

Being 'inclusive'

This paper was prepared by Tudor Griffiths as a discussion starter for a meeting of the EFCW Executive, and is meant, therefore, to provoke debate rather than provide definitive answers.

One word bandied around, particularly in circles not renowned for being evangelical, is 'inclusive'. Among our non-evangelical brothers and sisters, we are not generally thought of as inclusive. It might be worth thinking about it – how inclusive should we be in the Church in Wales?

This is a 'paying taxes to Caesar' question in that any direct answer is open to a self-incriminating follow-up. 'Inclusive' is a heavily-loaded and emotive term in the present context. 'Inclusive Church' is an organisation with a particular agenda and approach to inclusivity.

The direct invitation of the question is to engage in drawing boundaries, which is a hopeless if not invidious exercise when the initial references are themselves unclear. The Church in Wales is ill-defined in terms of its boundaries. Is it the institution, the clergy, regular worshippers or users of the occasional offices? It could conceivably be any of these, or indeed be open to other understandings. The whole basis of our parish system is that we claim to minister to all – at least in principle.

The word 'inclusive' entered Christian usage with reference to the question of our relationship with other people of other faiths. It is important to consider how we should relate Christianity to a country where there are other faiths present. Alan Race, I think, first drew up a spectrum to describe the Christian relationship with others – exclusive, inclusive, pluralist. The word 'exclusive' has been used to affirm the unique saving presence of God in Jesus Christ, but it is more appropriate to affirm Christ's uniqueness and decisive activity and drop the word 'exclusive' entirely. Race as a pluralist was not averse to using a negative word to describe a position he did not like. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is located primarily in the resurrection which is, *inter alia*, the affirmation of his incarnation and his life of teaching and healing. Karl Rahner used the word 'inclusive' in his view of Christ's work anonymously in and through other religions, but this has been rightly criticised as (unintentionally?) imperialist.

Nonetheless it is appropriate to think 'inclusively' in refusing to limit God's saving grace to those who are consciously 'Christian'. More fundamentally it is important to recall that the grace of God's image is a gift to every human person. The gracious summons of God is issued to all; God refuses to love no-one. The invitation to respond to God is issued to all without exception.

In addressing our question we need to concentrate initially and primarily on the core rather than the boundaries of the Church. At the core of the Church's being is the summons to discipleship in the present in the light of the eschatological promise of salvation. The Holy Spirit was given to make this an experienced reality. The Church is a community of pilgrims whose primary calling is to focus on Christ and the summons to be more Christ-like. If we see ourselves as 'fellow-travellers' (although that may not be the happiest choice of word) along a journey we may be less inclined to be judgmental. This is a pilgrimage in which we are welcomed and transformed. It is not that we are simply affirmed in the state in which we came to Christ. Our identity as Christians is, to use Pauline language, in Christ. This is

not undermining our basic human dignity as made in the image of God; it is both restoration and completion.

Christian ethics is the summons to be what we are 'in Christ'. It is a call to personal and social transformation. It is relatively non-controversial that Christians are concerned for a society that may be described as 'inclusive' – meaning that every individual and family feels they have a stake in society and they matter within the state and their own local community. Recent events of terrorism and brutality among young people indicate what happens when significant groups feel themselves excluded and alienated from their neighbours. Hope 2008 is about trying to encourage Christians to be actively concerned for their local communities. For me one of the issues in Hawarden is how to respond now a BNP candidate has been elected on to the community council.

But an issue has been raised as to the extent to which the Church can with integrity enhance inclusion within society when it is so divided within over issues such as same-sex relationships and women bishops. There are those such as Steven Shakespeare and Hugh Rayment-Pickard who argue that *true inclusion is the Christian value par excellence*

(The Inclusive God SCM 2006). They argue that conversion is needed in that our lives are transformed because we overcome the fear, guilt and prejudice which underpin exclusivism. For them the issue of becoming an 'inclusive' church is an issue of justice and is therefore a first order concern for the Christian church.

Similarly Kathy Galloway of the Iona Community argues that for a church to have any integrity in our world it must be truly inclusive, which for her translates into positive affirmation of gay relationships. Gay relationships with their own integrity enrich the Christian community and give it a credibility in today's world where people in their 20's and 30's especially find it frankly incredible that *gays and lesbians have continually to make a case for themselves as sexually expressive and relational human beings* (From The Times June 30, 2007).

However, in an interview with a Dutch newspaper, Archbishop Rowan Williams denied that inclusion *per se* is a virtue, whereas welcome is (Interview with Wim Houtens, Nederlands Dagblad 19 August 2006). The crucial difference is that whereas inclusion implies affirmation, welcome at the very least allows space for the kind of transformation that was considered earlier to be at the heart of the Christian calling. The model for the Church in Wales (or indeed any church) has to be the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who welcomed people in the name of his Father, but nonetheless called them to be converted and transformed. He refused to condemn the woman caught in adultery (alone?!), but in proclaiming forgiveness told her to go and sin no more (John 8:11). The story indicates that not all deeply-held beliefs and attitudes are affirmed by Jesus in the case of the Pharisees.

There is a very interesting correspondence, currently running between Andrew Goddard and Giles Goddard (www.inclusivechurch2.net/Andrew-to-Giles-8-8th-March-2008-75e3e96), on the place of sexual expression of love within same-gender relationships. Whereas Giles Goddard considers this to be integral to godliness, Andrew sees it as inimical, quoting Wolfhart Pannenberg in support of his case: *Here lies the boundary of a Christian church that allows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the*

point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognised homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. In this uncompromising and bold statement, boundaries are seen in terms of teaching rather than as lines drawn primarily in order to exclude people. Inclusiveness is not to override all other concerns in our calling as a church.

The debate about how 'inclusive' the Church in Wales should be is usually taken with reference to the more liberal agenda as exemplified by Inclusive Church, but it also relates to the concerns of Credo Cymru when it comes to proposals for women bishops. This is seen as totally incompatible with the claim to be truly catholic and thus unacceptable. Without rehearsing all the arguments and discussions at the Governing Body, it seemed to me at least to show that evangelicals have a deeper concern about inclusivity than many of our more liberal brothers and sisters. Maybe it's called Anglican comprehensiveness in this case, but it does seem possible that some who speak loudly about being inclusive are rather choosy about those who are to be included!

One word which might be more helpful in thinking about these issues is 'hospitable'. Hospitality is an indisputable Christian virtue (Romans 12:13; I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8), particularly in relation to Christian leaders. Hospitality is about generosity and giving space for conversation and reconciliation. One possible model for Anglicans is the monastic tradition of hospitality. The monastic community is deeply rooted in a rhythm of prayer, orthodox confession and discipleship. The tradition of hospitality is an essential part of its identity and calling. This hospitality is completely non-discriminatory. But the problems recipients of monastic hospitality may have with the beliefs and practices of the community are the problems of the recipients and not fundamental challenges to the community itself in its rhythm of being. This is not self-satisfaction but the conviction of being on a journey of transformation, confident in the One who is calling.