



forward together

An organisation for evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. Editor: Ian M Watson Issue No.2 August 2005

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

On Thursday 26th May, during the General Assembly week, Forward Together held its first Annual General Meeting. The atmosphere was positive and optimistic. Gordon Kennedy's opening remarks as Chairman were particularly well received as he shared his view of Forward Together's future. He did so by giving four "failure criteria" by which to measure our performance. Here they are in summary.

Forward Together will have failed: **if there is an evangelical schism.** This fear was highlighted in Harry Reid's book "Outside Verdict". We believe that schism would be a disaster, not just for the Kirk, but for the work of the gospel in Scotland. Forward Together is committed to working within the Church of Scotland. Our aim is to stay in and by so doing strengthening the church. Forward Together has been accused of being divisive. Simply by existing our detractors claim that we will engender division. We refute this categorically.

Forward Together will have failed: **if we as evangelicals do not effectively engage in the life and work of the church.** Many evangelicals are reluctant to commit time to Presbytery, central Boards and the General Assembly. This is understandable, for the parish is a full time job. We are all busy. But part of our calling is to be engaged at all levels of church life. Forward Together is about a reformation of the church after the will of God. We are a reform movement. We are not about preserving the status quo. And therefore, we will actively encourage and assist our membership to be active in the life of our denomination.

Forward Together will have failed: **if we offend others by the way we communicate or work with them.** Evangelicals have been accused of being against everything, and of having an aggressive approach. We admit some truth in that accusation. We believe in grace and must be known as gracious. We depend upon the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit and must

display his fruit in all our lives and service of the gospel.

Forward Together will have failed: **if we don't develop means of working together.** This is a big work. We are engaging with the contemporary world. This is not a job for just the 12 members of the Steering Group. We must encourage one another to work, think and study, to share ideas and come to a position on matters of debate. At the moment it is not clear how we do this. The internet, as well as the old fashioned telephone and letter writing will play a part. We need to produce the material we want communicated to the nation and the church.

We are not planning for failure, we are praying for the power of God to be at work in the life of his church. People of the gospel can only be positive and hopeful in following the Lord Jesus who has overcome every failure and reigns in glory over his church and his world.

BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

In recent months a debate has been running in Ministers' Forum, the in-house newsletter for ministers, concerning the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. An important aspect of what we believe about our Lord Jesus has been ridiculed, described as unbiblical, and unessential. We asked David Wright, recently retired professor of Church History at Edinburgh University, to write a short piece to encourage those of us who actually believe the Creeds. This he has done. David edited a most helpful book about Mary, our Lord's mother, from an evangelical perspective entitled 'Chosen by God', published by Marshall-Pickering.

The doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus (as it is more accurately called; his birth was entirely natural) is perhaps the best attested of all the Christian church's beliefs about the person of Jesus Christ. It is

unambiguously taught in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and is in fact the most prominent common element in their very different infancy narratives. It is not explicit in Mark or John, but then neither of these Gospels narrates the story of Jesus' birth.

The doctrine was taken for granted (ie. it was not the subject of controversy) from the earliest post-New Testament writings onwards, and was one of the very earliest elements in what became the Apostles' Creed.

What the doctrine teaches – that the human Jesus was conceived in Mary without sexual intercourse by the power of the Holy Spirit – is entirely congruous with the bigger belief that this human being was from his very earliest beginnings united with the Son of God in the incarnation. Those today who deny the core doctrine of the incarnation (see for example John 1:14) can hardly be

expected to bother with the virginal conception. And by the same token, their rejection of the latter should bother us less than their rejection of the former.

In affirming the virginal conception we have no need to exaggerate its significance, as though, for example, it explained, in biological terms, how the incarnation happened, or as though without it, it could not have happened.

