

SCOTTISH PROTESTANT VIEW

FREE

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Editor: Mr Jack Bell

PROTESTERS OUTNUMBER THE PAYING AUDIENCE AT THE KING'S THEATRE

By Mr Jack Bell

Hundreds of Christians turned up at the King's Theatre to protest on the opening night of 'Jerry Springer - The Opera'. Approximately 55 members of Zion Baptist Church took part in the demonstration.

*Protest as reported in
Glasgow Evening Times
(below)*

**Protesters out in
force to voice anger
at controversial
Jerry Springer opera**

By MAUREEN ELLIS

AROUND 300 Christian campaigners turned out in force to protest at the opening night of Jerry Springer - The Opera in Glasgow.

They packed the entrance to the King's Theatre and lined the pavement opposite the venue, many brandishing banners and singing hymns.

The protest was led by the Christian Voice organisation. Stephen Green, the group's national director, joined



Members of Zion Baptist Church protest against this blasphemous show

protesters in Glasgow last night.

He said: "It's really encouraging to see so many local Christians here."

The satirical opera has courted controversy since it was screened by BBC2 in January 2005.

The BBC received 55,000 complaints ahead of its broadcast.

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JERRY SPRINGER -THE OPERA. LETTER OF COMPLAINT

16th January, 2006

Glasgow

Dear Provost,

I would like to comment on the planned performance of 'Jerry Springer the Opera', which is scheduled to be shown at the Kings Theatre in March of this year.

I feel that this show which was screened by the BBC last year is very blasphemous. In the opera Jesus is portrayed as a sexual deviant, His wounds are mocked, His relationship with His mother is mocked, Mary is portrayed as being raped by an angel, God is portrayed as a fool who needs therapy, Jerry Springer is portrayed as the Saviour.

As a Christian who loves the Lord Jesus, and who loves the Word of God, I find these portrayals very offensive. Today we are all very aware of the need not to offend in either word or deed. I appeal to you to take a lead in preventing this blasphemous opera from being shown in the city.

Yours sincerely,

Emily Bamford

REPLY FROM GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL



Glasgow City Council

Cultural and Leisure Services

Director
Bridget McConnell

Cultural and Leisure Services
Glasgow City Council
20 Trongate
Glasgow G1 5ES
Phone 0141 287 4350
Fax 0141 287 5199

Dear Ms Bamford

"Jerry Springer the Opera"

Thank you for your letter addressed to the Lord Provost.

The King's Theatre is managed by Glasgow Theatres Limited and programming decisions are taken by the organisation. The producer of the show is Avalon UK.

As venue manager, Glasgow Theatres Limited is committed to presenting a rich and diverse programme to the community as a whole. Despite its subject matter, "Jerry Springer the Opera" is a peaceful show, and does not endorse violence or unlawful activities - indeed the authors confirm that the production is a satire not aimed at Christianity but at what they take to be the valueless amorality of TV's "The Jerry Springer Show".

The show has enjoyed resounding success over a number of years in the public and non-commercial sectors including a long run at the National Theatre, and its transfer to the commercial sector is completely justified. The production has collected numerous awards and accolades - validating its creative and artistic merits.

It enjoyed a successful run in London's West End where it won an Evening Standard award for "Best Musical".

Glasgow Theatres Limited do not intend to be deliberately inflammatory nor to offend their audiences. The aim is rather to give the general public the opportunity to make up their own minds and judge the show for themselves. To that end, of course, all communications to potential customers, including publicity and advertising material, make very clear the nature of the show and the issues it addresses, in order that customers can make an informed choice.

Yours sincerely

Jill Miller
Strategic Manager Culture and Sport
(Social Renewal)

If phoning or visiting please ask for Charles Bell
Direct phone 0141 287 8943 Direct fax 0141 302 2820
E Mail:charles.bell@cls.glasgow.gov.uk



Protesters out in force to voice anger at controversial Jerry Springer opera

Frances Coburn, from Pollok, who was among the protesters, described the stage performance as “evil”.

However, Chris Denton, from the west end, who was going to watch the show, hit out at the campaigners. He said: I don’t like our freedom of speech being at threat by extremists.”

A spokesman for the show said organisers were delighted to have opened in Glasgow last night.

He added: “We are aware there was a minor protest before the show started. However, this did not affect the performance.”

Police officers monitored the protest. A spokeswoman said: “It was a peaceful demonstration and there were no arrests.”

