

Articles by Andrew Goddard (in a personal capacity), April/May 2023, on www.psephizo.com
An earlier set of 3 articles from March focussed on General Synod and its aftermath are [here](#).

[I - Can we square the Living in Love and Faith circle?](#)

In his [recent critical profile](#) of Archbishop Justin Welby, Giles Fraser recalls [interviewing him in 2012](#) when he wrote of the then Bishop of Durham whose name was becoming prominent as a likely successor to Rowan Williams,

On the subject of women bishops he speaks of the need to square the circle, reconciling those who think it a theological necessity and those who think it a theological impossibility. How do you do this? “Well, you just look at the circle and say it’s a circle with sharp bits on it.” I laugh. So does he.

It increasingly appears that a similar “look...it’s a circle with sharp bits on it” approach is what has been attempted in the bishops’ response to Living in Love and Faith (on which [see Bishop Christopher Cocksworth’s reflection](#)). They are claiming to uphold the doctrine of marriage while introducing developments which until now (as in [the earlier proposals of GS2055](#) back in Jan 2017) have been held to be incompatible with it. In the couple of months since this geometrical novelty was introduced, however, despite the claims of some, more and more are realising that just as [mathematically](#) the possibility of squaring the circle was eventually disproved, the bishops’ proposals will likely prove impossible to implement.

There are three “sharp bits” which the bishops introduced in order to address the deep disagreements present among themselves and the wider church and to create the illusion of having squared the circle:

- An account of blessings
- An account of civil marriage and holy matrimony
- An ambiguous unclarity concerning sex outside marriage

Although getting through General Synod, the proposals have failed to convince many (about 45% of the clergy and laity in Synod). Their sharp bits now risk producing a tear in the fabric of the Church of England and perhaps finally shredding the already severely torn fabric of the Anglican Communion (given [the response of the Global South](#), reaffirmed in [a recent Holy Week letter](#) from its Chairman Archbishop Justin Badi, and the gathering of [GAFCON](#) which though clearly distinct has significant overlap in leadership with the Global South).

1. What does it mean to bless?

First, the bishops in offering draft prayers of love and faith, included prayers of blessing (though initially these were described as “for blessing”).

Here the trick was that although this crosses a red line for many (not least because of the wording of [Lambeth I.10](#)), it can be argued that this was simply a blessing *of people* and need not (despite popular usage of “blessing” in society and the church) imply approval. In the words of [an article written for the bishops by Isabelle Hamley](#) and influential in persuading some who were otherwise reluctant to take this step:

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- in Scripture “it is people that are blessed primarily...even when their actions might cause concern” (p. 3) and
- “the action of blessing represents a reflection of God’s intent that another person flourish, and a prayer for them to come into God’s life in all its fullness, as defined by God (and therefore ‘holy’)” (p. 5).
- thus “a service of blessing could recognise the goods of same-sex relationships and bless the people within the relationship” (p. 6)
- we would be offering “prayer for growth in holiness” (p. 7)
- without this being “a prayer of blessing specifically over the relationship” which “would imply a judgement that this relationship is in keeping with what we understand of God’s divine purposes” (p. 7).

Looked at in this way it is possible for some still to see the circle of received Christian teaching on the basis that, in [the words of the Bishop of London to General Synod](#), “God’s blessing is an expression of God’s desire to see people flourish. It is not a statement of approval, but of God’s lavish love which we are commanded to channel equally lavishly”.

However, the “sharp bit” of blessing people in non-marital, including same-sex, relationships led to others seeing the square they wanted of the church being more affirming of same-sex unions even if they were not yet called marriage. This was also how many, including the Archbishop of York, encouraged people to view what was on offer, thus alienating those committed to upholding the church’s teaching including, it appears, some bishops initially persuaded to support the proposals.

A key question then becomes “for which patterns of relationship might it be acceptable to use these prayers?”. In particular, there are questions concerning those same-sex relationships which are, in law, recognised as marriage and questions concerning use of the prayers for any sexual relationship which is not holy matrimony as the church understands it. These are the next two “sharp bits”.

