

VII.

REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC QUESTIONS, RELIGION & MORALS

Introduction

The last year has seen no let up in developments which demonstrate the continuing decline in Britain's moral and spiritual health. Each year we are perhaps tempted to think that the situation could not get much worse but the Bible and history teach us that nations which begin by neglecting divine revelation tend to end by rejecting it outright, giving their approval of the grossest forms of wickedness. The holy God who made man for His own glory cannot stand idly by while such things occur. In His awesome justice He first reprimands the ungodly by giving them up to "uncleanness" and "vile affections" and if there is no repentance or recognition of His sovereign claims He then further judges them by giving them over to "a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:26-28). A nation and its culture may become so sick that it eventually dies – even (or should we say, especially) one like ours which has enjoyed so much of the divine favour. We fervently hope and pray that such a calamity will not overtake us and that in deserved wrath for our many provocations the Lord would remember undeserved mercy.

In this year's report we refer to the main items considered by the Committee during the past twelve months, highlighting the points which have been of particular concern to us and indicating how we have sought to address them.

1. SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

The long-awaited referendum on Scottish independence duly took place on 18th September 2014. By a special provision sixteen and seventeen-year-olds were able to vote and a massive 84.6% of the total electorate took part. The referendum campaign appeared to galvanise sections of the population which had more or less given up on the democratic process but the level of engagement also had a lot to do with the nature of the vote. In General Elections people are asked to choose between parties whose policies on many important issues may be difficult to distinguish: in any case the successful party will only be able to govern for a maximum of five years before having to face the electorate again. In the referendum people were being asked to decide on a major constitutional issue with the outcome potentially having far-reaching effects for generations to come: they no doubt felt that on this occasion their vote really counted. It is certainly true that since the referendum the membership of several political parties, chiefly those supporting independence, has risen considerably and it will be interesting therefore to see whether the turnout in Scotland at the General Election on 7th May is significantly greater than in recent similar elections.

The result of the referendum was clear with 1,617,989 (44.7%) voting 'Yes' to independence and 2,001,926 (55.3%) voting 'No' – a margin of over 10%. Of the thirty-two local authority areas four voted in favour of independence and twenty-eight against; the highest 'Yes' votes were in Dundee, West Dunbartonshire and Glasgow and the highest 'No' votes were in Orkney, the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. Post-referendum polling revealed that support for independence was stronger among younger voters than among the middle-aged and elderly.

The Committee opposed independence and the ending of the Union of 1707, chiefly because of the threat this would pose to Scotland's identity as a Protestant Christian nation. A notable proposal in the Scottish Government's blueprint for an independent Scotland was to promote the repeal of the Act of Settlement. Immediately after the referendum the Prime Minister announced a process to consider further devolution in Scotland. A Commission was set up under Lord Smith of Kelvin who was given the task of convening

cross-party talks, the five political parties with representation in the Scottish Parliament being invited to nominate two representatives each. Wider Scottish society was to have an involvement through a general invitation to make written submissions.

i. Submission to Smith Commission

The Committee made the following submission to the Smith Commission on 16th October:

We write as the body appointed by our Church to represent its views to government and do so following your call for the various institutions in society to submit their views to help guide your Commission's consideration of what further powers should be devolved to strengthen the Scottish Parliament within the UK.

We have no particular view as to what further powers, if any, should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Rather we wish to express our desire that whatever further constitutional changes may take place as a result of the present discussions and future debate nothing should be done which would lead to a further weakening of the Christian character of the United Kingdom, whether considered as a whole or in terms of its constituent parts.

In particular we hope that the terms of the Union of 1707, whereby there is a permanent settlement in favour of a Protestant monarchy in the UK and the Presbyterian church establishment is secured for all time in Scotland, will remain unaltered. It is our belief that these two long-standing and wise provisions have, through the blessing of God, done much to ensure the stability, strength and success of our nation over the last three centuries.

Prior to the referendum our Committee produced an examination of the Scottish Government's proposals for Scottish independence in which we indicated our concerns in relation to the above-mentioned matters. The referendum is now over and the proposals for independence have been rejected but we enclose a copy of the document for your interest, together with a Summary which highlights its main points.

In our congregations our parliamentary representatives and others who hold important civil office are remembered regularly at a throne of grace. We therefore assure you of our prayers for the Commission, that the Lord would guide you and all who may be involved in the task which you have been set.

The Smith Commission received 407 submissions from civic institutions and 18,381 from members of the public. These were discussed by the political representatives and a broad agreement was reached. The Commission published its recommendations on 27th November and among the extra powers which it believes ought to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament are the following:

- complete power to set income tax rates and bands;
- powers to legislate how the parliament is elected and run;
- power to extend the franchise for Scottish elections to 16- and 17-year-olds;
- control over a number of welfare benefits;
- licensing of onshore oil and gas extraction in Scotland;
- control over abortion.

In addition the Commission recommended that the block grant from the UK Government to Scotland would continue to be determined via the operation of the Barnett formula and that UK legislation would state that the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government are permanent institutions. It is expected that a bill to implement these recommendations will be brought forward and debated at Westminster after the General Election.

ii. Letter to Political Leaders and MSPs

On 31st October our Committee wrote to fourteen individuals who had played a prominent part in the referendum, either as leaders of political parties or of the 'Better Together' and 'Yes Scotland' campaigning groups; on 3rd November the same letter was sent to all MSPs. The text was as follows:

We write following the referendum in Scotland on 18th September which saw a majority vote against independence and thus in favour of remaining in the United Kingdom. We believe that the result provides us with an opportunity to consider where we are as a nation and what course we should be taking. As a Christian church we are not ashamed to say that for guidance on these things we turn to the Word of God, the Bible.