Evening Times 7.3.06

COMPLAINT LETTER SENT TO THE KINGS THEATRE, GLASGOW

Dear Sir/Madam

As manager or manageress of the King’s Theatre, Glasgow I am writing to ask if you would stop this ‘Opera’ from being shown in March ‘06, As a Born Again Christian I know that this show will be a great offence to God and to my Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, and it goes without saying a great offence to every Christian in Glasgow....

Extract from letter send by Charlotte Smith

REPLY FROM KING’S THEATRE, (extract)

16 February 2006

Dear Charlotte Smith

Thank you for your letter of 14 February about the forthcoming tour of **Jerry Springer - The Opera**, which is due to visit the King’s Glasgow, in spring 2006.

I should begin by saying that although we are planning to present the show at our venues we are not the producer of the show and you may also like to contact the producer directly - Avalon UK.

Our role as a venue owner is a commitment to present a rich and diverse programme to the community as a whole. We are aware of the controversy surrounding this particular production, but in a country that prides itself on freedom of speech, we reserve the right to present a variety of productions from across the spectrum of society. Despite the subject matter, it is a peaceful show, and does not endorse violence or other unlawful activities - indeed the authors confirm that the production is a satire not aimed at Christianity but at what they take to be the valueless amorality of TV’s **The Jerry Springer Show....**



Rumours of visit by Pope Benedict XVI are 'exaggerated' says Church source

By Donna Nicholson

REPORTS of a papal visit to Scotland are "exaggerated" and "unfounded" the Catholic Church in Scotland revealed this week.

Hopes that Pope Benedict XVI will visit the UK, including Scotland, were downplayed by a Scottish Church source this week who made clear the Vatican had given no confirmation about a visit to the UK.

It was revealed last week that Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien, President of the Scottish Bishops' Conference, was lending his support to calls for the Pope to visit Scotland.

This followed an official invitation from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Despite reports that the Pontiff had taken up the invitation to visit next September, 25 years after the late Pope John Paul II came to the UK, Church officials in Scotland this week said no such plans had been made or confirmed by the Holy See.

The Catholic Church source in Scotland

said the reports of a confirmed papal visit were "unfounded" and that a decision to take up the invitation from the English bishops would not be made so soon, nor would a date be set this early.

The source added that since becoming Pope last April, Benedict XVI's presence is requested by countries all over the world and it is unlikely that he will add Scotland and the rest of the UK to that list just yet.

It has also been suggested that the Pope has no plans to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor by travelling extensively.

Last week the SCO revealed Cardinal O'Brien's personal desire that any papal visit to the UK should include Scotland, following the success of Pope John Paul II's visit here in 1982.

An official statement from the office of the Archbishop of Westminster revealed Cardinal Murphy O'Connor "is keen that the Pope be aware of how delighted the British people would be should he feel able to accept" an invitation to visit the UK.

The reference to "British people" was designed to leave an invitation open for the Holy Father to also visit Scotland, an

invitation that is likely to be discussed by the Scottish Bishops' Conference when it meets in April, said the spokesman.

Scottish Catholic Observer 17.03.06



Open-air preaching

A camp meeting [preacher] or open air preacher should go straightforward, and should strike home at every blow. Set sermons prepared for chapel pulpits, are of little use. The open-air preacher should have his mind upon Luke 24:16-17: 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations'.

He preaches man's fall and lost state; he preaches the atonement; he preaches repentance; he preaches the forgiveness of sins, justification by faith, the new birth, being born again, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.

He endures the travail in birth, presses through temptation, gets into the full

exercise of faith, the unction of the Holy One descends, liberty opens. and, as much as in him lies, he preaches the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

He often produces a greater effect in a quarter of an hour, than many a pulpit preacher does in a full hour. Some preachers in chapel pulpits spend portions of time in proving what they advance; but the straight forward open-air preacher does no such thing.

He preaches the lost state of man, the death and resurrection of Christ repentance, faith and holiness. He warns, by setting forth the terrors of hell, and encourages by preaching the glories of heaven., but he leaves his preaching to prove itself.

He looks to God, and to the prayers and faith of himself and people, and watches for effects - watches for the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the quickening of believers.

A sound camp meeting preacher avoids apologies and frivolous remarks. He preaches a free, full, and present salvation. He redeems his time, and completes his work. He does not squander away his own, and the people's time, by attempting to tell what others have preached, or will preach; but he attends to his own work, occupies his own portion of time, and makes an end without attempting to occupy the time that belongs to others.

He is prompt and attentive, and closes at the signal given, if not before.

