



forward together

An organisation for evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. Editor: Ian M Watson Issue No.3 Jan 2006

Fundamentals to Live For

A message from our Chairman, Rev. Gordon Kennedy

Certain events cause the axis of our world to tilt. Although they do not occur in a predictable pattern, they do occur with unsettling frequency. Consider the past twelve months: the South Asian tsunami, the earthquake in Kashmir, the flooding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the powerful protest of 200,000 marching on the streets of Edinburgh demanding that our leaders "Make Poverty History", the four bombs which killed 50 innocent by-standers travelling to work in London in July. We all felt the world shift on its axis.

Fundamentalism is a closed unthinking mind.

It has been interesting to note the response to the terrorist attacks on London. A letter to the Times on Friday 22nd July suggested that the problem wasn't just a fundamentalist Islamic group but all fundamentalisms and indeed all belief. The letter explicitly blamed Christian belief for the world's woes. It's an old complaint, but in this developing situation it comes with a new edge. Fundamentalism is wrong.

But why? Because, we are told, it is wrong to believe anything in a fundamental way. This is a challenge we must answer. Are we wrong to believe anything fundamentally?

First, what is fundamentalism? One of the most intellectual men I ever met was of the opinion that fundamentalism is a closed, unthinking mind. To say: I believe this or that and I am not going to think about it; I will not offer any reasons in defence or support of my belief; this is what I believe and that's that! This is fundamentalism.

This is a good way to understand fundamentalism. It makes a distinction between a thoughtful believer and an unthinking drone. God has given us minds to think. As the Apostle Peter tells us, we should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us.

One of the most dangerous things you can ever do is to try to empty your mind. Your mind is not supposed to be empty but filled with thoughts of the glory of God. We can easily understand how someone so unthinking and uncritical in their belief could become a suicide bomber or terrorist. You just don't think about it. Biblical Christians then are not fundamentalists.

However, we do have fundamentals. A fundamental is a basic, primary foundation. Every building has a foundation, and so does every way of life. That is what a fundamental is, a foundation.

How are we to avoid fundamentalism? By thinking. As Christians we all believe something. Do we know what we believe? Can we clearly articulate what we believe?

We all have a basic systematic theology that shapes and informs our Christian living. Even those Christians who say they don't want anything to do with theology have one! It's just that if you don't think about it then it will be a poor theology, defective in many areas.

Today is not a day for abandoning our foundations

Those evangelicals who studied divinity in our Scottish Universities cannot fail to have their minds exposed to non-evangelical theologies and biblical studies. Have we retreated into our comfortable evangelical ministries never to allow such things to darken our minds again?

When our evangelical position is challenged, is our best response just the loud chanting of age-old slogans that we only imperfectly understand because, unlike our predecessors, we have not sharpened our minds in disputation with those who hold alternative views? Such fundamentalism will not do.

Our opponents in the Church, who name us fundamentalists without ever defining what they mean, accuse us of being dead, both in

the head and in the heart. We are told we neither think deeply about what we believe, yet are so cerebral and intellectual as to be no earthly use. Our fundamentals are producing only death.

Those so-called Islamic fundamentalists who become suicide bombers are willing to die for their fundamentals and to kill others. Their fundamentals are to die for.

Thank God we have fundamentals to live for.

So let me ask you: How would you recognise a thinking, believing evangelical Christian? Is there not a life about such a person? A vitality that rubs off on others? Do we not recognise such a person by their kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness – even a gentle holding to foundational beliefs?

Are they not patient, long-suffering, slow to anger abounding in love? Do we not believe that by his sovereign work our God is remaking us in the likeness of Christ? How can we believe fundamentally in the sovereignty of God in a manner that is not Christ-like?

It was good that our present Moderator at the past General Assembly challenged us all to display in our Spirit filled lives the fruit of that life-giving, life-changing Spirit.

We will not rebuff the intended insults of those who label us as fundamentalists by taking the huff and refusing to take part in the life of our Church. As we display the life of Christ in our lives, in our conduct, in our friendliness and graciousness we pull the sting of all insults; for who will say that Christians should not live like this?

Today is not a day for abandoning our foundations or fundamentals but for living them to the glory of God and the salvation of men and women.

*Thank God
we have
fundamentals
to live for.*

“IS CHRIST DIVIDED?”

Principal Emeritus C. Graham of the Free Church College shares from his experience of the pain of schism. The result is a powerful exposition of 1Cor.1:13 with clear Biblical principles to guide us.

