



# forward together

www.forwardtogether.org.uk

An organisation for evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. Editor: Ian M Watson Issue No.8 July 07

## Surprise? What surprise!

by Forward Together chairman, Gordon Kennedy

**A**s Forward Together has worked within our Church, expressing our biblical convictions about the issues before, us I have noticed a surprised reaction from those who are not evangelicals. I don't mean to be unkind but it is getting a bit wearisome when some non-contentious position is expressed and is greeted with a surprised, 'What? Do you think that?'

When I speak about the Tear Fund "Work a Miracle" campaign to support victims of HIV/AIDS in Malawi ([www.tearfund.org/Miracle](http://www.tearfund.org/Miracle)), or about "Stop the Traffik" ([www.stopthetraffik.org](http://www.stopthetraffik.org)) and the work being done in the UK to support victims of modern slavery, why are non-evangelicals surprised that we are involved in such issues? When a report to the General Assembly recognises that a temptation to sin is not a bar to entering or exercising Christian ministry should we not be slightly offended when we are told how good it is for evangelicals on the drafting group to have conceded such a point?

The easy target is the others, those who are not evangelical. How could they be so unaware of the wide range of concerns that we have as evangelical Christians? Why don't they know who we are, what we believe, and which areas of Christian discipleship are important to us? Don't they read evangelical books? Don't they attend evangelical meetings? Don't they regularly visit the FT web site?

No they don't. And if all we ever do is complain about them not being part of our 'group' they never will want to find out. (By the way – do you think we could start a campaign among ourselves: No Complaint Friday? Wouldn't it be great if we could go for a whole day, say a Friday each week, and not complain about anything? Do you think you could manage a whole day without complaining?

Who knows? It might give the Church a whole different perspective on evangelicalism!)

There is a challenge for us here. We know that evangelicals are concerned for the needs of the poor, about injustice and poverty, about the government of our nation and the nations of the world. Not only are evangelicals concerned but we care deeply about these things and are burdened for the oppressed and marginalised. There is no monopoly on compassion. But who are we telling? How do we let anyone know that we care about these things? Rather than saying that non evangelicals should find out about us, perhaps we need to ask about the quality of our communication.

Our Lord Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." If we really love one another, if we really love everyone we meet, if we really love the world as our Father in Christ loves us, it should be impossible for us to hide it. We preach the love of God eternally displayed in the relationships of the Trinity, graciously given in the work of Christ on the cross, poured out upon our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit – we believe in a God of love. We know we have been commanded to love one another as Christ loves us; to love our enemies and pray for them. Is this what we communicate as evangelicals in our engagement with the Church?

Can we not love God in submission to the gospel and love our neighbour without compromising that gospel? Can we communicate our love for those we meet so that they might experience the greater love of God for them in Christ? Let's arrange a surprise for our neighbours, our friends, those we disagree with: let's surprise them with love.

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### IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 2 FORWARD TOGETHER AT THE FREE CHURCH ASSEMBLY

PAGES 3 & 4 DIARY OF A FIRST TIME COMMISSIONER

PAGE 4 "THE COST OF UNITY"

PAGE 5 "THE ONE HOLY APOSTOLIC CHURCH"

PAGE 5 "HUMAN SEXUALITY AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS"

PAGE 6 "THE DAYS OF ELIJAH"

## SLEEPING DOGS!

**O**ur Legal Questions Committee seems unable to let sleeping dogs lie. Having initiated a debate which no one else in the Church really wanted they decided to return to the issue of the ordination of women, a subject which one would have thought was well and truly settled within the Church. Apparently not. According to their report, there has recently emerged from various unnamed sources concerns that “some ministers, elders, Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries” are disregarding, or at least wish to disregard, the 1966 legislation which states that women are just as eligible for ordination as men. As a result the Committee felt that it “may be useful for the Church to be reminded of the clarification of this issue provided by the General Assembly of 1991.”

That clarification took the form of a statement to the effect that the 1966 Act is neither compulsive nor permissive. Any Kirk Session which has made a policy decision not to ordain women to the eldership, and any minister or elder who seeks to persuade a Session to do so, is in breach of their ordination vows.

