

REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE

Convener: Mr F R Daubney

INTRODUCTION

THE Report was compiled in the usual way by each member of the Committee writing one or more reports on items of topical interest.

During the year the Committee's article on homosexuality was publicised in the following ways: it was printed in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and on the Church website; letters from the Convener, with links to the article, were printed in the *English Church Newspaper* and the *British Churchman*. The editor of the *English Church Newspaper* published the full article across two issues; the article was also reproduced in booklet form and sent to every member of the Scottish Parliament, from which only two responses were received.

In October 2018, a letter of protest was written to a Church of Scotland minister in Inverness for his advocacy of a "gay pride" march through the city and his criticism of Bible-believing Christians. As is usual on these occasions, no reply was received. There seems to be no desire to engage in discussion.

In February 2019, the Convener attended a Scottish Government consultation meeting in Glasgow, on the proposal for the introduction of new "Hate Crime" legislation. Others attended a similar meeting which was held in Stornoway.

Following the Synod of 2018, the Statement of Differences was amended to incorporate the proposed changes. This Statement has been closely scrutinised over the years by the Committee and Synod, and we are keen to see it approved by Synod at the 2019 meeting.

RELIGION

Romanism – abuse, conflict and decline

The main interest that we have in that system which calls herself the "Catholic Church" is connected to the hope that it will cease, and therefore no longer hide the Gospel from sinners. That day will come when the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thessalonians 2:7) will be no more. There are signs that it is a deeply troubled organisation with a rapidly declining influence. In the USA, which is often a barometer of global change, there has been a close to 30% decline of those identifying as Roman Catholic amongst the population over the past six to seven years (nearly 50% if Hispanic immigration is excluded). This may portend a complete collapse, argues Garry Mearns, a senior management consultant, and a Roman Catholic with in-depth knowledge of the situation (*The Hill*, 25/5/18). In Europe, Australasia and in South America too, Rome faces declining congregations. Several factors are turning people away from the Roman Church – the most significant being the worldwide child

abuse crisis. Never has there been any organisation with such a terrible record of abusing children. To add to the multitude of abuse scandals that have arisen in the past few years, a raft of fresh scandals have broken out over the past year: in the US, Germany, Australia, Netherlands, Italy, Chile and Argentina. A 900-page Pennsylvania grand jury report describes a sickening catalogue of abuse, of more than 1,000 children, abused by 300 Romish priests over the past 70 years; and moreover, a litany of lies and deceit by senior figures in covering it up.

There was a time when the wickedness of Rome was in great measure hidden behind the secrecy of closed doors. Such however is the sheer scale of clerical depravity, and the openness of information in the age of the internet, that it can no longer be effectively covered up. In Germany 3,600 children were sexually abused at the hands of some 1,670 RC clergy over the past seventy years, according to a September 2018 Church report leaked to the Press. In Chile 80 priests have been reported to authorities because of abuse in the past 18 years. In many countries, there is less of a culture of openness. In discussing the state of reporting of abuse, Archbishop Scicluna, formerly the top child abuse prosecutor at the Vatican, said: “We have to realize that there are constraints . . . that mean we’re not at the same point in different parts of the world.” As well as a multitude of child abuse cases, there have been likewise scandals concerning the abuse of nuns and junior clergy worldwide.

Bergoglio, the present Pope, has a number of times favoured those who have been accused of abuse, or covering up of abuse, until such time as he is forced to act by the facts becoming public knowledge. One such case arose on a papal visit to Chile last year when he called accusations against Bishop Barros slander. Barros had been appointed by the Pope in 2015 and had been sanctioned as long ago as 2011 for sexually abusing minors. The papal fallibility became all too obvious when the Pope later had to admit to his own “serious errors” in defending Barros. Cardinal Pell, one of the Pope’s closest advisors, and head of finance at the Vatican was found guilty in Australia in December 2018 of child abuse. Pell, McCarrick, a cardinal who has now been defrocked for child abuse, and the Argentinian Bishop Zanchetta, were all appointed to important positions in the Vatican by Bergoglio, even though he knew there were very serious accusations against them. The late English Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor, who is said to have been the most important agent in promoting the election of Bergoglio, was accused of child abuse, and a subsequent investigation was reputedly quashed by the Pope shortly after the papal election (*LifeSiteNews*, September 2018).

