

Diversity without engagement?

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples. If you have love one for another”

The 'big challenge' for churches is mission. But I have no doubt that the big issue which challenges us in our cohering, our belonging together as a church, is this area of human sexuality. And of course they are linked. It's easy to see that missional challenge in the context of the attitudes of many young people. But it's much deeper than that. It's about what we model as the church in the world - model in the way in which we hold one another in love - embracing difference and diversity - modelling integrity, honesty and trust. We talk easily - sometimes too easily I fear - about the richness of our diversity. But diversity without engagement? We need to do better. That is costly loving and there will be Christ-like suffering at its heart,

This has been a good event. You have come in good faith. You have committed yourselves to the dialogue. And it has been good to be here. I've listened and taken part - and been deeply challenged. Finding the right way forward and finding the right timing will be a work of the spirit. I hope that we will all go away encouraged.

This meeting has been about helping the mind of the church to form - or as a friend of mine says, it's about 'beginning to think with the church'. The answer won't be found by channelling the debate off into theological commissions. Nor in win/lose votes - although General Synod will play its part. My personal view is that the answer won't be found at either end of the spectrum of views - it's likely to be more comprehensive and untidy than that. We've been focusing on our own diversity - we need also to be aware of the diversity of the Anglican Communion and of the extent to which our church is respected across the Communion.

There is another dilemma at the heart of our approach to this in Christ. It's whether we prioritise issues over relationships or the other way round. These are age-old challenges. Relationships over issues risks seeming unprincipled - as if we might allow ourselves to be indifferent to human need or justice for the sake of our unity. To prioritise issues over relationships risks reducing the gospel to a series of test issues.

We are a very collegial church. Small size makes that possible. We all matter. The function of leadership in such a church is not to provide the answers - nor to inhibit the church from seeking the answers, I think that leadership should help us to do the very best we can - and above all to shape the space which we need - space in which we can move into a deeper catholicity and all-embracing wholeness which excludes partiality. And leadership takes what arises from conversations like this and charts a pathway which will ultimately give expression in practical terms to what the mind of the church is becoming

We started with a conversation between David Porter and myself about what he and I learned in the Northern Ireland conflict. We learned how easy it is for polarised attitudes to grow - when we move too slowly. We learned how easy it is for polarised attitudes to grow - when we move too quickly. We can turn one another into more extreme versions of ourselves - when what we are really called to do is to help each other - across our differences - to move towards one another and towards the will of God for all of us.

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The Most Rev David Chillingworth, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld, Dunblane and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Homily delivered at the closing Eucharist at the Cascade Conversation meeting in Pitlochry, 30 April 2014.