

REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE

Convener: Rev. W. Weale

FOLLOWING the usual format of this annual report to the Synod, we highlight some matters of significance which reflect the religious climate that prevails and also those aspects of our society which may be taken as a gauge of its moral health. The Church of Christ within any nation ought to be a light to guide men in the way of uprightness and as salt to preserve society from decay and depravity. We must again mourn over the fact that, for the most part, the professing Church and the leaders of it are blind guides who lead poor souls astray and that, to an ever-increasing extent, the “salt has lost its savour”. This report on the Church within the nation is further evidence of the Lord’s controversy with Britain. It strongly suggests that judicial blindness prevails.

The National Churches

Sadly, the protracted spiritual decline in the Church of Scotland has continued. Evangelicals within its pale are protesting formally against the acceptance by the Church of the right given to sodomites to adopt children. The Church has also given freedom to its ministers to perform ceremonies in connection with the Civil Partnership Act.¹ It seems that whatever evangelicals may hope to do within the Church of Scotland, they have failed thus far to stem the tide of liberalism and heterodoxy that has engulfed the organisation as a whole. In its official documents, it has all but rejected the Westminster Confession, and the theology emanating from most of its pulpits is so far from the Calvinism of the Scottish Reformation that no true Calvinist could feel at home in its communion.

A significant organisational change has been effected in recent times in the Church of Scotland. The Church Committee structure has been completely overhauled and replaced with five larger and more powerful Church Councils. While the national Church remains Presbyterian in name and while Church courts continue to operate, there is a growing sense that real power and influence lies in these Councils rather than in the Church’s Courts. Alas, however, the voice of the Scottish Church is increasingly being drowned out by the arrogant claims of the papal antichrist to represent Christianity in the public arena. Without a complete return to Reformation principles and practices, the Church of Scotland will soon be unworthy of the name of a Church of Christ at all. That it no longer represents the Reformed Church in Scotland is clear for all to see.

The Church of England has done nothing to reveal any substantial sympathy with the Word of God in its declarations concerning the sin of sodomy in the past year. A growing sense of alienation now exists between the Church in the UK and the African bishops who stand more consistently for biblical morality.

1. *Scotsman*, Tues., 21st Feb. 2006. See <http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=337&id=268852006>

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, has been accused of having personal views on sodomy which are contrary to the teaching of the Church and being therefore unable to give proper and effective leadership. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* in November 2005 revealed that 17 primates, representing nearly half of the 38 provinces that constitute the worldwide Church, indicated that they were losing confidence in him.² The unbiblical office of Archbishop itself greatly hinders true reform, but the acceptance of sodomy by the Church generally, while it is officially disallowed, is at the root of the present division that is threatening to fragment the Anglican communion.

Rome

True Protestants have always contended that Romanism is not Christianity but is a false religion. The place given to false religion in the United Kingdom is now so conspicuous that any claim to being a Christian nation is fast becoming a wish of the Church's rather than a reality. Not only in our public media but in our institutions of government and from the throne itself, statements are made which reveal an apostasy from the religion of the Reformation. This apostasy is very apparent considering the place given to Popery within the nation. As true Christianity declines year by year, Romanism wields further power and influence and increasingly represents itself as Christianity to the common people.

The death of Pope John Paul II in February 2005 was preceded by almost constant media coverage and followed with an outpouring of lamentation almost universally. The whole world gazed Romeward again when he was buried and when his successor was chosen to that seat he has usurped over the nations of the earth. As the world "wondered after the beast", very little of the public comment highlighted the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the papal system. This, in times when our country goes to war in distant lands in professed attempts at transplanting democracy, suggests at least an element of hypocrisy. Even before his departure to meet his Maker, there were calls made for Pope John Paul II to be proclaimed a saint. Protestants need to be reminded that the doctrines of Rome have not changed.

Little sense of shame exists any longer in Scotland when the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland pays homage to Pope Benedict XVI.³ Little sense of shame is found among so-called Protestants when our elected representatives and the heir to our throne go out of their way to acknowledge what the Scriptures describe as the antichrist system. Attention was drawn by the *Scotsman* in December 2005 to the death of Professor John McIntyre, who, as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1982, publicly welcomed Pope John Paul II to Scotland, under the statue of John Knox.⁴ Rome has made a lot of further progress in Scotland in the intervening years.

2. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/11/17/>

3. Several other Protestant Churchmen did likewise.

4. <http://news.scotsman.com/topics.cfm?tid=337&id=2439862005>

Islam

Much attention has been given recently to the question of the degree of toleration and protection to be given to the religion of Mohammed. While some commentators are justly fearful of what the future might bring if the present growth of Islam continues in Britain,⁵ the government insists on extending further liberties to this dangerous system of delusion. We have been given a stark reminder of the deadly cruelty of this religion in the past year. In the heart of our capital city in July of 2005, suicide bombers took the lives of over 50 British citizens.⁶ Strangely, what surprised many commentators was the fact that it did not need foreign agents to carry out this atrocity. Young men nurtured within the country itself have shown their treasonable disregard for human life and for the liberty of their fellow citizens. Sadly, suicide bombing is not without expressions of sympathy amidst the general clamour of condemnation.⁷ The discovery that both the successful and the failed suicide attacks were the work of British nationals sits uncomfortably with the present government's appeasement policy towards militant Islam.

