



## March 2024 Newsletter



### WELCOME

### LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

### PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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## WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

The desire of an increasing number in our society for an unrestricted right to abortion seems to grow stronger all the time. In a more distant past, the desire for unrestricted abortion was only considered to be desirable up until a certain point in the development of the child in the womb. Indeed, those who advocated such a right in the past would have shared our sense of horror at the very idea of such an unrestricted right being extended to the point of birth. However, in our increasingly degenerate, heartless, immoral and pagan (nature worshipping) civilisation, there are now those who are pushing for just that and are doing so in the House of Commons.

Let us first be clear as to what abortion is and what it isn't: Some time ago, abortion was defined as the termination of pregnancy by the removal or expulsion from the uterus of a foetus or embryo prior to viability, whether such expulsion occurred spontaneously or deliberately. This allowed some to argue, spuriously, that there was very little difference between a miscarriage and what we now call abortion.

However, it is now well-established linguistic usage to confine the use of the term 'abortion' to the deliberate removal of the child from the womb while the term 'miscarriage' is used, exclusively, to describe the spontaneous expulsion from the womb. In the midst of all the confusion, and in an area where there is little to cheer, this linguistic development is something to be profoundly thankful for as there is all the difference in the world, from both natural and spiritual perspectives, between natural death and inflicted death. What would be thought of someone who tried to argue that if some two-year-olds die anyway, it can't be wrong to kill them?

As to the procedure itself (the actual details are too awful to detail – although it should be said that much is lost by not pondering them or seeing their results in hospital bins) there are two methods by which abortions are currently carried out: One involves taking two drugs which kill the child within a few hours of taking the latter one; the other, 'vacuum aspiration', known more commonly as the 'suction method', does as its name suggests – it dismembers the child and sucks its various parts out of the womb. This 'procedure' (which makes it sound like a mere hip replacement) takes around 10-15 minutes and takes place under a general or local anaesthetic.

Although most women only take an hour or so to recover and go home on the same day, it is still a dangerous procedure and the sheer mental difficulty of getting over it emotionally is kept extraordinarily quiet: it's one of these unmentionable things of which there are an increasing number in our liberal society – in much the same way as it is sometimes difficult to find much information on 'trans' people who bitterly regret their attempt to change sex.

Unsurprisingly, however, many women struggle for years to get over what they inevitably recognise themselves to have done, and despite all they have been told about 'parasites' and their own 'rights', they know that they have voluntarily ended the life of their own child, a child which every part of their own being is still telling them, instinctively as well as intellectually, they ought to have preserved and protected. To add insult to the injury inflicted on the child, they have ended that life within the 'sanctuary' of their own womb, a space intended to be the ultimate 'safe space', an organ specially and wonderfully designed for the preservation and nurture and growth of that child.

The arguments used in defence of abortion are, in fact, poor.

Many of them have to do with the child being somehow less than human in its earlier stages (although it is now clear that babies develop earlier and much more quickly than people once thought – even those who fought to introduce abortions now realise that the child is far developed before it is destroyed. The child in the womb even feels pain long before it was once thought to do so).

2 However, that whole line of thinking misses the point. As regards the child being something less than human prior to birth, the stubborn fact remains that even when the child in the womb is in the earliest stages of its development, it is nonetheless a human life and is so from the point of conception. Although neither the sperm nor the egg constitute a human life (and are at no point, considered separately, a potential life) the first cell created by their mysterious union contains within it all that constitutes human life. This initial cell is not a potential human life (as some refer to it) but a real human life. No amount of sophistry can alter or hide this fact.

And it is this very fact – the fact that it is a human life – rather than the precise stage of that life’s development which accounts for its sanctity as a being in God’s image. In glorious and humbling condescension, Christ himself was once a single cell, and in later life, while praying to his father in heaven, he says concerning himself prior to his body parts taking distinct shape:

‘You formed my inward parts...I am fearfully and wonderfully made...my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret...your eyes saw my substance being yet unformed, and in your book they were all written’ (Psalm 139).