The present pope has been very actively engaged in putting his stamp on the Church by appointing cardinals sympathetic to his left-wing views. So far, he has appointed 75 cardinals. Mearns wrote: “As a socialist cleric, his tools are controlling communications, silencing dissent, spending other people’s money and, under pressure, cloaking himself as ‘God’s voice on earth’.” Such openly critical views by papists of their own pope, once unheard of, are becoming increasingly common. Archbishop Vigano of Italy, a former Papal Nuncio to

the USA, who the Press describes as conservative, has attacked the Pope, calling upon him to resign for his handling of the McCarrick case (the Pope had removed sanctions against McCarrick that his predecessor had imposed upon him, and instead had promoted him and even made him his trusted counsellor!). In a letter Vigano said of the Pope that “he knew from at least June 23, 2013 that McCarrick was a serial predator. He knew that he was a corrupt man, he covered for him to the bitter end.” In August 2018 he called upon the Pope to resign and has several times repeated the call, albeit from hiding as he fears for his own safety. In response to these accusations the Pope has refused to engage with the Press but has on at least two occasions impugned his critics as doing the work of the devil.

That the work of the devil is going on apace within the Roman Church is indisputable. One estimate put the percentage of homosexual clergy within the Vatican as high as eighty percent. Amongst other matters, the Pope has raised the ire of conservatives by implying that divorced people may receive mass, and by failing to do anything about the increasing prevalence and influence of homosexual clergy. The historian Professor Roberto de Mattei has warned that the RC Church is in danger of collapse because of the extent of the “homosexual plague”. Some years ago he raised the ire of liberals by linking the fall of the Roman Empire to the influx of sodomites from Carthage. His thesis is that history is being repeated in the Romish Church.

A Papal summit in February 2019 to tackle the problem of abuse has just finished at the time of writing. It has resulted in no substantive changes. Anne Barrett-Doyle of the abuse-tracking group bishopaccountability.org, summed it up: “As the world’s Catholics cry out for concrete change, the Pope instead provides tepid promises, all of which we’ve heard before. . . . Especially distressing was the Pope’s familiar rationalization that abuse happens in all sectors of society. . . . We needed him to offer a bold and decisive plan. He gave us instead defensive, recycled rhetoric.” The Vatican seems to be attempting to normalise the situation, not only by highlighting child abuse in the general population, but also in warning that reports of popish abuse will not cease any time soon. The abuse problem seems to be caught up in other conflicts such as the partisan political struggle, and the homosexual agenda, which may prevent decisive action, even if the Pope was of that mind. As their “infallible head”, absolute power is invested in him, but if he is to prevent a break-up he needs a degree of unanimity.

It is perhaps inevitable that the Roman Church, being essentially a power-hungry organisation, should rupture according to political difference. The internal conflicts reflect its complete worldliness – indeed the mounting public evidence is of it being, as the true Church in Scotland since the Reformation has always believed it to be, the single most wicked organisation on earth, in Scriptural terms “that antichrist” (1 John 2:18) whose head is “that man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). It is a house divided which sooner or later must fall. We hope that day will come soon.

Anti-Semitism in Christianity

It must be remembered that anti-Judaism is not the same as anti-Semitism. In anti-Judaism a person disagrees with the tenets of Judaism, while anti-Semitism is an emotional bias or hatred not specifically targeting the religion of Judaism but the Jews as a people. Anti-Judaism is not anti-Semitic, as it only rejects the religious ideas of Judaism without rejecting the Jewish people. Evangelising of Jews is not a form of anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism strictly targets Jews because of their supposed biological characteristics or lineage. It is a form of racism in which a person expresses their anti-Jewish prejudices. We believe that there is a spiritual element, as the Jews are the natural seed to whom the promises belong.

As the early Church emerged from Judaism, the early Church Fathers identified the Jews and Judaism with heresy and held them to be “outside of God”. It was stated that the god of the Jews was inferior to the Christian God, that Judaism itself was incomplete and Christians were the true “Israel of God”. It was also recognised that the Jews would be saved at the end of the world. Augustine held that the Jews were to be loved as a means of bringing them to Christ.

As the Romanist heresy grew under such theologians as John Chrysostom, the idea developed that as the Jews had rejected Christ, they were only fit “for the slaughter”. Jerome, one of the early Fathers, identified all Jews with Judas Iscariot so that “Judas is cursed, that in Judas the Jews may be accursed”. This theology led to a general oppression or persecution of the Jews in society and the accusation that they drank the blood of Christian children in mockery of the mass. The Fourth Lateran Council required Jews to wear a mark of identification to show that they were Jews.

At the time of the Reformation, Luther believed that it had been the evils of Roman Catholicism that had prevented the conversion of the Jews. But when his own attempts to evangelise them failed, his general attitude towards them changed. In his book *On The Jews and Their Lies* he spoke against them and called for their permanent oppression and expulsion. In this regard Luther continued to hold medieval views that were anti-Semitic. However, at the end of his life, in his final sermon, he stated, “We want to treat them with Christian love and to pray for them, so that they might become converted and would receive the Lord”.

Throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries Romanism still held strong anti-Semitic views. David Kertzer, in his book, *The Popes Against the Jews*, states that the papists adhered to a distinction between good and bad anti-Semitism. Bad anti-Semitism promoted hatred of the Jews because of their descent and should be considered un-Christian as the Christian message was intended for all and anyone could become a Christian. Good anti-Semitism criticised Jewish conspiracies to control newspapers, banks and governments. Up until 1870 the Papal states required Jews to live in ghettos, and such groups as the

Jesuits refused candidates from Jewish descent unless their great grandfather had been a Romanist.

Adolf Hitler, in a meeting with Romanist Bishop Wilhelm Berning of Osnabruck, stated: "I do not set race over religion, but I recognise the representatives of this race as pestilent for the state and for the Church, and perhaps I am thereby doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions." The Nazis also used Luther's book *On The Jews and Their Lies* to claim a moral righteousness for their ideology. In this book Luther stated, "We are at fault in not slaying them".

In the year 2000, 220 rabbis and intellectuals from all branches of Judaism issued a statement that "Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold, nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity."

Modern anti-Semitism is rooted in economic and racial thought. White supremacy groups, many of which identify as being Christian, are also anti-Semitic. They accuse the Jews of seeking to control the media, international banking, radical left-wing politics and promoting multiculturalism. No doubt this has been aggravated by instances like Billy Graham and President Nixon being caught on tape in the 1970s discussing how to address the Jewish control of the American Media.

Anti-Semitism in UK politics has recently been in the news. However, it is the fear of Jews living in Scotland that causes us the greatest concern. A spokesman for the Jewish Community responded to a survey taken in 2015, by saying, "It is terrible being Jewish in Scotland", Jews are "treated differently" and "singled out" in relation to anti-Semitism. The number of anti-Semitic incidents has increased. Many Scottish Jews "actively discuss leaving Scotland because they feel alienated, vulnerable and not at home". "Many Jews are still considerably more nervous about the state of anti-Semitism, politics and society than was the case 10 or 20 years ago."

Much of the prejudice directed at Scottish Jews is due to the bigotry of Scots opposed to Israel who express their views by bullying, intimidating and abusing Jews. Jews are being singled out because of their cultural and religious ties to the Jewish state. The idea of Zionism or a Jewish movement for self-determination is considered to be socially unacceptable and politically incorrect.

This fresh anti-Semitism seems to be encouraged by Churches taking an anti-Israel stance and being involved in boycotting Israeli produce. Such anti-Israeli activism often involves comparing the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians, to the Jews' treatment of Jesus. Many Israelis living in Scotland are forced to hide their nationality and many Jews keep their Judaism secret. They feel alienated and no longer Scottish. The Scottish government's "disproportionate obsession" with Israel does not help matters, nor Police

Scotland's failure to tackle blatant anti-Semitism among the Scottish anti-Israel movement.

Although we cannot condone all the activities of the State of Israel, especially their opposition to Christianity, we ought to be praying earnestly for the fulfilment of the Lord's promise that the Jewish people "shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). A true Christian ought to have a love for the Jews and a real desire for their conversion and ingathering.

Judaism today

A distinction must be made between Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Many Jews do not practise Judaism but rather consider themselves to be secular, atheistic or agnostic. Secularism is growing among today's 14 million Jews. Over the generations many people of Jewish descent have embraced the Christian Faith.

Judaism began with the establishment of Rabbinical Judaism and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. At that time the sacrifices of the Temple and the priesthood came to an end. The Rabbis became the authority on spiritual and legal matters.

Judaism has four main sects:

- Orthodox Judaism adheres to the traditional laws and customs as they relate to the liturgy, diet and Sabbath observance. It requires full submission to the Talmud and the authority of the written and oral laws of Judaism.
- The Reform movement which began in the 19th Century seeks to integrate Jews into mainstream society. It follows an abridged liturgy and makes observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws optional.
- Judaism is another movement which began in the 19th Century to counter the Reform Movement. It is a compromise movement retaining a conservatism in religious practices but encourages the advancement of modern education and culture. The Law is reinterpreted to adapt to contemporary culture.
- Reconstructionist Judaism is a movement that seeks to adapt classical Judaism to modern scientific views, art and reason. Here, Judaism is seen as an evolving civilisation rather than a religion.

Modern Judaism holds to various beliefs that makes it incompatible with Biblical Christianity:

- It denies that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and believes Him to be a false prophet.
- It denies that Jesus is Divine.
- It interprets the Old Testament in line with its rejection of Christ, making the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 to be the nation of Israel rather than Jesus.

- It rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. This means that the god of Judaism is not the God of Christianity.
- It rejects the Scriptures of the New Testament, while giving a prominent place to the Talmud – uninspired writings of men.
- It claims that man is born in the image of God without original sin.
- It believes that a proper relationship with God only comes through repentance, prayer and obedience to the Law. Salvation is merely a betterment of self and society (a covenant of works).

