

Spirit and Culture at the Foot of the Cross'

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba address to USPG Conference 2010

'Witnessing to Christ Today' is the theme of our conference. I want to begin by addressing this from the perspective of mission realities for Southern African Anglicans across our hugely diverse Province. In particular I want to consider the difficult issues of gospel, culture, and diversity. I shall then offer some reflections on the wider implications for the whole Anglican Communion, during which I shall say something about that troublesome word, indaba, which we seem to have inflicted upon the rest of the world!

The Call to Witness and Mission

Let me begin with words of Jesus which commission his followers to witness and to mission. As Luke's gospel records, Jesus, at his ascension, tells his disciples to remain in Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He then says to them 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:4,8).

Being witnesses to Jesus Christ is the essential heart of mission. Therefore we proclaim the eternal Second person of the Trinity incarnate at Bethlehem. He is the Son of God in a unique way: crucified for the sins of the world; risen and ascended; of whom St Peter said 'there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

Yet this is not only a Christo-centric, a Jesus-centred, undertaking. Both Father and Spirit are intimately involved. The Father sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, and it is this that makes witness and mission truly possible. The nature of this empowering for the tasks God gives us, is at the heart of what I want to talk about today.

Power in the Spirit

The Greek word for 'power' is *dunamis*, from which we derive the word dynamite. Yet it is not just about brute strength. *Dunamis* is about the ability to achieve. In ancient Greece this covered everything from politics to battle, from philosophical and spiritual realms to medicine. In the New Testament, *dunamis* conveys the power, the capacity, that enables the fulfilment of God's purposes. The prophet Isaiah – in verses often used at confirmations and ordinations – speaks of the 7-fold Spirit, of wisdom and understanding (or discernment), of counsel and might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Is 11:2). Alongside 'might' we are given a great range of other abilities.

This should give us confidence and encouragement in our task of mission and witness. For God's promise is to empower and equip us, not with brute force and naked power, but with far broader – and perhaps more subtle – gifts for proclaiming the gospel 'to the ends of the earth', and giving it true and authentic expression in ways that genuinely communicate, in whatever contexts we may find ourselves. It seems to me that the gifts of wisdom and understanding and discernment are of vital importance, first, in engaging with the various cultures of our world, and second, in holding on to one another as we do so.

Gospel and Culture

No-one, nowhere, is without culture. All of us find ourselves in cultures of one sort or another, and the gospel has a message of both judgement and hope for each one. It is only dependence on the Spirit's guiding that will enable us to hold each up to the searing light of Christ, and to know what it is we may affirm, and what we must challenge.

Even where there is much to affirm, we will generally want to do this through a recontextualisation within the perspectives of life in Christ. Or, to put this in the language of Scripture, we will want to ensure it is transferred from the dominion of darkness, to the kingdom of light (Col 1:13), and that it is understood from within that perspective of light and life. What I mean is that we must make clear that we uphold what is good and godly, for reasons that are good and godly. Often we may not want to affirm the assumptions and motives behind practices of contemporary societies, even though we may support the practices themselves.

It can be helpful to speak of 'baptizing culture'. In doing so, we recollect that baptism means being united with Christ through dying to the old life and being reborn in him. So even where our faith finds expression in ways that align with surrounding cultures, we expect there to be a radical dying to the underlying assumptions of that culture and a rebirth into new life where Jesus, and Christ-likeness, reign.

I find baptism a helpful touchstone as I try to discern what the Spirit is saying to the cultures in which I find myself pursuing God's mission. And, in Southern Africa, I certainly find myself in a lot of cultures! South Africa alone has 11 official languages, each with varying cultures, alongside myriad other indigenous and immigrant communities. We also have vast socio-economic diversity that increasingly transcends differences of race: from opulent suburbs to impoverished shanty towns; from wealthy traditional rural leaders to near-destitute peasant farmers. And we are still wrestling with the transition to a multicultural, pluralist, democracy.

