



Not a Matter of Opinion: Discernment, Difference and Discrimination

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Riceville in Iowa is a town you have probably never heard of. But in 1968, a young junior school teacher, Jane Elliott, conducted an extraordinary experiment with her class of eight- and nine-year-olds. Elliott had been struck by a TV news interview on the day Martin Luther King Jr had been shot. Concerned by the implicit racial bias in the TV reporting (e.g. one reporter opined that 'black people will need controlling more than ever, now...'), Elliott decided to trial her social research. She divided her class into two: kids with brown eyes, and kids with blue eyes.

Over the course of the next few days, she fed the class new lines of thinking. Blue-eyed kids were smarter, more honest, cleaner and more civilised, she said. The blue-eyed kids were rewarded with extra playtime, and given preferential seats in class. Brown-eyed kids were punished more harshly for wrong-doing, and treated as inferior. The class were told the brown-eyed kids were more likely to get into trouble. The blue-eyed kids began to enjoy their sense of superiority. And they began to believe it was all true. Although this educational social experiment only lasted a few days, she observed that discrimination was easy to induce. We are, as people, suggestible.

We cannot change our eye-colour. It is a part of our identity. We may have opinions about what skin colour, natural hair colour or eye-colour all might mean and infer. But these are all opinions we can change. So the cornerstone of modern law on equality is that it is wrong to discriminate against people on the basis of their given identity: male, female, black, white – and other givens. Opinions about identity can change. But identity, as a fundamental 'given', is accorded the status of equality in law in most developed nations.

Now, there are three different ways in which one could conceive of discrimination. First, if done on the basis of a person's or people's given identity, we rightly call this unlawful discrimination. Except for the churches – who exempted themselves from the 2010 Equality Act – every other employer, organisation or institution that tries to promote discrimination on the basis of another person's or people's identity is liable to prosecution and penalty. As gender is a given, including transgender identities, gender-based discrimination is illegal. Increasingly these days, sexuality is seen as a 'given', in the sense that it is a 'natural orientation', and not a lifestyle choice. For any employer, organisation or institution to try and discriminate on grounds of sexuality is to risk a conflict with the law. Only the churches continue to discriminate in this way.

Second, one could discriminate on grounds of competency. Employers, organisations and institutions do this routinely. Not everyone can go to Oxford or Cambridge to read law or physics. Tests are taken, and criteria applied. Only the best make it. As long as the discrimination is fair (i.e., only intellectual), then it is applied. But due allowances must be made for disabilities of various kinds, such as dyslexia. And this may extend to educational opportunities too. So, in a very close call between two candidates of equal merit and one place, universities may invest in some mindful and appropriate 'positive discrimination'. Equally, to balance the diversity on a Board of Directors, one may make judicious use of discriminatory reasoning.

Third, there is discrimination on the grounds of integrity. A person applying to run a vegan charity would be expected to embody and support the values of the charity. They could not, I think, run a dairy and beef business in their spare time, and claim that was hobby that did not interfere with the performance of their duties. It would. The public would probably think it odd, and hypocritical. The rationale and reputation of the charity would be susceptible to harm under such leadership. True, the actual competency of the individual to run the charity may not be in doubt. They might be able to do the job on every level of competency. But as a matter of integrity, they should not even be considered for the role.

The Philip North case involved all three forms of discrimination. As a member of 'The Society', Bishop North does not believe women can be real - or 'truly' -

clergy. His own integrity – that of believing in a male-only ontological patrilineal succession – makes it impossible for him to believe that women can be ‘truly’ clergy. But Bishop North’s integrity would require others to negate their own integrity and (given) identity in deference to his opinion and to accept his episcopal oversight. Not just the clergywomen either. Any parish that welcomed women clergy, or had women clergy as part of a team would be similarly affected. So would those parishes where the clergyman was ordained by a female bishop. Despite Bishop North’s claim that he would promote women to positions of leadership in the church, the official position of ‘The Society’ he represents is that ultimate leadership in the church is exercised by episcopal and priestly (male-only) colleagues, and not by the laity. The Director of ‘The Society’, Dr Colin Podmore, a layperson, has confirmed this.

So the laity, parishes and congregations of Sheffield Diocese would have been left with some very awkward questions had the appointment of Bishop North gone ahead. If these sacraments of grace that the congregations of South Yorkshire received daily and weekly at the hands of their clergy are good and efficacious enough for them, why would they not also be good enough for their bishop? Who, let us not forget, would have had to share the ‘cure of souls’ with these clergy.