Nor does the virginal conception entail that Jesus was not one of us, fully and truly human. After all, that is not our attitude towards those conceived as a result of non-natural means such as AID or IVF. The New Testament nowhere hints that at his birth the Jesus was other than a wholly normal baby.

continued on page 4

AN ASSEMBLY WITHIN WALLS

This year the Assembly gave its full consideration to the life and work of the Boards and Committees and how this work is to be carried forward in the new structure of Councils that began their work on 1st June.

The Moderator, David Lacy, gave a good lead in ordering the business and was excellent in thanking retiring convenors for their years of service. He had obviously done his homework. He led worship with a blending of psalms and hymns together with items from the National Youth Choir of Scotland, modelling the combining of the old and the new. Turning our thoughts to the Apostle Paul's writing on the fruit of the Spirit David reminded us all of the quality of life that Christians should seek to live.

On the Monday morning the Assembly was treated to the opinion of some children. "What don't you like about the church?" asked the Moderator. "It's cold and the seats are hard," was the reply. Years of singing "I am the church, you are the church" seem to have fallen on deaf ears. To young minds and old the church is bricks and mortar. We all have much work still to do. Later that morning the Assembly received a report from the Youth Assembly. In rejecting a proposal for Youth Elders the Assembly correctly recognised that nurturing those who are 'youth' in the life of faith is a work for all the family of the church and all the elders together.

In a gesture which was at once unusual but most welcome, the Moderator lead the Assembly in prayer for that troubled nation.

In the afternoon, the Guidelines for Deployment of Ministries (formerly known as the National Plan), which provides a structure for rationing ministers throughout the country, was accepted. Can the Highlands now look forward to a flood of ministers re-channelled north from the Central Belt? We'll see.

The Panel on Worship intimated that the practice and meaning of Holy Communion is going to be investigated. That's one to look out for.

Tuesday was Church and Society Day, and began with Ecumenical Relations. The Convener, Erik Cramb, reported on the discussions with the Free Church. Forward Together will be taking a keen interest in these talks. We understand from our Free Church friends that the obstacle to closer fellowship centres on the rather unorthodox approach to scripture taken by the Kirk's representatives.

The rest of the day was given over to Church and Nation. The usual important, wide-ranging issues were covered, from Israel/Palestine, to over-crowding in Scotland's prisons, and the Koyoto Protocol. And did your church bell ring at 13:45 on 5th July to mark the first day of the G8 Summit as we were all asked to do? The fact that 13% of the world's nations produce 45% of the greenhouse gas will surely not be lost on our political masters.

The highlight of the debate, and surely the most relevant issue for the Church of Jesus Christ, concerned the situation in Sudan. In a gesture which was at once unusual but most welcome, the Moderator lead the Assembly in prayer for that troubled nation.

It's a sign of the times that the day was over by 3.30pm, for which we give grateful thanks.

World Mission came in for a lot of criticism on Wednesday. The Convener was forced to admit that the restructuring which has led to us withdrawing from certain partnership churches was done without consulting the partner churches themselves. Twelve members of staff are not having their contracts renewed. To rub salt in the wound, they only heard about the decision from a synopsis of the minutes of the Board rather than directly.

By way of defence, the Convener pointed out that the Board's difficulties were a result of the 2004 Assembly's decision to reduce their budget. Meanwhile, our hotel complex in Tiberias stands as a monument to our commitment to world mission.

Thursday afternoon was given over to Ministry. It was a most sobering debate. The Convener (FT member Douglas Cranston) had to point out that only a congregation with an income of £75,000 actually pays the full cost of their minister, and there are only 321 such congregations in the whole church.

FT Steering Group member Prof. Andrew McGowan attempted to persuade the Assembly to declare the Highland Theological College as suitable for training ministers. There was fierce objection to this from certain quarters, based, it was said, on the lack of theological breadth at the College. As if the divinity departments of our ancient universities are famous for their theological balance. Andrew accepted a compromise suggestion that the Ministries Council consider his request.

Friday saw the end of the Board of Communications which is being divided up among a couple of the new Councils. Some Commissioners found it hard to imagine that the Church's communication skills with the outside world would improve as a result.