**Forward Together is happy to advertise this restatement of the law of the Church and to encourage our members not to be in breach of the law.**

However, a couple of questions arise. First, who are the sources who are expressing such disquiet? We look in vain for complaints to Presbyteries from members of congregations who feel discriminated against. Where are the appeals to Assembly from women who have been denied the ability to exercise their gift of eldership? One suspects that the sources (assuming they do exist) are from outwith the small number of congregations concerned, and who, for the sake of a personal crusade, would jeopardise the peace and unity (if not of the whole Church) of a few congregations.

Secondly, we note with interest that the advice of 1991 very strongly denies the provision of conscientious objection to the ordination of women. Dr. Weatherhead, then Principal Clerk, states categorically that “individual views of scripture, and individual conscience, cannot prevail over the law of the Church.” Dr. Weatherhead is correct. It does, however, leave one wondering about the much-lauded “freedom of conscience” that this very Committee commended to last year’s Assembly in regard to Civil Partnerships. What is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander. The Church, through her Presbyteries, has decisively rejected the proposal to permit a religious ceremony marking a Civil Partnership. Yet freedom of conscience is being touted as justification for some ministers going ahead and blessing such unions anyway.

The liberal establishment like to describe the Church of Scotland as a “broad church”. By broad church, we understand that a variety of views on a variety of subjects are tolerated. Is there really no room in our broad church for those who believe that the ordination of women is contrary to the Word of God? Must they be excluded from the National Church and forced to find a home elsewhere.

Sleeping dogs don’t bite and are best left well alone.

## FORWARD TOGETHER AT THE FREE CHURCH

*The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is not the only show in town during the third week of May. The Free Church Assembly also meets. This year they generated more interest in the media than normal when their Moderator, Dr. Ross, called for a united Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Forward Together chairman, Gordon Kennedy, was accorded the unique honour of being invited to address the Free Church Assembly; the only parish minister so invited in living memory. After explaining the aims of Forward Together, Gordon went on to speak about being an evangelical in a mixed denomination like our own. Here is what he said.*

**I** have been asked to comment on the struggles evangelicals are facing and the places where growth and encouragement are seen within the Church of Scotland. To understand the challenges facing evangelicals within our Church I think some recognition of our historical situation must be made. We are still recovering from the Disruption of 1843. I have no desire to be critical of those godly ministers who followed their conscience in the Disruption; I merely seek to recognise the weakening effect of the Disruption on the evangelical cause within the Church of Scotland. Losing so many godly ministers, elders and members weakened the Church of Scotland at every level of its life, from parishes to General Assembly. We give thanks to God that he is rebuilding the evangelical cause within the Church of Scotland, but recognise that this rebuilding has not yet regained the ground that was lost.

Over the last 60 years we give thanks that God has raised up many significant ministries within our Church that have been a blessing to all of our churches in Scotland. God is at work in the Church of Scotland raising up evangelical ministers, elders and church members, establishing prayer meetings in parishes around Scotland, building significant works beyond our denomination, like Rutherford House. Daily, God is adding to the number of those being saved through such ministries within the Church of Scotland.

In the Church of Scotland we do not only give thanks for ministries in past years but rejoice that our faithful God is calling into ministry his servants for this generation and for the years to come. From the Puritans we learn that the welfare of the churches depends on the quality of ministers. The rebuilding of the evangelical cause within the Church of Scotland depends in no small part upon God continuing to establish effective ministries and I would ask you to join us in praying for this.

We all need to learn to read the signs of the times. In the Church of Scotland evangelical ministers have concentrated upon establishing long term Biblical preaching ministries within their parishes. This is something we never

want to abandon. But within the Church of Scotland there is as great need and opportunity for evangelicals to engage effectively with the life of the church beyond their parishes. God is providing opportunities for evangelicals to serve on Committees and Councils at General Assembly and Presbytery level, to work for the reformation of the church in this way.

Being part of a Presbyterian church we cannot live as Congregationalists but have a calling from God to serve him in our Presbyteries and General Assembly. At the very least we recognise that if evangelicals do not take part in discussions in Committees and Councils who will speak for the gospel? Who will present a biblical perspective? I know this is hard work, lonely and painful. However, the reforming of the church works from both ends: from parishes, and from General Assembly. Please pray for effective engagement by evangelicals wherever they have opportunity within the Church of Scotland.

