The Primates Meeting last week was not an easy or comfortable place to be. To be positive, the expected splits and walk-outs did not take place. More than that, the Primates agreed to 'walk together'. That agreement was remarkable but it was achieved at a cost - cost in relationships and in the consequences which the Episcopal Church has been required to bear. My distress at that outcome has been at least partially healed by the extraordinary grace and redemptive power with which the Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, has spoken:

*“I stand before you as your brother. I stand before you as a descendant of African slaves, stolen from their native land, enslaved in a bitter bondage, and then even after emancipation, segregated and excluded in church and society. And this conjures that up again, and brings pain. The pain for many will be real. But God is greater than anything. I love Jesus and I love the church. I am a Christian in the Anglican way. And like you, as we have said in this meeting, I am committed to ‘walking together’ with you as fellow Primates in the Anglican family.”*

In the meeting, I did hear a new clarity between us about our difficulties over human sexuality. African provinces suffer missional cost because they are associated with the Episcopal Church through the Anglican Communion. Assertive Islam moving through Africa can portray them as a 'gay church'. More liberal provinces can be accused of homophobia because they are associated with conservative African provinces through the Communion. There too a missional cost is paid, particularly in our work among young people. The Primates have established a Task Group. But it is hard to see how this particular circle can be squared in a way which allows provinces in very different contexts to act in diverse ways while honouring the integrity of the Communion as a whole.

All of this is woven into the history and self-understanding of the Scottish Episcopal Church. In 1784, Samuel Seabury was consecrated by the Scottish bishops as the first bishop of the American Church. The Episcopal Church to this day sees the Scottish Episcopal Church as its root in Anglicanism. That choice is one of the factors which led the emerging Anglican Communion to take shape as a family of independent provinces. It also set up an inevitable tension between the autonomy and the inter-dependence of the provinces. I believe that that tension is one of the riches of the Anglican Communion and one of its greatest challenges. The tension has continued to be played out in the life of the Anglican Communion to this day - most recently through the Windsor Report, the Anglican Communion Moratoria and in debate about the Anglican Covenant. This Primates Meeting is only the most recent example of the same difficulty. Under the pressure of deep division, the Primates Meeting has chosen unity over diversity and suggested that the Episcopal Church has put its autonomy ahead of its respect for the unity of the Communion,

It is important to remember that this is not just about the Episcopal Church. Other provinces, including the Scottish Episcopal Church, are moving in a similar direction. None of this is lightly undertaken. Our challenge in Scotland is how we can sustain the internal diversity of our church as we enter a debate about canonical change which would permit same-sex marriage. I fear that our meeting in Canterbury this week will make that harder because it risks sharpening difference within our own church. Tensions about our response to human sexuality issues are experienced intra-provincially - within provinces - as much as inter-provincially and there is an interplay between them.

Before I moved to Scotland ten years ago, I spent my adult life in Northern Ireland in a ministry deeply involved in the Troubles and in issues of reconciliation. It was a story of twists and turns, of hope turning into despair and of strident voices demanding swift answers to complex problems. It was always clear that there would be no real peace unless we together addressed the central problem - which is how we might learn to live together across and beyond generations of bad history and the pain and loss which we had inflicted on one another through the years of violence.

At the end of our Primates Meeting, Jean Vanier spoke in our Eucharist. He led us in a feet-washing. His challenge was that we should experience and remember what it feels like to serve and bless one another - even when we do not quite feel like it. He reminded us that we need to learn how to meet at the deepest level - not agenda-driven meeting or argument - but meeting at a level in which we can see the face of Christ in each other. I believe that only when we reach that point will we be at the beginning of the end of the challenges which we face . Only then will we be truly capable of showing the face of Christ to a world in need.

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