

FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

**REPORTS OF
STANDING
COMMITTEES
OF SYNOD**

Submitted to Synod in May 2010

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REPORT OF THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE

Convener: Rev. D. Campbell

INTRODUCTION

THE Religion and Morals Committee has been producing reports with more or less detail on the state of the nation and trends in religion and morals since its formation at the half-yearly meeting of Synod in June 1914. Many, over the years, have been critical of the manner in which this report has portrayed other Churches. We endeavour, without being censorious or hypercritical in terminology and without causing unnecessary hurt or offence to sincere Christians in other denominations, to fulfil a necessary duty. The responsibility of the Church in every generation is to lift up its voice like a trumpet and to declare to the nation her transgression and sin (Isaiah 58:1). This is not to claim anything for ourselves of blamelessness, as is often alleged. The Committee remains of the view that our own great need, as it is the need of the nation, is of evangelical repentance and contrition. We offer these reports, we trust, in the spirit of Daniel who in confessing the sins of the land and people, identified himself with them, for “all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice . . . we have sinned, we have done wickedly” (Daniel 9:11, 15).

We firmly believe that, in terms of the Synod resolution of 1975, the separate existence of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is “justified because, and only so long as, it is necessary”. When we hear of the events taking place in other denominations in Scotland professing adherence to the principles of the Scottish Reformation, we are thankful that, with all our many failings, a testimony to these principles is preserved among us still. The Committee feels we must remind ourselves of the necessity, as the previously cited Synod resolution states, “to preserve unity in the Church itself, since true love to one another is a distinguishing characteristic of the Church of Christ”; it prays too that “the whole Church will be given grace to walk together in the Spirit, maintaining in humility, loyalty to the heritage which we have received”.

We view with alarm and sadness that in the Church of Scotland efforts are being made to down-grade further the morals of the Bible in relation to sodomy. While the Committee have decided to await the outcome of the 2011 General Assembly review before commenting further, it is deeply shocking that any professing Christian Church can tolerate and allow those who, “declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not”, in her pulpits (Isaiah 3:9). The woe pronounced on such is, we greatly fear, to be the portion also of those who connive at and even encourage them in their sin and intrusion upon the office of the ministry. To evangelicals who have, in sincerity, sought to remain in her communion and to stem the tide of liberalism and decay, the time has surely come to, “come out of her . . . lest ye be partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

We applaud the decision of the Free Church General Assembly of 2009 to call a halt to union dialogue with the Church of Scotland – dialogue which should never have commenced. Not wishing to pre-empt any decision which may be arrived at in this year's Free Church Assembly, the Committee would be remiss to avoid mentioning with alarm the real possibility that purity of worship, as presently practised in that Church, may be eroded. We are very conscious of the prayerful desire of many in the Free Church of Scotland that this eventuality will be averted. In joining that prayerful wish, we cannot but lament the widespread changes which have come over that denomination since its early 20th century attempts to promote union with the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Practices and beliefs tolerated and promoted in that body seem to make that joyful prospect even more remote than it was when first mooted. We long for that unity in the truth which our fathers also craved, but remain determined to hold to our testimony in a declining age.

The Work of the Committee

The Committee's report this year takes a slightly different form in some respects to previous years. This was left to the discretion of the writers and we trust that the detailed review of religious trends and events will be of use as well as interest to readers. As has been the custom for a number of years, two members of the Committee are appointed to write the two parts of the report. The Committee is greatly indebted to these members who give their time and commitment to this considerable task. This year Rev. Bruce Jardine produced the Religion report and Mr. Hector Munro the Morals report. The Committee have not interfered with the style or presentation of these reports and would like to thank both members for their work on behalf of the Synod. Our hope is that those reading will use the facts presented and the many grievous happenings as matter for earnest prayer at the throne of grace.

The Committee met twice since the last meeting of Synod for two hour sessions. Among other things discussed and agreed, two letters were sent by the Convener protesting against the planned papal visit; one to the Prime Minister and one to the First Minister of the Scottish Government. These letters expressly requested that no arrangements be made for the pope to visit Scotland in this year which marks the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. A proposal for a petition to be framed was passed from as unlikely to prove much more than the weakness of Protestantism in this country. The Committee, however, wishes to propose a special day of prayer throughout the Church over this lamentable issue. This proposal is made formally in an overture to the Synod.

Another item which took up the attention of the Committee was the draft policy guidelines produced by the Director of Public Prosecutions in England concerning assisted suicide. An opportunity to submit an opinion to the public consultation was taken and will appear with other submissions in due course. It is heartening to see the rising opposition to these proposals and also the declared intention of the Scottish Prosecution service not to introduce a similar

proposal. The Committee has produced a Resolution outlining its opposition to the Bill on Assisted Suicide presently before the Scottish Parliament. The clamour for assisted suicide to be legalised gathers pace. In opposing this, the Committee is anxious to present biblical reasons and also to direct poor sinners to the consolations of the gospel as the healing balm for despondent and despairing souls (Jeremiah 8:22). As in many other areas, the Committee and the Church at large is greatly indebted to the work done by the Christian Institute in its campaigns and information distribution.

Two matters relating to organisation were discussed by the Committee at its meetings. The burden of responding to issues of national importance has traditionally fallen on the Convener and Clerk and it was agreed that in future this work be shared among all members of the Committee. This will hopefully be reflected in future reports to the Synod in which the contribution of each member will be brought together in a summary form. Conscious also of the responsibility that the Committee has to the Synod and the need for clear accountability, the Committee discussed preparing a constitution setting out its duties and responsibilities, together with rules for its meetings. Owing to lack of time at its meeting this proposal was held over for discussion later, DV. This constitution would be offered to the Synod for adoption and it is hoped will be a means of clarifying what the Synod expects the Committee to do on its behalf.

The Committee also wishes to record its sense of loss at the passing of Dr. Duncan MacSween, who was for many years, an active and eminently able and useful member. Dr. MacSween regularly contributed to the reports over the years and was a reliable and faithful participant in its discussions. His presence and his many years of experience and wisdom will be greatly missed. At present the membership of the Committee is 10, with six ministers and four elders. The Committee is aware that a high proportion of its membership are young and inexperienced and draw attention to this in the hope that future changes will bear it in mind. The time of the Committee meeting may also be requiring review as it makes attendance difficult for those who have employment commitments during daytime hours.

As Convener I commend the report to the Synod and to the people of the Church as a sobering and sad reflection on the state of religion and morals in our land and further afield. It is, like reports before, a further call to earnest prayer and supplication that in justly deserved wrath, the Lord would “remember mercy”.

REPORT ON RELIGION

THE purpose of this report is to give an accurate and objective picture of the state of world religion at the present time. The writer has drawn on reported events from the last few years, with the purpose of establishing the state of religion at the end of the first decade of the new millennium. He has endeavoured not to repeat any items that have received timely report and

comment within the pages of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* or have been circulated through the Christian Institute mailings that the majority of Synod already receives.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Exorcism:* It was recently noted that Jeremy Davies, 73, the diocesan exorcist for Westminster since 1986, has carried out thousands of exorcisms in the London area.¹ The Roman Catholic Church, concerned over the growing interest in Satanism and the occult, has made plans to train hundreds of further priests as exorcists. Bishops are now required to have a number of trained exorcists within their diocese. The present pope, Benedict XVI, is a firm believer in the existence and danger of demonic evil and is concerned over the danger posed by satanic sects through Rock music and the Internet.² The Roman Catholic Church in Poland is planning to open its first ever exorcism centre to offer spiritual help to the needy near the Baltic city of Szczecin. There are already about 50 trained exorcists in Poland.³

Shrines: A cure of an Italian woman, who is reported to have recovered from a serious illness after returning from a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1952, has been officially recognised as Lourdes' 67th cure.⁴ It is also claimed that Thomas Robinson, aged 9, was cured of a malignant brain tumour.⁵ However, historical biographer, Therese Taylor, has uncovered a darker side to Lourdes. She claims that the Grotto at Lourdes, known locally as the fairy cave, has always been connected with darker forces such as fairies, wraiths and sorceresses. Since pagan times, the area has been connected with the apparition of white women, who were believed to be spirits of a lustful, capricious and powerful nature. It is said that these apparitions have been connected with a number of suicides: some locals believe that these spirits were luring people to their deaths. Human bones were found in the cave, prior to the supposed visions of Mary the mother of Jesus. These bones appear to be the remains of human sacrifices. We should remember that, when St. Bernadette first reported her visions of Mary, she was accused of being bewitched by an evil spirit.⁶ On 4th May 2008, the Roman Catholic Church officially recognised a further shrine in the Alps where Mary is said to have appeared to a young shepherdess back in 1664. The shrine already attracts 120,000 pilgrims a year and could grow to rival Lourdes, as a place to find a cure or gain salvation.⁷

However, the Vatican has also announced that visions of Mary, seen in Medjugorje in Bosnia Herzegovina, are demonic. Five million pilgrims visit the shrine annually. It is claimed that Mary has appeared over 40,000 times and imparted tens of thousands of messages and secrets. The Vatican refuses to recognise the site as "everything happens in function of money: pilgrimages, lodging houses, sale of trinkets. This whole sham is the work of the demon. It is a scandal."⁸ Yet the Vatican's condemnation of the shrine has had little or no

* "The driving out of an evil spirit," *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*.

effect. Worship has also been banned elsewhere: on a hill in Burundi, where a woman, called Euzebie, claims to see a vision of Mary on the 11th of each month,⁹ in South Korea, where Julia Youn, a woman who claims to have stigmata,* has gathered a large sect around herself after claiming to have seen a statue of Mary weeping blood;¹⁰ in Surrey, where Patricia de Menezes, founder of Community of Divine Innocence sect, claims to have seen visions of Mary; in Canada, where members of the Army of Mary follow Marie-Paule Giguere, who claims to be a reincarnation of Mary.¹¹

Such controversy is not new. Back in 2005, 10,000 people crowded around the Jesuit headquarters in Naples to catch a glimpse of a man called Brother Elia, whose face, hands and feet, like those of the late Padre Pio, now canonised by the Church, is claimed to show signs of stigmata. The Church hierarchy, however, is not happy at his growing popularity among the masses, especially when they are unable to agree on the veracity of his stigmata. Brother Elia claims to have been receiving visions of Mary since he was 7, to talk to angels and to have the power to heal.¹² Over seven million pilgrims a year continue to visit the tomb of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio), who was famous for his supposed stigmata, power of healing, bilocation, levitation and prophecy. On 24th April 2008, his remains were put on show in a crystal casket, with a wax mask being used to cover his face. Just under a million pilgrims were expected to visit his body by the end of 2009.¹³

Pope John Paul II: Ever since Pope John Paul II died on 2nd April 2005, there have been calls for his sainthood and, indeed, Pope Benedict XVI began the process of Beatification on 13th May 2005, after waiving the usual 5-year waiting process. On 30th May 2007, sister Marie Simon-Pierre, a nun from Paris, announced her overnight cure from Parkinson's disease and attributed the cure to the intercession of Pope John Paul II, to whom she and her fellow nuns prayed for a cure. It is believed that this supposed miracle will now bring an end to the Beatification process. Another miracle is now needed before he can be canonised.¹⁴ In April 2008, the Polish Church officials requested that the heart of Pope John Paul II be put on show in Poland as a relic. His body currently remains in Rome and receives the veneration of thousands of pilgrims a day.¹⁵ After the death of John Paul II, the Vatican offered relics from one of his cassocks via the Internet and over 160,000 requests were received.¹⁶ It is claimed that flames in a photograph taken of a bonfire, lit to mark the second anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II, form a figure of the late pope.¹⁷

Unholy Orders: The Santa Clara convent in Bisceglie, southern Italy, was closed after a fight between its last three remaining nuns. The Mother Superior was admitted to hospital after being attacked by the other two sisters, who

* "The phenomenon of marks appearing on the body in the places corresponding to Christ's Passion wounds hands, feet, side," *ibid.*

were provoked by her authoritarian ways and nasty habits. The local Archbishop was unable to bring about reconciliation and so ordered its closure. However, the Mother Superior refused to leave and barricaded herself in.¹⁸ In another incident, 150 Polish police officers were forced to scale the walls of a convent in the town of Kazimierz Dolny to evict 64 nuns and one monk. The nuns had been expelled by the Vatican from their order, but had refused to leave the building. It is reported that some of the nuns swore and acted aggressively towards the police. The Mother Superior and monk were both arrested. One nun was taken away in an ambulance, along with an eight-month-old baby, whose presence was not explained.¹⁹ The number of nuns in the USA has drastically fallen over the past few years, prompting an investigation by Church officials into the reasons for the sharp decline. Concerns have also been raised over the non-traditional views being adopted by many young nuns.²⁰