Countless words were spoken and written during the referendum campaign but little attention was given to the place of the Christian religion in our nation. Since 1560 reformed Christianity has been the dominant influence on Scotland's culture, a fact reflected in the Union of 1707 where care was taken to ensure a permanently Protestant monarchy throughout the United Kingdom and to secure a Presbyterian church establishment in Scotland. We believe that through the blessing of God these two constitutional provisions have contributed greatly to the stability and success of our nation over the last three centuries.

In their blueprint for independence the Scottish Government indicated that they wanted to deprive Scotland of the first of these time-honoured provisions. The white paper entitled *Scotland's Future* contained the following statement with regard to the Act of Settlement of 1701: "An independent Scottish Government will promote, and support amongst the Commonwealth States with the Queen as Head of State, a ... measure to remove religious discrimination from the succession rules."

This proposal, which could lead to a Roman Catholic occupying the throne, represented a major threat to Scotland's identity as a Protestant nation. Currently the monarch must promise to "maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law," as our Queen did at her coronation, but a Roman Catholic could hardly make that promise. With other Christians we made our concerns known to the Lord and we are thankful for the result of the referendum for it means we have been spared from this dangerous proposal, at least for the present. The church as a whole has not been as watchful over our Protestant throne and Presbyterian establishment as it ought to have been and we trust that this deliverance will make us more zealous for these vital institutions in the future, for our historic liberties are bound up with them.

In the referendum campaign much was made of "the sovereignty of the people" but sadly the fact that God is sovereign in all things was lost sight of. He is ever at work in the world for the good of His cause. The church is at the centre of God's purposes and we believe it should be foremost in the minds of our politicians in all their debating and lawmaking. In the Bible we are told that "God is the judge" and that He "putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm 75:7); we note that following the referendum the leaders of two political parties have relinquished their positions.

While we face a variety of political, economic and social challenges as a nation our real problem is a spiritual one: we have forgotten that our first priority should not be any earthly kingdom but the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Its moral values are timeless and they are binding upon us all but sadly we have been trying to change them to suit ourselves. We have sinned grievously as a nation and therefore our prayer is that there would be national repentance. May we give heed to this promise in God's infallible Word: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

The political focus is now on the Smith Commission. We have no particular view as to what further powers, if any, should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Rather our great desire is that whatever further constitutional changes may take place as a result of the present process nothing should be done which would lead to a further weakening of the Christian character of the United Kingdom, whether considered as a whole or in terms of its constituent parts.

Finally we assure you that in our congregations we remember our parliamentary representatives regularly in prayer and especially those who are in government, that the Lord would guide them in their work. We do so recognising that one day we shall all be accountable to Him for all that we have done.

We received a number of replies to our letter. Mr Alex Neil MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights, concluded his reply by stating: "We look forward to the continuing participation of Scottish Churches in further conversations about the future of Scotland." Mr Alastair Carmichael MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, ended his reply by stating: "You will note that the Smith Commission did not make any recommendations for matters pertaining to religious matters or influence, neither does it cover the accession of the monarchy." The replies received from two MSPs, Messrs Alasdair Allan and John Mason, prompted the Committee to write further letters to them.

It is difficult to predict what course the ongoing campaign for independence will now take. During the referendum it was repeatedly said by the leading advocates of independence that the vote was a "once-in-a-generation" or even a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity to secure their goal but having lost the vote it seems as though many of them now want another referendum within a few years. The present political climate has an air of uncertainty about it but whatever the outcome of the General Election we trust that it will not further the ends of those who have a secularising agenda for our country's constitution which would mean even less of a role for the Christian faith in the life of the nation than it currently enjoys.

2. SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

We have covered the subject of same-sex 'marriage' extensively in our recent reports. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 4th February 2014 and the first same-sex 'weddings' took place on 1st January this year. One of these involved two lesbians having five grown-up children between them from previous relationships. It was attended by the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the co-convenor of the Scottish Green Party Patrick Harvie as witnesses and after the humanist ceremony the First Minister said: "This is a momentous day for equality in Scotland, one where same sex couples have the right to marry the person that they love. This will send a powerful message to people about the kind of country we are." And what sort of country is Scotland in practice now? Surely one which has forgotten that there is such a thing as moral right and wrong and that "righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

i. Correspondence with Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

Subsequent to the passing of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Act the Committee had an exchange of correspondence with the Public Testimony Committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland on the implications of the new legislation for churches which believe in the biblical teaching on marriage and particularly on the question as to whether such churches can continue in good conscience to participate in civil marriage. The Committee are most grateful to Mr Maurice Grant, an Adviser to the Church's Legal Advice & Property Committee, for his input to this correspondence. The most recent letter was sent by our Committee to the Public Testimony Committee on 25th November as follows:

It is our considered view that it is possible for us as a church to participate in the current arrangements for the registration of marriage without any compromise of our Christian principles.

The chief reason for us reaching this conclusion is that our ministers would not be authorised to solemnise marriage under the new legislation but under the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, as the recent correspondence from the Registrar General makes plain. We believe that there is no inconsistency in viewing the new legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament as *ultra vires* as regards the function of the State, while acknowledging the previous legislation to be within the limits of the State's proper authority.

It is a fact that the current procedures are identical to those used on previous occasions under the 1977 Act and the nomination forms are unchanged. It remains a condition of the authorisation that the marriage ceremony includes a public statement by the parties that they accept each other as husband and wife.

While we abhor the departure from the obligations of the moral law which the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act represents at the same time we are wary, in terms of the duty which we have to practice the establishment principle as far as is consistent with biblical and confessional teaching, of divorcing ourselves unnecessarily from all connection with the State.

As a church we remain watchful for any deviations by the civil authority, in either its legislation or its action, from biblical norms regarding human sexuality and personal relationships. As the Lord helps us, we will continue to protest against them.