Hugh Bourne (early primitive Methodist leader)

Evangelical Times November 2000

Divine Intervention Defeats Religious Hatred Bill

By Mr Jack Bell

As Christians we have much to be thankful for. Praise God that the Government were defeated in trying to pass their repressive law.

Praise and prayer was heard to be made outside the House of Commons on Tuesday 31st January by Christians demonstrating peacefully, in the presence of a large number of police.

After attempting twice before to pass this law, the Government went down for a double defeat in their third attempt, losing by ten and then by one vote. Winning by one vote shows Christians that every person's effort was vital to secure this extraordinary victory. We must also remember that the Lord did not intervene for us to sit back in our churches. Let us show our gratitude to our Lord by going out and proclaiming the glorious gospel of Christ.

The law as it now stands

"It is only possible to break the new law by using threatening words or behaviour with the intention of inciting hatred against a person because of their religious belief," says the **Christian Institute**. The Lords' amendments have added the following free speech protection for the new religious hatred offence:

29J Protection of freedom of expression

Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.

"The Minister, Paul Goggins, told the House of Commons on 31 January that if the Lords' amendments were passed, 'it would be virtually impossible to bring a successful prosecution' (*Hansard Column 190*)."

The Lawyers Christian Fellowship comments: "The Bill which will now become law will only allow someone to be prosecuted if:

1. the accused used threatening words or behaviour;
2. he intended to stir up religious hatred; and
3. the words or behaviour cannot be classed as an expression of criticism or dislike, or a discussion of, particular religions or the beliefs or practices of those religions."

"It is now hard to envisage a case where a Christian, preaching from the Word of God in good faith and from good motives, would fall foul of this legislation. As you will know, from the very start of this campaign, we have opposed the idea of the Religious Hatred Bill in any form. However, it is our view as lawyers, that the Bill that has been passed has so many safeguards and protections built in, that it will represent almost no threat to Christians preaching the Word of God. We would still prefer that the law was removed from the statute books, but the victory last night in the Commons was real, and allays almost all the fears which we have talked about over the past months."

British Church Newspaper, February 2006



The 'right to hate'

The Catholic Association for Racial Justice, an agency of the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, makes no secret of its support for the notorious hate provisions that have just been defeated in parliament. Indeed they would like to see the hate provisions reintroduced and no doubt Rome will continue to agitate for that.

Their statement says, "There are dangers in championing free speech to the point where it approaches the affirmation of a right to hate".

That is most dangerous nonsense. It is nothing to do with the 'right to hate'. It is the right to express an opinion, which is a wholly different matter. We already have perfectly good laws to deal with speech which is likely to do harm.

Rome, Islam and the secularists would love to multiply laws which can be used to prevent anyone saying anything that they do not want to hear and which would allow them to attribute the basest motives to the speaker.

British Church Newspaper February 2006

**ALL ARTICLES IN
THIS MAGAZINE
REPRODUCED AS
EVIDENCE**

Church leaders offer message of peace to Hamas

CHRISTIAN leaders in Palestine came together last week to present a message of peace to Hamas.

The patriarchs and heads of the churches of Jerusalem turned to the beatitudes for their joint peace message to the Hamas party following its recent victory in the Palestinian elections.

But they also stated that they “respect and support” the democratic decision of the Palestinian people to elect the party of their choice and urged Christians in the Holy Land not to fear the outcome.

The religious representatives looked to the Gospel of Matthew for their letter of peace, stating: “Our message to the government of Hamas, members and leadership, is the message of Our Lord Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mountain. Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God.”

The text of the message went on to congratulate the

Palestinian people “for their democratic performance in the recent parliamentary elections” and expressed their respect and support over the result as well as congratulating Hamas.

And it called upon the Palestinians to “continue their contribution to the making of their history whatever may be the difficulties or obstacles, internal or external. We pray for all those who will govern in this difficult period, and we extend our co-operation to them for the public good and the national Palestinian aspirations together with the cause of justice and peace in a non violent way, whether in regard to foreign relations, (or) the rule of law with full religious freedom, especially in the social and educational fields.”

The religious leaders also had a message for the Christian peoples of the Holy Land calling them to “transmit the message of our faith and our concern for all.”

