

## **Covenant Fellowship Scotland**

### **Response to the Report of the Theological Forum to the 2017 General Assembly, with particular reference to the Appendix to the Report: 'An Approach to the Theology of Same-sex Marriage (2017)'**

#### **1. *The Remit of the Theological Forum***

It is clear from section 1 of the report, confirmed by questioning the Convener of the Theological Forum, that the Forum has complete freedom to write a report on any subject it chooses, without a remit from the General Assembly or even a request from a Council. For example, there is no deliverance of the General Assembly inviting or instructing the Forum to write a report on the theology of same-sex 'marriage', it volunteered to do so. Section 2 of the report indicates that it also engaged with 'new questions about the Westminster Confession'. We understand from the Convener that this was the result of an approach to the Forum by one individual member of the Church. Questions need to be asked about the apparent independence of the Theological Forum from the General Assembly and the Councils of the Church.

#### **2. *The Membership of the Theological Forum***

It is our conviction that the membership of the Theological Forum as presently constituted is not representative of the theological views present in the Church regarding the subject of this report. In particular, it does not appear to be representative of the large body of members and adherents of the Church of Scotland who were opposed to the Overtures concerning Ministers and Deacons in same-sex civil partnerships (2015) and Ministers and Deacons in same-sex marriages (2016). Our concern seems to be justified by features of the report that appear rather biased against the Traditionalist position and in favour of the Revisionist position (see point 4 below). At the General Assembly of 2016, this matter was raised with the Convener. We watch with interest to see if a better theological balance becomes evident when the new members of the Theological Forum are appointed at the 2017 General Assembly. It is essential that the whole church has confidence in the Theological Forum or it will be unable properly to serve the church properly.

#### **3. *The Unity and Peace of the Church***

At the General Assembly of 2012, the Rev Dr Peter Donald presented the third and final report of the committee on Human Sexuality. That report was on Christian marriage. It was passed unanimously by the General Assembly, without a vote. The fact that the Church was united is remarkable, given more recent divisions. The peace and unity of the Church was maintained. By contrast, the present report does not tend towards the unity and peace of the Church. Instead, it is controversial and will tend towards division. For some, it may lead to secession from the Church. Given the unanimous approval for the 2012 report (only five years ago) one must ask why another report is being presented now. What is the moral imperative for such a report, especially one that appears not to engage with the earlier report? The Convener of the Theological Forum has said that 'theology has moved on' since the 2012 report. We shall consider this when we look at part 2 of the report. The true answer, however, seems to be a 'Revisionist' agenda which is determined to take the Church further and further down a path which is entirely contrary to God's Word. In 2009, we were told that this was about one minister in a same-sex relationship and we were assured that there was no intention of changing the Church's view on marriage. Look where we are today! The Church should reaffirm the 2012 report as expressing our present doctrine and practice and reject this rather biased and unclear report which the Church did not commission.

#### **4. *The Bias of the Report***

In this report, the Forum tries to give the appearance of standing on central ground, assessing honestly the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Revisionist' and 'Traditionalist' positions. This is very far from

being the case. This is a ‘Revisionist’ report and virtually every ‘Revisionist’ will applaud what is contained here. It is hard to imagine any consistent ‘Traditionalist’ approving this report. For one thing, the TF has departed from the terminology agreed over recent years of using ‘Traditionalist’ and ‘Revisionist’ to identify the two main, broad ‘camps’ present in the Church on matters of sexuality. In this Report, the word ‘Revisionist’ appears only once (1.3), to be replaced from section 1.4 onwards by the much more appealing ‘inclusive’, while the ‘Traditionalists’ remain with this label or the alternative ‘conservative.’ The bias is also evident in what those holding to the Church’s time-honoured, orthodox teaching on marriage could only describe as ‘caricature’ of the way they handle scripture – more about this later.

## **5. *The Appendix to the Report***

In section 3 of the report, the Theological Forum indicates that it has ‘worked, listened and consulted in an effort to offer an Approach to the Theology of Same-Sex Marriage’. It does not indicate who was ‘consulted’. At the General Assembly of 2016 the Convener offered to arrange a meeting with the chairman of Covenant Fellowship Scotland but this did not take place until November when clearly it was too late to influence the theological content of the report. Were other ‘Traditionalists’ consulted?