The current authorisations for our ministers to perform civil marriages are valid until the end of 2017 and we will need to be very watchful as a Church for any developments which may adversely affect the authorisations after that date. On one level same-sex 'marriage' is simply an affront to basic common sense, but on another it is part of a determined assault on Christian values and it is sad to see churches weakening in their resistance to this perverse, sinful and soul-ruining conduct. After six years of wrangling with the occasional attempt at unprincipled compromise, the Church of Scotland is due to make a final decision at its General Assembly in May on whether to permit the ordination of ministers in civil partnerships; as thirty-one out of forty-five presbyteries have backed proposals to allow congregations to depart from the Church's 'official' position and call such ministers, it appears certain that what is titled the 'Ministers and Deacons in Civil Partnerships Act' will be passed.

Will such a decision, assuming it is arrived at, end this sorry saga? In a few years the state has gone from approving civil partnerships to permitting same-sex 'marriages' and it would not surprise us if the Kirk follows suit. Indeed such a move may not be far off. A joint report of the Legal Questions Committee and the Theological Forum which is to be presented to the Assembly proposes that if the Ministers and Deacons in Civil Partnerships Act is passed then the Assembly also pass amending legislation extending the ambit of the Act to include ministers and deacons in same-sex 'marriages'. While recognising that "the Church is not currently in a position to extend its understanding of marriage to include same sex marriage" the report nevertheless suggests that the amendment could be made "as a practical response to a new reality within the civil society in which the Church is located." A consideration of the likelihood of legal challenge if ministers and deacons in same-sex marriages are treated differently from those in civil partnerships appears to have influenced the thinking. If the amendment is accepted then it is probable that it too would have to be sent down to presbyteries under the Barrier Act procedure.

If the Church of Scotland ceases to bar its ministers from entering these unnatural unions then it can hardly be long before it accepts its ministers 'merely' solemnising them. If the established Church, walking ever more closely with ungodly government, should take that step then things may well be made more difficult for conservative denominations opposing same-sex relationships and for their participation in the conducting of civil marriage.

3. ASSISTED SUICIDE

Last year's report referred to the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill sponsored by the Independent MSP Margo MacDonald which after her death in April 2014 was taken over by the Green MSP Patrick Harvie. The Bill aims to make it lawful to assist a person to commit suicide in certain circumstances, those circumstances being where a person has a terminal or life-shortening illness or a progressive condition which is terminal or life-shortening and wishes to end his or her life. Since its formal introduction to the Scottish Parliament on 13th November 2013 the Bill has been undergoing consideration by the Health and Sport Committee.

i. Submission to Health and Sport Committee

The Health and Sport Committee issued a call for written evidence to which we responded on 6th June as follows:

Below is our submission on the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill. In making our submission we address the questions which are asked on the Scottish Government website:

1. Do you agree with the general purpose of the Bill to make it permissible, in the circumstances provided for, to assist another to commit suicide?

No. We would never agree to such a purpose in any circumstances. The Bill is based on the mistaken premise that man has a 'right' to end his own life. In vital matters such as this we must not be guided by our own wisdom but by the Bible, which is the Word of God. The Bible is the only rule to direct us in what we believe and how we behave and it reveals no such right, declaring that God retains that right over man. It states that our lives are in God's hand to do as He pleases with them and not in our hand to do as we please with them. Therefore it is a great sin 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, etc., will be doing if the proposal becomes law).

The sixth commandment of the moral law contained in the Bible states, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). By this commandment we understand that both murder and self-murder are condemned by God.

2. Do you have any views on how the provisions in this Bill compare with those from the previous End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill?

We see little difference between the provisions contained in the two Bills. This is not surprising given that the Bills have the same author and the same general aim. Consequently we oppose this Bill as strongly as we opposed the previous one.

3. The Bill precludes any criminal and civil liability for those providing assistance, providing the processes and requirements set out in the Bill have been adhered to. Do you wish to make any comment on this?

We believe that the law of our land should reflect the law of God as we have outlined it above. Therefore criminal and civil liability for those who provide assistance in the commission of suicide under any terms ought to remain. The Larger Catechism, a doctrinal standard of our Church and of other Presbyterian churches in Scotland, 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." (Q. 136) On this basis we are of the view that those who aid and abet suicide in any way should continue to be subject to the penalty of the law.

4. The Bill outlines a three stage declaration and request process that would be required to be followed by an individual seeking assisted suicide. Do you have any comment on the process being proposed?

As we object to the very idea of assisted suicide it is obvious that we also oppose whatever process the Bill may propose for the carrying out of assisted suicide: if the principle is wrong then the process must be wrong too, however it is organised.

5. Do you have any comment on the provisions requiring that the person seeking assisted suicide must have a terminal or life-shortening illness, or a progressive condition which is either terminal or life-shortening?

We do not believe that any of the situations in which people may find themselves, including those stated in the Bill, however difficult and distressing they may be for themselves, their families and their friends, justify the deliberate ending of their lives. Also for anyone to attempt to make a definitive judgment on what the duration of their own or another person's life will be is to assume the place of God.

Suicide is never the answer to any plight we may find ourselves in and indeed it is likely to plunge us into a far more miserable eternity. The way to true peace and lasting happiness is through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which we have the privilege of preaching and hearing. "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 are thankful to the Lord for the great advances in palliative care which have been made in recent times. These developments mean that the suffering associated with conditions which may be beyond medical treatment can often be alleviated to a significant extent. We believe that in a truly compassionate society it is palliative care which ought to be promoted and not suicide, whether assisted or otherwise.

6. Are you satisfied with the eligibility requirements as regards age, capacity, and connection with Scotland as set out in the Bill?

As we object to assisted suicide in principle a consideration of the 'eligibility requirements' as they are set out in the Bill is superfluous.