Incidentally, the point at which a human life becomes a ‘person’ is an utter red herring and Christians should avoid arguing on such grounds: the Bible never argues for the sanctity of the human life on the basis of the possession of ‘personhood’ but on the basis of that human life itself being God given and bearing God’s image.

Of course, taking away human life by force, without some wrongdoing on the part of that human life, is murder. Depending on the various stages of that human life, or the relation between the murderer and his victim, that murder may be termed genocide, infanticide, matricide, patricide, fratricide, homicide, regicide or suicide – all of which are, of course, criminal acts – but this is simply called ‘termination’ and the child terminated is a ‘foetus’. It’s easier to kill what is first renamed and redefined. Perhaps if it was called ‘foeticide’ it might be viewed more seriously than it is.

As for the woman having a ‘right to choose’, it is difficult to see why this should be the case. First, every individual human life is immediately invested with Divine, and ought to be invested with legal, protection. It is God’s right to choose. Second, the child also has a father. Third, the child is not ‘part of the woman’s body’ but entirely distinct from it even while located within it: Remarkably, the child’s blood type is usually different from the mother’s blood type, and the mother’s body (her immune system) recognises the child, in the way in which it responds to the child within the womb, as not part of her own body and compensates for that in the most extraordinary ways.

As for the fact that the child is dependent on its mother’s body, it is hard to see why this should be a reason to authorise the death of that child. Why should the dependence of one human upon another constitute some kind of license to kill? Do we apply that rule to babies on the breast? People in intensive care? Or people with severe disabilities? Sadly, I suppose some do...

Some will argue that it isn’t good to take human life into the world where their quality of life is likely to be poor – but who should be the judge of that? Most children with Downs Syndrome are now routinely destroyed in the womb, but most of us now know from experience that some of the happiest parents in the world are parents of Down Syndrome children – even though they were originally shocked, possibly even devastated, when these children were diagnosed or born – and some of the happiest children in the world are children with Down Syndrome. We have no right to prejudge the quality of life that others might have, and we are not qualified to do so in any case. To go beyond Down’s Syndrome, I have often noticed that the happiest people I meet are people with disabilities of what others would consider unacceptably limiting ‘defects’.

In last week’s intimations, I mentioned the astonishing confusion in the minds of those who argue, on the one hand, for recognising the serious trauma and devastating loss involved in miscarriage – to the extent of being outraged where burial has been denied and viewing such denial as a loss of ‘dignity’ in disposing of the child – while arguing, on the other hand, that the mother has a right to kill that same child right up to the point of its birth! This ‘right to kill’ is, apparently, on the basis that the child, at that point in its existence, is a ‘parasite’ a ‘cluster of cells’ or a ‘tumour’ (these are all terms I have heard used in descriptions of an aborted child in order to justify killing it). Does it not occur to such people that having funerals for a ‘parasite’, or a ‘tumour’ is utterly abnormal?

The counter argument – that the worth of the child is only determined by the mother’s attitude to it – is as bizarre as it is disturbing. Have we really reached a point where the value of one human life is entirely dependent on how someone else sees that life? How unbelievably selfish and narcissistic!

Of course, with logic so poor yet with argumentation so predictable, it is easy to see the trajectory. If it is acceptable to view the child at the point of birth as a ‘cluster of cells’ and as a ‘parasite’ (presumably because it is still dependant on its mother) then it continues to be these things outside of the birth canal while still connected to the umbilical cord. Indeed, the umbilical cord itself being cut doesn’t alter the fact that the child continues to be dependent for many months – even years – afterwards (a human child develops into independence more slowly than almost any other creature).

It is no wonder, then, that a tenured professor in Canada has openly advocated that the right of abortion should naturally be extended into a right to end the child's life for some considerable time after birth. The initial 'shock' at such a suggestion will soon evaporate – believe me – if current proposals for unrestricted abortions are approved. It will lead to the legalisation of what is currently categorised as infanticide, something which came to be accepted in the days of the Roman Empire, but which Christianity banished from Europe – until the 'enlightenment' of the 21st century. Such is 'progress'.

All this is connected with the erosion of the value of human life on a much wider scale. Once you justify its destruction at any stage, it becomes easier to justify it at another stage.

