

VII. REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS, RELIGION & MORALS

Introduction

Last year's Report dealt with the Establishment Principle and its relevance to the cause of Christ. We noted that although church and state are separate institutions yet being divine institutions they are to co-operate with each other on behalf of the kingdom of God. We saw how this principle provides the church with a rationale for bearing witness to government.

In this year's Report we focus on some of the moral, political and ecclesiastical issues which have attracted the Committee's interest in one way or another over the past year. Some of these issues have featured in previous reports and continue to be of relevance. Others have increased in prominence during the year and have commanded our attention. The rest have simply arisen and we think they deserve some comment. Although there is a great variety to the issues covered in our Report the approach we take to them all is the same and the only one we believe is appropriate for us: we seek to examine them in the light of God's Word and to assess the consequences for church and state.

We acknowledge that the issues we have chosen to concentrate on are not necessarily the ones which have received the most notice on the part of government or the church at large but it is our conviction that they are all worthy of our consideration nonetheless. Some of them will be of increasing significance as time goes on. It is good to be informed about these things and to be kept up to date so that we may pray intelligently and speak up appropriately and we trust that what we have to say will be helpful in this regard.

We recognise that the three types of issue which we have identified above, namely moral, political and ecclesiastical, are not mutually exclusive; they often overlap and are closely intertwined as we shall see. The moral issues we reflect upon have been taken up by Parliament and have exercised the Church. The political and ecclesiastical issues we refer to have a moral dimension as do all things ultimately and the political issues have a bearing upon the church and the ecclesiastical issues upon the state to some extent.

As reformed and presbyterian Christians, these links do not surprise us. In our worldview God is at the centre and circumference of everything as Creator, Preserver and Governor, glorifying Himself in all that comes to pass according to His eternal purpose. His supreme goal is the exaltation of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ in our nature as the Mediator and Saviour of a redeemed, sanctified and glorified people and to that end Christ has been appointed "King of nations" (Rev. 15:3 mg) and "head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:22).

Our brief survey of the state of things in our land is in many ways discouraging as it demonstrates the declining influence of biblical, Protestant Christianity in our midst. However much our politicians and other ruling elites may want to hide from it, the fact is that our society's problems are largely explained by the decay of spiritual life and godliness which has occurred over recent decades. However we must believe, and do believe, that the Lord continues to be sovereign over the affairs of men, that His covenant with His chosen One remains in place and that His power to change things for the better is undiminished.

1. Moral Issues

There are three issues of a moral kind which have engaged the Committee's interest, either directly or indirectly, over the past year.

i. Same-sex-marriage

The issue of so-called 'same-sex-marriage' has moved on significantly during the past year. On 25th July 2012 the Scottish Government announced that it would legislate to allow same-sex-marriage. This decision followed its consultation on *The Registration of Civil Partnerships and Same-Sex-Marriage* which was conducted from 2nd September to 9th December 2011. On 12th December 2012 the Government issued a consultation on its draft *Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill* which closed on 20th March 2013 and an analysis of the responses is due to be published later this year, with the Bill expected to be introduced into Parliament before the end of the year.

There have been parallel developments in the UK Parliament with a *Marriage (Same-Sex-Couples) Bill* to legalise same-sex-marriage in England and Wales: this Bill received its Second Reading on 5th February this year. It was noteworthy, and indeed encouraging, that a majority of MPs belonging to the Conservatives, the senior party in the Coalition Government, either voted against the Bill or abstained.

It is sad indeed that the Scottish Government is going ahead with same-sex-marriage when the clear majority of those who responded to its first consultation expressed opposition to the whole idea. However we should not be surprised at what has happened. In her ministerial foreword to the initial consultation Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister, stated on behalf of the Scottish Government: "We tend towards the view that...same-sex-marriage should be introduced so that same sex couples have the option of getting married if that is how they wish to demonstrate their commitment to each other." It was the Government's intention all along.

It is fairly obvious that, despite some superficial differences, the core agenda of the administrations both north and south of the border is one and the same. In common with many other western governments, it involves the undermining and overturning of our Christian heritage. It seems that the Word of God must be replaced with the wisdom of man.

It is sadder still that such a thing as same-sex-marriage could ever be contemplated by government. It indicates how low we have sunk as a nation. There should not have been any consultation on the matter! It was not needed! The idea of same-sex-marriage goes against all instinct and tradition, let alone Scripture. Everyone knows that marriage is a union between two people of the opposite sex. Nature tells them that and so does their conscience. It is only in the last few years that another voice has been heard and it is not the voice of reason but of the father of lies (John 8:44).

Marriage is a very important institution, being a creation ordinance. It is one of the key building-blocks for a healthy and stable society. No doubt that is why the devil is attacking it from so many angles – promoting desires and attitudes which are detrimental to it, whether it be promiscuity, divorce or homosexuality. And he has many willing helpers in our governments and parliaments at Holyrood and Westminster.

It ought to be clear that the spread of homosexuality is harmful to any nation. It is notable that the propaganda of the same-sex-marriage lobby focuses almost entirely on the 'rights' of certain individuals and the need of 'equality' for all, however perverse the lifestyle followed. It seems that no other factor is allowed into the reckoning.

But there are other factors, and the Committee believe they raised an important one in their response to the Scottish Government's recent consultation. We said: "Very little consideration is given to the most vulnerable individuals involved, namely children. Does the government not know that the development of children can only be harmed if they are wilfully deprived of either a father or a mother? We have the distinct impression that their needs are being sacrificed in the pursuit of political correctness."

The saddest aspect of the whole matter however is that the Government is going ahead with same-sex-

marriage when the Bible declares it to be an abomination in God's sight. Homosexual unions are condemned by the seventh commandment of the moral law which says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). They were specifically forbidden in Israel: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Lev. 18:22). The New Testament repeats the prohibition when it says that "abusers of themselves with mankind" will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

It is our responsibility to state this truth. Governments must be confronted with the reality of what they are doing, whether they care to be told or not. Today regrettably they tend not to care. However the Scriptures are the reality, as one day we shall all find out.