7. Do you have any comment on the roles of medical practitioners and pharmacists as provided for in the Bill?

In the Larger Catechism from which we have quoted already the following sins are also forbidden in the sixth commandment: "the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life." 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) While the duty of preserving life applies to all men it is especially relevant to those who are involved in the health professions. We regard it as particularly sad and indeed utterly perverse that people whose very calling is to sustain and maintain life should be officially employed in helping to bring about the early demise of some individuals.

8. Do you have any comment on the means by which a person would be permitted to end his/her life under the Bill?

As we object to the whole purpose of the Bill, which is to legalise assisted suicide, it is obvious that we also oppose whatever means may be proposed for carrying out assisted suicide.

9. Do you have any comment on the role of licensed facilitators a[s] provided for in the Bill?

We believe that the role of so-called 'licensed facilitators' as provided for in the Bill is a wrong and sinful one in that they would clearly be infringing the law of God: as we have indicated already the sixth commandment forbids "all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence."

10. *Do you have any comment on the role of the police as provided for in the Bill?*

We believe that the role of the police as provided for in the Bill is also a wrong and sinful one in that they too would clearly be infringing the law of God which forbids “all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence.”

11. *Do you have any comment to make about the Bill not already covered in your answers to the questions above?*

We regard it as a most serious matter when those who occupy positions of civil power use their authority – which they have ultimately from God – to promote something which God plainly forbids. This is the case with the Members of the Scottish Parliament who are behind this Bill and will be the case with any MSPs who give their support to it.

We should use any position of authority we are entrusted with 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. In this regard we find it sad, and indeed tragic, that this Bill is under the scrutiny of the Health and Sport Committee – a body which should surely be advancing our well-being and not its very opposite.

If this legislation is passed then our fear is that people with various debilitating conditions may begin to think that they are under an obligation not to be a ‘burden’ on their loved ones or wider society and to feel that there is a certain pressure upon them to take the steps provided for them to end their lives – especially when there are people available who are willing to ‘help’ them in this and make it more straightforward.

It is hardly surprising given the nature of this proposed legislation that the Bill and its supporting documents do not contain any discussion of what constitutes the *real worth* of a person’s life. We submit that man’s true dignity lies in the fact that he is made in the image and likeness of God: each of us has a never-dying soul which means that uniquely among the creatures we are capable of knowing and enjoying God and of finding our fulfilment in this.

Finally we urge all MSPs to take note of the recent solemn providence in connection with this Bill in the death of its proposer and call upon them to abandon this misguided legislation.

On 25th September the Health and Sport Committee published an analysis of the written evidence, providing the following profile of the submissions: “In total, 886 submissions were read and summarised for this analysis. Overall, 73% of respondents expressed support for the Bill, with 24% in opposition and 3% either neutral or making no comment. When analysed according to respondent type there is a contrast in view. Amongst individuals, 78% support the Bill, 21.5% are in opposition and 0.5% make no comment. Support within organisational submissions is much lower at 16.5%, with 49% opposing the Bill and 34.5% stating neutrality or making no comment.”

ii. Further Submission to Health and Sport Committee

The Health and Sport Committee took oral evidence on the Bill in January and while not being granted an opportunity to appear before the Committee we were able to make a further written submission on 20th January as follows:

In addition to our submission on the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill which we made on 6th June 2014 we wish to make this further submission containing three brief points which we believe go to the heart of what is being proposed in the Bill.

1. *The Bill represents a futile attempt at autonomy from God.*

Suicide is the ultimate act of man's autonomy or efforts to achieve independence from God. Indeed the late Margo MacDonald MSP used that very language in explaining the aim of her 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."

There are choices we make in our lives which have a significant impact upon us. We each come to decisions on such things as education, career and marriage. Suicide however cannot be regarded as simply another one of these 'life choices'. There is nothing subjective about suicide for it is a *final* choice from which there is no going back. According to the Bible the implications for those who depart this world without forgiveness for their sins are enormous and indeed horrendous: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). We are all accountable to God for our actions and we will all appear before Him. A person may claim not to believe in God but that does not interfere with the fact that He has made us and He will judge us at the last day.

2. *The Bill is yet another assault on the sanctity of human life.*

Sadly over recent decades there have been laws passed in our country (or attempts at passing them) which threaten the lives of some of the most vulnerable individuals at every point in the age range. At one end we have the destruction of defenceless infant life by abortion; at the other end there is a clamour to allow euthanasia to be performed on the elderly and frail; now this Bill proposes to permit the hastening of death for some in between. Is this really what is meant by a "compassionate" society? Do we in fact have any idea what sort of society we are creating by abandoning the Christian foundations of our nation?

Even if there was just the slightest possibility that ending one's life or assisting someone in the ending of their life was going beyond what properly belongs to man then we would surely be wise to refrain from such actions. Yet we submit that there is far more than simply a possibility that such actions are wrong. The sixth commandment states very plainly, "Thou shalt not kill". It condemns both murder and self-murder. God has placed a prohibition on the taking away of any person's life unjustly and to claim that we have any 'right' to do such a thing is a defiance of His revealed will and is sinful.

3. *The Bill is in direct opposition to the Scottish Government's own declared policy on suicide.*

Since 2003 the Scottish Government has been operating a suicide prevention strategy through NHS Scotland under the banner of 'Choose Life'. On the Choose Life website we are told: "Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy. One suicide represents lost life, lost talent, lost creativity, a lost mother or father, brother, sister, son or daughter and a wound that does not easily heal in those who are left behind."

We could not agree more with this statement. It is a message which is also contained in the Word of God where we read: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19) However hopeless our condition may appear to be there is the promise of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who said: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

If the Bill was to proceed and to be passed it would clearly be at cross purposes with this worthwhile strategy and for this reason also we urge the Committee not to give the Bill their support.