“Some may be afraid or troubled because of this new

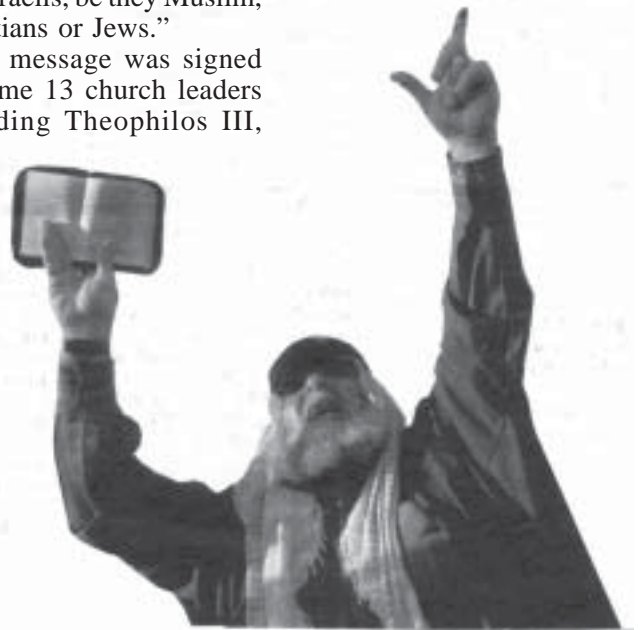
phase,” they stated. “We respond, first, with the words of Jesus Christ: ‘Do not be troubled or afraid. Peace I bequeath to you; my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give.’”

The message ended with a prayer for God to “guide us towards what is good for all and for this Holy Land with all its inhabitants, Palestinians and Israelis, be they Muslim, Christians or Jews.”

The message was signed by some 13 church leaders including Theophilus III,

Greek Orthodox Patriarch, Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch; Torkorn, II, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarch; Franciscan Fr Pierbattista Pizzabella, Custos of the Holy Land; Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch; Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch; Abune Grima, Ethiopian orthodox Patriarchate; Paul Nabil Sayyah, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate; Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East; Bishop Mounib Younan, Lutheran Evangelical Church; Pierre Melki, Exarch for the Syrian Catholics-Jerusalem; Andre Dikran Bedoghlyan, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate and Archimandrite Mtanious Haddad, Greek Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate.

Scottish Catholic Observer
10.2.06



Editor of SPV's comment

The religious leaders quoted alone must be fooled into believing that Hamas are interested in peace in the Holy Land. There are two key beliefs that keep Hamas in continual conflict with the state of Israel. The first is that the land belongs to Islam and secondly that the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem must be kept pure. The result being that no peace negotiation is acceptable and Israel as a nation must be destroyed. As the Covenant of Hamas states: It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine - Article 6. The liberation of Palestine is an

individual duty for every Moslem - Article 13 (the two articles are quoted from 'Islam and the Jews' by Mark A Gabriel). Thank God we can turn aside from the futile vision of ecumenism and look to the scriptures for hope in any situation. Paul reminds us in Ephesians chapter 2, 'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made right by the blood of Christ.' The gospel not only reconciles God with men but men with men in the one new man. Lets us pray that the gospel will not be hindered in the Middle East.



What is Hamas?

It is a revealing equation: Hamas has held the top statistics for the most suicide bombings, the most Israeli fatalities, and now, the most seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Between November 2000 to April 2004, Hamas carried out 425 attacks, killing 377 Israelis and wounding 2,076, according to the Israeli army.

Hamas, an acronym of *Harakat al Muqawama al Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), corresponds to an Arabic word meaning "fervor", or "zeal".

Founded as an Islamic party in 1987 by Sheikh **Ahmed Yassin** (who was assassinated in an Israeli air strike in 2004), Hamas is indeed zealous, especially in its ideological opposition to the

existence of Israel. Infamous now for perpetrating some of the most lethal attacks against Israelis, Hamas actually gained prominence among Palestinians for providing welfare and social services, and building schools and hospitals.

Israel supported Hamas financially during the first *intifada* (the uprising from 1987 to 1993), hoping to weaken the PLO and its leader **Yasser Arafat**. But this support backfired when, during the second *intifada* (2000-2004), Hamas spearheaded the violence against Israel.

The well-funded organization generously supported the families of suicide bombers from its estimated \$70 million annual budget. Hamas receives funding

from Palestinian "charities" in the West, and from Iran, Saudi Arabia and private backers in other Arab states.

Hamas began its reign of terror by executing Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel. It progressed to kidnappings and other attacks against Israeli soldiers, and then shootings and stabbings of Israeli civilians. Hamas entered the foray of suicide bombings in April 1993. Its most deadly attack was the bombing of a hotel in the coastal town of Netanya on March 27, 2002, in which 30 people were killed and 140 wounded while celebrating the *Seder* meal on the first night of Passover. Since 2002, Hamas militants in Gaza have been

firing homemade rockets into communities in southern Israel.