Let us now consider the content of the Appendix in more detail.

## **6. *The Use of Scripture***

Section 1 of the Appendix concerns ‘The use of Scripture’. Unfortunately, this section does not actually deal with any Scripture! Given that every single reference to homosexual acts in Scripture is negative, one can see why a study of these references might have made it more difficult for the Theological Forum to say in its concluding section 3.c that, ‘The Forum does not believe that there are sufficient theological grounds to deny nominated individual ministers and deacons the authority to preside at same-sex marriages’. The only way to come to such a conclusion is to ignore every single relevant passage of Scripture. Those who want to read a detailed analysis of what Scripture has to say on the subject of homosexual acts, in the context of the overall biblical teaching on human sexuality, should consult the report of the Theological Commission (2013) section 7.

## **7. *The Arguments for Inclusion (1)***

In section 1.4 of the Appendix, the report lays out its first argument for ‘broadening the Church’s understanding of sexual relations to include those among persons of the same sex’. This is the argument that, since ‘committed and faithful partnerships between equal persons of the same sex were largely unknown in the ancient world’, therefore Paul could not have been addressing such situations. *Ergo*, committed, same-sex relations are not condemned by Paul and other New Testament writers. This argument founders for three reasons. First, it is inaccurate to say that such relationships were unknown in the ancient world, as has been demonstrated by various scholars, and this is in line with the claim of many that same-sex attraction is recognized as a transcultural feature of human life. Second, homosexual sexual acts are condemned, in both Old and New Testaments with absolute consistency, irrespective of whether the relationship was committed and faithful or not. Third, if we hold to an orthodox doctrine of Scripture we must argue that Paul and others did not write simply on the basis of what they knew, or thought, or what their society knew or thought. Rather they were instruments of God and it is the voice of God speaking by his Spirit through the Scriptures which gives authority to the prohibition of sexual acts between those of the same sex.

## **8. *The Arguments for Inclusion (2)***

In section 1.5 of the Appendix, the report lays out its second argument for ‘broadening the Church’s understanding of sexual relations to include those among persons of the same sex’. This is the argument which distinguishes between the ‘written text of Scripture and the living Word of God, the latter being associated with Jesus Christ who speaks to us in our hearts and consciences’. The argument is that ‘we owe our allegiance to Jesus Christ the Word made flesh rather than adherence to the literal words of Scripture’. This means that where ‘people’ believe that Jesus is calling us to a new

understanding, we ought to obey. There are four points to be made here. First, notice the phrase ‘literal words of Scripture’. This is meant to convey that those who hold to the teaching of God’s Word are literalists and probably fundamentalists! This flies in the face of the serious and sustained tradition of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics to be found among evangelicals and other ‘Traditionalists’. Second, this is a denial of our history and tradition as a Reformed Church. The Reformed churches have always argued that Scripture is the final authority for all decision-making. This is the position taught both in our Church’s Confession of Faith and in its Articles Declaratory. Third, if we follow what the Theological Forum proposes, any group of ‘people’ could simply decide that God is saying something new (which contradicts Scripture) and say that Jesus told them so. Is this not Gnosticism writ large, a secret wisdom which cannot be checked or verified? Fourth, if Scripture can be overruled so easily by ‘people’ who come to certain convictions, what is to prevent these ‘people’ arguing that adultery is now approved by Jesus, or (committed, permanent) polyamorous unions, despite what is said in 3 (b) of the Report, or something similar?

#### **9. *Looking at the words of Scripture or through the words of Scripture***

In sections 1.7 (supported by sections 1.8 and 1.9) we come to the core argument of the report in relation to Scripture. We are told that ‘more conservative readers’ tend to focus on ‘the *words* of Scripture’ whereas ‘more inclusive readers’ tend ‘to look *through* rather than *at* the words of the text’. Essentially, ‘inclusive readers’ want to look at the text not only in its original context but to see beyond the text and recognise that Scripture tells a ‘developing story’. The response must be first, that conservative readers are reading Scripture the way it has been consistently read throughout the history of the Christian Church and more especially since the Reformation. Second, we should note that conservative readers also recognise the need to read Scripture in terms of a ‘developing story’ (or progressive revelation). No conservative is arguing for animal sacrifices and a High Priest to be installed. The problem with the ‘more inclusive readers’ is the argument that the ‘developing story’ can flatly contradict, rather than fulfil and develop, the earlier revelation.