Clearly, Judaism and Christianity have significant differences. In reality they do not worship the same Triune God. They have a different theology of salvation. Judaism is works orientated and rejects the atoning work of Christ and His divine nature.

One other element of modern Judaism is the place given to Zionism or the belief that the Jewish people must be resettled in their own homeland in order for them to obtain salvation and to bring salvation to the Jewish people.

For an adherent of Judaism to become a Christian would mean for them to reject their Judaistic heritage and distinctive cultural characteristics such as circumcision. In other words, they would have to become as gentiles. This alienates them from their families and religious communities.

According to the Old Testament, the Jews are descended from Abraham and it is to them first that God has given special promises and a prominent role in the evangelisation of the world. This is confirmed in the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12; the Land Covenant in Deuteronomy 30; the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7 and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Even though they have failed to worship God as commanded and rejected the Messiah, yet God is faithful, and He will fulfil His promises to them at the appointed time.

There are great blessings promised to the gentile Church in connection with the restoration of the Jews and we ought to be praying for the fulfilment of this (Psalm 80).

Persecution

In the past year the trend of worsening persecution against the Christian Church has continued unabated. We know from Scripture that the great dragon, “that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan”, persecutes the Church with great wrath, making war with the Churches “which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”. The latest evidence from bodies such as Barnabas and Open Doors, who specialise in reporting persecution of Christians world-wide, shows that the experience of the Church still matches the testimony of Scripture. In this reporting it is regrettable that these organisations speak of Christians from sects such as Romanism.

Part of the growing opposition to the Church is found in nations with authoritarian or dictatorial regimes such as China and North Korea. Persecution of the estimated 200,000-400,000 professed Christians in the latter country is the most fierce, with many tortured and killed and tens of thousands

confined to brutal concentration camps for a mere profession of Christianity. In China, the government has been clamping down on the Church through new laws which have restricted religious freedom. Thousands of churches have been closed as a result and a ban on sales of the Bible from shops and e-commerce sites was introduced.

Another recent trend is the growing aggression of Hindu extremists in countries such as India and Nepal where their political power is on the increase. Numerous states in India have passed anti-Christian laws leading to the forced closure of mission schools and hospitals. While it is always hard to find reliable statistics, Open Doors recorded 12,500 attacks in India against individual Christians, attacks on 100 schools, arrests of 200 simply for their Christian faith and 10 deaths.

In countries with sizeable Muslim populations across the Far East, the Middle East and Africa, violent persecution of Christianity continues to grow. The list is so extensive that it cannot be given in full here, but the worst offenders are reckoned to include Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Indonesia. On the African continent violent Islamic terrorist groups such as Boko Haram are behind much of the bloodshed which has taken place. Last year, in one region of Nigeria alone, Boko Haram attacks led to the destruction of 30 church buildings and 4,436 Christian homes, while many lives have been taken away when heavily armed militias killed thousands of church members.

Such is the sense of the scale of the persecution, that the subject was debated in the House of Commons towards the end of 2018 under a motion tabled by the Democratic Unionist Party. In the course of the debate it was claimed that in the current year 100,000 Christians will be massacred and 200 million persecuted for their faith. The House passed the motion calling on the government to do more through foreign policy and aid work to support these Christians. This is a welcome gesture, but it is to be feared that there are those within the political establishment in the UK who would relish the opportunity to bring more persecution to the Church of Christ within their own country. Indeed, the persecution of Christians in our own land is not unknown.

The Scottish Churches

The year 2018 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of women to the ministry in the Church of Scotland. The proportion of women ministers had reached 25% by 2014, and it continues to rise. The impression is that a new Church of Scotland minister is now likely to be female, and the proportion of women elders is already well over 50%. Given such a fundamentally unbiblical composition, it is not surprising that the Church of Scotland makes no stand whatever on contemporary moral matters such as abortion, sodomy, divorce, and the smacking of children. If anything, its influence tends to be against Christian principles.

Still worse, however, is the Episcopal Church of Scotland which now supports and practises sodomite marriage. In 2018, its Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, which had previously opposed sodomite marriage, had a female

bishop, Anne Dyer, imposed upon it who was an ardent supporter of sodomy. This led to resignations; and at least two congregations have left the denomination as a result of the controversy.

The trend of funerals becoming a celebration of life accompanied with levity and innovations of worship, often led by women ministers, is causing increasing dilemmas of conscience for many regarding their attendance.

MORALS

Abortion (child killing)

This report is given under the sense of the dark shadow of infant death throughout the United Kingdom, and the wrath of God against it for the great sin of such child killing. We believe that the life of an infant (embodiment and ensoulment) begins at conception, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5), and “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. . . . My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth” (Psalm 139:13,15); and is the gift of God, bearing His image. Therefore, we regard abortion as the express violation of the solemn commandment of God, “Thou shalt not kill”, and therefore a great sin.

