



Church leaders plea for centenaries to be celebrated with sensitivity - See reports in this issue

Pastor who said Islam was 'doctrine spawned in hell' is cleared by court

An Evangelical Christian preacher who denounced [Islam](#) as “heathen”, “satanic” and a “doctrine spawned in hell” has been cleared

after a three-day trial in a verdict that upheld the right to offend under the principle of freedom of expression.

James McConnell, 78, was prosecuted under the Communications Act after making his remarks when preaching in his church, Whitewell Metropolitan Tabernacle in Belfast, in May 2014. His comments were posted on the internet, [causing a public outcry](#).

McConnell was accused of the improper use of a public electronic communications network and causing a grossly offensive message to be sent by means of a public electronic communications network. He denied both charges, and later said he was prepared to go to prison if convicted.

But Liam McNally, the judge hearing the case, said it was “not the task of the criminal law to censor offensive utterances”. He added: “The courts need to be very careful not to criticise speech which, however contemptible, is no more than offensive ... Accordingly, I find Pastor McConnell not guilty of both charges.”

The right to freedom of expression “includes the right to say things or express opinions that

offend, shock or disturb the state or any section of the population,” he said.

Outside the court, McConnell said he would repeat the message of the sermon, but word it differently. “The only regret I have is the response from the Muslim community – that I was out to hurt them,” he said.

“If there are Muslims out there I want to assure them I love them and, if they need help, I am there to help them, but their theology and their beliefs – I am totally against them.”

The pastor said he did not realise how far his sermon would travel. The court heard it was watched by 700 people online. “As far as I was concerned I was preaching to my own people, I was preaching in my own church – I didn’t realise it would go out there and so forth,” he said.

The judge said McConnell was “a man with strong, passionate and sincerely held beliefs”. He said: “In my view, Pastor McConnell’s mindset was that he was preaching to the converted in the form of his own congregation and like-minded people who were listening to his service rather than preaching to the worldwide internet.”

Although the words on which the charges were based were offensive, they did not cross the legal threshold of being “grossly offensive”, the judge said.

During the three-day hearing last month, McConnell told Belfast magistrates court that he had not intended to provoke, hurt or offend Muslims but was unrepentant for preaching the gospel. He said he had turned down a plea bargain involving an informed warning because he did not want to be “gagged”.

Several hundred evangelical Christian supporters attended each day of the hearing to show solidarity with McConnell, and the court was packed with the pastor’s supporters for the verdict, which was greeted with applause.

An [Islamic academic spoke in support of McConnell](#) outside the court on the grounds of freedom of expression. Muhammad al-Hussaini, a senior research fellow in Islamic studies at the Westminster Institute, said: “Against the flaming backdrop of torched Christian churches, bloody executions and massacres of faith minorities in the Middle East and elsewhere, it is ... a matter of utmost concern that, in this country, we discharge our common duty steadfastly to

defend the freedom of citizens to discuss, debate and critique religious ideas and beliefs – restricting only speech which incites to physical violence against others.

“Moreover, in a free and democratic society we enter into severe peril when we start to confuse what we perhaps ought or ought not to say, with what in law we are allowed to, or not allowed to say.”

During the trial, a Catholic priest, Fr Patrick McCafferty, appeared as a character witness of behalf of Pastor McConnell.

The two men first met more than 20 years ago, and Fr McCafferty told the court: ““I can say that Pastor McConnell has no hatred for anyone whatsoever and the people of his church are not people who go out in this community and cause trouble, they are the exact opposite.”

Several high-profile politicians, including Northern Ireland’s former first minister Peter Robinson, the Democratic Unionist party deputy leader, Nigel Dodds, and the former finance minister Sammy Wilson, spoke out in support of the pastor.

Before the verdict, [McConnell told the Belfast Telegraph](#): “If the judge imposes a fine, then I won’t be paying it and I don’t want anybody else to pay it on my behalf either. It’s a matter of principle.

“Paying a fine would be an admission of guilt and I have said from the beginning that I am an innocent man. I know that not paying a fine means that people eventually end up in jail and I am prepared to accept that.”

The National Secular Society said the verdict was a “welcome reassertion of the fundamental right to freedom of expression”.

Campaigns manager Stephen Evans said the society strongly disagreed with the tone and content of McConnell’s comments, but added: “At a time when freedom of speech is being curtailed and put at risk in any number of ways, this is a much needed statement from the judge that free speech will be defended and that Islam is not off-limits.”

The Evangelical Alliance of [Northern Ireland](#) also welcomed the verdict, saying it was a “victory for common sense and free speech”.