This is where the language of ‘sacramental assurance’ is particularly iniquitous. For some in ‘The Society’ want to be slightly fudgy-agnostic about women clergy and the sacraments they celebrate. ‘We can’t be *sure* they are vehicles of grace’, they say. But women are somehow to appreciate being esteemed as pastoral colleagues, who are nonetheless able to work in their vocations and ministries. A language of equality is deployed with one hand, but is withdrawn with the other.

But this won’t do. It is discrimination, dressed up as doctrine. Can the owner of an airline say, for example: ‘look, all our pilots are great, and we train and treat them all equally – it is just that I *personally* won’t fly in any of our planes piloted by women, because I can’t be *sure* of them, so I advise my close family to veto likewise. But as for the wider public, well, I don’t much mind...’. Could a male Senior Partner in a General Practice advise patients not to use their equally-well qualified female doctors – only because they are women? It would be discriminatory to do so.

Can a diocesan bishop say that up to a third of his clergy are not 'truly' priests, so that at least one third of the parishes are not receiving valid sacraments? Apparently so. To be clear, that is the present position of the Church of England. This is discriminatory. Not on the basis of competency, either. Rather, purely on the grounds of *identity*, and the promotion of the discriminators' 'integrity' (i.e., merely their opinion, which can be changed), over and against the integrity of the identity of the clergy, parishes and people (i.e., which can't be changed). This is gender-based discrimination, pure and simple.

Bishop Philip, as one of several Bishops who leads 'The Society', does not recognise women clergy as 'truly' clergy (as Principle One of the 'Five Guiding Principles' requires), or men ordained by women bishops. Bishop Philip has said he recognises these people as 'lawfully' clergy, but not 'truly' – hence the call of 'The Society' to issue identity cards, solely in order to discriminate, and not receive the ministry of women, and men ordained by women bishops. That group constituted more than one-third of the clergy in Sheffield diocese, where +Philip was to be bishop, until his withdrawal on 9th March 2017.

As far as the 'Five Guiding Principles' are concerned, it is worth remembering that these were imposed on Synod by the House of Bishops as the 'cost' (or counter-weight) for approving women bishops. They are not part of the legislation in Parliament that approved women bishops. They constitute an imposed Code of Practice, which members of 'The Society' do not, de facto, adhere to.

Some in 'The Society' might claim that they are on the receiving end of discrimination in the Church of England. So let us deal with this, briefly. First, no-one doubts their priestly or episcopal ministry based on their fundamental, given identity: male. Second, they are not discriminated against on grounds of competency: they can be Bishops, Deans, and so forth. Third, there is provision for those who belong to groups that hold discriminatory views – they are given Provincial Episcopal Visitors (Aka PEVs, or 'Flying Bishops') plus other preferment and resources.

Is there a 'stained glass ceiling' for those who hold such views, preventing them from becoming Diocesan Bishops in places not familiar with their opinion being used in the exercise of leadership, ministry and oversight? The 'Five

Guiding Principles' says there is no such ceiling. But common sense, theological integrity and Christian charity tells us that such views would be extremely unwelcome in most dioceses.

Consider the parallels. Suppose a male Head Teacher, about to be appointed in a tough inner-city Church school, does not think women should hold positions of authority or teach – especially in religious studies. At the school, one third of the teachers are women. Half the pupils are female. So are half the parents of the pupils. At interview, the candidate explains that they get on well with women, encourage them in their work, and will support them. But their religious conscience leads them to conclude women should not really teach, or be leaders.

Should the governors appoint him, even if he is the best candidate in every other sphere? The law would say 'no' to this appointment, and the governors would be penalised if they went ahead. It would be an inherently discriminatory act. Because, the appointment of this Head Teacher would discriminate against all the women teachers – solely on grounds of their identity, not their capacities or competencies. If the appointment went ahead, the parents would rightly complain: what message does this send to their daughters - and to their sons, for that matter?

This is what happened in Sheffield. The laity lobbied against the appointment in large numbers. They did not want their diocese run by a leader who held inherently discriminatory views. Neither did the clergymen want this either: what would it say about them, as ordained men? And the women, of course, stood their ground too, quite rightly. There is no reason for any other diocese to act differently in the future. Nor should they.