Since the Abortion Act of 1967, there have been almost 9 million infant deaths in the United Kingdom (including 520,000 in Scotland), that is, about 3,300 children every week, or 475 each day, (including 192 every week, or 27 each day, in Scotland). This is equivalent to the present combined population of Scotland and Wales.

We are caught up in what are literally “killing times”. These killings have been committed, and are presently being done, not only against the express directive of God, but also against a very public witness, both by pleading and poster, of the zealous pro-life or anti-abortion organisations. There are six of these bodies actively opposing this wickedness, employing in addition to other means, a horribly graphic, yet real and restrained description of a typical abortion performed on women who are between 14 and 24 weeks with child (the heart of the child normally begins beating at 17 weeks). They describe the actions of the doctor doing the abortion using a metal grasping instrument to tear out of the mother’s womb the child’s legs, arms, spine, intestines, heart, lungs and head (after having crushed the skull, as shown by the seeping out of a white fluid in evidence of the squashing of the brain), so that the child is reduced to a pile of bloodied parts thrown on a table, to then be disposed of casually.

Lamentably, these very active and vocal organisations have a hollow zeal, untempered by knowledge. They are either popish, or heavily influenced by that satanic sect. They express much concern for the life of the child carried by the mother and go to great lengths during their vigils outside abortion clinics to preserve that life, (and in a very few instances succeed in persuading a woman with child to keep the living one within her). However, whilst they are

instrumental in preventing some abortions, they promote and foster another gospel, that is, a salvation by works, not by faith in the obedience of Christ, which is a deadly perversion of the truth of Scripture, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16). They bring a cursed dogma, which if embraced murders the soul.

The wicked spirit that encourages women to abort is rife in the United Kingdom (including Scotland), with 92 per cent of the population favouring abortion, 1 in every 5 women with child aborting the child, and 1 in every 3 women aged 15 to 44 guilty of having killed a child they were bearing. There is a murderous spirit afoot in the land, with some women, desirous of pursuing an emerging trend in the United States of America to implement “full-term abortion”, that is, to kill the child when he or she is born (infanticide). During the past 51, almost 52 years, there have been so many abortions carried out in the United Kingdom, including Scotland, under the gaze of the Most High, Holy God. These abominations have been, and are being done, before Him who hates and must punish sin.

These great sins are a major cause of the wrath of God against Scotland. They have defiled the land with an enormity of sin and guilt and quenched and grieved away the Holy Ghost. Yet, by far the greatest sin in the land is not abortion, which is even warranted biblically if the woman’s life is considered to be in grave danger, but the slighting and despising of the adorable and only Saviour of sinners, Jesus Christ, as He is freely offered in the Gospel (a good report of Himself).

The wrath of God is palpably evident against Scotland, primarily because of what appears to be an almost universal rejection of Christ (as well as the sin of child killing, and many other sins not mentioned here). Furthermore, so many in the land are giving “appearance of reprobation, and a forerunner of hell” (David Dickson). We are to look over the belly of these evil and discouraging days, to the Scriptural promise of the better times, when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). Then will dawn that which shall be as life from the dead, and we long that it may be soon.

The equality agenda

The equality agenda asserts that certain groups must receive special advantages to ensure equal treatment. They include age, disability, sexual orientation and gender reassignment, sex, race, and religion or belief. Including LGBT within this is a subtle way of promoting such sinful choices alongside other more acceptable issues. It is clear, however, that those promoting this believe some of these characteristics deserve greater equality than others. All kinds of organisations have equalities policies and run diversity training to prevent discrimination. Not content with this, they feel

they must now promote some of these characteristics in order to be seen to encourage equality.

To many people, this agenda sounds like it is simply talking about treating people with respect and fairness. But with a leftist emphasis on equality of outcome it is an agenda with authoritarian pretensions. It seeks to regulate and control every area of society to further this agenda. It is never satisfied because it seeks the impossible goal of equality of outcome. It has obvious inconsistencies in relation to absolute equality. Age discrimination does not apply to children. When some call the abomination of homosexual “marriage” equal to real marriage, they do not envisage that anyone can marry absolutely anyone they might wish to.

Equality of outcome is an impossible goal that undermines God-given liberties and responsibilities. It is not the same as equity. The Bible requires justice and equality before the law but condemns partiality. It also demands righteousness in relation to what God’s law requires and forbids. The equality agenda has no regard for this and celebrates sinful lifestyles. Scripture asserts equal human worth but also equal responsibility to give obedience to God. This too is entirely different from the equality agenda.