One of the more bizarre aspects of the Bill is a proposal to establish 'belief' ceremonies as a third type of ceremony, alongside religious and civil, for getting married in Scotland. This is surely to demean what was once universally referred to as 'holy matrimony'. We believe that this is what the campaign for same-sex-marriage is really all about. It is an assertion of human autonomy – a full-blooded attempt to throw off divine restraints and to expunge the notion of God from our minds altogether.

We learn of this rebellious attitude in the second Psalm: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psa. 2:2,3). We also learn of our sovereign God's awesome response to this rebellion – and may our governments take note: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (vv. 4,5). How we should cease from our provocations of the Almighty!

The Committee responded to the Government's flippant proposal as follows: "We oppose the plan to establish 'belief' ceremonies to celebrate marriage as envisaged in the legislation. All belief is ultimately 'religious' in character. Those who opt for a civil ceremony believe that the God of the Bible does not matter: that is a religious belief. Secular humanists who want their own form of ceremony believe that the God of the Bible does not exist: that is also a religious belief. To allow for 'belief' ceremonies would open a Pandora's box of absurdity and evil. Will we see marriage ceremonies which celebrate a couple's shared belief that Elvis Presley is still alive? Or that UFOs are genuine? Or that leprechauns really exist? Will the Government be prescribing the Freemasons as authorised to solemnise marriage? Or witches' covens? Or the Church of Satan?"

The matter of freedom of speech and freedom of conscience on this issue, especially for teachers, is one which continues to give us cause for concern as a Committee, despite the assurances the Government has given. We made this statement in our submission:

"Teachers in Scottish schools should have the legal right to teach the following facts:

- 1) Since its origins humankind has been constituted biologically as male and female. It did not constitute itself in this way for it is so according to its very nature.
- 2) Throughout history every human authority has recognised human marriage as taking place between biological males and biological females.
- 3) It is only in the 21st century that human authorities have determined to contradict what is according to nature and history."

We then pointed out that Scotland is still a professedly Christian country and that according to Christian teaching based on the Bible 'marriage' between two males or two females is an impossibility and a perversion of a fundamental creation ordinance. Teachers in Scottish schools should have the legal right to state this. We also indicated our concerns as to precisely what rights parents who oppose homosexual unions will have to withdraw their children from classes where same-sex-marriage and civil partnerships are taught as 'normal'. We believe they should enjoy full rights to do this.

When we think about it, the issues involved in this legislation are enormous and momentous. The Lord requires us to make a stand against same-sex-marriage, for our own sakes and for the sake of those who come after us. While it is unspeakably sad that things have come to this in our beloved land, it is a joy and a privilege to identify ourselves with the Lord and His cause and especially so in a day of such declension. May God give us grace to do so.

ii. Abortion

While the issue of abortion has not occupied the Committee directly over the past year it has surfaced once again at Westminster and has been food for our thoughts: we feel burdened to take it up, lest it slip from our minds. It is a most frightening and solemn fact that since the passing of the infamous Abortion Act of 1967 nearly eight million babies have been killed in the womb in the United Kingdom. The figure is so monstrous and the implications so horrendous that we tend to be numbed by the sheer scale of this evil. Yet Scripture will not allow us to be indifferent or inactive for it gives us the command, "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction" (Prov. 31:8). Abortion is a shameful blot upon our nation and the reformed church and reformed Christians have been too silent.

Why does every human life have value? If we want to know the facts about our race we must set aside the speculations of "science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20) and turn to the Word of God. After creating all other forms of life over six days, God finally created man, uniquely in His own image and after His own likeness (Gen. 1:26,27). Since God is a Spirit, the resemblance which man has to God cannot belong to his body and must pertain to something else. What that something else is, we understand when we read how man was made: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

It is the possession of a soul which makes man so special, for it provides us with the capacity to know and enjoy God. Even after his fall into sin and the loss of the divine image man has a dignity which sets him apart from other creatures, and indeed above them (Gen. 1:28). By the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the divine image may be restored and the sinner blessed through the friendship and fellowship of his Maker for all eternity.

Much is made, by those who oppose the biblical account of man's beginning, of the supposed link between humans and apes. Scientists are fond of telling us that chimpanzees are our closest living relatives. They tell us that we share most of our genetic material with them and suggest that man is descended from them. The true explanation for the genetic similarity between apes and men is very different however: it is not that we have a common descent, but a common Designer.

The Word of God has something to say about life in the womb in particular. The Psalmist saw this period of his existence as part of his own life history, not as a stage prior to entering proper human life. "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret....Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psa. 139:13-16).

We are also told how God set apart Jeremiah while he was still in the womb: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee" (Jer. 1:5). We learn too that John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Ghost" from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15) and leaped for joy when Mary, pregnant with her child Jesus, visited his mother Elisabeth (Luke 1:41,44). With Scripture as our infallible guide the only safe position for us to take is that *human life begins at conception*.

It is sometimes pointed out that a child of less than 20 weeks is incapable of being born alive, yet scientific

research has shown how even early life in the womb is not a mere collection of cells or lump of tissue but possesses all the various features (in their embryonic form) which together constitute human life. If it is said that unborn life is not real life because it is wholly dependent upon, and cannot survive without, the mother, then there is an obvious response: a child which has actually entered the world requires parental or other adult support for many years, until ready to lead an independent existence.

Even if there were just the merest hint of a possibility that what is destroyed in abortion is a fellow human being, then the law of the land should forbid it. But we are not left in any doubt as we have seen. Therefore we believe that the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod. 20:13), applies as much to infant life in the womb as to adult life outside it. God has placed a garrison around every individual with the exception of the murderer whose life becomes forfeit because of his wicked action (Gen. 9:6). The society that breaches this safeguard does so at its peril.

The Abortion Act permitted abortions to be carried out up to 28 weeks in most cases and later in some, including right up to birth where there was a substantial risk that the child would be severely physically or mentally handicapped or the mother’s life was in danger. When the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act was introduced in 1990 the general limit was reduced to 24 weeks, on the basis of advances in medical technology, although at the same time restrictions were removed for late abortions in cases involving such things as “foetal abnormality” (a ground which has been used to abort babies with cleft palates and other treatable conditions). Approximately 90% of abortions are performed at 12 weeks or less but almost 2% occur after 20 weeks.

