

REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE

Convener: Mr. F. R. Daubney

1. INTRODUCTION

IN preparing this annual report for the Synod we have followed the usual format. Members of the Committee have contributed items which look into some of the subjects which have dominated the media and our thoughts during the past year. Our thanks are due to Dr. Angus MacLeod for the items on abortion and euthanasia. Islam and the atrocities perpetrated by its deluded followers are a continuing concern, not only to the people of God but to the nation in general, and to the nations of the world. The Pope of Rome appears to the world as a genial and kindly old man with a pleasant countenance but Rome never changes and the ugly face of his church continues to be in the news with allegations concerning sexual abuse. The Church of England, to its shame, has some problems of the same kind to contend with. A committee of the Synod is to report on the difficult situation that the Church is faced with following the enactment of the iniquitous Marriage Act of 2014. For that reason the Religion and Morals Committee has not reported on the subject on this occasion. However, to see politicians and same sex couples rejoicing, whilst trampling on God's Word with regard to marriage, is grieving in the extreme.

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

2. RELIGION

Scottish ecumenism

The various Churches in Scotland have spent another year pursuing their own courses, most of them refusing to be guided by the teaching of God's Word in doctrine, worship and practice. The deplorable moral and spiritual condition of the people of our land can be traced to a large extent to the unfaithfulness of the professing Church over the years. A false spirit of ecumenism prevails throughout much of the visible Church with, for example, Roman Catholic priests and prelates asked to participate in services with men professing to be Protestant ministers of the gospel. While there have been no unions between any of the various denominations over the past year, it seems clear that the Associated Presbyterian Churches and the Free Church of Scotland seem set to unite soon. This is one further indication of the extent to which the APC have departed from the position and practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, whom they still claim to represent and whose property

they still occupy unlawfully. We understand that APC groups joining the Free Church will be allowed to keep their own distinct congregations. Whether they will attempt to take Free Presbyterian property into the Free Church remains to be seen.

Romanism

It was reported on the 10th of February 2016, that the Pope of Rome (having previously announced a “Holy Year of Mercy”, beginning in November 2015), had sent more than a thousand priests on a world-wide mission to forgive sins, such as, “. . . defiling consecrated bread and wine, violating confessional secrecy, and plotting to kill a Pope”, whereas, formerly such supposed power had been confined to the Pope or a top official. The Pope here in this directive blasphemously arrogates to himself the power to forgive sins, and the ability to authorise others to do so also, which in reality is the prerogative of God alone, “. . . who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7b). Holy Scripture identifies the Pope as a notoriously vile sinner, as the following verses testify: “. . . that man of sin . . .” (2 Thessalonians 2:3b), “. . . that Wicked . . .” (v. 2:8a), “. . . whose coming is after the working of Satan . . .” (v. 9a), taking “. . . pleasure in unrighteousness” (v. 12b), and presiding over an institution referred to as “the mystery of iniquity” (v. 7a). Scripture gives an implicit description of the Pope as reprobate, and guilty of the unforgivable sin, that is, the sin unto death (both being derived by good and necessary consequence). And, also as a mere man, consumed with malice toward Christ and His people, left to contracted obstinacy and judicial obduracy, which may be seen in his striving to destroy the true, Reformed religion. His boast that he is able to forgive sin, and that he can enable certain appointed priests to do the same, is false. He is strongly deluded, and his missionaries are engaged in a futile exercise. If the Pope was truly desirous to see sinners finding their sins forgiven, and hearing the great Forgiver comforting their hearts with, “. . . Son be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matthew 9:2a), he would be endeavouring to make a whole-souled offer of Christ to all men, which he cannot and will never do. At the Day of Judgment he will only have himself to blame for appearing before the Lord Jesus with his sins not forgiven “and not among the elect, washed sheep and obedient, but among the reprobate, filthy goats and disobedient”.

Islam in the United Kingdom

Population

In 1951 there were only 22,000 in England and Wales who identified themselves as Muslim, which was less than 0.1% of the population. Over the next sixty years that percentage rose steeply through immigration, and a relatively high birth rate, to 4.8% by 2011. The Muslim population in Scotland was 1.4% in 2011, and in Northern Ireland 0.2%. The UK Muslim population is presently increasing ten times faster than the non-Muslim population. The

Pew Research Centre projects that it will reach 5.6 million, or 8.2% of the population, by 2030. Most UK Muslims belong to Sunni sects, with a significant minority of about 15% being Shia.