So many other issues need to be brought into this which neither time nor space allow – the help needed by women who feel they want or should have an abortion, sometimes at the most basic levels of fearing gestation, parturition, and parenting; the importance of responsible fathers; the needs of thousands of couples unable to have children. All these issues are important – but the most fundamental issue is one of life and death.

Finally, the strongest argument for an abortion, the most emotive, and until fairly recently the most widely used, is that it becomes necessary, or at least permissible, if the life of the mother is in danger. However, some other factors need to be fed in here: Although it is a surprise to almost everyone who hears this statistic, this kind of scenario is so rare that it involves only a vanishingly small 0.004% of all cases of abortion. So, supposing this exception were to be allowed, is the allowance of abortion in 0.004% of all pregnancies enough reason to allow the mass murder of millions of children in the womb every year?

Second, does anyone stop to think if the mother has a say in this? Or, indeed, the father? The Saviour himself said, 'greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'. Is it not conceivable, then, that some mothers may wish to say, 'please save the child and not me'? However, I would suspect that the very selfishness and narcissism which argues for unrestricted abortion would probably find such self-sacrifice absolutely and utterly impossible to understand.

Your minister

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## NEWS & EVENTS

### GAMBIA UPDATE

#### **Trials**

Brikama RP Church has experienced some trials lately. In the midst of these difficulties, the Lord has kept and upheld His flock from wolves who came in seeking to devour. We are reminded that, "the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

#### **Evangelism**

Recently, three members, living in and around the Church community in Brikama, have engaged in evangelism, each Wednesday, to reach out with the Gospel and the reformed faith. In addition, several members are also engaged in personal evangelism.

These efforts have proved fruitful, as we are seeing new people attending worship almost every Lord's Day. For instance, last Lord's Day, we had three visitors, including a Muslim whom we invited along, during the weekly outreach. We hope and pray that these visitors will continue in attendance and come to know Christ, as the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

- 4 Last week, two new children attended Church. When we asked them who invited them and they pointed to some children in our Church.

We are also engaged in outreach in a nearby village called Kabekel, the population of which is half Muslim, half Roman Catholic. Each Friday, we hold a fellowship where the Word is shared and Psalms are sung.



## **Life Impact School**

Life Impact School in Brikama currently has a total of 200 students. Each week the children are taught from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, along with the kids catechism. In addition, for some time now, we have been teaching them Psalm Singing.

Each Friday, we hold a Teachers Fellowship. We have recently been discussing a Bible tract entitled, “An Urgent Plea to Roman Catholics,” in order to address the issues associated with works based salvation and other errors of Roman Catholicism, as opposed to Biblical salvation, by faith in Christ alone. The reason being is that there are a lot of Roman Catholics living in our community.

## **Pastors Fellowship**

Each month, we hold a Pastors Fellowship in a village called Lamin, which I run along with Pastor Edrissa Colley (Presbyterian Church in the Gambia). The purpose of the fellowship is to invite pastors along, in order to introduce them to the reformed faith and to fellowship together on that basis. At the last fellowship we watched a sermon preached by Rev. Craig Scott entitled, ‘The Christian Duty to Love Israel’. This led to a worthwhile time of discussion on a much neglected truth.

The Pastors in the PCG are reformed in their doctrine. Last week, they invited me to join them in a seminar and address over 200 youths on the topic of ‘the Bible and Culture.’ There was also a time for Q&A, where many questions were raised, such as, can Christians lose their salvation? We hope to organise similar seminars in the future, in order to share the reformed faith with these youths, who are eager to learn.

## **Church Building**

The temporary Church Building is progressing at pace. The borehole for the water supply has been installed and the blocks are currently being made, which will enable the construction of the building to begin. The only challenge we have is that thieves are rampant in the area. This meant that the contractor had to hire security to protect the site, during the construction process.

## **Prayer**

Pray that the Lord would grant us a spirit of peace and unity in the congregation.

Pray that the Lord would add to our number and build us up, not merely numerically, but most importantly in conformity to Christ.

Pray that the Lord would, establish the work of our hands (Psalm 90:7) here in Brikama and throughout Gambia, as we reach out with the Gospel and the reformed faith.