What is clear is that the vast majority of abortions are carried out for social reasons rather than medical with some women having multiple abortions during their lives. Figures show that in 2011 only 1.2% of abortions performed in the UK were on the grounds of foetal handicap and that abortions performed because of a risk to the mother’s life amounted to just 0.02% of the overall total. The total number of abortions in 2011 was over 200,000 or nearly 600 per day.

Under the Devolution Settlement in Scotland, abortion is effectively a matter reserved to the UK Parliament at Westminster. While there have been many Private Members’ Bills since 1967 seeking to change the abortion law by reducing the time limit or removing some of the grounds upon which abortions may be carried out, all of them have failed. The most recent attempt was on 31st October 2012 when a Westminster Hall debate (a brief adjournment debate which does not require the House of Commons to vote) on reducing the upper time limit for abortion from 24 weeks to 20 weeks took place, called by Conservative MP Nadine Dorries. However the Health Minister Anna Soubry indicated that the Government had no plans to change the law.

We are thankful that there are at least some politicians who have a conscience on this issue. The current abortion law is not only a scandal but also illogical and inconsistent. In the same hospital where doctors and nurses are doing their best to save a premature baby born at 24 weeks, others may be performing an abortion on a woman carrying a child at the same point of gestation. The one is viewed as having great worth, while the other is regarded as worthless: man can be very cruel in asserting his autonomy. In the end, lowering the time limit for abortion is not the answer: the deliberate ending of the life of a child in the womb is simply wrong and should be made illegal whatever the stage of development.

iii. Assisted Suicide

If abortion is the taking away of another person’s life, then suicide is the taking away of one’s own life. In last year’s report we referred to the fact that, having been re-elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 2011, Margo MacDonald had proposed an Assisted Suicide Bill to replace her End of Life Assistance Bill which was heavily defeated in a free vote in the Parliament in December 2010.

The declared purpose of the new proposal is “to enable a competent adult with a terminal illness or condition to request assistance to end their own life, and to decriminalise certain actions taken by others to provide such assistance.” This does not differ significantly from the proposal behind the previous Bill and the new Bill is also limited to assisted suicide and will not allow voluntary euthanasia. The difference between these two concepts is that in the first the individual personally performs the action which ends his life, albeit with the help of others, while in the second the individual requests another person to perform that action upon him. Practically, it could be the difference between injecting oneself with a lethal medication and receiving the same injection from someone else. This is obviously a rather fine line, and the truth is that neither alternative can absolve either party from their complicity in what we believe to be a sinful action.

Suicide is the ultimate act of human autonomy. Indeed this is the very language that Margo MacDonald uses in explaining the aim of her new Bill. “Autonomy of choice is the central tenet of my proposal. I believe that each of us has the same right to exercise choice and take responsibility for the manner of our death as we do with all other actions during our lifetime. I accept that such a decision is subjective, but I remain of the opinion that only the person concerned, assuming they have full capacity, has the right to decide whether their life has become intolerable.”

We indicated in last year’s report that the Committee were contributing to a consultation on Margo MacDonald’s proposal and we reproduce our contribution here for information and interest:

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill Sponsored by Margo MacDonald MSP

Response to Margo MacDonald’s Consultation by Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

Introduction

Your Foreword indicates that the purpose of the Consultation is “to investigate expert and lay opinion on the specifics of the process now proposed.” Because the Consultation deals only with the process of assisted suicide and not with its principle we are not submitting answers to the questions asked in the Consultation. Instead we are taking advantage of the invitation you give at the end of the Foreword: “But should any person or group feel that their particular interest requires more consideration, they are invited to submit written responses.”

A Summary of the Bill

As you indicate there is no Bill as yet – only a draft proposal for legislation. As we understand things what is proposed by you may be summarised by the following quotes (*) from the Consultation document:

Main Provision

The main provision of the proposed Bill is stated on page 11 of the Consultation:

It will give any person who meets the eligibility requirements the right to request medication to end their own life.

It will set out a straightforward process for a qualifying person to follow, involving initial registration followed by two formal requests.

It will decriminalise the actions of those who assist a qualifying person to end their own life within the parameters set by the Bill.

It will require a trained and “licensed facilitator” to be present when a qualifying person takes their own life.

Eligibility Criteria

The ‘eligibility criteria’ are stated on page 12 of the Consultation. A qualifying person must:

be capable (i.e. have the mental capacity to make an informed decision – using the definition

established by the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2001)
be registered with a medical practice in Scotland
be aged 16 or over
have either a terminal illness or a terminal condition
find their life intolerable.

Process

Three steps are necessary for any individual who meets the eligibility criteria to procure an assisted suicide. These are set out on pages 13-16 of the Consultation. They are:

Pre-registration. Pre-registration would consist of signing a simple declaration to the effect that the person regards assisted suicide as an option he/she may or would wish to pursue. The document would be signed by two witnesses.

First formal request. With a valid registration a person may approach a doctor and make a first formal request for an assisted suicide.

Second formal request. The qualifying person would be required to wait for a minimum of 14 days before making a second formal request. If a valid second request is made, then it would be expected that the person's doctor would write a prescription for lethal medication, for dispensing by a pharmacist.

Whilst the process of the first and second request is being followed, the qualifying person would be provided with a list of licensed facilitators whom they could contact.

The role of the 'licensed facilitator' is stated on page 17. It is to:

collect the medication from the dispensing pharmacist and convey it to the person (and return to the pharmacist any medication not used within a specified period)

stay with the person throughout the remainder of the process and assist them in any way necessary to enable the person to take the medication correctly – but will be forbidden to administer the medication

with the appropriate consent, film the process for the legal record

fill in the necessary final paperwork and report the person's death to the police.

Our Objection to the Bill

In the light of this summary we find no need to comment on the 'eligibility criteria' or the 'process' referred to in the Bill. Notwithstanding the difficult, distressing and sometimes utterly desperate circumstances which people may find themselves in through illness or accident we object very strongly to the *provision* made in the Bill. Our objection may be stated in very simple and straightforward terms.