Education and wealth

Approximately one-third of adult Muslims are unqualified, which is a significantly higher percentage than the general population. This is at least in part due to a higher proportion of uneducated immigrants. Muslim faith schools are reported to have higher academic success rates than average, and there is a higher proportion of Muslims amongst higher education students compared to the general population. Muslims are significantly poorer than other religious groups, having less than a quarter the wealth of Hindus, the next poorest religious group.

Political involvement

There are presently eight Muslim MPs at Westminster, about 1% of the total, one of whom, Sajid Javid, is a cabinet minister. The Scottish National Party MSP, Humza Yousaf, is Scottish Minister for Europe and International Development. He was expected to be the first Muslim Foreign Minister in Europe had the SNP succeeded in the Independence Referendum.

Crime

In England and Wales about 14% of the prison population are Muslim, over two-thirds of whom are British nationals. This proportion increases to 20% in high security (Category A) prisons. Only about 1% of these prisoners have been convicted for terrorism-related offences. The main categories in order of number of offenders are: Violence against the person, Drug offences, Robbery, Sexual offences, Burglary and Fraud.

Threats to the UK from Islam

There is considerable concern in the UK and other Western countries in regard to threats arising from within Muslim communities directed against the wider population. These perceived threats are:

1. Islamist terrorism, from groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda. Young, not necessarily devout, Muslims, particularly those who are disenchanted with their lot, are the target for these terrorist organisations. They are carefully separated from family and other stabilising influences, and subject to extreme propaganda to achieve the aim of the terror organisations of radicalisation and willingness to perform terrorist acts. Polling surveys show that there is a potentially large pool of young Muslims that might be inclined to consider extreme Islamist propaganda. A number of polls have suggested that there is a significant minority, between 10-20% of the Muslim population, who sympathise with ISIS, or fighters joining it in Syria.

2. Criminal offending. Severe forms of punishment are common in many Islamic countries; e.g., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Western countries are a “soft-touch” by comparison. One possible reason for high crime amongst UK Muslims, particularly immigrants, is that they do not feel the same deterrent as they do in their native cultures. This was evident amongst recent Muslim immigrants to Germany and Sweden, where daring attacks by gangs of Muslim men on western women have been reported. Islamic teaching, concerning an eternal paradise which is carnal in nature, may also have some affect on its devotees’ behaviour in permissive western countries.
3. Spread of Islam and intolerance of other beliefs. Muslims believers are committed to the spread of their religion. There are reported to be over 100,000 converts to Islam in the UK, a number which is increasing by approximately 5,000 a year. These are mainly young white women who have become involved with, or married, Muslim men. In other countries where Islam has increased to become a significant, or majority religion, it has had a tendency to oppress the wider population with the imposition of Sharia law, and the persecution of Christianity and other religions. The fear, therefore, that such process may happen in the UK is very real. In one survey, 36% of young Muslims aged 16-24 believed if a Muslim converts to another religion they should be punished by death. There is a much higher retention of adherents in Islam than in Christianity. Although in part this is likely to be due to the threat of apostasy, education is also a key factor. Islamic sects are careful to teach the tenets of their religion from an early age.

The issue of the trustworthiness of information from the Muslim community is a concern in regard to understanding the threats posed from it. There is an Islamic doctrine, al-Taqiyya, that permits Muslims to lie in certain circumstances, which is similar in nature to the Jesuit doctrine of mental reservation. One such circumstance is when under perceived persecution, believers may outwardly deny their beliefs. To some this doctrine may be practised only when in mortal danger, but others have a more broad interpretation when the interests of property, the community, or even Islam itself, is at stake. This is not to suggest that Muslims typically practise deceit, which is normally forbidden in Islam, but the ambiguity in interpretation of when al-Taqiyya is permissible, inevitably creates distrust, whilst the doctrine is maintained.

