

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CONTINUING)

Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee

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19th October 2021

To: The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP (President for COP26 and Minister of State at the Cabinet Office);
cc The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP (Prime Minister of the United Kingdom); The Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
(First Minister of Scotland)

Dear Sir,

2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)

It was recently brought to our attention that an invitation was extended to Pope Francis to address the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) which is due to take place in Glasgow between 31st October and 12th November. It is not clear to us who invited the Pope to address COP26, and in what capacity he was invited, but we believe it to have been very unwise, for the following reasons:

Claim to Religious and Political Authority

As you will be aware, the Pope claims to have both religious and political authority. A doctrinal note to Roman Catholic policy makers released by Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XV) in January 2003 asserted that:

“the Catholic church has the divine, ultimate and legitimate authority to define the truth on morality and what is right in politics.”

[Source: ‘Article 52 of the European Constitution’. Article on *Catholics for Choice* website. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <http://www.seechange.org/what%27s%20new/article52briefingreport.htm>]

Do the organisers of COP26 believe the claims made in Cardinal Ratzinger’s doctrinal note? We do not believe that Rome’s claims to either religious or political authority have any Biblical or historical basis. However, our main concern is with the Vatican’s claim to religious authority.

The Protestant Reformation

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) as a Protestant Church adheres to the principles of the Reformation of the 16th century. In a sermon given in 1959 in King’s College Chapel, Aberdeen, at the annual Kirking of the Students Representative Council, Sir Thomas Taylor (1897-1962), Principal of Aberdeen University, addressed one of the fundamental principles of the Reformation in Scotland:

“It is sometimes said, in a superior kind of way, that our Reforming forefathers were intolerant, i.e. intolerant of Roman Catholicism. So they were, for good reason. But the issue before them was not whether they should be tolerant or intolerant. It was in fact an issue of life or death; it was, in plain terms, whether the familiars of the Inquisition were to be allowed to walk the streets of Edinburgh, as they walked the streets of Lisbon and Madrid, of Rome, Brussels, and Amsterdam.”

[Source: Thomas Murray Taylor, *Where One Man Stands* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1960), p. 97.]

Commenting on the National Library of Scotland’s display commemorating the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation in 2010, Dr Anette Hagan, senior curator of rare book collections at the Library, referred to some of the political and social consequences of the Reformation in Scotland:

“Our latest display is a fantastic showcase of key artefacts relating to the Scottish reformation, which is one of the most important events in our country’s history and had repercussions reaching far beyond the dramas of John Knox’s quarrels with Mary Queen of Scots.

It marked a switch in international alliances away from Catholic France and towards Protestant England, enabling the Union of the Crowns in 1603, and established Calvinism as one of the dominant influences of Scottish life, leading to centuries of hellfire sermons – but also to a society with a strong sense of social

“God is our refuge and our strength” – Psalm 46:1

responsibility and the highest rate of literacy in Europe.”

[Source: ‘450 years after the Reformation’. Article by Phyllis Stephen on *the Edinburgh Reporter* website. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2010/08/450-years-after-the-reformation/>]

In 2017 Anglican Mark Thompson, Principal of Moore College, Sydney, summarised the ongoing significance of the Reformation when he wrote:

“Several times this year I have been asked why the Reformation still matters. After all, the key events happened 500 years ago and a lot has happened since then. A century of ecumenical endeavour has led some to insist that the Reformation is no longer needed or no longer relevant. Who wants to celebrate a moment of division?”

My by-now well-rehearsed answer (it is October after all) is that the Reformation still matters because of the changes that were made, the doctrine that was taught, the blood that was spilt, the error that persists, and the gospel mission that remains.

The Reformation changed our world. That is a big claim but it is true. The Reformation changed the nature of family life, the nature of church life and even architecture, the nature of Christian ministry, and the relationship of church and state.”

[Source: ‘The Reformation Speaks Today’. Article by Mark Thompson on the *Moore Theological College* website. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://moore.edu.au/resources/the-reformation-speaks-today-2/>]

The United Kingdom is a Protestant country, with the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law. There is a permanent settlement in favour of a Protestant monarchy and a Protestant church establishment in England and Scotland.

