

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

Reports from the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee to the General Assembly serve as an opportunity to highlight the breadth of matters being considered by the Committee each year. Sadly, the scope of matters requiring attention continues to expand. The slide in public morals has become ever more rapid. Areas of sin are tolerated and even defended in society and by politicians in a way that would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago.

On a more practical level, it is often the case that one realises the value of what one had when it is gone, and, in this respect, the Committee have realised the value of their previous Clerk, Mr John N. Gillies. Without an appointed Clerk the work has been shared by various members of the Committee (and advisers!) and special thanks are due both to Rev. David M. Blunt and Rev. Calum Smith.

1. Day of Humiliation and Prayer

Following a Petition to the 2021 General Assembly from the Northern Presbytery, a Day of Humiliation and Prayer was called for by the Committee for Saturday 4th December 2021. The Day was well observed throughout our Congregations and Presbyteries, and the thanks of the Committee are extended to all Kirk Sessions and Congregations that supported this call. The sins of ourselves as the Church, and those of our nation, were lamented and confessed, and a cry to the Almighty was made across the land.

2. The Lord's Day

A special sub-group of the Committee has been established to consider items related to the observance (or lack thereof) of the Lord's Day. The Christian Sabbath is a flagship indicator of the general moral standard of any community. This sub-group have contacted Presbyteries seeking information of any breaches that might be appropriately responded to by the Committee. A regular protest against the Sabbath-breaking ferry runs into Stornoway is maintained by Rev. David Fraser. Presbyteries are encouraged to make use of the sub-group should any issue arise in local areas which might benefit from being addressed by the Committee. This is not at all to prevent the work of Presbyteries in their own sphere but to offer such assistance to them as the Committee can provide.

3. Abortion

The Committee continue to oppose the vile abortion laws throughout the United Kingdom. It is heart-breaking that these laws have become more entrenched, not less, in recent months, with the passing of legislation in Westminster to make "at-home" abortion a permanent legal right. Abortion was made a devolved matter in 2015 but Westminster legislation sets a woeful precedent. Indeed latest figures show that 2020 has the sad distinction of being a record year for abortions in Scotland. Despite this flood of infant deaths, the Scottish Government are continuing with proposals to make abortion easier, by making permanent the emergency legislation brought in during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is despite the Government's own consultation showing a majority of Scots opposed to these measures. The Committee are thankful that so-called 'buffer-zones' excluding Christian witness and other pro-life protests from the immediate area around abortion clinics appear not to be receiving active consideration at Holyrood. The Committee continue to support and commend the 'Abort Abortion' campaign organised by our Home Mission Worker, Mr Donald John Morrison.

4. Legislation

The Committee continue to occupy themselves with responding to unbiblical legislation and proposed legislation. They remain concerned that elements of the defunct and illegal Named Person Scheme remain

in operation in some areas of the country. Enquiries have been made to ascertain if this is indeed the case. Similarly, the Equal Protection from Assault legislation, prohibiting parents from exercising biblical discipline, remains under scrutiny within the Committee. At present Gender Recognition Reform legislation is another area of alarm. The damning evidence of the damage done to confused young people is mounting, where drugs are given to young folk to prevent the normal development of their bodies. The emotional damage is also frightening. Most of all, the spiritual oppression in seeking to damage the identity of those made in the image of God is incalculable. The push for legislation to permit assisted suicide has again come before the Scottish Parliament. The Committee continue to monitor these matters.

One other area of serious concern at present is the effort being made across the United Kingdom to ban so-called Conversion Therapy. These proposals (presently at Westminster, but Holyrood legislation is likely to follow) purport to outlaw any efforts made to change the lifestyle of a homosexual person to embrace heterosexual norms, and abandon the sinful practices of homosexuality. The implications for preaching, pastoring and even Christian witness are significant, and the Committee are committed to vigorously opposing this. The Committee are thankful for the work being done by the Christian Institute in this area, as well as in many other matters.

5. Covid-19

The Committee have had less direct engagement with Covid-19 matters than in the previous year. Nonetheless the Committee have continued to monitor the actions of the Scottish Government in this area, particularly as they relate to public worship. The Committee have been pleased to note the return to the observance of the Lord's Supper in many of our Congregations. It grieves the Committee that, despite this clear warning from the Lord, we, as a nation, have not heeded this call, have not sought the Lord on our knees, have not forsaken our darling sins, nor have returned to the worship of the one true God.

6. War in Ukraine

The Committee have only briefly had opportunity to consider the ongoing war in Ukraine. They are conscious that the situation may well have changed significantly by the time of the publication of this Report. Nonetheless the Committee consider the plight of the Ukrainian people to be the result of an unjust act of aggression on the part of the Russian President, Mr Putin. They appeal to our Congregations to pray for all those who are impacted by the violence and bloodshed and seek opportunity to demonstrate Christian care wherever possible.

We remain thankful that the Lord is on the Throne, and that the evil of men is ever overruled for his own purposes. One interesting matter to note is the expectation of the state of Israel to receive up to 200,000 displaced Jews returning to Israel from the war zone.

Further, the Committee note that the whole world has, by this aggression, moved closer to a widespread if not worldwide conflict, than at any time since the fall of Communism and the old USSR. Having refused to bend the knee and repent at the last worldwide crisis, we are now faced with an even greater threat than the pandemic. When will the nations of this world, and our own United Kingdom in particular, acknowledge her sins and humble herself before the throne of grace? It is an alarming thought what might next come upon this world if we continue to ignore the warnings of heaven.

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 Clerks *pro tem*, Convener, and Vice-convener;

2. The General Assembly commend the work of the Committee to our people. They continue to encourage the uptake of related matters by local Church courts, and note the availability of the Committee to assist local courts where appropriate;
3. The General Assembly note and approve of the Day of Humiliation and Prayer held in December 2021 and thank all Congregations and people who sought mercy from the Lord for both Church and nation;
4. The General Assembly join the Committee in continuing to commend the 'Abort Abortion' campaign and assure Mr Donald John Morrison, Campaign Co-ordinator, and other anti-abortion campaigners of the ongoing prayerful support of the Church. They condemn the recent passing of permanent legislation making "at-home" abortion legal;
5. The General Assembly note the establishing of a sub-group dealing with matters relating to the sanctity of the Lord's Day. They readily commend the keeping of the Lord's Day to all our people and indeed to all mankind;
6. The General Assembly note continued concerns about the defunct Named Persons' legislation being utilised in local authorities and instruct the Committee to clarify this position;
7. The General Assembly express deep concern over proposed Gender Reform legislation and decry the confusion sown in this area, especially amongst young people in our society. They remain committed to the biblical pattern of male and female, man and woman;
8. The General Assembly instruct the Committee to continue to monitor plans for the legalising of assisted suicide and report thereon to the next General Assembly;
9. The General Assembly note with concern proposals to ban so-called Conversion Therapy. They instruct the Committee to make all suitable representations objecting to this proposal and report progress to the next General Assembly. Further, the General Assembly affirm that no government has the right to interfere with the calling of Christ's Church to call sinners to repentance, and to counsel those who struggle with temptation to sin;
10. The General Assembly note the continued monitoring of Covid-19 legislation as it concerns churches by the Committee and encourage them to retain a watching brief in this area;
11. The General Assembly deplore the loss of life caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine. They urge our Congregations to be much in prayer for those suffering and grieving as a result of the war in Ukraine;
12. The General Assembly note the further evidence of the hand of providence with the fragility of European peace, and appeal to our governments, both at Holyrood and Westminster, to call the nation to repent of its sin against the Lord, repeal ungodly legislation, and seek mercy from the Lord Almighty.