



Letter to the Editor

Justin Welby's Leadership

In his interesting article 'Emergent Archiepiscopal Leadership within the Anglican Communion' Martyn Percy pays tribute to the courage, willingness to take risks, and ability to make warm relationships of Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury.¹ He is, however, critical of his overall style of leadership. This is on the grounds that it is first of all 'charismatic' in the non-technical sense of the term, in that it relies on his undoubted personal gifts of leadership, and secondly, that this is combined with a reliance on managerial models of church governance. This managerial style is linked with the setting up of working groups of lay people outside the synodical structures. It is a style of leadership according to Percy that characterizes leaders in industry, of which he was once one. Including the Archbishop of York in his criticism he writes '[t]he current archbishops are now functioning much like corporate chief executives'.²

That is neither a good nor a fair analogy. If we are to use terms drawn from the corporate sector then the Archbishops are acting as Chairmen of the Board, rather than Chief Executives. Good practice in business now states that these roles should not be combined. Certainly when I was Bishop of Oxford I found it helpful to think of myself as the Chairman rather than Chief Executive. This latter role was carried out by the Diocesan Secretary working closely with the elected boards and officials and there are equivalents at national level. It was also helpful from time to time to have small working parties of experts who feed their findings into the elected bodies for consideration, as in fact happened with the Green report on leadership in the church of which again Percy is so critical. At a time when the church's resources are so stretched the expertise of lay people on how these can be managed and deployed most effectively is one of the charisms the church needs.

In contrast to this emphasis on building personal relationships Percy argues that the church should be relational. The problem, thinks Percy,

1. Editor: see Martyn Percy, 'Emergent Archiepiscopal Leadership within the Anglican Communion', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 14.1 (2016), pp. 46–70.

2. 'Emergent Archiepiscopal Leadership', p. 64.

is that 'the need for *relatedness* gets replaced by *relationships*. The two are different.'³ He rightly argues that the church is set as a body within time as an institution with a number of interdependent parts. Its task is to receive what has been given and build it into the institution with a view to carrying this given truth to future generations. This means that different churches and their structures and not just its members will need to be in relation to one another. Further, it will inevitably involve much consultation, discussion, and argument and will appear untidy and slow moving. This cannot and should not be short-circuited by a combination of charismatic leadership at the top combined with management techniques handed over to small groups of lay people outside the synodical structures.

Percy singles out the fact that the Archbishop has personally visited the 38 Primates of the Anglican Communion. This, he suggests, cannot be a substitute for the way all the structures of the church need to interact with one another at greater depth over a longer period of time. Yet is the building up of personal relationships by leaders really to be set against the necessity of relatedness between churches? Person-to-person encounter with the need for institutions and their different structures to relate to one another? The two are indeed different but they belong together, and if good personal relationships are developed at the highest level, there is that much more chance that the institutional structures of the churches to which they belong will be encouraged to relate well to one another as well. There is no evidence that the Archbishop's dynamic style of leadership is leaving the institution behind. On the contrary, the dramatic breakthrough that the Church of England achieved over the consecration of women bishops clearly owed much to the particular personal gifts that Justin Welby brought to the issue after previous failures. There is a good model for Justin Welby with the first and most important council of the church as described in Acts 15. The agreement there over a fundamentally divisive issue was made possible by the personal relationships that Paul had made with Peter and others in the church at Jerusalem.

The issue of gay relationships is more intractable than that of women bishops. The Anglican Communion now has a major problem with the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) and the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). This church is not a member of the Anglican Communion and is in fact a rival of the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Anglican Church of Canada. It is, however,

3. 'Emergent Archiepiscopal Leadership', p. 62.

in full communion with three churches who do remain members of the Communion.

Here Percy criticizes the Archbishop for inviting a leading member of ACNA to be a Six Preacher at Canterbury Cathedral, saying that this 'risks the identity and composition' of those who sense that such a gesture might be counter-productive.⁴ The fact is, however, that the Anglican Communion is now badly frayed at the edges, if not fractured. The more the Archbishop can do to keep some threads from fraying further the better. I deeply regret the existence of ACNA and take a fundamentally different stance from them on gay relationships. However, the position they represent has been the one that the church has held until very recently, and there is much in the Anglican patrimony that they share with churches who do remain in the communion. The willingness of the Archbishop to hold out the hand of friendship and inclusion in this way is surely to be welcomed despite the blurring of boundaries. The Church of England has done this in recent decades with the provision it has made for special episcopal oversight for those opposed to the ordination of women. This has been frustrating for many of us, but it has helped to hold the Church of England together and is to be preferred to the kind of rigidity that has split so many churches in the past.

Richard Harries
(*Professor Lord Harries of Pentregarth*)
King's College, London
richard.d.harries@gmail.com

4. 'Emergent Archiepiscopal Leadership', p. 60.