GOVERNING BODY MEETING

**14 & 15 April 2021**

**QUESTION TIME**

**1. The Reverend Josh Maynard (diocese of St Davids)**

The “Advent Call to Prayer” published by the bench of Bishops for Advent 2020 was, in principle, to be commended. It is heartening that the bench is urging the people of Wales to pray for our nation.

I was, however, troubled by and had several comments from parishioners about, the following:

In reference to God’s light  - “*For us,* that light shines most fully in Jesus”

In reference to the prayer itself - “If you are of a different faith or tradition, you will want to adapt these words to your own belief.  We acknowledge this by bracketing the words we will use as Christians, but you may choose to pray in different ways or words”

This accommodation was given by bracketing the name of Jesus in the attached prayer.

In light of the above, do the Bishops of the Church in Wales still affirm the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ for salvation, as the only source of eternal hope for humanity?

If they do still affirm this historic doctrine of the church, why did they lack the confidence as Bishops to stand by it in their “Advent Call to Prayer”?

**To be answered by the Bishop of Bangor**

I welcome this opportunity to respond to Rev Josh Maynard’s question which I think has three parts to it although his commentary has only one explicit question.

Let me answer that question directly. The apostle Paul sums up the uniqueness of Jesus in both creation and salvation: ‘For in him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Colossians 1:19). The Christian church has always taught, in the words of the Nicene Creed, there is only one begotten Son of God who is ‘God of God and Light of Light’. The catechism of the Church in Wales teaches that that ‘the Father sent his Son to reconcile the world to himself.’ (question 12). Taken together these words reflect an ancient conviction ‘there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

One of the realities to which we must give voice however is that God’s self-revelation is found in many sources; in Creation, in human beings made in the image of God and in faiths other than Christian. It is this last point perhaps that is most difficult to fully comprehend and assess. We ought to remember that our own faith is rooted in the promises to Abraham so that we ought not to deny the presence of truth in other religions. The extent to which implicit faith (as opposed to explicit faith) is a signature of the presence of Christ is not something the Bishops will wish to exegete here beyond recognising there is a conviction, shared by countless Christians across the world, that this is possible.

When we say that the Light shines *for us* most fully in Jesus, we are not offering Christ as one way among many equally legitimate ways. We are acknowledging, as Christians, our own conviction about Christ’s person and work in and around us. The Bishops do recognize that other faiths may wish to join us in a prayer that echoes strongly with their own longings. This kind of engagement is generous, fair and respectful and are glad to have offered it to the whole of Wales at this difficult time.

+BB

**2.** **The Reverend Richard Wood**

Given that Governing Body will, in September, be debating and voting on a Bill to authorise a service of Blessing following a Civil Partnership or Marriage between two people of the same sex, how should members prepare for its consideration? What high quality theological resources from the various perspectives and attitudes to this issue might be valuable for them to consult?

**To be answered by the Bishop of St Asaph**

I’d like to thank the Revd Richard Wood for this very important question. In short, members of Governing Body should prepare by study, conversation and prayer.

At disestablishment a structure was adopted which made the Governing Body the highest instrument of governance in the Church in Wales. Governing Body alone can determine and change questions of doctrine and discipline, and that authority, in controversial or important matters, has to be exercised by an enhanced two-thirds majority in each of the three houses of laity, clergy and bishops.

I was tempted to offer the observation that the Governing Body can be regarded as the “supreme authority” in the Church in Wales, but that would not be correct, since the Prefatory Note to the Constitution accords that position to Scripture, and states that the Church’s “supreme authority in matters of faith is the Holy Scriptures as interpreted in the Catholic Creeds and the historic Anglican formularies.”

This point, however, highlights the responsibility of Governing Body – it is not free to do whatever it wishes, but is bound to act in a way which seeks God’s will, and which gives due regard to the authority of Scripture, interpreted through the lens of Tradition (specifically the Catholic Creeds and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion) and by the use of Reason – what is sometimes called the famous “three-legged stool” of Anglicanism: Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

When we approach a question as important as which human relationships a Church may bless, Therefore, it is incumbent on every member of Governing Body to prepare for the debate by ensuring that they are informed by Scripture, Tradition and Reason as we seek to discern God’s will. The issue of the Church’s attitude towards same sex relationships is one of significant contemporary controversy, and there is a vast amount of material on this subject which members of Governing Body may choose to study.