Potential for conversion

That there are many young Muslims who are possible terror recruits is evidence that they are seeking a better life than that which they have grown up with. They are often rejecting their parents’ “moderate” religious practice. Some, at least outwardly, are also rejecting permissive western culture. In both

cases they are not wrong to do so. Unfortunately there is little if any exposure to biblical teaching amongst them that might lead them to enquire after the truth of the Gospel. Many Muslim women also find themselves in oppressive circumstances, brought about by their religion and culture. They too, if they had opportunity to hear the Gospel, might well be drawn. We concur with the view that the islamisation of the UK, and the troubles it has brought, are God's judgement upon this nation for rejecting the Gospel. Yet we hope and pray that many UK Muslims, may yet be brought to look unto Jesus, as the One of whom God has promised that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved".

Islamism in the world

Islamism, also known as Political Islam, is an Islamic revival movement often characterised by moral conservatism, a literal following of the Koran and an attempt to implement Islamic values in all spheres of life.

Graham E. Fuller, an American political analyst specialising in Islamic extremism, suggests Islamism can be defined as a form of identity politics or "support for Muslim identity, authenticity, revivalism and revitalisation of the community". This has led to the most ambitious and aggressive Islamist militia to date – ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). The Arab world prefers to call them Daesh, which is an Arabic acronym of the English ISIS, and has a mocking connotation, a name, therefore, that ISIS detests. Islamists press for the implementation of Islamic law (Sharia) and for pan-Islamic political unity, including an Islamic state or Caliphate. They work towards the removal of everything within their power that they believe to be incompatible with Islam.

It is reported that there are over 120 active Islamic extremist groups who have the stated goal of Islamic revolution and the forced implementation of Sharia law and/or an Islamic state Caliphate. These include the notorious al-Qaeda and Hamas (the Muslim Brotherhood of Palestine) whose founding charter calls for the destruction of Israel.

The Sunni branch of Islam stipulates that, as a head of state, a caliph should be elected by Muslims or their representatives. Followers of Shia Islam believe a caliph should be an Imam chosen by God from the Ahl al-Bayt (the "Family of the House", Muhammad's direct descendants).

Charles Moore, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, said: "Islamism is unappeasable because it is a doctrine, not a set of demands. Like Marxist-Leninism, it purports to prove that a conspiracy runs the world. The anti-Muslim capitalist forces – America, Britain, the Jews – and the 'hypocrites' (the corrupt regimes that run so many Muslim states), conspire to prevent the true Islamic state arising. In this crazy, but coherent account it becomes possible to believe, as millions of Muslims apparently do, that it was the Jews who bombed the World Trade Centre."

The brutality against Christians in many countries dominated by Islamists is heart-breaking. The reports we hear are horrific. In Libya such brutality has soared since the emergence of Daesh. The Barnabus Fund reports that in 2015

Daesh filmed the executions of around 50 “followers of the cross” – 21 Egyptians in February, and 30 Ethiopians in April. The list in other countries seems endless and the brutality almost unbelievable. Where Muslims gain the upper-hand in a country, the Islamists almost invariably intimidate and terrify their fellows into these acts of persecution.

There are some exceptions. Tunisia is 99% Muslim and yet its new constitution describes Islam as the religion of the state but not its source of legislation. In general, churches are allowed without harassment, but evangelism among Muslims is not allowed and the growing influence of Daesh is a continuing worry.

We may know very little of the doctrine and practice of these persecuted Christians but we do know that their courage is admirable. For those among them who are true professing Christians, to continue their witness in these dreadful circumstances must be due to the strength of the One whose strength is made perfect in weakness. “For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Romans 8:36).

Cults

There are many cults and it is not possible to give information about them all. From time to time we may encounter groups about which we may be at first unsure. Scripture provides the ultimate test of their teachings. It can be helpful, however, to have some criteria that immediately sound an alarm that such groups may be a cult. The following is not exhaustive but may be helpful.