Our Province also includes Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland – from ancient kingdoms to new democracies (some, post-civil war). Among them are some of the world's highest child mortality rates and lowest life expectancies (whether from HIV and AIDS or malaria). We also have two of the most remote inhabited islands on the planet – St Helena and Tristan da Cunha.

We are in many ways a global microcosm. How we heed God's call to mission and witness, appropriately expressed across such a breadth of people and circumstances, while still holding together, certainly requires all the wisdom, understanding and discernment that the Holy Spirit offers us! And questions of gospel and culture are often where this is most acutely felt.

I was conscious of this last month, when I was in the Diocese of Zululand for the 140th anniversary of their foundation. This was, of course, by Victorian English gentlemen, operating in a colonialist context; and – as you mentioned in your pastoral letter last week, Bishop Katharine – colonial missionary expansion tended to be ignorant and insensitive in imposing its own uniform standards and practices on the cultures it encountered. But there is hope! Zululand was the first Southern African Diocese to have a black diocesan Bishop – whose name, appropriately enough, was Alphaeus Zulu. That was in 1960. Our current Bishop is of Italian descent, married a Zulu lady, and speaks fluent isiZulu. Well, this is perhaps a rather radical way of combining European and African heritages!

Nonetheless we find there are still many areas where practices rooted in the English Victorian church come up against African tradition, and knowing how we should respond is not always easy.

Gospel, Culture and Marriage

Let me take the example of marriage and family life. This can be one of the most central, and problematic, areas within parish ministry and mission. We may think we know what we mean by marriage, but the word embraces a huge range of practices. In Scripture we find everything from strategic tribal alliances to individuals falling in love at first sight; from Old Testament polygamy to the New Testament ideal of faithful lifelong monogamy. The church, of course, upholds faithful lifelong monogamy between a man and a woman. But the cultures and practices around this differ hugely within the communities of our Province.

I am a from the Bapedi people, and my wife is UMxhosa, and our extended families often have different views on how we ought to live! You can imagine that the church's marriage preparation classes in different parts of our Province have to tackle very different questions, and all need to be held up to the light of the gospel. What is the appropriate influence of parents and wider families? What is our attitude to paying lobola or traditional dowry? Does the church's teaching reflect the remarks with which St Paul, writing to the Ephesians, prefaces his comments on the roles of husbands and wives, 'Submit to one another, out of reverence of Christ' (Eph 5:22), or are we allowing Victorian patriarchal views to compound those of African cultures?

And what about our mission where polygamy is seen as a mark of a man's success? South Africa's current President is polygamous, as is the King of Swaziland, and non-heads of state like the Zulu king, and many of their subjects. South African legislation also recognises polygamous Muslim marriages. From 1888 to 1988 Lambeth Conferences concluded that a polygamist who wants to become Anglican must not marry further wives, but also must not put away current additional wives and children, because of the social deprivation they would suffer.

But other issues still arise. Should there be different treatment of subsequent wives as compared to first wives, or to women in monogamous marriages, or, indeed to unmarried mothers? Are we clear about our reasons? And are we ensuring we do not encourage communities to stigmatise children who, through no fault of their own, are born to parents who don't fit into tidy categories of marriage – particularly the categories of the Victorians!

These issues can become very stark, and the source of longstanding disputes within parishes! We must respond in ways that not only provide 'answers', but, more importantly, help individuals and communities to grow in knowledge and love of God; in maturity of faith; and in sharing this faith, this godly love, with others.