As with other useful and attractive words, equality has become abused as a term. We find a Scriptural description of true equality in 2 Corinthians 8:14. It does not mean absolute equality, rather there is to be a fair balance through mutual dependence. God provides in Providence greater abundance in spiritual and temporal things to some, that they may minister to the needs of others. Let us seek grace to pursue biblical priorities for equality.

Homosexual agenda

The Word of God tells us that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). The continued aggressive push by the homosexual community and their growing band of supporters to force their agenda on our country in the last year is evidence of their increasing boldness and wickedness. One of the most prominent prongs of their attack on the moral standards of our nation has been the increasing use of public marches to rally support to their cause. For the first time these abominations were held last year in our once faithful Highlands and Islands, with homosexual marches in both Inverness and Stornoway. The support given by the public and a whole host of political leaders, media, and businesses, gives the impression at least that the majority of the population is now behind the homosexual movement.

The BBC is openly and deliberately promoting the homosexual agenda and they have expressed the aim of making homosexuality equally suitable for mankind as heterosexuality. Part of this drive involves an official target of having homosexuals make up 8% of all staff levels including leadership. Current estimates show that 11% of their staff are already LGBT anyway, without any positive discrimination having been in place. They have also set a target of 8% for onscreen portrayal of homosexual characters. One Christian

newspaper commented that “Christian homes which still have a television, now might think about saving the annual licence fee”.

The Scottish Government is one of the most aggressive supporters of homosexuality and they seem bent on making Scotland, once the fairest daughter of the Reformation, the leading homosexual-friendly country in the world. One instance of this is their recent move to introduce mandatory promotion of homosexual rights in all Scottish primary schools – something no other country in the world has yet done. Ominously, no opt-outs are to be permitted, exposing every child attending these schools to their abhorrent teaching.

It is becoming more and more clear that the Church’s stance over homosexuality is to be a key test of her faithfulness to her Divine Head. Numerous Churches, including the national Churches of Scotland and England, have shown their enmity to God and their friendship with the world in their open support for the homosexual movement. During the past year the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland sent a booklet outlining the scriptural position against homosexuality to every member of the Scottish Parliament. The church’s duty to be faithful to Christ brings an obligation to denounce homosexuality as heinous sin, whatever the cost.

The news media

The Athenians “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21). The revolutionary effect that the internet has had on the production and consumption of news has made our culture more Athenian than ever. Events are reported as they happen with 24-hour broadcasting and social media. It reduces the time available to present facts that are verified. The very quantity of time devoted to certain topics skews our perspective on the relative importance of events. On the internet most news is presented in terms of what people want to hear and how it fits with their view of the world. People select the news that suits their views or emotional response, and avidly share it with others before checking whether it is genuine. Facts become less important, leading some to describe such a culture as “post truth”.

The advent of “fake news” has diminished confidence in journalism. Traditional media have tried to portray themselves as reliable in contrast. Yet they too have been guilty of deliberate forgery sometimes, such as the recent case of the reporter Claas Relotius being sacked by *Der Spiegel* for faked stories. BBC insiders freely acknowledge an institutional left-wing and pro-homosexual bias. Bernard Goldberg, longstanding CBS insider, documented blatant techniques for distorting the news. These include selectivity, priority, spin and labelling. The sheer volume of information and opinions presented can have the cumulative effect of wearing down and disabling critical thinking. We do not wish to undermine honest, hardworking journalists but we must be conscious that everyone has their own opinions and bias, whether conscious or otherwise. Some journalists are so far removed from an objective

understanding of, or acquaintance with, religion, that they are incapable of reporting it accurately and with discernment.

We need to be on our guard in relation to the way that events are reported to us. Let us also examine ourselves concerning what news we seek to know and why and how we seek it. Do we have a Christian response to the news that we hear that we would seek to use it for the purpose of prayer or praise?

Personal and Social Education

Personal and Social Education is the current dogma being prescribed in the teaching of our children today. In his introduction to the Review of Personal and Social Education, Mr John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in Scotland, said, “While the health and wellbeing of every child and young person is rightly the responsibility of all school staff, learning in health and wellbeing is largely taught through personal and social education, or PSE. Learning in PSE should address the current issues affecting the lives of young people such as an understanding of consent and healthy relationships, substance misuse education, how to manage their mental health, the impact of social media and the importance of LGBT inclusion.”

The Review says, “Children and young people should feel nurtured, safe, respected and included in the learning environment and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider learning community”. This appears to be commendable, but on closer examination, PSE is found to involve quite explicit sex education being introduced to infants of 3 and 4 years of age and LGBT behaviour being taught as natural. Small children are to be taught these things with no right of parents to remove them from the classes. LGBT issues are to be embedded in all aspects of the curriculum and will be a core part of education for all ages. There will be no tolerance for those who disagree, and teachers will not be able to avoid the all-embracing aspect of it in the education of our children. All of this will aid the Time for Inclusive Education, LGBT, agenda. It results in an unavoidable two-pronged approach on all children taught in the state sector.