The historical doctrinal standard of the Church of England is the 39 *Articles of Religion*. Article XXXVII (‘Of the Civil Magistrates’) declares:

“The Bishop of Rome [i.e. the pope] hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England.”

The historical doctrinal standard of the Church of Scotland is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Chapter XXV (‘Of the Church’) declares:

“VI. There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense, be head thereof; but is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.”

The Roman Catholic Church’s opposition to the Protestant Reformation continues, and its intention is that the United Kingdom should be ‘reconciled’ to the Papacy, which would be a repudiation of the Protestant Constitution of the United Kingdom and against our national interests.

The Legal Personality of the Holy See

Timothy A. Byrnes, Professor of Political Science at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, has written:

“A cable from the US Embassy to the Holy See in 2001 captured this wholly unique status when it described in telling terms the primary “national” self-interest’ of the Holy See as seeking ‘to protect Catholics around the world, its own position of influence, and its vast wealth’ (The Guardian 2010). Note, again, the telling use of the phrase ‘national self-interest’ to describe the preferences and actions of a transnational, non-territorial religious entity.”

[Source: ‘Sovereignty, Supranationalism, and Soft Power: The Holy See in International Relations’. In: *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 15, issue 4 (2017), pp.6-20. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15570274.2017.1392140>]

The Roman Catholic Church makes it clear that it regards its legal personality as necessary or useful in carrying out her mission:

“The Church makes use of the juridical means necessary or useful for carrying out her mission.”

[Source: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Part Two, Ch. 9, Section III, b. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_c ompendio-dott-soc_en.html]

However, John R. Morss, Senior Lecturer in Deakin Law School, Melbourne, Australia, wrote in his paper on ‘The International Legal Status of the Vatican/Holy See Complex’:

“The Vatican has been allowed, in effect, to select attributes of statehood that it wishes to enjoy (such as those conferring powers, influence and immunities) without accompanying those privileges with an acknowledgement of the obligations that normally attend statehood...”

The papal system of diplomacy...is not diplomacy as international law recognizes it. It is religious outreach...”

Morss states in his Conclusions:

“Either the responsibilities that go with statehood must be fully embraced [by the Vatican/Holy See complex] or the immunities that go with statehood must be fully relinquished. The analysis presented above supports the second of these options.”

[Source: John R. Morss, ‘The International Legal Status of the Vatican/Holy See Complex’. In: *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 26, issue 4 (November 2015), pp. 927-946. Retrieved October 27, 2018 from <https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/26/4/927/2599610>]

Moral Corruption

We believe that certain moral principles and practices which undergird the mission of the Roman Catholic Church, for example Mental Reservation and Auricular Confession, have a demoralising influence on any political or religious relationship between civil powers and the Vatican.

Although, sadly, corruption is rampant throughout the world, and is also to be found in many religions and even churches, it is widespread within the Roman Catholic Church. For example, there is widespread immorality in the Roman Catholic priesthood, including paedophilia, and an even more widespread cover-up of such criminal behaviour. The historic position of the Roman Catholic Church has been that criminal behaviour on the part of clergy is the sole responsibility of the Church, and that it should not be referred to state authorities.

It appears to us that it is only when it is compelled to do so by external pressure, such as the weight of public opinion or the criticism of international and regional bodies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, that the Roman Catholic Church makes any attempt to address the corruption within its bounds, with regard for example to paedophilia and financial scandals.

We referred earlier to a paper by John Morss on ‘The International Legal Status of the Vatican/Holy See Complex’. In his paper Morss also wrote:

“It might be said that, as demonstrated by the recent Vatican response to issues of children’s rights, there is no reason to believe that anything other than slow, selective and ultimately unreliable acceptance of international responsibilities is to be anticipated. Every new incumbent of the papacy can change policy.”

The Confessional

An extensive work by three American authors states:

“Priests know about the clerical abuse of minors from hearing confessions of other priests, but of course can do nothing about an individual case, being held by a most sacred obligation to observe the seal of the confession at all costs.”