Counterfeit Miracles: More than 100,000 believers flocked to an ancient monastery in Nicula, in northwestern Romania, to kiss an icon believed to have miraculous healing powers. There were 24-hour services with crowds sleeping in the open. According to legend, the icon, a picture of Mary painted in 1691, wept for 26 days in 1699 and that, in 1702, the picture was responsible for an army officer's wife being cured of blindness.²¹ Pilgrims also flocked to the flat of Valeriu Junie, after reports that images of Jesus and the apostles Peter and Paul had appeared on a wardrobe there. Mr. Junie claims to see such images on a regular basis. A local priest, Vasile Nuhaiu, said, "Jesus was there. It's a miracle."²² Pilgrims also flocked from all over Poland to Wadowice, the birthplace of John Paul II, to fill bottles with holy water and to drink from a "miracle fountain" flowing from the statue of the late pope. However, local authorities later admitted that a water pipe had been installed under the statue as a water feature.²³ 57-year-old Gregorio Gomez, a Tzotzil Indian, had a dream that led him to discover an image resembling Jesus on a rock. The image later drew hundreds of Pilgrims to the mountains of Mexico's southern Chiapas state.²⁴ In March 2007, two portraits of Christ belonging to Eric Nathaniel of Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, began to leak red fluid. Thousands of people have gathered to see the "bleeding portraits".²⁵ In February 2008, at least 50 people in the Indian district of Kerala were blinded after gazing at the sun, following a rumour that an image of Mary had appeared on its surface. The rumour began in the same hotel in Erumeli where statues of Mary are said to have cried honey, bled oil and perfumes.²⁶ Leaders of the Santa Muerte (Saint Death) cult in Mexico have complained of the government's destruction of over 30 of their shrines. Santa Muerte is the patron saint of crime and criminals.²⁷ Dozens of faithful Roman Catholics have been visiting a statue of Mary outside a Vietnamese Roman Catholic Martyrs Church in Sacramento, California, after the parish priest and congregation saw bloody tears being wept by the statue.²⁸ A hotel in Mexico has claimed that an image of Jesus appeared on one of its pot plants after

Hurricane Wilma. It is claimed that the image was responsible for the safety of its residents during the storm.²⁹ Francesca Zackey from Benoi, in South Africa, claims to have had 20 visions of Mary; each vision is accompanied by the smell of roses. Her home has become a centre for pilgrimage.³⁰ In July 2009, workmen cut down some overgrown trees at Holy Mary Parish Church in County Limerick. One of the workmen claimed to have discovered an image of Mary on the stump. The image has now been made into a shrine, attracting hundreds of worshippers.³¹ A small group gathered at a Marian shrine in Kerrytown, Donegal, after local man Joe Coleman, a faith healer and visionary, claimed to have received a vision informing him that crosses would appear in the sky. Witnesses claimed that crosses did indeed appear in the sky over a ten-minute period. After the crosses faded, the shrine's statue of Mary was said to have changed colour and form; "she appeared to have a human face and her head turned and she looked at people, before crying".³² It remains a custom in the village of San Pedro Cutud, north of Manila, to imitate the example of Christ by crucifying a number of local men each year. The men wear a crown of thorns and are literally nailed to crosses after being whipped with bamboo canes.³³

Relics: Thousands of childless women have been visiting a small flat in Naples to sit in an old armchair draped in a worn blanket, to ask St. Mary Frances of the Five Wounds of Jesus for a miracle. Each needful woman is asked whether or not they are married, before a jar, containing a vertebra and lock of hair from the Saint, is used to touch them. Pilgrims are later led to the room where the Saint spent most of her life and in which hair shirts and a whip hang from the wall to remind pilgrims of the need for voluntary penance.³⁴ The Roman Catholic Church ended its year of "St. Paul" on 28th June 2009, with Pope Benedict XVI announcing that scientists had confirmed that Paul's bones had been found under a church in Rome. The bones were found, along with incense grains and purple linen, laminated with pure gold in the spot where the apostle is traditionally said to have been buried.³⁵ The relics of St. Terese of Lisieux (a thigh bone and foot) were shown in York Minster in October 2009, at which there were scuffles between worshippers and protesters. They were also taken, with Home Office approval, into the Wormwood Scrubs prison. The Church of Rome used the occasion as a means of raising money by the sale of roses, which Terese said she would like to throw down to the earth when she was dead. In 1997, Cardinal Hume discouraged plans for the relics to visit Britain, as he feared that it might at the time have been seen to be a discouragingly backward-looking and morbid style of worship. Now the visitation of relics is seen as a way of bringing a more psychological approach to strengthening and comforting believers. Yet the whole idea of relics remains a doctrinally difficult area for the Church. How can you differentiate the veneration of physical relics from the superstitious idea that they simply possess magical powers?³⁶

Child Abuse: A Roman Catholic Bishop has excommunicated a journalist after he secretly recorded a Church confession, for an article concerning sex abuse by priests. The journalist posed as a monk who had come to the confessional to confess his abuse of a young girl. He was absolved by a priest and given Psalm 131 as a penance.³⁷ In late 2009, volumes of the *Ryan Report* into the abuse of children by the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland, spelled out a horrifying catalogue of sexual, physical and emotional abuse by Roman Catholic clergy. The report highlighted the fact that the Church hierarchy knew of the abuse and yet failed to take any serious action, either to prevent it or to punish its perpetrators or even help those abused. It also states that the Garda did not act, as they thought that the Church was outside of their remit.³⁸

Cardinal John Henry Newman: The process to canonise Cardinal Newman, the founder of the Oxford movement and convert to Romanism, began in 1958. He now has two miracles attributed to him. This must please Pope Benedict XVI, who is a follower of Newman's teachings, and has agreed that the Cardinal is responsible for a miracle in 2001. Roman Catholic deacon, Jack Sullivan of Massachusetts, claims to have been cured from a serious spinal disorder after praying to the Cardinal.³⁹ In April 2008, the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Sainthood applied to have Newman's remains moved to the Birmingham Oratory. The Ministry of Justice granted permission on 11th August 2008, the 118th anniversary of his death. It was hoped that, during the removal, experts on holy objects would be able to retrieve some relics such as bones, skin and cloth. After his canonisation, these objects would be placed in small shrines within many British churches. However, this was all academic as, when the grave was opened on 2nd October 2008, it was discovered that Newman's remains had returned to dust, without any trace of teeth or bones. All the relics that could be found were several locks of hair, a wooden crucifix and a coffin handle. John Hunter, Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology at the University of Birmingham, cast doubt over the fact that the remains had decayed so quickly. "It is very interesting from a forensic point of view to find a body that has completely decayed within this amount of time. It is very unusual and very unlikely. It's very unlikely for a body to vanish completely." The Church countered by claiming that there may be some parts of the body still to be found among the three boxes of textile remains that were removed from the grave. The homosexual lobby opposed the whole idea as Newman is buried along with his life-long partner, Ambrose St. John. Newman lived with St. John from 1843 to 1875.⁴⁰

Interfaith Relations: The Roman Catholic Church is continuing its moves to increase links with Islam.⁴¹ It is claimed that interfaith co-operation between Protestants, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in the Philippines is growing through their combined work on a new translation of the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church funds the work in return for a place on the translation team.⁴² It must also be noted that the recent *Manhattan Declaration*, signed by such

figures as J. I. Packer, Chuck Colson and many others, has declared that the followers of both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy are Christians.⁴³

Proposed Papal Visit: The pope has been invited to preach in Durham Cathedral during his proposed UK visit by its supposedly Evangelical Bishop, Tom Wright.⁴⁴ It is also expected that the pope will address MPs at Westminster Hall, the same place where the Roman Catholic Thomas More was sentenced to death in 1535, as was Guy Fawkes. It is believed that the visit will last about 4 days.⁴⁵

Commercialism: A man calling himself Pilgrim Gil offers to undertake a pilgrimage on behalf of anyone who wants to go to Fatima in Portugal but is unable to do so. The pilgrimage and a certificate of proof cost £1,673.⁴⁶ The Church of Rome has begun what it calls “religious outsourcing” due to a lack of priests in the industrial world. Prayers for the dead and Masses are being paid for by Roman Catholics in the West and then “off-shored” to India. The idea is that a parishioner in London will pay £50 for a Mass that his local Church is unable to perform; the Church authorities will then pay a priest in India to perform it.⁴⁷

Evolution: The Vatican has announced its unequivocal belief in the theory of evolution. It is now held that “biological evolution and the Christian view of creation are complementary to each other”.⁴⁸ The pope has also endorsed the belief that there may be life elsewhere in the universe. It is now Vatican doctrine that a belief in extra-terrestrials does not conflict with faith in God as the creator or in Christ dying for the sins of mankind.⁴⁹

THE BRITISH CHURCHES

The Church of England: The Rev. Rupert Foxwell has caused outrage in the town of Tonbridge, Kent, by claiming that he can cure cancer by the laying on of his hands. He believes that he will rid the town of all disease and illness within 10 years.⁵⁰ The Church of England’s Liturgical Commission has issued an outline order for a combined Baptism and Marriage service.⁵¹ Senior Clergy have raised concerns that the government has been diverting funds, meant for helping the poor, to support other faiths and that the government has “a preoccupation with Muslim communities at the expense of Christian groups”.⁵² It is reported that the Archbishop of Canterbury does not believe that the book of Genesis is literally true; that he does not know if anyone actually goes to hell and that the current debate within the Church of England over women Bishops is embarrassing to the Church. He has also stated that he is fond of the writings of the writer Philip Pullman, the campaigning atheist. Pullman has previously referred to the aim of his children’s books as being to “undermine the basis of Christian belief” and about “killing God”.⁵³ The annual idolatrous parade through Walsingham took place this year with a new image of Mary in white being carried in honour of the presence of the Roman

Catholic Bishop of Lourdes.⁵⁴ The Church of England has promoted Darwin's theory of evolution throughout 2009, in celebration of the 200th year of Darwin's birth and 150th anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of the Species*.⁵⁵ **Church of Ireland:** The leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland addressed the Synod's annual Eucharistic service in May 2009, for the first time.⁵⁶ **Church of Scotland:** At the General Assembly in May 2009, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was given a standing ovation after addressing the Assembly and telling them that homosexuals have a place in the Church. He said: "In this family there are no outsiders. All are insiders – lesbian, gay, so-called straight – we are family."⁵⁷ The Church has also suffered greatly from the financial downturn, after losing in the region of 89 million from the value of its investments. At the current rate, Church reserves will be exhausted by 2018. Staff at CrossReach, the Church's social care service, face redundancy and it is feared that ministers' stipends may have to be cut. The Church faces shortfalls in the number of its ministers – at present 16% of its congregations are vacant. It is proposed that lay members, after taking an 18-month training course, should be ordained to serve as "locally ordained ministers".⁵⁸ The Church is also considering the use of "virtual ministers" who would, via the Internet or other means, provide a live link to vacant congregations.⁵⁹

THE AMERICAN CHURCHES

Presbyterian Church (USA): A Church Committee has been looking into the possibility of changing its standards to remove any condemnation of sodomy. The Committee is considering the revision of Q87 in the *Heidelberg Catechism* that has formed part of the Church's constitution since 1967. The Committee will report back to the General Assembly with its findings in 2010. At the same time, the Church's 173 Presbyteries are voting on whether or not to delete a requirement of fidelity and chastity from the constitution, in an attempt to open the way for the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals to the clergy. **Episcopal:** Katherine Jefferts, the presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, has been accused of teaching bad religion after preaching that the whole idea of personal religion is a heresy.⁶⁰ **Lutheranism:** The Lutheran Church of America has voted to separate itself from Biblical Christianity by accommodating and endorsing unrepentant homosexual activity.⁶¹ In October 2009, a top-level crisis meeting was held between Lutheran and Roman Catholic clergy after a senior Lutheran pastor described the pope as being "incompetent" and criticised ecumenism. The true reason for the rift seems to lie in Pope Benedict's policy after absolute power.⁶² Some Lutherans have become so dissatisfied with the downward trend in the Church that they are considering setting up an alternative Church body.⁶³

