

ADDRESS  
TO THE GENERAL SYNOD  
OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF  
CANADA

Wednesday 20 June 2007,  
11.40am

by

THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK  
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THEME:  
EPIEIKES AND EPIEIKEIA:  
MORE THAN JUSTICE

O God, who said "*Let light shine out of darkness*", shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of your glory in the face of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*"Let your moderation be manifest to all. The Lord is near"* (Philippians 4:5)

The Greek word (**epieikes**) which we translate as **moderation** is one of the most untranslatable of all Greek words. It occurs five times in the Epistles and its noun, (**epieikeia**), **gentleness**, **graciousness** (in Acts 24:4, 2 Corinthians 10:1) twice.

In 1 Timothy 3:3 it's translated as "**lenient**"; in Titus 3:2 "**conciliatory**", in James 3:17 "**forbearing**"; and in 1 Peter 2:18, "**reasonableness**".

The apostle Paul is saying to his Philippian friends: "Let your **moderation, patient mind, softness, magnanimity, gentleness, graciousness, forbearing spirit** be known to all. The Lord is at hand." Put differently, "Let all the world know that you will **meet a person half-way**."

This reminds me of a story about a cobra that goes to a saint and says, "Please give me a rule of life so that I can be more spiritual and saintly like you. People love you but are totally terrified of me. When they see me, if they have a chance, they kill me at once."

The saint says, "Well, first of all, don't bite people anymore."

So, the cobra goes back down the mountain happy that the saint has accepted him as a student, and he sits by the village path all day long, thinking over the saint's advice.

But after a couple of days, people begin to notice him, and since he's sitting so still and looks so happy, the people get curious. After a few more days, unafraid of the cobra by now, some of the children have started poking him with sticks and teasing him, throwing pebbles at him, kicking dirt on his head. A few cruel adults too, toss garbage at him and kick him when they walk by him.

After about a week, the saint walks down the village path and sees the poor cobra sitting there all bruised and bloody and full of mud. The saint says, "My God, what's happened to you?" The cobra replies, "I was just following your instructions, master; I don't bite people anymore". Realising all that had happened, the saint looks down lovingly at the cobra and says **"But I didn't tell you not to hiss!"**

Gracious magnanimity isn't mere passivity amidst numerous difficulties but an opportunity for a positive engagement of love. It isn't toughness gone soft -- as a Yiddish proverb says, "If you can't bite, don't show your teeth."

Long before the New Testament used the word *gracious-magnanimity*, this word had a great record in Greek ethical writing. The meaning behind it is this: it expresses that **"gracious magnanimity or moderation** which recognises the impossibility that cleaves to formal law.

Aristotle discussed gracious-magnanimity (*pieikeia*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

He says that gracious-magnanimity (*epieikeia*) is that which is just and sometimes that which is better than justice (Eth.Nic. V. 10.6). It corrects the law when the law is deficient because of its generality. And he compares the person who is graciously magnanimous (*epieikes*) with the person who is immoderate (*akribodikaios*.)

The person who is immoderate (*akribodikaïos*) is the person who stands up for the last title deeds of their legal rights; but the person who is graciously magnanimous (*epieikes*) knows that there are times when a thing may be legally completely justified and yet morally completely wrong. A person has the quality of gracious-magnanimity (*epieikeia*) if they know when *not* to apply the strict letter of the law, when to relax justice and introduce mercy.

Similarly I would say, a graciously-magnanimous Church has a responsibility to both affirm moral standards and to ensure that its rules don't seem rigorous to the point of inhumanity.

We need to ask ourselves if we aren't being challenged in our application of Canon law and gracious-magnanimity in relation to the question of Human Sexuality. It's a challenge that won't go away. Personally, I take an orthodox view on human sexuality. The word '*orthodoxy*' from Greek means teaching what is right and true; and in Christian tradition, this leads to **glorification** -- 'being changed from glory to glory' -- orthodoxy is **transformative**.

That is why I am persuaded that our sexual affections can no more define who we are than our tribe, ethnicity or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is not such thing as a 'homosexual' or 'a heterosexual', or a 'bi-sexual'; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation. "**In Christ**" -- and in him alone -- "We know both God and human nature as they truly are"; and so in Christ alone we know ourselves as we truly are. There can be no description of human reality, in general or in particular, outside the reality in Christ.

Human sexuality must, therefore, be understood and talked about in the context of the reality in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

What is paramount for me are the words of the Apostle Paul that "*I resolved to know nothing (while I was with you) but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" My motivation too in relationship to all those I meet is to seek nothing but Christ crucified among them.