The Bill is based on the mistaken premise that "each of us has the same right to exercise choice and take responsibility for the manner of our death as we do with all other actions during our lifetime." (p.6) There is no such 'right' to end one's life for God our Creator who gives us every breath that we take and will one day give us our last breath has not given us that right. Our lives are in His hand to do as He pleases with them, not in ours to do as we please with them. It is a great sin therefore either to take one's own life (which is what those who seek and procure an assisted suicide will be doing if the proposal becomes law) or to help another person to take his or her own life (which is what the 'licensed facilitators', pharmacists, doctors and perhaps others will be doing if the proposal becomes law).

This is the clear message we are given in the Bible, which is the Word of God and the only rule to direct us in what we believe and how we behave. Of first importance in this matter is the sixth commandment which states, "*Thou shalt not kill*" (Exodus 20:13). By this commandment we understand that both murder and self-murder are condemned by God. The Larger Catechism, a doctrinal standard of our Church and of other Presbyterian churches in Scotland, which is based wholly on the Bible, helpfully explains that among

the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are: “all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence” and “the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life” (Q. 136).

The Larger Catechism also explains that among the duties required in the sixth commandment are: “all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any” (Q. 135).

We submit that what the Catechism says is a faithful summary of the Bible’s teaching on this most important matter. We encourage you to search the Scriptures on this subject and to search your own conscience too. It is a solemn thing when those who occupy positions of civil power use their authority – which they have ultimately from God – to legislate in favour of something which God plainly forbids.

We are all answerable to God for our actions and the higher the position we occupy the greater our responsibility. We should use any position of authority we have to protect and succour the weak and vulnerable in our society and not to facilitate the bringing of harm to them – and in this case actual death.

Suicide is never the answer to any plight we may find ourselves in. The way to true peace and lasting happiness is through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” (John 3:16)

We trust that the Lord in His mercy and grace will give you another mind on this most serious matter. Indeed we implore you to think again. Meanwhile we assure you of our prayers and express our willingness and indeed our desire to correspond with you further and to meet with you personally to express our thoughts more fully.

The consultation closed on 30th April 2012 and the *Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill* was launched in the Scottish Parliament on 24th January 2013. It being a Member’s Bill, rather than a Government Bill, the rules require that for the Bill to make progress it must have the support of at least eighteen other members, representing at least half of the political groups on the Parliamentary Bureau (the Bureau manages the business of the Parliament and includes the Presiding Officer, a representative from each political party which has five or more MSPs and a representative of any grouping of five or more members from parties with fewer than five MSPs or from no political party).

In the end the Bill had the support of nineteen other members representing every political group on the Bureau. However this by no means guarantees that it will succeed. We understand that the Bill is to be presented before the Parliament this summer and when it is debated it will be interesting to see whether it has substantially more support than the previous Bill which when it came to a final vote secured just 18 votes out of one hundred and twenty nine MSPs.

2. Political Issues

There are two political issues, of relevance to the nation, which we believe to be of such importance that they should be highlighted at this time.

i. Act of Settlement

The Act of Settlement is one of three important planks to our country’s Christian constitution, the others being the Coronation Oath and the Oath of Allegiance. Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 which brought the Protestant William and Mary to the English throne, the Bill of Rights was passed by the English Parliament the following year, limiting the powers of the Crown and securing democratic liberties

but also barring Roman Catholics from the throne. The Bill of Rights provides that “all and every person and persons that is, are or shall be reconciled to or shall hold Communion with the See or Church of Rome or shall profess the Popish Religion or shall marry a Papist shall be excluded and be forever incapable to inherit, possess or enjoy the Crown.”

In 1701 the Act of Settlement was passed to secure for all time the Protestant succession to the English throne and its provisions were extended to Scotland by the Union of 1707. The Act restates the key points of the Bill of Rights but also requires the Sovereign to “join in Communion with the Church of England as by Law established”. The Act of Settlement and the establishment of the Church of England go together for since the Act of Supremacy of 1534 the monarch has served as ‘Supreme Governor’ of the Church of England, a role which a Roman Catholic obviously cannot fulfil.

At the Commonwealth Summit held in Perth, Australia on 28th October 2011 Mr David Cameron, the Prime Minister announced plans to change the terms of the Act so that a monarch or heir who marries a Roman Catholic will no longer lose his or her right to the throne and also that male heirs will no longer have priority over female heirs. The first of these proposed changes has clear constitutional implications and we reported last year that the Committee had written to the Prime Minister on this issue. In the end the letter was not sent until 14th June 2012 as the Committee agreed that it should also be copied to the Heads of Government of the other Commonwealth countries which have Queen Elizabeth as their Monarch and Head of State. There are fifteen such countries, ranging from the relatively large (in geographical and population terms) such as Australia and Canada to the very small such as St. Kitts & Nevis and Tuvalu.

The text of the letter which the Committee sent to the Prime Minister was as follows:

The Act of Settlement

Dear Mr Cameron,

Our Committee wish to express to you their views regarding the proposed alterations to the Act of Settlement which were agreed upon at the meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government held in Perth, Australia in October 2011. While we are thankful that no change is planned to the provision in the Act of Settlement whereby the monarch must be a Protestant we do have the following concerns:

1) *We are concerned at the proposal that a monarch or heir to the throne who marries a Roman Catholic will no longer forfeit his or her right to the throne.* The reasons for our concern are:

i. The Act was designed to secure for all time the Protestant succession to the throne, requiring the Sovereign to “join in communion with the Church of England.” It is a law of the Roman Catholic Church that Roman Catholics must do all in their power to influence their spouses towards Roman Catholicism and raise their children as Roman Catholics. Therefore if a member of the Royal family was to keep his or her right to the throne upon marrying a Roman Catholic it would open up the possibility of our country having a monarch who is under Roman Catholic influence, has Roman Catholic sympathies or is even a secret Roman Catholic, with all the constitutional difficulties and dangers which that would entail.

ii. There is in fact no law preventing members of the Royal family from marrying Roman Catholics; the Act merely prevents them from inheriting the throne if they do. During the reign of our present Queen two members of the Royal Family have renounced their right of succession after marrying Roman Catholics. However their children remain in the line of succession as long as they are in communion with the Church of England (and as long as they do not marry Roman Catholics). This seems to us to be an open and honest arrangement.