A VETERAN'S POINT OF VIEW

Norry Maciver, veteran of many an Assembly offers this assessment of the week's proceedings:

As a long time attender at General Assemblies, my immediate reaction this year was one of disappointment at how basically dull the whole process was. I cannot say that I have any clear insight as to why, although I proffer the following possibilities:

First of all, the fact that the Boards and Committees of the Church were being restructured may have inhibited active involvement and debate on crucial issues, that being held over, in a sense, until 2006 to see how the new councils, in fact, develop and perform.

Secondly, I have a sense that the Assembly is being very subtly and smoothly managed in such a way that open debate is, in fact, inhibited. For example, the constant reference to making speeches short and non-repetitive is, of course, wise but I am also conscious that most of the people at the General Assembly find it extremely difficult to get up and speak and those who do, very often come with prepared speeches and really are not in a position quickly to cull these in any way. Therefore, the alternative is between making the full speech and not speaking at all and I sense, with the pressure from the front, very many people opt for the latter and I think that make the General Assembly less representative and less exciting.

NOMINATIONS

FT members should be aware that in the autumn papers from the Nomination Committee will be landing on ministers' desks, seeking suggestions of those willing to serve on the central Councils.

We encourage our members to give prayerful and thoughtful consideration to this request when it comes. We believe that evangelicals ought to play a full and active role in the courts of our Church.

A VERY SCOTTISH HYMN BOOK

At long last the much anticipated 4th edition of the Church Hymnary has been published. Julian Hodgson, organist at Kirknourhill Parish Church, reviewed it for us from a musician's perspective.

Church hymnary 4th ed Canterbury Press, 2005 1-85311-613-0 £27

Many years ago I remember listening to "Stop the week" when the *Penguin Book of Hymns* by Ian Bradley (who is on the editorial committee of *CH4*) was being reviewed. One of the reviewers observed that the words were just pegs on which to hang a popular melody. Anathema to theologians perhaps, but with some justification for the cultural historian and even church musician. I shall concentrate on the music of *CH4* and leave the theology to others better able to discuss it, save to note in passing that the female Holy Spirit [593] and use of movements from the Mass [648, 651, 653] may cause some eyebrows to be raised. But to quote Ian Bradley "one of the greatest glories of Christian hymnody is that it is a truly ecumenical enterprise. Hymn-singing really does cross denominational barriers."

Scottish traditional melodies permeate the collection, a welcome change from *CH3*.

Those familiar with *Common Ground* will have some idea what to expect: two-thirds of the items from that hymn book are included in *CH4* (by comparison only one-third of *Hymns for today's Church*, but three-quarters of *The Penguin Book of Hymns*). Users will therefore be assured of a good mixture of the familiar and the (relatively) new. In addition to a core of familiar hymns (though *Redemption Songs* is behind us), some emphasis has been put on the inclusion of Scottish traditional tunes, material from non-European cultures, responsorial hymns and psalms, brief reflective or praise items, as well as a good selection of new or recently composed hymns and tunes.

Congregations looking for a comprehensive selection of Psalms will, I fear, be disappointed – there are 78 Psalm settings, compared with *Praise!* which includes all the Psalms. There is a wide variety of types of setting: fine old tunes for metrical Psalms (I was pleased to see the old Covenanting tune "Martyrs" included [34]); traditional tunes; new metrical versions and tunes (a fine version of Psalm 148 by John Bell [105]), though a composite version of Psalms 149

and 150 is rather uncomfortably squeezed into Parry's "Jerusalem" [106]; Anglican chants (Stanford's famous "Te Deum" [107]); Scottish traditional melodies ("The Isle of Mull" [89]); and a useful selection of doxologies.

