

Law and Religion in England and Wales: Comprehensive Overview (2024-2025)

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This research compendium examines significant developments in the intersection of law and religion in England and Wales, covering legislative changes, judicial decisions, policy developments, and societal trends that have shaped the legal landscape concerning religious matters.

1. Legislative Developments

1.1 Church of England Measures

[Chancel Repair \(Church Commissioners' Liability\) Measure 2025](#) - This measure modernises ecclesiastical law by transferring historical chancel repair liabilities from landowners to the Church Commissioners upon land acquisition. The reform addresses long-standing issues highlighted in *Aston Cantlow PCC v Wallbank* [2003] UKHL 37, protecting future landowners from [unexpected financial burdens](#) while streamlining obligation management within the Church of England.

Further Explanation - The Chancel Repair (Church Commissioners' Liability) Measure 2025 addresses the historical obligation of certain landowners to fund repairs to the chancel of parish churches. Effective in 2025, this measure transfers such liabilities to the Church Commissioners when they acquire affected land, converting the liability into a duty imposed on the Commissioners. This change aims to protect future landowners from unexpected financial burdens and streamline the management of these obligations within the Church of England. The measure reflects a modernisation of ecclesiastical law, addressing a longstanding issue highlighted by cases like *Aston Cantlow PCC v Wallbank* [2003] UKHL 37, which clarified the enforceability of chancel repair liabilities.

[Church Funds Investment Measure 2025](#) Enacted to enable Church of England fund trustees to transfer assets to [charity-authorised investment funds](#), this measure updates the 1958 framework. It allows more flexible investment strategies for funds managed by the Central Board of Finance, applying to Canterbury and York provinces (excluding the Channel Islands and Isle of Man unless locally adopted).

Further Explanation - The Church Funds Investment Measure 2025 enables trustees of Church of England funds, such as those managed by the Central Board of Finance, to transfer assets to charity-authorised investment funds. Enacted in 2025, this measure updates the framework established by the Church Funds Investment Measure 1958, allowing for more flexible and potentially more profitable investment strategies. It applies to the provinces of Canterbury

and York, excluding the Channel Islands and Isle of Man unless adopted locally. This legislative change supports the Church's financial sustainability while maintaining its religious mission.

1.2 Parliamentary Bills and Acts

[Terminally Ill Adults \(End of Life\) Bill](#) Introduced by Kim Leadbeater MP on October 16, 2024, this bill allows terminally ill adults to end their lives with safeguards. Following its first reading in October 2024 and second reading on 29 November 2024, the bill progressed to report stage on 13 June 2025, with further debate scheduled for 20 June 2025. The Archbishop of Canterbury issued warnings emphasising religious concerns about life's sanctity, highlighting the ongoing tension between religious ethics and personal autonomy.

Details: Presented by Kim Leadbeater MP, the bill allows terminally ill adults to end their lives with safeguards. It had its first reading in October 2024, with a second reading scheduled for 29 November 2024. The Archbishop of Canterbury issued a warning statement, emphasising religious concerns about the sanctity of life (Archbishop's Statement).

Significance: The bill underscores the ongoing debate between religious ethics and personal autonomy, with religious leaders advocating for caution to protect vulnerable individuals.

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, addressing assisted dying, began its report stage in the Commons on 13 June 2025, with further debate scheduled for 20 June 2025, as per Hansard. This bill has significant implications for religious communities, many of which hold strong ethical objections to assisted dying, highlighting the intersection of law, morality, and faith.

[Lords Spiritual \(Women\) Act 2015 \(Extension\) Bill 2024-25](#) This bill passed its final House of Lords stage on 22 October 2024, and moved to the House of Commons for second reading on 14 November 2024. It extends provisions allowing women bishops to sit as Lords Spiritual, reflecting the Church of England's commitment to gender equality in religious representation. The bill in essence aims to increase the number of women Bishops in the House of Lords.

Details: Passed its final stage in the House of Lords on 22 October 2024, and moved to the House of Commons for a second reading on 14 November 2024. The bill extends provisions allowing women bishops to sit as Lords Spiritual (House of Commons Briefing).

Significance: Reflects the Church of England's evolving role and commitment to gender equality in religious representation.

[Online Safety Act \(Active 2024\)](#) - Enacted in October 2023, this act requires technology companies to protect users from illegal content, including hate speech targeting religious groups. [Ofcom's 2024 consultations](#) focused on illegal harms and child safety duties, addressing online religious hatred while balancing protection with freedom of expression.

