

## **Anglican-Lutheran Society Annual Meeting 2019**

St George's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Southwark, London

### **'Living in Diversity'**

#### **Panel Discussion**

**with Dr Chris Asprey, the Rev Sarah Farrow and Dr Hugo Adan**

Chaired by Dr Jaakko Rusama (Lutheran Co-Moderator)



Dr Rusama started by thanking everyone for what had been a challenging day. He said that living in diversity reminds us in church circles how, ecumenically and theologically, we often use different definitions. One of them is “Reconciled Diversity”, another has been “Unity in Diversity”, but the worldwide term most often used is “Visible Unity”. Our Society takes seriously the challenge of “Visible Unity”.

We have talked about “difference”, he said, but we have come together, young and old, from different nations, cultures and religious traditions, and we belong together. Real ecumenism is coming together, learning from each other, hearing and listening, not only in our churches but in the world and in our closest environment.

He had two questions for the panel. First, what have you heard today from the other speakers and from our members? Second, what will you take home with you when you go?

Chris Asprey said what many others felt, that it is very difficult to assimilate it all very quickly. Two things that Hugo Adan said had struck him. First, that the English/Latino community had been founded in a very mundane way. From just two Columbians who happened to be in an Anglican Church, who happened not to speak English, and that Fr Hugo happened to be around at the right moment something new has happened. It was not as a result of our planning. The bi-lingual parish arose out of a real situation rather than from an idea or concept. Second, the immense challenge of taking diversity seriously. Paradoxically, the more you come together the more it drives you apart. Taking diversity seriously means having two congregations, and that he found very provocative.

Chris had loved engaging with Luther and experiencing again the sheer joy of Luther's discovery of grace and its ability to refresh and renew one's experience of the Gospel. Sarah had emphasised the paradox in Luther's spirituality and today we live in an age of paradox.

Jaakko followed up by asking Chris what he thought was the problem with Eucharistic Hospitality, something that in the L'Arche story had proved a difficulty. Chris responded that it was all to do with Church Order. It is not theological! The Joint Declaration on Justification was a great piece of work, he said, but he felt that not much had come from it. It has established a basis for unity between the two traditions but lack of progress towards unity was, he suspected, a question of power. The Papal Bull, *Et Unum Sint*, said that the Papacy needs to be reformed if it is again to become a symbol of unity within the Church. Lutherans might not want the Pope as a symbol of unity! 'From my Catholic point of view,' Chris said, 'I'm happy that the Pope is living in somewhat humbler conditions than his predecessors!'

Jaakko reminded us that Methodist, Reformed and 'even the Anglicans' have signed up to the Joint Declaration. Praxedis Bouwman agreed that the follow-up to the Joint Declaration had been very disappointing.

Sarah Farrow had been thrilled to hear how two people had at last been heard and had found a home. To see an individual as a child of God is so important, someone living in the same state of grace as me. She laughed as she reflected that Lutherans tend to keep very quiet about acts of service. 'We don't want anyone to think we're doing works of righteousness or anything like that! Don't say that we're Lutheran! We're just helping people!' What she was going to take away was that God loves my neighbour so much that God created me to help my neighbour. And the corollary to that is that I'm somebody else's neighbour and that person is there to help me!

Hugo Adan said that to be able to walk together in diversity is a joy. He loved the Taizé service with the readings in English, Polish and Spanish and singing in different languages as well. The temptation to switch off is so powerful sometimes, but to pray with others and to go beyond your comfort zone is something wonderful.

Madeleine Holmes had been struck by the importance of the ordinary. Whatever was presented to Jean Vanier, he acted upon it. We don't know where a simple action will lead. That, she said, is where God is always working.

Fr Phillip Swingler, our Roman Catholic Observer on the Executive Committee, commented on Chris Asprey's story of the man who broke bread and shared it at home. This, he said, was a kind of *agape* and he wondered if this kind of thing round a shared table might be a valuable form of inter-communion. He had been to Walsingham where the Orthodox Bishop, at the end of a service in which only the Orthodox could communicate, had broken the remainder of the bread and distributed it to everyone regardless of their religious affiliation. At Taizé, for example, the Pope had allowed anyone to receive communion at Mass. But the problem remains that Roman Catholics cannot receive communion from Anglicans. Chris responded that on Maundy Thursday they do have an *agape* meal in the London community of L'Arche when they have the foot washing in which everyone can take part.

Jim Cargin reminded us that L'Arche is a Christian community welcoming people of all faiths and none. It sounds very fine, as if the Christians welcome others. But now L'Arche has an international leader who is a Jew who, after 40 years in the community, asks, 'I am from a Jewish background. At what point do I become one of the welcomers and not one of the welcomed?' Jim admires the fact that in Fr Hugo's parish there is no privilege for either language, and that speaks to Jim as a possible approach whereby everyone welcomes everyone else on a level playing field.

Eliza Zikmane will take away two themes: first power and the part it plays in all our communities; second, brokenness and openness, which cannot be separated, and pain being a sign of life.

Bishop Jürgen Johannesdotter, our Lutheran President, thanked all the contributors, the organisers and everyone for coming. These meetings are important. Ours today started with brokenness, and we quickly learned that starting something new is always difficult. When the church found that starting something new was easy was when the time was right. The theme of belonging was also important. Attending any Anglican-Lutheran Society event is always like a coming home party. It is so good to see so many members, some old friends and some new ones, and to learn so much from each other.

He closed the day's programme with prayer and a blessing.