to live morally better lives (recognising that we are works in progress), and to be free from legalism.

References and notes

1. In fact, he preached on John 3:16 and never mentioned abortion at all.
2. It was reproduced on the website of the Luther Foundation Finland and the Finnish Evangelical Mission Diocese in 2007.
3. Bell, P., Creation in schools hits the headlines, creation.com/creation-in-schools, updated 12 May 2025.
4. The humanist movement in Britain grew out of the Fellowship of the New Life alongside the Fabian Society, a left-wing organisation, but secular humanism also influences right-wing parties in the present day.
5. Leff, A.A., Unspeakable ethics, Unnatural Law, *Duke Law Journal* **1979**(6):1229–1249, 1979.
6. Johnson, P.E., Nihilism and the end of law, *First Things* **31**:19–25, 1 Mar 1993.

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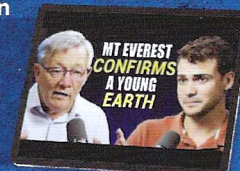


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