



Clear evidence of anti-Christian bias in Counter-Extremism Commission

Government Extremism Commission in Breach of Conduct Code – “divisive and dangerous” Commissioners Must Resign

Sara Khan, Peter Tatchell and Dame Louise Casey

Commissioners of a new government commissioned group, whose task is to study extremism and report back to the Government, hold Christophobic and hostile views that will alarm Christians throughout the country. Bible-believing Christians who are pro-life and pro-traditional marriage are seen as “menacing”, even bracketed alongside terrorist groups like ISIS and the Taliban, while being part of “less progressive religious communities.” Lynda Rose, CEO of Voice for Justice UK, is calling for their immediate resignation.

Lynda Rose says: “We have members of a Commission with very divisive and dangerous views about Bible-believing Christians. If you are pro-life or pro-traditional marriage, you are effectively seen as backward and not properly integrated into British society. This Commission is meant to study what extremism is, and, in due course, advise the Government on new policies that deal with extremism. This includes the need for new powers. But given how three of its Commissioners see Christians, including the Lead Commissioner, we can expect the Commission’s findings to promote Christophobia.”

She adds: “Christian freedoms are already under serious threat and the influence of these Commissioners is likely to further smear all law-abiding Christians in the UK.

Peddling hostility for Christian beliefs that are integral to Christian teaching is a recipe for disaster. These Commissioners must resign immediately.”

In the Spring of 2019, the Commission for Countering Extremism seeks to publish a wide-ranging study on “all forms of extremism” that will include the public’s understanding of extremism, its scale, the tactics and objectives of extremists, the harms caused, and the current response. This Commission was set up by the Government as an independent and impartial public body.[1] As such, its Commissioners are required to comply with the *Cabinet Office Code of Conduct*. [2] The Code stipulates that where a conflict of interest arises, the Commissioner must “not participate in the discussion or determination of a matter where the interest might suggest a danger of bias.” [3] It means that certain Commissioners legally can’t, in view of their already publicly stated views about Christians, participate in much, if not all, of the Commission’s work. This Code is seriously and conspicuously breached by the membership of three members of its “Expert Group”, whose public positions and expressed views place them in clear conflict.

We applaud the government’s efforts to tackle and defeat terrorists and others who incite violence and murder, and those whose ideology is geared to bringing down our democracy and all its supporting institutions. However, given the perverse and divisive Christophobic views of three of the Commission’s members, Christians are clearly wrongly at risk of being classed alongside dangerous extremists. Input from these individuals, one of whom is the Lead Commissioner, will effectively peddle hostility towards Christians. This is before the Commission’s Call to Evidence has closed, after which the Commission will then need to study the resulting findings from its Call to Evidence.

We should note there is no legal definition of “extremism”. However, according to the Government:

Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.[4]

These “shared values” are also known as fundamental British values.[5]

Sara Khan

**If Christians must celebrate same-sex relationships,
then atheists must celebrate Jesus Christ!**

The Lead Commissioner of the Commission for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan, writes in the foreword of the Commission’s Terms of Reference:

Our country’s rich diversity, fundamental freedoms and liberal democracy define us as a nation and are cause for celebration. We embrace different races, religions, sexualities and beliefs. But a worrying picture is forming, which should concern all those that cherish these values. Many of those I have spoken to believe that extremism is increasing and are concerned about ideas and behaviours that undermine our values.[6]

The Lead Commissioner makes a serious error, when suggesting that there is something “extremist” (and therefore, dangerous to society) about people who do not “embrace” different religions, sexualities and beliefs. What does “embrace” mean? When an atheist refuses to “embrace” Christian beliefs, is this “extremist”? Clearly not. Likewise, is a Christian “extremist”, when rejecting atheism or other religious beliefs?

