

Fel Na Choller Dim ❖ That Nothing Be Lost

A Conversation to Preserve the Breadth of Welsh Anglicanism

21-22 September 2016

Keynote Address
by the Rt Revd Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St Asaph

Preliminary Remarks

I would like to begin by drawing attention again to the subtitle of the conference, which for me is important. It is to be a conversation, an exploration. In my address, I want to offer you some ideas and working assumptions, not definitive statements, and certainly not a solution.

First of all, I want to make two preliminary remarks. First, about the nature of my contribution here today. When I was a member of staff at the Anglican Communion Office, I had to serve people of very different views and it was appropriate to be reticent about my own views. However, when one becomes a bishop, one has to come off the fence. Pastoral decisions have to be taken about the real lives of real clergy and laypeople.

And as a bishop, I have to be faithful to three different dimensions. First of all, I have to be faithful to what Cardinal Kasper has called the ‘diachronic communion of the Church’, the Communion that we share in those who have gone before us in the Christian faith down through the ages. I have to be mindful of the synchronic communion of the Church, the fellowship we share with all baptised Christians across the world. This can be particularly hard as a bishop, and I have significant sympathy for Pope Francis, who has said, ‘I have to be the Pope for the people with their feet to the floor on the brakes as well as for the people with their feet to the floor on the accelerator’. I experience the same tension. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, there is what can be called the exochronic communion: the Communion which is outside and beyond of time, the Communion with God and with Christ into which we are brought by his grace. This Communion is foundational to the other two, and a true fidelity to all three is required in the ministry of a bishop. I find it particularly hard for example when people say that in ordaining women, the Church is surrendering to the spirit of the age. I believe that in ordaining women I am being faithful to the apostolic tradition, not abandoning it. This is not the place or the time to explore these arguments, but I believe that the ordination of women is a true development of the apostolic tradition and not a repudiation of it.

Anyway, as I have said, in what follows I want to offer my thinking, and not solutions.

Secondly, I want to explain what I mean when I use the word “Communion” in this address. As a theological term, “Communion” in the body of Christ can mean so many things: full visible Communion as an ecumenical term; impaired communion, broken communion: they are all terms familiar in modern discourse. In this address, I want to indicate that by ‘Communion’ I mean “Eucharistic Communion”, are we prepared to share in a common celebration of the Eucharist; to receive Communion at each other’s celebrations?

Hard Questions

After these two preliminary remarks, I next want to offer two hard and pointed questions.

First, to the Church in Wales I pose the question; ‘Do we want traditionalists in our midst?’ The Church in Wales has to give a definitive answer that question; it has not yet done so. It has used the right phrases in the legislation (which speak of ‘an accepted and valued place within the Church in Wales’ for traditionalists) and in the code of practice (which says that the Church in Wales ‘remains committed to enabling all its members to flourish within its life and structures as accepted and valued’). But do we really mean it? I myself have always taken those phrases at face value.

Diversity is an important element of the Anglican tradition. We are an inclusive and diverse church. I find that I am more and more committed to that, because my Master demands it of me, and it gets me into trouble in other contexts.

There are of course limits to acceptable diversity; we can't accept anything and everything, but again this is a subject for another occasion. On this specific question (Do we want traditionalists in the Church in Wales?) I have been upset by recent challenges to the view that we should remain a diverse church on this issue. In his opening presentation, the Ven. Dr William Strange spoke of "the silencing of orthodox Catholics". It was a chilling phrase. I want to bear testimony that this has not been a deliberate policy, but there are voices raised against the inclusion of those who are regarded as supporting discrimination on grounds of gender. I was alarmed when one speaker in the Governing Body suggested that it was time even to stop confirming traditionalists. I was surprised at the strength of the reaction when I ordained a traditionalist to the diaconate this Pentecost. I am therefore worried about whether the Church in Wales is in fact committed to the words contained in its legislation.

My hard question to traditionalists is this: Do you really want to be part of the Church in Wales, or more specifically, do you want to be in Communion (by which I mean Eucharistic Communion as I set out above) with the bishops of the Church in Wales? The Church in Wales is committed to holy orders being open on an equal basis to men and women at all three levels. It can offer no long-term security about anything, including that statement I suppose, in a polity where Governing Body is, under God, the supreme legislator for the faith and discipline of the Church in Wales. But the Church in Wales is committed to protecting personal conscience, but not to making structural provision. It is very, very unlikely that any form of supplemental or alternative episcopal ministry will be offered.