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Disruption of 1843.*

Moderator, let me conclude by warmly commending the Joint Statement prepared by members of our two Churches, presented to both General Assemblies this year. I believe it is right that we use a word such as ‘scandal’ to describe the divisions within Presbyterianism in Scotland and confess that our divisions have not served to promote the truth of the gospel to the people of Scotland, who increasingly are not hearing the message of the love of God for them in Christ Jesus, and all too often do not see that love when they look at our churches. We can be wholeheartedly united as we proclaim Jesus Christ as the one Lord and one Saviour of all people—in Scotland and throughout the world—and in praying that God may bless our land with good government and godly leaders. It is time for all who love the Lord to stand together in the cause of the gospel.

I trust that this Joint Statement will be widely studied and that the hope expressed for a continuing and expanding dialogue between our churches is realised. Those things that unite us in the gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus are greater than the divisions that separate us from one another. As we learn to love one another as Christ loves us, can we not pray that God will remove our fear and distrust of one another that we might serve him together in his work of saving men and women in Scotland today and tomorrow?

# DIARY OF A FIRST-TIME COMMISSIONER

Some personal reflections on this year's Assembly by FT member Scott Watson, Edinburgh

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April** Blue Book arrived yesterday. Had my first look through today. Feel overwhelmed. There is no guidance on how to read this huge document. And there is all the church language: anent, urge, affirm, encourage. Which is more important? Eventually decided to read the Deliverances and conclusions.

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May** Reception for first time Commissioners. Helpful but also patronising. We are given a wee speech about how 'we' are the GA, and 'we' are the decision makers, not the Council's or Committees. I feel like I've just come out of a Headmaster's 'pep-talk'.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May** Opening day. I feel truly humbled and privileged to have been part of today's opening ceremony. This year's Lord High Commissioner is Prince Andrew. Later I heard it said that he "is no public speaker". Maybe so, but I was moved by his comments about his parents. Prince Andrew clearly has affection for his parents. We then move straight from the pomp and ceremony of the opening session into opening business.

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Assembly Arrangements Committee are first to present their report. All their Deliverances are accepted by the GA without debate, including moving the days of the GA to Thursday—Wednesday. Is this good for people like me who work full-time? Will this benefit ministers? It's too late to think about this issue now! And then I realise: even if I did want to say anything, how would I do it? I don't remember being told about this on Friday night! And the Assembly Hall is full of people. There is no way I'm going to be the first to speak! Is this how it is going to be all week, the committees presenting their reports and the GA just accepting them? If I am going to really engage with things this week I am going to have start anticipating the debates and reading the reports that I think matter.

The Legal Questions Committee and Joint Report of the Legal Questions Committee and Ministries Council are also presented this morning. The convener of LQC reminds us that this is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act giving woman equal status as men in the ministry, and that Kirk Sessions should be considering women for the eldership. It seems that some churches have not caught-up with the rest of the church and they do not have women elders. At last, some debate. What can be done about these "rogue" churches? What can Presbyteries do? Can Presbyteries challenge them? Discipline them? *Make* them have women elders! It seems that churches cannot be forced to have women elders (what if there were no

women suitable, or no women willing to accept the eldership).

The Committee has been very clever by raising this issue. They have not given a proposed deliverance and there are none from the floor. But they have achieved their purpose: a warning shot across the bow. In this year of the GA's first women minister moderator a message is being sent out to those individuals and churches whose theological view regarding women 'in ministry' differs from the Church's view.

Then comes the next 'big issue'- bullying and discrimination. For such a major issue there seemed little debate. Commissioners questioned was why the term 'sexual orientation' was not included in the list of "protected grounds", along with age, gender, marital status, colour etc. Convener explains that the Committee wanted to avoid a divisive debate about this. I think what the Convener means is that the Committee did not want the evangelicals to argue against this term being included and so they decided to exclude it! A commissioner moves that 'sexual orientation' is included and this leads to the first electronic vote. I feel there is an underlying agenda going on by those who want this term include. 'Evangelicals' should be the first to speak out against discrimination and bullying. An individual's sexuality *per se* is no bar to the ministry and nor do I believe it should be. So why did I feel uncomfortable by this intervention? The aggressive tone of the main speaker on the issue? I sense that the 'homosexuality issue' will rear its head at every opportunity this year.