2. How does civil marriage relate to church teaching about marriage?

Secondly, the bishops – in a major and largely unexplained *volte face* from previous statements – sought [to offer a new interpretation of civil marriage in the light of it being extended to same-sex couples](#). Initially there were tentative statements from

- [the bishops themselves](#) (“*It can therefore be argued that the 2013 Act resulted in there being two institutions in the law of England, both of which for legal purposes amount to “marriage” and have the same consequences in civil law, but which have distinct definitions: civil marriage which is gender neutral and Holy Matrimony which requires the couple to be respectively male and female...It can be argued that a same-sex couple entering into a civil status which does not claim to be Holy Matrimony should not of itself be regarded as challenging or rejecting the Church’s doctrine of marriage as expressed in Canon B30 (Of Holy Matrimony), GS 2289, p. 7, italics added*) *and*
- [church lawyers](#) (“because what is capable of constituting a marriage for the purposes of ecclesiastical law (the union of one man and one woman) now differs

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fundamentally from what is capable of constituting a marriage for the purposes of the general law (the union of two persons without regard to their sex), *there is a good case for saying that* the institution of Holy Matrimony and the institution of civil marriage are now distinct, even though legal incidents are generally the same for both”, GS Misc 1339, para 5, italics added)

Quickly these became much firmer assertions. A clear distinction is now being drawn between civil marriage and holy matrimony in order to justify public prayers of blessing for couples in same-sex marriages (possibly even immediately after their civil ceremony). Previously the bishops had stated that to enter such marriages was clearly “at variance with” and a “departing from” church teaching (see my fuller discussion [here](#)).

This sharp distinction is one which few find convincing for various reasons. The lawyers claimed that now in ecclesiastical law and in general law concerning marriage “the two definitions are mutually exclusive and this can be seen as having resulted in there now being two different institutions by the name of “marriage”” (GS Misc 1339, para 6). This seemed to treat all civil marriages since the introduction of civil marriage as excluded from the church’s definition of holy matrimony.

Contrasting “civil marriage” and “holy matrimony” and thus having no overlap in terminology has become a key feature of this particular “sharp bit”. Nevertheless, this cannot hide the fact that few in church talk of “holy matrimony” rather than “marriage”. Nor can it deny the reality that the [vows in the civil ceremony](#), including for same-sex couples, can take the form ‘I do solemnly declare, that I know not of any lawful impediment why I (your name) may not be joined in matrimony to (your partner’s full name)’.

The new legal advice effectively suggests we treat civil marriages (certainly if they are between two men or two women) as we have treated (not without controversy) civil partnerships. They are simply a legal status between two people with no more connection to the church’s doctrine of marriage than say becoming joint owners of a house. This can certainly “be argued for” but few see it as providing even “a good case for” the proposals let alone a legally and intellectually watertight one. I suspect that even those who wish the church would affirm the square of same-sex marriage do not find this “sharp bit” added to the circle convincing. They seem, however, willing to accept it if it has to be the means of removing the previous legal blockages to the blessing of civilly married same-sex couples within the Church of England without changing its doctrine of marriage.

3. What is our sexual ethic?

Thirdly, the bishops presented the draft prayers and their decision to replace *Issues in Human Sexuality* with no clarity as to whether the church’s existing sexual ethic (as affirmed for example, in the 1987 General Synod motion and in Synod’s 2007 motion not to do “anything that could be perceived as the Church of England qualifying its commitment to the entirety of the relevant Lambeth Conference Resolutions (1978: 10; 1988: 64; 1998: 1.10)”) would continue to be upheld or altered by the bishops.

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The Bishop of London (who is the lead bishop for LLF) said five times in her [written answers to questions](#) (Questions 144, 148, 149, 151, 155) at the February General Synod that “the *Prayers of Love and Faith* are silent about sexual intimacy”. She also, however, made clear that “The draft Prayers of Love and Faith do not change the Church’s teaching on Holy Matrimony” (Q151) and that the House of Bishops “has not retracted” the teaching that “the only rightful place for sexual activity is Holy Matrimony” (Q150).

Here is where there is currently perhaps most confusion as to whether we are really being offered the same circle as before or something which has morphed, or is at least morphing through adding “sharp bits” to it, more into a square.