On the subject of sex and marriage, is a self-professed liberal an “extremist”, when rejecting the belief that marriage must be monogamous, for life, and designed only for opposite-sex couples? In contrast, why are Christians placed in the “extremist” category, when they believe marriage is exclusive, by definition, to opposite-sex couples?

Rejecting the idea and practice of same-sex relationships can presumably fall under what Sara Khan labels failure to embrace different sexualities. But this is based on a fundamental and dangerous misunderstanding of tolerance. If embracing people means to recognise they have inherent dignity, bear the image of God, and deserve respect, then Christian teaching, centred as it is on love, unreservedly compels us to “embrace” all people. But Christian teaching does *not* mean we must embrace their values and lifestyles too – especially where there is clear conflict with Christian belief. Living alongside and respecting people with values different from our own is a mark of “tolerance”. Requiring Christians to affirm and “embrace” values contrary to their faith

is a form of vicious totalitarianism whose practical effect can only be the deliberate suppression of Christian belief.

Are atheists expected to “embrace” the lifestyles of Christians? Clearly not, so why is this only one way? What does this attitude say about the “liberal democracy” Sara Khan claims to celebrate, when one group which holds passionately and doggedly to its belief is not a threat, but those who hold to a different view are unequivocally labelled “extremists”?

Bizarrely and disingenuously, she also claims:

My approach to this Study will be the same approach I have taken throughout my career: a robust defence of pluralism and human rights, gender equality, and our fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief.[7]

On what moral authority is Khan deciding to cherry-pick the ‘good’ from the ‘nasty’ tenets of world religions – tenets which, in her personal view, must comply with her own set of supposedly worthy religious beliefs? What confidence can we have in someone who claims to be robustly defending freedom of religion, while also expecting Christians to celebrate different sexualities? She is imposing her worldview and value judgments on to others. So much for the “liberal democracy” she claims to celebrate and cherish!

Peter Tatchell

“Menacing” Christians are put in the same category as ISIS & Taliban

One Commission member is gay rights activist, Peter Tatchell. At times he has appeared to speak in nominal defence of cases involving free speech that is critical of LGBT issues and abortion,[8] suggesting apparent tolerance. Conversely, he is also on record for deeply divisive and intolerant views, easily falling foul of hate crime laws – views which he has never repudiated. In 2014, for example, his foundation released a *Manifesto for Secularism – Against the Religious Right*, whose text still remains on his foundation website.[9]

The manifesto, signed by over forty activists (including humanists, feminists, ex-Muslims, and LGBTs) was set up to challenge what it calls the “global rise of the Religious Right and its menacing values.” Attributing disturbing parallels between what he calls the “Religious Right” in Europe and the US, with countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Manifesto stated: “Even when religion has little or no formal political power, such as in the UK and US, the Religious Right has often sabotaged women’s reproductive rights and equality for LGBT people.”

To translate this, Christians are classed as “menacing” if they are pro-life and pro-traditional marriage and are categorised alongside some of the most oppressive regimes in the world where freedoms of religion, belief and conscience, and freedom of speech are absent. The absurdity of this belief is very serious, as it is not only dangerously intolerant of viewpoints other than its own, but seeks to slur and silence *all* Christians who hold to biblical values, especially on matters of sex and marriage. It therefore poses a titanic threat to our democracy and the hard-fought-for freedoms underpinning it, like freedoms of speech, belief and conscience, and their public manifestation.

If this is not alarming enough, then perhaps an even more divisive part of the manifesto is when it brackets traditional-minded Christians in Europe and the US (the “Religious Right”) alongside ISIS, the Taliban and other terrorist and/or extremist groups who seek to bring down western societies and governments. Can it not be argued that this view itself is hateful, intolerant and extreme (“extremist”), and undermining of a pluralist democracy? And can it not equally be said that the demonisation of law-abiding Christians by comparing them to terrorist groups is a clear example of “hate speech” against those holding religious belief under the terms of the Equality Act 2010? And this is not just limited to Christians, of course, because we should also include all conservative-minded Jews, Muslims and Hindus – as well as non-religious people in general who hold to conservative beliefs about marriage, sex and family.