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May** Took Saturday evening and Sunday off to spend time with family and attend my own church. Also spent some time reading reports. I see there is a committee called The Safeguarding Committee, responsible for child and vulnerable adult protection across the church. Decide this is something I could contribute to.

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May** Communion. Perfectly choreographed! There must have been between 800-1000 people in attendance. The singing is fantastic and my heart is stirred.

Two issues close to my heart are brought together today- my professional work in the field of child protection, and the Church. Can I sway the GA to add something to a report not even considered by the Committee?

People at my work have asked what I will be doing with my week's holiday. I've tried to explain the GA and my motivation to be here as best I can. It would be fantastic to take back to my colleagues (front line child protection social workers) a message from the CofS that we recognise the difficult and stressful work they do; AND, that we have called on the Scottish Executive to acknowledge and recognise this work and increase funding for this

work. So, spent most of the day preparing a Deliverance to add to the Safeguarding Committee's report. Try to have a nice lunch but nerves got the better of me!

The Safeguarding Committee is on after lunch. Who is interested in child protection? It seems that everyone is! Question after question to the Convener, sometimes the same question but asked a different way. The Convener becomes frustrated. People don't like child protection issues, it's often a 'grey area'. Commissioners want things in 'black and white' terms. The Convener holds his ground. All the time I'm wondering if I could withdraw my motion. What would happen if I just left? The Moderator goes through the Deliverances, section by section.

Then suddenly it's my turn. I look to the Moderator, wait for an encouraging smile, and permission to proceed, she looks blankly at me and, well, I'm just meant to know what to do so I do it! I decide to go for the sympathy vote, and start my speech with a 'I'm a first time commissioner' line, and by slipping in 'my paid employment is...' making sure they all get the message what a sacrifice I have made to be here! I finish my speech and hear a polite round of applause: quite happy with that. The Convener accepts the motion and the GA stamps its feet in approval. I've done it! The GA will:

*Call upon the Scottish parliament and Executive (1) to recognise and acknowledge the valuable work in the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults undertaken by professionals in social work, police and health and those working in the voluntary sector and, (2) to increase funding to statutory agencies in social work, police and health, and those voluntary organisations involved in the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults.*

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This evening attended the One Kirk panel discussion, with Professor David Wright and Ian Watson defending the evangelical position. Despite some provocative and at times even derogatory comments, Professor Wright responded with balance and reason. Many of Ian's comments were just plain uncomfortable truths that people had to listen to but did not want to hear: scripture is God's inspired word and our standard for life; the Church should be a voice of truth in society; we are sinners living in a fallen world.

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May** This year the Moderator is using an Icon as a focus for her devotions with the GA. It is only in discussing this with another commissioner that it is brought to my

continued from page 3

attention that there has been some controversy around the use of an icon.

My church in Edinburgh has been developing an Arts Ministry and we have just completed an eight-week course on 'Arts and the Gospel' developed and led by our Arts Ministry leader, Steve Innes. We have been looking at the Gospel in paintings, film music etc.

My wife and I have also been reading Henri Nouwen's diary 'The Road to Daybreak, A Spiritual Journey' (the Moderator actually quotes from Nouwen). In one entry he reflects on time he spent watching iconographers. He says:

*I felt awe for these two humble and respectful people, who told me everything I wanted to know. What impressed me most was their conviction that the renewal of the art of iconography was in fact a renewal of the spiritual life. Not only did [the iconographers] exercise their art as a sacred task for which they had to be spiritually prepared, they also saw their work as a way to bring people to faith in the presence of the divine among us. They told me about many people who had found God through their interest in icons."*

I feel a tension between the potential (or even actual) idolatry in this matter, and the spiritual "renewal" this has affected in people's life. Does this make me less evangelical?

**Wednesday 23rd May** This afternoon we debated the Mission and Discipleship Council report, 'A challenge to unity: same-sex relationships as an issue in theology and human sexuality'. It's a well balanced, considerate, sensitive report which, I believe, was been undertaken prayerfully and honestly. While there is much focus on the issue of homosexuality it does take a broader look at sexuality as a whole and not just homosexuality.