We must sit with Scripture before us. We must bring to bear all that we have learnt from two millennia of tradition, the history of God at work among his people and in his church. And – being Anglicans, and wedded to the primacy of Scripture, interpreted through tradition and reason! – we must then use all the skills that reasoning offers. This is the reasoning of the wisdom, understanding, discernment by which the Holy Spirit helps us find Christ-shaped, redemptive and life-giving answers. These answers may appear different on the surface, but on a deeper level, they will be coherent with each other and with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the vital point – Jesus Christ is the standard for discerning the path between authentic cultural expression and flawed syncretism; between ensuring we do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), and yet nonetheless properly testing what we believe may be the Spirit’s leading. As St John writes in his first letter, we recognise the Spirit in the confession of Jesus Christ incarnate (1 Jn 4:1-2). Orthodox Christology, orthodox life in the Spirit, and orthodox praxis, all go together, whatever the cultures we find ourselves in – and our ability to recognise this in one another is what holds us together in our different expressions of gospel truth.

This is a profound truth. It is fundamental in helping us discern between acceptable diversity, and unacceptable deviation. It is what helps us in our vocation to ‘make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ when we wrestle with the really difficult questions (Eph 4:3).

So let me now turn to the ‘really difficult question’ of the Anglican Communion – our differences over human sexuality and how we handle them.

An Anglican Microcosm

Southern Africa is not only a global microcosm in socio-economic, political and geographical terms. Our Province is also something of a microcosm of the Anglican Communion. Alongside huge diversities in race, language and culture, we are high church and low church; those who call themselves Anglo-Catholics and ‘Afro-Catholics’ and Evangelicals; and those whose passion is Christ’s ‘good news for the poor’ pursued through political and social justice alongside evangelistic outreach.

While geographically, and in other ways besides, we are part of the Global South, that is not the whole story. We do take our membership of the Global South very seriously, and fully share the mission priorities identified in April’s Fourth Anglican Global South to South Encounter. We face the same concerns over poverty, hunger and sickness, and the breadth of human consequences of injustice and failure in our economic systems. We too are challenged by crime, violence, corruption, and the weaknesses – even instabilities – of our political life; and by the problems and threats of natural disasters, climate change and ecological fragility. Alongside the rest of the Global South, we too are committed to prioritising the pastoral needs of the laity, especially professionals, women and young people, and resourcing them for witnessing to our faith, as so many do, at the cutting edges of mission.

But we are not typical of the Global South. We also have many congregations that are wealthy and westernised, people who are much more typical of the Global North – and, let me say also, with all the breadth of churchmanship that is found in the North!

Nonetheless, we still hold together – and are managing to do so over human sexuality.

It is well-known that within our Province, and within our Synod of Bishops itself, one can find pretty much the whole range of views on human sexuality that are found within the global Anglican family. This ranges from seeing Mary Glasspool’s longstanding lesbian relationship as no impediment to her suitability for consecration, through to membership of the Fellowship of Confession Anglicans.

This is a live issue within our Province also, since South Africa now allows for civil partnerships between people of the same gender. In response, and though we are by no means of a single mind, we continue to affirm that the marriage of Christians is between a man and a woman, and that

clergy who are not married should be celibate; and we do not allow clergy to officiate at civil unions or to bless them.

We are also considering pastoral guidelines for the consequences and questions that civil partnerships raise for ministry within our parishes. Do we welcome people in such partnerships in our congregations? Should their children attend Sunday School? What if they seek baptism for their children? What if those children in their teens seek baptism and confirmation for themselves? And what do we say to the parents of those who enter civil unions, who may be overwhelmed by confusion and conflicting emotions?

These questions also prompt us to think more deeply about the essence of marriage. It is not solely the legitimating of genital acts, but sometimes our discussions of polygamy and of same sex relationships seem to reduce it to little more than this. Therefore all this is no light or easy matter to us.

When we meet – as, for example, the Bishops do twice yearly – we feel sharp, sharp, pains and great distress when, as inevitably is the case, we are called to consider developments around these issues. But we are united in this: that none of us feels called to turn to another and say ‘I no longer consider you a Christian, a brother in Christ, a member of the body of Christ’. None of us says ‘I am no longer in communion with you.’