Director Peter Lynas said: “It is vital that the state does not stray into the censorship of

church sermons or unwittingly create a right not to be offended.”

Presbyterian response to Pastor James McConnell Case

Commenting at the conclusion of the case taken against Pastor James McConnell at Belfast Magistrates' Court yesterday (5th January) the Very Rev. Dr. Norman Hamilton, Convener of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Council for Church in Society said:

“The right to express a point of view in a public setting, or in the public square, including the liberty to express strongly held beliefs, is one of the marks of a healthy democracy.

“As a church we are increasingly troubled that the state is seeking to limit freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of conscience in the interests of political correctness. It is essential that the Christian church and all Christian people are at the forefront of promoting such freedoms for the benefit of every citizen, as far as they are

consistent with the building of a genuinely free and pluralist society.

“At the same time, whether our outlook on life is shaped by a faith-based perspective, or none at all, for us all to live in a peaceful and cohesive democratic society, there will always be self-imposed parameters that support important freedoms such as the rights of free speech and of free assembly.

“In this there is a profound tension, especially in a global and social media-driven age. The law must properly value and protect a citizen’s right to freedom of speech and expression, while at the same time protecting each of us from unacceptable abuse.”

Pastor James McConnell has said he is prepared and “resolute as ever” as he awaits his fate over a controversial sermon on Islam.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/pastor-mcconnell-resolute-as-ever-ahead-of-verdict-1-7144047>

A leading Northern Irish atheist has defended Pastor James McConnell’s right to free speech, as judgement looms over his controversial anti-Islamic sermon.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/top-ni-atheist-figure-mcconnell-should-not-be-facing-court-1-7142317>

Mothers' Union celebrates 140th anniversary

The Anglican mission agency Mothers' Union is celebrating its 140th anniversary in 2016. Throughout the year it will hold a number of events to mark 14 decades of “faithful outreach to families of all faiths and none.”

The Mothers Union was formed in 1876, when Mary Sumner brought together parents in her own Hampshire parish to build their confidence in bringing up their children. Since then it has grown to an organisation of over four million women – and men – in over 80 countries of the world and continues to encourage parents in looking after children, not only physically and mentally but also spiritually. From the outset, the Mothers' Union recognised that strong relationships and the role of family, however defined, are crucial in building healthy communities.

“Whilst the ways in which we operate to fulfil that need may be different from that of the world



of the 19th century, our vision today is still of a world where God’s love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships. This is the essence of our work,” the agency says on its website. “We aim to show our Christian faith by the transformation of communities worldwide. We can do this through the promotion of stable marriage, family life and the protection of children. This is our mission. It is what we aim to achieve.”

“In the first book of Samuel he marks an unlooked for victory against the mighty Philistines by erecting a stone, naming it ‘Ebenezer’ – meaning ‘stone of help’ – as a permanent reminder of the leading and guidance of God: ‘Thus far has the Lord helped us,’” a spokesman said. “Over the past 140 years,

Mothers' Union has faced, and will continue to face, many challenges. Family life is under increasing pressure and the call on charitable resources is higher today than ever before. But we can look at how we are meeting these challenges and say, like Samuel, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.'"

A special anniversary celebration service will be held at Winchester Cathedral, England, on 22 September – where the Mothers' Union was founded; and [service resources are being made available](#) to help local churches hold their own Mother Union anniversary services on Mothering Sunday (6 March), Lady Day (4 April), and Mary Sumner Day (9 August).

The Mothers' Union has also set itself a fundraising challenge of £1.4 million to support its work providing practical action to support 500,000 throughout the year.

- The Mothers' Union is engaged in daily prayer for next week's Primates Meeting. On its website, the agency says: "Whilst Mothers' Union is an autonomous organisation, our close fellowship and shared mission in many parts of the world mean that the meeting of the Primates of the Communion which will be held in

Canterbury, UK, 11 – 16 January, will be held in the hearts of all Mothers' Unions around the world. Therefore, please join us in prayer as we pray daily for the Bishops and Archbishops attending the meeting.”

The Mothers' Union has published its [own prayers](#) as well as linking to the [litany for the Primates Meeting](#) prepared by the Anglican Communion secretary general, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon.

Irish catholic bishops call for 'radical culture of peace' as country prepares to mark Easter Rising centenary

One hundred years after the Easter Rising, 2016 needs to be the year for “a radical culture of peace”, Irish bishops have said.

The comments came in the Irish episcopal conference's message marking the 100 year anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916 as well as the Battle of the Somme, which began the following July.

The Easter Rising was an armed insurrection during Easter Week by republicans aiming to end British rule and establish an independent Ireland.