#### **10. *The Living Voice of Jesus Christ***

In section 1.13 of the report, the Forum argues that all of us are committed to the idea of the ‘living voice of Jesus Christ speaking in the Scriptures’ suggesting that ‘the differences between us rest on how these Scriptures are to be heard today’. The truth is that we are utterly at odds over the interpretation of Scripture. There are three convictions which distinguish us from the ‘Revisionists’ who wrote this report. First, we believe that the living voice of Jesus is heard in the Scriptures and we affirm the clarity and perspicuity of Scripture as affirmed in our Reformed tradition. Second, we believe that the ‘living voice of Jesus Christ’ will never contradict what God has revealed by his Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. Third, we believe that the moral teaching of Jesus in relation to marriage (Matt 19 and parallels) is clear and cannot so easily be set aside.

#### **11. *Section 2 of the Appendix – General Comment***

The report says in 1.14, ‘Having considered scriptural interpretation, we now turn to extra-biblical arguments’. The truth is that there has been no serious consideration of scriptural interpretation or any attempt to justify the hermeneutic followed by the Theological Forum. Only now, as the ‘extra-biblical’ arguments are presented, do we get an insight into the real theological convictions lying behind this report, namely, the theology of Professor Song of Durham University. When the Convener says that ‘theology has moved on’ he means that he has been persuaded by the arguments of Professor Song. [See 2.4.6 where the Report refers to an element of Song’s work which it describes as ‘the most perceptive theological move in the literature to date.’] There is no rationale offered for choosing Professor Song’s work as over against, for example, the work of Dr Robert Gagnon, who has published voluminously on this subject and comes to the diametrically opposite position from Professor Song. Nor is there any argument as to why, instead of Professor Song, the Forum did not choose to base their theology on the work of Professor N.T. Wright or Professor Oliver O’Donovan, again different from both Song and Gagnon. In other words, the choice of Song seems entirely arbitrary and has been

chosen only to reinforce the views which the Convener of the Theological Forum and others had already formulated.

## **12. Sections 2.2 (A) and 2.3 (B)**

Section 2.2 (A) on ‘Human rights arguments’ rehearses very briefly the historical rise of such arguments, but for the most part [see sections 2.2.5 – 2.2.7] recognizes some of the weaknesses of these arguments as reflected, e.g., in the work of Stanley Hauerwas and Helen Alvare. While nothing is said about this in the Report, Professor Song’s work is also critical of such an approach which he deliberately eschews (see below).

Section 2.3 (B) on ‘Analogical Arguments’ is based largely on one 20 page 2010 academic paper by Professor Porter and reviews something of the connections between Church and State regarding marriage through much of Church history. This attempt at trying to show that marriage has taken many forms throughout the century does not, however, identify any period or society where it was entered into by same-sex couples, and we are brought back to a right-based and justice argument in 2.3.24.

## **13. 2.4 (C) : Theological arguments with particular reference to the work of Professor Robert Song**

Here the Report turns to what it entitles [2 (C)]: ‘Fully theological arguments for the admissibility of same-sex marriage’. This is the theological heart and centre of the report and requires some careful examination.

### **General Comments**

With respect to Professor Robert Song’s 2014 book *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* there are a number of general things that may be said before we get on to the specific details of his book:

- While there are things in this book that we disagree with profoundly, there are other aspects of it with which we are in complete agreement and which offer significant theological insights from which we have benefitted.
- However, it seems rather incongruous that such a high profile be given in the Theological Forum (TF) Report to Professor Song’s work for two main reasons:
  1. In the report Song’s work is set alongside other arguments whose methodology Song, in the Preface to his book, makes a point of saying he has ‘tried not to follow’ and indeed ‘sought to avoid’ because of three major inadequacies in their arguments: (a) the way they handle scriptural texts; (b) their failure to deal adequately with marriage as a creation good, intrinsically open to procreation; and (c) their assumption that commitments to other creation ‘goods’ of marriage – namely, faithfulness and permanence - are separable in principle from procreation, without a compelling theological justification for this. The three arguments Song has ‘tried NOT to follow’ in his book are generally-speaking the three main arguments used by revisionists and they include the ‘Human Rights Arguments’ found in section 2.2. of the TF Report, and some parts of section 2.3. The TF Report makes no reference to this significant clash of methodologies which Song sets out plainly in the Preface to his work and which therefore lie at the heart of this Report.
  2. What Song is arguing for in his book is specifically NOT same-sex marriage, but something significantly different, covenant partnership – the clue is in the title to his book. Indeed in chapter 5 of his book Song highlights the main problems he sees with thinking of ‘covenant partnership simply as marriage.’ These include (p 88): (i) the fact that it would lend itself too easily to the denial of the significance of sexual difference, with consequences ... for our understanding of ourselves ... but also ... of sexual relations: sex would easily become whatever we choose to make it mean, and (ii) the Church’s witness on marriage might find

itself yielding to secular trends. How can the TF use a book that champions covenant partnership – which the author goes out of his way to argue is something quite different from marriage – how can the TF use such a book to back a proposal for same-sex marriage? As Song states quite clearly (p 26): ‘marriage understood as a creation good is not possible for same-sex couples.’

- This book is fairly recent in academic terms (2014); very few ministers in the church will have known it was being studied closely by the TF. Significant time – not just months, but years - is needed to reflect on the whole of Song’s book and on the universal and ecumenical scholarly response to it. Section 2.2.7 of this Report itself indicates (with reference to the 1990s) that ‘liberal Christians have been mistaken in their views in the past’, views which in time they have modified. This is the way in which academic theology, in common with many other disciplines, operates. It seems highly unusual to base a large part of one’s argument on such a new piece of work that the academy itself has not had time to reflect on, engage with, and respond to, let alone the clergy and eldership, or the church at large. It is even more alarming that the traditional doctrine and practice of the church with regard to marriage that has lasted for 500 years and was last affirmed unanimously by the 2012 General Assembly should be swept aside within 5 years largely on the basis of one piece of academic work of one scholar that has already been heavily criticised as well as highly praised by different parts of the theological academic community.

### ***Comments on Specific Sections of the Report***

**2.4.3** Here the Report highlights the significance that Song recognises ‘the coming of Christ holds for the theology of marriage,’ to use Song’s own words (p 8). However, Song makes no reference whatsoever in his book – let alone in its opening chapter - to the figure used by the TF (sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4) of a woman presiding at Communion, a figure which may be in danger of distorting Song’s emphasis.

**2.4.5** Here the Report focuses on what is presented as a significant biblical passage for Song’s argument, Luke 20:34-6, but especially v 35 where Jesus said, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.”

The parallel synoptic passages at Matt 22:30 and Mark 12:25 also include the exact same words (in Greek) in the present tense ‘they neither marry nor are given in marriage’, but the contexts there make it very clear that what is being referred to is a future eschatological time ‘in the resurrection’ (Matthew), ‘when the dead rise’ (Mark). The question here is whether Luke has exactly the same timeframe in mind, as, e.g., the NIV suggests by translating the phrase with a future application. This would also be in keeping with what drew this response from Jesus in the first place, the Sadducees’ question about the eschatological resurrection.

However, it may very well be that Luke is in fact presenting the nuanced position that with the resurrection of Jesus, the NT church is now living in the reality of a partially realised eschatology, in the ‘now and not yet’ of the coming Kingdom of God. And he may well be saying that in this new reality there is a new vocation to which some are called and with which some are gifted. Paul certainly develops this teaching in 1 Corinthians 7. Discussing these matters, Song is at his best biblically and theologically. By the end of his opening chapter Song has clearly established that with the coming of Christ, and particularly with his resurrection, the tension created by the coming of Christ and the breaking in of the Kingdom of God is resolved in the notion of vocation or calling (1 Cor 7): some are called to, and gifted with, celibacy; others continue to be called to, and gifted with, marriage.