iii. To change the Act of Settlement is a very complex matter, requiring the consent of the legislatures of all

sixteen Commonwealth countries which have the Queen as their Monarch and Head of State. Yet the Government has been appearing to act as though an agreement to change the Act having been reached at the Commonwealth meeting ratification is a mere formality. This does not seem to us to be treating the Commonwealth countries, their parliaments and their democratic processes with the respect they deserve. It is also the case that any change to the Act of Settlement would affect many other pieces of legislation, going back centuries, which have served our nation well.

iv. To change the Act of Settlement in this way would place our Queen in an impossible position. When the Queen acceded to the throne in 1952 she made the Accession Declaration in the following form, as required by law: "I...do solemnly and sincerely in the presence of God, profess, testify and declare that I am a faithful Protestant, and that I will, according to the true intent of the enactments to secure the Protestant Succession to the Throne of my realm, uphold and maintain such enactments to the best of my power." When the Queen ascended the throne in 1953 she was asked the following questions contained in the Coronation Oath, as required by law: "Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law?" She answered these questions in the affirmative. It is clear that these Oaths forbid the Queen from giving the Royal Assent to any act passed by Parliament which would rescind the laws which relate to the Protestant religion and succession. If she did then she would cease to be legal Sovereign in our country and in the Commonwealth countries where she is Monarch and Head of State.

v. We believe that the Reformation of the sixteenth century delivered Great Britain from the baneful influence of the Roman Catholic Church politically and religiously. Ever since that time the stated objective of the Roman Church has been to recover what she then lost. To have a Roman Catholic, or someone sympathetic to Rome or under the influence of Rome, on the throne would be a major step in achieving that end. May we remind you of the position of the established churches in our country. Article XXXVII of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England states: "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England." Chapter 25 section 6 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the historic doctrinal standard of the Church of Scotland, states: "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God."

vi. It is being said that the provisions of the Act of Settlement whereby a Protestant succession to the throne is secured are discriminatory towards Roman Catholics. (We might point out that the monarchies in Belgium and Spain are legally secured as Roman Catholic institutions and we have not heard any complaints regarding this.) However if there is anything discriminatory in the Act of Settlement then it is for good reason. As the Bill of Rights of 1689 states: "it hath been found by experience that it is inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom to be governed by a papist prince." We do not regard it as a wise move to ignore the lessons of history.

2) *We are concerned at the proposal that the law on male primogeniture be abandoned.* The reasons for our concern are:

i. It does not seem to us that such a change would be in accordance with biblical teaching, where preference in matters of inheritance is given to male offspring rather than female.

ii. We understand that the practice of male primogeniture regarding inheritance goes back to the 10th century in England and is part of English common law, which has a binding authority in England. The succession to the throne being a matter of inheritance it has always conformed to common law and male heirs have been given priority over female heirs. A change in the Act of Settlement to the effect that the line of succession to the throne will in the future be determined solely by order of birth with no regard to sex may have repercussions for the integrity of common law and its place in the British constitution.

iii. Abandoning the law on male primogeniture with respect to the throne could have repercussions for other inherited titles, such as peerages, as the rules governing the vast majority of hereditary peerages require the peerage to pass to male heirs only. It would open the way to legal challenges by the eldest daughters of hereditary peers, on the grounds that for them to be omitted from the possibility of succession is unfair, since this restriction has now been abandoned for the highest office of state. While it may be thought preferable that a title continue rather than become extinct the problem which arises if a female inherits the title is that it passes out of the family altogether.

For these reasons, which we believe are significant, we strongly urge you to abandon the proposed alterations to the Act of Settlement.

We thank you for your time in considering what we have to say. We would be pleased to hear from you on this matter and we would be happy to enlarge on our concerns if this is desired.

Please be assured of our prayers for you as Prime Minister and for all who are involved in the work of government.

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” (1 Timothy 2:1,2)

Things have moved swiftly since the Commonwealth Summit. Some countries, including Canada, have already changed the law and on 23rd April the *Succession to the Crown Bill* passed its final stage at Westminster and was expected to receive Royal Assent within a matter of days. An agreement has been struck whereby the change to the law will apply retrospectively from the date of the Perth Summit. It is fairly obvious that these moves are being driven by the possibility that the first child of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will be a daughter.

Predictably, when the measure was approved by the House of Lords the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, who had introduced the Bill into the House of Commons, said that he was “proud the British Parliament [had] taken this step to end centuries of religious and gender discrimination.” He referred to it as “a truly historic moment”. We can certainly agree with this final assessment, but on the basis of Scripture and our nation’s past we fear that it may turn out to be so for all the wrong reasons.

ii. Scottish Independence

Earlier this year the Scottish Government announced that a referendum on independence for Scotland will be held on 18th September 2014. The announcement followed negotiations with the UK Government which resulted in an agreement on such matters as who will be allowed to vote and the wording of the question to be asked.

Clearly this is an important issue and one which potentially has huge implications, not only for those who live in Scotland but also for those who belong to the rest of the United Kingdom. The passing of the Act of Union in 1707 created a new national identity and a shared history which has lasted over three hundred years and depending on the outcome of the referendum this could come to an end.

The subject of Scottish independence raises all sorts of questions but perhaps the initial one for us to answer is this: To what extent, if any, should the church get involved in what some insist is a political matter? As we indicated in our introduction political issues are rarely *purely* political, and it is difficult to see how this issue in particular may be regarded in that way. While independence as a national status is a unobjectionable thing in itself, independence *in this instance* would appear to involve such important

questions as the place of Protestantism and Presbyterianism in Scotland, the security of our religious and civil liberties, the ideals of the Solemn League & Covenant and the status of the Treaty of Union itself.

It is worthy of note that the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland considered the subject of Scottish independence last year and issued a public statement on the matter. Also we have learned in recent days that both the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland are to debate the subject at their respective Assemblies this year. It is likely that the Committee will be giving more thought to this complex issue in the year ahead and they will be pleased to receive contributions to their deliberations from church courts and from individuals within and without the church.