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY

It is claimed that as Alexei II, the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, died on 5th December 2008, he appeared in a dream to a close relative in Estonia and said, "I am dying now". At the same time, it is claimed that an icon

began to weep scented oil at a church in the Sverdlovsk region.⁶⁴ An Orthodox official in charge of inter-church relations met with the pope during a five-day visit to Rome. It is noted that more cordial relations exist between the two Churches than previously thought possible.⁶⁵ A Greek Orthodox monk, who died 15 years ago, is attracting thousands of worshippers because of his remarkably preserved body.⁶⁶ The supposed hand of John the Baptist, which is meant to be responsible for many miracles, has been displayed in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow during a tour of Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine. It is said that a crippled stroke victim, who visited the relic, was cured after kissing its display case. Thousands of worshippers waited for up to 11 hours to kiss the relic during its tour.⁶⁷

CULTS, SECTS AND FALSE MESSIAHS

Scientology: The cult has etched out two large interlocking rings on the surface of the New Mexico desert as markers for Scientologists returning from outer space. The signs act like a signpost pointing to a nuclear-proof bunker, housing copies of the works of the cult's founder, Science Fiction writer Ron Hubbard.⁶⁸ Two French Courts have convicted the Scientology group of mass manipulation and fraud. The group was fined 630,000 Euros. The French refuse to acknowledge Scientology as a religion, holding that it is a purely commercial operation.⁶⁹ Australian authorities have been more blunt, calling it "a criminal organisation", after allegations of its merciless hounding and punishment of critics and its policy of taking its members' money. There have even been rumours of blackmail, forced abortion and wrongful imprisonment.⁷⁰ Yet Scientologists claim to be like the knights of old; standing for justice, wisdom, temperance, resolution, truth and liberty. The main headquarters and conference facilities for Scientology in Britain are at Saint Hill in Sussex. Scientologists claim that a new civilisation is being built there. "It is a place where you can reach levels of knowledge, awareness and freedom never before possible in man's long history." This takes place through following their prescribed courses. A look at any copy of *The Auditor*, their official magazine, will show the astronomical amounts that followers are expected to pay for the courses they undertake. *The Basics Books & Lectures Package* with a 25% discount costs £3,065 and *The Congresses Package* with a 25% discount costs £2,170.⁷¹ **The Chosen Ones:** Russia is home to a large number of sects – at least 120 of them make their followers live in total isolation like those who call themselves the Chosen Ones. Several years ago, Pyotr Kuznetsob, a schizophrenic engineer from Belarus, declared himself to be a prophet, left his family and began writing books. In 2005, along with a number of followers, he settled in the village of Nikpskoye, in the Penza region of Russia, to await the end of the world, due in May 2008. On 7th November 2007, 25 adults and children barricaded themselves into a snow-covered cave full of gas and petrol and refused to leave.⁷² It is believed Kuznetsob later tried to commit suicide after his predictions failed to take place.⁷³ **The Grail Movement:** The cult has 10,000 members who follow the

teachings of Oskar Ernst Bernardt and “depicts man as a being whose spirit can return to its source in heaven by performing good deeds in earth”.⁷⁴ **Benevolent Missionary Association:** Police in Malaysia entered a house after receiving complaints from neighbours of continual chanting and found three women conducting prayers to bring their prophet back to life. Ching Chi Vui Ivan, leader of the Benevolent Missionary Association, had died 13 months earlier. Before his death, he told his followers not to bury him, as he would come back to life. His badly decomposing body was kept wrapped in plastic within the house.⁷⁵

Lia Aminuddin from Java believes that she is imbued with the spirit of the prophet Gabriel. She claims that she is Mary and that her son is Jesus. Lia has become the centre of a growing cult.⁷⁶ **Steven Tari**, a cult leader in Papua New Guinea, calls himself the “Black Jesus”. The authorities accuse him of being guilty of child abuse, murder and cannibalism. Tari copies the style of clothing Christ wears in paintings and has grown his hair long. He has been going among various hill tribes and has gathered a large group of followers. He teaches followers to destroy their Bibles as heretical books and believe in him as the true Son of God.⁷⁷ **Jose Luis De Jesus Miranda** is the founder of a cult called **Creciendo en Gracia** (Growing in Grace). Jose is a former drug addict and criminal who now claims to be the incarnation of Jesus and the Antichrist at one and the same time. The cult is growing all across the Americas, claiming at least 10,000 active followers. Followers are called on to receive a “666” and “SSS” tattoo which Jose says stands for *Salvo Siempre Salvo* (Saved Always Saved). Jose claims to run God’s government on earth. Globally, the cult has 335 education centres, 200 pastors, a radio programme played on 287 stations and a 24-hour television network. To receive a blessing, you must pay a tithe set at as much as 40% of your income.⁷⁸ Former MI5 member, **David Shayler**, claims that he was anointed as the Messiah while visiting a psychic who channelled the spirit of Mary Magdalene. He believes that there was a Hebrew anagram of “David Shayler, Righteous King” written on Aaron’s rod. He holds that his new divinity enables him to change the weather, prevent terrorist attacks and fix football matches. His mission is “to inform humanity about the changes in the Universe and spread the spiritual rules of unconditional sharing, never judging and having faith in the Universe”.⁷⁹ **Sergei Anatolyevitch** from Siberia, a former traffic policeman, claims to have received a mystical revelation in May 1990, by which he was reborn as Vissarion, the returned Jesus Christ. He dresses and grooms himself to look like an Orthodox Christian icon with a benign smile, gaunt features and wispy beard. In August 1991, he founded **The Church of the Last Testament** or **Community of United Faith**, which is believed to have about 10,000 active members and over 50,000 adherents. His followers are called the Vissariontsi or Vissarionites and have founded a now thriving town called Ecopolis in Siberia. The doctrine they follow is a mixture of Russian Orthodoxy, Buddhism, apocalypticism, collectivism and ecological values.⁸⁰

CREATIONISM AND EVOLUTION

Christian Ministry AIG (Answers in Genesis) opened their Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, on 28th May 2007. By October 2008, 550,000 had visited the museum. The museum seeks to combine fossil displays with biblical history and to celebrate the wonders of creation while giving an evangelical view of sin. It is the view of the Museum Directors that the battle for creationism must be fought among the very young and, therefore, they draw on the fascination that children have for dinosaurs to teach about the literal six days of creation. It is the general purpose of the museum to put forward an alternative to the theory of evolution.⁸¹

It is reported, that Charles Darwin, when he was aged 50, felt sick at the sight of a tail feather of a peacock because it pointed to a flaw in his theory of evolution. His theory of evolution predicted that a lot of intermediary links between creatures would be found in the fossil record. The validity of his theory was founded on the notion that a vast fossil record of creatures in different stages of evolution would be found; yet now, after 150 years, no such intermediate fossil record has been discovered and the crucial links are missing.⁸² A recent poll by ComRes found that more than 50% of the population do not believe that the theory of evolution can explain the full complexity of the created world.⁸³

Sir David Attenborough, the well-known naturalist and Television presenter, has, in the science journal *Nature*, blamed the command of God in Genesis 1:28, “and God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”, for the recent environmental devastations, as it teaches that the world’s resources are expendable.

ATHEISM

Anton La Vey formally established the **Church of Satan** on 30th April 1966. The very name was chosen because it was both blasphemous and sacrilegious. Its members refuse to believe in the existence of any higher spiritual being than man and yet they practise ritualistic magic with the belief that they can produce a tangible result in the world around them. Their main ritual is called *Ragnarokin*, in which they focus their energy to “will” a change in society to make the satanic point of view more widespread. The group does not believe that Satan is an anthropomorphic, independent, conscious being; rather, they view Satan as a philosophy that represents the carnal, the rebel and the adversary of God. They consider themselves as the adversaries of the world they live in and to be different from those that call themselves devil worshippers or Satanists because they refuse to accept any Christian doctrine. They claim that what they believe is the natural fruit of atheism, that there is no God and no devil. In the Church of Satan, every single person is considered godlike and to have the right to do everything that they want as long as it does not harm another person. In their own words, it is a “carnal based religion”.⁸⁴

The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies launched a summer recruitment drive while holding a number of summer camps for atheists. At the camps, children recruits, between the ages of 8-17, were to be taught how to “damage religious activity in schools” and lobby local authorities about religious issues. The campaign had the backing of prominent atheists such as Richard Dawkins and A. C. Grayling.⁸⁵ The camps taught lessons on rational scepticism, moral philosophy and the use of such music as John Lennon’s *Imagine* which contains lyrics that deny the existence of heaven and hell.⁸⁶

It is reported that the number of atheist or agnostic groups active on US College campuses has more than doubled since 2007. These groups use social networking sites such as *Facebook* to organise events, give a channel for discussion and provide a way of testing the waters with others.⁸⁷

In February 2009, atheists complained of a Bible poster campaign by the TBS before it was even due to start. Attempts were made via various websites to actively encourage complaints to the Advertising Standards Agency, in an attempt to outnumber the number of complaints made against a recent Atheism-based campaign.⁸⁸ The children of religious parents are now being targeted in an anti-religion advertising campaign. The British Humanist Association’s adverts read, “Please don’t label me. Let me grow up and choose for myself.” The adverts are part of its attempts to have all faith schools closed down. The posters used show young children surrounded by religious names such as “Protestant Child”.⁸⁹ It was reported at the beginning of December 2009, that the government is proposing, in the new Education Bill, to make the teaching of Evolution compulsory for all 5-11 year-olds in England and Wales. The decision follows a relentless campaign by the British Humanist Association for its introduction.⁹⁰ Philip Pullman, in his new book, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, claims that the idea of Jesus being God came from the “fervid imagination” of Paul. It is known that Pullman uses his books as tools for “proselytising” others, especially children, to the atheist cause.⁹¹

It has been known for some time that Richard Dawkins sees himself on a mission to eradicate religion and superstition. The theme of his television series, *Enemies of Reason* and *The Root of all Evil?*, was their eventual replacement with Science and Reason. However, it is becoming increasingly evident that he is viewed by his own peers as being too dogmatic and unreasonable in the implementation of his own views. There is a growing concern among many scientists that his approach is giving a bad impression of science, such a bad impression that many lay people are being put off science altogether. The essence of true science is meant to be a method of enquiry into the unknown and not a vehicle for dogma and prejudice.⁹² The January 2009 issue of *Fortean Times*, a magazine that seeks to consider strange phenomena, accused Dawkins of being “an unimaginative and ill-informed buffoon . . . on matters of religion”. The article went on to claim that “there is plenty more to complain of in Prof. Dawkins’ treatment of religion, however,

without being a creationist or a disciple of ‘intelligent design’ or even a believer in God”. Why? Because “it is a false syllogism to make the leap, as he does, from the dottiness of creationism and the elegance of Darwinian theory to the notion that all religion is bonkers, malign, a bane upon the Earth, a kind of brainwashing, nasty, abusive, crass, and ought to be abolished”. Dawkins is also charged with using “infantile” arguments, being “lazy”, and “if he is not merely ill-informed, Prof. Dawkins could be accused here of intellectual laxity, if not dishonesty. He has already been accused of moral cowardice.”⁹³

It was reported, in February 2009, that Christian Union groups at Universities throughout Britain were actively campaigning against Richard Dawkins’ campaign and had distributed over 400,000 copies of the Gospel of Mark to students.⁹⁴

SATANISM

In January 2004, Italian police found the body of Mariangela Pezzotta, who had been shot and then buried alive. Her ex-boyfriend was lead singer in a Death Metal band called “Beasts of Satan”. Band members were later discovered to have been involved in a satanic cult and possibly guilty of eight murders that took place during the performance of satanic rites. The Italian government estimates that well over 5,000 young Italians might be connected with similar satanic cults.⁹⁵ Previously, in June 2000, three former students confessed to the murder of Sister Maria Laura and said that her murder had been a sacrifice to the devil. The girls had previously taken part in satanic rituals such as drinking each other’s blood.⁹⁶ In June 2007, a gang of **Russian Satanists** murdered four Gothic teenagers. Each teenager was stabbed 666 times in reference to the mark of the beast in the Book of Revelation. It is believed that the murderers went on to eat parts of their victim’s bodies. The murderers gave reasons for becoming Satanists, including one who said, “I tried to turn to God, but it didn’t bring me any money. I prayed to Satan, and things improved.” It is thought that the gang had previously dug up human remains for use in their ceremonies.⁹⁷ A member of the **Satan’s Brethren Association** in Slovenia has been appointed to a five-year term as Director of Slovenia’s State Office for religious Communities.⁹⁸ The rise in Satanism has been blamed on several things, such as the prevalence of Death Metal and social issues. Once a teenager gets involved in internet chatrooms dedicated to the music, they can be led on to the practice of Satanism.