According to Hamas, all the Land of Israel including Judea, Samaria and Gaza is as an inalienable Islamic *waqf* or religious inheritance, which can never be surrendered to non Moslems. The group refuses to recognize Israel or use its name, instead referring to the nation as the "Zionist entity." The organization calls for Israel's destruction in its charter. Hamas dropped its call for the destruction of Israel from its electoral manifesto, though the group's leaders called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" in campaign speeches.

Israel Today May 2006

THE MARION MARTYRS

By Mr Jack Bell

Thomas Cramner

Bishops and labourers, the blind and lame, men and women, elderly and teenagers - none was spared the fierce persecution of Mary Tudor in her attempt to rid her realm of all who followed the Protestant faith. One such martyr was Archbishop Thomas Cramner. For two decades Cramner, Latimer and Ridley worked together as powerful advocates of Protestantism at Cambridge. His rise to the pinnacle of the Church of England was meteoric. The first came to the attention of Henry VIII in 1529 by defending the king's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, a fact never forgotten by Catherine's daughter, Mary Tudor. Among his many legacies to his church was his encouragement of the king to



authorise the Bible in English. During the reign of King Edward he used all his energy and zeal to further the Reformation, but his death exposed Cramner to the rage of his enemies. Even although he supported Mary's accession he was found guilty of his treason and imprisoned. His resolve and courage were ground down by his persecutors who urged him to recant. He was lonely, tired, worn down and with his spirits at their lowest signed his first recantation in January 1556. Queen Mary decided that even though her arch enemy had recanted, his execution should still go ahead. He was taken on the morning of 21st March to St Mary's Church, Oxford, where he was accused of the most atrocious crimes. Given then the opportunity to publicly confess his sins, he prayed and then spoke to the congregation with these words: "Forasmuch as my hand hath offended, writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall be punished, for when I came to the fire it shall be burned first. And as for the Pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy and antichrist with all his false doctrine." His enemies were foiled and robbed of a great triumph. He was steadfast and immovable in what he had professed and using the words of Stephen, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit", he left this scene of time.

**Righteousness exalteth a nation,
but sin is a reproach to any man**

Proverbs 14:34

Comment

Watching our language

Language - intelligent verbal communication - is God's gift to those made in his image. It gives us the ability to speak forth his praise. It is a depository of society's values, expressing - and even potentiating - the concepts and experiences that preoccupy people.

Words have the power to either elevate or corrupt. They also too readily degenerate into insult or blasphemy - as the Lord Jesus recognised when he said, 'Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake' (Matthew 5:11).

The potency of language is remarkably illustrated by the ascendancy of 'political correctness' (PC). This recent phenomenon has found widespread acceptance in Western democracies - yet is bound up with an astonishing abuse of language. Through the manipulation of words, society has become sanitised to the worst forms of sin.

Cover up

For example, sexual immorality between a man and woman used to be called 'living in sin' (or perhaps 'adultery' or 'fornication') but is now called 'having a partner'. 'Gay' once meant 'light hearted and carefree' (*OED*), but now it means something very different.

PC is often used to conceal truth and reality, allowing such things as racism, nepotism, sexism and ageism to wear a cloak of respectability. The small boy is no longer allowed to declare that the emperor has no clothes.

Indeed, the very words 'political correctness' are chameleon like. PC is not about politics but about morals; it does not deliver correctness but covers up unmentionable abuses. This is a shared conspiracy that few have had the courage to challenge.

This perversion of language is a particularly subtle aspect of the contemporary moral downgrade. As Evangelicals we must watch out for such linguistic sleights of hand and not be taken in by 'weasel words'.

For centuries Roman Catholic theology has been adept at taking words like 'grace', 'faith' and 'justification', evacuating them of their gospel meaning, and smuggling them into the doctrine of salvation by works.

Today, even some so-called Evangelicals are bent on redefining words like 'sin' and 'atonement' to satisfy man's PC tastes. Why? Because, if it is to succeed (they tell us) the gospel must be user friendly - appealing to human nature.

Now PC has brought the same abuse of language into the moral and relational levels of society. This brings challenges to daily life that no Christian can escape. How should we respond?

Faithful

We do well to recall the courageous example of John the Baptist. No doubt it was a serious breach of 'etiquette' and disregard for the PC of his day when he declared to adulterous Herod Antipas, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife' (Mark 6:18). He paid for his honesty with his life.

Yet, how else could John be faithful to his God - and to Herod himself? How else could he reach into the king's conscience and make it clear that he could not both be an adulterer and go to heaven?