The Parliament is expected to vote on the Bill towards the end of May and we intend to contact MSPs nearer the time asking them to reject the Bill. In our second submission we highlighted the inconsistency between the Bill and present government policy: if the Bill was passed it would effectively mean that the state is saying that there is ‘good’ suicide as well as bad. We trust that this glaring contradiction, along with other considerations, will weigh upon the minds of MSPs when they come to vote. When Margo MacDonald lodged her final proposal for this Bill on 18th September 2012 it had the support of nineteen MSPs (out of a total of 128) from the five political parties with representation in the Parliament, including twelve from the governing Scottish National Party. It is of interest therefore that in an interview with the *Scottish Catholic Observer* in March the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who voted against Margo MacDonald’s first bill, indicated that she had not been convinced about assisted suicide this time either. She stated: “I believe we should support people to live and I am therefore in favour of good quality palliative care... There also remains a major stumbling block to assisted suicide: How could you have sufficient safeguards?” This encourages us to hope that the Bill will eventually be defeated.

4. ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

On 26th June the Scottish Labour MSP Anne McTaggart lodged a proposal in the Scottish Parliament for a bill to amend the law on human transplantation, including by authorising (in certain circumstances) the posthumous removal of organs and tissue from an adult who had not given express consent. The bill envisages a move from the current “opt-in” system of donation to an “opt-out” system, such that someone who dies is presumed to have consented to gift their organs unless they have themselves opted out or informed their family that they do not wish to have their organs used for this purpose.

i. Response to Consultation

The Committee responded to a Consultation on the proposed Organ and Tissue Donation (Scotland) Bill on 23rd October and they are grateful to Dr Andrew Naylor for his contribution to their submission. Our response was as follows (questions 3 to 11 assumed an “opt-out” system to be in place and as we are not in favour of such a system we declined to answer those questions):

We write as the body appointed by our Church to represent its views to government and do so in response to the Consultation on your proposed Bill relating to organ and tissue donation in Scotland. As requested we answer the questions in the consultation and make some additional comments as appropriate.

1. The overarching purpose of my proposal is to move from the current opt-in system to a soft opt-out system of organ donation. Do you support this move? Please indicate “yes/no/undecided” and explain the reasons for your response.

No. We do not support a move from the current “opt-in” system to a “soft opt-out” system of organ donation.

We believe that the current system is correct in that it respects the fact that the wishes of the individual must be paramount in this sensitive matter and not the wishes of the state. We abhor any idea that the state should take “ownership” of the remains of the deceased. We believe that only where the individual has given specific authorisation for the removal and transplantation of their organs after their decease should this be allowed to take place. We would ideally like to see the present Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006 tightened up in the following two ways: (i) so that the nearest relative may no longer authorise the transplantation of a deceased person’s organs when the deceased person has not given that authorisation; (ii) so that the age at which children can authorise the use of their organs or tissue for transplantation after their death is raised from 12 to 18.

2. How essential is it to change the law (from an opt-in to a soft opt-out system) in order to achieve the intended benefits (increased transplant rates, reduced waiting lists)? Are there other (non-legislative) measures that could achieve similar outcomes without the need for legislation?

We do not believe that the “intended benefits” for society which are cited (however they may be calculated) should be the determining factor in deciding whether this proposed change in the law should actually take place. It is wrong to take a utilitarian approach to what is in the end a personal, ethical and indeed religious matter.

Our sincerely-held view, based upon the Bible, is that the bodies of the deceased (in the context of the Consultation the ‘deceased’ are individuals who are brain-dead or nearly so and therefore incapable of independent respiration, being dependent on a life-support machine) should be treated with the utmost respect and certainly not regarded as a resource to be ‘harvested’ for organs and tissues to suit the needs of others. A care for the mortal remains of the dead has always been a characteristic of the Christian faith: it is based on a belief in the resurrection to come in which all men will have a part (Acts 24:15) and on the example of what was lovingly done to Christ’s own body (Matthew 27:57-60). Thus the Church has historically practised burial rather than cremation, unlike some other religions and the humanism which is prevalent today.

We believe that the proper step to increase the availability of organs and tissues for transplant would be to give greater encouragement to *living donations*. The range of organs and tissues which can be transplanted from living donors is surprisingly large. Organs involved include kidneys (more successful than from deceased donors according to the NHS) and parts of the liver, lung, pancreas and intestines. Tissues involved include skin, bone, marrow, stem cells and blood. The regenerative capacity of some tissues means that in their cases living donation can take place more than once. We do of course acknowledge that organ donation in particular is not entirely ‘risk-free’ for the donor.

We might also add that the data contained in the Consultation document do not indicate that moving from a system of ‘informed consent’ to one of ‘presumed consent’ will necessarily lead to a greater proportion of the population acting as organ donors: the figures from 2002 show three countries with a system of presumed consent (Israel, Sweden and Poland) actually having lower donation rates than the UK.

12. Do you have any other comments on or suggestions relevant to the proposal?

We think that moving to an “opt-out” system may well add to the distress of the deceased’s closest relatives. Not only would they have to cope with the trauma of losing their loved one but potentially they will also be faced with questioning as to what they think their loved one’s wishes were regarding the removal of their organs and tissues after death.

There is perhaps also a more general problem in what is being proposed in that if the authorities are seen to be increasing their ‘demand’ for the organs and tissues of the deceased it may lead to the perception – no doubt a wrong one – that in some cases death is being ‘hastened’ in order to secure organs and tissues.

The Bill deals with organ and tissue donation for the purpose of transplantation only. However if an “opt-out” system is brought in is there not a real danger that this will be the first step down a slippery slope to a situation where the bodies of the deceased will be regarded simply as commodities to be exploited and the removal of organs and tissues will be justified for a whole variety of reasons, including the very distasteful?

