

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

The Committee, over the past year, have continued to make representations on a number of issues affecting the spiritual and moral well-being of our nation. With such a rapid pace of change affecting the whole of society, there is no shortage of areas for engagement. Nevertheless we do so with the knowledge that we bring not our own wisdom, but that of the only wise God and our Saviour. Our great desire is to see his name honoured across our society and nation once more, and to that end we seek to be salty salt.

One of the more encouraging matters recently has been the indications that local Courts, both Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries, are taking up this share of the burden, and making earnest representations across a full range of issues, both moral and spiritual. This has been the desire and strategy of the Committee, and it is a matter of thankfulness to our Courts that the Committee gladly acknowledge the increasing rôle being played by them in their own localities. It has become increasingly evident that many representations made by the Committee on behalf of the denomination as a whole are being treated with no more weight than a letter from a private individual. Whilst this certainly has caused disappointment and frustration at times, it is also a framework within which our local Courts can play an important rôle in mobilising our people to engage with the serious matters that plague our society.

**1. Named Person**

Proposed Named Person legislation has remained on the watch list for the Committee over the past year. The Committee are thankful that firm proposals have not yet been brought forward by the Scottish Government, and indeed it appears that it is no longer the priority, nor the flagship legislation, that it once was. Nevertheless, the Government has not fundamentally altered its belief in the powers of the state to interfere in family life. It is therefore almost inevitable that similar schemes and related proposals will be raised in the future.

The Committee are continuing their investigation into the relationship between the Named Person legislation and existing Child Protection systems, but are not yet in a position to report conclusions to this Assembly.

**2. Smacking Ban**

The Committee have repeatedly raised concerns about proposed changes to the rights of parents to administer physical punishment, and follow biblical principles, in raising their children. Under the title of *Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill*, this legislation, should it pass, would make any physical punishment of a child by a parent or guardian a criminal offence.

Although this Bill is being introduced by John Finnie, MSP, it is supported by the Scottish National Party. Very few MSPs have unequivocally condemned the proposals. At their October meeting the Committee agreed that they would seek to prepare two documents giving guidelines for biblical parenting. These documents would hopefully be made available through the denominational magazine or website, and are well underway at the time of writing.

To demonstrate something of the skewed processes of the Scottish Government in this matter, we would note that the Holyrood Committee tasked with scrutinising this Bill is comprised of seven members. Of the seven, five had indicated their support for the proposals before any scrutiny took place. It is noteworthy that members of the Scottish Law Agents Society and police have warned that the ban is neither a wise law to implement nor a fit use for already stretched resources.

Rev. Richard Ross was able to represent the views of the denomination generally at a meeting of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee of the Scottish Parliament, held recently in Portree. Despite numerous witnesses presenting their concerns, Mr Ross reported that sadly the Committee demonstrated closed minds on the subject, and little progress seemed to be made. However the Committee are most thankful to Mr Ross for his efforts. Whatever our assessment of these matters, the claims of Christ and the authority of his Word were presented without equivocation to our politicians, and his Word accomplishes that which he pleases.

### **3. Organ Donation**

The Committee maintained a watching brief in regard to Organ Donation. These proposals, in the form of the Organ and Tissue Donation (Scotland) Bill, have now fallen in the Parliament. The Committee have therefore removed this from their agenda at present.

### **4. United Kingdom relations with the Vatican**

A substantial document on this subject is currently at review stage within the Committee. Much work has gone in to researching the precise nature of the connections between the British State and the Vatican, and the Committee wish to record their thanks to Mr Lindsay MacCallum and to Rev. E.T. Kirkland for their work on behalf of the Committee.

### **5. Mental Illness**

Following on from a question to the Committee at the last General Assembly, the Committee have considered matters relating to mental health and our congregations. Far greater awareness of mental health in society over the past few decades has raised awareness of these issues, although the ability to understand the human mind remains more than our medical science can claim.

As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, compassion and consideration to individuals who suffer in this area ought to characterise our approach and attitude. Sadly this may not always be the case. Stigma, prejudice and ignorance can all have an off-putting effect on those who might wish to come to our services, and join in our fellowship. An eye-opening discussion paper was produced within the Committee, and this topic remains under discussion.

### **6. Hate Crime**

A recent review of legislation related to so-called ‘hate crime’ was carried out by Lord Bracadale. The recommendations of this review include both consolidation of existing law and expansion of the categories and instances that would come under this heading.

Amongst other brethren present, the Convener had opportunity to attend the Scottish Government’s Consultation on this matter in Stornoway. Other consultations have been carried out across the country and ministers and elders have maintained the same biblical objections throughout. The proposals intend to add categories of religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity into the definition of vulnerable groups protected by this law. The Consultation itself is now closed, and we are watching closely to see what impact, if any, the Consultation has on the Government’s proposals.

### **7. Gender confusion and promotion**

The flood of immorality in our society continues with the rapid rise and endorsement of the transgender spectrum. All across the political ranks of our land, leaders have failed to oppose this appalling redefinition of human identity. A helpful paper on the subject was presented at last year’s School in Theology, which the Committee would commend to all.

The cruelty of removing all boundaries from our young people in the first instance, and from society itself by extension, will undoubtedly see our culture reap the whirlwind of human brokenness, depression and increased suicidality in years to come.

Marches promoting the full spectrum of immoral lifestyles continue across the nation, with the Committee noting those organised in the Highlands and Islands for the first time in 2018.

The God of Scripture knows best his own Creation, and the true nature of the human race. His standard is male and female, made for each other, as one flesh in the bond of marriage.