BLACK MAGIC & SUPERSTITION

It was reported in April and June 2008 that at least 19 albinos throughout Africa, including children, had been killed and mutilated over a 12-month period to supply body parts for black magic. Witch doctors use their skin, bones and hair in their magic.⁹⁹ When an aunt of **Gambia’s** president died in early 2009, he suspected witchcraft and ordered the arrest of 1,000 alleged witches. A number of confessions were obtained through torture, which left at

least two dead.¹⁰⁰ Further reports from **West Africa** claim a rapid increase in witchcraft-related rumours.¹⁰¹ In 1899, the Colonial settlers of **Zimbabwe** made it a crime to accuse anyone of witchcraft. In 2006, a Criminal Law Codification became law in Zimbabwe, making witchcraft a criminal offence punishable by a fine or five years in jail. The law was passed after a substantial increase in the number of Witch doctors, caused by the country's economic turmoil and a rise in fear and desperation. However, the new law also legitimises traditional healers who perform divination, fortune telling and the use of charms and spells.¹⁰² In January and February 2009, it was reported that witch hunting was becoming epidemic in the Highland region of **Papua New Guinea**. In the previous year, there had been over 50 deaths related to witch-hunting. Accusations of witchcraft usually arise after the unexpected or unexplained death of loved ones and the victims are usually strangers to the area. The Sorcery Act of 1976, passed by the government, tolerates white witchcraft, but forbids the practice of black magic.¹⁰³

PAGANISM

On 10th May 2006, a Greek Court lifted a ban on the worship of the 12 ancient gods of Greece. There are believed to be about 2,000 hard-core pagans who want to return to the ancient ceremonies and plan to petition the Greek government and EU to bring this about. Up to 100,000 sympathisers of the old religion are said to meet at clandestine ceremonies every full moon.¹⁰⁴ In a study made in 2001, over 134,000 Americans claimed Wicca as their religion.¹⁰⁵ A witch school opened for business on 1st July 2006, in the town of Hoopston, Illinois. The school now has 120,000 students from all over the world, most of whom take courses over the internet. The courses offered vary from Druidism and Celtic History to crystal and gem magic. Successful students will become accredited members of the Wiccan clergy. On 24th April 2006, Gabreila Chukar became Romania's first official witch after negotiations with the government. Witchcraft is increasingly popular in Romania's rural areas. Witches are sought out by women to settle love scores, heal broken hearts or punish a love rival.¹⁰⁶ British pagan police officers, who practise witchcraft, have been allowed to establish their own Pagan Police Association. They have also been given the right to take eight days off work to celebrate their religious holidays, such as Halloween and the mid summer solstice.¹⁰⁷

FALSE RELIGIONS

ISLAM

Islamification of UK: Nearly 100 Sharia tribunals and informal courts are now operating within the UK. There are also thought to be around 90 local Sharia councils across the UK that dispense information and rulings, many of which are considered inconsistent by their critics.¹⁰⁸ In July 2009, the independent think tank, *Civitas*, advised that Sharia courts should not be

recognised under Britain's 1996 Arbitration Act. It is feared that such courts may be handing down rulings that are inappropriate to this country because they are linked to Islamic laws which are seriously out of step with Western thinking, as the essence of Sharia Law is to give a ruling that is according to the divine will, as recorded or deduced from the Koran. One particular area of concern covers rulings in divorce cases as, under Sharia law, women are not viewed as being of equal worth with men and there is also no specific commitment to the best interests of the child. In October 2008, the House of Lords ruled that Sharia Law was incompatible with human rights.¹⁰⁹ Yet it is believed that the UK government is seeking to change financial regulations to accommodate Sharia finance, including Islamic bonds. Current accounts, mortgages, investment funds and motor insurance that conform to Sharia law are all now available in the UK. Such a move appears to be nothing less than an attempt to have the UK submit to Sharia law. Junior government Minister, Shahid Malik, MP for Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, has predicted the total Islamification of Britain and a Muslim Prime Minister by 2040.¹¹⁰ Several organisations such as **Stop the Islamization of Europe** have been formed to combat such advances by Islam.¹¹¹ Islam, when in the majority in any country, is increasingly seen as being as oppressive as Communism was.¹¹² It was reported in May 2009 that the European Commission is considering new Directives that will result in Muslims being entitled to operate Sharia Law within their own communities throughout the EU. Civil Law judges would be forced to accept the ruling of a Sharia Court.¹¹³ It has been agreed that Scouts in Dundee will be able to pledge allegiance to "Allah" rather than to God and the Queen. The move came with the formation of the "Dundee 45th troop" which is to be recruited from the Muslim community. There are currently just over 25 Muslim Scout troops throughout the United Kingdom.¹¹⁴ The government's counter terrorism board has issued draft guidance for police authorities advising them not to arrest "extremist Muslims who commit certain crimes, fearing that to charge them with crimes could make them 'more extreme'". The crimes to be overlooked include "incitement to religious hatred" or "viewing extremist material on the Internet", including anti-Semitic remarks and publications. The government is seeking to appeal to the wider Muslim community. It must be noted that, although Muslims only make up 3% of the UK population, they make up 10% of the UK prison population.¹¹⁵

Islamification of the West: International Barnabas Director, Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo, expressed concern at a recent fundraising event that some Christian leaders were contributing to the success of Islamic mission. He claimed that ventures that seek to engage with Islam end up in giving too great a place to its teachings at the expense of the Scriptures. He noted that there were now 1,700 Mosques in the UK and the idea of "Jihad of the womb", or the increase in the birth rate among Muslims, which at present is three times that of British women, was very real.¹¹⁶ For centuries, Roman Catholicism has been the world's largest religion and Islam the second. It is now believed that Islam has

overtaken Roman Catholicism. The followers of Islam represent 19.2% of the world's population and Roman Catholicism 17.4%.¹¹⁷ A concerted attempt is being made to have more Muslims serve in the White House. Details of the most qualified Muslims were submitted to the Obama administration. Muslims only make up about 2% of the US population. President Obama has tried to distance himself personally, from being seen as a Muslim, but has, at the same time, been seeking to reach out to the Muslim world.¹¹⁸ The United Nations, in March 2009, moved towards criminalizing the "Defamation of Islam". The move would mean the distortion of human rights, free speech and religious freedom and marks a backward step for liberty and democracy.¹¹⁹ The majority of Switzerland's population (57%) have voted to ban the building of any further mosque "minarets" in Switzerland. The ban was opposed by the government, the major political parties, the Roman Catholic Church and business leaders who feared insulting Switzerland's 400,000 strong Muslim population. However, there is a general unease in the country concerning Islam.¹²⁰ Mosques across the country, of which there are 200, tried to prevent a negative vote by opening their doors to non-Muslims in an attempt to promote greater understanding.¹²¹ Turkey was quick to challenge the ban, calling it "undemocratic and intolerant" and demanded "corrective action". However, one Turkish Newspaper, the *Hurrryret*, spoke of Turkey's interfaith tolerance being proved by the number of churches and synagogues burnt down in the country as well as a call to remember that theirs was a country in which, "locals have slit the throats of Christian missionaries".¹²²

Counterfeit Miracles: People from all over the southern Egyptian province of Sohag gathered in front of Mohammed Abu Dif's house in the village of Tunis to seek blessings from a calf that they believe was sent from Allah. It is claimed that when the calf was born, its skin was folded in such a way as to form the words "There is no God but Allah".¹²³ A baby boy born in Dagestan, Russia, is said to have left doctors stupefied after the word "Allah" is alleged to have appeared on his chin. Since then, several verses from the Koran have allegedly emerged on his back, arms, legs and stomach. The boy was diagnosed with coronary spastic infantile paralysis at birth, but this is said to have been cured when the writing appeared. Two thousand pilgrims come daily to see the boy.¹²⁴ A book called *Possessed: How to Treat and Prevent It* became an instant best seller in Brunei. In the 113-page book by Awang Abdul Aziz Juned, Brunei's leading cleric, he advises reciting verses and prayers from the Koran to ward off spiritual attacks and strengthen Muslims against them. Demon possession is a common fear in Brunei.¹²⁵ A Saudi family recently took a *djinni* or *genie* to court, accusing it of leaving threatening messages on their phones, stealing their mobiles and throwing stones at them.¹²⁶ Mohammad Ponari, a nine-year-old boy from Java, was struck by lightning in January 2009 and, because he survived, is believed to possess special healing powers. Thousands queue daily to receive cures from him which he imparts to them by making an elixir from a magical stone.

It is believed that many of the supposed cures have ended in the death of pilgrims. The Islam of Indonesia is mixed with Animism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Many Islamic clerics also double as shamans and witchdoctors.¹²⁷

Morality: Sheikh Muhammad al-Habadan, an important Saudi cleric, on Arab television, called on women to wear a full veil or Niqab that reveals only one of the wearer's eyes. He believes that showing both eyes makes women look seductive.¹²⁸ Islamic militants have been rounding up anyone with silver and gold false teeth and forcing them to have them removed. The extremists believe that such false teeth are vain and worldly.¹²⁹

UFOs: Islamic preacher Omar Bakri,¹³⁰ of Lebanon, has urged Muslims to convert any aliens they encounter to Islam. He said, "We are obliged as Muslims to make the whole galaxy subservient to almighty Allah".

BUDDHISM

A tortoise caught by a fisherman in Cambodia is being kept at a Buddhist temple because of its healing powers after a number of locals had dreams about its ability to heal illnesses. Worshippers pray in front of it, wash injuries with water it has bathed in and even drink its bathing water to cure their illnesses. The tortoise is believed to be a reincarnation of one of Buddha's guards.¹³¹ Daily attendance at a Zen Buddhist temple in Japan has dramatically increased after a black and white Chihuahua dog joins in prayers by sitting on his hind legs, raising his paws and putting them together to touch his nose.¹³² Every year, an unusual ceremony takes place in the Buddhist monastery of Wat Krang Si Charoensuk in Thailand. The remains of Luang Phoo, one of its previous abbots, are taken out of a glass case and paraded before a large crowd, before being covered in gold leaf in honour of his being considered to be an enlightened being.¹³³ The 6th descendant of the ancient tree, under which Buddha attained enlightenment in eastern India more than 2,500 years ago, is suffering from a mysterious ailment. Many Buddhists believe that this is a seriously bad omen for mankind.¹³⁴ It is reported that 700 students at a school in Kamala, Thailand, were sent home after 29 students were "possessed" by demons. The symptoms included uncontrollable convulsing, loud screaming and paralysis. The school was closed for a week while Buddhist monks exorcised the grounds using snakes' and pigs' blood. A Muslim ceremony was also celebrated.¹³⁵ Similar reports have previously been made in both Indonesia and Australia.¹³⁶ There is a marked move towards secularism among young Buddhist monks. They are increasingly using Internet cafés and becoming involved in Heavy Metal music. Many are seeking after worldly items such as mobile phones and gold jewellery. Several scandals have also been noted, involving immorality, gambling and criminal activities.¹³⁷

HINDUISM

A rare albino-like king Cobra was paraded around a statue of the Hindu deity Amman, in a suburban temple in Malaysia, before a crowd of 30,000 who brought it offerings of milk, eggs and money, as they considered its appearance to be a good omen.¹³⁸ Hundreds of people flocked to an Indian village in the eastern state of Bihar to worship a baby girl born with rare deforming tumours. They believed her to be an incarnation of the Hindu god Durga, a multi-armed goddess.¹³⁹ Villagers from Southern India worship a colour-changing frog.¹⁴⁰ In 2007, 400,000 Hindus going on pilgrimage in the Indian Kashmir, to see ice stalagmites worshipped as an incarnation of lord Shiva, were disappointed as the ice had melted into puddles.¹⁴¹ A British transsexual, called Pamela or Stephen Cooper, has become a prominent spiritual figure at the Bahucharaji temple in the Indian state of Gujarat. Worshippers come to the temple to be blessed by its 80 eunuchs, and Pamela's blessings are especially sought by women hoping to become pregnant.¹⁴² On 6th November 2007, Rampur Kodar Katti had the extra limbs, which she had been born with, removed by surgeons. Before her operation, she was believed to have been the reincarnation of the 4-armed Hindu goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, on whose feast day she was born.¹⁴³ A baby was born in northern India on 11th March 2008, with craniofacial duplication, meaning that she had two faces. She is believed to be the special gift of the gods and a reincarnation of Durga, goddess of valour, who has three eyes and many arms. Up to 100 worshippers visit her every day, making offerings in exchange for her blessing.¹⁴⁴ On 31st August 2009, a Muslim was killed in front of his three-year-old granddaughter as he left a Mosque in Tooting. It is believed that Hindu extremists carried out this and another near fatal attack that took place on 8th September 2009.¹⁴⁵