There were some grounds for thinking such shape-shifting is occurring in the bishops’ paper. In a number of places it could be read as suggesting that they are no longer saying that sex is for marriage and that for the unmarried holy living requires abstinent singleness. Instead it could be understood that the bishops were in the process of making a paradigm shift to focus instead on the qualities and virtues of a relationship as the determinant as to whether it could, in the eyes of the church, legitimately be sexual. This is a possibility in, for example, the following places where they write of:

- how, recognising “the diversity of committed relationships that exist both in the Church and in wider society today” they “joyfully affirm and want to acknowledge in church, stable, committed relationships between two people – including same-sex relationships” (p. 1)
- clergy being able to “pray God’s blessing on two people in an exclusive committed relationship” (p. 2)
- wanting to “find ways of affirming same-sex couples – inside and outside the church” (p. 4)
- “responding to the goodness of relationships between two people who are committed to one another in love and faith” (p. 5)
- the new prayers being “to celebrate committed relationships between two people” (p. 6)
- doing more work on “everyday faithful relationships” which would be affirming of “‘gospel values’ that can orient growth in virtues of all who live in committed sexual relationships: virtues such as love, faithfulness, self-giving, mutual trust and truthfulness” (p. 17)
- enabling people “to inhabit committed sexual relationships in a way that is hopeful and life-giving, and that provides a stable context for the flourishing of family life” (p. 17)

At [the press conference](#) launching the prayers the Bishop of London spoke of “a range of views” among the bishops on whether sex should take place only in marriage. She acknowledged that in the various forms of “faithful, lifelong relationship between two people” which the prayers were designed for “some will be sexual, some will not, some will be friendship, and some will be sexual”. The Archbishop of York went further saying “I believe the great gift of sexual and physical intimacy to be cherished belongs in stable, loving, committed relationships. And therefore, I will celebrate the fact that people are

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living that way and expressing their intimacy that way". A few days later, [asked](#) "Is it still church teaching that gay sex is a sin?" he replied,

Well, what we are saying is that physical and sexual intimacy belongs in committed, stable, faithful relationships and therefore where we see a committed, stable, faithful relationship between two people of the same sex, we are now in a position where those people can be welcomed fully into the life of the Church, on their terms.

He then reiterated that "we believe that stable, faithful, committed, loving relationships are good. They are the place for physical intimacy".

In contrast to this, however, the bishops are committed not to change the doctrine of marriage and canonically the prayers cannot even be "indicative of any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter" (Canon B5.3). This condition was supported by Synod in the only amendment it passed to the bishops' motion and that amendment did not include the canonical qualifying reference to "any essential matter".

In only November last year the Bishop of London, [answered a question \(Q38\)](#) as to whether Canon B30 "represents the doctrine of the Church" and so "any sexual relations outside of this definition of marriage is a sin" by stating,

Canon B 30 does indeed continue to articulate the doctrine of the Church, including asserting that holy matrimony is the proper context for sexual intimacy.

This answer recognises that the canon does not simply define marriage as "a union...of one man with one woman". The canon is clear that one of the purposes of this union is "for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections". This is presented as "the teaching of our Lord affirmed by the Church of England" and the purpose summed up in those words is simply a restatement of what is found stated more fully in "the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*" (which under canon A5 is one of the places where the doctrine of the Church of England is to be found):
marriage

was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Past legal advice ([appendix to GS 2055, para 9](#)) has been clear (despite the comments quoted above from the Bishop of London and Archbishop of York) that on the basis of current teaching any prayers "should not *implicitly* or *explicitly* convey the idea that the Church was *sanctioning* or *condoning* a sexual relationship between the two persons" (italics added). In addition, "a service which sanctioned or condoned such a sexual relationship would not meet the requirement that a service must "edify the people" and would probably also be contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in an essential matter". This was reaffirmed in legal advice in 2018 concerning a diocesan synod motion requesting "the House of Bishops to commend an

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Order of Prayer and Dedication after the registration of a civil partnership or a same sex marriage”:

the House would need to make it clear that the service was not explicitly or implicitly sanctioning or condoning a sexual relationship between the parties unless the House had decided to change its teaching that sexual relationships outside marriage “are regarded as falling short of God’s purposes for human beings”.