Some have already let out shrill cries that Philip North's withdrawal was a victory for populism. It was nothing of the sort. Rather, it was a powerful demonstration of localism. Sheffield diocese wants a bishop who is in full 'catholic communion' with the rest of the church. Philip North's consecration as Suffragan Bishop of Burnley was only carried out by PEVs and other 'untainted' bishops – even the Archbishop of York stood aside in his own Minster. Sheffield diocese also needs a bishop who is in local communion with all his clergy – not just the men (provided, of course, those men were not

ordained by a woman bishop). Bishops are to be a focus of catholic and local unity. Bishop Philip could be neither, through his own choice to be a member of 'The Society', that won't accept the wholeness and integrity of the whole church. 'The Society' cherry-picks on the basis of gender-based discrimination.

Whatever deals were done on the floor of General Synod, there was no reason at all for the people of Sheffield and South Yorkshire to pay the price for this as a dubious experiment in 'mutual flourishing' (e.g., what if it didn't work? How would you know if it was, as it had not been tried before?). The localism of the bishop should not be underestimated. In 2015, 12.5% of the population voted UKIP. If we had proportional representation as our election system, UKIP would have more than 80 MPs. (NB: the LibDems would have more than 30). But just imagine the task of allocating UKIP MPs to geographic constituencies. Would Witney like to be represented by one? Or what about the centre of Birmingham or Bradford? The locals would resist – and fiercely, I suspect.

Sheffield diocese resisted a bishop of 'The Society' for largely similar reasons. Yes, 'The Society' has national clout. Yes, the 'Five Guiding Principles' were hammered out on the floor of General Synod. But quite rightly, nobody wants to pay the price for that locally. Why should they? Local MPs are elected locally. Bishops are not. But – and this is crucial – they need to be able to represent their locality. Introducing a card-carrying candidate who champions gender-based discrimination to South Yorkshire and Sheffield would never easily work. It was patronising and iniquitous to even ask the question of the locals. Why should they have ever have even countenanced such a discriminatory agenda, let alone given it serious consideration? What were the Crown Nominations Commission thinking of? Sheffield, proudly, was a city that held some of the first Suffragette meetings in the early twentieth century.

This whole debacle has serious consequences for our mission and ministry as a national church. One of the reasons this had not been adequately addressed is that the Church of England is hierarchical. So, our church leaders did not seem too bothered in 2008 when Kristin Aune, a sociologist of religion, announced startling findings. Collectively churches in England have been losing 50,000 women worshippers a year, more than a million in total. Evidence indicated this was partly because young women found churches alienating and disempowering. As a church we tolerate discrimination, give it space to

flourish, and resource it financially through ‘flying bishops’ and other provisions. As Savi Hensman noted, writing for *Ekklesia*,

There is also a widespread lack of understanding of the theological importance of justice and the psychological and sometimes physical damage done by discrimination of all kinds...In addition, many senior clergy live in something of an institutional bubble where problematic practices are glossed over. For instance in a hospital, if a junior doctor announced that he did not regard women as proper doctors, it would be unlawful to appoint him, let alone let him be supervised by a man rather than the woman who heads his department. Yet the major concessions already made by the church are often taken for granted by those who benefit. Likewise school governors would not just nod through the appointment of a head if he were part of a movement which encouraged parents not to let their children be educated by women teachers...¹

We need to remember that Britons spoke loudly in favour of ordaining women as priests in the Church of England. Seventy to eighty percent endorsed them in polling by Gallup (1976, April and October 1984, 1988, 1996), NOP (1978, 1981, 1984), Marplan (1979), MORI (1989), and Continental Research (1993). In the 2013 Westminster Faith Debates (Woodhead/YouGov) polling consistently showed that both the general public and regular churchgoers perceived the Church of England to be negative and discriminatory towards women in respect of ordination to the priesthood and to the episcopate.²

Yet the church does discerningly permit *some* discrimination, when it allows for ‘liberty of conscience’. The church has, in its wisdom, made gracious provision and concessions to those who, in conscience, cannot accept women priests. Through such support, the church enables these groups to flourish. But there is no reason to welcome their inherently discriminatory gender-based worldview into the wider church, and crown it with the honour of governance and grant them even wider oversight. Especially when it would mean large numbers of clergy might find their identity, ministry and value now no longer actually held value under such a new bishop.

¹ Savi Hensman, *Being Sheffield's bishop and the limits of inequality*, <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/23820>, published 11th March 2017

² Clive Field, 'Has the CofE lost the English people? Some quantitative tests' *Theology* 2017, Vol. 120(2) 83–92.