Scottish traditional melodies permeate the collection, a welcome change from *CH3*. Care is needed in the selection of traditional tunes though, since unlike the English folk songs used by Vaughan Williams in his two major hymn books, Scottish folk songs have never been moribund and so carry the baggage of their words: "Ae fond kiss" for example [786]. The arrangements of traditional tunes are for the most part fairly straightforward, but there is a tendency (noticeable also in many of the new hymn tunes) to over-elaborate the harmonies. "Skye Boat Song" [600] features (to be technical) a dominant minor 13th with a modally flattened 9th, the tragic nature of which would have appealed to Bach or Mahler, but seems out of place here. The arrangement of "Dream Angus" features another harmonic trait abounding in the book – the seventh chord. In itself unexceptional, but so overused as to become a musical cliché, an instant representation of a slightly painful sweetness. In "Dream Angus" there are 24 seventh chords, imparting a slightly sea-sick quality. I don't know what the village choir will make of "Incarnation" [317] which starts off on three consecutive sevenths for tenors and basses, a sequence repeated three times.

The Church must be inclusive, and so it is good to welcome a substantial selection of hymns and short praise items from non-Western European traditions. Whether congregations in Scotland will take these to heart is uncertain: I'm not sure that *World Praise* was particularly successful in Scotland. Once again we have to be careful in the selection of music. I worry that the use of music from other cultures could be seen as continuing cultural imperialism – though the editors argue quite the reverse in their introduction. What are we to make of the inclusion of "Linstead Market" [673]? Traditional it may be, but do the editors really think it represents Afro-Caribbean culture? More like Test Match Special. When I worked in Brixton it would have been rejected as "Uncle Tom-ism", but it undoubtedly has popular appeal.

The numerous brief praise items, many from Iona, Taizé and non-European traditions will be welcome as an opportunity to introduce (as the occasion suggests) either some informality or increased congregational intensity. But I do have doubts about liturgical melodrama – spoken word over

musical accompaniment [23, 733]; it brings to mind all sorts of non-liturgical associations! The many responsorial items, involving a cantor to whom the congregation responds with a simple phrase, will be new to many but will certainly add variety to the service.

Most congregations will be pleased to see modern hymn and hymn-tune writers well represented (Christopher Idle, Brian Wren, Marty Haugen, Graham Kendrick and Bernadette Farrell amongst many others). They have provided some splendid hymns and tunes which should appeal and are well worth trying. But why are so many tunes repeated? "Joel" (not in my opinion a particularly distinguished piece), "Gonfalon Royal" and "St Magnus" all appear five times; indeed ten tunes represent 43 hymns. This rather sets at naught the editors' recommendation that alternative tunes (where given) should be sung as a last resort.

But I do have doubts about liturgical melodrama – spoken word over musical accompaniment

The editors have for example given "Chartres" ("Noel Angevin" surely) different words in *CH4* [73] from *Common Ground* [124]. If tunes are to be repeated, why not take the opportunity for variety and give them different arrangements or in different keys?

For congregations who prefer to adopt a single hymn book, *CH4* will provide ample opportunity to use well known hymns and tunes, and give encouragement to try out and to adopt traditional and modern music (though nothing unsingable like *CH3!*). For those congregations that prefer to take their praise from a variety of sources, *CH4* will provide a valuable additional resource. The editors are to be congratulated in producing a melody edition; a great help in learning new music quickly.

[If anyone is willing to review the theological content of CH4 please get in touch with me. ed]

WHY WE JOINED FORWARD TOGETHER

We asked some members of FT to tell us why they joined.

David Wright

When Roland Walls (who taught at New College for many years) moved from the Episcopal Church to the Roman Catholic, he told me that he wanted to belong to a church which believed the Nicene Creed.

My joining Forward Together reflects a similar concern, that the Church of Scotland is increasingly cutting free from its native roots – anchored in Scripture, displayed in the Creeds, rediscovered in the Reformation. I have become convinced that in order to contend more effectively for this historic Christian faith (and contending for the faith is a thoroughly biblical activity) an organization is needed. The time is right to do so. I hope in particular that very many elders and office bearers and members – as well as ministers – will join. We must reverse the process of the Kirk's self-deracination, amounting at times to almost deChristianization.