Tatchell’s views, and the potential influence they will have on the Commission, risk putting the government’s attempts at building social and community cohesion in grave jeopardy. It also suggests that the Commission’s attempt to define extremism rests on a prejudiced, fixed and hostile belief about those Christians who are pro-life and pro-traditional marriage.

Dame Louise Casey

Pro-abortion and pro-LGBT relationships are tests of integration

Bible-believing Christians are “less progressive”

Another member is Dame Louise Casey, who in 2015, was commissioned by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to undertake a review into integration and opportunity. One year later, a Report was published.[10]

In a section of Dame Louise’s Review entitled *Public Attitudes*, the “acceptability of different sexualities” and abortion are treated as among the measurements of social integration. The Review states: “Measuring the attitudes of the general population and of particular communities can be helpful in assessing many issues, including how integrated we are as a nation...”

Included in the list of issues, which Casey calls “more controversial questions related to integration”, [11] are: “tolerance of views which directly contradict your own”. This invites three questions. First, if tolerance means people should live side by side with others in peace, while each passionately holds to different viewpoints and values, then are Christians intolerant when they oppose abortion on moral grounds? Second, if this is so, *how* are they different from others, who oppose pro-life beliefs based on their own purported moral grounds? Third and last, why is one form of moral opposition “intolerant” and therefore undermining of “integration”, while the other is not? These are crucial questions Casey’s Review failed even to acknowledge, let alone address.

Another item treated as a benchmark of integration is what Casey’s review calls “conflicts between tradition and values such as equality.” [12] Inevitably, this brings in potentially many issues, some of which won’t apply to Christians; for example, religiously-driven gender segregation in places of worship and education.

While not mentioned explicitly in this section of the Review, a belief in marriage only being between a man and woman, still overwhelmingly the mainstream view of the world’s population, is presumably one that falls foul of “equality”. Later in her Review, Casey’s view of “equality” violation is confirmed beyond doubt, when she writes that LGBT people suffer abuse and harm, “where they come from less progressive religious

communities”.[13] This is a dangerously sweeping statement and no attempt has been made to exclude Bible-believing Christians from this stated harm and abuse.

What is clear, however, is that Christians who believe in the Bible’s teaching on sex and marriage are labelled part of a “less progressive” religious community. To cite one example, if a Christian experiences same-sex attractions, but chooses not to identify with those feelings, opting instead for celibacy or therapy, this would be classified as “abuse” of those identifying as LGBT. It apparently matters not one jot that such an individual adult has moral agency! Churches and individual Christians holding such Bible-based beliefs are labelled homophobic. So much then for two of the fundamental British values; namely, mutual tolerance and respect for other faiths and beliefs, and, respect for individual liberty!

Dame Louise might as well have written that biblical beliefs belong to the dark ages, and that Christians who take such values and precepts seriously are *not* integrated. Which view, when applied to the strategy of the Counter-Extremism Commission, as declared by both the Lead Commissioner and the Government, translates into their being extremists, who must be challenged. But one wonders why, because the Christian Gospel abhors all forms of violence or abuse, and Christians demonstrably pose no threat.

Casey also writes: “Intimidation and hatred for those who leave their faith was brought to the attention of the team, particularly from people who left more traditional or conservative religious sects and who felt persecuted within their own community.” Next, she states the problem is “not hidden” and then goes on to cite a 2013 British Social Attitudes survey,[14] as evidence of the problem Christians pose to modern British society (Muslims and other non-Christians with conservative views are equally on the radar here). When citing this survey, Casey makes some inexcusable errors in her lazy language when stating:

‘...40% of Anglicans and 35% of Catholics in Britain thought that *being gay* was “always” or “mostly” wrong. Less progressive views towards sexuality may also be found among older people and those with low educational qualifications. But the trend across society is towards more liberal and progressive views.’[15](Italics added)