## **Pastor Sylvester Konteh**





*Youth Seminar*



*Pastors Edrisa Fabureh, Edrissa Colley & Sylvester Konteh*



*Borehole on the Church land in Brikama*

## COLUMBA OF IONA

Columba was the great evangelist and missionary to the North Picts of Scotland. He was born in the year 521 and died in 597. When Columba started his work, no messenger of Christ had ever reached the North Picts; when he died, the work of their evangelisation had been largely accomplished and well done.

Columba was born at Garten, in the county of Donegal in Ireland. An old Irish life of him says: "The noted saint forsook his homeland out of love and surrender to Christ...and this thought filled him his whole life through." A certain Dallen Forghaill, one of Columba's contemporaries, who may have known him personally, says of him: "He was a very prudent man, a believing Christian, learned, chaste, full of love; he was noble, friendly, the physician for the soul of every prudent man; protection for the naked, comforter of the poor. No one ever left this world who held the cross grasped in a more lively way than he." Another writer says of him: "From tender youth he cherished the most intimate love for Christ,"

In the year 563, at the age of 42, Columba entered upon his mission. He went first to Scotland with twelve companions, himself their leader. Among the twelve was a certain Mochenna, a son of a chieftain of Ulster, <sup>6</sup>Columba thought that this youth was needed in Ireland, and sought to dissuade him from going to Scotland, but it was no use. Mochenna replied to Columba: "You are my father; the Church is my mother; and my fatherland is everywhere, wherever I can win souls for Christ."

Instead of establishing himself on the mainland of Scotland, Columba decided to make his permanent headquarters on the island of Hy or Iona, which belonged to the Scottish kingdom of Delriada. In later times this island was often known as Hy-Columbkille, or "island of St. Columba." Soon after arrival, Columba and his monks built cells out of wood and earth. They built a cell for their abbot on a slight elevation. This rude foundation was destined to be of great consequence for Christendom. The historian Bellesheim says: "These are the unpromising looking buds of an establishment which was to bring the benefits of religion, culture, and civilization, during the course of time, to millions of people. Only with feelings of the deepest admiration could even men whose religious conceptions make the spirit of monasticism incompatible with the Christian religion, visit these places which are so worthy of reverence.

Here Columba spent two years without a break. In addition to the routine of supervising the monastery, he spent part of his time in manual work, and especially in copying the Bible. He is said to have made 300 copies of the New Testament with his own hands. Besides these activities, he was careful to maintain good relations with the ruler of the land. One Conal was at that time king of Delriada, He received Columba courteously, and made him a present of the island of Iona.

The Scots of Delriada were Christians at this time, but the North Picts were not. Columba, therefore, sought their conversion, beginning in the year 565. In this work, of which we have no detailed knowledge, Columba remained occupied for some years.

Iona formed the centre and nucleus of activity of the missionary workers who grouped themselves about Columba. Working from this base of operations, Columba established a great number of monastic foundations in both Scotland and Ireland. These new monasteries retained their bond of connection with Iona, and altogether formed a single organism, From our Protestant point of view, which we believe with good reason to be Scriptural, monasticism is a perversion of the Christian religion. However we should remember that in those early days nearly all missionaries were monks, and these men were without doubt among the most faithful and Christ-like Christians of their time. They were true witnesses for Jesus Christ and his gospel, and each monastery they founded was a beacon light of Christian truth throwing its rays far out into the darkness of the surrounding paganism. Without approving of monasticism itself, we can realise and appreciate the Christian consecration of these men and the great good they accomplished by their self-sacrificing labours. And as Covenanters we are especially their debtors, for they were greatly used of God toward the conversion of Scotland to Christianity, and thus they were among those who, humanly speaking, laid the original foundations of the Covenanter Church.

As Columba felt the end of his earthly pilgrimage approaching, he said "I shall repose from my labours, and the following night I shall go the way that my fathers have gone . . . Be of good comfort, for the Lord Jesus will gather me unto himself." Then he slowly and laboriously climbed a high hill near the monastery of Iona and blessed the establishment he had been permitted to establish, using these words: "Small indeed and of mean appearance is this house, but it will be held in great honour, not only by the king and people of Ireland, but also by foreign princes and barbarian nations; yes, even the saints of other churches shall gaze upward toward it with admiration." At the time of his death Columba had been a missionary among the Pictish peoples for 37 years.