3. Ecclesiastical Issues

There are three ecclesiastical issues involving three different religious bodies which we think are worthy of being included in this year's report.

i. Roman Catholic Church

In recent months two events have occurred within the Roman Catholic Church which we could scarcely have imagined we would ever see. The resignation of Pope Benedict XVI took everyone by surprise and led to the election of Pope Francis I, the first Jesuit to be elevated to the papacy. An intellectual and scholar has been replaced by a man with an apparent air of humility and the common touch. The style may be different but we have every reason to believe that the substance will be the same and the potential for intrigue even greater. The papal office is unbiblical and blasphemous and can only corrupt the person occupying it for we believe that the pope is the "man of sin" spoken of by Paul who "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3,4).

At home there was the shock resignation of Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Britain's most senior Roman Catholic cleric. On 25th February he resigned as Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh after it emerged that a number of priests from his diocese had made allegations of "inappropriate behaviour" towards them by O'Brien stretching back thirty years.

Intriguingly a few days before his resignation O'Brien had called for priests to be allowed to marry if they wish to, acknowledging that "many priests have found it very difficult to cope with celibacy". In his resignation statement he said: "For any failures, I apologise to all whom I have offended". A few days later, without mentioning the cases directly, he admitted that his "sexual conduct" had fallen below the standards expected of him as a member of the clergy.

The resignation of Cardinal O'Brien highlights once again the vexed issue of clerical celibacy. The Roman Church has imposed the single state upon her priests and nuns for many centuries yet the Bible says that marriage is "honourable in all" (Heb. 13:4) and that a compulsory celibacy is one of the "doctrines of devils" which will characterise the great apostasy of the latter times (1 Tim. 4:1-3). As we have been made only too aware in recent years, enforced celibacy has led to much sexual uncleanness among the Roman priesthood. Celibacy is a burden which our nature generally cannot bear, one which God does not ordinarily intend men to carry and one for which grace is rarely given.

O'Brien had been outspoken on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and embryo experimentation and had also involved himself in constitutional matters, calling for the repeal of the Act of Settlement claiming that it is hampering efforts to curb 'sectarianism'. Sadly he had been given a prominent role in the 'Scotland for Marriage' campaign, being one of the main speakers at a rally outside the Scottish Parliament on 30th November 2011 at which the campaign was launched. The revelations concerning O'Brien's behaviour have given the supporters of same-sex-marriage the opportunity to gloat and to level the charge of hypocrisy against those fighting for traditional marriage. While even good men may fall we believe that

it was most unwise to have included a representative of Rome and supporter of compulsory priestly celibacy in the campaign. We note that on the Scotland for Marriage website O'Brien's name has been removed from its place at the head of the list of signatories to their petition.

ii. Church of England

There have been two events of note in the Church of England during the past year. In November 2012 a measure to permit the ordination of women as bishops was narrowly defeated in the General Synod. The ordination of women priests was authorised in 1992 but for many on the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic wings of the Church the prospect of women serving as bishops with the function of ordaining priests and the authority over men which that involves was a step too far. Doubtless the matter will be revisited.

While we are thankful for this providence we must point out that the episcopal form of church government practised in the Church of England is unbiblical to begin with. The issue of church government is often regarded as a 'secondary' one and there is a tendency for it to be overlooked but as presbyterians by conviction and by subscription we are bound to contend for what we believe to be the biblical form of church government for it too is part of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Episcopalianism misunderstands the office of bishop. In Scripture this office is equivalent to the office of elder (Tit. 1:5-7), which is why there was a plurality of bishops in the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:1). Instead of ascending courts as in the presbyterian system episcopalianism has a hierarchy of individuals holding offices unknown in Scripture and possessing powers which were never meant to belong in the hands of single individuals. None of the officers in episcopalian churches, not even the ministers of local congregations, are chosen by the people but are effectively put in place by the hierarchy. In the case of the supreme officers this prerogative has to a significant degree been ceded to the state. All in all the system lacks in scriptural support.

Following the resignation of Rowan Williams, the appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury was announced on 9th November 2012. Justin Welby is something of an unknown, having only been a bishop for a little over a year prior to his elevation. He has an evangelical background and it was encouraging to learn that in his sermon at his 'enthronement' on 21st March 2013 he made positive references to his famous predecessor Thomas Cranmer, who was martyred for the faith. However we also notice that his utterances on women bishops, homosexuality and the Church of Rome have been characterised by the equivocation which we have come to expect from modern holders of his office.

iii. Church of Scotland

One matter has dominated the Church of Scotland over the past year and as we turn to it as our final issue we find that we have come full circle. In 2011 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted for a so-called 'inclusive trajectory' for ministers in same sex relationships, allowing those who were ordained before 2009 to be inducted into pastoral charges, with the possibility of a general acceptance of such people for ministerial training, ordination and induction in 2013. The Assembly agreed to set up a theological commission to consider whether ministers should have freedom of conscience to bless 'civil partnerships' and to devise a possible liturgy for such occasions.

It was admitted that these moves marked a significant departure from the church's traditional teaching. The step was also taken despite a letter having been received from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which has close ties with the Church of Scotland, confirming their own position that sexual relations outside of marriage between a man and a woman are sinful. "We now know better than the Bible" was the tone adopted by one commissioner at the 2011 Assembly. Another insisted that as the Bible had got it wrong on slavery, the role of women and the death penalty for adultery we should not be afraid to discard what it says about homosexuality, maintaining that current scientific evidence makes it clear that homosexuality is perfectly natural and not sinful.

In April the Church of Scotland published the report of its Theological Commission on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry and it does not surprise us that it makes no recommendation on the matter. Instead it offers two conflicting options (namely either to continue on the 'trajectory' towards homosexual ordination or to depart from it) and leaves it to the Assembly to decide between them. The Commission was made up of seven members with three backing each option and the convener not attaching his name to either.

According to the Church of Scotland website, the first option, which emerges from what is called 'The Revisionist Case', "offers the Church a way of allowing the ordination of ministers in same-sex relationships who have entered into a civil partnership, while protecting both individuals and congregations who in conscience do not agree with the theological principles which underpin that choice." The second option, which comes out of what is termed 'The Traditionalist Case', "while reaffirming its belief that homophobia is sinful, invites the Church to reaffirm its traditional stance that the only appropriate expression of sexual activity should be within marriage between one man and one woman."