I can barely imagine what it might be like for a woman priest, going for their annual appraisal, as the Vicar of a tough and demanding working class parish somewhere in Sheffield diocese during 2016. Having been appraised, she might receive affirmation for her work and vocation, and encouragement to continue developing the mission and ministry of the parish. But can you imagine going through that same process in 2017, when her new bishop does not recognise the same woman as even being ordained, or that her parishioners are not now in receipt of any valid sacramental ministry? That would be Bishop Philip North's position, according to 'The Society' he represents.

If I were that clergywoman, this would destroy my morale. It would fundamentally undermine my identity and confidence. And that is essentially the difference between valid discernment in ministry, and pathological discrimination. Discernment is good, and disagreement can be creative. But discrimination damns others who, quite independent of their gifts and competencies, are destined to be denigrated, disempowered and disabled solely on the basis of their identity by those practising putative discrimination. That's why it needs to be resisted, at all costs.

The Sheffield debacle began to unravel some time before I published my original essay on the issue.³ At the consultation stage of the process to select a new bishop, the women clergy of the diocese were asked, informally, if they would welcome a woman bishop. In what can only be described as an act of gracious magnanimity, they said 'no', indicating that the diocese was not ready for this yet. They were also thinking of their (fellow) clergy in the (so-called) 'Hickleton Chapter', a 'virtual' and non-geographic gathering, made up of the male clergy under the 'flying bishop'. The women at no stage were asked if they would accept a bishop who did not ordain women. They quite reasonably assumed that the first question implied the second question was not on the table. The 'Statement of Needs', drafted by a small group of 'insiders', carefully avoids any reference to this second question.⁴

³ Martyn Percy, *Questions of Ambiguity and Integrity*, Modern Church, 24th February 2017: <http://modernchurch.org.uk/news-blog/bishop-north-resignation>

⁴ Statement of Needs 2016 – Consultation: The priorities and qualities of the next Bishop of Sheffield. <http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/statementconsultation>

This was, with the benefit of hindsight, a deliberate lapse by that small group drafting the 'Statement of Needs'. No-one consulted on whether the Diocese of Sheffield would welcome a bishop who would not ordain women.

What happened next was inevitable: the views which should have been gathered by the drafting group could only be voiced once Philip North had been selected. Parishes and clergy duly registered their concerns, in large numbers. The postbag was enormous, and grew daily. This was no organised campaign. It was ordinary people, concerned about the impact of gender-based discrimination in their local parishes. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Jane Elliott's 1960s social experiment could not be repeated today. But we have other social studies to reckon with. Research shows that companies where women are strongly represented at board level in the FTSE 100 Index tend to out-perform their more male-dominated competitors. Where the male-female ratio is 50-50, the figures are better still. This also encourages better harmony and happiness in the workplace.

In contrast, the Church of England's idea of 'balance' is evening up the number of 'traditionalist' bishops with those who are women bishops. These numbers are about tied at the moment. (There are ten women bishops; but there are nine serving bishops who won't ordain women – including one for conservative Evangelicals). There are still only two diocesan bishops who are women.

Frankly, this is pathetic. And it shows that the Church of England is keener to pander to forces of discrimination and sexism than it is to embrace gender justice and equality. The Church of England consistently sends out mixed signals. It is good to have women clergy, apparently. But please, don't let us celebrate this too much for fear of upsetting those who still want to engage in gender-based discrimination.

What is now needed in the Church of England is a thorough and wholesale review. Not just of the 'Five Guiding Principles', and the question of whether or not a 'traditionalist' can ever be a diocesan bishop. These are mere symptoms of the deeper malaise. What the Church of England now needs to review is just one thing: discrimination. Just that: discrimination.

Why does the Church of England promote, prefer and resource people and groups who discriminate against people on the basis of their gender, sexuality and identity? We would not tolerate it on age, or ethnicity. But on gender? Why, exactly? Do we still think that the discriminators might have something valid and useful to say about women that the wider church still needs to hear? That women are, after all our debates, still potentially worth *less*?

I know that those who subscribe to alienating forms of theological anthropology won't be converted quickly or easily. It took generations to achieve comparable change on slavery and racism. Women, meanwhile, don't want to be fobbed off with 'gracious respect'; they want equality. Women are not a 'theological issue' to be 'resolved'. They are half the population: mothers, daughters, friends, family, sisters - people. The language of 'mutual flourishing', enshrined in the Declaration of the 'Five Guiding Principles', is of little use to women if it still allows them to be discriminated against – especially if such views are still regarded as being of *equal value* in the church.