Overall we believe that the emphasis in transplants should be upon those procedures which are likely to produce a *significant* increase in the quality or duration of physical life for the individuals concerned.

Finally, while we do not question your sincerity in wishing to help those who may benefit from transplants we respectfully urge you to think again as to where your proposed change in the law may lead and not to proceed with your Bill.

On 6th February Anne McTaggart secured the right to introduce her Bill, being supported by forty MSPs. It is not yet known when the Bill will be introduced. The Committee are keeping a watch on this matter.

5. HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY

On 3rd February this year the House of Commons considered the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations. The Regulations apply throughout the UK and enable two particular techniques to be used under licence as part of *in vitro* fertilisation (IVF) treatment. The techniques aim to prevent the transmission of serious mitochondrial (cellular) disease from a mother to her offspring by transferring genetic material from healthy donor adults to affected ones; the techniques therefore have the potential to bring about ‘three-parent babies’. The vote came before the Committee had been able to prepare a letter for MPs but the Convener sent a brief personal email on the day of the vote asking MPs to vote against the Regulations. The Regulations were passed by 382 votes to 128.

i. Letter to Peers

After their approval in the Commons the Regulations were considered by the House of Lords. The Committee wrote to Peers on 21st February as follows:

We write to ask you to attend the debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations in the House of Lords on 24th February and to vote against the Regulations.

No doubt you have heard many arguments for and against these Regulations, some of them involving quite complex science. We would like to mention what we believe to be compelling reasons why these Regulations should be rejected:

1) *The Regulations represent a dangerous leap into the unknown.*

The ethical implications of the techniques which are to receive approval under these Regulations are frightening. They include children having to cope with the fact that they have multiple genetic parents and people facing the possibility of lifelong monitoring because the unproven techniques which were used upon them may have unthought-of consequences. There is also the danger of irreversibly altering the germ line – the series of cells which continues down through successive generations – potentially affecting descendants for all time to come in ways which are harmful. In addition there are serious safety issues associated with the mitochondrial transfer and modification of the mammalian egg and also with the process used to enable women to provide donor eggs.

The truth is that our Parliament is on the threshold of legislating to permit the creation of a new type of human being. If it approves these Regulations then we will be the only country in the world to do so. Warning us against taking this step is the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights which states that ‘germ-line interventions’ could be considered as practices which are “contrary to human dignity”. There is also the well-known *New Scientist* magazine which has called for a halt to them because insufficient research has yet been carried out to assess the potential risks. These warnings should give us much pause for thought.

We find it alarming that many MPs wish to press ahead with genetically modified babies when they seem reluctant to allow genetically modified food (although it is not illegal to do so as yet no genetically modified crops are grown commercially in the UK). We do not understand why

politicians can be so decisive about the former while they are so hesitant about the latter. Surely the consequences of altering human beings must far exceed those of altering foodstuffs?

2) *The Regulations are a further threat to the sanctity of human life.*

The two techniques to be legalised under the Regulations, namely Maternal Spindle Transfer (MST) and Pro-Nuclear Transfer, (PNT) are not 'ready for use' and would require further experimentation on human embryos to perfect them, involving the destruction of those embryos. In addition the second of these procedures, in its routine operation, involves the creation of two embryos, both of which are ultimately destroyed.

We affirm that *a human embryo is a human being rather than a resource for experimentation*. For us this is a vital point and we believe it should weigh heavily with us all. Embryonic life is not less-than-human life but the first part of any person's history – including our own – as we learn from the Bible: "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" (Psalm 139:13-16).

The only sensible, wise and indeed humane position for any society to take is that human life begins at conception when the embryo is formed. In the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), God places a garrison around vulnerable individuals and if we wilfully breach this safeguard we are bound to incur divine judgment. We find the idea of an embryo being treated as refuse to be disposed of deeply shocking in what is meant to be a civilised nation.

3) *The Regulations will not achieve what many think they will achieve.*

The advocates of the techniques to be legalised by the Regulations argue that creating genetically modified babies would solve the problem of the occurrence of a disease transmitted in the mitochondria (small organelles found in most cells) of some women. Some moving instances of people who might be helped by the new technologies have been presented by a largely sympathetic media. We do not diminish the anguish of potential parents coping with this situation. However it must be understood that neither of the proposed techniques represents a cure for mitochondrial disease: the disease will still continue to appear randomly at birth and children born with the disease will not be helped.

The techniques would only be applied to families already identified as being at risk of conceiving a baby with mitochondrial disease. While we sympathise with their plight we believe that there is a growing tendency to assume that we all have an automatic 'right' to what we may sometimes think everyone else has, especially health and happiness. None of us has that right, especially if it is enjoyed at the expense of other human beings, in this case potential descendants and the embryos which will be destroyed.

4) *The Regulations would very likely lead to demands for so-called 'designer babies'*

MST involves creating a human being with three genetic parents. PNT involves the creation of two embryos, both of which are ultimately destroyed, to create a third human being with four genetic parents. Should we not instinctively recoil at this sort of manipulation? As a sign of things to come we learn that since the House of Commons approved these Regulations on 3rd February scientists at Newcastle University where these techniques have been developed have already begun offering women willing to donate their eggs the sum of £500. Such a move shows a great disrespect to the House of Lords which has not even considered these Regulations yet. More importantly we can see

the beginning of a slippery slope whereby humanity loses its God-given dignity and becomes a commodity instead.

However they are being presented these Regulations would legalise a form of ‘eugenics’ – the engineering of the genetic make-up of our fellow human beings. Replacing mitochondrial DNA might have unforeseen impacts on personal traits and so the Council of Europe’s Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine states that “an intervention seeking to modify the human genome may *only be undertaken for preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic purposes and only if its aim is not to introduce any modification in the genome of any descendants*” (italics ours). What may be intended as a benign measure to help some tragic cases may soon be employed for sinister purposes. It is a road we should not even begin to travel down.