1. Believing that this organisation/group are the exclusive community of the saved.
2. Rejecting any group/person outside this group as entirely false/evil/unsaved. Adherents are required/encouraged to sever ties with family outside the group. When anyone leaves the group they must be largely ostracised.
3. A source of authority other than, equal to and in addition to, the Bible (organisation, leadership, book). Frequently, they have their own translation or “correction” of a Bible translation.
4. Practical denial of justification by faith in Christ alone. Various practices or beliefs are deemed necessary in addition for salvation.
5. Devaluation of the person and work of Christ (denying His deity or His humanity or shifting the emphasis from Christ alone). Denial of the Trinity or a heretical view of the Trinity is often involved.
6. Authoritarian, controlling leadership focussed in one person or a small group. The leadership is above question and any challenge results in expulsion.
7. Levels of initiation. Connected with such secrecy there may be different messages for public and private audiences.

8. False prophecy, changeable teaching and practices. This may include intentional deception about the group's history, teachings, leadership, etc.
9. All details of life controlled by the leadership. A requirement to make very high personal commitment of time and money to the group.

The Watchtower Society (so-called Jehovah's Witnesses) is one of the most prominent cults. While they appear prominent, American research has estimated that they have the lowest retention rate of any religious tradition. In recent years, they have begun a "metropolitan public witnessing programme". They offer their literature in prominent places within cities where there are a lot of pedestrians. It is deeply saddening to witness this, together with the comparative lack of the true Gospel being promoted in such spaces of our cities. It would, at least, be helpful if a tract would be produced which could be given to them (though they are not always willing to receive literature).

The Charity Commission opened a statutory inquiry into Watchtower Society activities several years ago. They are seeking access to its documents. The inquiry relates in part to how it safeguards children. It has been alleged in the media that the organisation issued an edict ordering the destruction of records relating to incidents relating to individuals. This is said to be a move to avoid the Goddard Inquiry not long after a similar Australian inquiry condemned the Watchtower Society's handling of such cases.

Cults are not the only false prophets in the land but the Saviour's solemn warning certainly applies to them: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Religious observance in schools

Some believe that the war against Christian influence in Scotland has now moved from the battleground of marriage to education. Secularists appear to be focussing attention on abolishing religious observance in schools. In November 2015 the Arts and Humanities Research Council published its report, *Collective Worship and Religious Observance in Schools: An Evaluation of Law and Policy in the UK*. Its recommendations are as follows:

- (a) *It is recommended that Education Scotland provide clear guidance as to what constitutes religious observance and where worship is situated within that.*
- (b) *It is recommended, in line with Section 6 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, that children are consulted on the day to day running of the school as set out in the school's development plan and that this should include consultation relating to religious observance.*

(c) *It is recommended that the term “Religious Observance” be formally changed to “Time for Reflection” in order to be more inclusive.*

The Scottish Government do not appear to think that the recommendations require any particular course of action. They insist that Religious Observance may take a variety of forms and need not include worship at all. Indeed, official guidance suggests that “an organised act of worship” is better included in the informal curriculum. Sadly, much of the Church worship that takes place in Scotland today is man-centred and no true guide for schools in any case.

The official guidance defines Religious Observance as “Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community”. These are emphasised as “common human values”. This allows for anything at all. The Scottish Government are content that both traditional religious observance and virtually non-religious activities are included under such a broad umbrella. The confusion and uncertainty surrounding religious observance allows them to seek to please both Churches and secularists. In truth, it was never properly defined, including in 1872 when the Churches gave their schools over to the State.

The truth is that religious observance is rarely religious and rarely observed. Religious observance is expected to occur at least six times a year in non-denominational schools. Such occasions need not have reference to Christianity nor any religion. It is left up to each head teacher but local authorities are becoming increasingly concerned with monitoring the involvement of outside bodies. Of course, in Roman Catholic schools, both religious observance and Religious and Moral Education fully comply with Romanist teachings and rituals.

The main current guidance is “Curriculum for Excellence: Religious Observance (Time for Reflection) Briefing 16”. Its provisions are suitably vague and non-religious. “Effective Religious Observance is active, engaging, challenging and thought provoking. It supports children and young people in the development of their own set of beliefs and values.” There is a tendency in all of this, as with Religious and Moral Education, to philosophise religion. In other words, its answers are viewed through the lens of philosophical inquiry. The student is given many profound ultimate questions and pointed to a confused mass of diverse potential answers. Their “personal search” results in inevitable scepticism or assorted preferred “spiritual” convictions. This may not be the practice in all schools but there is a bias towards this in the new curriculum.