And so in my ministry I have learnt to care, hear and listen to those who describe themselves as Gay or Lesbian. They, like me, are called to redeemed humanity in Christ; and what upsets me is the way in which some of my brothers and sisters in Christ refer to members of Christ's Body (Gay and Lesbian Christians) as if they aren't part of that body. I strongly believe that **holy communication is part of Holy Communion.**

I am driven to exasperation when Christians don't disagree well and Christianly. The Christian as St Paul sees it, is the person who knows that there is something beyond justice. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before Jesus, he could have applied the letter of the Law according to which she should have been stoned to death; but he went beyond justice. As far as justice goes, there isn't one of us who deserves anything other than the condemnation of God, but God goes far beyond justice.

St Paul lays it down that the mark of a Christian in their personal relationships with their fellow human beings must be that they know when to insist on justice and when to remember that there is something beyond justice. (Colossians 3:12-17)

<sup>11</sup> <sup>1</sup> *The St Andrew's Day Statement* 1995. The Church of England Evangelical Council, p.5

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Why should a person be like this? Why should they have this joy and gracious **gentleness** in their life? Because, says St. Paul, '**the Lord is at hand.**' If we remember the coming triumph of Christ, we can never lose our hope and our joy. If we remember that life is short, we will not wish to enforce the stern justice, which so often divides people but will wish to deal with people in love, as we hope God will deal with us.

**Legalism is human, but gracious-magnanimity is divine.**

"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; this is the Law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12). Sadly, it is often a case of "*Do it to others before they do it to you.*"

And so, the basis and the fundamental thing about gracious-magnanimity (*epieikeia*) is that it goes back to God. If God stood on his rights, if God applied to us nothing but the rigid standards of law, where would we be? God is the supreme example of the one who is graciously-magnanimous (*epieikes*) and who deals with others with gracious-magnanimity (*epieikeia*). Again and again we have seen congregations torn by strife and reduced to tragic unhappiness because men and women and committees and courts stood on the letter of the law. When a congregation's governing body meets with a copy of its Church's book of law prominently displayed on the Chair's table, trouble is never far away. A new world would arise in Society and in the Church if all of us ceased to base our actions purely on law and legal rights and prayed to God to give us gracious-magnanimity. (*epieikeia*).

What we need is loving our neighbour as we love ourselves. Rebuilding communities by what we give and not what we demand; active-participation, and not claiming our rights and Blaming Someone Else (BSE)!

We all need to hear again and take to heart that greatest short story in the world. The story of **the loving father**, told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32. It should never have been called the parable of the Prodigal Son, for the son isn't the hero. It should be called the parable of the Loving Father, for it tells us rather about a father's love than a son's sin. Nor does it tell us of the elder brother as the villain of the piece -- the self-righteous person who would rather see a sinner destroyed than redeemed. It is about a loving father with two sons. One son tests his father's love to the limits. And the other plays it safe and never tests his father nor enjoys the prodigality of his father's love.

Once, Abraham Lincoln was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious Southerners when they had finally been defeated and had returned to the Union of the United States. The questions expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered, *"I will treat them as if they had never been away."* It's the wonder of the love of God that he treats us like that.

In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25, Jesus was telling his disciples that if you want to meet God face to face, the nearest you are going to come to it on this planet is to look into the faces of your brothers and sisters -- and especially your sisters and brothers who have been declared unrighteous, unclean, unacceptable. **It isn't that we find God there; it is that God finds us there.**

That is where our faith is nurtured and bears fruit. There, where we expect to meet monsters, we meet God instead. The opportunity to serve God lies there among the prisoners, the naked, the sick, the hungry, who have been reckoned to be least deserving of any service at all.

The vocation of the Anglican Communion is this. As Michael Ramsay said in *'The Gospel and the Catholic Church,'* the centre of Anglicanism, her primary vocation is to witness to the perpetual passion of Christ's body which must lead, according to the divine providence, into the heart of the gospel.

Proper penitence and a readiness to go willingly, and perhaps be lifted up, to suffer whatever sacrifices may be necessary for the visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

For this to happen we must die in order to bear fruit and be messengers of God's redeeming love. We are called to die to the values of the world -- greed for wealth, status and power; as well as our psychological tendencies: our desires and compulsions for success, to be loved, to be held in esteem, to be acclaimed by those in our group, to have, power and control over others. .It's a call to disarm ourselves, to die to our plans and let God's plans and ways take hold of us.

I have come to believe that when I shall come face to face with the **Wounded Healer** who bears the marks of love, he will ask me, "Sentamu, where are your tears for me to wipe away? Where are your wounds of love received through loving and laying down your life for me and my brothers and sisters?"

It's from the Cross that the life of God's love shines forth upon the world in its fullest splendour. And, as David Bosch has said (in *Transforming Mission*), "The Church is an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty."

**"Let your gracious-magnanimity be manifest to all. The Lord is near."**

**Amen**