It is sheer nonsense, of course, to accord equality of status to views that are inherently discriminatory. Such logic can only lead to the *further perpetuation* of inequality and discrimination. The only winners in that battle would be those who vest their 'identity politics' with derogatory and discriminatory theological anthropologies. Women cannot easily 'flourish' as equals under such conditions. So the 'Five Guiding Principles' are merely a 'cease fire' in the Church of England's long saga of '*Gender Wars*'. Or a truce, at best. But these 'Principles' cannot bring peace. Because a temporary political solution cannot resolve our deep theological divisions. Only deeper theology will bring us lasting peace. Such theology will be founded on equality and inclusion, not dubious 'equal-but-different' discriminatory reasoning.

Let me illustrate this with a plausible, but hypothetical case. Suppose for a moment Patrick was ordained deacon by one of our female diocesan bishops. Patrick served a curacy in her diocese. After a year she alone ordains him priest. But towards the end of his curacy, he begins to harbour much stronger catholic inklings. Some of his new close friends are members of a group known as 'The Society'. Now as a new priest-in-charge, he feels alone, and longs for fraternal priestly fellowship.

So Patrick applies to join 'The Society'. He attends a weekend at Walsingham with members of his congregation and other priests and parishes. But at the final concelebrated Eucharist, in which all priests take part, a friend takes him aside and advises him it would be better if he did not robe, and sat with members of his congregation. Another suggests he robes, but does not say the words or raise his hands at the moment of consecration. Another says it matters not if he robes, nor what he says, as it would be void anyway – so what harm is done?

Poor Patrick. He has realised that his priestly ministry cannot be received or recognised by anyone in 'The Society', as he was ordained by a woman. But can he be 're-ordained' now? What legal and theological provisions can 'The Society' make for clergy like him? Legally, he can't be ordained again. But the official position of 'The Society' is that he was never 'truly' ordained.

In the event, Patrick decides on none of the options his friends at the Walsingham weekend offer. He goes for a walk, and has a cuppa in a local café. And as he drinks his tea, he has an epiphany. 'So, this is what "mutual flourishing" looks like', he muses to himself. 'This is what it is like to be a woman priest in the Church of England.'

Such a case would be a farce. But it is plausible. And it exposes, at a stroke, the sheer folly of the Church of England in tolerating this asinine theology of 'taint-based-ontology'. One based solely on the gender of the minister – a simple case of gender-based discrimination.

The road to equality for women has been slow at times, even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. So it is important that disingenuous debate and discriminatory action is challenged and resisted in the Church of England. In their commentary on the 'Five Guiding Principles', Forward in Faith write that it is possible to affirm the first guiding principle and respect for women priests and bishops as 'lawful office holders', because,

the Church of England is committed to admitting women to all orders of ministry, but this does not require its members to agree with the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. The distinction between office (diocesan bishop, archdeacon, incumbent) and order (bishop, priest, deacon) is important. If someone has been appointed to an office by due legal process, that office is not vacant. It is

possible in good conscience to recognize the holder of that office as holding the legal responsibilities that belong to it. Such recognition does not necessarily involve recognizing him or her as a bishop or priest in the sacramental sense, or receiving his or her sacramental ministry. Similarly, canonical obedience to an office-holder does not imply anything about the office-holder's sacramental status. Clergy owe canonical obedience to the holder of the office of diocesan bishop, whether or not he or she has been ordained to the order of bishop...⁵

This is of course, 'straining the gnat and swallowing the camel' (Mt. 23: 24). The first principle affirms that women are 'truly and lawfully' clergy. But as I pointed out in my earlier essay,⁶ and referring back to W.S.F. Pickering's work,⁷ this is a deep dynamic in Anglo-Catholic identity, perceptively excavated in his sociological analysis: namely, a fondness for ambiguity. Similar problems arise over whether 'mutual flourishing' *really* means what it says to both parties. Because Forward in Faith are clearly committed to eventual *extinction* of women clergy, as their commentary on the second and third guiding principles plainly states:

...that the Church of England 'has reached a clear decision on the matter' is plainly the case. A clear decision may not necessarily stand for all time, however. Acknowledgement of the decision may be coupled with hope and prayer that, in the fullness of time, the Church of England will come to recognize it to have been wrong... a process of discernment within the Anglican Communion embodies the concept of 'reception'...the Church of England's decision regarding women's ordination may be clear, but it cannot be regarded as absolute...

