

THESIS TO BE DELIVERED AT THE CHRISTIAN MEN'S BREAKFAST
SATURDAY 4th APRIL 1992

THE FUNDAMENTAL AND FUNDAMENTALISM

What I have to say this morning, I will relate at a fundamental level. The word “fundamental” simply means, the lowest possible frequency at which a system will function.

It is at this level, that which is dead within us can be brought to life. It is at this level that we can be released from an enslavement that has been limiting our life.

It is at this level that we are able to enter the perspective of our place and purpose in life, as members of Christ’s Body, which I will explain.

The Apostle Paul in his first Corinthian letter (1 Cor. 12:27-18), said: “Together, you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a different part of it.

Then he went on to say, “In the Church, God has given the first place to Apostles...” Apostles of course, are those who have been trained and sent. A disciple is a learner.

“The second, to Prophets...” That is, those Apostles who preach and interpret the Word by divine inspiration. The third to Teachers... “After them, Miracles and after them, the gift of Healing; Helpers, Good Leaders and then those with many Languages. (J.B.) How important it is for us to discover our part and use it wisely and with dignity.

We go back to the word, “FUNDAMENTAL” using as an aid — the musical chord.

The Bass note is the fundamental note. The important note is the TOP note. It calls the tune. It creates the air from which the other notes take their cue.

Along with the intermediate notes in the chord, the Bass creates harmony. The importance of the Bass or Fundamental note is that it adds depth to the quality of the music.

Now, the top note in the function of the Church, as we will see, is the Biblical Scholar. He studies the Scriptures – the historical – the geographical and the political perspectives.

He seeks knowledge on the source of the material – the date of the writings – he examines the literary, style and characteristics – to help us understand the Scriptural text.

Now, a Question: “Can you imagine the Bass note of a chord, saying of the top note, “You are wrong!”? That’s NOT its function. Its function is to create harmony.

A poor analogy, perhaps, yet it is showing us how we need to be aware of where we are at – whether at a fundamental or intermediate level and what our role really is...

For there are so many Christians at a fundamental or intermediate level who take the prerogative to say of a Biblical Scholar, “He’s wrong – all wrong!!!” simply because they don’t agree with him.

Not one of us is in a position to be critical of another, without first taking into account that other person’s perspective and what it is that makes that perspective acceptable to that person.

We must be able to put ourself in that other person's position – taking into account our own views and limitations – and – the way we react to others.

Many years ago, when I was studying for the Lay Preachers Certificate Examinations – I could not tolerate the views of others that differed from mine.

Our Tutor a gracious – elderly and wise Minister – called me aside after Classes one evening, and said:

"I have two books that I want you to read. One you will enjoy. The other you will disagree with mostly but I want you to read them both."

The first book, – I loved. The other – sent my blood pressure up. Then it came down. I became angry. Then I calmed down. I was intolerant. Then I reached a state of balance.

Where do we stand really – in relation to our religious differences – as being part of Christ's Body function? I believe I am in a strategic position to ask that question...

For you see – by way of circumstances, I am a baptized Methodist. I am a baptized Baptist. I was confirmed into the Anglican Church – and I am an Ordained Uniting Church Minister.

Then again there is a sense in which I am an adherent of the Catholic Faith by way of circumstances.

While I was a student in Theological College – a Senior Lecturer in Theology, and the Principal himself, both unwittingly introduced me to the Catholic Faith. And my heart warmed.

While I was in Parish Ministry, it became compulsory for Ministers to undertake Continuing Education studies. I enrolled in studies with the Catholic Church, recommended by the Uniting Church.

Then, when the Uniting Church decided to become independent, I continued my studies with the Catholic Church even to this day.

So then – having been able to enter the perspective of the Catholic Faith – through study and practice over many years I deeply reverence and respect what makes that perspective acceptable to them.

It was a Uniting Church Moderator who steered me into studies on the Rosary beginning with a book written by a Methodist Minister.

I must say, how deeply hurt and ashamed I have felt, at the unjust criticisms and comments about the Catholic Faith – coming from Protestant Christians.

Though disgraced by Martin Luther's condemnation against indulgences and other practices at the time of the Reformation and humiliated by the turn the Reformation had taken...

The Catholic Faith has emerged from its abasement. And since the Vatican II Council of 1962-65, has undergone many changes, with strong Biblical Based teachings and genuine ecumenical strides towards tolerance while still being faced with 16th and 17th century – anti-Catholic-worn-out, untruths. God Bless them!

