Worshipful Company of Weavers
Limborough Lecture
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Inclusion: Faith, Church and Media

How we extend and maintain an inclusive society must be one of the most urgent and complex issues that we face today. It challenges us to ask deep questions about the nature of our society, where our values come from, how they are passed on and what happens when they are challenged. Over the last few years the terrorist threat and the refugee crisis have both led to a great deal of public and private heart searching.

I would like to offer some reflections based on my experience of the Church and the media. I consider myself fortunate to have been immersed in these two great British Institutions and also to have had experience of being part of and alongside the two great universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Church, media. Oxford and Cambridge all have issues with inclusion. The Prime Minister's recent criticism of Oxford University for admitting only 27 black men and women out of 2,500 in 1914 – about 1%, is typical of the kind of criticism such institutions attract. They want to be inclusive; they know it is part of their mission and is necessary for them to be credible; yet they remain in some ways bastions of white and middle class and southern England. If not exactly the preserve of an elite, they reflect the lives and values of what we might call the 'chattering classes'. I don't necessarily want to condemn the chattering classes, of which I fear I am probably a member, but it is to acknowledge that those of us who chatter away in the pulpit or in the media often do so with a bad conscience, aware of the need to be more inclusive but not always sure how to go about it.

Religious faith might appear to complicate the issue and there are those who insist that religion makes inclusion harder to achieve. It is not difficult to say why. Faith is a key marker of identity. It marks us belonging to a particular community of belief and practice. Faith includes us into itself, but at the cost of separating us from other faiths. The role of faith in building a truly inclusive community is therefore at best ambivalent. Faith builds up by defining us as distinctive, as different from others. It includes us by excluding us, introducing the paradox that inclusion and diversity do not always sit together easily.

But, as I shall try to argue, faith may have more to offer in our current situation than the secularism that proposes public neutrality and insists that faith retreats to the private sphere. Let me begin to explore what I mean with reference to the Church of England.

In its very foundation the Church of England was both rigidly inclusive and oppressively non-inclusive. The inclusivity is in its name. This was to be the national church, the godly face of English society. The Reformation idea of election would become a potent way of expressing English identity. It embraced all who accepted the legitimacy of the Tudor monarch both as sovereign of state and supreme governor of Church. Beyond that, the Church did ask too many questions about the private belief of individuals. 'I have no desire to make windows into

men's souls' as Elizabeth 1st memorably put it. Public conformity was the price that had to be paid by Catholics and other Protestants; they were tolerated as long as they appeared loyal. The Church of England's fear was always more to do with treason than real heresy; either the treason that could come from loyalty to the Pope or the treason that came from radical views about the nature of authority in Church or state. The Elizabethan arrangement was fragile and required constant policing. Yet the reigns of Elizabeth and James 1st were the years of the greatest creativity of the Church in terms of theology, poetry, the translation of the Bible; all on the liturgical foundation that went back to Thomas Cranmer. It is not surprising that at the Restoration it was Cranmer's Prayer Book that was published in its final form.

In the same year, 1662, the Act of Uniformity which prescribed its use had the effect of excluding 2000 ministers. These were those men of God who had become accustomed to exercising much greater freedom in forms of worship than the new law permitted. The Act created the concept of Non-Conformity. The eventual consequence of this was to exclude all who did not conform to Church of England practice from holding civil or military office or from being awarded degrees from Oxford or Cambridge. The repressive nature of this legislation seems extraordinary to us today. But after over 100 years of religious turmoil there was a hunger for peace at almost any price. And so the intolerance of the Act was tolerated, and although it eventually failed to maintain the conformist society it had been designed to create, it took several centuries for it to be dismantled. Tolerance between different Christian bodies came about gradually through a slow and sometimes painful erosion of the Church of England's monopoly and by the Church's grudging acceptance of revivalist movements within itself. The failure of the Church of England to be the Church of the English people was perhaps one of the most creative failures in English history.

By the middle of the 20th century leaders and thinkers of the Church of England had come to see their role, not so much as monopoly providers but as mediators, with the Church at the heart of the ecumenical movement in England. Anglicanism, which was now a world phenomenon, was thought of us being at the very heart of the ecumenical movement, a bridge church, being both, as it was often asserted, Catholic and Reformed. Yet even this modest claim had something slightly unreal about it. The Church of England ended at Hadrian's wall. The Church in Wales was disestablished. And the claim to be a 'bridge church' was always undermined by the obvious fact that the Church of England itself was far from obviously united. Different factions held different views on the nature of the Church and the significance of Scripture and the sacraments. One slightly cynical remark from a non-Anglican Church leader expressed what many secretly thought: 'ecumenical progress is always shipwrecked on the rocks of Anglican disunity'. There is an uncomfortable truth here. The reality is there are small but vociferous minorities within the Church of England who make it clear from time that their allegiance is only provisional. For them, the real Church is the Roman Catholic Church, or an ideal Protestant Church based firmly on Reformation principles, practices and beliefs or a charismatic assembly manifesting the activity of the Holy Spirit. These various groups want to be accommodated under the canopy of the Church of England as long as the Church of England does not stray too far from an acceptance of the validity of their position. In other words the canopy allows the survival of those whose groups whose real instinct might be to tear it down. What is true of

the Church of England is in general also true of the Anglican Communion as we have seen recently in the light of divisive Anglican arguments on gender and sexuality.