The bishops said both events had a “profound impact on national identity and shaped the political landscape in ways that can still be felt” today.

They added upcoming commemorations “have the potential to stimulate much-needed reflection on where we are as a society and what we want to achieve for the future.”

There had been fears that the ‘decade of centenaries’ marking such events would ‘reopen old wounds’ but bishops said, “thankfully these fears have not materialised.”

Instead, they maintain the anniversaries have allowed Ireland to maturely reflect on the past. Part of this they say is a chance to “challenge” themselves and “reflect on whether we have been sufficiently courageous in promoting a radical culture of peace.”

The bishops added the Church has an important role in “nurturing healing conversations” which comes to the forefront when we remember such events.

The message ends with a call to renew commitment to peace and provide clear steps society needs to take to address the obstacles in the way.

Pádraig Pearse's overtly Catholic Rising was immoral and anti-democratic

All births are violent and accompanied by blood and great pain. Such too was the birth of the aspiring republic that is [Ireland](#).

Patsy McGarry write in Irish Times - Its life began with what Taoiseach Enda Kenny described last Sunday, at [1916](#) commemorations in Dublin Castle, as a revolt of “poets and patriots . . . that changed forever the course of Irish history”. And that it did.

None of which takes from the fact that the Rising itself was an immoral and anti-democratic act organised by a minority within a minority, who, looking into their own souls, saw there what they deemed was right for the Irish people.

It was a mindset that would later precipitate a civil war in the infant state when Eamon de



Pádraig Pearse was very clear where he stood in this vision of events. He was the Christ-like figure.

Valera (the only surviving commandant of the Rising) and supporters rejected the Dáil vote of January 1922 that accepted the Treaty by 64 votes to 57. The people, it seems, had no right to be wrong either, as they saw it.

Such hubris is hardly a surprise when you consider the messianic views of leaders of the Rising, particularly Pádraig Pearse. The timing of the Rising for Easter was deliberate, and intended to signify a risen people commensurate with the risen Christ.

Christ-like

Pearse was very clear where he stood in this vision of events. He was the Christ-like figure. Shortly before he was executed in May 1916 he wrote the poem *A Mother Speaks* for his mother. It reads:

Dear Mary, that didst see thy first-born Son

Go forth to die amid the scorn of men

For whom He died,

Receive my first-born son into thy arms,

Who also hath gone out to die for men,

And keep him by thee till I come to him.

Dear Mary, I have shared thy sorrow,

And soon shall share thy joy.

Such was the confluence of Pearse's thinking with Catholic thought that he could write at Christmas 1915, in *Ghosts*, that "like a divine religion, national freedom bears the marks of unity, of sanctity, of catholicity, of apostolic succession". One, holy, catholic and apostolic, you might say.

As if to underline the Catholic nature of the rebellion he and all signatories to the Proclamation, including [James Connolly](#),

received Communion from Catholic priests prior to execution.

None of these men had shown any understanding of, or consideration for, the fate of approximately 25 per cent of Ireland's population then who were not of "the nation" and not [Roman Catholic](#), in a state where "marks of unity, of sanctity, of catholicity, of apostolic succession" was to be the predominant ethos.

It should have come as no surprise then that the outcome of such ill-thought-out unilateral violence was two sectarian states on this island, a Protestant state for a Protestant people and a Catholic state for a Catholic people. Or that the twain should rarely meet.

It should have come as no surprise either that the northern state, as constituted, became a failed political entity, while that in the South was a failed economic entity for most of the 20th century.

Had constitutional politics prevailed in Ireland beyond the 1914 Home Rule Act, it is probable a southern state emerging from such legislation would have had a more easeful financial separation from Britain than that precipitated by 1916.

Then it might not have been necessary to reduce the old age pension in the new state by 10 per cent in 1924, two years after it came into being, while the penury and mass emigration of subsequent decades might have been avoided.

None of this is to ignore the 485 people killed in the Rising, most of them civilians, 40 of them children under 17, none of whom asked to die.

All were ignored at the Dublin Castle ceremonies last Sunday, except for the 78 volunteers killed, whose names were read out. They at least chose to be part in the Rising.

Singling them out simply continues the glorification of political violence sanctified by 1916 that has bedevilled the island of Ireland for most of the past 100 years.

Further, such 1916 commemorations should not take place at Easter but over the last weekend of April each year. Marking the event at Easter is to concede to the quasi-blasphemous religious stance of Pearse and his colleagues.