Legislation: Enacted in October 2023, active in 2024.

Details: The act requires tech companies to protect users from illegal content, including hate speech targeting religious groups. Ofcom's consultations in 2024 focused on illegal harms and child safety duties (Osborne Clarke Insights).

Significance: The act addresses online religious hatred, a growing concern for minority communities, but raises debates about balancing protection with freedom of expression.

[Freedom of Expression \(Religion or Belief System\) Bill](#) - Introduced by MP Nick Timothy on 10 June 2025, via Ten-Minute Rule motion, this bill aimed to protect and widen the scope of freedom of expression concerning religious beliefs. Prompted by prosecutions like that of Hamit Coskun for Quran burning, the bill passed without opposition but faces low likelihood of becoming law.

[Sentencing Guidelines \(Pre-sentence Reports\) Bill](#) - Introduced on 1 April 2025, following controversy over Sentencing Council guidelines that considered offender's race, religion, or cultural background. Led by Lord Chancellor Shabana Mahmood, the government opposed these guidelines, arguing they undermined equality before the law.

In March 2025, the Sentencing Council proposed guidelines that considered an offender's race, religion, or cultural background when requesting pre-sentence reports, prompting accusations of 'two-tier' justice. The government, led by Lord Chancellor Shabana Mahmood, opposed these guidelines, arguing they undermined equality before the law. On 1 April 2025, the Sentencing Guidelines (Pre-sentence Reports) Bill was introduced to prohibit such considerations, as reported by GOV.UK. This controversy underscores the delicate balance between addressing disparities and ensuring impartiality in the justice system.

2. Judicial Decisions

2.1 Ecclesiastical Court Cases

[Consistory Court Cases on Church Heating](#) - Supporting the Church of England's net-zero carbon emissions commitment by 2030, consistory courts reviewed 21 cases under Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules 2022 through 31 March 2025. Cases addressed sustainable heating systems: four heat pump installations, five electrical systems, eight gas systems, and four alternative modes, reflecting environmental sustainability integration into religious practices.

The Church of England's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, set by the General Synod in February 2020, has influenced ecclesiastical law. Consistory courts reviewed 21 cases under the Faculty Jurisdiction (Amendment) Rules 2022 up to 31 March 2025, addressing church heating systems. These cases involved four heat pump installations, five electrical heating systems, eight gas heating systems, and four other modes, as detailed in Law & Religion UK. The focus on low-carbon heating options, such as heat pumps, reflects the integration of environmental sustainability into religious practices, with only 29 of 42 dioceses committed to the net-zero target.

[Re Lambeth Cemetery \[2025\] ECC Swk 2](#) Chancellor Petchey clarified that Canon 38, subsection 4(b) requires cremation ashes to be 'reverently disposed of' in designated areas such as churchyards or bishop-approved land. This decision provides guidance on Anglican cremation practices while ensuring ecclesiastical law compliance.

The ecclesiastical court case *Re Lambeth Cemetery* [2025] ECC Swk 2 clarified the legality of scattering cremation ashes by an Anglican minister. Chancellor Petchey ruled that Canon 38, subsection 4(b) requires ashes to be 'reverently disposed of' in designated areas, such as churchyards or bishop-approved land, as reported by Law & Religion UK. This decision provides guidance on religious practices concerning cremation, ensuring compliance with ecclesiastical law while respecting Anglican traditions.

2.2 Civil Court Cases

[Higgs v Farmor's School \[2025\] EWCA Civ 109](#) The Court of Appeal addressed Kristie Higgs' unfair dismissal case, where she was terminated for social media posts expressing religious objections to teaching gender fluidity. The Supreme Court refused permission to appeal, highlighting tensions between freedom of expression, religious beliefs, and workplace policies in educational settings.

In *Higgs v Farmor's School* [2025] EWCA Civ 109, the Court of Appeal addressed the unfair dismissal of Kristie Higgs, a school employee terminated for social media posts expressing religious objections to teaching gender fluidity. The Supreme Court refused permission to appeal, as noted in BAILII. This case underscores the tension between freedom of expression, religious beliefs, and workplace policies, particularly in educational settings. It highlights the legal challenges of balancing individual rights with institutional expectations in a pluralistic society.

[Philip Morris v James Morris, Kate Shmuel and Gregory White \[2024\] EWHC 2554 \(Ch\)](#) This High Court case examined the forfeiture rule under section 2(2) of the Forfeiture Act 1982, addressing whether individuals traveling to Switzerland for assisted dying should face inheritance penalties. The ruling clarified legal implications while intersecting with religious beliefs about life's sanctity.