There has been so much debate about this over the past year that it seems that this issue really is all we in the church talk about. In some ways there was little to debate as the groups wanted to the GA to continue their remit to consider this issue. I welcomed this report and was somewhat disappointed by FT's response to it: 'Not worth the wait'. This reaction coupled with some of the constant 'niggling' from other factions of the church throughout the week left me with a feeling that someone, somewhere would want to open this whole issue up once again just as the GA did last year.

That is exactly what happened. Rev. Sandra Black (Glasgow: Toryglen) wants to add a Deliverance that 're-affirms' the church law that being gay is no bar to any ministry in the CofS. I have no doubt that this was an aggressive, and divisive intervention. I sat praying that there would be a reasoned, skilful, and gracious, response from 'evangelicals'- and

thank God there was.

'The deliverance uses the term 'gay' instead of 'sexuality'- change this and it would seem reasonable.' 'No' is the response. We start getting hot under the collar. 'What about unity?' asks another. This statement does not sit right with 'evangelicals' and we cannot accept this. Please withdraw given all you want to do is 'reaffirm' something. 'No' is the response. We shift uncomfortably in our seats. A motion to suspend all debate on this issue is defeated. An unlikely ally emerges! Norman Shanks also calls on the commissioner to withdraw- yet again 'No'. But this is a report about listening, understanding each other and unity. The report chair is asked if he supports the deliverance and, thank God, he does not. Only then does the commissioner withdraw.

I didn't feel relief at this and my sadness grows as the Assembly hall empties now the excitement is over. There are so many more issues to debate and consider that affect our church and our witness in our communities that never get aired in such a setting as the GA. I wait for the rest of the afternoon to commend and encourage the Council on their work with people with learning disabilities,

one of the most marginalized groups in our communities and church.

FT event this evening focusing on slavery and human trafficking. Joel Edwards gave a truly inspirational talk on evangelicals in today's

society. For me Joel's message really is the message of the week; indeed the message of the year to us evangelicals: there is a time to say nothing. Using the story of the women caught in adultery Joel explained that Jesus said nothing. He acknowledged the accusers and the women. He waited, and only at the right time did he say something which went straight to the very heart of the matter (and indeed the heart of each accuser). We are challenged to say nothing, but to get along side, to help, to empathise, to encourage, to have compassion for the hurting, and to speak out only at the right time.

**Friday 25th May** The last day of the GA. There is a noticeable decline in numbers. I guess people are heading home. We debate finances, church buildings and manses. The week ends as it started. There is a proposed deliverance relating to ministers' living arrangements and the commissioner uses the term 'partner' in the deliverance. This goes over my head, but one person is still alert thankfully. What is meant by partner? Simply husband and wife? There's deep sigh from the GA at these comments, as if to say "Oh, come on, stop being so sensitive and pedantic."

It might seem petty, but thank God for the intervention. Perhaps the commissioner was just trying to be 'PC'. Or perhaps there was more to it. Whatever it was it confirmed my thinking at the start of the week that the sexu-

ality issue is here to stay. In some ways dealing with the *blatant* is easier—you know what you are dealing with. It's the subtle, quiet, persistent approach that, over time, makes changes. Let's be alert.

That's the end of the GA for this year. I have experienced the range of human emotions. I've gained an insight into the workings of the church that I only could have gained by being at the GA. I will miss it next year.

## THE COST OF UNITY?

*On the Monday night of Assembly your Secretary and Prof. David Wright took part in a panel discussion hosted by OneKirk, entitled "The Cost of Unity". Also on the panel were Dr. Barbara Wheeler, from the PC(USA); Dr. Norman Shanks of the Iona Community; Rev. John Armes, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh; and Dr. David Ferguson, of New College. We asked David Wright to reflect on the evening. He makes an interesting comment about the fruitfulness or otherwise of such engagements.*

I an rightly kept bringing the issue back to Scripture. Lurking not far below the surface of much of the debate was a fundamental difference about the nature of Christianity. Conservatives/evangelicals tend to regard the faith as a given, to which we must remain faithful, which we must guard and transmit as a sacred deposit, rooted in the historical biblical revelation and partaking of the same 'once-for-all' character as the Christ event itself.