For these and other reasons we respectfully urge you to be present in the House of Lords on Tuesday and to vote against these Regulations.

Seven Peers responded to our letter. Sadly when the vote took place the Regulations were backed by 280 to 48. The Regulations are due to come into force on 29th October but may be challenged in the European Courts..

6. GENDER ABORTION

In February of this year the Conservative MP Fiona Bruce moved an amendment in the House of Commons to the Serious Crime Bill seeking to outlaw sex-selective abortion (sometimes referred to as ‘gender’ abortion). Her amendment would not have changed the law but sought rather to clarify the meaning of the 1967 Abortion Act which was passed in a day before medical advances made it possible to identify the sex of an unborn child.

i. Letter to MPs

Prior to the vote in Parliament the Committee wrote to all MPs as follows:

We write to ask you to support Fiona Bruce’s amendment to the Serious Crime Bill which would outlaw sex-selective abortion (sometimes referred to as ‘gender’ abortion) and which is to be voted on in the House of Commons on 23rd February.

We do not hesitate to say that we oppose the deliberate ending of unborn human life altogether. On the basis of the Bible we believe that human life begins at conception and that in the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13), God issues a warning against the taking away of human life unjustly, especially the life of the weak and vulnerable. We believe that we have a God-given duty to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves: “Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction” (Proverbs 31:8).

The use of the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967, which covers England, Wales and Scotland, has been extended far beyond what the MP who introduced it (David Steel, now Lord Steel of Aikwood) intended, as he has acknowledged. While we abhor the thought of the life of any poor, defenceless infant being ended deliberately in his or her mother’s womb there is something profoundly shocking in the idea that parents may choose to end the life of their unborn child *purely on the grounds of that child’s sex*. This should surely shock all but the most hardened of individuals. It cannot be allowed to have a place in what is meant to be a civilised society.

It will no doubt be said that sex-selective abortion is not really a problem in the UK. The matter is probably difficult to quantify. What adds to the concern is the fact that the British Medical Association has outlined cases where they believe sex-selective abortion is permissible on mental

health grounds and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, which performs thousands of abortions annually in the UK, has claimed that gender abortion is not illegal. *So now is the right time to make sure that this evil practice, whatever its current frequency, is made as non-existent as possible.* Strengthening the law of the land in this area by making gender abortion explicitly illegal is in the power of Members of Parliament and it would be a good, wise and compassionate step to take.

Finally may we say that in our view Fiona Bruce's amendment deserves the support of all who have any proper respect for the dignity and worth of human life, whether male or female, both being made by God after His own image.

For these and other reasons we urge you to attend the House of Commons on Monday and support Fiona Bruce's amendment.

The Committee received responses from seven MPs, including a note of appreciation from Fiona Bruce herself. Regrettably the House of Commons voted by 292 to 201 to reject Fiona Bruce's amendment and supported instead a separate amendment to review the extent of sex-selective abortion in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. During the debate there was an indication of the grievous state of things in our land when the MP Sarah Wollaston, who is chairwoman of the Health Select Committee and a former GP, warned against the amendment because it would "confer personhood on the foetus".

Another who spoke against the amendment was the Health Minister Jane Ellison who took the line that gender abortion was already illegal in the UK. The hollow nature of such an assurance was quickly revealed. In March Christian Concern reported that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) had informed lawyers representing an individual pursuing private prosecutions against doctors who were prepared to offer abortions of two baby girls on gender grounds that it would take over and drop the cases. The reasons given for this action were: "on the current evidence before the court, there is insufficient evidence to form a realistic prospect of conviction" and, "the public interest considerations in not pursuing a prosecution outweigh those in favour, as concluded and set out in 2013." This travesty reminds us how cheaply unborn life is now regarded by our society and demonstrates the opposition which exists within the establishment to any attempt to bring doctors who break the law on abortion to account. Ways are being sought to challenge the decision of the CPS and we wish them every success.

7. NAMED PERSONS

We reported last year on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act which was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 19th February 2014. The Act requires local authorities and health boards to provide a 'Named Person' for every individual aged 0 to 18. Such persons will be a point of contact for advice or anxiety about the particular children assigned to them and there has been widespread concern at the way in which sensitive information about children will be passed on to these 'state guardians' by public bodies without the consent or even the knowledge of their parents.

As we indicated in last year's report the Committee shares this concern and so wrote to all MSPs accordingly prior to the final vote on the Bill. We promised to continue monitoring this matter and in addition the General Assembly directed the Committee to investigate the relationship of the Named Persons legislation and the implementation of the existing Child Protection system and to report to the 2015 Assembly with recommendations for both the denomination and for Christian parents.

We also mentioned last year that immediately after the Bill had been passed the Christian Institute announced that it was going to seek a judicial review of the legislation. In the end four registered charities (Care, the Christian Institute, the Family Education Trust and The Young ME Sufferers Trust) and three individuals raised a joint petition in the Court of Session, claiming that in passing the legislation MSPs had exceeded their power. When the petition was lodged on 9th July Colin Hart, director of the Christian

Institute, said: “We are making a stand for all mums and dads who are doing their best for the children they love. We are not prepared to stand by and watch as the roles of parents and their rights to a family life are diminished and trampled over by an authoritarian big brother government intent on making its presence felt in every living room in the land.”

On 22nd January Lord Pentland refused the petition. An appeal was lodged against the judgment and is being fast-tracked with every likelihood that it will be heard as early as June. The four charities already mentioned and a number of other bodies, both Christian and secular, have come together under the banner of ‘No To Named Persons’ (NO2NP) with the aim of co-ordinating what appears to be widespread opposition to the legislation.