When I read these words I see the apostle Paul, not flushed with anger, but pale and trembling as one in shock. For he faces something he deemed impossible and the actuality of it is terrifyingly appalling. Christians are quarrelling, vehemently, ragingly and mockingly. They are forming rival factions and boasting about it.

How can this be? In Paul's eyes it is like a dismembering of the body of Christ. Surely in His body of flesh the blessed Lord suffered enough. There is nothing that reduces the Christian to tears like the remembrance of the body of Christ broken. That brokenness was to procure healing and protection in God's favour and a binding unity in all, who by living faith are bound to and represented by Christ.

But this factiousness on the part of people professing faith in Christ is like a rending of His mystical body, for do not the scriptures tell us that all who are in Christ, all who acknowledge "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" are His body, His fullness, His bride?

Picture the body of Christ, wounded, dismembered, torn apart. See the picture as vivid and appalling as it really is and then ask, "Where did He get these wounds?" and you will get the chilling answer, "In the house of His friends."

It makes us writhe in pain. We groan and moan for healing. But if we are to obtain healing our groans must be the groans of repentance, our moans the moans of confession. We have to realise that the prophetic word concerning the descendents of those who crucified the Lord applies to us as well as to them "They will look on the one they have pierced and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child".

So this is a summons to repentance on the part of all of us who have by pride or self-righteousness, or envy or malice or carelessness had a part in this sinful dismembering. Who of us can claim total innocence? It is also, I hope, a summons to watchfulness and alertness to avoid all future occasions of schism.

Now some may say that the picture has been over-drawn. The real situation is not as dire as has just been presented. The great thing to emphasise is the underlying irrefragable, inviolable and invincible love, which binds together in unity all who have real faith in

Jesus Christ. Union with Christ every genuine believer enjoys, and the faith, which binds to Christ issues in love to all in Him. Does not the apostle tell us that we are all one in Christ, that ethnic, cultural and gender differences are all transcended? We are all one in Him. That is a unity that cannot be broken.

I will say Amen to that. The trouble is that I do not see all of them dwelling together in unity. I see many dwelling apart and the language I hear is not the language of love but of strife and division. Surely unity should be a visible and audible quality! It is certain that the more visible and audible unity is, the better will be the mood, the feeling, the health and the will to service of all concerned.

Equally certain it is that there will be a vastly improved evangelical impact upon the outside world which Christians are so anxious to recover from the power of Satan so as to become part of the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

The prayer of our Lord recorded in John 17 tells us that the unity He wants for His people is not only structurally real (a sharing in one being) but also such a visible unity of purpose that will compel the attention of the world. He prays to His Father, "That they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them as you have loved me."

*Picture the body of Christ
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A specific detail of the Lord's prayer that should not be overlooked is that the unity of His people is marked by their awareness of distinction from the world. The world lies in the wicked one. The world resists faith in the Son of God as sole Redeemer.

The church, on the other hand is the community of faith and obedience. But that obedience is never perfect. Though redeemed the faithful are not yet perfect. They are deficient in wisdom and patience and compassion, in short, in the perfection of love.

Given that redeemed people are still very imperfect and that each and all have right and obligation to act according to their understanding of the word of God, it is inevitable that there will be different manifestations of the one church of Christ.

As individual believers are said to be like

different parts of the body, like hand and eye and ear, yet each contributing to the health and welfare of the whole, so different congregations and denominations owning the one head in honest obedience may portray the manifoldness of the grace, rule and glory of the Lord. So the Lord Himself recognised seven Churches in Asia as within the comity of His one total church.

If variety of polity and operation in a common endeavour to win the world to Christ were an accurate and comprehensive description of the situation we confront, our sense of pain and our difficulty of co-operation would be greatly diminished.

But the actual situation is vastly different, marked as it is with rivalry, and mutual recrimination and condemnation. What we observe is the very divisiveness which the apostles so strongly deprecated and condemned.

In this confusion one thing is clear. If a church is taken over by worldly people having no real commitment to the service and glory of Jesus Christ it becomes incumbent on those who are faithful to Christ to separate from them. This is no act of schism but a measure protective of the honour, glory and headship of the Lord.

Yet even this separation will be marked with deep sorrow and sadness. It is noteworthy that when the apostles confronted division, their mood was one of sorrow more than anger. In their endeavours to overcome division they spoke with extreme patience. They entreated, they pleaded. They seemed to go on bended knees.

Just listen to them. Here is Paul, "I beseech you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same things, that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement" (1Cor.1:10)

He has words to the same effect to the Philippians and the Romans. Peter is of a mind with Paul counselling "Be you all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; you are all children of one Father, joint heirs of one and the same inheritance." (1Pet. 2:8) Apostolic unanimity on this point is assured by John's record of the Lord's prayer to which I have already referred.