This fact of the new vocation and gift of celibacy, inaugurated through the coming of Jesus, is regarded by Song as important with respect to the first of the three creation ‘goods’ - procreation, faithfulness and permanence - that the Church in general has recognised at least from the time of Augustine, based largely on the teaching of Genesis 1-2, supplemented by the use of the metaphor of marriage to describe the covenant relationship between God and Israel in the OT (Hos 1-3; Jer 2-3), and between Christ and his Church (Eph 5:25-27). With the coming of Jesus, and the new vocation of celibacy, Song argues that the significance of the first of these creation ‘goods’ - procreation - has changed (p 20), it no longer being seen as essential.

This point is crucial to the rest of Song’s argument and can be found on pp 15-19 of his book, which focuses on the role he believes procreation has in enabling humanity made ‘in the image of God’ to fulfil what he seems to regard as humanity’s main imaging function, that of ruling and subduing the earth (17): ‘It is the very concrete orientation of sexual differentiation to procreation that brings out the logic of the passage [Genesis 1:26-28]: being created in a relationship of male and female is what enables humankind to procreate; being able to procreate enables it to fill the earth and subdue it; being able to rule the earth enables it to fulfil its role as bearing the image of God.’ Song further argues that ‘we can now see how Christ resituates Adam’s imaging of God ... The last Adam ... who unlike the first Adam does succeed in having all things placed under his feet, does not do so by procreation.’

A major problem with Song’s argument here is that he does not consider how it was that humankind failed to exercise authority over the earth despite their procreating. We would suggest that a major clue to this failure is given in a statement of Song on p 18: ‘Jesus’ mother and brothers are not those to whom he is biologically related, but whoever **hears** the word of God and does it (Luke 8:21; Mk 3:34) [our emphasis].’ We would suggest that this identifies the characteristic of those who belong to the family of Christ as their obedience to the word of God. This also fits well with the account of beginnings in Genesis 1-3. There are strong exegetical reasons – not least the use of the phrase ‘he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image’ in Genesis 5:3 – that suggest that being ‘in the image of God’ consists of being in a relationship of son-ship or child-ship to God, which is how Luke understood it (Lk 3:38).

What is required in such a relationship, as the rest of the Scriptures (not least the words of Jesus quoted above) attest to, is obedience to the words of God. Genesis 3 makes clear that Adam’s failure to obey is the point of his/ humanity’s failure to ‘image’ God properly. In stark contrast, Paul teaches us that the last Adam’s triumph comes as a result of his obedience (Phil 2:8): ‘he became obedient to death – even death on a cross! **Therefore** God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

For the followers of Christ living in the reality of a partially realised eschatology surely obedience to the call of Christ on our lives is what is essential, which can include a call to marriage or a call to celibacy. While procreation is certainly affected by the coming of Christ, can we really argue that procreation is now as ‘theologically redundant’ for Christians as Song does? Is not the (Abrahamic) promise (Gen 12:2 and its many iterations and expansions in Genesis), which itself was a re-affirmation of the creation blessing (Gen 1:28), still for us and our children ... (Acts 2:39)?

**2.4.6 – 2.4.11** Unless you have read Song’s book, you will not be able to appreciate how the TF Report gets from what is stated in 2.4.5 to what is said in the following paragraphs. That is because these paragraphs cover in the main chapters 2 and 3 of Song’s book where he moves beyond what is clear in the NT to a measure of speculation, or to what he, and the TF, would describe as the ‘deeper structure’ of the biblical story.

In chapter 2, Song goes on to ask whether there are other relationships which witness to this new eschatological era to which Christians belong. Here, he introduces the idea of covenant partnership

which he defines as ‘non-procreative relationships, which share the other two creation ‘goods’ of faithfulness and permanence (as well as a different kind of ‘fruitfulness’ from that to which procreation leads). At this point he argues (p 37) ‘if we are to introduce the category of covenant partnership at all, the fundamental distinction it connotes is not between heterosexual and homosexual relationships but between procreative and non-procreative relationships.’ This is reflected in the TF Report at 2.4.6 where it is described as ‘the most perceptive theological move in the literature to date.’ Song regards such covenant partnerships as a third ‘vocation’ alongside the call to marriage and the call to celibacy. If this third vocation did in fact exist in the early church we would have expected to see at least some evidence of it in the NT, which we do not. Song himself admits frankly (p 23) that the NT ‘never envisages any possibility of a third [vocation].’