The key question here then becomes whether, and if so how, the church’s current sexual ethic can be changed. It would appear that, because of the commitment not to change or indicate a departure from the doctrine of marriage, various avenues are being explored to square this particular circle and add this third “sharp bit”. Some, for example, are now seeking to distinguish between doctrine and teaching. This is despite the difficulties linguistically of doing so and the answer of the Bishop of London last November to General Synod that made clear the teaching about sex being for marriage is part of the doctrine of marriage. However, the Bishop of London in an answer to the London Diocesan Synod, recently stated,

In preparing the Pastoral Guidance bishops will consider exactly how *the unchanged doctrine of marriage of the Church of England* – as expressed in the Canons and the liturgies of the Church of England – *relates to the teaching of the Church with regard to sexual intimacy and marriage*. As they stand, neither the Canons nor the liturgies necessarily prohibit sexual intimacy between persons of the same sex on legal grounds. This will be a matter for bishops to decide on biblical and theological grounds. (italics added).

Alongside this, the Archbishop of York and others have recently made reference to the possibility of us witnessing a *development* of doctrine and this framing of it may then be presented as consistent with having an “unchanged doctrine” from which there has been no “departure”.

Moving forward: Circle? Circle with sharp bits? Square?

The LLF discernment process is now [entering a new stage](#) following the bishops’ proposals and reactions to them, particularly in General Synod. Under a fresh co-ordinating group replacing the [Next Steps Group](#), there are now three new groups being formed comprising bishops and advisers. These will be working on revising the prayers, developing pastoral guidance, and discerning what is needed to provide “pastoral reassurance”.

One of the central problems is that it remains far from clear how much the circle of inherited teaching and practice is in the process of being changed by the addition of these three (and perhaps other) significant “sharp bits”. The challenge is summed up in the attempt to argue that the doctrine and law of the church is not being changed but nevertheless significant developments are taking place in practice which have previously been understood as impossible to implement within existing doctrine and law.

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In presenting their proposals the bishops seem initially to have believed they had found what has been called a “diversified consensus”. This accepted both the need for some (probably more than minimal) changes and the bishops’ inability (procedurally and politically) to change the doctrine of marriage. More conservative bishops then viewed the proposals as still basically forming a “circle”: they simply enabled those who wished to do so to pray for God’s best for individuals in non-marital relationships with certain qualities (some of which would be civil same-sex marriages) but the fight to keep the church’s doctrine of marriage unchanged had been won. Although these may be sexual relationships, the prayers were silent about that and to pray for blessing on people did not, they were assured, necessarily entail approval of any sexual aspect in their relationship.

Other bishops, however, though frustrated in their attempts to secure the “square” of marriage in church for same-sex couples, viewed the proposals as the church finally commending committed non-marital relationships simply on the basis that they embodied certain qualities. These relationships included same-sex marriages and so as these were no longer contrary to the church’s doctrine of marriage and able to be blessed it was thought they must also now inevitably become open to clergy.

In addition, given the decision to replace *Issues* and the silence about sex, many of these bishops also expected the teaching about sex only being for marriage to be altered in the guidance that was to follow. When, on the publication of the proposals, the statements of the Archbishop of York and others gave voice to this latter view it was inevitable that those committed to the church’s teaching could not but see the sharp bits being added to the circle and conclude that, to many people in the church and wider society, the circle was being made to look too much like a square.

The challenge now is how the groups working on the prayers (particularly their rubrics) and the guidance can best address these challenges and what degree and form of “pastoral reassurance” will be required once the final shape of these becomes clear. These will be explored in two subsequent articles.

[II - Facing our Disagreements on Living in Love and Faith](#)

In [the first of three articles](#), I highlighted the challenges that now face the post-LLF process in ‘squaring the circle’ of different commitments made in our understanding of blessing, the nature of marriage, and our agreed sexual ethic. In this second one, I explore the question of our disagreements and what might be needed to address them.

One of the features of the bishops’ proposals and the reactions to them is that everyone is now acknowledging that we clearly and deeply disagree. In the [words of the Bishop of London to General Synod](#),

As bishops we have been seeking the mind of Christ in the uncomfortably sharp disagreements that we have about same-sex relationships.