INTERFAITH MOVEMENT

The first ever English (a similar event already takes place in Scotland) **Interfaith Week** ran from 15th to 21st November 2009. The aims of the week were "to strengthen good interfaith relations at all levels; to increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, in particular celebrating and building on the contribution which their members make to their neighbourhoods and to wider society; and to increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious belief".¹⁴⁶ It is reported that thousands of schools, including the Church of England's 4,720 primary and secondary schools, took part in the week.¹⁴⁷ The World Council of Churches continues to call for unity, not only between Christian Churches, but between all faiths.¹⁴⁸

A Celebration of Faiths and the Environment was held at Windsor on 24th November 2009. Both the Duke of Edinburgh and the Secretary General of the UN were in attendance. Representatives from the World's nine major faiths were also present. The purpose of the meeting was to announce a large range of practical initiatives to save the environment.¹⁴⁹ However,

the increasing involvement of religious leaders in the climate change debate has been condemned by many as no more than a “dreadful” idea and not part of their assigned spiritual jurisdiction.¹⁵⁰ There is also growing alarm at the nature of environmentalism, especially when Mr. Justice Burton declared in the High Court at the beginning of November 2009, that “belief in climate change . . . deserves the same protection in the workplace as a religious conviction”.¹⁵¹

Tony Blair, former Prime Minister and convert to Roman Catholicism, has given his endorsement to the charismatic and Rome-leaning Alpha course. Mr. Blair founded an interfaith organisation called the **Faith Foundation**¹⁵² in May 2008. The purpose of the foundation is to “counter extremism in all six leading religions” through a realisation that the great religions of the world share the same values of respect, justice and compassion, with all extremism being viewed as a distortion of faith rather than an intrinsic part of it. The Foundation hopes to use modern communications to educate, inform and develop interfaith understanding. The Foundation has been criticised for trying to reduce religions to the same predetermined common denominator by stripping them of their identity; it is “a matter of promoting one, and only one, religious confession, which a universal global power would impose on the entire world”.¹⁵³

PERSECUTION

In the spring of 2009, the international charity, “Open Doors”, published its annual *World Watch List* of the 50 worst nations for persecuting Christians. The report reveals that it has become harder to openly practise Christianity in the Middle East. North Korea remains the most dangerous place to be a Christian, with Saudi Arabia and Iran coming joint second. Afghanistan comes fourth, Somalia fifth, Maldives sixth, Yemen seventh, Laos eighth, Eritrea ninth and Uzbekistan tenth. The chief executive of the charity states that “the increase of persecution against Christians is a disturbing global trend. The plight of Christians can no longer be ignored.” A full report can be found at www.opendoorsuk.org¹⁵⁴ It is feared that a resolution, passed on 26th March 2009, by the United Nations Human Rights Council to protect religious ideologies, may in fact do so at the expense of freedom of expression.¹⁵⁵

Britain: In Manchester, a five-strong police team examined a Church’s literature inviting the public to its Easter services after they received a complaint that it was offensive to homosexuals. Officers from the force’s “Hate Crimes Unit” later confirmed that they found no evidence that the leaflet was offensive.¹⁵⁶ In February 2009, a Christian foster carer, who had cared for over 80 children, was struck off for allowing, though not actively encouraging, a Muslim teenager in her care to convert to Christianity. The girl herself had been interested in finding out more about Christianity before she was placed with the foster mother. Social Work officials held that the foster carer should have done all she could to preserve the girl’s original religion.¹⁵⁷ The carer has

a previously unblemished record since becoming a foster carer in 1999.¹⁵⁸ In March 2009, an Asian Christian minister, who hosts an Asian Gospel Show on Christian television, was brutally attacked in London by three Asian men. The police treated the attack as a “faith hate crime”.¹⁵⁹ In the weeks previous to the attack, his views had been aggressively challenged by Muslim callers in a broadcast phone-in.¹⁶⁰ It was feared in April that Christian parents, who had kept their children away from controversial lessons promoting homosexuality, could face prosecution from the local council.

Owners of a small hotel in Cornwall were sued at the beginning of 2009 by a sodomite couple after they refused to allow them to share a double bed. The hotel owners operate a decency policy of only allowing married couples to sleep together.¹⁶¹ Police warned a street preacher in Lincolnshire that it was a criminal offence to claim that homosexuality is a sin, even though he never mentioned the fact in his actual preaching.¹⁶² A primary school receptionist was disciplined after asking friends to pray about the school’s treatment of her daughter. She claims she has suffered religious discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The daughter aged five, who attends the school where she works, was reprimanded by a teacher for speaking about her Christian faith to another child. In response, her mother sent a private email from her home computer to friends asking them to pray for them. Someone gave the mail to the school headmaster, who charged the receptionist with professional misconduct that resulted in her receiving a final written warning.¹⁶³

Caroline Petrie, a nurse, who was suspended without pay for offering to pray with a patient, even though the patient was not offended, was later reinstated. Her suspension was taken as a clear case of political correctness gone wrong and her reinstatement as a victory for common sense.¹⁶⁴

A new code of conduct for teachers in England and Wales has been redrafted in order to calm fears that staff had about being disciplined at work because of their faith.¹⁶⁵

Europe – Norway: Norway has recently passed “hate crimes” laws protecting homosexuals from criticism and intimidation.¹⁶⁶ **Sweden:** Pastor Ake Green received a one-month jail sentence under a Swedish “hate crimes” law that forbids criticism of those that are involved in homosexual behaviour. The sentence was later overturned on appeal. **Southern Ireland:** In 2009, the Irish Government announced large cuts in the funding of Protestant schools. It is claimed that the cuts will put Protestant education back 40 years.¹⁶⁷ **Moldova:** Moldova continues to refuse legal status to religious communities of various faiths, in spite of contrary judgements by the European Court of Human Rights. **Azerbaijan:** A Christian was recently deported to Russia and separated from his wife and family as punishment for holding religious services in his home. A number of Christian books were also confiscated.¹⁶⁸ **Ukraine:** On 14th October 2009, a homemade bomb was thrown into the Calvary Chapel Church in Kaharlyk, Ukraine. Minor damage was done to the building, but none of the six people asleep in the building were hurt. It is believed that the attack was

carried out by members of the “Ukrainian Nationalist Movement”, who see many Protestant churches as harmful sects.¹⁶⁹

Colombia: At least ten Protestant pastors in northern Colombia have been threatened by armed paramilitary groups during the start of 2009.¹⁷⁰ **Canada:** In 2002, after “hate crimes” laws were passed, the Alberta Human Rights Tribunal actively forbade evangelical pastor Stephen Boisson from expressing his moral opposition to homosexuality and fined him \$50,000 for stating in a paper that the homosexual agenda was “wicked”.¹⁷¹ In December 2009, Pastor Boisson was exonerated of having committed a “hate crime”.¹⁷² **United States of America:** A federal judge has agreed with officials from the city of Dearborn, who have banned a Christian group from distributing literature during an Arab festival.¹⁷³ Paul Diamond, one of Britain’s top Religious Rights Barristers, has claimed that the Christian foundations of the United States will be eroded if its politicians and courts continue to import anti-Christian legal precedents from the UK.¹⁷⁴ **Mexico:** In August 2009, traditionalist Roman Catholic leaders expelled 57 evangelical Christians from towns in two different states, after they refused to participate in Roman Catholic religious festivals. These religious festivals are a mixture of Roman Catholic idol worship and native rituals, which usually end up as debauched drunken affairs. Those banished were initially attacked with machetes and ropes, before being forced to flee, leaving their property and belongings behind.¹⁷⁵

India: A large anti-Christian mob brutally attacked two missionaries in March of 2009. They were stripped naked and severely beaten, while their belongings were burned. The missionaries were later arrested.¹⁷⁶ On 30th June 2009, a group of Christians in Orissa, India, were attacked for refusing to take part in a Hindu Festival.¹⁷⁷ Such incidents are increasingly common.¹⁷⁸ Hindu militants are accused of seeking to kill staff at a Christian orphanage and day centre, as well as actually destroying the homes of 5,000 Christian families.¹⁷⁹ It is reported that, after the continued violence in Orissa, the government has established seven relief camps for 50,000 people made homeless in the continuing anti-Christian violence. Claims have also been made of a church elder being crucified on a bamboo cross and his wife being repeatedly violated by 14 men before being chopped into pieces for refusing to deny their faith.¹⁸⁰ Few convictions for anti-Christian violence have been recorded.¹⁸¹ It is claimed 800 tribal Christians and adherents of aboriginal religions were “reconverted” to Hinduism in a ceremony in December 2009, by a Hindu nationalist cleric. Hindus believe that all babies born in India are born Hindus, including those born to parents of other faiths, and therefore need to be purified.¹⁸² There is fear among Nationalist Hindus that continual conversions to Christianity pose a serious threat to Indian security.¹⁸³ **Sri Lanka:** There was a noticeable rise in the number of Christians attacked in the weeks following the defeat of the Tamil Separatists in May 2009. The attacks have

involved the burning of a Church, the destruction of property belonging to Christians and personal attacks.¹⁸⁴ **Pakistan:** In January 2009, a hundred Muslim protesters surrounded a courthouse and chanted death threats against a Punjabi Christian accused of sending a “blasphemous” text message. The defendant, along with his wife and daughters, had previously been assaulted in their own home.¹⁸⁵ It is believed that a great number of the false accusations raised against Christians are really made for non-religious reasons such as land disputes.¹⁸⁶ In May 2009, it was reported that Taliban murdered an eleven-year-old boy of a Christian family. Two other Christians were executed during the raid, with another two being injured and many Christian houses, shops and churches being burned.¹⁸⁷ The terrorists are also accused of violating Christian women and physically abusing others with clubs, iron rods and whips.¹⁸⁸ A Christian mother appealed for help after her 12-year-old daughter was kidnapped, coerced into converting to Islam and forced to marry a 37-year-old man.¹⁸⁹ A number of Christian women and girls have been attacked with acid and petrol bombs in the province of Kasur.¹⁹⁰ In July 2009, Muslim demonstrators burnt seven Christians alive, including three women and two children. As well as these deaths, a number of Christian houses were burned, churches vandalised and Bibles desecrated. The demonstration was started by a rumour that a copy of the Koran had been burned during a Christian wedding.¹⁹¹ Fifty houses were also set on fire in the district of Gojra, leaving 14 Christians dead, including women and children. It is believed that the cause of this riot was a rumour that a Christian had blasphemed the Koran.¹⁹² In August 2009, 50 houses and a church were set on fire in north eastern Pakistan during violence which claimed the lives of 14 Christians, including women and children. It is believed that trouble began after a Christian was accused of blaspheming the Koran.¹⁹³ There have also been claims that police fired on mourners at the Christian funeral, preventing them from carrying out the burial.¹⁹⁴ On 11th September, a number of Christians were burned with acid when 600 Muslims went on a rampage. A total of 117 houses were vandalised, some with petrol bombs. These events follow on from the burning of over 60 Christian homes elsewhere in the country.¹⁹⁵ A young Christian believer was forced to flee the Taliban and go into hiding after they sought to convert him to Islam. The young man was severely beaten after seeking to defend himself by quoting from the Bible. The Taliban later accused him of blaspheming the prophet Mohammad.¹⁹⁶ **Bangladesh:** Islamic pilgrims beat up a Bible school student for distributing Christian literature among Muslims.¹⁹⁷ It is claimed that a young Christian woman was abducted by four Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam before being made to marry one of her kidnappers.¹⁹⁸