And on guiding principle five, Forward in Faith writes

...this principle implicitly recognizes that full communion will *not* be possible, and that communion will be diminished (because the Church of England no longer has an episcopate or a priesthood that enjoys full mutual recognition)...

These readings of the 'Five Guiding Principles' are contemptuous and dishonest. They mock the spirit and letter of the Code. In view of this, it was entirely right that Bishop Philip North declined the nomination to the See of

⁵ See *The Five Guiding Principles: A Commentary*: <http://www.forwardinfaith.com/WBProvisions.php?id=213>

⁶ Martyn Percy, *Questions of Ambiguity and Integrity*, Modern Church, 24th February 2017: <http://modernchurch.org.uk/news-blog/bishop-north-resignation>

⁷ See *Anglo-Catholicism: A Study in Religious Ambiguity*, London: SPCK, 1989

Sheffield. He would have not have been in full communion with the vast majority of his clergy, and not in full communion with more than 80% of his congregations and parishes - something that 'The Society' also confirms in its literature. This would have been an untenable ecclesiological and theological position for anyone in a position of governance and oversight. Namely, someone who holds a minority view: but cannot recognise or affirm the majority view - as a matter of their conscience. It is best, therefore, if such people who represent a tiny minority view, does not attempt to lead the majority who simply don't and won't share such views. For who will want to follow someone who does not recognise or affirm the vast majority of their followers? What kind of leader discriminates against their followers and employees? And asks that we pledge our fealty, and understand and empathise with their discrimination, because they want this discrimination to have the quasi-legal status of a 'protected characteristic'?

The whole approach of the 'The Society' and Forward in Faith to the 'Five Guiding Principles' lacks integrity and sincerity. Their engagement with the 'Principles' is built on discriminatory, duplicitous and disingenuous interpretations of language. It cannot be truthful to claim that they are committed to 'mutual flourishing', then openly pray and work for the extinction of women priests and bishops, and so return the Church of England to a state of exclusive male leadership.

The irony of Anglo-Catholic groups such as 'The Society' and Forward in Faith is that their heavy investment in ambiguity produces some very odd results that ultimately undermine their position. In their tortuous manoeuvres to both affirm and deny women, all with disingenuous and discriminatory uses of language, they end up effectively affirming lay presidency at the Eucharist. By denying women are truly clergy - and those men ordained by women bishops - yet doing nothing to prevent these weekly celebrations at altars all over the Church of England, they sanction such action. One can only assume that any good 'traditionalist' bishop worth their salt would put an immediate stop to laypeople celebrating Holy Communion across their diocese. I imagine that the language of 'sacramental assurance' will once again be appealed to here: 'we can't be *sure* these people are priests, and their sacraments *efficacious*... but we never said they were only laypeople'. But this is all just insulting and facile.

And it makes no sense. You can't be 'a bit pregnant'. You can't be half baptised. You can't be half ordained.

It is to such matters that Sir Philip Mawer's review now turns. As the Independent Adjudicator for the Church of England, appointed in 2014 to establish a procedure for the resolution of disputes arising from the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests, he will have to review not just the failure of process in the Sheffield case, but also the serious theological failures that underpin this matter, and the mocking, disingenuous ways Forward in Faith read the guidelines. Failure of process is one thing; the manifest deficiency of theological principles is quite another.

To be clear, I am willing and able, in all conscience, to see those groups that wish to practise discrimination – be they ontologically-based in 'catholic' wings of the church, or 'complementarians' in conservative Evangelicalism – continue as part of the Church of England, and to be resourced for their flourishing. I do not think it ecclesially wise or in Christian charity to try and drive them out. They are part of the body of Christ, and more unites us than divides us.

But make no mistake: these groups are also, inherently, *discriminatory*. And I cannot see how justice or integrity is best-served, or the mission and ministry of the national church can ever be enhanced, by extending the influence of such groups across the wider church. These groups have elected to marginalise themselves; this is their own chosen path. They have chosen opinions that necessitate distancing themselves from the mainstream. And so they should remain in their partially sealed-off wings (but self-constructed, incidentally), until such time as they wish to part company with those alienating opinions, and no longer choose to practice their identity-based discrimination. Our integrity – and interestingly, theirs too – demands nothing less.

MWP, Passiontide 2017