The re-publication of cartoons mocking Mohammed in January 2006 produced an extreme reaction from Islamic countries around the world with several embassies being destroyed and attacked and ambassadors being withdrawn from European countries. Violence was even threatened on the streets of London and was brought to the doors of media centres. The British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, pandered to this inexcusable response by criticising the publications. No such defence was offered when the name of Christ was blasphemed so wickedly in a nationwide television drama. Many Muslims in Britain seek to distance themselves from those whom our government chooses to brand extremists. They attempt to convince us that Islam is a democratic and peace-loving religion that can easily co-exist in harmony with Christianity and western civilisation. What is becoming more apparent, with daily reports of murder and violence in the name of Islam, is that increasing numbers of Muslims throughout the world reject this theory.⁸ The acceptance of it by our rulers is a desperate effort on their part to defend an impossible multi-cultural and multi-faith harmony. The choice we have made in giving such extensive freedoms to Islam is leading us closer to civil unrest and conflict, which could have drastic results in this nation.

5. One interesting example can be found in the *Salisbury Review*, Summer 2005, page 11, "The Muslim Conquest of Britain", by Christie Davies.

6. See "Notes and Comments" in *FP Magazine*, Vol. 110, No. 8, August 2005.

7. Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo, the International Director of the Barnabas Fund and the Director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, comments in an article in response to 7/7 that, "Some of the 'condemnations' of 7/7 given by the British Muslim leadership have little value, hedged as they are with provisos and get-out clauses. What good is it," he asks, "to condemn suicide bombings in London and affirm them in the Middle East?" See www.barnabasfund.co.uk

8. A list of acts of terrorism in the name of Islam, world-wide, since 9/11, has been compiled by a group called "Islamist Watch" and makes disturbing reading. See www.thereligionofpeace.com

In February 2006, two BNP activists were cleared of inciting racial hatred for describing Islam as “a wicked faith”.⁹ We deplore much of the BNP policy and practices and have reservations over the case, yet we agree with their statement on this point. There can be no doubt about the wickedness perpetrated by the most zealous advocates of Islam and there can be no question about the heretical nature of the doctrines of that system of religion. The jailing of a prominent Muslim cleric for incitement to murder during the course of “sermons” in Finsbury Park Mosque, is an encouraging sign that the forces of law and order are taking such extreme threats to our liberties seriously. However, until our rulers and our people acknowledge that Christianity is an exclusive religion and cannot exist alongside a doctrine that blasphemes and wars against Christ Himself, we see no prospect of deliverance from the dreadful scourge of militant Islam.

Religious Freedom

If we have understanding concerning the times in which we live, we will not have failed to recognise an erosion of religious liberties, which were purchased for Christ’s Church in our land at so great a cost.¹⁰ The sense that our freedoms are under attack is widespread. Yet freedom is extended to false religions in our nation as never before. What was once accepted as plain truth is proscribed as intolerance and bigotry. The way of truth is increasingly “evil spoken of”. Light is put for darkness, sweet for bitter and good for evil. As in the days of Isaiah, when the teachers were “removed into a corner”, so it is today in our land where once our Parliaments were guided by the Word of God. The Church of Christ is indeed “as a cottage in a vineyard . . . as a besieged city.”

The efforts of our present government to further weaken the voice of opposition to false and pernicious religions were seen in the proposal to make a new law against “incitement to hatred on grounds of religion”. Christianity has always stood firmly against hatred of every kind. To condemn as hateful a religion which was founded on hatred, has grown by hatred and still thrives on and encourages hatred, is now deemed incitement to religious hatred. While there is no merit in causing unnecessary offence and animosity, there are times when the truth concerning false religions must be spelt out clearly. The scriptures set the standard for us in this regard when they exhort us to “speak the truth in love”. Our denunciation of Popery, Islam and every other false creed should be regulated and measured by this divine precept. Yet many are offended when their hatred is described as that which God hates and it seems that the proposed law would have made such declarations unlawful. The Bill as proposed by the Government was happily defeated in the House of Commons, in a manner that surely highlights the hand of God at work in the

9. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/4671026.stm>

10. The interference of government agencies in the life of the Church can be seen in issues relating to child protection, employment law and the care of the elderly.

