



Rev. Dave Clancey

## Editorial

My sons have recently gone back to school after the holidays. On the first day of term the youngest announced that he needed new shoes for he had outgrown his current pair. In my cynicism I thought he was simply angling for fancier shoes, but after careful examination it turned out that his feet had significantly grown to the point of probably needing new shoes. In two weeks! His current pair of shoes had done him well, but it was time for some new ones.

The same happens in other parts of life. We have various structures and supports surrounding us as people. Just as a plant needs a stake or a trellis to support it, or a cake needs a cake tin around it to hold it as it bakes and rises, so too as people we have structures and supports to allow us to grow and develop. And from time to time those structures and supports may need to change. They either wear out, or we outgrow them, or they are no longer appropriate. And because their task is only to support and provide for growth, it's a good thing to change them to allow for growth and development and forward movement.

Yet at times we can love the structures and the supports more than we love the thing they are supporting. I can remember holding on to a pair of shoes as a child because they were the coolest shoes you had ever seen, and despite the fact that my toes hurt (a lot!) wearing them, I wasn't going to let them go. I was more concerned about the structure and the support (or to be honest, the style) of my shoes more than that which they were supporting.

As Anglicans there are some wonderful things about the support and the structure of our denomination. The parish system means that every part of these Islands is under the responsibility of a clergy person who is tasked with witnessing to the crucified and risen Christ and who has promised to proclaim the word of God. Our pattern of confirmation has allowed countless thousands of men and women to be educated and formed as disciples of Jesus, and to publicly proclaim their faith in Christ. As individuals many of us can remember Sunday School programmes and youth groups which have held and formed us

- through them we have deepened our relationship with God and strengthened our hold on the gospel.

But as wonderful as those structures and supports have been, we need to be careful that we don't confuse them with the gospel itself. For the good news of Jesus revealed in Scripture is not bound by any structure. The Spirit of Jesus will blow wherever he pleases. Structures are incredibly helpful for the growth of the gospel. They help the good news of Christ to spread. But they are not the gospel.

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In recent months one of the primary structures of our denomination met. In May General Synod gathered and continued to discuss the issue of whether our church would bless those in same-sex relationships. The *A Way Forward Report* had been circulated around our Province in the weeks and months leading up to General Synod, and there was a motion put to the Synod which, if passed, would have meant that such blessings would be undertaken in our church, and those in such blessed relationships would be eligible for consideration to ordination.

Members of the Latimer Fellowship - and many many others - prayed to God that such blessings would not be adopted, and in his grace and mercy God heard and answered our prayers. The motion was left to "lie on the table" and our church has not enacted the means by which such relationships would be blessed. Our structures have stayed the same, and continue to support the proclamation of the Biblical gospel - a gospel which calls all of us sinners before God, and which offers all sinners full and total forgiveness and mercy when we come in repentance and faith to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

A motion “lying on the table”, however, is not the same as it being defeated. And while we are thankful to God, and to General Synod, and particularly the General Synod representatives who stood graciously and firmly for the status quo, the reality is that General Synod has still committed itself to changing our churches view on homosexuality. For the motion lies on the table until General Synod 2018, where there is (in the words of the General Synod motion) “...a firm expectation that a decision to move forward will be made there.”

There is a recognition, however, that such forward movement will require structural change. A yet-to-be-named working party has been tasked with considering possible “structural arrangements [...] to safeguard both theological convictions”. While some might roll their eyes at another working party, others might see a positive side to this. For there appears to be a recognition that the two theological convictions are incompatible with each other, and therefore new structures are required. This might be a new structure for those who wish to introduce theological change, or it might be a new structure for those who wish to retain existing theological practices. But either way, new structures are being considered.

As Anglicans we have built into our understanding of church that times and places will require structural changes to allow the gospel to go forward. Article 34 states that traditions “may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word.” and that “Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.” Far more

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recently our the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, stated that “Denominations - including our own Anglican Communion - are only provisional necessities because of the frailty of human nature and the failure of Christian charity.”<sup>1</sup>

As Evangelicals we should not be concerned about structural changes, as long as they enable the church to proclaim the Biblical gospel to a world in desperate need of the love and grace that Jesus alone can offer. Indeed, we should welcome any change that facilitates such proclamation and safeguards the gospel against alteration or dilution. We must pray for the men and women who will make up the new working group appointed by the archbishops. We should take the opportunity afforded to us to provide the working group with suggestions about what structures will safeguard evangelical convictions. And we should hold to the confidence that God himself gives us that “all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” Let us be those who see this gospel grow and bear fruit - in our personal lives and in our churches - and who pray that God would provide structures that might allow this gospel to grow more and more.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. K. Runcie *Authority in Crisis? An Anglican Response*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1988