The Review concludes by saying that, “Health and Wellbeing/Personal and Social Education can have a crucial role in supporting higher levels of literacy and numeracy, in making the school environment respectful, in preparing young people for the challenges and opportunities that they will experience and in delivering a positive outcome for society”. One may not doubt the sincerity of those who are behind this initiative, but it completely denies the rights of parents and teachers who want no part of it.

PSE teaches inappropriate sex education to infants and seeks to saturate their young minds with the concept that sodomy in all its modern manifestations is natural, proper and acceptable.

While all this is going on in Scotland, the Government in England is consulting on plans for Relationships Education to be taught as a statutory subject in primary schools. This will mean teaching young children about

different types of relationships, including sodomy, trans-sexualism and same sex “marriage”. According to draft guidance, parents of primary school children will not be allowed to withdraw youngsters from relationship education, but sex education will not be compulsory. The guidance says schools are free to determine how they address LGBT-specific content, but the Government recommends that it is integral throughout the programmes of study. The Christian Institute reports that, “At a time when there is growing alarm at the sexualisation of children, this package of change could lead to the sex education industry, which promotes explicit materials, having much greater influence.”

Smartphones and social media

Smartphones are mobile phones with multi-purpose mobile computing abilities. In addition to the usual functions of phoning and texting, they have extensive mobile operating systems which incorporate software for internet browsing, and multimedia functions such as music, videos, cameras and gaming. As of February 2018, 80% of mobile phone users in the UK used a smartphone; this equates to 75% of the general population, around 45 million people.

The potential for benefit is huge but conversely, the potential for harm is undeniable and is widely exploited. Cyber criminals are fraudulently taking advantage of smartphones in ever increasing regularity. We read on a daily basis of the harm done to people, especially children, by the misuse of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other forms of social media. Vulnerable young people are being encouraged to self-harm and even to commit suicide by images and messages on these forums. In addition, they may be stalked by paedophiles and others who wish to do them harm. Despite this, the media giants appear to be immune to moral pressure, or parliamentary rebukes. Clearly legislation of some sort is needed to require them to behave responsibly. Profit from advertising seems to be the motivation, regardless of the consequences to young children and grieving families.

Texting has become the favoured method of communication for a majority of youngsters today; some have been described as “hypertexters” who send over 120 text messages a day. The constant availability of the internet, and the relative privacy of accessing it on a mobile phone (it is estimated that more than 50% of parents know little or nothing about what their children do on their phones), mean children can be drawn into inappropriate behaviour such as “sexting” (sending sexually suggestive images by text), cyber bullying and accessing unsavoury social media content.

Fallen man has a natural predisposition towards that which is sinful, and children, with their curious and immature minds, are particularly vulnerable when they become involved in this dangerous environment.

Parents should consider carefully the age of their children before buying them smartphones, and ensure that they teach them to use them in a responsible and disciplined way. Parental guidance, the teaching of right and

wrong, and a strong moral compass nurtured in a loving Christian home, are ever more necessary in a rapidly changing world.

Suicide – a Christian perspective

Over 5,000 people in the United Kingdom commit suicide every year. Statistically men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women.

There is a difference between volitional or wilful suicide and suicide due to psychological or physiological factors such as clinical depression, an altered mental state such as schizophrenia or chemical imbalance. This article deals with volitional or wilful suicide.

Suicide is the deliberate taking away of one's own life, usually as a response to suffering in some form or other. Suffering can be physical, mental, emotional or spiritual in nature. This suffering may arise from depression, money troubles, the breaking of a relationship, bereavement, peer pressure, bullying, confusion over gender, escape from punishment or pain. Alcohol and drug abuse can also be contributing factors.

There are six examples of suicide in the Bible. Abimelech, Judges 9:54; King Saul, 1 Samuel 31:4; Saul's armour bearer, 1 Samuel 31:4-6; Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 17:23; Zimri, 1 Kings 16:18; Judas Iscariot, Matthew 27:5. All the examples of suicide in the Bible are of men of a dubious moral character who are never commended for their actions. It is represented as a fitting end to a wicked and unrepentant life.

The believer may be tempted with this sin like any other. Satan tempted the Saviour to commit suicide, Matthew 4:5-6. Solomon reached the point where he hated life, Ecclesiastes 2:17; Elijah was fearful and depressed and yearned for death, 1 Kings 19:4; Jonah was angry with God and wished to die, Jonah 4:8. Yet, they would not take their own life. Instead, they learned to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13) and to wait upon God for comfort and rest (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Suicide needs to be distinguished from willing self-sacrifice of one's own life, such as in military service, the self-sacrifice of the Saviour Himself (John 10:18), nursing the infectious, and dangerous mission work. The death of Samson, a hero of the faith, was a divinely enabled self-sacrifice and not suicide.