The writer of Ecclesiasticus (27:4-7, 8th Sunday of the Year "C"), adequately describes the current Catholic position:

"In a shaken sieve, the rubbish is left behind.
So too, the defects of a man, appear in his talk.
The kiln tests the work of the Potter –
The test of a man is in his conversation.
The orchard where the tree grows,
is judged by the quality of its fruit,
similarly a man's words betray what he feels.
Do not praise a man before he has spoken,
since this is the test of men."

You know? The Reformation was both the BEST and the WORST thing that could have happened to the Church!

The BEST – because it brought into the open – the deepest life we have ever known eventuating from the pressure of GOD, in St. Augustine – St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Martin Luther.

The WORST – because, instead of the cause of corruption in the Church being dealt with in Grace and healed – the Church was split.

A Protest-ant Movement began to develop and various denominations representing various beliefs began to emerge.

However, with the spread of Protest-ant-ism far worse corruptions and atrocities appeared – than the Catholic Church was accused of.

How would you liked to have had your ears chopped off or drowned in the most gruesome manner, simply because you would not conform to the Protest-ant point of view?

I'm sorry! We like to call ourselves Protestants – don't we – it sounds ever so much better. Yet we are still Protest-ants.

The worst development in the Protestant Faith – has been that of Christian Fundamentalism.

It originated in America – both from the influx of Migrants and post-1860 Civil War developments when ideas began to change.

Christian thinkers were influenced by such men as, Charles Darwin – Karl Marx – and Sigmund Freud. Such Christians were branded as Modernists.

Fundamentalism began as a reaction to the modernistic view. And in the early 20th century, a number of pamphlets were published entitled, "The Fundamentals".

The documents stated the basic beliefs of the Bible and claimed among other things that the Bible contained NO errors – it was a factual historical record – and condemned the Catholic Church. From these writings – a movement known as Fundamentalism developed. The interesting point is that Fundamentalists accepted the documents without question.

Slowly, the division of the 16th and 17th century Protest-ant-ism were being replaced by a deeper division within the Protestant Church. Fundamentalists broke away from the Mainline Churches, into individual groups.

In one of my parishes, there was a break-away from the Baptist Church. This was followed by a break away from the break away. Then followed a further break away from the break away of the breakaway, all within the space of three years. And all over Biblical interpretation.

I must say here, that Fundamentalism is NOT a particular interpretation of the Bible It is a lack of interpretation.

Because of this, it is almost impossible to communicate with some fundamentalists concerning the meaning of God's Revelation in the Bible.

It is very difficult for some fundamentalists to read the Bible in the context which the authors intended, because, in general, they believe it was dictated by God – directly – to human authors of Scripture.

The lack of historical perspective concerning the development of the Bible, makes it difficult for the average Fundamentalist to understand that the Bible is God's inspired word, given to us through centuries of historical and cultural conditions. The Bible is not a Book! It is a series of Books.

Now, Fundamentalism became very legalistic and rigid and placed emphasis on people's badness rather than their goodness. And saw God as a vengeful God rather than a loving God.

Not only has our Protestant Churches been effected by the Fundamentalist movement the Catholic Church has also suffered.

The Unity for which Christ prayed and died has been s-h-a-t-t-e-r-e-d! I know we all have our imperfections and faults. It is in every church.

If only God could lay hold of us like He did Jacob and direct us back to the point where we separated. But you see, each one of us has a cultural background a tradition which is very powerful not only because of its history and the Catholic Church has the longest history of all. It is also strong because of the total strength of all who adhere to that tradition. And whether we realise it or not, it influences our attitudes and the way we respond to others.

For the generations of today, there has been no point of separation. We live mostly in the influence of the tradition or the culture in which we have been brought up. This is very noticeable in people.

How can one go back to a point in time which has no meaning for them. The big issue as I see it, is, the Body of Christ has been separated it is shattered there is no real sense of unity.

There are still tensions that exist between the old traditions – the enlightened traditions – and the Fundamentalist Movement. Between the Eastern and the Western Churches.

Yet there IS a movement toward UNITY today. Where there has been dialogue between Christians of different religions there has developed a warm acceptance between individuals.

This is just a beginning, which I hope, will lead to an unconditional surrender on the part of us all to stand as ONE against the very subtle and evil power that has brought about our separation.

A time when we will meet one another in embracing forgiveness and love and the Holy Eucharist becomes the nourishing and renewing point in our celebration. After all, isn't this really what became the gift of love that renewed the Prodigal Son – despite his brother's anger?