

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CEEC'S POSITION ON POST-LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

Disinformation is one of the great enemies of our time. Whether intentional or accidental, it undermines good discussion, partnership and mutual flourishing. We see it in the political world, on social media and even in the Church of England! So it's good when people ask questions that enable us to clarify, to confirm and to challenge what we believe to be myths.

In recent weeks, a number of people have asked questions on various social media platforms about CEEC's position. So here is a very brief overview.

CEEK'S PRIMARY HOPE AND PRAYER

The key thing to hear is that CEEC believes the current doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England around issues of human sexuality reflect the truths of the Bible as understood across centuries and continents. CEEC believes them to be good for the flourishing of society and each and every individual.

And so the primary hope and prayer of CEEC as we move towards the end of the LLF process is that the House of Bishops will bring to General Synod a proposal to reaffirm the doctrine and liturgy we have inherited and to recommit ourselves as a church to upholding it. If this is the case, then any further talk of differentiation will not be on the lips of CEEC.

WHAT IF THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS PURSUES CHANGE?

However, if the House of Bishops proposes changes going forwards of either a doctrinal, liturgical or practical manner, CEEC will be duty-bound to contend against anything that is not supported in scripture. If this contending is effective, and any proposals dismissed, then once again there may be no need to talk of differentiation.

However, if the House of Bishops proposes and successfully navigates change through the General Synod (or some other route?) that cannot be supported from scripture, then differentiation will become an immediate necessity as many evangelicals would find it difficult to be part of a church that affirms relationships that scripture defines as outside of God's plan for human flourishing.

It is possible that any proposed changes would come with a conscience 'get out' clause. However, if clergy have to actively decline an invitation to conduct an affirmation, celebration or blessing of a same-sex partnership, they are likely to receive substantial negative attention on social media and in their local communities. It is also likely that the pipeline for the recruitment of ordinands and appointment of clergy will marginalise those unable to indicate an 'affirming' position. For orthodox bishops, they may find themselves having to sanction and support decisions and actions that go against their conscience. And in every PCC that has to hold a discussion in the light of a request for a service of affirmation or blessing of a relationship outside of heterosexual marriage, change without differentiation will be a recipe for pain and division.

VARIOUS FORMS OF DIFFERENTIATION

If differentiation were needed, then it could be provided in different forms and at different levels. An informal provision (e.g. the formation of a 'society') is attractive in that it is easy to set up, but not so helpful in that it carries no structural weight/influence to secure orthodoxy going forward.

The employment of some form of episcopal oversight (either the same as or different to the system of 'flying bishops' with which we are familiar) might provide a greater level of security if provision was mandatory rather than discretionary on request – though the disadvantage is that clergy and

parishes will still have to choose to opt into orthodoxy, and the actual making of this decision may cause significant damage and split with evangelical churches.

A SECURE FUTURE FOR ORTHODOX LIFE AND WITNESS

The highest 'form' of differentiation would involve the rearrangement of episcopal oversight, dioceses and provinces. As such, this would be an enormous exercise. However, it would thereby provide the level of security that is needed for orthodoxy to flourish permanently within the Church of England. And if this was done through the provision of a new province in which change could be pursued (a so called 'third province for liberals') then the vast majority of the Anglican Communion would be able to remain in fellowship with Canterbury.

Other models of provincial differentiation include allowing the two existing provinces of Canterbury and York to hold varying positions around sexual ethics (with clergy/churches choosing which they belong to), and the creation of a new provinces for orthodoxy. This latter proposal could be problematic for the Anglican Communion as a whole given that the majority view of the Communion remains orthodox.

For further information on the thinking of CEEC please go to our website (www.ceec.info) where there are resources that offer more detail.