I have said that not every separation is an act of schism. I will let Charles Hodge clarify the matter for us. He wrote: "Schism is separation from the church without adequate cause...No

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FORWARD TOGETHER IN PERU

In July 2006 FT member and elder at Barclay Brunstfield Church in Edinburgh, Scott Watson, along with his wife Julie, will be taking part in a two week trip to support the Vine Trust's work with the Street Children of Peru.

The Vine Trust is an international interdenominational charity that works to bring opportunity, health and hope to disadvantaged communities, and has a particular concern for vulnerable children. The Peru Partnership (The Vine Trust and Scripture Union Peru) is its flagship project. In Peru, the Trust is involved in three main areas of work: Street Children, Medical Work through the Amazon Hope Ferry Project, and Micro Enterprise.

The Amazon Hope Ferry Project is probably the best known part of the project. The story of how Church of Scotland minister, Willie McPherson, along with others, took a small, ex-Royal Navy boat across the Atlantic Ocean and then up the Amazon river, crossing the length of South America, was made into a feature film and shown in cinemas across the country.

Scott told Forward Together Newsletter, " We have been supporters of the street children work for a few years now. We had been thinking and praying about what more we could do to help with this work. Then a friend approached us and asked if we would think about joining the July 2006 work-party. We are the type of people who will give all the support we can to a cause, as long as we do not have to travel to a far away, 'strange' land! However, we knew that God had answered our prayers and we could not refuse this challenge - no matter how daunting!"

Scott and Julie will be taking part in building a street children's centre high up in the Andes. The hope is to prevent some of the child migrants reaching the cities where they inevitably end up homeless, hungry, sexually abused and exploited.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 150 million street children. They are as young as three, are mostly boys and their numbers rise daily. Children are uniquely dependent on the good will and initiative of others for help.

Before they go, Scott and Julie are aiming to raise over £1000 to help fund their trip and to pay for any materials needed for the construction of the new centre.

If you could offer financial support to help fund the trip and buy building materials, please contact Scott and Julie at the address below.

Scott Watson,
1/Flat1, 16 Cormiston Terr.
Edinburgh, EH11 6AH
juliescott@waitrose.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

During the General Assembly
Forward Together will be
holding two meetings on
Wednesday 24th May 2006.

Public Meeting at the
Free Church College
1pm - 2pm (last year our free
lunch was described as the
best of all fringe meetings)
and
our Annual General Meeting
at the Royal Overseas Club
7pm.

WHY WE JOINED FORWARD TOGETHER

David McAdam

I'm constantly rebuked by Jesus' parable that encourages us pray consistently and never give up. It challenges me in my tendency to settle down and assume things will always be the way they presently are in the Church in Scotland for the duration of my lifetime. The widow's refusal to accept that her situation must be that way, calls me out from my lethargy towards the kind of consistent believing faith the Son of man longs to find on earth.

I hope Forward Together will provide the kind of fuel I need to sustain that kind of praying - informing me of crucial issues, energising me to engage where I am able to, and uniting me in a praying and working fellowship with people committed to working for the renewal of the Church in a Christ exalting and gospel centred way.

David is the Associate Minister at Chryston Parish Church with responsibility for their Moodiesburn congregation.

Robert Craig

I am a ministry candidate in my junior honours year at Glasgow University. I am a 41 year old father of three and a former soldier and builder.

I had become disillusioned with the attitudes I kept coming across in the Church of Scotland, as I moved from church to church in my training. Many were trading off their faith for a quick fix: they were prepared to accept and rationalise almost anything for an easy life. As I saw churches become fortresses interested only in the pastoral well-being of the congregations I knew this inward looking mentality was misguided.

I joined Forward Together to receive and share fellowship and support with Evangelical Christians like myself. I believe that the written word we find in scripture is an absolute truth not open to compromise and that faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit obliges us as the community of faith to relentlessly carry this message to those who have not yet received it. I believe that Forward Together is a forum for this type of ministry and that it recognises our obligation of service as disciples.

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man is justifiable in thus breaking up the unity of the church unless he is required to profess or do something which the Bible condemns as false or wrong; or unless he is prohibited from professing or doing what the Bible commands." (The Church and its Polity.)

Finally, with the words of the Lord's prayer clearly in memory let us listen to the words of an old Puritan (John Flavel) "Of this I am sure, that when sanctified persons, agreed in judgement and principles, walk together... glorifying God with one mouth and cleaving together with oneness of heart, this is such a church unity as answers Christ's end in the institution of particular churches."