<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/p%C3%A1draig-pearse-s-overtly-catholic-rising-was-immoral-and-anti-democratic-1.2484737>

Irish Church leaders' joint New Year's Message calls for harmony in remembrance

The Church of Ireland and Catholic Archbishops of Armagh; the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the President of the Irish Council of Churches have issued the following New Year's Message:

'This year, 2016, will bring with it the centenary of many significant events which have shaped the history and culture of this island and its people. In remembering our past we must also seek a true vision for our future.

In recent years, much has been achieved in working towards a peaceful society throughout Ireland based on mutual agreement, understanding and respect. As the light of a New Year dawns, may our united prayer be that peace and justice will continue to grow and blossom throughout our land.

May our memories and commemorations of the past, alongside our hopes and longings for the future, strengthen our resolve to live together in

harmony, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we find our hope, for he is “the same yesterday, today and forever”.’ (Hebrews 13:8)

Revd Brian Anderson, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

Archbishop Richard Clarke, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh

Archbishop Eamon Martin, Catholic Archbishop of Armagh

Rt Revd Dr Ian McNie, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Revd Dr Donald Watts, President, Irish Council of Churches

Home run by C of I evangelical society is focus of child abuse inquiry

A public inquiry into alleged child abuse turned its attention yesterday to a residential home run by an evangelical Anglican society in Ireland.

The Irish Church Missions was established to convert Catholics to Protestantism. The conservative organisation ran Manor House Children's Home near Belfast in Lisburn, Co Down, and had links to the Church of Ireland.

The Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Inquiry began hearing evidence of alleged wrongdoing at the home during public sessions in Banbridge, Co Down.

The mission is governed by Anglican evangelical clergy and laity who are concerned for Gospel growth in Ireland.

The organisation's website states It is a recognised mission agency within the Church of Ireland and the worldwide Anglican Communion, with offices in Belfast and Dublin.

The HIA is considering harrowing claims of emotional, physical and sexual abuse at 22 institutions in Northern Ireland from 1922 when the state was founded to 1995. It is chaired by retired judge Sir Anthony Hart and is also probing actions at homes run by the Catholic Church and the state.

The inquiry was established by Northern Ireland's power-sharing ministerial executive and is expected to make recommendations on how to compensate victims.

Proceedings commenced with a brief opening address from Sir Anthony then counsel to the Inquiry, Christine Smith QC, then delivered an overview of matters relating to Manor House.

The module of evidence is expected to last one week.

In total, the inquiry is expected to hear from more than 300 witnesses during public evidence sessions.

It is due to submit its report to ministers in a year's time.

A public inquiry into alleged child abuse will turn its attention on Tuesday to a residential home run by evangelical Anglican missionaries in Ireland.

News Letter

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/hia-inquiry-to-probe-home-run-by-anglican-missionaries-1-7143329>

With saintly shout and solemn jubilee, the Royal School of Church Music's new festival service book

The Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) has recently published the latest in its series of themed festival service books for use at choral festivals and other church occasions. ***With saintly shout and solemn jubilee honours those in whom the Church has recognised God***

at work and offers a wide selection of hymns, worship songs and choral items for choirs of all sizes and abilities.

This latest service book which takes its title from Milton's poem, "Blest pair of sirens," has been devised by Peter Moger, Precentor of York Minster, and compiled by Andrew Reid, Director of the RSCM and Tim Ruffer, RSCM's Head of Publishing. As in previous publications in the series, the book contains a complete service, including readings and prayers and can be used in churches and chapels with full SATB choirs, as well as those with more limited musical resources.

There are alternatives for each musical item and guidance to help with adapting the service, whether it is for a large Area festival or a Choral Evensong. For example, there are three different settings of the *Kyrie* ranging from a simple but effective chant from the Taizé Community in France, to a setting by Charles Wood (whose 150th anniversary of his birth is celebrated in 2016) from his *Mass in the Phrygian Mode*. The third and more contemporary alternative is taken from Jonathan Dove's *Missa Brevis*.

This new publication includes works by Stanford, Harris, Victoria and Harwood as well as more contemporary compositions from Sally

Beamish, Sir James MacMillan, Philip Moore, and Philip Wilby. There is a beautiful anthem specially written for the book by renowned composer Grayston Ives and a new setting of the *Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis* by Richard Shephard, written with parish church choirs in mind. Hymns and songs range in style from ancient plainchant to contemporary worship and include, “King of the ages, Almighty God” and “There’s a place where the streets shine”.

The RSCM’s series of festival service books has proved very popular with churches and can be used whole or in part. Each book provides an assortment of choral resources that choir directors can dip into again and again, and **with saintly shout and solemn jubilee** includes a suggested order for Choral Evensong, providing settings of the Evening Canticles and responses as additional resources.

