

Reflections to House of Bishops

Looking at this group, I feel like a rather mangy lion in a den of rather formidable Daniels. Thank-you for your welcome, especially for the privilege of speaking. A Nigerian saying, guests are like fish, they rot after 3 days, and I have been here five. Bishops of Durham come in three sorts. First there were the saints and evangelists, who were around more or less until the late 9th century. Secondly, for roughly the next 700 years or so were the cousins of the King or those bourgeois upstarts like Wolsey whose principal job was to facilitate hitting the King's enemies over the head with large blunt instruments, or failing the arrival of a convenient enemy, anyone else. And then there were the scholars, from the Reformation, or at least the Restoration, onwards. From time to time you get throwbacks, like Michael Ramsey, who was a saint, as well as a scholar. In me, you also have a throwback, but unfortunately to the second period.

In this reflection I want to start with what I have seen. The structure of the meeting, with its well integrated retreat and business sessions, was excellent, and the mediations in the mornings were exceptional and personally nourishing. I found integrity and openness on issues, graciousness under pressure, and towards others who have not been gracious, catholicity, complexity and inclusion. I have found some myths demythologised. For example the myth that TEC is only liberal, monochrome in its theological stand, and the myth that all minorities of view are oppressed. There is rather the sense of a complex body of wide views and many nationalities addressing issues with what I have personally found inspiring honesty and courage, doubtless also with faults and sins, but always looking to see where the sins are happening. The processes are deeply moving even where I disagreed, which I did on a number of obvious issues, but the honesty of approach was convincing, the buy into and practice of Ndaba superb. In summary, there has been a sense of calm confidence and expectation, and of facing the vast challenge of the next 10-15 years. You have a better pension plan too.

As to the future. Reconciliation within the Communion is a huge challenge and comes for all of us with working as you are, with grace, through Ndaba, through generosity of Spirit and above all with long suffering and patience. Being here reminded me again that we in England and elsewhere need to find a better way of doing things in how we disagree. I am well aware that you too have had very rough passages, some of which continue. But I think you are a little ahead of us. What is clear too is that in in the Communion we need to fit our structures to the reality of our changing and complex relationships, not try and shape reality to structures. Start with relationships, and seek forbearance, charity and love. BUT we will not see it happen for a long time. The issues in Africa are far more complex than they look. There are the changes in relative power, as many African churches also find a welcome sense of confidence and capacity so often stifled in the past. There remains the evil

legacy of colonial power, which has poisoned the ground on which to sow the seeds of reconciliation.

The Church of England facing a tough period in which domestic issues abound with changes in the historical role of the church, whether with challenges to church schools, reform of the House of Lords, issues around freedom of religious expression such as wearing crosses at work, internal issues and a change of leadership. There is a danger of becoming very inward looking.

For us I pray and hope that we live with confidence and hope, and grow in the ability to live in complexity. That we are able to have diversity without enmity. God has made the churches full of diversity, that is the miracle of unity, praise God for diversity, when lived in love and integrity.