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Why I voted against the Motion 29 recommendations, and why I'm still not leaving! ^[1]

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I am not a Bishop, or a Vicar General, nor an Archdeacon. I'm not even a member of Standing Committee. I'm just a Burge? but I want to offer my thoughts as someone who represented Nelson Diocese at the General Synod.

The General Synod or Te Hinota Whanui of the Anglican Church in these islands voted to adopt the recommendations of what we have been calling Motion 29 report. (The actual motion at the 2018 meeting we just had was Motion 7, just to confuse things, but it adopted the Motion 29 recommendations, with some minor changes.)

I don't want to try and go into detail on the report for many people reading this the key issue is straight-forward, and that is the acceptance of blessings for same-sex couples in a civil union or marriage. The church, as a whole, agreed to allow Bishops to choose to have some sort of service or part of a service written, and for those Bishops to allow an ordained Anglican minister to use that material for a blessing of a civil union or civil marriage, regardless of the gender of the couple, and so on.

In doing that, the outcome includes these things:

- No Bishop has to offer this in their Diocese.
- No Anglican minister has to use this (ever) even if their Bishop allows it.
- Anglican ministers remain free to teach for and against these blessings? a minister who does not agree with this decision is free to teach that disagreement in the Church.

While I am very grateful for these points, I voted against the motion.

The reason is simple: I don't agree, because I am clear that Holy Scripture describes same-sex sexual relationships as outside of God's purpose and call for humans. I do not agree at all with the claim that the relevant passages are about something else. In addition to those individual passages I see a wider picture of human creation and redemption toward our final fulfilment in union with Christ, and I see an emphasis on female and male together, even though some of us are called to be unmarried now and all of us will be unmarried in the resurrection.

The gospel is for every person and welcome, love and compassion are key? I want to bless

every person, because God is like that. More than that, I am very well aware that I am a sinner, and that God blesses me. Within that, Holy Scripture also speaks directly about the importance of sexual behaviour and obedience, with great importance placed on what the Church holds up as fitting. So, I cannot bless same-sex sexual relationships and thus declare them ?fitting?.

I am utterly clear that this Motion 29 decision is the decision of a Church acting unfaithfully. I am deeply disappointed. At the same time, I am at least as unhappy about our failure to obey God in mission and evangelism.

Why then am I not leaving?

Although I see myself connected to a Church that is unfaithful in this way, I see myself committed to working hard for the future of that Church, and to do so ?on the inside?. I have many good friends who are looking to leave. Some of you reading this are in that place and although I cannot tell you what you should do, I do appeal to you: ?Please consider whether staying is the call of God for you also.?

So ?

1. Until the rules of this Church tell me that I cannot live out and preach and teach the Gospel of God in Christ (the whole of Holy Scripture!), and:
Until the rules of this Church tell me that I have to bless relationships which do not belong to the call of God I will not be leaving over this issue.
2. I do not believe that God has given up on this Church. In fact, I see much evidence of God?s faithfulness and much change and growth for the good. Some parts of this Church are continuing in a fashion that (to me) does not live or proclaim the Gospel, or proclaims a very much cut-down version, and the fruit is there to see. But, new Gospel life is shooting up in a whole raft of places and it can even feel exciting to be an Anglican when you see it. Brilliant and genuine mission is taking place and faithful new leadership springing up at many levels. In fact, although General Synod just passed this motion, I see among the group at that synod many who are much more faithful than in the past. I say that, even though it did not vote down the Motion 29 recommendations.
3. I am utterly aware that sometimes we are called to leave a group or ?church?. (I have given some thoughts in 1. above about to when that might be ? but in the end it will still be a matter of listening to God. Maybe the Lord will ask me to walk away sooner than I know.) I respect highly those who believe the call is to leave. But I am also alert to the many faithful ones whom God has called to ?stay?. Just think of God?s prophets on the inside of unfaithful Israel. What a mess they confronted. For Elijah it meant hiding in the wilderness and great danger in turning up with the Lord?s Word. For Jeremiah it meant hanging-tough in a very public way and handling the ridicule. For all of them it meant living in a really painful place. Think too of English reformers like Tyndale and Wycliffe, who battled to keep bringing the Gospel inside the Church of their day. Way back in the mid 300?s Athanasius battled ?against the world? for a great truth. Eventually the Church came round (or back?) to right belief. Don?t misunderstand, I do not say that these examples are the same as it is for me ? they are not even the same as each other ? but I do take seriously that even when God?s people are utterly compromised God can still call me to be on the inside. (Don?t even start challenging me about my own sinfulness, that is another whole piece of writing.)
4. Within the sense I have of a call to stay, I am intent on supporting those who are striving to be faithful, and to be with them ? on this matter of human sexuality before God, but

also in every way that is important. In pursuing the just righteousness of God, in partnering with members of Maori and Pacifica Anglican churches who are striving for faithfulness in the mission places they occupy. I want to walk with faithful people who find themselves mixed into a deeply unfaithful Church and who want to see God's mercy judge and redeem all of us.

5. I want to be part of the future God is bringing to this Church.

Don't misunderstand, I am still deeply unhappy, deeply distressed. All the more distressed when I think of people leaving and of the bitter loss that is to me personally. But at this point I stay, I work, and I struggle to be faithful and to serve others in that way. I am committed to maintaining fellowship with those who hear a call to leave.

What about Nelson Diocese and BTC? Our stance remains and is clear: these blessings will not happen here and cannot while we hold to our Diocesan policy on human sexuality. Equally the call to love and share Christ with everyone remains absolute, regardless of every circumstance.

Finally: Someone at the General Synod asked, "Are you leaving then?" My reply was grumpy but honest: "No, I'm not leaving - it's my Church!" Actually, I was wrong of course. It is Jesus Christ's Church, and He can still work in it. Always.

Reftagger

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