

Callan Slipper, Concluding Reflections, Friday 23 June 2023

Learning on the Way: Receptive Ecumenism and the Catholic Synodal Pathway

First of all, I would like to say thank you. This has been a moment of beauty as we have had the chance to meditate upon the work of God in a range of different traditions. As we heard each church present itself, I found myself feeling: 'I wish I was one of those!' It is a joy to see the richness of blessing upon the one body of Christ.

Next, I have found myself learning a huge amount from each church and as, an Anglican, I felt that those I have most learnt from were the Pentecostals and the Quakers, churches that in a formal sense are in some ways the most different from my own. What I appreciate in both is the focus upon the core of what we are doing, upon dwelling in the life we have been given in Christ. Especially, I think, we Anglicans can learn a great deal from the Quakers. Anglicans may have received many gifts, and even have a genuine experience of synodality that values many of the good things that have been provided for God's people, but it is true that it is easy for our deliberative procedures to dwindle into being a scaled-down form of Parliament, where politics and adversarial debate so easily displace the Spirit of Christ. It is not uncommon for Anglicans to begin meetings with a moment of prayer, which is immediately set aside as we then get down to the real and exciting business of wrangling with each other. By contrast, a Quaker business meeting presents a very different picture and shows how, instead of having an argument among human beings, however well-meaning and sincere, we can better come together to seek the mind of Christ in the power of the Spirit.

This point, however, rests on a wider issue that speaks not just to Anglicans but to all, absolutely all, of the churches. Behind the proper working of synodal structures, we need a deeper experience of synodal living. Our fundamental life experience, our way of living, always guides our specific moments; and this is true also of our moments of synodal decision-making. This puts us before the question of spirituality, for the way we are together in our decision-making reflects the way we are together in our daily lives. We need, therefore, a synodal spirituality for life and for decisions, and not just a theory, but a way of living with each other that we continually inhabit.

When it comes to Catholic learnings, I think I would like to mention two, both of which are drawn from Anglican experience. The first reflects a longing that has been mentioned at various points in this symposium: the need to hear the voices of women and of the laity. Whatever our theories of gender may be, women and men have different experiences in society from one another. We need both perspectives to make good decisions. Furthermore, we need the gifts and charisms of all the laity. Theology alone is not enough; we must have the range of sciences, skills, knowledge, and experience to understand and decide well. At the upcoming synod on synodality it is excellent that there will be men and women religious, as well as priests and deacons present and voting. It is even more important that there will be laypeople among this group of non-bishops.¹ Taking this a step further, it is possible to learn from Anglican experience that until such time as a proper way is found for permanent institutional arrangements to give access to the necessary wisdom from all vocations, *interim structures* can be set up to hear the breadth of voices and have them participate in the actual taking of decisions.

The other possible learning I would suggest, which may be more of a pipedream, is to give a still greater role to the *consensus fidelium*, which means that even when a decision has been made,

¹ There will be 70 voting delegates who are not bishops, making up approximately 21 percent of the synod—chosen from priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and laypeople.

and it is officially recognized that it has been taken, there should be space for those who in conscience do not agree. This would mean allowing *structures of loyal dissent* until such time as a matter has clearly been received by the entire church. What has been decided may be true, but its truth is not confirmed until it has been received by the *consensus fidelium*. Structures of loyal dissent would allow for the process of reception to take place.