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Despite this, and the oft-repeated recognition that the proposals go too far for some and not far enough for others, remarkably little has been said about the nature and the implications of our disagreements.

There has, however, already been much work done on disagreement within the Church of England, notably the 2016 FAOC report on [Communion and Disagreement, summarised in the LLF book](#) (pp. 230-4), made the focus of its [final conversation](#), and central to the [fifth and final session in the LLF course](#). This work has acknowledged that conversations often get stuck and it becomes “very difficult for those involved to hear and respond to one another” because “people disagree not only about the issue at hand, but also about the category of disagreement that they are having” (LLF book, p. 231). It also recognises that the issues we are now seeking to make decisions on are exactly this kind of disagreement: one “where we can’t even agree on how deeply our disagreement cuts into our ability to be church together” (p. 232).

In the light of this work on disagreement we could now acknowledge that

all Christians would probably agree that there are some disagreements that do impair our ability to live and work together—disagreements that require some kind of practical differentiation even if we remain in a single church together...

and

...most Christians would probably agree that there are some disagreements that push such impairment to breaking point (p. 233).

We could even also recognise that we are perhaps now finding ourselves in one of these two situations in the Church of England in terms of responses to LLF. The recent [Kigali Commitment](#) shows that both GAFCON and the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans (GSFA) view the Anglican Communion as clearly in one of these two places due to the Church of England’s actions.

Instead, however, these matters are, it seems, the proverbial elephant in the room. We avoid talking about the nature and implications of our disagreements by means of repeated calls to “walk together” in the midst of and despite our disagreements. Indeed, one of the arguments advanced for what the bishops are proposing is that this is the best, perhaps only, way to “walk together”. To quote the Bishop of London again:

In proposing our way forward as bishops, what we have done is chart a path that navigates the realities of the disagreements among us in a way that enables us to walk together – acknowledging its discomfort and ensuring that individual conscience is protected. One way of describing this way forward is to see ourselves standing in different places – and finding a point that each of us, by stretching out our arm, can touch and reach the fingertips of the other. It will be uncomfortable for everyone, but it is about creating a space for the Holy Spirit to move among us and to continue to guide us and shape us into the likeness of Christ.

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What are our disagreements?

There are, [as LLF showed](#), multiple theological disagreements which feed into these discussions. For example, concerning how we read Scripture and view its authority and also how we interpret particular experiences and patterns of life in the light of our understanding of God's good purposes in creation and redemption and the effects on humanity of the Fall and our sin. At present, the focus of these disagreements relate to what our doctrine *should be* in relation to marriage and, as part of that or derived from it, what patterns of sexual relationship *should be* viewed as a way of holiness fitting for a disciple of Christ. Here those pressing for change wish the church to embrace two new understandings:

(1) a doctrine of marriage as a gift of God that opens marriage up to two people irrespective of their biological sex rather than restricting it to one man and one woman *and/or*

(2) a doctrine of marriage that does not view marriage between a man and a woman as the divinely intended pattern of relationship for sexual intimacy.

These are the two central issues on which we are currently divided as we seek in the LLF process to navigate different responses among Christians to changing patterns of sexual relationships in society and in particular the introduction of same-sex marriage.

The bishops' declared intention not to change the church's doctrine of marriage or marriage liturgy so as to include same-sex couples has removed (1) from the current discussion in terms of the church's formal teaching. It has, however, not in any sense foreclosed ongoing debate on this within the church. In addition, the question of our understanding of marriage has now become refocused on a new question:

(1a) can the church commend, celebrate and bless *civil marriages* between two people of the same sex (perhaps claiming that it is only blessing the people in such civil marriages rather than their relationship or legal union) and

(1b) can the church, given those ordained affirm they will "endeavour to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people", allow clergy to enter same-sex civil marriages and treat them simply as legal unions?

In relation to (2) the question can be framed as

(2a) can the church cease speaking of all sex outside marriage as falling short of God's purposes (or, in other words, as sin) and instead commend, celebrate and bless *non-marital, including same-sex, sexual relationships*, if they embody certain qualities (again perhaps claiming that it is only blessing the people in such relationships rather than the relationship itself or its sexual aspect) and

(2b) can the church, given the canons require that a "clerk in Holy Orders shall...at all times be diligent to frame and fashion his life and that of his family according to the

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doctrine of Christ, and to make himself and them, as much as in him lies, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ" (Canon C26.2) allow clergy to live in such relationships?