I will come back to what this Anglican experience might contribute to the building of a truly inclusive society later on. But for now I will just note one thing. Inclusivity within the national Church both requires and facilitates a degree of personal reserve and discretion on the part of both the ordained and the lay. Clergy swear loyalty to the monarch and canonical obedience to the bishop, but they do not have to sign up formally to a confession of faith other than that of the historic creeds and formularies of the Church, and their obedience to the Bishop conditional on the Bishop's demands being consonant with what is lawful and honest; an interesting get out clause.

Lets move on to the BBC. Founded by John Reith who was a semi-lapsed Presbyterian its original mission was 'to inform, to educate and to entertain.' Reith imbued the new broadcasting company with a sense of divine purpose. Its motto was internationalist rather than narrowly nationalist: 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation'. A later dedication built into the fabric of Broadcasting House was based on words from Paul's letter to the Philippians: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report …think on these things'. When I joined the BBC in 1972 I was very aware of that high purpose.

The BBC I joined had long been committed to broadcast worship and to religious comment. It employed ministers of the major denominations to produce these faith-based programmes. It was ecumenical in outlook, determined that its efforts in the area of religion should not be bogged down by denominational differences. In this it was really remarkably successful. A daily broadcast act of worship, The Daily Service, had its own liturgical book. It was more formally liturgical than some Non-Conformists found comfortable and less so than many Anglicans were familiar with. It helped to generate the idea (which was also helped by patterns of school worship as prescribed by the 1944 education Act) that the four nations of the United Kingdom were Christian in a way which went beyond denominational divisions. It was not perfect. The Catholic contribution was not established as easily as others. But it did work for a time and helped to foster the view that there was such a thing as public Christianity made up from, but also independent of, official church bodies. This public Christianity was based on adherence to the scriptures; with a strongly ethical and exemplarist emphasis (rather than a dogmatic or sacramental one). The successors to the Daily Service were a whole range of musical and devotional programmes on Radio and Television, the most successful and lasting of which has been Songs of Praise.

The BBC had a key place in preserving a kind of cultural Christianity through the 1960s and 70s. It was therefore still possible at that time to describe British society as Christian; Christian here meaning historically, ethically and in terms of very broad belief. Programme controllers did not always like this consensus, but in general they accepted it. There was room for spiritually minded agnostics and liberal minded Jews; David Kossoff, with his retelling of Bible stories, Hugo Gryn and Lionel Blue as contributors to Thought for the Day and other programmes.

But even as we sat in the shade of this canopy there was massive change going on. The arrival of large numbers of black Christians from the West Indies and Asian Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus transformed society and raised new challenges of inclusivity and diversity. Church and media were quite slow on the uptake of all of this. The BBC and other media reported widely and not always sensitively on the hostility that many encountered in the 1960s; boarding houses with prominent signs in the windows stating baldly 'No coloured, no Irish', a practice that would be banned by the 1968 Race Relations Act. While this act was going through Parliament Enoch Powell gave his famous 'Rivers of Blood' address to the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre. This, of course, polarised the debate about immigration and made it extremely difficult to have a rational or nuanced discussion of the topic, a difficulty which still persists today.

We are all over-familiar with the staged media confrontation in which one side claims that immigration benefits society and should be encouraged, while the other side insists that immigration is depriving the native-born of jobs and school places and should be curbed.

Immigration changed the faith-map of Britain although the percentages of those belonging to other faiths were initially small. Even by 2011 there were only 4% Muslims in the UK and 3% accounted for all other than Christian faiths, including Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jews. But faiths changed the map more literally. Domes, minarets and temples appeared in cities alongside steeples, Friday prayer became a visible phenomenon in parts of London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bradford.

Many of the initial migrants were Christians from the West Indians and later from West Africa. They assumed that they were returning to the home country and that they would be welcome to practise their faith by joining the established churches. But they were often wrong. When West Indian Anglicans and Methodists attempted to join local congregations they found they were rebuffed. The spirit of 'no Irish no coloureds' was alive and well in the British churches. Disillusioned, many were drawn to form their own black led congregations. Pentecostal and prophecy-based churches sprang up to cater for the needs of these congregations.