It is a fact that the Named Persons scheme is already operating in a pilot way in different parts of the country. When Lord Pentland issued his judgment Jackie Brock, Chief Executive Officer of Children in Scotland, said: “Having a primary point of contact available to all children is the formalisation of practice that already exists across the country.”

At their meeting in June last year the Committee set up a sub-committee on Named Persons and Child Protection Legislation which is seeking to get to grips with this issue as time and other duties allow. Our focus is on three things: seeking information from the Scottish Government as to how the Named Person legislation is being implemented; obtaining relevant information as to how the present Child Protection System is being operated, and liaising with the NO2NP organisation regarding their opposition to the Named Person legislation. It is hoped that the Committee will be able to provide more information at the General Assembly.

We note that the Christian Institute and others who sought the judicial review and appealed against Lord Pentland’s judgment have said that they are in this for the long haul. In the light of the incomplete nature of their investigations into this intricate subject and noting the providence whereby the legal challenge to the Named Persons legislation has further to go, the Committee are asking the Assembly for permission to continue their work on this matter and to provide a full report with their recommendations to a future Assembly or its Commission as appropriate. Meanwhile let us pray fervently that the Lord will grant the appeal good success.

8. OTHER ITEMS

We report briefly on two further items.

i. Britain’s Relations with the Vatican

We made reference last year to the work which the Committee have been pursuing on a document covering Britain’s political relations with the Vatican and the inherent dangers, and our hope that the document will eventually lead to a letter to the Prime Minister. Much material has been gathered but it has yet to be put into a usable form; an effort is being made to have a final text available for the October meeting of the Committee.

ii. Day of Humiliation and Prayer

In August the Committee received a communication from the Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides concerning the Day of Humiliation and Prayer. This Day has been proposed by the Committee and appointed by the Assembly every year since 2009, to be observed by congregations on the first Saturday in December or the closest convenient date. The Presbytery desire that “the Committee would give consideration as to whether what over recent years has become an annual event should not more properly be appointed only ‘When some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent, or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved; as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained’ (*Directory for the Publick Worship of God* – ‘Concerning Publick Solemn Fasting’).” In response

to the Presbytery's request the Committee asked Rev. Raymond Kemp to examine the historical side of this question and he has prepared an interim report on the historical setting of the appointment of Days of Humiliation and Prayer. The Committee have asked Mr Kemp to continue his remit by researching the Acts & Proceedings of Assembly from 1843 forward.

The sheer volume of religious and moral issues, many of them complex, challenging the church today and calling for a response can sometimes appear overwhelming and the Committee are certainly very conscious of their inadequacy in attempting to handle them. In a day of declension the Lord's people may take heart however from the word of God which contains this promise: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. 59:19). Satan may have his "hour" but the God who has delivered His church in times past is well able to deliver her still – and He will.

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 give thanks to God that the outcome of the referendum on Scottish independence means that the Scottish Government's desire that the Act of Settlement be repealed is less likely to be fulfilled. They pray that in a time of constitutional change and increasing political uncertainty the Lord would continue to preserve Scotland from every threat to its identity as a Protestant Christian nation;
4. The General Assembly note with alarm the ongoing efforts being made within the UK to undermine the divine institution of marriage and how these efforts are being abetted by branches of the church as well as by the state. In particular they deplore the way in which the Church of Scotland appears to be following a course towards the acceptance of same-sex 'marriage' and plead with that denomination to repent of this sin and return to the Scriptures as the only rule to direct us. They pray that the Lord in His mercy will halt these harmful trends and that ministers will continue to be able to perform civil marriage in the future without compromise of biblical principle;
5. The General Assembly note the situation regarding the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill. They urge the Committee to persevere in addressing biblical teaching on this subject to MSPs, trusting that this will speak to their consciences, and pray that the Lord will be pleased to thwart this wrong and indeed calamitous idea when the Bill comes to a final vote in the Scottish Parliament;
6. The General Assembly note that the right to introduce a bill into the Scottish Parliament seeking to change the system of declared consent to human organ and tissue donation to a system of presumed consent has been secured by Anne McTaggart. They encourage the Committee to follow the progress of this bill and to take further suitable action as they see fit to represent to the appropriate parties the Christian viewpoint on this subject;
7. The General Assembly note with grave concern the passing of the Human Embryology and Fertilisation (Mitochondrial Donation) Regulations by the UK Parliament with their destructive

implications for embryonic life and their potential for profound and harmful effects upon generations of our fellow human beings;

8. The General Assembly note with sadness the failure in the House of Commons of Fiona Bruce's amendment to the Serious Crime Bill which sought to make explicit that gender abortion is a criminal offence. They encourage her to continue in her efforts and urge other like-minded politicians throughout the UK to endeavour to curtail the ravages of abortion. They exhort the Lord's people to persevere in prayerful and practical endeavour to get abortion not only limited but also abolished;
9. The General Assembly note the incomplete nature of the Committee's investigations into the Named Persons provision of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act which was passed by the Scottish Parliament last year, and also the ongoing legal challenge to and growing campaign against Named Persons. They permit the Committee to continue their work on this matter and instruct the Committee to submit a full report with recommendations to the 2016 General Assembly or to an earlier Commission of Assembly as appropriate;
10. The General Assembly encourage the Committee as they continue their work on Britain's political relations with the Vatican and pray that the final document may help to remind our government that the only wise course for nations to follow is to refuse all ties with the so-called Holy See;
11. The General Assembly note the Committee's investigations into whether the current arrangement for a Day of Humiliation and Prayer is consistent with the historic practice of the reformed Church in Scotland. In the meantime they commend to the prayers of the Church our nation's present religious and moral state and call upon the congregations of our Church to observe a day of humiliation and prayer on Saturday 5th December or the closest convenient date and encourage other Christians throughout our country to do likewise.