These have now become the focus of contention: are these developments consonant with the church's doctrine? Or are they indicative of a departure from that doctrine and so *either* cannot happen *or* require a change in the church's doctrine of marriage (or canons and liturgy relating to ordination) before they can be approved?

It would *appear* therefore that the focus is shifting away from what our doctrine *should be* to what our doctrine *actually is* and, closely related to that, *what actions therefore indicate a departure from our doctrine*.

The disagreement is, in other words, now being presented more as a matter of *interpretation* and *application of existing doctrine* than a fundamental disagreement over the *substance* of doctrine. But that is, of course, at best a partial truth. At worst it is a deception sitting uneasily with the pastoral principle of admitting hypocrisy given the underlying fundamental disagreements that clearly exist over what the church's doctrine of marriage *should be*.

The challenge is that those who are pressing for changes (1) and (2) in doctrine (and the consequent sexual ethic), having failed to achieve this in relation to marriage as a male-female union, are now arguing that previously prohibited actions are, in fact, not really prohibited by the unchanged doctrine and so can legitimately be introduced into the church.

Thus it is claimed in relation to (1) that the doctrine of marriage has no bearing on the question of entering the status of a same-sex civil marriage. The answer to (1a) and (1b) is therefore that, contrary to all previous legal advice and episcopal statements, the church can now authorise blessings of same-sex marriages and permit clergy to enter them. Similarly, in relation to (2), it is claimed that the restriction of sexual intimacy to marriage is not, contrary to past episcopal statements, actually part of the doctrine of marriage but has always been some lower level category of current episcopal teaching or guidance. The answer to (2a) and (2b), it is therefore being claimed, is that liturgically celebrating non-marital sexual relationships and allowing clergy to enter these is not contrary to or indicative of a departure from that doctrine; these innovations can be introduced simply by the bishops changing their past episcopal teaching or guidance.

[What are the practical options going forward?](#)

As the wording of these questions makes clear, these matters lie at the heart of the work of two of the three new working groups: that examining the wording and rubrics of the proposed draft prayers has to consider (1a) and (2a) and that working on the promised new pastoral guidance has to consider (1b) and (2b). How, in the light of our disagreements, might it be best to proceed?

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Clarifying doctrine

The most obvious solution is to clarify what our doctrine is, decide whether or not that doctrine should be changed in some way, and then determine whether or not any of the proposals are indicative of a departure from the doctrine.

If the doctrine is to change this is something which the bishops cannot do simply on their own (though it is less clear what the situation is if it is claimed that what is happening is simply a reinterpretation and new application of the current doctrine even when that means the working, *de facto*, doctrine is changed in significant ways). Leading canon lawyer, Professor Norman Doe, explains in his *Legal Framework of the Church of England* (Chpt 9 at p. 258) that although the bishops have particular responsibilities in relation to doctrine due to their episcopal ordination, they cannot unilaterally alter it:

General Synod is the only authority within the Church of England competent to alter the legally approved doctrines: no doctrinal development may occur unless the three Houses of General Synod consent to it. Indeed, it has been understood judicially that General Synod possesses *in law* an unlimited power to change the church's fundamental doctrines, provided the required procedures are followed. The procedures are rigorous and, by requiring the participation of the whole church as represented in General Synod, they give juridical expression to the theological principle that doctrines ought to be derived from a *consensus fidelium*.

Doe continues to quote the General Synod's constitution (paragraph 7) whose current wording is reproduced [here](#) (in Appendix D). This has a number of detailed checks and balances (including potential separate referrals to Convocations or House of Laity) to prevent doctrine being changed too easily. Illustrative examples of the ways in which there is special protection of doctrine can also be found summarised in the authoritative work of another leading canon lawyer, Mark Hill:

A Canon which concerns worship or doctrine may not be submitted for Royal Assent unless it has received final approval in Synod with a majority in each house of not less than two-thirds of those present and voting (*Ecclesiastical Law*, 4th edn, 2.26) and

Synod may approve, amend, continue, or discontinue any form of service, provided that it is of the opinion that it does not represent a departure from the doctrine of the Church and that any such decision is finally approved with a majority in each house of not less than two-thirds of those present and voting (*ibid*, 5.03).