The first in the RSCM’s series of Festival Service Books, *The Word revealed*, was published five years ago to mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, and *At all times and in all places*, published in 2012, marked the 350th anniversary of the Book of Common Prayer. The focus in **with saintly shout and solemn jubilee** is one of celebration. In the introduction to the

service, Peter Moger says: “When we are baptised, we join a vast company of men and women which stretches across space and time...these are God’s saints. We honour all those in whom the Church has particularly recognised God at work.”

with saintly shout and solemn jubilee is available to order through RSCM Music Direct: www.rscm.com/shop (where there is a complete list of the contents and a number of audio recordings – see ‘additional information’ on the product page. Alternatively email musicdirect@rscm.com, or telephone 0845 021 7726. Significant discounts are available for RSCM affiliates and individual members. Price £6.50p (significant discounts are available for RSCM affiliated churches, schools and members)

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Northern Ireland medics fear prison over abortion advice

<http://gu.com/p/4f7zm/sbl>

Teacher to be compensated over comments on gay son

Irish Times

Resource teacher Bernie Marron took the case against the board of management of St Paul's, a **Church of Ireland** primary school in Collooney, Co ... The Equality Tribunal ruled in favour of Bernadette Marron, who took a case against the board

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/teacher-to-be-compensated-over-comments-on-gay-son-1.2484823#.VougPUINxr8.twitter>

Journal.ie

She said her boss made derogatory comments about her son's clothes, and members of the Catholic Church.

<http://www.thejournal.ie/teacher-to-be-compensated-after-principal-made-comments-about-gay-son-2531361-Jan2016/>

Funeral customs 'too hard to alter' in Cork and Kerry

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/funeral-customs-too-hard-to-alter-in-cork-and-kerry-374380.html>

Barnardos aiding more children than ever before

Irish Examiner

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/barnardos-aiding-more-children-than-ever-before-714120.html>

Business warns against cutting NI university places

News Letter

Cutting university places risks undermining Northern Ireland's ability to attract new overseas investment in 2016, a leading business organisation has warned.

<http://www.newsletter.co.uk/call-to-preserve-university-places-to-secure-growth-1-7143350>

Irish News

<http://www.irishnews.com/business/businessnews/2016/01/04/news/business-chiefs-warn-against-cutting-number-of-university-places-371887/>

'It doesn't make me any less Irish' accepting MBE says former republican internee Pat McCarthy

Belfast Telegraph

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/it-doesnt-make-me-any-less-irish-accepting-mbe-says-former-republican-internee-pat-mccarthy-34333455.html>

Times/Wales Online

Reports about a website post by David Davies, MP for Monmouth, criticising the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Wales over their stance towards refugees. The MP also accuses the Church of being unduly 'obsessed' by climate change. The *Times* quotes Bob Ward, a climate researcher at the LSE as saying the Church is right to highlight climate change.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4656441.ece>

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/mp-says-archbishops-canterbury-wales-10681996>

Ind

Report on blog posts by David Chillingworth, Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, expressing concerns about the Columba Declaration, which commits the Church of England and the Church of Scotland to 'grow together in communion and to strengthen their partnership in mission.' In a blog post entitled 'Columba Declaration – time for a rethink' Bishop David calls for a delay in publication of the full document to allow time for consultation. A Church of Scotland spokesman is quoted as denying that the Scottish Episcopal Church had been sidelined.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/pact-between-churches-of-england-and-scotland-needs-rethink-a6796531.html>

Times

Report which says that Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote letters of support for Peter Ball, the former Bishop of Gloucester, in 1993 despite having a report on allegations against Ball who was jailed last year after admitting sex offences against young men. Article refers to the Church's independent review into the Peter Ball case.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4656475.ece>

Tel

Article on when to take down Christmas decorations which says that in Britain the tradition is that Christmas

decorations stay up until Twelfth Night. The article says that according to the Church of England, Twelfth Night is the night before Epiphany.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/topics/christmas/christmas-news/12080835/When-should-I-take-down-my-Christmas-decorations.html>

Financial Times

Article on the restoration of Christ Church, Spitalfields, in east London

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f073a67e-b2d2-11e5-b147-e5e5bba42e51.html>

Letters

Tel (*scroll down*)

Further letters, including one from Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, on comment article by Charles Moore about Bishop George Bell and the Church of England settling a civil claim over an allegation of abuse

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/12080966/Letters-Chewing-gum-is-a-sticky-little-hazard-on-pavements-and-public-seating.html>

Guard

Comment arising from the release of letters last week written in support of Peter Ball, the former Bishop of Gloucester, following a Freedom of Information request.

<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/jan/04/letters-backing-bishop-peter-ball-should-all-be-disclosed>

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January 6

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