*maybe all we can realistically hope for is...a divided church*

Liberals/revisionists give the impression – I felt this clearly on Monday night – that the faith is always evolving, being continually re-minted in successive cultural contexts, not so bothered by the particularities of 'under Pontius Pilate' and 'so it stands written', and preferring to appeal instead to general abstracted theological or ethical themes and even ready to be tutored by prevailing mores or society.

Given the occasional spurts of heat engendered by even such a good-natured debate, I was left wondering whether 'The Cost of Unity' (the title for the evening) is not as well met by abstaining from fruitless cul-de-sac discussion as by repeatedly turning over the same well-trodden ground – with a heightened sense of disagreement, raised blood pressure and a sharpened awareness of the more clamant demands of making disciples. This might have the example and counsel of Jesus in its favour. The resultant 'unity' would be disappointingly thin, but maybe all we can realistically hope for is such a divided church.

# The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. No commas. Period.

*This is the text of an address given by Rev. Dr. Jerry Andrews, chairman of the Presbyterian Coalition, our evangelical partners in the PC (USA).*

**E**very disciple of the Master yearns for a gathering of all the disciples into a visible and vibrant fellowship that throughout its life together expresses fully its life in Christ. Recognizing that the Spirit has baptized each of us into the Son who being in perfect union with the Father thus unites us to the eternal life and love of the Trinity, we rejoice that we have been united in the fellowship of that life and love – the Church.

The Church we experience in our generation, which we have formed, and in which we live out our ecclesiastical commitments – the Presbyterian Church (USA) - is in need of reformation. Its needed reformation is to be according to the Word of God. No guide other than what the Lord of the Church has spoken is used by the Spirit of the Lord to renew, restore, and revive the Church. Insofar as Christ's will for the Church is set forth in Scripture, it is to be obeyed. We recommit to that obedience.

The Church of Jesus Christ is one holy catholic apostolic. It is not one or more of these without the all the others; it is at once and for all time fully what Christ has called and created the Church to be. We reject the false choice that we must select some faithful expressions of the Church, for example its oneness, at the expense of or neglect of others, for example its holiness, as though these are competing attributes among which we must choose. Thus we reaffirm we will not be content with or accept as final any form of the Church that fails to strive for a more perfect expression of all that the Church is – one holy catholic apostolic. Without commas

**One.** The Church is by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed. Our own denomination is engaged in conversations sometimes unloving and seldom healing that appear to be interminable. The eternal truth is valued lightly and willingly surrendered for a momentary peace. Truth and falsehood are brought upon a level. We note that former generations of officers vowed to maintain truth that the Church may experience unity. The pledge and the practice have been lost. Though it is difficult to recognize the oneness of the Church within our own denomination, structures notwithstanding and sometimes barely standing, not to mention its distant and distancing oneness with other fellowships and communions, and though some have despaired of ever seeing or recovering it, we still seek it. At the same time, without apology, we will seek the unity of the Church and its visible manifestation in forms and practices that are founded on the Scriptures and their faithful exposition throughout the

centuries.

**Holy.** The Church is to be in but not of the world. Our own denomination is becoming confused by and with the world. Our identity as a people set apart is increasingly at risk. Toward the end of restoring that identity, protecting a clear witness in and to the whole Church, protecting a reputation for godly living in and to the world, and for the sake of protecting a good conscience before God, we differentiate ourselves as a fellowship within the Presbyterian Church (USA). Without desiring to distance ourselves from others in the denomination, indeed with the hope of serving them better, we claim the right and now renew the practice of free association with others of similar conviction and commitment.

**Catholic.** The Church is scattered for the sake of the gospel. That scattering has become an isolation and in our own denomination, because of an arrogance which ignores the testimony of the Church in times past and the contemporary global Church, a potential schism. The covenantal association we choose reconnects us to the Church around the world, especially the Reformed family scattered abroad, and the legacy of the Church of which we are in our generation a steward. This fresh reconnection, which we believe is desired by those so scattered, insures that our differentiated fellowship within our denomination is not a diminishing of our life together but an expansion. Our abundant resources – time, talent, and treasure – we will direct toward that global fellowship that it may flourish and more faithfully represent Christ to the nations, including our own.