In chapter 3 Song then goes on to speculate – or theologise? - as to whether these covenant partnerships can include sexually active same-sex partners and argues that they can because (i) while sexual differentiation is justified within marriage, that’s only because marriage in creation is oriented to procreation; it is not necessary for covenant relationships; (ii) procreation is no longer eschatologically necessary in this eschatological era, so there are no grounds for requiring all committed relationships to be heterosexual; (iii) sex can be good in itself, apart from any role in procreation (e.g., Gen 2; Song of Songs; 1 Cor 7 ‘conjugal rights’); and (iv) sex can point to the nature of our relationship with God (e.g., the intimacy of communion with our partner can point to that which we can experience with God).

The problem with this is that nowhere in the Bible do we find examples of sexually active covenant partnerships outside of marriage, or examples of sexually active same-sex relationships of any kind that are endorsed by Scripture, even in eschatological contexts (cf 1 Cor 6:12ff; Eph 5:5). Song himself accepts this lack of biblical evidence (62): ‘whatever it was that the biblical writers were referring to in relation to same-sex sexuality, they took themselves to be opposed to it.’

At this point (chapter 4) Song requires to make the move from the ‘surface meaning of texts’ to the ‘deeper structure of the biblical story’ (p 63) – hence the importance for the TF of broaching this matter in section 1 of the Report. Song has, of course, been seeking to argue this in chapters 1-3, but especially in chapters 2 and 3.

Towards the end of chapter 4, he begins to employ the argument that just because Jesus and Paul and the early church were unable to free themselves from the societal pressures that regarded same-sex sexual relations as scandalous, that needn’t mean that we should be bound by such pressures any longer. In support of his argument he points to the way in which, over the centuries, the Church has changed its attitudes to slavery, the role of women in church and marriage, and to the idea of just war as examples of how our thinking can change regarding sexual relationships as well. The problem with each of these examples is that there are texts and passages of Scripture than on a ‘surface reading’ can be understood as at least pointing in that direction. In the case of same-sex sexual relationships there are no such texts or passages. As another reviewer, Ian Paul, has pointed out what Song is doing here – and what the TF Report is also doing in following him (and others who do likewise) – is ‘in effect arguing that [the NT] is theologically and semantically incoherent – that what we read on the surface actually points, not just at right angles, but in the opposite direction to the ‘deeper structure’ of the biblical story.’

**2.4.10** Here the Report claims that ‘in *creation*, the purpose of male and female was for *pro-creation*. So, within that mind-set, sexual differentiation was for procreation.’ With procreation no longer being seen by both Song and the TF as ‘essential for the growth of the Kingdom’ the possibility of non-procreative unions is opened up, and what is in mind in particular as the argument develops is non-procreative, same-sex sexually active unions. One of the big problems with this is that it doesn’t take account of the creation narrative in Genesis 2, where no reference whatsoever is made to the role of procreation. Instead there is a strong emphasis on the creation of a (specifically) woman/ female ‘helper

right opposite' for the man to alleviate his aloneness and to transform a 'not good' situation to a 'good' one (Gen 2:18). Sexual differentiation is from the very beginning part of the fabric of the other creation 'goods' of faithfulness and permanence as the 'man' cleaves to his 'woman' (Genesis 2:24) and they become one flesh. This too is picked up in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* which, in its listing of the purposes for which marriage has been ordained, gives priority to 'the mutual help of husband and wife' over 'the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed.'

### ***Conclusion***

The Theological Forum has put forward a report which seeks to justify the Church permitting designated ministers and deacons to conduct same-sex 'marriages'. Unfortunately, the Forum has not engaged with the relevant Scriptures, has caricatured the 'Traditionalist' position and has based its core theological case on the work of one scholar whose work does not provide a solid foundation upon which to abandon the orthodox position of the Church, which it holds with the vast majority of Christians worldwide and which is ably expressed in the Church's Confession of Faith (based on Genesis 2:24): 'Marriage is between one man and one woman'. We therefore urge the General Assembly to reject this report and reaffirm the Church's biblical and historic position.