The sharing of our pain has in fact left us feeling more closely bound to one another. Reflecting on this has brought me to conclude that, it is as if we see the marks of the living Christ, who is also the suffering Christ, in one another and in our common life, as we await together the power of the resurrection within our painful circumstances.

Now, it is true that in the past, the Church in Southern Africa, by the grace of God, held together against all odds, under the pressures of apartheid. To some degree, shared opposition to apartheid helped forge a common identity. Even so, it was a very hard won unity, since there was little agreement about how best to oppose apartheid: about sanctions or the armed struggle or army chaplains. But a shared enemy – and one now in the past – is not a reliable foundation for going forward together. Today we are having to revisit the question of common identity, vision and mission, expressed authentically in the diversity of our contexts. This we shall do at Provincial Synod in September.

Yet it is not skilful use of vision-building techniques that truly holds us together. Rather it is God at work among us, calling us together as the body of Christ, to share in mission, in witness, for the sake of God’s broken and hurting world.

Jesus Christ, his Crucifixion and Resurrection

Sometimes it seems to me that God does this by working through, rather than in spite of, our own brokenness and pain. In this we find two important messages for the world. First, the way God deals with us, his people, demonstrates how he desires to deal with the world around us. Second, our readiness – or otherwise – to receive his ministering to us, can also be a powerful testimony – for good or ill – to the on-looking world.

The heart of God's ministering is through the Spirit making real to us our baptism: that is, our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. The question before the Anglican Communion is whether we really are prepared fully to participate in Christ's death and resurrection in this way.

What this might mean was brought home to me vividly in April, which saw the twentieth anniversary of the letter-bombing of Fr Michael Lapsley SSM by the agents of the apartheid regime. Some of you may know his story. He lost one eye and both hands. To watch him preside at the Eucharist, holding the bread between articulated metal claws as he repeats Christ's words 'This is my body, broken for you' is to be challenged to a deeper appreciation of the cross, and of its cost, and what it means to share in it, without which we cannot share in resurrection.

But resurrection comes. Fr Michael invited us to a service of thanksgiving: not only that his life was spared; but that out of the great evil perpetrated against him, God by his grace is bringing a far greater and more lasting good. For Fr Michael set up and runs the Institute for the Healing of Memories which conducts significant work among victims of violence and torture all around the world. As he says himself, this 'is not to say that I will not always grieve what I've lost ... Yet I believe I've gained through this experience. I realise that I can be more of a priest with no hands than with two hands.' Fr Michael is a living embodiment that walking the path of Jesus Christ opens the possibility for God to take all that is destructive or broken, and transform and transfigure it, and bring a good that is far greater than what went before.

This is the redemption that we seek for our Communion. Therefore we must go forward, unafraid to bear our pain honestly as we keep journeying with Christ, and seeking his mind for us at each step of the way. This is our experience in Southern Africa. Looking back, we see God's grace in the painful struggle against apartheid, that not only threatened to divide the church, but was for many a life and death matter. Against those experiences we find it hard to understand how human sexuality has become such a touchstone of faith, and mark of fellowship or enmity within the Anglican Communion.

Yet today, especially in what I have experienced within our Synod of Bishops, what counts is not the past we shared in adversity; but rather it is the continuing sensing of Christ in and among us, in the pain of our divisions, which holds us together, through our suffering – confident in the resurrection. And so we dare to join together in the prayer of St Paul, who said 'I want to know Christ, and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in death if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead' (Phil 3:10,11).

Another Anglican Microcosm

I would even go so far as to say we see parallels between ourselves as a Synod, and Archbishop Rowan Williams himself. In the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as a focus of unity for the whole Communion – a role not of his choosing, but a heart-rending gift of the Communion as we constitute ourselves – Archbishop Rowan is in some senses called to bear the strains of the whole worldwide Communion within himself. We can only imagine, from our own experiences, the considerable personal cost this is to him, as he continues to 'hold on' as long as this call to do so is laid upon him. We in Southern Africa carry him in our heartfelt prayers, as he too awaits the outworking of resurrection in our suffering.