**Apostolic.** The Church is not only to be in continuity with the teaching of the apostles, which serves to maintain our unity, but also with their mission, on which we are promised the Savior's presence. The sense and practice of mission in our own denomination has waned. No longer altogether believing that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, we lost our passion for proclaiming salvation in Him and making disciples. The fellowship we form has at its heart a reinvigorated commitment to the Great Commission.

The sins of commission and omission which we lament being present in our denomination are present within ourselves and we confess them. We do not claim to know the most faithful and effective ways forward or, in knowing them, to have followed them. We claim the freedom in Christ, indeed the responsibility to Christ, to engage in what has been neglected – the apostolicity of the Church; to gather that which is scattered – the catholicity of the Church; to protect that which is at risk – the holiness of the Church; to seek that which is given – the oneness of the Church. We commit to no less. Period.

## HUMAN SEXUALITY AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

*Gordon Kennedy reflects on the state of play so far.*

**T**he subjects of Human Sexuality and Civil Partnerships both featured prominently at this year's General Assembly and are worthy of comment. The first report of the Worship and Doctrine Task Group on Human Sexuality, addressing questions arising from the challenge of homosexuality to the Church, was presented and received by the General Assembly. This report has not changed the position or law of the Church but does aim to take forward the debate on this matter. The report helpfully sets out both positions in this debate in terms of scripture, theology and church history.

Although the members of FT might feel they already know the answer to this debate it is good for us to recognise that our evangelical perspective has been faithfully presented and it becomes us to read and consider what the other presented position is that we might accurately debate with those holding such a position. We most strongly encourage the study of this report.

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The result of the Overture anent Civil Partnerships was reported to the Assembly. Answering a question the Principal Clerk explained the effect of this decision. He said that before the Assembly 2006 there was no law of the church permitting or prohibiting a minister from conducting a ceremony to mark such a partnership. The effect of the rejection of the Overture anent Civil Partnerships is that there remains no law of the Church permitting or prohibiting a minister from conducting a ceremony to mark such a partnership. It should be remembered that by 'law of the church' we mean a legislative act of the General Assembly, not a decision of the General Assembly agreed by deliverance – there is a difference!

We recognise that this is an accurate statement of the effect of the Barrier Act process last year and thank the Principal Clerk for making such a clear statement. However, we also recognise that the Church will at some point in the near future need to decide on this matter. It is not good for the church to limp along not speaking clearly on such a contentious issue. We hope that the good work done by many FT members in their sensitive and careful speeches and contributions to Presbytery debates will bear fruit in the months to come and when we finally do make a decision on this matter.

**Forward Together** is an organisation for evangelicals within the Church of Scotland. Membership is open to all members of the Church, and to those with an active association with the Church. Those wishing to join are required to sign a Statement of Faith. There is a subscription of £10 p.a. (£5 for those not in employment). Kirk Sessions may join for £50 p.a.

Chairman: Rev. Gordon Kennedy, minister, Portpatrick l/w Stranraer:St.Ninian's  
 Vice-chairman: Rev. Dr. Alistair Donald, minister, Maud l/w New Deer  
 Secretary: Rev. Ian Watson, minister, Kirkmuirhill  
 Treasurer: Mrs. Isobel Berks, (to whom subscriptions should be sent)  
 11 McKirdy Court, Kirkmuirhill, ML11 9YL  
 Web-site master: Rev. Andrew Philip, minister, Dunfermline: St.Leonard's

Steering Group members are :  
 Rev. Iain Cathcart, minister, Howgate l/w Penicuik South  
 Rev.Dr. Bob Fyall, Cornhill Trust, Glasgow  
 Rev. Michael Goss, minister, Barry l/w Carnoustie  
 Rev. Iain Greenshields, minister, Snizort  
 Rev.Dr. Andrew McGowan, Highland Theological College  
 Rev. Murdo Maclean, minister, Glasgow:Carmyle l/w Kenmuir Mount Vernon  
 Rev. Peter Park, minister, Ayr:Castlehill  
 Rev. Ramsay Shields, minister, Milngavie:St.Luke's  
 Rev. James Stewart, minister, Perth: Leatham St.Mark's

## "WE DON'T DO GOD"

Readers may be interested in the following information. When MSPs were sworn in on 9<sup>th</sup> May, they had the choice of pledging allegiance to the Queen in the presence of God (an Oath) or simply to affirm that they pledge allegiance to the Queen without any reference to God (An Affirmation). Apparently there is no choice about pledging allegiance to Queen, but there is choice as to whether they bother with God or not.