Details: This High Court case addressed the forfeiture rule under section 2(2) of the Forfeiture Act 1982, examining whether individuals who travel to Switzerland for assisted dying should face inheritance penalties. The court's ruling clarified legal implications for such cases.

Significance: The case intersects with religious beliefs, as many faiths, including Christianity, hold strong views on the sanctity of life. It highlights tensions between personal autonomy and religious ethics in end-of-life decisions.

Context: In April 2024, the House of Commons Library published a briefing on the law of assisting suicide in England and Wales, covering parliamentary activity, international comparisons, human rights challenges, and stakeholder views, including religious perspectives (Assisted Suicide Briefing).

3. Policy and Parliamentary Developments

3.1 Religious Freedom and Expression

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) The UK continues championing international religious freedom. Jim Shannon MP's 2024 bill aimed to ensure continued Special Envoy for FoRB appointment, with David Smith MP appointed to the role in December 2024, reflecting the UK's commitment to protecting global religious freedoms.

On 10 June 2025, MP Nick Timothy introduced the Freedom of Expression (Religion or Belief System) Bill via a Ten-Minute Rule motion, as noted in Hansard. Prompted by prosecutions of individuals like Hamit Coskun for burning the Quran, the bill aimed to protect freedom of expression concerning religious beliefs. Although it passed without opposition, its likelihood of becoming law remains low, highlighting the contentious balance between free speech and religious sensitivities.

[Non-Religious Pastoral Officers in Armed Forces](#) The Ministry of Defence introduced Non-Religious Pastoral Officers (NRPOs) in 2024 to support service personnel without religious identification, complementing existing chaplaincy services and reflecting increasing belief diversity within the armed forces.

In 2024, the Ministry of Defence introduced Non-Religious Pastoral Officers (NRPOs) to provide support to service personnel who do not identify with a religion, complementing existing religious chaplaincy services. This initiative, announced in November 2023 and implemented in 2024, reflects the increasing diversity of beliefs within the armed forces, as noted in GOV.UK.

3.2 Parliamentary Debates

[Non-Stun Slaughter Debate \(9 June 2025\)](#) Parliament balanced animal welfare concerns with religious freedoms for Jewish and Muslim communities. Minister Daniel Zeichner emphasised

government preference for stunning while acknowledging religious exemptions rooted in the Slaughter of Animals Act 1933.

On 9 June 2025, Parliament debated non-stun slaughter practices, balancing animal welfare concerns with religious freedoms for Jewish and Muslim communities, as recorded in Hansard. Minister Daniel Zeichner emphasised the government's preference for stunning but acknowledged religious exemptions rooted in the Slaughter of Animals Act 1933 and retained EU legislation. This debate reflects ongoing tensions between secular regulations and religious practices.

[Humanist Weddings Debate \(12 June 2025\)](#) Parliamentary discussion addressed potential legalisation of humanist marriages, with government reviewing the Law Commission's weddings law report. This reflects growing recognition of non-religious belief systems and their legal framework integration.

A parliamentary debate on June 12, 2025, addressed the potential legalisation of humanist marriages, with the government reviewing the Law Commission's report on weddings law, as documented in Hansard. This discussion reflects growing recognition of non-religious belief systems and their integration into legal frameworks, potentially reshaping marriage laws to accommodate diverse worldviews.

3.3 Law Commission Consultations

[New Funerary Methods Consultation \(2025\)](#) The Law Commission announced consultations on new funerary methods, including briefings in London, Leeds, and online. This review aims to modernise burial and cremation laws, potentially affecting religious practices concerning human remains disposal.

The Law Commission announced a consultation on new funerary methods in 2025, including briefings in London, Leeds, and online, following the release of a consultation paper, as detailed in Law Commission. This review aims to modernise laws governing burial and cremation, potentially affecting religious practices concerning the disposal of human remains.

4. Crime and Security

4.1 Religious Hate Crimes

Statistical Overview [The Home Office reported](#) 10,484 religion-based hate crimes in England and Wales for 2023-2024, representing a 25% increase from the previous year. This rise primarily targeted Jewish and Muslim communities, driven by events such as the October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper called these levels of antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes 'a stain on society.'

Security Funding [The government allocated £28 million](#) in 2023 for security measures at places of worship, including £24.5 million for mosques and £3.5 million for other non-Jewish faith groups, demonstrating support for protecting religious communities facing increased threats.