Prayers

Following this logic, in order to clarify the doctrine of the Church, the proposed prayers would best be brought to Synod not with a view to the bishops commending them under Canon B5 but under Canon B2 in order for there to be an authorized form of service. This is because

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The final approval by the General Synod of any canon, regulation, form of service, or amendment thereof conclusively determines that the Synod is of the opinion that it is neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter (Hill, 5.01 cf Canon B2.1).

The difficulty for those wishing to proceed with the prayers is that it seems, [given the voting at the February Synod](#), the current Synod falls well short, in both the Houses of Clergy and Laity, of the necessary two-thirds majority to pass the current proposed draft prayers. A refusal to use the Canon B2 route, however, means that whether or not any prayers are indicative of a departure from the Church's doctrine will remain undetermined even were the bishops to commend them. This is because the bishops alone cannot determine whether this test (inserted, arguably in an even stronger form, in the Cornes amendment at the February General Synod) has been passed simply by stating that it is their opinion the prayers are not indicative of such a departure.

It would also appear, [as Russell Dewhurst has argued](#), that even were the bishops as a House or College to state their collective view that the prayers were neither a departure from the church's doctrine nor even indicative of such departure, this judgment (unlike that of General Synod by a majority of two-thirds) would not be binding on every bishop. In particular, the question remains unanswered as to how each diocesan bishop – as “the chief pastor of all that are within his diocese, as well laity as clergy...” called to “teach and to uphold sound and wholesome doctrine, and to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange opinions” (Canon C18.1) and “the principal minister” with “the right, save in places and over persons exempt by law or custom, of...ordering, controlling, and authorizing all services in churches, chapels, churchyards and consecrated burial grounds” (Canon C18.4) – would respond.

Canon B5.4 is clear that

If any question is raised concerning the observance of the provisions of this Canon it may be referred to the bishop in order that he may give such pastoral guidance, advice or directions as he may think fit, but such reference shall be without prejudice to the matter in question being made the subject matter of proceedings under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963

Russell Dewhurst therefore writes of the prayers, if simply commended by the bishops, that “it appears that a bishop may be able to veto their use under Canon B 5(4)” because, in the light of B5(4),

If a question is duly raised and the bishop chooses to give direction, rather than guidance or advice, then the duty of canonical obedience may be engaged. If this is so, then failure to follow the bishop's direction would be a breach of ecclesiastical law and a disciplinary offence. This would seem to indicate that, if a question is raised, the bishop would be able to direct a minister not to use Prayer of Love and Faith, or indeed any other variations which the bishop believed were inappropriate, in a given context or generally.

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If this is the case then the apparent desire of the bishops (expressed in the Bishop of London's words at General Synod) to bring back to Synod "very clear proposals [of prayers] that can be used consistently across the dioceses in the Church to protect those who wish to use them and those who do not wish to use them" is going to be difficult to guarantee if any bishops believe the prayers are indicative of a departure from the Church's doctrine of marriage. This may open the question as to whether consideration might be given to some other route such as approval of a service, under certain conditions, by the Archbishops or, if they wish, by any diocesan, under Canon B4 or B5A. The difficulty remains however that these too would also lack any authoritative determination of doctrine as this can only be gained by proceeding under Canon B2.

Pastoral Guidance

The same problem of consistency across dioceses looks like it will also prove difficult to achieve in relation to the new pastoral guidance. This is because the deep disagreements found in Synod and the wider church are also present among the bishops. It is clear that the bishops are keen to develop and implement pastoral guidance which will be "consistent across dioceses and reflect the doctrine and ecclesiastical law of the Church of England" (in the words they use to describe the planned Pastoral Consultative Group that will "lead...the production of the new pastoral guidance" and "support and advise bishops and dioceses on pastoral responses"). But the different and incompatible answers that bishops will give to (1b) and (2b)—for example whether those in a same-sex marriage should or should not be able to be ordained—means that it is very hard to see how any new guidance to replace *Issues* will be able to be implemented, in good conscience, by every bishop.

