



Esgobaeth Llandaf Diocese of Llandaff

Lle Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Where Faith Matters

Contribution to Debate at the Governing Body: 5 September 2021

In L.P. Hartley's novel "The Go-Between", Leo, a thirteen-year-old boy, is traumatized by his innocent role as messenger between Marian, the wealthy daughter at the big house, and Ted Burgess, a local farmer, when they conduct an affair during the summer of 1900. Leo returns to the village some 50 years later and meets Marian's grandson and finds Marian living in a cottage on the estate. They are the only two surviving people who remember the events of that summer and the affair, and Marian persuades Leo to act as go-between once again, this time to assure her estranged grandson that there was nothing to be ashamed of in her relationship with Ted Burgess, of who he is the descendant. Marian says to Leo, who, because of his experience that year, has led a lonely life:

"Everyone should get married. You, too, Leo; you're all dried up... Tell him, Leo, tell him there's no spell or curse ... the only spell or curse is an unloving heart."

I cannot bring myself to believe in a God who would want to make us as we are and then curse us with an unloving heart simply because of whom we might chose to love. We were not meant to be alone; God does not want us to be "all dried up" and he certainly does not call us to a single or monastic life according to our sexuality. It was Saint John of the Cross who said that, at the end, God will judge us not on what we have achieved, but on how much we have loved.



Esgobaeth Llandaf Diocese of Llandaff

Lle Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Where Faith Matters

On a previous occasion, when I addressed the Governing Body on this subject, I quoted another author, Patrick Gale, from his television drama “Man in an Orange Shirt”, when he described a long-term gay relationship as being about “making toast and raking leaves”. It made me think about what such a relationship *is* all about – the simple everyday things of sharing a life together; the living day by day in the knowledge that there is someone who cares, I mean who *really* cares, about what you have done and what you have said and what you have thought; someone who provides the comfort of allowing you to feel safe; someone with whom you never have to weigh thoughts or measure words because you know that they will keep what is of value, and gently blow the rest away; someone who will laugh at your stories even when you have told them a thousand times; someone who will tell you how wonderful you are, even when you feel a total failure.

And so, I spoke of simple pleasures; of the events of an ordinary life; of moments shared; of the snatched minutes of time when no one else in the world exists because of the inexpressible joy of being in the company of that *one* other person; of the silence that is never threatening because, in any event, you are both thinking the same thing; a simple look; a smile; a touch; the things you both look forward to; the common memories of past events; hopes and fears and dreams. These are the things which people share. These are the things of which I spoke.

After that debate, someone in a conventional marriage said to me that I was too optimistic and that after 26 years it was simply no longer like that. I don’t know whether she remembers what she said to me that day; and she will certainly not be aware of how often I have thought of those words



Esgobaeth Llandaf Diocese of Llandaff

Lle Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Where Faith Matters

... and prayed for her. But I think that I would like to say now that, for me, after 35 years, it is, in fact, exactly like that ... and although life sometimes seems to throw everything it has at you, I would still say that every day is better than the one before.

I know that in a Christian life, each individual is supported in the work which they are called to do by the power of the Holy Spirit; and I would want to testify to that in my own ministry. But, as human beings we also need the support of a companion, a friend, a partner. If, during my life, I have ever been able to bring comfort to someone who is grieving, or facing surgery, or enduring sickness, or is dying; if I have ever been able to impart a sense of faith in the young or the curious; if I have ever been able to bring hope to the anxious or the world-weary; if I have ever made any valuable contribution to this Governing Body, or any of the other committees or bodies on which I have served; if I have ever brought joy into the life of anyone I have ever met – and I'm not entirely convinced that I have ever achieved any of these things – but, if I have, then it is simply because of the strength, support, encouragement and love I have received from the man with whom I have shared my life for all these years.

Thirty-five years ago, I was afraid; I was afraid of the Church simply because I loved someone and that love was reciprocated. Afraid. What did that say about the community whose purpose and function it was to share the love of Christ? I was not afraid of God, for I knew that if it was love, then the Lord wouldn't mind. But I was afraid of the Church: of being rejected; of being "found out". I do hope that we have moved on. I



Esgobaeth Llandaf Diocese of Llandaff

Lle Mae Ffydd Yn Cyfrif | Where Faith Matters

do hope that we *all* want a generous, welcoming and open Church which expresses the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for *all* his children.

I urge you to vote in favour of this bill. *Please* do not allow anyone who looks to the Church for comfort to be cursed with an unloving heart. Do not allow anyone else to be afraid. Don't force anyone else to be "all dried up".

Steven Kirk