Keeping things simple, I believe that first place ought to be given to the work of our own Doctrinal Commission, which produced a widely commended report in March 2014, which considered the question and arguments for and against precisely. This report can be found online on the Church in Wales’ website, identifiable by a simple search using the search terms “Church in Wales” “Doctrinal Commission” and “same sex relationships”. This provides a concise overview of the debate.

Many other Provinces have produced similar resources; most recently, *Living in Love and Faith*, which has been produced by the Church of England, and these resources can also be found by an internet search, and, if desired, purchased. The Anglican Communion’s own debates have been informed by a single study volume, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, which approaches the subject from scriptural, cultural, theological and scientific perspectives (and which is available for £14.99 from Amazon).

The value of these three resources is that none of them attempts exclusively to takes sides, and they approach Scripture, Tradition and Reason to explore whether both the arguments for and arguments against can be fairly expressed and evaluated. The bishops are currently exploring how we might invite members of Governing Body to engage particularly with the Living in Love and Faith resources, as they are particularly shaped towards discussion.

For the members of Governing Body who want to read more than this (and these three resources provide over 850 pages of reading) there are also books, internet articles and lectures beyond number which adopt a more polemical attitude towards this question, arguing for one side or another. Rather than attempt to list a selection of these, I will point members to the bibliographies attached to some of the above mentioned reports, and suggest that they may profit from their own researches.

In terms of reading, however, it is important to do more than re-inforce one’s own thinking by choosing literature that supports the view you may already hold. Governing Body needs to become acquainted with, and to test the arguments of all viewpoints, lest the debate become a shouting match in which we never really listen to each other or to God.

I would like to add that how we conduct the debate is as important as what we debate. We must talk with one another, and with people whose experiences are very different from our own. Our Church is made up of sisters and brothers in Christ, who are gay and straight, and other real identities. We must remember that we are talking with each other and about real individual human beings and fellow Christians, not just about outsiders and abstract ideas. Can we create a safe space for or discussion? *Living in Love and Faith* includes a very helpful opening section, *An Invitation*, in pages 3-7 of the main resource, which sets out principles of engagement on this subject. It argues that we should approach the subject with the aim of (1) addressing our ignorance, (2) acknowledging our prejudices, (3) admitting the possibility of hypocrisy, (4) behaving in a way which dispels fear, (5) speaking into the silence of respectful listening, and (6) paying attention to how power impacts upon our discussion.

Finally, we should pray. It is by prayer that we discern the mind of God, and by praying as a Church that God can speak to us as a Church.

*God, who (at this time)
taught the hearts of your faithful people
by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit:
grant us by the same Spirit
to have a right judgement in all things
and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort;
through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

*(The Collect for Pentecost)*

+GLl

March 2021

**3.** **Dr Heather Payne**

The Church in Wales has strong involvement with the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), which, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Primates’ meeting and the Lambeth Conference, is one of the 4 Instruments of Communion of the worldwide Anglican  Church. The recent refocussing of the Anglican Communion Office has underlined the importance of Provinces actively taking forward work programmes with ACC Networks, which are a diverse and multinational resource supporting strong, coordinated action to promote the 5 marks of mission of our Church- to tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure. The Church in Wales already has active participation in a number of ACC Networks, but we will need to respond to this ACC refocusing with strategic coordination of effort and resources across the Province. Will the Bench commit to identifying Episcopal leadership and Provincial support to ensure that we continue to work effectively with ACC Networks, and develop a Provincial  implementation plan to lead up to the next ACC in 2023?

**To be answered by the Archbishop of Wales**

I would like to thank Heather for her question since it gives me the opportunity to speak about the wider Anglican family of which we are part.

A review has recently taken place of the role and responsibilities of the Anglican Communion Office which is located in London and its recommendations have been accepted by the Anglican Consultative Council’s Standing Committee of which I am an elected member. As a result of this process, much of the activity of the ACO will now be focused on those areas of work which cannot be undertaken locally and more effectively through provinces, regions and other agencies. I was invited, as a member of the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council to be part of the review’s implementation group and we completed our work about two months ago. Discussions are ongoing to determine how the new relationship between Provinces and the central coordinating activities of the ACO will develop work in practice. However, a key feature of the new organisational ecology will be the Anglican Consultative Council Networks. Both of our representatives on the Anglican Consultative Council, Heather herself and Archdeacon Mary Stallard are active members of ACC networks and are taking leading roles in their development. Both the Bench of Bishops and the Standing Committee will keep a close eye on developments in this area. My successor as Archbishop, as one of the 41 Primates of the Anglican Communion, will take the lead on relationships with our sisters and brothers in the worldwide Anglican family.

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