(David recently retired as Professor of Church History at Edinburgh University. He is an elder at Holyrood Abbey Church. He was the first elder Moderator of Edinburgh Presbytery. David took part in the discussions that led to the relaunch of FT.)

Robert Kernohan

I joined to affirm the unity of the Kirk and its rightful place in the universal or catholic Church. For unity is only possible on the biblical basis of the Church. True catholicity must depend on respect, under Scripture, for the Church's best traditions. And those, like valid reforms and proper use of the minds

God gave us, rest on God's unique revelation in Christ.

The visible Church (in all its denominations) is a fallible institution, but its worst failures come when it forgets how and why it was instituted. It must call all humanity everywhere to repent, but in seeking "dialogue" can be too unwittingly ready to conform to social, intellectual and economic fashions.

(Robert is an elder at Crammond Church, Edinburgh, and was editor of Life and Work from 1972-1991)

Murdo Fraser MSP

I was not brought up in the Church of Scotland but became a member some years ago. My experience of many Church members is that they feel that the national leadership often represents views out of touch with the grassroots. The Church of Scotland is truly a 'broad church' theologically, but at least in recent years most public utterances seem to have come from a theologically liberal perspective. In my view there is no doubt that evangelicals are under-represented at the higher levels of the Church, and the evangelical voice is often ignored. I was therefore delighted to see Forward Together formed as a forum for evangelicals in the Church, and I hope that the organisation will grow in numbers, strength and influence over the years to ensure that the evangelical standpoint is properly represented.

(Murdo is a list MSP for Mid-Scotland and Fife, representing the Conservative Party. He is a member of Alyth Parish Church.)

Anne Dvet

I am 69, a retired primary school teacher and a member of Kirkmuirhill Church of Scotland. I joined 'Forward Together' because it was evangelical and I believe the message of the Bible should be the basis of our actions not the ever-changing views of wider society. It is committed to maintaining the unity of the Church but also to making sure the Church expresses God's will in a clear and distinctive manner. It would be easy to become discouraged in this time of pressure and change but this organisation should help to keep us informed of the issues and the background to them. With God's help we will support one another.

Gordon Campbell

I am 36 years old, and an auxiliary minister in the linked country parishes of Auchterhouse, Murroes and Tealing (near Dundee). By day I work as a financial manager at the University of Dundee where I am also an honorary chaplain. Sometimes I feel more in step with other denominations than with my own. Mother Kirk is old - and sometimes she forgets who she is and where she has come from. Sometimes her speech is unintelligible even to those closest to her. She's easily led and good at getting lost. Yet often her eyes still sparkle. I joined Forward Together because I want Mother Kirk to benefit from rehabilitation! If we are to be faithful to Christ's call to be in the world but not of it, there will be times when we will be out of step. I also joined because being out of step can be lonely!

FORWARD TOGETHER

is an organisation for evangelicals in the Church of Scotland.

If you would like to join us or would like more information you can do so through:

- 1. our web-site at www.forwardtogether.org.uk**
- 2. contacting Ian Watson at The Manse, 2 Lanark Road, Kirkmuirhill, ML1 1 9RB (tel. 01555 892409)**

BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

continued from page 1

Theologically, the virginal conception points to a new action of God the Holy Spirit for the salvation of humankind. The Saviour had to be both fully human and yet sinless. The virginal conception attests both the identity of Jesus with humanity and his distinctness from the rest of sinful humanity. And while we should concede that the Scripture is not explicit about the virginal conception's being the means by which the sinlessness of Jesus was secured, this must be the implication of Luke 1:35 – *So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

While it is crucial that we stand with the faith of all the mainstream Christian traditions in every age in affirming what Scripture teaches, it is also right that we avoid misconstruing its significance, and overload it, as so much later Mariology did.