Of great concern to the Committee were proposals for the deeply ungodly ‘Time for Inclusive Education’ scheme to be rolled out across Scottish schools. The Committee have received anecdotal evidence that such indoctrination of our children into this new gender ideology is already rife across many state schools in Scotland. How our nation has fallen from its designation as ‘the land of the Book,’ and how it blindly believes itself to have advanced beyond the Scriptures, which are the supreme authority!

### **8. Asher’s Bakery Case**

It was with considerable joy that the Committee noted the ruling of the Supreme Court in October 2018 in favour of Asher’s Bakery. The case had centred upon the refusal of the bakery to proceed with a cake order, which included a slogan promoting homosexual “marriage.” The implications for believers, had the case ultimately been lost, were profound.

The unanimous decision of the Supreme Court judges was a wonderful vindication of the faithful and humble stance taken by the McArthurs, and we most heartily record our thanks to the Lord for this deliverance.

### **9. Sabbath Working**

The Committee continue to be concerned about the impact of coercion in the workplace relating to working on the Lord’s Day. It is increasingly difficult for our people to find employment without being called to compromise over Sabbath work. The Committee have received advice from the Christian Institute. While there is some protection for workers in the retail sector, other areas of employment suffer from a lack of clarity in this area. Often we would have to fall back on case law and the merits of individual circumstances. There appears to be a clear inconsistency at present in the law of the land, and a case could be made for seeking the expansion of protection for believers in this area.

### **10. Blasphemy**

Following a call from the National Secular Society to abolish Scotland’s Blasphemy Law, the SNP ruling council indicated that they intended to accede to this request. The Committee then wrote to the Scottish Government asking them to clarify their position.

### **11. Anti-semitism in the UK**

A new area of discussion within the Committee has been the rise in reported instances of anti-semitism across the United Kingdom. The Committee in no way wish to engage in any party politics. However it was noted that the voice of the church at large was sadly silent, and it was agreed that a brief remark on this subject should be included in our Report.

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), being one part of the Church of Jesus Christ in our nation, recognise the current alarm and unease amongst many Jewish communities in Great Britain.

Christianity and Judaism are of course divided over the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. To Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, he is the true and only Messiah, the Son of David and true King of the Jews. He is our blessed Saviour and as our Passover lamb, he has satisfied God’s justice for us forever. It grieves us still that so many of his own people continue to reject his claims.

We earnestly pray for and desire the conversion of the Jews, and that the natural branches may be grafted into the vine once more. However, that this is not the case at present does not leave us hostile to Jews in

any sense. They are the people of our Saviour. Under God, we owe our New Testaments, and the preservation of our beloved Old Testament, to ethnic Jews. We still sing the sweet psalms of King David every week in all our worship services.

We find in them a richness, depth, and reality missing from all non-inspired songs. We study and delight in the laws, customs and rites of Moses. In them we see wonders and beauty foreshadowing the work of Messiah. We continue to observe a true Sabbath day, though for us it is transferred to the first day of the week, in honour of the resurrection of Jesus.

It grieves us also that many, even in the name of Jesus, have proven themselves hostile to the welfare of the ancient people of God, and opposed to their best interests. We assert that all such enmity is not according to our New Testament Scriptures, nor according to the spirit of our Saviour himself. The New Testament clearly guides us in the attitude that must prevail amongst the followers of Jesus, to those of his own nation, who have not as yet accepted his claims *...as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance* (Romans 11:28,29).

## **12. State submission to Christ**

Having been instructed by the 2018 General Assembly to investigate the whole area of the practical outworking today of the duty of Government to recognise and submit to the rule of Christ as King of nations, the Committee have not made the progress desired and intended in this area. Some brethren have been approached to produce articles on this topic, and an excellent first draft of one such article has been recently submitted to the Convener for his comments. A further article on the wider area of Authority is also being prepared. The Committee expect to progress this matter more in the coming months.

GREG MACDONALD, *Convener*  
MURDO MACDONALD, *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 both note and encourage the uptake of these matters by local Courts;
3. The General Assembly note the continuing investigation of the Committee into the relationship between the Named Persons Legislation and existing Child Protection systems and direct the Committee to finalise their work in this area, with their recommendations to be brought to the forthcoming General Assembly;
4. The General Assembly share the Committee's concerns regarding the *Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill* and note the preparation of documents on biblical parenting for distribution through the denominational magazine and website;
5. The General Assembly note the progress made in researching the nature of the relations between the United Kingdom and the Vatican and encourage the completion of the project;
6. The General Assembly note the work done on mental illness and recognise the need for Christians to be at the forefront in providing care, demonstrating the compassion of the Saviour for needy sinners;
7. The General Assembly note the work of the Committee in relation to proposed Hate Crime legislation in Scotland and affirm their opposition to any legislation that would endanger the freedom to preach the Gospel in its fullness in our land;

8. The General Assembly profoundly oppose the efforts to redefine gender in our society. They reaffirm the right of the Creator to define the nature of our race as being male and female, and condemn especially the efforts to impose transgender ideology upon our schools and young people;
9. The General Assembly give thanks to the Lord for the successful outcome of the Asher's Bakery case in the Supreme Court in October 2018. The Assembly commend the McArthurs for their faithfulness to the Lord throughout these most difficult proceedings;
10. The General Assembly note the work of the Committee in relation to Sabbath-working protection and instruct them to continue to investigate what protection might be available for workers who refuse to break the Fourth Commandment;
11. The General Assembly note and approve the comment of the Committee in regard to Anti-semitism in the United Kingdom, and affirm the desire of this denomination for a great reconciling of all Jews and Gentiles in the Gospel;
12. The General Assembly note the progress made by the Committee in investigating the whole area of the practical outworking today of the duty of Government to recognise and submit to the rule of Christ as King of nations, and instruct the Committee to report further to the next General Assembly.