Morocco: It was revealed in April 2009, that Morocco had expelled five Christian missionaries without charge because they were illegally seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity.¹⁹⁹ **Eritrea:** 2,000 Christians in Eritrea are being imprisoned just for being Christians and are being kept in solitary confinement with frequent beatings from prison guards.²⁰⁰ The prisoners claim

that they are being treated like animals in an attempt to have them renounce their faith on a “recantation form”. It is believed that 160,000 Eritrean Christians have fled to the Sudan and more than 20,000 to Ethiopia.²⁰¹ **Kenya:** A Church building was ruined in Northern Kenya after an attack by Islamic extremists from Somalia. Tensions between Christians and Muslims have been growing in Garissa, after the building of a mosque close to a Christian church, and a local pastor had sought to evangelise some Muslims. It is reported that many Christians are now living in fear of their lives. Several restrictions have been placed on them, including a ban on Christianity being taught in schools.²⁰² “The National Christian Council of Kenya” has rejected proposals for Islamic courts in a new draft constitution. It is feared that the legal introduction of the courts will lead to the Islamification of Kenya, where only 10% of the population are Muslim.²⁰³ **Algeria:** Several Evangelical Christians have been charged or detained in Algeria in an attempt to prevent the spread of protestant Christianity in the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim country.²⁰⁴ **Zanzibar:** Islamic militants seeking to bring an end to the spread of Christianity, destroyed two churches during recent attacks. **Somalia:** Islamic extremists have beheaded two sons of a Christian who refused to betray the hiding place of their church leader.²⁰⁵ A Kenyan pastor visiting Somalia was stopped when entering the country and beaten up by Immigration officials who threatened him with the fact that they had previously killed two Christians.²⁰⁶ A Christian convert was killed south of Mogadishu in July 2009, by Islamic extremists intent on “cleansing” Somalia of Christians. It is believed that the extremists are monitoring any converts to Christianity and actively hunting them down when they go into hiding. It was previously reported, that the same group had viciously attacked and violated a woman and her pregnant daughter before holding them prisoner for 5 days and leaving them only when they thought they were dead.²⁰⁷ Islamic extremists have executed a young Christian that they accused of trying to convert a Muslim boy. The 23-year-old was executed by two shots to the head after enduring a severe beating, during torture to disclose details of other Christians.²⁰⁸ **Nigeria:** A group known as the “Nigerian Taliban”, which aims to cleanse Nigeria of Christian influence and introduce Sharia Law, murdered 11 people in February 2009, displaced 1,500 others, destroyed 14 churches and eight vicarages. The violence later continued with the death of a church pastor and the destruction of 5 Church buildings.²⁰⁹ In July 2009, a thirteen-year-old Christian was forced to watch her pastor being murdered after she, her brother and an older Christian woman were taken hostage by a militant Islamic group. **Egypt:** In September 2009, a Christian shopkeeper was stabbed in the neck and abdomen and then beheaded by his attacker before the same man stabbed two other Christians. These attacks are considered as part of a wave of orchestrated violence.²¹⁰ Egyptian Imams have formed an Islamic Edict that states that it is “a sin against god” to build a Christian Church.²¹¹ A female Christian convert was arrested at Cairo airport, on 13th December 2008, while seeking to flee from persecution. While appearing in court, it is reported that the presiding judge declared that he

would like to kill her himself.²¹² Violence towards Coptic Christians by Muslims broke out in the Nile Delta after Coptic Christians were accused of kidnapping a Muslim girl in order to convert her to Christianity.²¹³ Two policemen convicted of killing a Coptic Christian in cold blood, during a savage beating, only received a 5-year prison sentence.²¹⁴ In April 2009, a Christian convert and her husband had to go into hiding in Cairo after receiving threats from family members and police. It was reported at the time that a group of Christians were shot while leaving church in the south of the country. At least two were killed and one wounded.²¹⁵ Government security authorities have been accused of abusing, and seeking to extort money from, a Coptic Christian who had rescued his daughter from her Muslim husband, who had held her against her will.²¹⁶ An Islamic sect opposed to western education killed 12 Christians in the state of Borno. Over 20 churches were also burned during the attacks.²¹⁷ **Sudan:** A number of Christians were kidnapped and at least seven were crucified by soldiers of the LRA, an Islamic group influenced by occult beliefs.²¹⁸ **Uganda:** About 40 Muslim extremists armed with machetes and clubs attacked a congregation during worship on 1st November 2009. One worshipper was left with several injuries and the building was badly damaged. Many Christians in the area now live in fear of future attacks.²¹⁹

Uzbekistan: It is virtually impossible to register a religious community in Uzbekistan and, in the north west of the country, all Protestant activity is illegal,²²⁰ especially the Baptist Church.²²¹ Even registered churches can face a great deal of opposition. Recently, the Pastor and other members of a Protestant Church were imprisoned and charged with holding unauthorised religious meetings. Police later destroyed religious literature confiscated in the raid.²²² **Iran:** Christians are always under surveillance. Two women converts to Christianity were arrested in March 2009, though not formally charged. They were told during a court hearing in August that their crime had been converting to Christianity.²²³ They were later charged with anti-state activity, propagating the Christian faith and apostasy. The charge of anti-state activity was later dropped and the women have since been released on bail after international pressure, but still face charges of proselytising and apostasy for leaving Islam.²²⁴ Iran is considering introducing a law forbidding Muslims from changing their faith on pain of death for men and life imprisonment for women.²²⁵ The leading pastor in the largest Christian community in northern Iran was arrested for protesting against a local authority ruling that Christian children should be forced to study the Koran. At the same time, the General Assemblies of God have been told that they face being totally closed down, unless they stop their Friday evening meetings.²²⁶ In May 2009, it was reported that a Christian couple received a suspended sentence for having spoken about Christ to their friends. Another young Christian man was arrested and suspended by his wrist and had his feet beaten.²²⁷ During the recent presidential elections, the government interrupted the broadcasting of several Christian television channels.²²⁸ **Iraq:** Three Christians were

murdered in Kirkuk in April 2009. The deaths took place during intense hostility between Christians and militant Islamists who are trying to “cleanse” the country of the defiling presence of Christians. The Christian population of Iraq has dropped from 1,500,000 in 1990 to 400,000 today.²²⁹ **Middle East:** Four Palestinian Christians lost their lives from a terrorist car bomb near a church; fifteen other professing Christians were also wounded.²³⁰

China: The government revoked the licences of 50 lawyers in Beijing and thereby effectively closed several legal centres which sought to represent persecuted house Churches in China.²³¹ A Chinese pastor was arrested and threatened with death after performing a baptismal service last April.²³² In July 2009, a Christian youth camp was raided and a large amount of material was confiscated. It is claimed that some of those at the camp were not only interrogated, but also threatened and beaten.²³³ A Bible School was also raided on 16th July and its founder, along with about 11 students, were taken into custody. They were all later released with the warning to go home and not to return to the Bible School.²³⁴ The Chinese government demolished a church building in Shanxi province and placed its security forces on the alert for possible civil unrest. During the demolition of the Church, 400 uniformed police and civilians used shovels, batons, bricks and iron hooks to beat church members. Over 100 Christians were hurt, some seriously.²³⁵ A court has sentenced five leaders of the underground Church to prison for up to seven years. These are some of the hardest sentences passed in recent years against those Christian groups that refuse to apply for registration with the government’s Religious Affairs Bureau.²³⁶ The Chinese authorities claim that Christians are only free to worship in state-controlled churches²³⁷ and it is forbidden for those under 18 years of age to believe in Christianity. Though there is evidence of great zeal among many Chinese Christians, yet the Church in China faces several challenges such as the need of better Theological Training.²³⁸ **Indonesia:** There are growing concerns in Indonesia that recent bills and legislation are preparing the ground for the introduction of Islamic Sharia Law. There are indications that many of the new laws are leading to open discrimination against Christians.²³⁹ **Laos:** Police in the Borikhamxay province are reported to have destroyed a church building on 19th March 2009. The Church was destroyed after 40 Christian families refused to be relocated to a different area.²⁴⁰ **Vietnam:** Christian services in Hung Yen Province were interrupted by police who beat worshippers, including women and children, before arresting the pastor and an elder. Both pastor and elder were beaten while in custody.²⁴¹ **Nepal:** A native missionary was freed from prison after serving 9 years of a 20-year sentence, after being falsely accused of murder. The Nepali Supreme Court upheld an appeal. It is believed that an anti-Christian extremist group framed him for murder, even though the dead man’s wife testified of his innocence. It is common for churches and Christians to be attacked by Hindu extremists.²⁴² **North Korea:** It is claimed that North Korea has publicly executed a Christian woman for distributing Bibles and

spying. Her husband and three children were sent to a political prison camp. It is believed that tens of thousands of professing Christians are currently suffering in state Gulags.²⁴³

A suggested remedy? Dr. Muhammad Al-Hussaini, founder of the “Scripture Reasoning” and lecturer in Islamic Studies at Leo Beck Rabbinical College, blamed the church hierarchy of the UK for the persecution of Christians around the world. He stated that the Church in Britain showed a “simply don’t care” attitude and that their protests were often no more than a “whimper”. He went on to say that, “If you truly wish to convince me, as a Muslim, that you care about more than your chocolate-box parish churches, then care more about persecuted Christian minorities than you do about your village picnics and your C.U. barbecues”.²⁴⁴

ANTI-SEMITISM

Richard Williamson, a senior bishop of the Lefebvrist Society of St. Pius X, has endorsed the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a slanderous anti-semitic book that claims that the Jews are seeking world domination through economic manipulation, control of the media and creating religious conflict. Though the society is a breakaway group from Roman Catholicism, the current pope has extended an olive branch to them.²⁴⁵ *The Times* reported in June 2009, that Chief Rabbi Sacks was concerned over the rise of anti-Semitism in Britain. He referred to how the Millennium bug and the events of 9/11 had both been blamed on the Jews. He went on to comment that a recent anti-globalisation rally had ended in a diatribe against Israel and the Jews. He noted that the number of synagogue and cemetery desecrations and personal attacks on Jews had also risen.²⁴⁶ The World Council of Churches’ central committee recently renewed its attack on Israel, particularly its settlements in occupied areas, and has called for an international boycott of settlement products and services.²⁴⁷

ENTERTAINMENT AND ARTS

An exhibition in the Gallery of Modern Art, entitled *Made in God’s Image*, gave the opportunity for visitors, who felt excluded from the Bible because of their sexuality, to write themselves into the Bible by adding comments to it. This resulted in a great number of obscene comments being added. The exhibition also included a video in which a Bible was ripped up and photos depicting scenes from the Bible corrupted with a sodomite slant.²⁴⁸ Aaqil Ahmed, a Muslim, was appointed Head of Religion and Ethics at the BBC in May 2009. Fears were raised that this was just another step towards the Islamification of the United Kingdom.²⁴⁹ On Thursday 21st May 2009, the BBC broadcasted the installation of Vincent Nichols as Archbishop of Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral in London. The celebration of the Mass was shown, including prayers for the dead. There was a prayer to the late Basil Hume asking for him to petition on behalf of the new Archbishop.²⁵⁰ A

large Christian protest took place in Glasgow in opposition to a blasphemous play being shown at the Tron Theatre, entitled *Jesus, Queen of Heaven*. The play was performed as part of the “Glasgay” arts festival in celebration of Scotland’s homosexual, bisexual and transsexual culture.²⁵¹

Since the 1950s, there has been a growing use of Religious and Theological themes in science fiction films and television – such films as *The Matrix*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* with programmes like *Star Trek* and *Apparitions*. One of the most recent programmes to draw interest from its Religious and Theological References was *Battlestar Galatica*. There are clear references to Mormonism and Roman Catholicism, with one of the main themes being a struggle between the show’s characters as to the respective merits of polytheism and monotheism. There were also general references to original sin, resurrection, reincarnation, angels and redemption. There are further covert references to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Moses, Christian Gnosticism, the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees as well as the retelling of Biblical events and some of the main characters taking the names of Biblical characters. So popular was the show that it spawned a number of Internet sites and books explaining the Theological concepts being covered.²⁵²

POLITICS

Gordon Brown has intimated his desire to abolish the 309-year-old law that prohibits heirs to the throne marrying Roman Catholics.²⁵³

The Christian Party entered into an agreement with the Christian People’s Alliance before the European Elections in 2009. **The Christian People’s Alliance** is joined to the **European Christian Democrats**, the main Roman Catholic Party in the EU. The two parties agreed to run joint candidates under the Christian Party banner, which meant making a compromise over their views of the EU. Traditionally, the Christian Party has been for withdrawal and the Christian People’s Alliance for Britain in the EU.²⁵⁴