Western Christians face the same dilemma as we strive to reach a generation that has desensitised itself to the sinfulness of sin by the very language that it uses. We need to rediscover the direct and unambiguous language of the Bible - reasoning with men as Paul did, 'about righteousness, self control and the judgement to come' (Acts 24:25).

Only then will they understand that they need the forgiveness and salvation that are found in Christ alone!

Evangelical Times: March 2006

Jerry Springer

Dear Sir,

TV film cameras and local newspaper reporters were out in full force at the front of the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, and a few police walking round the theatre perimeter on Friday 27 January anticipating a large protest gathering.

But where were all the Christians? Around 30-35 people turned out; mainly devout Catholics and Charismatic believers, with a handful of others. A few of them had undertaken a 2-3 hour round trip from North Devon and West Cornwall.

As if to emphasise the paucity of local Christian response, two men travelled 7 hours from Liverpool, because they felt led and 'compelled to come'. In spite of substantial obstacles, the Lord had marvellously enabled them to attend: one, a young family man with no money or transport; the other, an older man having to work right up to the point of travel. Closer to home, a 74 year old man who finds it difficult to stand travelled for 2 hours then stood for 2 hours in freezing weather, fighting pain and weakness.

The widely advertised protest provided ample opportunity for Christians to demonstrate their opposition to this blasphemous production. Where were the concerned Christians of Devon and Cornwall and in particular Plymouth, that night?

We may pray very earnestly in the warmth and comfort of home or at a prayer meeting, or heartily sing 'Stand up, stand up, for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross'. But, where were those soldiers that night whilst the name of God and the Lord Jesus Christ were being mocked, ridiculed and blasphemed?

Thankfully many Christians wrote letters of protest. Some had nightly distributed leaflets at the theatre for several weeks. But what a mighty witness it would have been if those who had been able to do so had been willing to support the public protest.

*Name and address supplied
Evangelical Times; March 2006*

Will the Prime Minister ever concede that he is a Catholic?

By Francis Beckett,
co-author of the book,
'The Survivor - Tony Blair
in Peace and War'.

IN 2003, Tony and Cherie Blair visited Pope John Paul II.

It is well known that His Holiness advised strongly against the proposed invasion of Iraq, but what happened after that was a closely guarded secret.

It's claimed the Pope arranged for his secretary, Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, to say a private Mass for his visitors, and for them both to receive Communion.

Cherie Blair, of course, has been a Catholic all her life, and there is nothing surprising about her receiving Communion in the Vatican. But what about her husband?

Would His Holiness have sanctioned the event if he had not been satisfied that Tony Blair was, in effect, a Catholic, even if he had not yet been formally received into the Church?

The answer is known only to a very few highly-placed and well-connected English Catholics, one of whom told me: "The Blairs have decided not to let news of his Catholicism break while Tony is Prime Minister."

For some years before he was Prime Minister, he attended Mass near his Islington, north London home, and received Communion. Eventually there were complaints to the late Cardinal Basil Hume, who was reluctantly obliged to tell him to stop, since he had not been formally received into the Church.

Today, he attends Mass with Cherie and their children but does not receive Communion. However, according to a priest based at Westminster Cathedral who is a regular visitor to 10 Downing Street, when he travels abroad, he always finds a



Tony Blair during a private audience with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in February 2003

Catholic church on Sunday and receives communion there.

The rather convoluted reasoning is that the Church allows you to receive Communion if you are in a part of the world where it is difficult to get to your own church. If Blair is considered an Anglican, then he can only receive Catholic communion when there is no Anglican church nearby.

Why does he hide it? Anthony Howard, the biographer of Cardinal Hume, thinks it has something to do with Northern Ireland.

Blair, he says, feels he would be less acceptable to the Unionists if he was openly Catholic. This is unlikely to be the whole explanation. Another part of it was his clash with the late Cardinal Thomas Winning over abortion.

Blair said that he was personally opposed to abortion, and would never be a party to one himself; but he was not prepared to vote to stop others from having abortions. To Winning, these were the weasel words of a politician who knew that a Catholic stand on the issue would be a political problem.

Winning's uncompromising condemnation made it more difficult for Blair to own up to his Catholicism.

It was the convent-educated Cherie who introduced him to the Catholic Church, just as she introduced him to the Labour Party and she still understands both those organisations far better than he does.

But the Catholic Church, unlike the Labour Party, fitted in with everything Blair believed in. He wrote in 1993, the year before he became Labour leader: "There is right and wrong. There is good and bad. We all know this, of course, but it has become fashionable to be uncomfortable about such language.