Ethnicity and faith were issues for the BBC as well. In 1965 it began a series broadcast on radio and television in Urdu and Hindi and aimed at recent arrivals from Pakistan and India. This was 'Make yourself at home' and contained advice on how to manage English society, shop, find a GP and a school and generally fit in. It was the forerunner of what would become a much wider service for Asian listeners and viewers. Its name suggests that the BBC at least had a vision of an inclusive and diverse society and was prepared to back it, sometimes in the face of public opposition. (There were plenty who did not want the new arrivals to feel or be at home).

In supporting an ideal of inclusivity the BBC was being true to its original internationalist motto 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation'. Its ethos of liberalism took the desirability of equality between people of different ethnicities and backgrounds as a given. The BBC was also prepared to allow its reporters to be shocked and moved by the plight of peoples in other countries caused by famine or

war. If you were being cynical you might say that the BBC's liberalism was more a matter of preaching to others than practising it itself: it would take many years before those of African, West Indian and Asian descent were contributing visibly in any great numbers to drama programmes, news, current affairs and comedy.

In the early 1970s the BBC redefined the purpose of its religious programmes department by ensuring that there were two strands of programmes. Confessional programmes were to stay in the form of Christian worship, celebration, talk and discussion. But alongside this was to be a journalistic element, already established on radio by the 'Sunday' programme, but now extended to television. Radio and television would now play a significant part in charting the importance of religion in conflict and dissidence around the world and at home. This was the era when the intrepid journalist Vanya Kewley managed to negotiate an interview with Colonel Gaddafi and when a film crew went into the Iran of Ayatollah Khomeini and were persuaded of the reasonableness and popular support of the regime to the astonishment of their editors back home. The BBC had a view of world and domestic events, even as it strove to be impartial, and this remains one of the paradoxes of its editorial existence. From time to time it would cull its foreign correspondents, or replace them when they retired. Michael Elkins had been a great friend to Israel as I was often told when I went there. Too great a friend, perhaps, his successors tended to be more critical of Israeli policies. Mark Tully, the BBC's India Correspondent had lived in Delhi for years and was widely thought to have gone native – he had been known to describe the caste system in sympathetic terms – as a way of ensuring that everyone had a 'place' within society even if it was a lowly one. He felt that this was preferable to having no place at all. But the liberal internationalism espoused by the BBC could only see the caste system as a social evil, and for this and other reasons he was eventually replaced by a correspondent with a wider brief and a stance that was thought to be more 'objective'.

The standpoint from which the BBC offers its news, current affairs and documentary programmes shifts a bit from decade to decade. It is not easy to articulate exactly what its liberal ethos entails. There was a debate recently over what to call ISIS. The BBC opted for 'so-called Islamic State' in preference to the Prime Minister's insistence on *Daesh*. The BBC claimed that *Daesh* was insulting and that to use the term skewered its requirement to be objective.

The BBC was in the forefront of the multi-culturalism that became social orthodoxy towards the end of the 1970s. Since that time Britain has followed other English speaking nations such as Canada in recognising the rights of diverse groups, including racial, religious or cultural groups to retain and promote their own customs under a single national administration. Essentially it supports equality of recognition even when this implies diversity in practice. The tolerance of some aspects of Sharia law in settling marital issues within Islam is thus contained within the provisions of British law. In theory it looks like a win win arrangement. But of course in practice it does not always work out that way and prominent voices have suggested that the system is broken. The liberalism behind it is simply undermined by some of the practices and values that it seeks to recognise. It sets inclusion and diversity at war with one another.

Many voices are now claiming that multi-culturalism has failed. Its aim to make sense of cultural diversity has led to ghettoization. It has left large numbers of women disadvantaged, without language and thus without access to wider society and its opportunities. At the same time it has enabled those who were already alienated by the fact and speed of immigration to blame the migrants; and spread the view that particular groups, most notably Muslims, hold values that are alien to British values.

So we find ourselves now in the middle of a debate about British values.

On the 799th anniversary of Magna Carta in 2014 David Cameron attempted to define British values as 'a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law' – these, he said, were as British as the union flag, football and fish and chips. He made a passing reference to the history and traditions that anchors these values and a smaller reference to the role of churches and faith communities in keeping them in currency. But history and faith were played down.

Meanwhile secular and humanist voices suggest that all religious imput into the values debate is tainted, and only a thoroughly neutral approach can enable the assimilation without which there can be no security. It has become commonplace for those opposed to religion to claim it as a primary source of social unrest, hatred and war. We should rejoice, say an increasing number of columnists and opinion formers, that people are turning away from religion. And this appears to be true. Recent research by the sociologist Linda Woodhead finds that the number of people claiming to have no religion has increased dramatically in recent decades. Of course this does not mean that all those who now claim to have no religion are necessarily secularists or humanists, or would recognise themselves as such. But the belief appears to be growing that equality and inclusion can only be established on the basis of a secular neutrality in which diversity of belief and practice is relegated to the private sphere.