David Cameron, the leader of the British Conservative Party, has said that he has faith in God and that the Churches, such as the Church of England, “play a very important role in society”. Yet Mr. Cameron claims that he does not believe that he has a “direct line” to God and that he does not pray to God for guidance and, indeed, that his faith “grows hotter and colder by moments”. He believes that it possible to live a good life without personal faith, but that the teachings of Jesus, as well as those of other religions, are “a good guide to help us through”.²⁵⁵

Protestant Christians in the Netherlands have formed a campaign group called **The National Foundation of the Preservation of the Political Reformed Principles**, to object to the emblem of the European Union being placed on car registration plates, as it conflicts with their religious convictions. They hold that the 12 golden stars on a blue background symbolises the veneration of Mary by the Roman Catholic Church. Historically, the date on which the Council of Europe adopted the flag on 8th December 1955 was

the Roman Catholic Feast of the “Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary”.²⁵⁶

SOME RELIGIOUS STATISTICS

Britain: In a recent survey, about 50% of the British population admitted to fearing death. 20% are afraid of death and how they might die; a further 30% claimed that they did not fear death as such, but how they might die and 25% claimed to fear neither death itself nor how they might die.²⁵⁷ Another poll by *Mori/Telegraph* found that 70% of us believe in the existence of the human soul and 53% in life after death, whereas 39% believe in ghosts (up from 10% in 1950), 22% in astrology (up from 7% in 1950).²⁵⁸ A poll, by *ComRes/Telegraph*, found that 79% of Muslims and 70% of Hindus believed that Britain should be guided by Christian values, whereas only 70% of Christians did.²⁵⁹ A poll by *ComRes/Guardian* found that 51% of the population do not believe that evolution is enough to explain the complexity of life on Earth and about 33% agreed that “God created the world some time in the past 10,000 years”.²⁶⁰ A poll by *Theos/Guardian* found that 44% of people in the east of England believe that the theory of evolution makes God obsolete, the highest of any region.²⁶¹ A further survey by *IpsosMori/Times* found that one in five Londoners had never heard of Charles Darwin.²⁶²

America: A survey carried out in November 2008, discovered that 60% of American Christians do not believe that Satan is a real being or that the Holy Spirit is a “living entity”, but a symbol of God’s presence. At the same time, the majority of Christians surveyed believed that a person can be under the influence of spiritual forces, such as evil spirits or demons, and yet retain the personal choice whether or not to do good or evil. The survey also found that 22% of Christians surveyed believed that Jesus sinned when He lived on earth.²⁶³ In a further survey, it is claimed that people in the United States are increasingly mixing religious practices from different traditions, including New Age beliefs. 24% are said to believe in reincarnation; 23% believe in Yoga, “not just as exercise but as a spiritual practice”; 26% believe that mountains, trees and crystals contain spiritual energy and 25% believe in astrology. About 33% believe that they have felt in touch with someone that has died, while 20% have felt the presence of a ghost, with 15% having consulted a fortune-teller or psychic.²⁶⁴

OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

In reading the above report, we cannot fail but to agree with the Psalmist when he said, “the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty” (Psalm 74:20). Yet the Psalmist could also say “have respect unto the covenant”. Why? Because even though the day may be dark, yet our God remains a Covenant making and keeping God and He has promised in the Covenant of Grace that Christ’s kingdom will one day be established over the

whole earth. The Millennial day will dawn and the powers of darkness that cover the earth will be swept away in the glory of Christ's spiritual coming. "The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us" (Psalm 115:12).

REPORT ON MORALS

It is becoming increasingly clear that Biblical absolutes have largely disappeared from our society in Britain today. We have created a new subjective morality which disregards the evil of sin – a morality which focuses on supposed compassion and tolerance while the concepts of punishment and justice have become more alien.

Such teaching begins at an early stage in life: first of all in the home and then in the classroom. Pupils must seldom be allowed to fail. The child's self-esteem is essential: not necessarily his knowledge of the subject. Negotiation is the issue, not obedience, as if the teacher (and at home the parent) and child were on an equal footing. Little wonder, in this climate, wayward children feel they have nothing to fear from adults. A recent teachers' union poll showed 97% of primary school teachers have disruptive pupils in their classroom and 74% of them claimed to have experienced real problems with actual physical aggression from their young charges.

As the child grows up to adulthood, we have increasing anarchy. There is more violent crime and an accelerating breakdown of the traditional family, leading to greater dysfunctionality, as sin abounds. This so-called compassion and tolerance turn out to be bitter pills as the reluctance to punish evil-doers allows them to continue intimidating their victims with little fear of the consequences.

VIOLENCE AND THEFT

The lack of Christian moral standards has led to a great increase in violence in our society generally and also within the home.

In Scotland alone, domestic abuse figures recorded from 2000 to 2007 have risen from 35,000 to 49,000. In London, knife crime has increased by 120% over the 5-year period leading up to 2008: the majority of victims being teenagers – some dying from their wounds.

One Home Office report quoted in *The Guardian* claims that across the country there has been a 25% surge in personal thefts and 4% increase in burglaries over the first quarter of 2009. Another news report stated that shoplifting has increased by 20% over 2009, making Britain first in Europe in the "shoplifting league". The Home Office minister has acknowledged rather lamely, "we are facing some new challenges", and added that they are working closely with police, and other agencies to help the victims. Of course, Members of Parliament themselves have, in the past year, come under extreme criticism due to inflated expenses claims made by many of them.

Sadly little mention is made of turning in repentance to God, as a nation or as individuals, to seek His mercy in our great need as sinners. Unemployment and the recession have been blamed for much of this crime but the truth is that the malaise is more spiritual than economic.

No sphere of life is exempt from violence. A British Transport Police report recently showed that they dealt with almost 7,000 serious incidents on Scotland's railway network in 2008/09: many of which were connected to drug taking and alcohol abuse.

The media have reported in depth on the appalling death of Baby Peter who was found dead in his cot with a broken back, fractured ribs, and 56 other wounds – one of the worst child abuse cases Britain has ever seen. His mother apparently boasted of spending days in a vodka fog, watching pornographic films with her boyfriend who was, as one newspaper claimed, a “sadistic Nazi-obsessed thug”. He was allowed to torture her defenceless little boy mercilessly. The disturbing picture that later unfolded showed that the mother herself had been seriously abused when young.

Dreadful details of the criminal activity of two pre-teenage boys from Doncaster emerged in January 2010. Completely neglected by their parents, they went on the rampage, torturing other young children and terrorising those who crossed their paths. When not engaged in brutal acts their lives were spent watching violent films, smoking cannabis and drinking alcohol. Ultimately they were caught after a particularly depraved and vicious attack on two children and then sentenced. However, newspaper reports indicate that possibly a softly, softly approach will be used by the authorities, as was the case with Jamie Bulger's killers some years ago.

“Can a woman forget her sucking child?” (Isaiah 49:15). How awful that “they may do”. How fearful sin is, and, solemnly, these seeds are in our own deceitful and desperately wicked hearts. The gospel is the only remedy.

Scotland, so highly favoured in the past, has now become a nation noted for its horrific murder toll. One study showed that Scots were twice as likely to commit homicide or kill themselves as people elsewhere in Britain. Another source said that in Scotland the use of knives accounts for 50% of the murders, while, again, alcohol and drugs feature as highly significant factors.

ABORTION

The appalling murder of the defenceless unborn in the womb is crying out for God's judgment on our land. Since the infamous Abortion Act was implemented in 1968 (as was noted in last year's *Morals Report*), more than 7 million unborn children have been killed in the United Kingdom. The figure for England and Wales in 2007 was 205,598 – 1,171 of these being performed on girls under 14 years of age.

In Scotland there were 13,817 babies aborted in 2007, which is an all-time high. Over 3,000 of those were performed on teenagers, one-third being repeat abortions. One newspaper report highlights the scale of the tragedy. It states

that in the last nine years nearly 3,000 abortions have been carried out on girls under the age of 16, some on those as young as 12 years old.

The Scottish Executive does show concern at these figures but it seems oblivious to the seriousness of the sin behind them. More education is the answer according to Health Minister, Shona Robison, who says, "Education has a key role to play which is why we are working with parents, teachers and NHS Scotland to provide additional support around relationships and sexual health". Yet there has never been more sex education in schools. One of the latest plans is to pilot sexual health clinics in some secondary schools, offering students free condoms, pregnancy tests and checks for sexually transmitted diseases.

Teenage girls can now get the contraceptive pill without a prescription as long as they consult with a pharmacist. This is ostensibly to avoid the embarrassment of going to a doctor. Pharmacists are also put under pressure to dispense the "morning after pill". At present they have freedom of conscience not to do so but a Government quango is seeking to deprive them of that right. The stark fact is that the UK teenage pregnancy rate still remains the highest in Western Europe.

Phyllis Bowman of "Right to Life" says, "The young have been deliberately sexualized in a culture which sneers at the idea of telling teenagers that they should not have sex". The Conservative MP Julian Brazier wisely states, "This is a further sickening indicator of a society that has broken down and lost its moral compass".

Behind the statistics lie many real broken women who are guilty of killing their own unborn children. The guilt also lies with doctors and other professionals, and on the whole nation which has legislated for this evil. The trauma afterwards has been almost unbearable for some. One woman said that she felt she could never be forgiven. Blessed be God, even this sin can be blotted out in the blood of the Lamb but it leaves desperate scars which are barely acknowledged by our supposedly caring, compassionate society.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Living in this sin is now considered to be an acceptable alternative lifestyle in our society.

The "Christian Gay and Lesbian Society", itself a blasphemous anomaly, advocates love as the only criterion in a relationship. The solemn warnings given against sodomy in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis and in Paul's Epistle to the Romans are passed over as irrelevant.

At its last General Assembly, after much debate, the Church of Scotland deferred a decision regarding the ordination of homosexual ministers for two years but this is seen by many as disingenuous as it still allowed the appointment of the controversial Rev. Scott Rennie as the pastor of Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen. He is the Kirk's first openly homosexual minister living with a male partner and last November was named Hero of the Year by Stonewall, the homosexual lobby group.

In protest against the Assembly's action a group called "The Fellowship of Confessing Churches" has been formed inside the Kirk. Their laudable aim is to stand up for biblical principles against this and other evil practices. However, at least one minister, Rev. T. MacKinnon, has felt he must resign his charge saying, in the *Daily Mail* on 25th July 2009, "I believe that ministers now will not be subject to discipline from the Church because if that which is called a sin in the Bible is allowed then anything goes. If the Bible does not have authority, we do not have the authority to preach." We hope that many more will join him.

Last August the Quakers sanctioned same sex "marriages". At present such "marriages" are illegal in the UK although, of course, our government allows homosexual couples to register their civil partnerships. A spokesman for the Quakers says that "homosexual couples who consider themselves married believe this is as much a testimony of divine grace as heterosexual marriage". How tragic that those who profess to be religious – even Christian – should use such biblical words as "grace" in such an evil context!

The Church of England, too, accepts people who have homosexual relationships and allows its clergy to register their civil partnerships. This, and other issues, has brought the Anglican community to a point of crisis, as there is within it a strong conservative group who want to adhere to the old paths. It was heartening to hear the Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Michael Nazer Ali, saying: "Homosexuals should repent and be changed."

The "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender Network" (LGBTN) are campaigning vehemently to have the law changed in Scotland to allow marriage on the same terms as heterosexuals, including holding weddings in churches. They want an amendment to the Marriage Scotland Act 1977 "to allow two persons of the same sex to register a civil *and religious* marriage". This does happen in some other countries, for example, Canada, but as yet is not recognised under UK law. Truly if the LGBTN are successful in their aims it will mean greater darkness for our land.

It is very sad to see Sarah Brown, the Prime Minister's wife, identifying herself with the homosexual movement. According to the *Daily Mail* in June 2009 she took part in a "Gay Pride March". "Sarah wanted to show her continued solidarity to the gay community by taking part," said a Downing Street spokesman, so giving the Government's tacit approval of her participation. Gordon Brown has also pledged increasing support to LGBTN candidates in the next General Election, while John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, wants Parliament to host civil partnership ceremonies for homosexuals.