defence of His cause.¹¹ The amendment that was passed, and which will become law, ensured that only “threatening words” should be banned, not those which are only abusive and insulting, and the offence has to be proven to be intentional. The amendment also specified that proselytising, discussion, criticism, insult, abuse and ridicule of religion, belief or religious practice would not be an offence.¹²

An interesting, if unsettling, example of restricted freedoms came to public light in a recent court case involving the Church of Scotland. A female minister who had been suspended for adultery took a complaint before an industrial tribunal and then to the Court of Session without success. In both instances the ruling was given that the Church was not her employer and that, as a minister, she was effectively employed by God. This has been the basis upon which the relation between Church and State has operated since the passing of the 1921 Church of Scotland Act. However, the complaint was taken to the House of Lords and in what is seen as a landmark ruling, it was sustained and the Church was required to treat the malcontent as an employee with employment rights.¹³ This imposition of the State on the Scottish Church is akin to the interference protested against by the Covenanters and the Disruption fathers. It is indeed an alarming prospect for our own Church if civil law can force the application of modern day employment law on cases of discipline and ecclesiastical appointments by Church courts.

The Persecuted Church

This part of our report on religion would not be complete without some reference to the afflicted and persecuted Church of Christ in other parts of the world. We do not know for how long open persecution may be kept back in our own nation, but we should ever remember those who, as in former days in Scotland, are “persecuted for righteousness sake”. The charitable work done by organisations like the Barnabas Fund which also draws media attention to suffering Christians, is to be commended to the prayerful people of the Church.¹⁴ While many persecuted Christians abroad are greatly in need of doctrinal teaching and reformation, their devotion to Christ under the fear of death signifies a sincerity in their religion which may be lacking in our own more peaceful society. We heartily commend such troubled saints to the prayers of God’s people among us.

Marriage

The deteriorating respect for the institution of marriage in our nation is but another indication of our spiritual decay as a nation. The bad example of the

11. A Government motion was defeated by just one vote. The Prime Minister had not waited for the vote, having apparently been told by his officials that the majority in favour of the Government motion would be large enough to secure victory without his personal vote.

12. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/ft/-/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4664398.stm

13. *Scotsman*, Friday 16th December 2005. See <http://news.scotsman.com>

14. A regular newsletter can be obtained from this body. See their website at www.barnabasfund.org

heir to the throne, who married his fellow adulterer in a civil ceremony on Saturday, 9th April 2005, highlights the lack of seriousness about marriage vows which prevails, and is encouraged, among the people of our country.¹⁵ (The date of this ceremony was changed to accommodate the funeral of the Pope of Rome, which Prince Charles attended.) Our rulers do very little to advance and promote the sacred institution of marriage, however loudly they profess to do so. In Scotland, the devolved Parliament took upon itself to effect changes to Family Law which not only make divorce easier, but which also blur further the biblical distinction between marriage and cohabitation. It is sad indeed to read the comments and speeches on this subject by those who rule over us.¹⁶ The Committee's response to the proposed Family Law Bill, sent to the Justice 1 Committee of the Scottish Parliament, can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

To the majority of right-thinking people in Britain, the enforcement of the recent Act of Parliament relative to Civil Partnerships is a disgrace to our nation. The disgusting displays of unnatural and sinful depravity by sodomites, which our national media glamorised, revealed the true meaning of this ungodly Act. We have as a nation now officially sanctioned and protected the sin of sodomy. In this we invite the woe of those who "declare their sin as Sodom and hide it not". May we not expect the judgement of God for these things? Amidst the almost universal acceptance, it is heartening to see that in one Local Authority, councillors and registrars took a stand and have refused to conduct any ceremonies in connection with this Act.¹⁷ This perfectly legal decision, taken by the Western Isles Council, received the support of the local MSP and we cannot but pray for sufficient resolve to be given to hold this position against whatever opposition might be raised.

Immorality

That marriage is undermined by the implementation of the Civil Partnerships Act and the passing of the Family Law Bill, is vigorously denied by the legislative authorities responsible. Yet the reality is becoming increasingly apparent that our nation is no longer willing to come under the moral law of God and the liberty that most demand is to freely indulge their depraved and sensual appetites. Freedom is almost universally confused with licence and the supposed liberty to express oneself. Gone are the days when even politicians saw that "men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites".¹⁸ The complete

15. In Spring 2002 around a fifth of dependent children in Great Britain lived in lone parent families, almost twice the proportion in 1981. See www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

16. See www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-05/sor1215-02.htm#Col21824

17. The Western Isles Council received hate mail and condemnation on public radio, and attempts were made by MSPs to have their decision reversed. (See *Stormoway Gazette*, 12th January 2006.)

18. Edmund Burke, quoted in *The Spectator*, 4th February 2006, page 16.

denial of our original corruption and our need of regenerating grace accelerates the decline into more flagrant ungodliness.