My question to the English bishops with us is: "How do you maintain a sense of being one episcopal college when you are not in full Eucharistic Communion with other members of that college? It has been pointed out elsewhere in this conference that for traditional Catholics, it is not the case that 'any man will do' as a bishop. They seek the ministry of a bishop who does not ordain women to the priesthood. I need to have that idea unpacked. I can understand a theology that says that women cannot receive holy orders. I could understand a theology of 'taint' whereby ordaining women as priests would be said to invalidate the ministry of the ordaining bishop. But I have to get my head around the idea that I have heard articulated when a bishop ordains women to the priesthood that results in a diminution of his Eucharistic Communion with those who cannot receive her ministry. I need to hear more about that in order to be able to understand it.

These are my two hard questions, and it is for others to answer them. For my part, I am committed to working for a Church that answers "yes" to both of my hard questions: committed to diversity and committed to Eucharistic Communion with its bishops. I hope for a joyful loyalty to the episcopal College, enabled by a generous embrace.

Finding a Way Forward

In my work for the Anglican Communion, I was often engaged in facilitating dialogue between groups whose positions seemed diametrically opposed. It often felt as if we were walking up a gully between two rock faces. The path would get narrower as it went up, and as it narrowed, it wasn't clear that we would reach our goal. But then, at the last moment, the last minute, we would glimpse a chink of light which indicated a way through. So, I have to ask there any overlap here between the positions of those who are committed to the ordination of women to all three orders and of those who cannot receive the ministry of women as bishops and priests?

What then might be the elements of a solution in our situation?

First, charity, trust and listening are essential, and this conference marks an important beginning in that regard. Some of the vitriol that there has been on both sides of the debate has been deeply undermining to the life of the Church. There has been poisonous – anonymous – writing on some websites. I recall that in the debates in the Anglican Communion, when some have called for a

polite conversation, others have answered that politeness is not a gospel value, but I disagree. Being polite, respectful and reverential is an essential part of hospitality, which is most definitely a gospel value. There needs to be listening. I meet regularly with my traditionalist clergy for that purpose. And if there is open listening, we must all be prepared to shift our ground in the light of what we hear.

My second point is that the Code of Practice is based on the right of individual conscience, but it is a real provision. It says that provision 'shall' be made, not that it 'may' be made. Traditionalists are given a *right* to flourish. I am unhappy with language that implies that traditionalists are permitted, only on the grounds that they are dying out. To flourish, and this is the word chosen in the official documents, a tradition must be allowed to live, to pass on its values and understanding to its congregations, to the members of its families, and its communities. The position of the Church in Wales is unequivocal, but it chooses (at the moment) to allow diversity on this matter. Traditionalists can and will be ordained in the Church in Wales. In my opinion, there must be no silencing of any of the mainstream shades of opinion.

Third, when there is a woman bishop, that will represent a new reality. I believe that the distinction that has already been recognised in the Church of England, and which has been referred to here between jurisdiction and sacramental ministry is part of the answer to it, and others have explored what it means. But in dioceses where there is a female bishop, why can the existing male bishops of the other dioceses not provide the everyday care that Fr Ben Rabjohns asked for in his presentation? I refer back to my second hard question ...

Fourth, I can see, however, that there is a question as to where, in a Church in which provision is made only for individuals, traditional Catholics can find their corporate life. As traditionalist you need a corporate fellowship. The answer I would give is that traditionalists can form a society. All Christians are free to form a society of the faithful to promote their vision of the Gospel. The Church in Wales will not create structural provision, but there is no power to prevent you organising corporately.

Such a society would, in my opinion, not be on the same lines as the English Society of SS Wilfred and Hilda, which has a different goal and orientation. Rather, I would like to explore the possibility of a 'double belonging': to the society and to the diocese. This is comparable to what I experience in my own family life, my wife being a Roman Catholic. Our children have been brought up with a double belonging to the churches of both of their parents. Another comparison would be with the double belonging that priests who are members of religious communities often experience in the Roman Catholic Church: with a double canonical loyalty, to their ordinary and to their religious superior. A society formed by traditionalists in this way would be another example of 'double belonging'. Priests would continue to owe a duty of canonical obedience to the bishop with jurisdiction, who is the ordinary, but they could have an affective loyalty to an Episcopal Visitor chosen for the society.

Concluding Remarks

If such a society were to work in the context of the Church in Wales, then shared trust becomes all the more important, for we are not looking for a solution in which there would be a Church within a Church, but a double belonging. Such a situation in the Church in Wales would require gracious restraint to be exercised by all, but I think it might be a pointer to a way forward.

Is the current code of practice the last word? Of course not, it is the current position of the bishops, but bishops change, and the Code expressly allows for development. The Bishop of St Davids and the Archbishop are about to retire and their successors will be chosen in the coming months. These and subsequent appointments could result in a change in the composition of the Bench of Bishops, and a move to revise the Code. Holding this conversation at the present time is therefore very important, for the questions I have articulated are questions to which there must be answer, and the ideas I offer may help us towards some lasting answers.