The certainties of Catholicism attract him, and bolster his own remarkable certainty. No one has quite realised what a remarkable personal decision it was to take Britain to war in Iraq, and the certainty and self-belief it required. Leave aside for a moment whether it was the right decision; just look at the circumstances in which it was made.

In all other wars, from WWI to Suez in 1956, there was something of a political consensus, at least in the Prime Minister's own party of the need for war.

Blair took his country into Iraq knowing that most of his cabinet opposed it, the overwhelming

majority of his party opposed it and even close members of his court, the people on whom he most relies, opposed it personally, though their first loyalty was to whatever Blair decided. Even the Pope opposed it (though not, of course, speaking infallibly).

If the Labour Party leader had been anyone else we would not have fought in Iraq. So Iraq was Blair's war in a way that no other war has been the Prime Minister's. The decision, and its consequences, are as personal as that. The grieving parents whose children died in Iraq can say, with more truth than the parents of those who died in other wars, that the blood of their children is on the hands of one man.

Not many people, even Prime Ministers, have to live with that sort of knowledge. It would crush most people. It does not crush Blair. That certainty and self belief is something which, for better or worse, he takes from his faith.

Scottish Catholic Observer:
February 2006

The Survivor – Tony Blair in Peace and War by Francis Beckett and David Hencke, published by Aurim Press in 2005 at £8.99, ISBN 1 84513 110 X.

Kirk ministers may be given choice to bless same sex civil partnerships

By Donna Nicholson

A KIRK Committee is set to call for ministers to decide for themselves whether to bless same sex unions under the new civil partnership legislation.

When the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sits in May it will be asked to examine the implications of the new civil partnership law and the place of individual ministers in blessing the unions.

The Assembly, which sits every year to discuss matters of importance facing the Church of Scotland, will be asked by the Kirk's Legal Questions Committee to receive a report relating to the issue of civil partnerships in Scotland.

Commissioners are set to hear that the reality of civil partnerships being entered into and fully recognised in law is an "obvious new pressure" on the Kirk.

And while acknowledging that the new law throws up the controversial question of same sex unions, it suggests that it be left to the discretion of individual ministers whether to consent or abstain from providing a religious element for homosexual couples entering a civil

partnership union.

A spokesperson for the Kirk explained: "The Committee itself readily acknowledges that this is a controversial question, but believes that it is important to recognise the existing freedom of pastoral conscience of ministers and deacons to guarantee that they do not face censure in the wake of providing this service.

"It is equally important to respect the rights of those who, in conscience, could not affirm same sex relationships, legally recognised by civil partnership. Consequently, the Committee will ask the General Assembly to agree that a minister or deacon who conducts any service marking a civil partnership does not commit a disciplinary offence while also asking the Assembly to agree that no minister or deacon will be obliged to conduct such a service against his or her conscience.

"The Committee will also ask the Assembly to agree that civil partners may ask another minister or deacon who is willing to conduct the service to do so if the parish minister has declined.

"The Committee's report

concludes by stating that it believes that the suggested agreement which it will place before the General Assembly is permissive in tone, but will protect conscience on all sides."

The report also makes clear that while civil partnerships cannot be entered into by persons of the opposite sex, there is no presumption in law that a sexual relationship exists where a civil partnership has been entered and can be an arrangement between friends solely for legal and financial reasons.

It advises that to some extent, therefore, it is necessary to take a neutral view of the implications of civil partnerships, but suggests that inevitably the issue is bound to attract controversy as "inferences are likely to be drawn". But the report goes on to suggest the Kirk "cannot do other" than recognise the legal reality of the situation.

Added the spokesperson: "The Kirk does, of course, have the protection of its own distinctive practice, through the independent spiritual jurisdiction in general, but it is not exempt from civil law in matters like pension rights and other patrimonial issues.

"The Legal Questions Committee believes that in these civil law respects, the General Assembly does not need to take any particular measures, but simply requires to recognise the implications of the new legislation, for instance in relation to pension entitlement and retirement housing provision.

"A major question facing the Committee was whether ministers and deacons may act in ways which would recognise the status conferred by the civil law event. There is no current expectation that civil law will devise the equivalent of a marriage ceremony and so the Church doesn't have to consider whether ministers would become celebrants for that legal function."

Scottish Catholic Observer
24.2.06

Editorial Comment:

It seems to be that everytime a moral issue arises, the National Church refuses to say what is right and what is wrong. Again it ducks behind discussion and debate.