We are thankful wherever we hear of opportunities for faithful input in the life of our schools. Yet, in general, surely we must lament the spiritual famine in which the children of our nation are growing up. Lamentations 2:19: “Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street.”

3. MORALS

Abortion and euthanasia

Abortion

The gratuitous and wicked murder of unborn children has continued apace. Although abortion rates in England and Wales were down slightly in 2014, over 1 in 100 women of child-bearing age had an abortion in that year. Disturbingly, more than a third of these abortions were on women who had previously had an abortion. Mercifully, the majority of these were performed early in the pregnancy (four-fifths before 10 weeks' gestation). The writer recently heard a nurse recounting how, when abortion was permitted up to 28 weeks, it was not infrequent that the child delivered during a surgical abortion would be heard crying feebly while being left to stop breathing. While such occurrences are much less likely to happen nowadays, this is a graphic testimony to both the extent of the depravity and the guilt of our nation in permitting such things to occur. We only deserve that the Lord would mark this great iniquity against our nation.

It has been clear for many years that abortion is, in practice, offered on demand in the UK but recent events have demonstrated this with greater clarity. Doctors who were captured on video offering abortion to women on the basis of the child's gender were not prosecuted because it was not in the "public interest". The Westminster Parliament also failed to legislate against gender-selective abortions, despite efforts by some parliamentarians to achieve this. An English barrister discussed this issue in an article in a national newspaper in which he argued that the law allows doctors to balance the physical risks of continuation of pregnancy against the risks of abortion. Thus, he argued, as the medical risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth are always greater than those associated with abortion, any abortion can be justified according to the letter of the 1967 Abortion Act. It seems unlikely this was the intention of the legislators who framed this law, but it now seems inconceivable in the current political climate that a decision to arrange an abortion in the UK will be subject to prosecution (other than for issues surrounding inadequate consent).

Euthanasia

Humanly speaking, it is surprising that euthanasia and assisted suicide remain illegal in the UK, considering the prevailing secularism, irreligion, and disregard for the sanctity of human life. In the providence of God, recent attempts in both the Scottish Parliament and the House of Lords to legalise such practices were unsuccessful, although in other places assisted suicide has recently been legalised. It is also worrying how in certain countries, such as Belgium and Switzerland, those who are not terminally ill occasionally receive assisted suicide, and particularly those who are mentally ill have been assisted to commit suicide.

Clearly, any form of assisted suicide or euthanasia is prohibited by God's law. However, it is useful to be armed with a variety of arguments against this practice which may be more likely to carry weight with those who have no respect to God's law. The most powerful argument is probably that vulnerable elderly people will feel under pressure to undergo assisted suicide to unburden their relatives. This is not an idle concern: a recently-published, well-conducted Swiss study provided evidence that assisted suicide was more common in those who lived alone or in those who were divorced, substantiating suggestions that people in situations of greater vulnerability are more likely to undergo assisted suicide. Proponents of assisted suicide should explain how many vulnerable individuals pressurised into assisted suicide would be an acceptable price to pay for the legalisation of this practice.

While it is disturbing to think of the huge numbers of unborn children murdered and the substantial numbers euthanised in the past year, we must remain steadfast and pray that God would turn the nations to fear him: "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jeremiah 32:17).

Continuing encroachment upon parental responsibility in the family

The most obvious example of continuing encroachment upon parental responsibility in the home is the "Named Person Scheme". The Scottish Parliament has decided that every child in Scotland should have a "named person" – a state official tasked with looking after their "wellbeing" – regardless of whether or not children or parents wish to have one and regardless of whether there is any need for State intervention. A named person will have the power to speak to a child, including about very personal issues, and provide information or advice – all potentially without parent consent. This will undermine the unique roles of parents, eroding the right to family life and privacy. It could also create potential for abuse, as with the infamous Orkney scandal of 1991 when 9 children were wrongly removed from their families over false accusations they had been abused by their parents. Children as young as eight were denied any contact with their families for several weeks before the allegations were dismissed by a Court.