All this goes back to what I said earlier about Jesus being our standard. If in our Synod of Bishops we did not see Christ in one another – and if we did not agree on the central issues of who Jesus is and of the salvation that he brings – it would be another matter. But we do. And so our differing views on human sexuality therefore take second place alongside the strength of this overpowering conviction of Christ among us. As long as we know unity in Christ in this way, human sexuality is not, and cannot be, a church dividing issue.

This is why our Synod of Bishops said last September ‘we remain committed to upholding the bonds of unity with one another, as we journey together through the difficult questions that confront the worldwide Anglican Communion. Differences of opinion are inevitable, schism is not.’ Therefore our heartfelt prayer is that the Anglican Communion will also find ways of continuing to journey, even in pain, together – sharing in both suffering and resurrection hope.

Renewal in the Spirit

For us, keeping talking together, and, more importantly, worshipping together, reading Scripture together, praying together – in shared openness and vulnerability to God and to each other – has been the key to continuing to see Christ in one another. The possibility of continuing to share fellowship in Christ is the strength of the proposals of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Pentecost letter, ‘Renewal in the Spirit’. Though these acknowledge the brokenness in our common life, and our damaged relationships – especially in our engagement with the wider ecumenical world – they nonetheless exclude no-one from our common counsels and our common life.

I firmly believe this is how it should be. Exclusion, severing ties and breaking contact can never be the best way forward. Surely we can never give up on each other – for God never gives up on any of us. This is assuredly the message of the penitent thief on the cross. To our last breath, God holds the door open to us – as individuals, and together as his people.

Archbishop Rowan speaks of us as not having yet fully received the Pentecost gift of mutual understanding for common mission. The Spirit’s gift of understanding is not only about each of us grasping God’s call on our own lives, it is also about recognising God at work in one another in our authentic mission work in differing contexts.

St Paul refers to this in writing in Chapter 12 of his First Letter to the Corinthians, about what it is to be the body of Christ. Considerable legitimate diversity under Christ is to be expected. ‘There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone’ (1 Cor 12:4-6). But this diversity can be hard to handle, as St Paul goes on to illustrate. The eye cannot comprehend what it is for the ear to hear, nor can the ear comprehend sight – but the one Spirit holds the different parts together, and enables them to work in harmony.

It is as if the breath of the Spirit has the capacity to translate the gospel of the Word made flesh, not only into the different languages of the first day of Pentecost, and all the languages of our twenty-first century world; the Spirit can also translate into every culture of our world – and between the inculturation of the gospel in different cultures. So, when we cannot understand each other, we must be sure that we have listened carefully to the still small voice of the Spirit. Is the Spirit speaking

to each of us? Can we recognise the presence of Christ, which is the touchstone, the standard, of the true Spirit of God?

I am convinced that in our current situation within the Communion neither have we done, nor are we continuing to do, enough of this sort of listening to one another. We do not understand one another and one another's contexts well enough, and we are not sufficiently sensitive to one another in the way we act. Autonomy has gone too far. I do not mean that we should seek a greater uniformity – I hope it is clear I am saying nothing of the sort. But we risk acting in ways that are so independent of one another that it becomes hard for us, and for outsiders, to recognise either a committed interdependent mutuality or a common Christian, Anglican, DNA running through our appropriately contextualised and differentiated ways of being.

Bishop Katharine, what I am going to say next is painful to me, and I fear it may also be to you – but I would rather say it to your face, than behind your back. And I shall be ready to hear from you also, for I cannot preach listening without doing listening. It sometimes seems to me that, though many have failed to listen adequately to the Spirit at work within The Episcopal Church, at the same time within your Province there has not been enough listening to the rest of the Anglican Communion. I had hoped that those of your Bishops who were at the Lambeth Conference would have grasped how sore and tender our common life is. I had hoped that even those who, after long reflection, are convinced that there is a case for the consecration of individuals in same sex partnerships, might nonetheless have seen how unhelpful it would be to the rest of us, for you to proceed as you have done.