TRUTH FOR YOUTH

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.
(Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

What are among the greatest obstacles to people believing the gospel today? Some are fairly obvious, such as the relative wealth of people in the western world, on account of which they feel insulated from any sense of spiritual need. Then there is secular humanism, which persuades people that science has the answers to the big questions of life, and God can be dispensed with as an outmoded concept. Another obstacle is the sheer pace of modern life, which leaves little time for quiet reflection on less obtrusive, but more important matters.

There is another, perhaps more subtle obstacle to the belief of the gospel, which is very pervasive in our modern world, and that is the notion of self-esteem. According to this theory, we should be able to say positively, "I like myself, I am a good person", "I deserve to be loved and happy". If we cannot make these assertions, then we are perceived to have a low self-esteem, and to be in need of therapy or some other means of building a better self-image.

What has this to do with accepting or rejecting the gospel? Well, it flies in the face of the Bible's teaching about human nature. It is said of humanity that in the days of Noah "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen.6:5). The Lord Jesus Christ said, "...out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt. 15:19). Paul said, "...I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom.7:18).

Such sentiments as these have been expressed in hymns. For example, look at these words from what is perhaps Augustus Toplady's best known, and, by many, best loved hymn, *Rock of Ages*.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

This verse sets out man's complete helplessness to do anything to make himself acceptable to God. On the contrary, the writer abases himself in the dust before God. "My hands are empty; I am morally and spiritually naked; I am helpless; I am foul. I am utterly dependent on Thee to clothe me in righteousness, to help me, to make me clean."

William Carey instructed that a line from one of Isaac Watts' hymns should be inscribed on his gravestone. Remember, Carey was a man who spent a lifetime in self-denying, cross-carrying, Christ following labour in England and India. "A guilty, weak and helpless wretch, On Thy kind arms I fall."

Modern psychology encourages people to love themselves, to think well of themselves, to regard themselves as deserving of commendation. It is a matter for great concern that this psychological approach has found its way into the church, and people are taught to think that God sent His Son to save them because they have personal worth. This is in reality a contradiction of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, because the biblical gospel tells people that they are sinful by nature and practice, under the condemnation of God, and helpless to rescue or change themselves. It tells them that their only hope is to come empty handed to God, who in love sent His Son to save sinners, not because they have personal worth, but because He is full of grace or favour towards the undeserving. Only in this way can they find acceptance with God. The wonder of it is that if they do come this way, they will find such acceptance.

Peter Kinley

Protestant Truth: March April 2006

CHILDREN'S CORNER

You probably will have heard of Eric Liddell, the man who wouldn't run on Sunday, but you probably haven't heard of Tom Farrell.

Tom Farrell was a great athlete and represented Britain in the Olympic Games

In 1956 he broke the British Games record in the 440 hurdles. He was running very well but he refused to take part in a competition against Russia and France. Why didn't he run?

"Well," he said, "That particular race was on a Sunday and Sunday is God's day and I want to give it all to Him". Tom Farrell knew that Sunday is God's day and that all of

that day belongs to God.

"Secondly," he said. "There are many grand Christian folk who have brought up children to keep the Lord's Day that I don't want to make it more difficult for any fellow, knowing how boys respect an athlete's word". Tom Farrell wanted to set a good example to all the boys and girls who are interested in sport.

"Thirdly, I do want God to have all the glory for anything that I do, because, after all, it is in His wonderful grace alone that this has been brought about".

What a great example from a great athlete! We too should keep God's day, giving it all to Him and keeping it free from sport and unnecessary work and all the things that can be done on the rest of the week.

Love from Mrs Glass



WOMEN'S VIEW

SUGGESTIONS TO PARENTS ON HOW TO GROW A CHILD FOR GOD

Pray for your child before he/she is born, and continue to pray for him/her afterwards. *Have a lot of enjoyment with your child.*

Love him/her unconditionally.

Look for opportunities when you can commend him/her. Express appreciation frequently.

Do not compare him with others.

Never mock your child or make fun of him/her. Beware of calling him/her dumb or clumsy or stupid.

Never make threats or promises that you do not intend to keep.

Be more concerned about Christian attitudes and character than you are about performance or athletic skill or clothing or external beauty or intelligence.

Live your convictions consistently. Your children will learn more by observing your example than they will by listening to your words.

Recognise that you are responsible to prepare your child for life in this world.

Avoid the use of angry or exasperated words.

Make your home a centre of Christian hospitality.



Seek to bring your child to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Labour to bring your child to Christ. God, of course, must do the saving, bring conviction, give repentance and faith. You, however, may provide the environment in which God saves by your prayers, Godly speech and example, daily devotions and involvement in a sound biblical church.

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