Immorality in society is seen in many areas. Sexual offences against children continue to cause grave concern and deep revulsion in the minds of ordinary people. While the evil perpetrators of these crimes are rightly condemned in the public media, increasingly offensive material, encouraging the breach of the seventh commandment, is available in newspapers, television, and the Internet and in the media generally. Promiscuity and licence in our society, together with degrading standards of dress and the overt sexualisation of young people, are surely responsible to some extent for this depravity and other evils. The content of television programmes, video games, and even of children's magazines, are areas of great concern to parents seeking to protect their children in this "evil and adulterous generation".

Recent surveys have shown that there are 50,000 people living with HIV or AIDS in the UK today, which is the highest number ever. Sodomy accounts for about 50% of the transmissions of the HIV infection in the UK. Of the heterosexual infections diagnosed in the UK, most were acquired abroad. Seventy-one per cent of heterosexually acquired HIV infections diagnosed in the UK in 2000/2001 were in people from Africa, or were associated with exposure there.¹⁹ On top of this, sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancies are still increasing in the UK. Such facts as these seem to have no effect on government policy. With blinded persistence, government sexual health strategies make contraception freely available to schoolchildren and the claim is ever made that the problem is solely an educational one.²⁰ In January 2006, Sue Axon lost a case in the High Court over her right to know if her under-age child was going to have an abortion.²¹ This ruling is bound to encourage children to continue in promiscuity without the risk of being found out. These are examples of how perverse our society has become. By turning aside from the morality of the Divine Ruler, we have become a nation that is "pure in its own eyes but has not been washed from its filthiness". It ought not to be any surprise to us that our nation has become polluted with diseases and infections marking it out for its sexual immorality and we should ponder seriously the warning that "whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge".

Violence

Figures for 2004/2005 reveal that the murder rate in Scotland is as high as it has been for 10 years.²² According to British Crime Survey interviews taking

19. Economic and Social Research Council – www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk – Fact sheet "HIV and AIDS".

20. A recent Sexual Health Strategy proposed by the Scottish Executive purports to promote abstinence, but the catch-phrase "abstinence plus" is in reality sidelining the meaning of abstinence and promoting what educationalists call "choice".

21. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/manchester/4636666.stm> (It is still a criminal offence to have sexual intercourse with a child aged under 16.)

22. Figure given by Annabel Goldie, MSP, in a Scottish Parliament Debate, Official Report of 15th December 2005.

place in 2003/04, it is estimated that there were approximately 11.7 million crimes against adults living in private households in England and Wales. One in four crimes in the UK in the same period went undetected and over 40% of violent crimes go unreported.²³ Knife attacks are becoming a common event in our cities and violence and bloodshed are not being reduced by government social policy strategies. In 2000 there were 4,448 suicides in the UK (12 every day) and the rate in Scotland is nearly double to that in the rest of the country. These very sad details are given here to illustrate something of the moral evils that take place in our own nation on a daily basis. They give cause for much sorrow and lamentation. As in Noah's day, the earth is "filled with violence".

Those who attempt to tackle these evils in society claim that better housing and a higher standard of living would reduce the crime-rate. Yet Britain is hardly a poor country. Most definitions of poverty in the UK focus on relative poverty (being deprived in comparison with other people) rather than absolute poverty (not being able to afford the basics like food, water and shelter). The Government defines a household in poverty as having income lower than 60 per cent of the median.²⁴ In 2003-4, 44 per cent of offences involving violence were related to alcohol. According to a Government report from 2003, alcohol-related crime costs the UK £7.3 billion every year.²⁵ Our affluence as a nation has never been higher and yet our depravity has increased with it. As the Scriptures teach, violence and murder are symptoms of the depravity of the human heart and are to be dealt with in any society by the terror of the sword. Mechanisms such as an automatic early release policy for violent criminals, suggest strongly that our rulers bear the sword in vain. With re-offending rates soaring, it is high time our rulers carried out what they have promised, and reversed this unjust and destabilising policy.

Abortion

Abortion figures for England and Wales, released in July 2005, show an increase of 2.1% over the previous year's figures. On their website, the campaign group "Pro-life" make the following valid and important comment: "Despite increased access to contraception, relentless sex education programmes, and easy availability of the morning-after pill, the abortion figures in England and Wales are climbing towards 200,000 a year and are likely to continue to rise."²⁶ When abortion was first legalised, around 5 women per 1,000 had abortions; this figure has risen to 17 per 1,000 today. Yet those following the issue closely, complain that the information available on abortion (and particularly the full extent of illegal abortion) is today much more restricted than formerly. The previously mentioned article asks the

23. See "Facts and Figures" – Economic and Social Research Council web-site: www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

24. According to this definition, 21 per cent of children and pensioners, and 14 per cent of all adults live in households below the poverty line.

25. See www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk

26. See www.prolife.org.uk

pertinent question, “Why in an age when the Government continually preaches increased transparency and public accountability, is less detail about abortion now available than it was five years ago? Illegal abortion remains a criminal act and no attempts of any kind should be made to bury information relevant to assessment of correct practice in this area.”