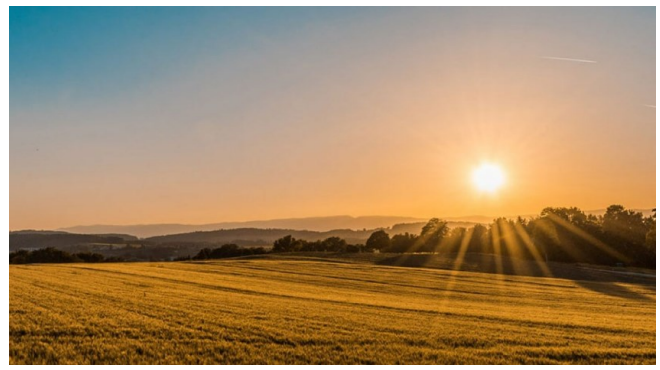
Adamnan, who died in 704, was the ninth successor of Columba as head of the monastery of Iona. He says of Columba: "From childhood he was brought up in Christian discipline and the study of wisdom... His face was like that of an angel; his speech was captivating; his activity was holy, with which he always employed his high talents and his mature intelligence to good effect. . . He was loved by all, for a never-fading joy, which rested upon his features, gave evidence of that happy attitude of mind, with which the Holy Spirit had filled the depths of his soul.'

Bellesheim says of Columba: "At all events the force of his character makes itself felt with irresistible power, and Columba belongs in just that category of bold men who have impressed the imprint of their exalted soul in ineradicable features upon the century which gave them birth." Surely in Columba, God gave a very great man to his Church, a man who accomplished a great work for Christ.

**J.G. Vos, Blue Banner Faith and Life, Volume 1, January 1946**



# Children's Corner



'I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life' (John 8:12)

Dear Children,

Have you noticed that the daylight starts earlier and stops later now? I hope that doesn't mean you wake up earlier in the morning and sleep later at night because I know that would not make your parents too happy!

I'm sure you know that we get our light from the sun. That means that as the daytime gets longer, we get a little more sunlight every day.

If you have read about the six days of creation in Genesis chapter 1, you will know that God created the sun, the moon and the stars on the fourth day. Now, why don't you go and read the chapter very carefully and see what God did on the first day? If you don't know, maybe you should just go and find out before you carry on reading – because I'm just about to tell you! You only need to read the first five verses of Genesis chapter 1.

Yes, on the first day He separated light from darkness. So, there was light before He made the sun! This might seem strange to you but when you read about God in New Testament it tells us that, 'God is light' (1 John 5:10) and Jesus also said about himself, 'I am the light of the world' (John 8:12).

Sunlight teaches us a lot of things about God: sunlight helps us to see things and God helps us to understand things as well; sunlight is bright and pure and God's glory is bright and pure as well; sunlight helps your body to grow (it gives you vitamin D) and God helps us to grow in in our souls as well; sunlight makes the ground fruitful and God makes our souls fruitful too by filling us with the fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

God's Word is like light as well.

When we read it, sometimes it shines inside us and we see all the bad things that we try to hide and we don't really like that but it's good for us because when we see these things we can pray and say 'sorry' for them.

When we read it at other times, it shines in front of us showing us the path to take in life and how we should live, 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Psalm 119: 105).

When we read it at other times, it shines behind us and shows us how God has protected us and helped us in so many ways.

When you trust in Jesus as your Saviour, God's light starts to shine inside you as well and as you start to live the way God wants you to live, others will begin to see it too. Who knows, maybe they will start to want the same light that shines in you!

Here is a way to remember some of these using the letters of 'light' at the beginning of each word.

God is **L**oving

God is **I**nfinite (you can find the meaning find in a dictionary!)

God is **G**racious

8 God is **H**oly

God is **T**ruthful

With my love and prayers,

Mrs S