There are times when it seems that your Province, or some within it, despite voicing concern for the rest of us, can nonetheless act in ways that communicate a measure of uncaring at the consequent difficulties for us. And such apparent lack of care for us increases the distress we feel. Much as we understand that you are in all sincerity attempting to discern the best way forward within your own mission context, the plea is: be sensitive to the rest of who are still drinking spiritual milk and are not yet eating solids.

Let me immediately add that, if there were certain others here, I would speak to them equally frankly. Cross border visitations and other moratoria violations have undermined not only your polity, but wider attempts to handle disagreements in a godly way before the face of the watching world. I will also add that, outside the scope of the moratoria, there are too many other shameful and painful ways that 'gracious restraint' has not been exercised by various different individuals and groups from all manner of perspectives. These too destructively exacerbate our attempts to live truly as a Communion, and contribute to the way that disagreements over human sexuality and its handling have come to dominate the life of the Anglican Communion to a disproportionate and debilitating extent. When I am interviewed, when I participate in radio phone-ins, no matter what the ostensible topic, again and again I find myself derailed by questions on this. I have to say this undermines our witness; dissipates energies that ought to be spent on the true priorities of mission; and distorts the focus and agenda of the Communion's common life to an increasingly detrimental degree.

In these circumstances, I find myself returning to the words of St Paul, when he warned the Corinthians that not everything that is lawful is necessarily helpful (1 Cor 6:12). St Paul writes that even when we believe our understandings, our actions, to be justifiable and correct, we can – and

sometimes should – choose not to pursue them, while that is to the greater benefit of the whole body of Christ. Yet this runs so counter to so much of today's culture, in which we are far more conscious of our so-called rights, and our freedom to exercise them to the full.

So now I want to return, for the final section of my reflections, to the question of how the Spirit helps us critique, and baptise, culture.

Gospel Light on Cultural Practices of Handling Difference

Earlier today I talked

- about how all our various cultures must be open to both the judgement and the hope which the gospel brings;
- about how some cultural practices may more easily be aligned with the gospel than others;
- and about how nonetheless, all need to be 'baptised' and find new life within the perspectives of Jesus, his incarnation, cross and resurrection.

Let me now apply these principles to how we handle difference, and set limits of acceptable diversity, within our Communion.

I want to suggest that we have not adequately grasped how following the practices of parliaments and international organisations can exacerbate polarisation, adversarial attitudes, and 'winner versus loser' mindsets. What do I mean? When we propose motions, people are generally invited to speak 'for' and 'against'. Of course, in debate people can range more widely and offer amendments; but a prior shape is imposed on our discourse both by the terms of the motion itself, and by our need to vote, yes or no – with the outcome being 'success or defeat'.

Now, I am not saying we should completely stop doing this. But we should be far more aware of how polarising and oppositional such practices are; and how all of this feeds destructive attitudes of competitiveness, dominance and power, over and against one another, that then run through our common life.

Furthermore, I hope it is not too cynical to say it sometimes seems that the popularity of successive drafts of the Covenant has ebbed and flowed, among various groups, in ways that correlate closely with their expectation of whether a particular text can be used to deliver their preferred outcomes around human sexuality – and not because it will best help us all live the far broader life of witness and mission to which God calls us. Of course, no text will be perfect, because we are not perfect, but I think what we have is 'good enough for now'. It is now up to us to trust God and trust each other, and cooperate in making it work well. Remember, we do have the opportunity to amend and improve it. And it does not exist in isolation, but sits alongside the Instruments of Communion with all their diffused responsibilities and structures that help shape our decisions. I do not see it as intended to centralise power or impose uniformity; and these should not be our goals, either.