In a disturbing article in the *Daily Telegraph* a comparison is made between the holocaust and murder of the Nazi regime in Germany and the modern practice of abortion in the United Kingdom. We quote a portion of the article to highlight some of the evils which are going on and the perspective which some are taking on the matter.

“To abort an unborn child beyond 24 weeks’ gestation is recognised in British law as infanticide – but only if the child is thought to be ‘normal’. If doctors diagnose physical or mental handicap, including, it seems, a cleft palate, it is lawful to kill the unborn child at any time up to its birth. This is a programme for eliminating the handicapped. Its justification is that it is better ‘not to burden’ either the present or future generations with their care. It differs in practice from the mass murder in Nazi Germany – but it is not easy to articulate how it differs at the level of moral principle. The State is killing unborn children because we do not want to live with them, or to bear the costs of looking after them. It is a justification the Nazis would have appreciated.”

About 200,000 unborn children are aborted every year in England and Wales, many because doctors have decided they will be handicapped. That is a killing rate of nearly 550 a day: less than the number of people gassed daily at Auschwitz, but a horrifically large number none the less – and larger than the numbers of defenceless handicapped murdered by the Nazis.”²⁷

Euthanasia

The murder of innocent children in the womb is a dreadful blot on this nation. Yet there is a further moral evil in euthanasia which increasingly cries to God for vengeance. In June 2005 the BMA Annual Representatives’ Meeting voted against a pro-euthanasia policy but in favour of a neutral policy on the issue. Commenting on this important and far reaching decision, the Prolife Alliance reminds us that “the result does not reflect the strong opposition of doctors and nurses to a change in the law.”²⁸ There was also considerable opposition to attempts made in 2005 by Jeremy Purvis, MSP, to legalise euthanasia in Scotland. His proposed private members Bill did not receive sufficient backing from MSPs and therefore could not go forward. It was widely reported that 56% of respondents to Mr. Purvis’ consultation were in favour of the Bill while only 33% were opposed. This overlooked the fact that a significant number of respondents represented large organisations, including the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (SPPC), an umbrella body for 53 organisations, including all Health Boards, Hospices and many community teams caring for

27. Reproduced on website of “Prolife”.

28. “Prolife” Press release, 30th June 2005.

the dying, representing thousands of people. SPPC had held a Day Conference on the Purvis proposals and came down resoundingly against.²⁹

The difficult decisions over life and death taken by doctors and nurses on a daily basis must surely place enormous pressure on members of that profession. When those who make rules and regulations on their behalf show at best an ungodly indifference to such a fundamental duty to maintain life, the implications for Christians in the medical profession could be far reaching indeed. Examples of voluntary euthanasia in the UK have increased in recent years.³⁰ The well publicised assisted suicide of British woman, Anne Turner, in January 2006, was given somewhat approving coverage by the BBC and other news media sources.³¹ This is a truly disturbing precedent and one which further highlights the spiritual darkness into which our nation has descended.

Sport

Like heathen nations in the past, our nation, having forsaken the fountain of living waters, is bent on hewing out for itself broken cisterns that can hold no water. One such broken cistern is the god of sport which increasingly devours the time, attention, money and heart of the people of our nation. As Paul foresaw in his own day, the time would come when men would be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God”. While this can be said of many, if not every, generation to some extent, we believe that sport has in the past 50 years become such a powerful influence in the nation that we have in it one of Christianity’s greatest adversaries. In America leaders of some young football and baseball teams have special prayer meetings with the players before important matches.³² Such confounding of religious worship with worldly pursuits, illustrates the low state of the religion that engenders it. Sadly, however, within some professed evangelical circles much place is given to sport. Sporting heroes, who profess Christianity, are feted as role models for young people. This is done even by some who claim to promote Sabbath observance, when the law of the Sabbath is flouted by these very role models.³³

At a national level we have become addicted to sport. Sporting heroes are honoured in formal ceremonies for their supposed contribution to national life and a vast amount of public money is spent on promoting sporting excellence and career sportsmanship. The past year saw a successful bid by London to host the Olympic Games in 2012. This was responded to with euphoria. Such events often bring fewer financial or social advantages than promised or expected but, more sadly, they contribute immeasurably to the idolatry and devotion given by young people to what is spiritually worthless. Recreation

29. See www.jeremypurvis.org/consultation1.htm and www.carenokilling.org.uk

30. The Swiss organisation Dignitas have been involved in over 40 UK deaths since 2003.

31. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid_4700000/newsid_4701600/4701642.stm

32. Article in *New York Times* – www.nytimes.com – for 30th October 2005.

33. The footballer Brian Irvine, the rugby player Jason Robinson and the athlete Jonathan Edwards have all participated in their sport on the Sabbath day while professing to be Christians.

has its place in the nation and also in the lives of God's people. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that a Christian would usually have to accept many compromises in order to be a professional sportsman. We need to warn our people against this powerful temptation.

