

A RESPONSE TO THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF SYDNEY DONATING \$1 MILLION TO A POLITICAL COALITION PROMOTING AN ANTI SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AGENDA

It was a surprise to discover from the Archbishop's Presidential Address to Synod that the Anglican Diocese of Sydney has donated \$1 million to the Coalition for Marriage to promote the "no" campaign during the current government opinion poll on same-sex marriage. This is a case of politics and religion being 'hand in glove'; and an example of questionable governance and poor missional priorities in the diocese. My disagreement with this action is as follows.

First, the "no" position is not representative of all Sydney Anglicans. In a diocesan survey taken several years ago around 30% of lay people indicated that they were in favour of same sex marriage. The survey was unscientific, nevertheless it indicated a significant number of people have a different position to the Archbishop and other diocesan leaders. Moreover, in a church, it is one thing to encourage people to donate to a cause (either religious or political) but it is another thing to take funds that are there for the benefit of all and apply them to the interests of a majority at the expense of a minority.

Secondly, this was not a decision of the Synod of the Diocese, but rather the more exclusive and secretive Standing Committee. There was no wider consultation, it was not debated openly, and therefore no transparency in the decision-making process. It is therefore an example of poor governance. Furthermore, it could be construed that this is a questionable use of charitable trust funds for political purposes, which also suggests poor financial management and fiduciary duty. No doubt, the Synod will endorse the actions of the Standing Committee, but nevertheless the decision to make this donation in this way indicates that the governance of the diocese has not improved greatly since it lost half of its financial assets in the Global Financial Crisis.

Thirdly, this type of behaviour is more akin to a church of earlier era that sought to control political processes in concert with government. Indeed, it is the behaviour of 'Christendom', where the church believed that it had a duty to manage (or even control) society for the good of all. In Christendom, the bishops could get kings to come crawling to them, today it is the other way around. In this case, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney has chosen to align itself with the hard-right of politics and allows little room for dissent within its own ranks.

Finally, this type of action seems to demonstrate an obsession with the politics of the church rather than the mission of the church. It is a failed cause, as the church is currently 'on the nose' with the public because of its failure in dealing with child abuse, domestic violence, and its treatment of divorcees, LGBTI people and others with whom it disagrees. This action will further alienate the church from those who hold differing views to it, and especially young people. In this respect, the church is seen more to be a political player rather than a place of welcome, faith, hope and reconciliation for those who are in need.

Where are the priorities for the mission of the church – the support of the poor, homeless and refugees or the provision of meaningful worship, helpful teaching and pastoral care? As has been so often the case through history, when the church plays politics people get hurt. Furthermore, it makes little sense at a time when the church should be looking to recover the good-will of the community. I would argue that this is a time when we should be humbly persuading people rather than judging or condemning them. We are on the wrong side of grace.

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