First taste of Named Person Scheme

A mother in Aberdeen, who has 5 children, reported March 2015 in Archbishop Cranmer's blog on the internet, about an interview her youngest child, aged almost 13, had been subjected to at her school, Harlaw Academy. Without prior notice the child was taken out of her class, and told she had an appointment with the school nurse, who was not the usual school nurse and one whom the child had never seen before. She was asked a lot of personal questions and felt very uncomfortable and taken aback. She rang her mother as soon as she could. The mother spoke to the school and filed a complaint against the NHS. The Headmaster said he had no prior knowledge of the questions. The lead nurse mentioned (1) SHANARRI (Safe, Healthy,

Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included), (2) GIRFEC (Getting It Right For Every Child) and (3) The Named Person Scheme which is already being implemented at Harlaw Academy. She refused to give a copy of the notes that the nurse had taken at the interview on the grounds of confidentiality. It appears that the intention is to ask these questions of all children in their first year in Aberdeen secondary schools.

Scotland's acceptance of the "Named Person Scheme" may lead to what happened to a couple in Norway who were bringing up their children as a Christian family and had all 5 seized and removed from them by the Barnevernet, the country's child welfare service. The parents, Marius and Ruth Bodnariu, were accused of "Christian radicalism and indoctrination". Their appeal against the State's intervention was rejected. A petition on their behalf has attracted nearly 30,000 signatures. Ongoing worries about Barnevernet have led concerned professionals, including lawyers, psychologists, and social workers, to petition the Norwegian Parliament in June 2015 seeking assurances: "Society wants to be confident that Barnevernet operates with high professional competence and exercises good judgement but those of us involved in individual cases unfortunately see another reality too often".

In the present climate in Scotland where the Christian religion is being rejected and marginalised the fear is that Christian families will be similarly persecuted.

As the police forces are now combined into one force answerable to the Government instead of local forces under local authority control, this could be used as an instrument of oppression as Christianity declines and the Government becomes more intolerant.

What a need there is for prayer without ceasing: "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

Crime and misuse of drugs and alcohol

There are a number of ways in which crime and drugs are linked. We often think of the "petty" crimes, such as shoplifting, theft, burglary and fraud, committed by those who are drug and alcohol dependant to fund their addiction. (It has been suggested that one third to a half of all thefts is related to illegal drug use.) But there are also the crimes committed by those who supply illegal drugs, fights with rival gangs of drug pushers, and violence towards drug users who are indebted to them. There are also many acts of violence committed while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It is reported that drunkenness is associated with a majority of murders, manslaughters, stabbings and half of domestic assaults. In addition to this, there are those who drive whilst under the influence of drink and drugs.

Recent figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show that there were just under 230,000 recorded drug offences involving the trafficking of illegal drugs committed in one year alone in the UK. It has been estimated that there are around 300,000 heroin and crack cocaine users in England, with

around 200,000 of them receiving treatment in any one year. Because of the high cost of funding their habit, and the low price which stolen goods will fetch, it is believed that the market value of stolen goods could be as high as £2.5 billion each year.

With regard to alcohol, the ONS statistics have highlighted that 53% of violent incidents involving adults were alcohol-related; the victims of which were (in order of frequency) most often male, strangers, acquaintances and a member of the perpetrator's household.

The UK drink driving statistics show that an average 3,000 people are killed or seriously injured each year in drink driving collisions; nearly one in six deaths on the road involve drivers who are over the legal alcohol limit; young men aged 17-29 figure particularly in both casualties and positive breath tests following an incident.

Strong drink has been a temptation to mankind since the Fall. In this current day we are also faced with the ready availability of a variety of harmful narcotic drugs and the situation is now of epidemic proportions. The damage to society, family life, and especially to the souls of our fellow-men is alarming. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

4. CONCLUSION

The Committee has been kept busy during the past year revising the "Statement of Differences". All the Presbyteries responded comprehensively to the request for comments on the draft which had been presented to the Synod of 2015. On the basis of those comments it was decided to carry out a complete review of the document for presentation this year. Our thanks are due to Rev. D. W. B. Somerset for the enormous effort he put into it. Other work involved a sub-committee addressing the feasibility of a form of Church school, to report to Synod this year. We are grateful to Mr. David Norris and Mr. Alex Ross for their hard work and devotion to this.