True evangelicals ought not to have any difficulty in coming to a view on this subject. Indeed, as far as we are aware, the whole Christian church in all its variety has not had any difficulty on this matter until now. This uniform position is doubtless a reflection of the fact that same sex unions are as much against the law of nature as the law of God. The idea that people who are openly living in homosexual relationships could be solemnly set apart by the church to serve as ambassadors for Christ has thus far been regarded as so far from what was moral or appropriate that it never entered into the church's collective mind to give it any serious thought, let alone set up a 'theological commission' to look into the question.

Yet the Church of Scotland has wrestled with the issue of homosexuality for twenty years and the particular matter of ordaining homosexuals to the ministry for the last four. That surely tells us something about the Church of Scotland. As with most of the larger denominations today, it is a coalition. While it includes evangelicals who subscribe sincerely to the fundamental biblical doctrines of the historic catholic creeds it tends to be dominated by liberals whose dogmas have more to do with the political correctness of our present day. There is also a large element which seems to have little conviction about anything.

The tensions inevitable in such an unwieldy alliance have now reached the point where two well-known evangelical congregations (St George's Tron, Glasgow and Gilcomston South, Aberdeen) have left the denomination along with their ministers; other ministers, office-bearers and individuals have departed. More are likely to follow if next month's Assembly approves the ordination of practising homosexuals.

What of the Report? We can only touch on a few matters here. The explanation for the breadth of theological opinion which exists within the Church of Scotland is found in one of the opening sections of the Report which would seem to be the work of the whole Commission. Reference is made to the Ecumenical Relations Report on the "Church of Scotland-Free Church of Scotland Dialogue" received by the General Assembly in 2009 which highlighted the radically different approaches to Scripture held within the Church of Scotland – a situation which was given official sanction nearly a hundred years ago.

We are told that while there are those within the Church who believe, according to the language of the Larger Catechism (Q.3), that "the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament *are* the word of God" there are also those who, appealing to the Shorter Catechism (Q.2) which states that the word of God "*is contained in*" the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, believe that there is not an exact equivalence between the words of Scripture and the Word of God.

This is a wilful misconstruing of the meaning of the Shorter Catechism and implies that the Westminster divines did not know their own mind on the subject. It is also a deadly error for it undermines the very foundation of the church's faith and life.

The ‘revisionists’ are the first to make their case. With this fatally-flawed approach to Scripture in place they are able either to make or to quote approvingly such misguided statements as the following as they “explore those passages [of Scripture] which have become key to the contemporary discussion of persons in same sex relationships”:

“The first passage, concerning the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom, and the lesser known but somewhat similar account of the unnamed householder in Gibeah, who gave hospitality to a travelling Levite and his concubine, contain so many anomalies that it is hard to see how they can be considered relevant to the current debate.”

“Can we honestly put loving, faithful, committed same-sex partners, one or both of whom may have responded to a call to Christian ministry, in the same category as ‘idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, murderers, slave traders and perjurers’?”

“What would Paul, with his understanding of the redemptive work of God, have thought if he had the knowledge of science which is now available to the Church and if he had encountered and heard the voice of homosexual Christians?”

We are pleased to see that when the ‘traditionalists’ get their turn they counter the revisionists’ argument that not all of Scripture is the Word of God, insisting rightly that “this is an entirely novel argument, with no historical credibility.” When they go on to examine Scripture they provide some helpful commentary on crucial texts and expose the inadequacies in the expositions offered by the revisionists. However we believe that there is a weakness in the traditionalists’ position prior to that when they deal with the interpretation of Scripture. They state:

“There are many subjects on which honest and faithful exegetes have come to differing conclusions. In the New Testament, for example, there are strands of teaching on baptism, on the relation between church and state, on eschatology, on marriage and divorce, on *women’s ordination* [italics ours] and many other matters, where Christians have gone to Scripture, believing it to be the Word of God and reached contradictory positions. These are differences ‘within the family’ and should not bring separation of fellowship. On the subject of homosexual acts, however, we face an entirely different situation. In both Old and New Testaments, homosexual acts are universally condemned. There is not one positive reference to homosexual acts in the entire Bible, rather such acts are regarded as sinful. This is what makes the issue of homosexual acts quite different from all of the matters on which Christians legitimately disagree. To give approval to homosexual acts as being valid within a Christian lifestyle is not, therefore, a matter of the interpretation of Scripture but is rather a rejection of the teaching of Scripture.”

While it is true that the Bible’s teaching on homosexual acts may be more easy to discern than its teaching on some of the other subjects mentioned and while it is obvious that Christians do disagree on these other subjects we cannot accept the idea that such disagreement is “legitimate”. We feel this is particularly so in the case of women’s ordination, a very pertinent issue in the Church of Scotland. (It is significant that one of the three ‘traditionalists’ is a woman who serves as an elder in Cardonald Parish Church, regularly gives pulpit supply and lectures in Christian Doctrine at the International Christian College in Glasgow.)

If a church can ordain women to the ministry then it is bound to have difficulty in resisting calls to ordain homosexuals to the ministry. Why do we say this? Because the same Word of God which condemns homosexual behaviour *also forbids women from occupying the ruling and teaching offices of the church*. It does so on the ground of the principle of male headship within the church: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3); “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”

(1 Tim. 2:12); “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34).

To this may be added the requirement that bishops (i.e. elders) be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). If the clear scriptural prohibition on women ministers can be set aside then how can the same people at the same time defend a prohibition on homosexual ministers by appealing to Scripture?

This problem goes back to the 1960s, the decade when the so-called ‘permissive society’ is deemed to have begun. At that time many sections of the church failed to maintain the walls of truth and righteousness which are meant to keep out an ungodly world. The Church of Scotland, allowing itself to be influenced by social trends more than by Scripture, permitted the ordination of women to the eldership in 1966 and two years later declared that women were eligible for the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

The root of the problem is a rejection of the *authority* of Scripture or at best a denial of its *clarity*. This is hardly a new thing. In the garden of Eden Satan, speaking through the serpent, began his temptation of our first parents by asking Eve: “Yea, *hath* God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1) Unless and until the Church of Scotland returns to a belief in the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God and the only and all-sufficient manual for its doctrine and practice then it will descend further and further into the abyss of immorality.