Television

Another very powerful and effective source of temptation is the television. Much of what pours into the living rooms of nearly every home in our land has now reached such a depth of ungodliness and worldliness that it is strange indeed to think of true disciples of Christ spending their time watching it. He who says plainly that His people are not to be conformed to the world, also taught His disciples to pray, "lead us not into temptation". It is difficult to imagine a more obvious source of temptation to worldly mindedness than that which appears daily on television screens. Television has obviously changed a great deal in the past number of years. Modern technology has made terrestrial television become a thing of the past for many. With an almost unending variety of channels and with an increasing amount of degrading and immoral material available, the spiritual and moral health of our nation, and indeed of our Church, is very much at risk.

Recent figures show that the average person in the UK spends 171 minutes (just under 3 hours) every day watching television, while the average time spent listening to the radio is 46 minutes and the average time spent reading a book is only 40 minutes.³⁴ This is not simply a statistic highlighting a shift in the media intake of our society, it is a reflection on the moral health of the nation. As Mediawatch-UK explains, the quality of programmes is deteriorating fast. The amount of pornographic material available on digital television, which is soon to become available to every household, is cause for grave concern.³⁵ Parents of young children would do well to be warned of the great danger television poses to children's welfare. Believers with a concern for their own souls and a sense of the power of indwelling corruption will have a similar concern for their own welfare and that of society in general.

Conclusion

The past year has given little cause for the people of God in this nation to rejoice. The loss of our Reformation heritage goes on apace. While false prophets and hirelings fill the pulpits of the land, the people love to have it so. The state of religion and morals is as desolating and grieving to the discerning people of God as in former years when this report has been submitted to our Synod. We have the melancholy duty of drawing attention to further evidence that the Lord has a controversy with this nation. It is becoming increasingly

34. See www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk – "Media in the UK".

35. "Despite being criticised as having the 'strictest censorship laws' in the world [Britain] now has 27 licensed TV channels dedicated to showing pornography. Anyone with a Sky digital package will know where they are." Mediawatch newsbrief, Autumn 2005 (see www.mediawatchuk.org)

apparent that by judicial blindness we are advancing further in our course of rebellion from Him and if mercy does not prevent it, we are bound to reap His judgements. The contents of this report for yet another year provide ample material for prayer and lamentation at the Throne of Grace for that mercy to be vouchsafed.

Yet, the Lord dwells in the midst of His Church and therefore “nothing shall her remove”. She is founded on a rock and the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. Her present duty is the same as in all previous generations – to go into all the world and to preach the Gospel to every creature and to do so in the certain knowledge that Christ is with her always, even unto the end of the world. A further source of encouragement to the troubled and tried Church is the exceeding great and precious promises concerning her future glory in this world. Kings and queens will yet be nursing fathers and mothers to the Church. The good hope that the whole earth will yet be filled with His glory, ought to stir up that spirit of prayer mentioned by Isaiah. “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isaiah 62:6-7).



APPENDIX 1

The following edited response to the then proposed Family Law (Scotland) Bill 2005 was sent by the Religion and Morals Committee to the Justice 1 Committee of the Scottish Parliament. While the Justice 1 Committee in fact recommended a compromise position to the Executive in which Divorce could be given after a period of 18 months with consent and 3 years where no consent existed, the Executive did not accept this and when the Bill was presented to Parliament the amendment which contained the compromise was defeated by a large majority.

THE Religion and Morals Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland has considered and discussed the proposed Family Law (Scotland) Bill 2005 and has been following the scrutiny of this Bill in your Committee. We are conscious that representations from certain religious bodies have already been considered by your Committee, but are confident that even at this stage you will be willing to consider a point of view which, as far as we can see, has not yet been made. While we are encouraged that the Bill addresses the moral and social evil of forced marriages, we wish to convey to you our views and responses to certain parts of the Bill which concern us. We believe that if these are implemented, they will have a very serious impact upon the nation at a cultural, religious and spiritual level.

We are strongly opposed to the view that the laws in our society should reflect the trends, conditions and circumstances in the society. This view if

acted upon, will almost certainly lead to the further erosion of the foundation of law and justice and to changes of a retrograde nature. We commend to you the changeless law of God as the absolute standard upon which all human laws should be based. Firm adherence to this standard would, we believe, promote the good, stability and happiness of the nation.

Changes to Divorce (Scotland) Act 1976

We note that from sections 10 to 13 of the proposed Bill, changes are made to the present law on divorce. We would like to register our strong opposition to these changes believing that they will if implemented, contribute to more family breakdown and an increase in the number of divorces with the unhappiness that follows. As lawmakers you are obliged and committed to support the institution of marriage and we firmly believe, as many others do, that these changes are extremely corrosive of the institution of marriage.