Refusing to register same sex civil partnerships has caused great distress to some employees of Islington Council. Theresa Davis, a registrar and professing Christian, refused to preside over homosexual marriages and ended up on sick leave through stress. On her return she was told to accept demotion or dismissal. She believes that she is being discriminated against on the grounds of her religious beliefs and took her case to a tribunal stating:

“Doctors can opt out of performing abortions on conscience grounds so why can’t I opt out of civil partnerships?” Another Islington employee, Lillian Ladele, in a similar situation, has recently lost her case for religious discrimination at the Court of Appeal.

Even the Isle of Lewis, which had such a strong Christian heritage, saw a “homosexual couple” register a civil partnership last July. The Western Isles Council has said that as their registrars did not carry out ceremonies, only legal registration would be available. Reports suggest that the Council will continue to uphold its discretionary right to ban ceremonies for same sex couples. However, we wonder how long it will be able to maintain this stand. A spokesman for Scotland Equality Network states that the Sexual Orientation Regulations will soon force Councils to conduct such ceremonies.

One newspaper reporter states that this, together with the new Lord’s Day ferry crossing from Ullapool to Stornoway, “is running roughshod over the sensitivities of one part of the British Isles that still takes its Christianity seriously”. Sadly again tolerance of those holding Christian values is not a strong point with those who insist on going down this evil path.

The Human Fertilization and Embryology Act 2008 allows homosexual and lesbian couples who adopt or have surrogate children to apply for parental orders. Both names can be on the birth certificate as parents. Labour MP Geraldine Smith rightly says, “to have a birth certificate with two mothers and no father is just madness”. It is indeed madness, but worse than that, it is contrary to God’s Holy Word.

ALCOHOLISM AND ALCOHOL ABUSE

Alcohol related deaths have increased dramatically over the past ten years. Official figures vary but the president of the Royal College of Physicians, Professor Ian Gilmore, told MPs at a special Committee Meeting that he believed that up to 40,000 people a year die from a great variety of alcohol induced diseases, including cancer, high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks. Blame is placed on supermarkets, which sell cheap alcohol, as well as on public houses.

Sir Liam Donaldson, the Chief Medical Officer, warned, “cheap alcohol is killing us as never before”, and called for minimum pricing. Another professional, Martin Plant, Professor of Addiction Studies says: “Supermarkets are displaying the morality of the crack dealer,” adding “they have been told for several years that what they are doing is completely irresponsible.” He points out too that pubs are particularly targeting young women, making offers such as, “free drinks tonight for women”, so drawing them further into the dark addiction zone.

As far as the recent 24 hour drinking laws are concerned, far from decreasing the problems previously associated with the peak times, it only pushes them further into the night. The Chief Constable of Northumberland states that more problems now occur at 3, 4 and 5 o’clock in the morning: “Every force with a big town centre,” he says, “is experiencing the same

problem.” This is backed up by the Deputy Chief Constable of the British Transport Police who argues that, though the original 11 p.m. closing time problem is not now so marked, yet large numbers of officers have to be deployed throughout the night to deal with extremely violent incidents, so leaving fewer resources for normal policing in the daytime.

In Scotland the figures become even starker. Dr. Peter Terry, chairman of the BMA in Scotland, claims that alcohol is linked to one in twenty deaths and says: “Every 3 hours someone dies of an alcohol related condition.” He states: “Scotland is awash with alcohol and the consequences are crippling the Health Service.”

A report commissioned by the Scottish Association of Alcohol and Drugs Action Team (SAADAT) shows the extent to which the nation is addicted to alcohol. Apparently more than one-third of Scottish men and about a quarter of Scottish women are drinking at potentially harmful levels, while a further 5% are totally dependent on alcohol.

In all these statistics the fact that drunkenness is a sin condemned in God’s Word is rarely acknowledged. However, while we condemn the sin we must have compassion on the sinner and realize that some people have more addictive personalities than others. Alcoholics use alcohol to mask pain which may come from different sources. There is great need for God’s grace and love to be ministered to the drunkard as well as to other addicts.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

The debate on assisted suicide has raged in the past year. Newspapers frequently report on poor souls who travel to the “Dignitas Clinic” in Switzerland to end their precious lives. This clinic is anything but dignified, as one former employee has pointed out. She states that it is “just a way to make a lot of money out of death and the fear of death”. Ludwig Minelli, the lawyer who founded the clinic, charges from 3,000 euros to 7,000 euros per person to end a life, yet claims it is non profit making.

Up to July 2009, 115 Britons have travelled to Switzerland on their last earthly journey, many suffering from treatable conditions. People’s fears are being manipulated when they feel depressed and afraid of the pain they may have to endure as their illnesses progress; however, they are often not given a true picture of the very good palliative care that is available to people with terminal conditions.

Sir Edward and Lady Joan Downs were a high profile couple who committed suicide at Dignitas. Lady Downs had been suffering from terminal cancer but her 85-year-old husband was well; however, he too was assisted to take his life at the same time and be ushered into the great eternity.

Swiss law requires two doctors to agree to the procedure being carried out but it appears that this is seldom adhered to. The former employee mentioned above says that: “People are dead just four hours after arriving at the airport. . . . It is like a conveyor belt.” This “clinic” is a sinister place ruled by the devil who is a murderer from the beginning and whose great aim is to hasten souls

on to Hell. It is heartening that in June 2009 the Swiss Parliament was alerted to consider tighter restrictions on who could access its assisted suicide clinics and there may be some moves now to restrict Dignitas's activities. We can only hope and pray that it will be closed down altogether.

In Britain a relentless campaign to legalise assisted suicide is being waged by groups such as "Dignity in Dying". They have played on the fears of vulnerable people such as Debbie Purdy, an MS sufferer, who is apparently terrified of unbearable pain and choking to death in spite of reassurances by experts in palliative care that with the right treatment there is no reason why this should happen.

"Dignity in Dying" is behind her case which she brought to the House of Lords in July 2009, when the Law Lords ruled that she had a right to know whether her husband would be prosecuted if he helped her to end her life in a euthanasia clinic. This has resulted in the guidelines for England and Wales being watered down, stating that there will now only be the prosecution of a family member assisting in a suicide, if police can prove that they stood to gain from the death. No relatives have, as yet, been prosecuted for giving such assistance and, under the new guidelines, it is unlikely any will be.

The *Evangelical Times* has quoted Andrea Williams, the executive director of the Christian Legal Centre, as saying: "The guidelines published today will cause great harm to individuals and society. We are concerned that the system will be open to abuse and to a creeping, ever widening application, which has been observed in previous cases in our own legal history where laws have been injudiciously liberalised." Though the guidelines apply only to England and Wales we fear that this ruling will soon have an adverse influence north of the border.

The "fear" culture which has been created expressed itself recently in a popular poll showing that 74% wanted doctors to be allowed to help terminally ill patients to end their lives and 60% wanted to be able to help the terminally ill to commit suicide without fear of prosecution.

An attempt by Lord Falconer to actually change the law so that no one helping another to travel to a place overseas to end their lives would face prosecution was defeated by 194 to 141 votes. It was also heartening to hear of the disabled Peer, Baroness Campbell, a Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, making a moving appeal, warning that many vulnerable patients would be at risk if the law was changed. She spoke powerfully against Lord Falconer saying, "those who know what it's like to live with a terminal condition are fearful the tide is already turned against us". Assisted dying, she said, is to "abandon hope and ignore the majority of disabled and terminally ill people". Vince Cable, a prominent senior Liberal Democrat spokesman, has also recently stated his opposition to legalising assisted suicide.

The law of God is there (as the law of the land should be) to protect the weak and vulnerable. This protection would be taken away if the law was further changed by godless legislators. Patients may come under subtle

pressure from relatives, for financial or other ends, to terminate their lives. Very sick people may then feel constrained to commit suicide when they could have received support and better care and discover a purpose in living.

Sarah Ezekiel is a motor-neurone disease sufferer, who was depressed and wanted to die, “to be put down as an animal”, as she put it. Now she has changed her mind and finds a purpose in life. She cannot move and can only communicate through a computer yet, with better care, she has come out of depression and sees herself as living a productive life.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has been reported as being sympathetic to the assisted suicide “cause” and is proposing to enter into talks with the MSP Margo MacDonald on the assisted suicide debate. Margo Macdonald, a Parkinson’s sufferer, is well known for her vigorous campaign to change the law on assisted suicide and is introducing “The End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill”, to be voted on by the Scottish Parliament in the autumn of 2010.

The Christian Institute has reported great disquiet amongst many of the individual RCN members at this change of direction. Lady Emmerton, a Fellow of the RCN, has expressed her outrage at the seismic shift in policy that now nurses could be encouraged to, “Engage in dialogue with their patients on assisted suicide”. She believes that “the majority of the members remain opposed to helping their patients kill themselves and are more concerned about improving their health care”. However, an article in one national newspaper would indicate that many nurses put the “individual’s rights to die” above the over-riding duty to care for the vulnerable to help them cope with their lives.

One source (speaking of Dignitas but expressing sentiments which are applicable to the whole debate), has summed it up by saying: “Stop talking about helping someone to die. People don’t go to Dignitas to die but to be killed – a great difference. Killing can never be a therapeutic act.”

EUTHANASIA

Assisted suicide and euthanasia are inextricably connected. Tony Bland, lying in hospital in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS), was the first patient in legal history to die through deliberate withdrawal of food and water intended to bring about his death. Since the Tony Bland case in 1993 there have been around 36 instances where the courts have legitimised the withdrawal of feeding and hydration tubes from people in Persistent Vegetative States. Since then the British Medical Association (BMA) have extended this category to serious non PVS cases such as dementia and stroke patients. Incongruously the BMA believe that there is no need to get court sanctions for such patients if their medical consultants and next of kin feel that it is in their best interests for such a person to be dead.

One such stroke patient, though conscious and showing evident signs of recovery, was left to die by withdrawal of feeding and hydration. Because of her condition she was unable to convey her wishes, though her previous Christian view of life was clearly against voluntary and involuntary euthanasia. It is to be feared that other patients in our hospitals are being put to death prematurely and the law does not protect them. Again language is being manipulated to hide the true intent. Sentiments are expressed such as, it is “kinder”, more “compassionate” to put them out of their suffering rather than live the rest of their days with a quality of life that someone subjectively has decided is inferior.

Article 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998 states that “Everyone’s right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally.” Those words would seem to indicate protection for all. However, the authorities cleverly seek to get round this by stating that withdrawal of food and fluids is an “omission” not an “act”.

The Liverpool Care Pathway has been set up by the Marie Curie Hospice Liverpool to help terminally ill patients at the end of their lives. Withdrawal of food and fluids and administration of strong sedatives may be appropriate in the very last stages of life when difficult sensitive decisions have to be made; however, this model is now being advocated across the community. A senior geriatrician, Dr. Adrian Treloar, said tellingly: “The eligibility criteria do not ensure that only people who are about to die are allowed on the Pathway. For instance patients with dementia, for whom dying can take years, and those who are bed bound and unable to swallow may be eligible.” Euthanasia can come in by the back door for those on this Pathway. Even Dr. Helga Kuhse, a proponent of euthanasia, has admitted that once food and hydration are allowed to be withdrawn, direct killing by lethal injection would soon follow.

Baroness Campbell, mentioned previously, suffers from spinal muscular atrophy, a degenerative disease that means she is immobile without help. When she contracted a serious chest infection and lost consciousness, her physician decided it would be kinder not to resuscitate her and “allow her to die”. It was only because her husband who, of course, knew her wishes, would not consent to it, that her life was spared. If her next of kin had agreed with the doctor, no-one would have treated her and she would inevitably have died.

Many are deeply concerned that we are on a slippery slope leading all the way from assisted suicide to euthanasia by lethal injection. In spite of all the reassuring rhetoric, the assisted suicide and pro-euthanasia lobby’s approach is brutal and barbaric and leaves all kinds of vulnerable people unprotected from their “compassionate murderers”.

CONCLUSION

Scripture warns us that “in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). We are seeing the fulfilment of these words in our own day. “Iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold” (Matthew 24:12).

God's people themselves are not immune to this corrupt atmosphere. They still have a principle of sin within them, as the Apostle Paul makes so clear in Romans 7:24. "The body of this death" is their burden every day, yet God's grace is sufficient for them and it is sufficient too for a lost world, if they will but seek salvation . . . even in perilous times. Christ came to seek and to save lost sinners and He is the same yesterday and today and forever – the compassionate Saviour.

We are to continue to pray to God to pour out His Holy Spirit upon us and to give us repentance: as individuals, as churches, and as nations.

NOTES TO THE RELIGION AND MORALS COMMITTEE'S REPORT

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