Yet the evidence suggests that secular neutrality is not the answer. If our values, shorn of history and religion as presented by the Prime Minister, seem rather thin, the secular approach by our nearest neighbour, France, produces a value system that is even thinner. France requires all to regard themselves as citizens first. Religion and non-French culture belong behind the closed door. But when citizenship does not free you from the ghetto, you can see why identity might be sought by a return to a faith which the state can neither welcome nor understand. If Islamic dress is not acceptable in public then the message a Muslim woman receives is that she is not acceptable. When Francois Hollande said at the memorial ceremony after the Paris bombings that we should counter the threats of ISIS and others by having more pop concerts and football matches I found myself thinking this simply will not do. A culture which is in denial about its religious roots and does not value those roots as a source of generous tolerance will have little to offer those whose identity is forged by faith.

So I do not see any future in the attempts to separate public and private; secular neutrality from private allegiance. For better or worse we have a society which is made up of diverse elements which are having to negotiate for a space and equality which cannot be taken for granted.

I want to return at this point to the experience of the the Church of England. It has been claimed that the Church of England is 'a failed monopoly'. I think this is a good description. In its foundation it attempted to be the Godward face of society, punishing and excluding those who did not conform. But as its failure has become more manifest over the centuries - as the excluded came to be included – so the national church has had to change its attitudes and learn from its experiences. The uncomfortable reality of having small minorities who tolerate its existence only in so far it accommodates them puts the Church of England in a unique position. In a speech in 2012 her Majesty the Queen said,

'The Church of England's role is not to defend Anglicanism. Instead the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country…..gently and assuredly the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and for those of no faith to live freely'.

That claim was not entirely accepted by the Woolf Commission into Belief which published its report last year which repeated a number of tired clichés about Anglican elitism and exclusivity. But others would accept the Queen's comment and point to the sometimes heroic work of clergy in inner city areas to be brokers of peace and forgers of community across racial, ethnic and religious barriers. Through the experience of its brokenness the Church of England is evolving, I believe, a wisdom about balancing diversity and inclusivity which sets it apart from those who would polarise the arguments to the point of civil unrest, or who would repress religious expression in the interests of secular conformity. The Church lives with those who are always threatening to leave. It lives with those who want it to be more inclusive than it is, or perhaps, can be.

In conclusion I want to draw out a few points from this experience which might suggest how we reflect on the problems of inclusion that are likely to intensify in the coming years.

First, the Church of England took a long time and many failures to establish itself as a generally benign spiritual and moral presence in society and it remains open to public scrutiny and dissent. It may be still be the established Church, but, in a phrase from the pastoral theologian Wesley Carr, it is a 'weak establishment'. That may not mean much, but at least it means it is not oppressing anybody anymore.

Second, the Church of England is inclusive in that it remains open to anyone living within its parish boundaries to seek baptism or the ministry of its minsters. Many of its places of worship are accessible on a daily basis. It represents a non exclusive presence which does not command, but permits those within and without to make use of it as they will.

Third, the Church of England is not a warm Church. There are warm congregations but the canopy of the Church of England is both spacious and draughty. You are bound to meet people you profoundly disagree with, views and practices that are profoundly disagreeable, even 'repugnant to the Word of God'. And there is not much you can do about it. The consequence of this is that this is a Church in which no one feels completely at home. All are, at the same time, insider and outsiders.

Fourth, it is not tidy. The price of inclusion is a lack of theological, pastoral and moral coherence. This is a problem, since nobody knows exactly what the Church of England believes or teaches. But it may also be a virtue.

If I translate these four features of Church of England life into our debate about inclusion I would suggest that first, we learn the virtue of patience. It is going to take a long time to discover how best to accommodate the need to be truly inclusive while honouring diversity.

Second, we cannot push people into availing themselves of opportunity. There may be cultural silos, but we must never give up hope for them, never stop the invitation to belong.

Third, we must accept that public society is not a warm space, but a cool one. People must learn to behave with a degree of reserve, politeness, tact. The English are quite good at some of that.

Fourth, we must accept a degree of irrationality and about the way society hangs together. This is not the irrationality of unearned privilege, it is the irrationality that comes from permitting and requiring different value systems to accommodate each other with a degree of generosity.

And on that note of generosity I will end. We have been embarked for most of my lifetime on a social experiment which is full of dangers and difficulties. Yet we inherit a spiritual and cultural tradition which has abandoned the attempt to enforce religious conformity, and increasingly is finding the resources to welcome the stranger and even to see in the unfamiliar the hidden face of Jesus Christ. We have a media corporation which still adheres to values of inclusivity and diversity which it has learned with at least some of the particular nuances of the Christian faith.

I would like to think that hope is what will sustain us as we continue to work out what this means for our common future.