(1) We are of the view that the time limits for divorce are too short at present and the changes proposed are therefore an aggravation of an evil which already exists. Divorce has become easier since the Divorce (Scotland) Act of 1976 and the result of this is that it has become more common.ⁱ We see no advantage in making divorce any easier and consider that sufficient time is not given to attempt reconciliation and mediation.

(2) The Bible teaches that there are only two grounds upon which the marriage bond can lawfully be broken and that these necessarily involve one or both parties in fault. These two grounds are adultery and wilful desertion.ⁱⁱ The Westminster Confession, which for centuries has been highly esteemed by Presbyterian Churches in Scotland and which is still the subordinate standard of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, teaches that such wilful desertion is only a proper ground for divorce when it cannot be remedied by the Church or by the State.ⁱⁱⁱ This implies a sufficient time period to attempt such a remedy.

(3) We are opposed to sections 12 and 13 of the Bill as the removal of these bars to divorce make divorce easier still and unfairly discriminate against those who are unable to consent to divorce on financial grounds. Any indication that collusion in divorce is looked upon with ambivalence will further erode respect for the institution of marriage.

Cohabitation in the proposed Bill

We are very alarmed at the series of proposals which relate to the state of cohabitation and the clear attempt in these proposals to place cohabitation on a par with the married state. These two states are very different and this difference is a moral as well as a social one. We urge you to rethink these

i. Census information and government statistics reveal this to be the case.

ii. Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 19:9; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:15.

iii. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 24, Section 6.

iv. SPICe Briefing, "Grounds for Divorce (updated)", page 14.

proposals and to take consideration of the tendency to further promiscuity which this legislation will encourage in our society.

(1) Marriage is the only state in which a man and a woman ought to have a sexual relationship or nurture a family. We strongly oppose the provisions of the Civil Partnership Act of 2004 and are alarmed at the influence which this Act is now having upon the institution of the family in our nation's laws. The Bible clearly teaches that all manner of fornication and promiscuous sexual relations are utterly immoral and therefore unchristian. We urge the Executive to refrain from giving further licence to sin by giving sinful relationships legal recognition.

(2) We are opposed to the provisions and implications of the Gender Recognition Act of 2004 and we are greatly alarmed that these are also influencing the legal standing of the institution of the family in our nation. This abandonment of truth and morality to satisfy a vocal minority will, we believe, end in much shame and misery for our nation and is bound to bring down God's deserved judgements on our rulers and people.^v Behaviour which the Bible clearly describes as sinful is now being defended and promoted in our laws and we fear that the consequences will be catastrophic for the moral health of our nation.

(3) We notice with dismay in the SPICe briefing 05/11 of 3rd March 2005 that the strongest defence of the proposed changes to the law regarding cohabitation is the trends which prevail in the nation. We see these trends as reason to legislate against cohabitation rather than in favour of it. We reiterate our position that the law ought never to be based upon the conditions or trends in society but rather upon a standard of right and wrong which must be absolute. This absolute standard is the law of God.

Forbidden degrees of marriage

We are also strongly opposed to further change in the area of degrees of affinity proposed in section 1 of the Bill. We find it highly reprehensible and immoral that in-laws can marry each other. This unnatural and distasteful proposal has no valid argument in its support and is forbidden by the moral law of God which is binding on all. We would be interested to know why this proposal has found a place in a Family Law Bill and would suggest that rather than promoting the good of families it will lead to confusion and deterioration of the extended family which has been so fundamental to the stability of our society.

v. While we heartily adhere to freedom of speech in our society, we are dismayed at the attention being given to the Equality Network and the statement from them which far exceeds in length that of any other group.

APPENDIX 2

The following paper was prepared for the Committee in response to the publication of the English Standard Version of the Bible and its use in professed evangelical circles. The content of this paper is largely based on material produced by the Trinitarian Bible Society (Quarterly Record, No. 563) and is used here with kind permission.

THE Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, had been a theological, spiritual and translational battleground for fifty years. Liberals, Neo-orthodox, and even those of conservative background, have used it, and even endorsed it. There were those, however, who were not completely satisfied with the RSV, and they determined to make a conservative revision of it, and the English Standard Version is the result. As a result we have a light revision of the RSV, and because of its textual basis and translational errors, carried over from the RSV we cannot call it a trustworthy translation of the Word of God.

An agreement was gone into with the National Council of Churches, whereby the Revised Standard Version could be used as the basis for a new translation. We must remember what the introduction to that same RSV said about the AV: "The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying." In 1998 permission was given to rid the original text of the RSV of de-Christian translation choices.

