PLATFORM PIECE FOR SCOTSMAN

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It’s a Goldilocks debate in the end. Too hard or too soft? Too hot or too cold? The Goldilocks question is about how much is ‘just right’. Over the past week or two, that issue has been debated by a cast of – among others – Baroness Warsi in her attack on secularism, Bishop Richard Holloway in his ‘Memoir of Faith and Doubt’, Cardinal Keith O’Brien in his ‘grotesque’ reference to Same Sex Marriage. Indeed I wonder if the problem is that Cardinal O’Brien believes a little too much while Bishop Richard Holloway believes not quite enough.

During the week, I shared in a seminar in Oxford with an Islamic scholar. Across that welcome inter-faith dialogue, we addressed a shared problem. Faith is there to offer continuity and rootedness in belief and values. In a fast-changing world, it is hard to find solid ground on which one can stand. What faith tries to do is to find an honourable and principled space between too fast and too slow, too flexible and too uncompromising.

Historically, churches of the Anglican Communion – like the Scottish Episcopal Church – have tended to be more rather than less accommodating to societal change. Others have seen their faithfulness as leading them to be less accommodating. Questions such as divorce and remarriage, abortion, contraception, assisted dying, are part of the engagement of church with society. They are all difficult questions for society and for churches. It is the nature of our church, particularly in the challenge of responding to human sexuality issues, that the debate and the passions which are stirred are publicly visible. Some voices call for openness and inclusion and connect to a ‘rights’ agenda. Other voices call for faithfulness to time-hallowed understandings of scripture. Through that debate, the church seeks to discern where it is called to be as it serves the whole of society.

And Jesus? Well he of course annoyed the religious establishment of his day by spending his time with those who were outside the spiritual and moral consensus of his time.