On the other hand, in sadder mood he warns, "Brethren, if you would study how to frustrate the design and grieve the heart of your Lord Jesus Christ (to whom you profess love and obedience) you cannot take a readier way to do it than by breaking the bonds of unity among yourselves."

"He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

HE SETS THE LONELY IN FAMILIES (Ps.68:6)

The Scottish Executive want to place the best interests of children at the heart of adoption and fostering policy. That is to be commended. But suggesting that allowing homosexual couples to adopt and foster will fulfil this criterion is not so obvious.

By finding that "on balance" gay adoption will not contravene the principle of "best interest" Church and Society have ignored the evidence and fallen (unwittingly perhaps) into the hands of the gay lobby.

In their helpful little booklet "Sideline Stability and Security" [March 2002, and quoted with permission] the Christian Institute produce the hard evidence that confirms the view that a homosexual lifestyle is incompatible with having children.

The revealing fact is that the gay community tends to have a rather anti-family, anti-children bias. Claims that research shows that gay and lesbians are as good at parenting as heterosexuals – if not better – are fictitious. Often the claims are just advocacy parading as research.

SOME COUNSEL FOR THE COUNCILS

That the working practices of the new Councils and Committees have been brought into sharp focus so early in their existence simply confirms the need for a group like Forward Together. Church and Society's response to the Scottish Executive's consultation on Adoption and Fostering was not only inconsistent with previous decisions of the General Assembly: the process through which the response was reached left much to be desired.

Long before the response became headline news, FT Steering Group member Andrew Philip raised his concerns with us. A "starter paper" had been produced by a small working group and had been circulated to members of the Council on the day of the meeting (allowing hardly any time for reflection). The final response was only circulated to Council members **after** it had been sent to the Executive and released to the press. In other words, this policy, claiming to be the Church of Scotland's considered view, is the product of but half a dozen people.

While we recognize that such consultations

Studies cited by the C.I. indicate that children of homosexual parents tend to be loners and have difficulties at school: avoiding involvement in group activities: considered by teachers as "introverts."

It is also noteworthy that even pro-gay studies show that same-sex parenting results in between 8% and 33% of their children embracing a homosexual lifestyle as adults. This is greatly out of proportion to the UK population as a whole where 3.6% of men report any same-sex genital contact ever in their lives. This is because such children are brought up to regard same-gender sexual attraction as a positive trait.

Children seeking adoption need the stability and normality of a home with a father and mother to rear them. More and more they are older children who have had a difficult start in life, and who need to know that they belong to a family that will endure. Forward Together believes Church and Society has let these children down by failing to argue for the tried and tested values of Christian family life.

Copies of "Sideline Stability" together with many other valuable booklets on issues of current debate can be obtained from the Christian Institute at First Floor, Cathedral Buildings, Dean Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1PG or log on to their web-site at www.christian.org.uk

require a quick response and that within the Kirk there are a variety of views, we call on Conveners of Councils to be mindful of Assembly decisions when speaking on behalf of the Kirk. After all, this is what is expected of Moderators when representing the Church. Where Conveners and Councils are asked to comment on matters of current debate, their answers should be consistent with the most up-to-date decisions of Assembly. This is all the more important now that the membership of Councils has been drastically reduced and Presbytery representation abolished.

Another concern. Councils are permitted to co-opt members. Some have done so with considerable zeal, others have not seen fit to exercise this power. What guidance has been given to Conveners on how this should be done? How can we discover who the co-opted members are? Gordon Kennedy, our Chairman, has written to Helen McLeod, Convener of the Council of Assembly whose remit is to oversee the workings of the Councils, seeking answers to these questions.

Forward Together does not claim to speak on behalf of anyone other than its members. It has been claimed that few people within the Church are concerned about homosexual couples adopting children. Yet at a meeting of Ayr Presbytery on 1st November, a deliverance approving such a move was defeated by 54 votes to 4, with FT members

An Invitation to all FT members who sit on central Councils and Committees.

We would like to help you be as effective as possible. With that in mind, FT is organising a lunch-time gathering, where those with experience of central committees will share their insights, allowing time for questions and discussion.

The meeting will be in February, date and venue depending on response. Lunch will be provided.

If you are interested please contact the Secretary at 01555 892409 or ian.watson21@bopenworld.com before Monday 16th January 06.

contributing to the debate. Perhaps FT's thinking is not so out of step with ordinary church members after all.

If you would like to join Forward Together 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, ML11 9RB

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