It is clearly stated in the ESV itself that the ESV "is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA". The tendency of translators over many years now has been towards dynamic equivalence, seeking to find the thoughts behind the text rather than being concerned with the words themselves. The RSV used eclectic principles for each variant, but the text used approximates the Nestle 17th edition of the NT. The ESV used similar modern principles of textual criticism, and for the most part followed the United Bible Societies' 4th edition/Nestle-Aland 27th edition. As a result the following verses are omitted from the ESV in their entirety, but are found in the Textus Receptus Greek New Testament:

Matthew 17:21; 18:11; 23:14.

Mark 7:16; 9:44; 9:46; 11:26; 15:28.

Luke 17:36; 23:17.

John 5:4.

Acts 8:37; 15:34; 28:29.

Romans 16:24.

1 John 5:7. The Johannine Comma is omitted without a footnote explanation as to why.

There are also many hundreds of omissions and changes from the AV which are retained in the ESV. In the genealogy of Jesus, given in Matthew chapter one, Asaph is retained instead of Asa, and Amos instead of Amon.

John 7:53-8:11 is placed in square brackets, and its place in Scripture questioned in footnotes.

The RSV has over six hundred instances of making conjectural emendations of texts considered ambiguous or insufficient. These are mainly in the Book of Job, and the ESA translators corrected most of these. The OT text used by the ESV translators, or revisers, was *Biblia Hebraei Stuttgartensia* (2nd edition 1983). They also made use of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Latin Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta. The problem with these textual additions and changes is that they do not come from the Hebrew text, and the reader is at the mercy of the translator's interpretive whims.

In Matthew 19:9 the AV has, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery".

The ESV has, "And I say to you; whosoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery". The prohibition of marriage to a divorced wife is omitted.

Some footnotes use the phrase, "Some manuscripts add . . .". The reason for the changes and omission is not given, so that the impression is given that the Word of God is being called into question.

In Mark 16:9-20 a set of in-text square brackets includes the statement: "Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20." What the footnote does not tell the reader is that the "long ending" of Mark's Gospel is included in every manuscript which includes this portion of the Gospel with the exception of three: the two famous Alexandrian uncial manuscripts, the Sinai (Aleph) and the Vatican (B), and the minuscule manuscript 304.

The ESV has dropped as archaic the AV and RSV practice of retaining "Thee", "Thou" and "Thine", as a special form of language used for addressing God, and given by God Himself. It does not differentiate between the singular and plural of the second person personal pronouns, you and thee. This tampering causes confusion.

Examples: Luke 22:31-32, ". . . Satan has desired to have you . . . but I have prayed for thee . . ."; John 1:49-51, ". . . I saw thee under the fig tree. . . . Verily, verily I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open. . . ."

One of the noticeable things in the ESV is the numerous changes in gender. Since 1986 most translators have made a point of removing male-orientated language. The removal of "patriarchal language" and the observance of political correctness seems to have been the aim. In 1997 the Colorado Springs Guidelines came into being to help modern translators. The ESV did not endorse such, but in the area of gender language the goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original. The term "anyone" replaces "any man" where there is no word corresponding to "man" in the original languages, and "people" is used in preference to "men" where the language refers to both men and women. This is done in an inconsistent manner; e.g. in Psalm 32 verse 1 is gender non-specific, while verse 2 is masculine. This has a jarring effect.

Common problems with modern translations are found in the ESV, where texts which speak specifically of blood atonement (Colossians 1:14) and the virgin birth (Luke 2:33, 43), and also the deity of Christ (1 Timothy 3:16), are either changed or omitted because they are not found in certain manuscripts. The “begotten” is missing from John 3:16 and from other places.

The ESV is 91% word for word with the RSV. It is essentially the same version as the RSV, but with some evangelical changes to make it more appealing to conservative Christians.

The AV used italics for words where the syntax, or grammatical structure, of the Greek or Hebrew made such necessary. The ESV has no italics whatsoever.

Conclusions

With this version, the ESV, as with all modern versions, we are still in the conflict which began in the Garden of Eden, in which Satan exclaimed, “Hath God said?”. Every modern version engenders doubt in the Word of God. The conflict ultimately is between God and the Devil.

We already have the infallible God-breathed Word, and it has the authority of the all-wise and all-holy God. The ESV attempts to readjust the RSV, which owes so much to the labours of Westcott and Hort, two Mary worshippers and spiritualists, who used discarded manuscripts to try to overthrow the Word of God. All these modern versions are but an attempt made by the evil one to break into the stream of the pure Word of God, which has been copied and reduplicated constantly by the Church of Christ since it came from God’s hand. The ESV is not an attempt to bring the versions back to the purity of God’s Word. It is the modern compromise Bible for all, with far fewer errors than the RSV, but God does not compromise. His Word is perfect.

The fact that evangelicals are involved in the ESV does not vouch for its purity. Its inadequacies rather show the spiritual weakness and blindness of those who undertook to produce it. “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

In the matter of its copyright, mention is made of the National Council of Churches, which is no friend of Evangelical Reformed Theology.