The Home Office reported 10,484 religion-based hate crimes in England and Wales for the 2023-2024 period, a 25% increase from the previous year, primarily targeting Jewish and Muslim communities, as noted in Freedom House. This rise, driven by events such as the October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, highlights growing societal tensions and the need for robust legal measures to combat religious hatred.

Statistics: Home Office data for the year ending March 2024 reported a 25% increase in religious hate crimes, totalling 10,484 incidents, with 96% specifying the targeted religion (Hate Crime Statistics).

Details: The rise was driven by crimes against Jewish and Muslim communities, linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict. Public order offences, such as causing fear, alarm, or distress, were the most common. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper called the levels of antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes ‘a stain on society’ (Guardian Report).

Significance: The surge highlights the need for robust legal protections for religious minorities. The Law Commission’s 2021 recommendations to reform hate crime laws remain under consideration, with no full implementation by June 2025 (Law Commission Report).

4.2 Public Order and Religious Expression

[Blasphemy Law Concerns](#) Prosecutions under the Public Order Act for actions like Quran burning have raised concerns about de facto blasphemy law reintroduction, despite blasphemy law abolition in 2008. Humanists UK argues these prosecutions using Public Order Act sections not designed for religious criticism undermine free speech protections.

Prosecutions under the Public Order Act for actions like burning the Quran, such as the cases of Hamit Coskun and another individual in Manchester in 2025, have raised concerns about the reintroduction of blasphemy laws, despite their abolition in 2008. Humanists UK argues that these prosecutions, using sections of the Public Order Act not designed for religious criticism, undermine free speech protections. This issue has sparked significant debate about balancing freedom of expression with respect for religious sentiments.

[Abortion Clinic Buffer Zones](#) Implementation of ‘buffer zones’ around abortion clinics under the Public Order Act 2023, effective in 2024, raised concerns about criminalising religious

activities like silent prayer, reflecting ongoing debates about public order versus religious freedom.

5. Societal Trends and Public Opinion

5.1 Political Influence and Voting Patterns

[2024 General Election Analysis Religious affiliation significantly influenced voting patterns:](#)

Anglicans provided 40% of Conservative votes, while 56% of Labour and 58% of Liberal Democrat voters were religiously unaffiliated. The Conservative Party maintained strong Anglican support despite overall electoral losses.

Election Analysis: The 2024 General Election showed distinct voting patterns by religion (UK Election Analysis).

Details: Anglicans provided 40% of Conservative votes, while 56% of Labour and 58% of Liberal Democrat voters were religiously unaffiliated. The Conservative Party maintained strong support among Anglicans despite overall electoral losses.

Significance: Highlights the influence of religious affiliation on political outcomes, reflecting the Church of England's enduring role in public life.

5.2 Public Attitudes

[Faith in Public Life Survey \(May 2024\)](#) The Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life survey revealed low confidence in religion as a positive force (36% agreed, 27% disagreed) and resistance to religion in workplace (42% positive, 41% negative) and politics (36% positive, 38% negative). These findings indicate societal shift towards secularism, influencing legal and policy approaches to religion in public life.

Survey: A May 2024 survey by the Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL Survey).

Details: Found low confidence in religion as a force for good (36% agreed, 27% disagreed) and resistance to religion in the workplace (42% positive, 41% negative) and politics (36% positive, 38% negative).

Significance: Indicates a societal shift towards secularism, influencing legal and policy approaches to religion in public life.

Ongoing Considerations

- [Proposed prison chaplaincy reform](#) to replace the Chaplaincy Council with a Chaplaincy Faith and Belief Forum
- [Continued implementation of the Law Commission's hate crime law reform](#) recommendations
- [Ongoing debate about balancing religious freedom](#) with public policy objectives

6. Additional Notes

- **Proposed Prison Chaplaincy Reform:** In January 2023, Lord Christopher Bellamy proposed replacing the prison Chaplaincy Council with a Chaplaincy Faith and Belief Forum to better reflect the diverse faiths and beliefs of prisoners, as recorded in Hansard. While consultations were planned, no specific implementation details for 2024-2025 were found, suggesting this reform may still be under consideration.
- **Public Order and Religious Expression:** The implementation of 'buffer zones' around abortion clinics under the Public Order Act 2023, effective in 2024, raised concerns about criminalising religious activities like silent prayer, as noted in an X post by @davidkurten (Buffer Zones). This development reflects ongoing debates about public order versus religious freedom.