The Convener wrote to the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport to complain about the rules which require nurses to wear trousers when on duty. Andrew Macfarlane, a civil servant in Ms. Robison's staff, replied (see below) to say that individual Boards as employers should resolve any issues or grievances which arise. Boards are required to ensure that all staff are "treated fairly and consistently, with dignity and respect in an environment in which diversity is valued". However, although this would indicate the possibility of flexibility, the dispensation seems to be widely ignored or unknown.

There is much to grieve and concern the Lord's people as they look at the state of religion and the moral condition of the nation but we must ever remember that the Lord is able to bring about a complete transformation of our nation in a very short period of time, and continue to pray that such a change

would take place. “And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory” (Psalm 72:19).

Dear Mr. Daubney,

Thank you for your letter of 2nd November 2015 to Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport concerning uniform policy in the NHS. I have been asked to reply on Ms Robison's behalf.

NHSScotland Boards, as employers, have full delegated powers in relation to employment issues, including National Uniform, Dress Code and Laundering Policy, which is set out in guidance letter CEL 42 (2010) and which was agreed by the Scottish Workforce and Staff Governance Committee (SWAG). This means it is for individual Boards as employers to resolve any issues or grievances arising directly with their employees. As such it is not appropriate for Scottish Ministers to comment or become directly involved in individual cases.

The Scottish Government is committed to equality and diversity, and that commitment extends to ensuring that these values are fully respected by, and reflected in the operation of NHSScotland

It may be helpful to explain some of the policies in place to support equality and diversity within the NHSScotland workforce. The Staff Governance Standard for NHSScotland requires Boards as employers to ensure that all staff are “treated fairly and consistently, with dignity and respect in an environment in which diversity is valued”.

To support this, the nationally agreed Partnership Information Network (PIN) policy “Embracing Equality, Diversity and Human Rights” published in December 2013 sets out a model policy that all NHSScotland Boards must meet or exceed in their own local policies. The objective is to ensure not only compliance with relevant legislation but also a culture that respects and values a diverse workforce.

The National Uniform & Dress Code policies were initially launched in 2008 with the aim of providing patients and the public with a consistent way of recognising uniformed staff by their role and to provide a commonly applied dress code standard across NHSScotland Boards.

Any member of NHSScotland staff who may have a concern with her Board in relation to the local staff uniform and dress policy can raise the issue with their staff representative or directly with their employer. Policies for employment issues are guided by the PIN policy “Dealing with Employee Grievances”.

Yours Sincerely

[Signed] Andrew Macfarlane

SABBATH OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE'S REPORT

Convener: Rev. J. B. Jardine

THE New Testament Church assembled on the first day of the week to worship God. It was on the Sabbath that they met to have fellowship with each other, to receive offerings and keep the Lord's Supper. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Sabbath is to be continued to be kept as the day on which Christ rose from the dead and in order to follow the example of the early Church. The Sabbath is to be kept holy to the Lord in our hearts and homes.

The work of the Committee continues as in previous years.

The following letters were issued but few replies were received. A sample of the replies received has been given.

Agricultural Shows and Sales

Turriff Show No response
Blair Atholl International Horse Trails..... No response

Festivals

Inverness Festival of Lights:

1. Drew Hendry, MP No response
2. Cllr. Helen Carmichael, Provost..... No response
3. Steve Barron, Chief Executive Acknowledgement

Burns and a' that Festival

"Your comments have been duly noted."

Glasgow International Comedy Festival..... No response

Edinburgh International Film Festival No response

Scotland's Big Nature Festival

"I feel it is necessary to inform you that the RSPB is a non-denominational organisation and is therefore not constrained by or restricted to any particular or specific religious order."

Loch Fyne Food Fair..... No response

Moray Premier Wedding Show No response

Connect with Colonsay No response

Royal National Mòd

A letter of apology was sent to An Comunn Gàidhealach after they advised that no formal activities took place on the Sabbath, although it was advertised as taking place over the Sabbath.

Shetland Accordion and Fiddle Festival No response

Ullapool Guitar Festival..... No response