[Source: Thomas P. Doyle, A. W. Richard Sipe & Patrick J. Wall, *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church’s 2,000 Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse* (Los Angeles, CA: Volt Press, 2006), p. 203]

The work in Australia of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017) has highlighted this problem. In her evidence to the Commission, Dr Marie Keenan, Lecturer at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice at University College Dublin, stated:

“The men in my research [clerical men who had abused minors] used the sacrament of reconciliation [confession] to seek forgiveness, resolve never to do this bad thing again and in some cases to ease their conscience.”

[Source: ‘Evidence – Dr Marie Keenan’, p.11. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/IND.0675.001.0001.pdf>]

On 21st June 2019, Pope Francis approved and ordered the publication of a Note concerning the inviolability of the ‘sacramental seal’, which includes the following statement:

“In the presence of sins that involve criminal offenses, it is never permissible, as a condition for absolution, to place on the penitent the obligation to turn himself in to civil justice, by virtue of the natural principle, incorporated in every system, according to which ‘nemo tenetur se detegere [no one is obliged to disclose]’.”

‘Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Importance of the Internal Forum and the Inviolability of the

Sacramental Seal'. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/documents/rc_trib_appen_pro_20190629_forointerno_en.html

Pope Francis

In an article posted on the *Militant Church* in 2019 in response to an article written by Bishop Robert Barron of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Gene Gomulka wrote:

“The even greater ‘elephant in the room’ that neither the media nor the U.S. Bishops – including Bp. Barron – want to expose is the amount of abuse that Pope Francis himself covered up in Buenos Aires prior to his papal election. How can the Pope discipline bishops for covering up or under-reporting sex abuse when most bishops know he himself covered-up innumerable abuse cases in his archdiocese with a population of 2.5 million Catholics?”

[Source: Gene Thomas Gomulka, ‘A Response to Bishop Robert Barron’s “Letter to a Suffering Church”’. Article on the *Militant Church* website dated 9 July 2019. Retrieved October 11, 2021 from <https://www.churchmilitant.com/news/article/a-response-to-bishop-robert-barrons-letter-to-a-suffering-church>]

In light of the above we believe that Pope Francis should not be given a public platform to promote the mission of the Roman Catholic Church and to deflect attention from the ongoing scandals within the Roman Catholic Church itself.

Neutrality

During the First World War Pope Benedict XV declared that his position was to be one of ‘neutrality’. This position was ostensibly maintained by successive popes, including by Pius XII during the Second World War and even up till the present. A report in *The Observer* stated:

“But all the EU countries represented in Wednesday’s meeting voted in concord and the motion - to strip Syria of those rights - sailed through by 87 against 15, with 34 abstentions...”

The Holy See was the only European country which attended the meeting, but declared abstention, in line with its tradition of not taking sides.”

[Source: ‘Chemical-weapons vote reveals ‘friends of Syria’ axis’. Article by Andrew Rettman on *euobserver* website. Retrieved October 11, 2021 <https://euobserver.com/world/151636>]

The Popes claim to be Christ’s representatives on earth. The Lord Jesus Christ was never ‘neutral’ on moral issues. He did not just condemn sin: He also condemned sinners (Matthew 23:13-39). We would not regard the declaration of ‘neutrality’ on the part of the Papacy as evidence of spiritual or moral leadership, but rather as evidence of a lack of moral courage.

We believe that the invitation to Pope Francis to address COP26 was ill-judged. Notwithstanding the announcement on 8th October that the Pope will not now be attending COP26, and that Cardinal Parolin will be leading the Vatican delegation instead, as its ‘secretary of state’, on the ground of all that we have stated above, we respectfully ask that even at this late stage the invitation to the Vatican be withdrawn.

Yours sincerely,



David Blunt
(Clerk *pro tem* to the Committee, and on behalf of the Committee)

PORM Committee

Mr Lindsay MacCallum, Mr Murdo MacDonald (Northern Presbytery); Rev. David S. Fraser (Southern Presbytery); Rev. Henry J.T. Woods (Presbytery of Inverness); Rev. Greg MacDonald (*Convener*), Mr Donald Morrison (Presbytery of the Outer Hebrides); Rev. Calum Smith, Mr Donald A. Robertson (Presbytery of Skye & Lochcarron); Rev. Warren E. Gardner, Mr John M. King (Presbytery of the US); Rev. David M. Blunt (*Adviser*).