Essentially this is our MSPs first act and they are called to decide whether to INCLUDE God or EXCLUDE God. This is how they decided on a party-by-party basis:

**70% of SNP MSPs decided to EXCLUDE God**

**30% of Labour MSPs decided to EXCLUDE God**

**0% of Conservative MSPs decided to EXCLUDE God**

**31% of Liberal Democrat MSP's decided to EXCLUDE God**

**100% of Green MSP's decided to EXCLUDE God**

**0% of Independent MSP's decided to EXCLUDE God**

Overall **42%** of our parliamentarians decided to EXCLUDE God.

## THEY STILL SPEAK

John Calvin, commenting on the death of James and the arrest of Peter (Acts 12) makes the following observation.

*There follows a fresh persecution instigated by Herod. We see that the Church was granted a short truce, so that, for a little while, it might revive its courage for a future occasion, as though recovering its breath, and then fight another day. So today there is no reason why the faithful should expect perpetual peace for themselves when they have fought their way through one or two battles, or should seek exemption for themselves, such as veteran soldiers are accustomed to having. Let it suffice if the Lord is granting some time of them to gather their strength again.*

In 1934, the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, reacting to his friend Emil Brunner's surrender to the populist theology of the day, wrote:

*I should like nothing better than to walk together with him in concord, but in the Church we are concerned with truth, and today with an urgency such as probably has not been the case for centuries. And truth is not to be trifled with. If it divides the spirits, they are divided. To oppose this commandment of the sake of a general idea of peace and unity would be a greater disaster for all concerned than such division.*

## DAYS OF ELIJAH

*by Rev. Richard Buckley,  
 minister of Glasgow: Trinity Possil  
 and Henry Drummond*

**T**he Church of Scotland is a Reformed Church; and we claim always to be seeking to reform ourselves. The problem is that we lack an agreed standard or canon by which to measure the reforming that is going on. Does it improve our understanding of the faith; or does it destroy the very thing we are trying to preserve? As someone said during the Assembly, "There is no substance of the faith"

The result of such an attitude leads for example, to acts of worship more akin to Greek Orthodox tradition (with the Assembly being asked to meditate on an icon); and the minister of St.Andrew's Jerusalem stating that she has no desire to convert Jews or Muslims to Christ, but to act simply as one that fosters peace and reconciliation.

As for civil partnerships, it's rather like "heads I win, tails you lose" in that those advocating the blessing of civil partnerships are doggedly sticking to their guns, while those against are constantly trying to be conciliatory and by so doing to gain a hearing.

We have to ask ourselves whether we have the stomach for the fight; are we willing to pay the price for faithfulness and commitment to the Word of God which is the very standard of the Church of Scotland. We fight for the life of our Church.

The King and Head of the Church was mentioned only once at the Assembly, in connection with the future supply of ministers. Apart from that he was all but absent and for many does not seem to be the very substance of the faith as Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit declares him to be in Acts 2.

And as there is no King each one does what is right in his own eyes. As there is no substance of the faith the book that declares that faith is set aside. Its theology and morality are re-

jected. Therefore it is no surprise that the preaching of the Word is at a low ebb and is regarded as outmoded. If it is not taken seriously and held up as God-exhaled then it is only the words of men, and its opinion as valid as my own.

In despair we ask, Is all lost? Is the Church of Scotland doomed? Is there any point in going on?

I find myself still answering: Yes. These days are no different from the days of Elijah and Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah, and indeed the apostles themselves. We are called to be the "offscouring" of the world, those of whom it can be said, The world is not worthy of them.

So lift up your eyes, for your redemption is drawing nigh. The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. Fight the good fight and keep the faith entrusted to you and to all faithful men and women.