Suicide is wrong for many reasons:

- It is against God as the creator and sustainer of life.
- It rejects God's gift of life, Job 1:21.
- It rejects God's sovereignty and His prerogative as the giver and taker of life, Job 12:10. Our bodies are not our own; "My times are in thy hands" (Psalm 31:15).
- It is a violation of the sixth commandment, Exodus 20:13.
- It disregards the image of God and the sanctity of human life, Genesis 1:26, 27, 9:5-6.

- It harms those left behind, Matthew 22:36-39, Ephesus 5:29.
- It overlooks the value of human suffering, Romans 5:3-5. Believers are called to suffer with Christ, Romans 8:17; and hope for that which is to come in the midst of present troubles.
- It fails to recognise how unnatural death is, Romans 5:12.
- It fails to appreciate the sufferings of a lost eternity.

Bible-based Christianity has always held suicide to be a terrible sin and a form of self-idolatry. It is equal to murder. It is a most solemn sin, as most “successful” suicides leave no opportunity for repentance.

Anyone who turns to Jesus for forgiveness is pardoned and accepted as righteous, Romans 5:9.

Scottish legislation

Over the last 60 years laws have been passed which are totally contrary to Scripture. Although passed by the UK Parliament, they have affected Scottish law. First, the death penalty for murder was removed. After this the 1967 Abortion Act was passed, leading to almost 9 million children being slain in the womb. The effect of this is an ageing population, as many of these destroyed children would have now been in the work force, so that there would not have been the need for foreign workers who bring with them their false religions.

But since the granting of a Scottish Parliament, things have become much worse, with laws which are an abomination in the sight of God, with legislation for civil partnerships, followed by homosexual and lesbian marriages. The Scottish Government is consulting on hate crime recommendations made last year by Lord Bracadale. This consultation closed on 24th February 2019. The most concerning proposal is for new “stirring up hatred” offences. The existing law only covers race, but could be extended to cover religion, sexual orientation and transgender status, which could have a profound effect on free speech and religious liberty, impacting on freedom to proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation, or to call people to repent of sin.

The Government is planning to make it illegal for parents to smack their children. If it becomes law, it would give parents a criminal record which could prevent them obtaining visas for visiting foreign countries.

Another cause for concern is John Swinney’s announcement to incorporate compulsory LGBT teaching into the national curriculum for all state schools, starting at nursery. “On each side walk the wicked, when vile men are high in place” (Psalm 12:8, metrical version). There are many at present promoting the wicked LGBT cause, and not only men, but also women.

What need there is for prayer to God who ruleth over all: “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).

CONCLUSION

As we noted in a previous Report, the terrorist organisation ISIS is in retreat and the past year has seen its aspirations to create a caliphate mercifully disappointed. The danger remaining is that its dispersed fanatics have scattered across non-Muslim countries in Europe and may yet cause much mischief. We pray that our police and security forces will be enabled to contain these malign people.

This Report includes an item on abortion. The advocates of this form of murder are ever more strident; American Democrats in Rhode Island and Virginia are proposing to allow abortions up to the end of pregnancy for any “health” reasons, including “age, economic, social and emotional factors”. They describe all protections for unborn babies as “insidiously restrictive, harmful and patriarchal reproductive laws”. In the UK there are campaigners wanting to further liberalise our own laws in accordance with a “woman’s right to choose”.

Paedophilia and the sexual abuse of children are constantly in the news and Romanism often appears to be at the forefront of what we hear. On-line grooming is another manifestation of this perversion. Satan and his minions are constantly busy suggesting ever more degrading forms of temptation to mankind.

Our report shows once more the exceedingly low state of religion and morals in our nation. Surely the greatness of the need must encourage us to continue instant in prayer seeking that the Lord would hasten the day when the whole earth will be filled with His glory and that every nation, tribe and tongue would bow the knee to Jesus.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE’S REPORT

Convener: Rev J B Jardine

THE Committee would use this opportunity to remind the people of the Church of the spiritual danger of breaking the Sabbath Day and becoming unnecessarily involved in the things of the world during the Lord’s Day. The unnecessary use of the internet, particularly social media, is detrimental to a proper observance of the Sabbath. The use of the internet to access religious materials on the Sabbath is not a work of necessity or mercy, and the 2012 Synod passed a resolution against all such unnecessary online access. Texting, messaging and phoning about either religious or worldly matters, including unimportant family news, that can be left to the Monday, are also detrimental to Sabbath keeping.

Rev R MacLeod, Glasgow, has been appointed by the Synod to give lectures on the Christian Sabbath. Mr MacLeod can be contacted direct by interested congregations. Public lectures were held in Halkirk and Portree towards the