The Survey itself doesn't talk about "being gay" but refers to "Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex"; note, this is different from having specific feelings towards people of the same sex. Many people, Christians and others, *choose* not to be defined in their identity by their sexuality, but this is a concept ignored completely by Casey. It is a subject too large to be addressed here, but suffice to say there are people, religious or not, who, while experiencing same sex attractions, do not see this as part of their core identity. Their values, be they secular or religious, guide them in a direction away from sexual practices associated with LGBT. The omission of this perspective in Casey's review is serious, all the more so given that the law not only recognises the existence of people defining themselves as "ex-gay", but asserts that discrimination against them is prohibited.[16] So much for respect for the rule of law – one of the government's fundamental British values, and said to be a marker of integration itself!

We should remind ourselves here about another hallmark of integration, namely, mutual respect and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs (another one of the fundamental British values). Where is tolerance of those who believe the "gay" identity is not "who they are"? The first step is to recognise that such people exist. Refusing to do so makes a travesty of the pluralism so openly celebrated by the Lead Commissioner and the Government.

Commissioners Called to Resign

We should note how crucial this Commission is intended to be by the Government itself. The Government states:

'The Commission will support the government, the public sector, civil and wider society and families to *identify and challenge all forms of extremism*. It will provide the government with *impartial*, expert advice on the tools, policies and approaches needed to tackle extremism; it will support the public sector, communities and civil society to confront extremism wherever it exists; and it will promote a positive vision of our core, shared values.'

[17](italics added)

Given the disturbing views of some of the Commission's members, Christians holding pro-life and pro-traditional marriage beliefs are at a real risk of being treated, under the Commission's findings, as "extremists".

The Call to Evidence has yet to be heard and the Commission still has to complete its study, yet some of its aims (identifying extremism) appear to have been decided ahead of time!

As noted earlier, members of public bodies are bound by the Government *Code of Conduct* and must not demonstrate bias, nor participate in any discussions or determination of matters where their interests might suggest a danger of bias.

It is argued Sara Khan, Peter Tatchell and Dame Louise Casey's public statements demonstrate serious bias and conflict with their duty of impartiality. We therefore call for them to do the right thing and resign immediately.

Sources:

[1]See the Home Office *Guidance: Charter for the Commission for Countering Extremism*, 15 March 2018; <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charter-for-the-commission-for-countering-extremism/charter-for-the-commission-for-countering-extremism>

[2]Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies, Cabinet Office, June 2011, p. 8. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/409604/code-of-conduct_tcm6-38901.pdf

[3]Ibid.

[4]*Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018, p. 8.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742176/Terms_of_Reference_into_Extremism_Study.pdf

[5]<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-stronger-britain-built-on-our-values>

[6]*Study into Extremism: Terms of Reference*, Commission for Countering Extremism, September 2018, Foreword from the Lead Commissioner.

[7]Ibid.

[8]See for example, the Asher's cake case: <http://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/ashers-gay-cake-verdict-is-victory-for-freedom-of-expression/>

Also, see Peter Tatchell's support for peaceful protests outside abortion clinics:<https://www.conservativehome.com/highlights/2018/06/tatchell-defends-anti-abortion-protests-and-tells-how-he-got-johnson-and-cameron-to-support-same-sex-marriage.html>

[9]<http://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/manifesto-for-secularism-against-the-religious-right/>

[10]*The Casey Review: A Review into Integration and Opportunity*, December 2016.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

[11]Ibid., p. 64

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., p. 101.

[14]<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx>

[15] *The Casey Review: A Review into Integration and Opportunity*, December 2016, p. 111.

[16][2014] EWCA Civ 34, see para. 98. Link:

<http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2014/34.html>

[17]Home Office *Guidance: Charter for the Commission for Countering Extremism*, 15 March 2018.