

PRESS RELEASE - Wednesday 20 May 2009

NEWS FROM FORWARD TOGETHER

"In a feature in a national Scottish newspaper today, Rev. Steven Reid Chairman of the Church of Scotland evangelical group 'Forward Together' will argue that the forthcoming General Assembly must uphold " overarching teaching of the Scriptures" on homosexuality. He will explain why so many ministers and many rank and file members of the Church of Scotland oppose the move by the Presbytery of Aberdeen to approve practicing homosexuals in the ministry.

The full text of Rev. Reid's article is shown below.

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For broadcasters, an MP3 file is available comprising a 20s comment from Rev. Reid.

FEATURE:

In recent weeks newspaper headlines like "Kirk in Crisis." and "Assembly headed for Row." have become commonplace. Many have suggested that the Church of Scotland is headed for a stormy debate at this year's General Assembly on the question of practicing homosexuals in the ministry. A key question therefore is what motivates those of us within the Church of Scotland who argue the case against the practice of homosexuality?

First and foremost, in the Church of Scotland the teaching of the bible is held to be the supreme rule of faith and life. When we begin to examine the bible's teaching on the persistent practice of homosexual activity we find that it is consistently prohibited and condemned. It is not the case, as has been suggested, that this is based on one or two selective biblical texts, but rather the overarching teaching of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

According to the Bible human beings are creatures called as male and female to be the image of God in the world. Part of that calling involves sexual expression but this is to be celebrated within its appropriate creation context. That biblical context is only found in the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. It is only in understanding this positive vision that we can then make sense of why the Bible speaks so negatively about forms of sexual expression that fall outside God's creation purposes.

There are those who readily admit that the Biblical evidence is against them even while arguing for homosexual clergy. Rev. Prof. William Loader, of Murdoch University in Australia is an example in a recent article in favour of same sex clergy he wrote;

"In the current discussions about homosexuality, some issues should be clear from the start. One is that the Bible roundly condemns homosexuality and homosexual activity. Of this there is not a shadow of a doubt. Its writers deplored homosexual acts as a deliberate perversion of human nature, a flouting of God's intention in creation."

However, Professor Loader's argument is that the Biblical writers did not know of homosexual people who are committed believers and faithful in their relationships.

This is the claim that is often made that the times have moved on and the biblical writers knew nothing of such loving and committed sexual relationships between people of the same sex. This surely misses the point. The bible's problem with homosexuality is not its lack of love and commitment, but that it is not a marriage which is the proper place for the expression of sexual relationships, and that such marriage can only be between a man and a woman. In Matthew chapter 19 Jesus said, "at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female", he goes on to speak about the institution of marriage. In this passage, Jesus is affirming the created order and stating that the institution of marriage is between a man and a woman. Since it is woven into the created order that sexual relationships are between a man and woman, this is not a principle that varies according to the culture of the day.

In the current debate there are some who have adopted scaremongering tactics. For example, it is suggested that the opposition to the Ministry of a practicing homosexual is parallel to those opposed to the ordination of women in the 1960s. But the difference between the two cases is the difference in the strength and the vehemence with which the Bible speaks on these issues evidenced by the women members, elders and ministers who oppose the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Even the most ardent opponent to the ordination of women would have to concede that the bible does not call it sin. That however is the unanimous verdict of the scripture on the persistent practice of homosexuality.

There are others who ask where the grace of God and the forgiveness of the gospel is in all of this? Where indeed? As I understand the present case before the Assembly, the man concerned is not seeking forgiveness. Instead, he is seeking to continue his unbiblical conduct with no attempt to change, and is expecting the Church to call it "good". In the bible, when Jesus forgives he expects us to change our ways. Indeed, there are a number of believers who have to deal with the fact that they experience homosexual attraction, but because they believe in the bible's teaching, they lead a life of celibacy in doing so they know the forgiveness and grace of God in their lives.

Over the next few days the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland will hear the case of the Rev. Scott Rennie and an Overture brought by the Presbytery of Lochcarron and Skye which asserts a clear doctrinal position on all matters of marriage and human sexuality. According to the published time-table the case will be heard first. This would mean the particular was decided before a principle was established. Assembly organisers state that there is a danger that if the Overture is heard first the outcome might influence the decision of Mr. Rennie's case.

Many commissioners however, question the logic of this position. I believe together with many others in the evangelical group 'Forward Together' that personal cases make bad law. They are often decided, not on objective principles, but subjectively. It makes far more sense therefore for the Overture to be heard first. It reaffirms the standard of sexual morality the Church expects from her ministers. Once that has been clarified the Assembly can then apply those principles to Mr. Rennie's case.

It is the hope of Forward Together, and the hope of many rank and file members of the Church of Scotland, that the Assembly will support the clear petition of the Presbytery of Lochcarron and Skye and uphold the appeal against the induction of Rev Scott Rennie.