In the final paragraph of their report the Commission state: “the prevailing view of the majority within the Theological Commission is that it would be good for the health of the Church if a decision, in principle, were to be taken now and not further delayed.” Perhaps the 2013 Assembly of the Church of Scotland will indeed see the debate come to an end, whatever the outcome will be. We sincerely hope and pray that the Church of Scotland will choose Scripture over sodomy rather than foolishly try to marry both.

4. Matters Addressed

Over the past year the Committee took the following actions, some of which have already been referred to in this report.

Same-sex-marriage. On 13th June 2012 the Committee made a submission to the UK Government’s consultation on Same-sex-marriage. On 27th July 2012, following the Scottish Government’s announcement that it would legislate to allow same-sex-marriage, the Committee issued a statement entitled The Scottish Government’s Decision on Same-sex-marriage. The statement was sent to all members of the Scottish Cabinet, including Alex Salmond as First Minister. On 1st November 2012 two members of the Committee met with Mr Simon Stockwell, representing the Scottish Government, as part of the Government’s focused consultation with ‘stakeholders’ to inform the drafting of the new legislation, especially as to what additional measures might be required to guarantee freedom of speech and religion in specific circumstances, including education.

On 12th December 2012 following the UK Government’s decision to legislate to allow same-sex-marriage in England and Wales the Committee issued a statement entitled Same-sex-marriage and the Scriptures. This statement was later sent by e-mail to all MPs, members of the House of Lords and MSPs with a publicly available e-mail address. On 15th January 2013 the statement was sent in printed form to the leaders of all the political parties with representation in the UK Parliament and/or the Scottish Parliament. On 12th February a reply was received from Mr Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing with “portfolio responsibility for equality”. The Committee were unhappy with the contents, particularly Mr Neil’s categorisation of the church as a “private organisation” and his remark: “I note all that you say about homosexuality. As you know, the Scottish Government does not share those views.” The Committee responded to Mr Neil’s letter on 19th April.

At their meeting on 2nd October 2012 the Committee considered a request from the Moderator of the past General Assembly that a letter be sent to Her Majesty The Queen urging her to use her influence as Head of State to resist the introduction by Parliament of legislation which would authorise same-sex-marriage. The Committee agreed to request the Commission of Assembly meeting later that evening to send such a letter with its own authority and the Commission set up a committee of four to compose the letter. As a member of that Committee, the Convener made an input to the content of the letter on behalf of the Committee and the letter was duly sent in December.

In the light of the recent revelations concerning Cardinal Keith O'Brien, the Committee has agreed to write to the Christian Institute once again expressing the Committee's sadness at the Institute's involvement with the Roman Catholic Church in campaigning against same-sex-marriage.

Assisted Suicide. On 30th April 2012 the Committee made a submission to Margo MacDonald's consultation on the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill. The text of that submission is found in section 1 of the report.

Act of Settlement. On 14th June 2012 the Committee wrote to the Prime Minister regarding the proposed changes to the Act of Settlement which were agreed at the Commonwealth Summit in Perth, the letter being copied to the Heads of Government of those Commonwealth countries which have the Queen as their monarch and Head of State. The text of that letter is found in section 2 of the report. A reply was received on 3rd September 2012 from Mark Harper MP as Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, in which the understanding was expressed that it is not the case that the Roman Catholic Church requires that the children of all mixed marriages be brought up in the Roman Catholic faith, citing the example of Frederick and Gabriella Windsor from within the current Royal family. The letter contained assurances that the Government is not making changes to allow a Roman Catholic to succeed to the Crown and is committed to the Church of England as the Established Church in England, with the Sovereign as its Supreme Governor. Finally it quoted a comment by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster after the Perth Summit: "I fully recognise the importance of the position of the Established Church in protecting and fostering the role of faith in our society today." The Committee responded to Mr Harper on 30th October 2012, thanking him for his assurances but stating our view that the Roman Catholic Church has long been at work to undermine the Church of England, it being keen to reassume the role of the Established Church in England, and that 'discrimination' is not necessarily a bad thing.

The issues which have occupied the Committee over the past year have been weighty and we are well aware of our inadequacies in handling them yet it is a privilege to raise a voice to the nation on behalf of our church. May we continue to call upon our gracious God for His help in these dark days. "It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law." (Psa. 119:126)

DAVID BLUNT, *Convener*
WILLIAM B. SCOTT, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;
2. The General Assembly commend the work of the Committee to our people. They encourage congregations and individuals to inform the Committee of local matters of particular spiritual and moral concern that might be helped by being more widely known and by being addressed by the Committee;

3. The General Assembly reaffirm their belief in marriage as instituted by God, namely between one man and one woman, and deplore the ongoing efforts of governments at Holyrood and Westminster to pervert this institution by introducing same-sex-marriage. They pray that the Lord in His mercy will yet bring these schemes to nought;
4. The General Assembly reaffirm their belief that all human life is sacred, from the earliest stage of its development in the womb to the final moments of its natural course, and that man has no right to assume the place of God in the termination of life. They implore the UK Government to recognise that abortion is an evil and to take steps to repeal the 1967 Abortion Act. They plead with members of the Scottish Parliament to resist the renewed attempt to have assisted suicide made legal;
5. The General Assembly note the changes which are being made to the Act of Settlement. They urge the UK Government to proceed with extreme caution in this area and to avoid any moves which would further weaken the Protestant nature of our throne and constitution to the advantage of the Church of Rome;
6. The General Assembly note the difficulties which ensue when the prescriptions given by Christ for the ministry and government of His church are set aside. They reaffirm their belief in the Bible's teaching that the offices of the church are reserved exclusively to men and their commitment to the presbyterial form of church government as the one which alone has the sanction of Scripture;
7. The General Assembly commend to the prayers of the Church our nation's present religious and moral state. In particular they call upon the congregations of our Church to observe a day of humiliation and prayer on Saturday 7th December or the closest convenient date and encourage other Christians throughout our country to do likewise.