When I read my Bible, competitiveness, dominance, power, polarisation and adversarial attitudes are not what I think of first when St Paul writes that 'we have the mind of Christ' when it comes to making spiritual judgements (1 Cor 2:16). I'm also conscious of our Godhead as Trinity being an

amazing example of mutually enhancing diversity in unity – rather than difference becoming the first step to oppositional thinking.

Faced with all this, my reason for introducing the concept of Indaba into the Anglican Communion (and yes, I was the guilty party on the Lambeth Design Group!) was to help us reconnect with more gospel-shaped approaches, that better reflect theologies around the work of the Spirit, and the body of Christ. I believe it can powerfully enhance our traditional ways of doing business.

Indaba

Indaba is not about trying to make everyone into Amazulu, nor about transplanting elements from one culture into a completely foreign and inappropriate context. I also know that Indaba is far from perfect – it is not always conducted inclusively, and it can be abused by leaders intent on getting their own way. But at its best, there is a great deal that is readily susceptible to the sort of ‘baptism’ of which I spoke earlier. Let me explain:

- Scripture speaks of us living as the Body of Christ, as one, but with many different members (1 Cor 12:12).
- Indaba calls community members together to share news of developments or discuss concerns that affect the life of the community or individuals within it.
- Scripture says that God has so arranged the body that the members may have ‘the same care for one another’ (1 Cor 12:25).
- Indaba is predicated upon a strong sense of shared well-being, experienced on a reciprocal and mutually supportive basis.
- Scripture says that when one part of the body suffers, ‘all suffer with it’ (1 Cor 12:26).
- Indaba necessarily entails a degree of acknowledged interdependence, even vulnerability, towards one another.
- Scripture says that the members of the body that are ‘weaker are indispensable’ (1 Cor 12:22).
- Indaba says leaders must work for the well-being of the entire community, especially those in greatest need, and the ‘haves’ must provide for the ‘have nots’.
- Scripture says that the less respectable should be treated with greater respect (1 Cor 12:23).
- Indaba promotes an egalitarian ethos, in which everyone should be encouraged to grow into a productive and contributing member of the community.
- Scripture says that to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12:7).
- Indaba says debate is conducted through everyone being allowed to have their say, contributing their own perspective, so that the fullest picture can be drawn, and from it an outcome that is as consensual, and as ‘win-win’ as possible, can emerge.

- Scripture says that, notwithstanding all this diversity, when living as God intends, there need not, there should not, be dissension (1 Cor 12:25).

So, I hope you can see why I felt that there was much within Indaba that can help us – as the best of a cultural practice, appropriately baptised. Part of such baptism is the contextualisation within the kingdom of God. For Christians, it is a matter of relating and listening not just to one another, but individually and together to the empowering Spirit – the Spirit of wisdom, understanding and discernment. Perhaps a similar sort of listening was what happened at the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15, after which the apostles and elders wrote to the Gentile believers ‘it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...’ (Acts 15:28). Let me add one further point.

Indaba is not an interminable talking shop. Indaba can and does impose sanctions, including the ultimate sanction of expulsion, on those who transgress the life of the community – but only after every other possible option is fully explored.

I hope you will see why I have drawn on indaba in my search for a more gospel-shaped space, a safer environment, for bringing and sharing concerns and differences, which we can use alongside the more adversarial cultures of debate which we have inherited and adopted, perhaps too unthinkingly. Engaging this way will help us get to that deeper level of mutual engagement, opening ourselves to recognise Christ at work within us, meeting in our pain at the foot of his cross, as we await the redemption of his resurrection hope.

And for this reason, the Continuing Indaba, together with the Bible in the Life of the Church project, and other shared Anglican initiatives must continue. This is the way to help us re-find one another, within the body of Christ to which we are called, and in which we are empowered, each as we need to be, by the Spirit, for our life of witness and mission.

May God bless us as we seek faithfully to follow his calling, and may he make us a blessing to others – for the building of his kingdom, and for the glory of his holy name. Amen.