This means that we are likely to face not only the difficulty that bishops are not of "one mind" but that they will not be able to agree a way to walk forward together which they can all, in conscience, implement within their episcopal ministries. This could apply in relation to the prayers and/or the guidance. If the bishops, by a majority, reaffirm the current negative answers to (1b) and (2b) then some bishops may nevertheless seek to advance changes within their own dioceses. If the bishops, by a majority, offer new and affirmative answers to those questions (by, for example, permitting the ordination of those in sexual relationships other than marriage) then some bishops may reject such developments. As the [Communion Partner](#) bishops have done in North America they may well insist on exercising their own episcopal ministries in conformity with the current understanding of the church's doctrine of marriage and the mind of the Anglican Communion as expressed in Lambeth I.10.

Furthermore, even if *the bishops* can agree a uniform way to move forward, whatever it is there are likely to be in all dioceses a (perhaps significant) number of clergy and parishes who will disagree with the proposed outcome. At least some of these are likely – even more so if there are a range of diocesan approaches—to wish to receive their oversight from someone who shares their understanding, whether that is maintaining the current teaching and discipline or wishing to embrace new patterns of liturgy or expectations of how clergy order their households.

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This leads into the task of the third working group and suggests that this is not simply going to have to consider “pastoral reassurance” for those clergy deeply unhappy with an agreed nationally consistent way forward. Nor is its work likely going to be restricted to the implications of this for the relationship of clergy and parishes to their bishop(s), itself a significant challenge. This group is likely going to have to consider how the Church of England responds to a situation where its bishops are no longer even claiming to be adhering to a consistent, nationally agreed pattern of episcopal ministry which they all believe is in conformity with the Church’s agreed doctrine in relation to these matters. The next article will explore these questions of differentiation.

[III - Living in Love and Faith: Good Episcopal Differentiation?](#)

in [the first of three articles](#), I highlighted the challenges that now face the post-LLF process in ‘squaring the circle’ of different commitments made in our understanding of blessing, the nature of marriage, and our agreed sexual ethic. [In the second one](#), I explored the question of our disagreements and what might be needed to address them. Here, in anticipation of the meeting of the House of Bishops next week, I look at what kind of relationships and differentiation will be required if the bishops continue on the path they have set out in the proposals to Synod.

[Learning from the Communion and the Church of England’s Past](#)

The Anglican Communion has, after over twenty years of fundamental differences and divisions among its provinces and bishops, recognised the need to consider what it might mean to develop forms of “[good differentiation](#)”. Recognising their own differentiated episcopate following the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2015, the bishops of the Episcopal Church issued [a statement concerning “Communion Across Difference”](#) highlighting the work of [the Communion Partners](#), the minority of bishops in TEC maintaining the Communion teaching of Lambeth I.10. In 2018 TEC built on this statement and set up [a task force](#) working on “Communion Across Difference” in relation to its own divisions over matters of sexuality and marriage. This [reported to the recent General Convention](#) which [created a new task force](#) to continue the work.

Within the Church of England we now face the possibility of bishops dissenting from any decisions in relation to Prayers of Love and Faith or the Pastoral Guidance and refusing, on grounds of conscience, whether more “conservative”, or more “progressive”, to follow any consensus. This raises questions as to the implications of such differentiated beliefs and practices among the episcopate. What might some form of agreed structural “good differentiation” look like if we are somehow to make space for divergent episcopal teaching and practice within the Church of England? The [recently published terms of reference](#) for the Pastoral Reassurance group includes reference to “considering the implications of freedom of conscience for bishops”.

The introduction of variation across the dioceses of the Church of England in important matters is not without precedent. For example, [Section 2](#) of the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure allowed in principle a serving bishop not to permit women to minister as priests in their diocese, though no bishops made the possible declaration.

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Similarly, [guidelines in relation to communion before confirmation](#) were introduced in 1997 where this matter would be determined by bishops for their dioceses. The rationale and process for introducing this innovation may point to a possible way forward in our current situation:

Since ‘Communion before Confirmation’ is a departure from our inherited norm, it requires special permission. After consultation, every diocesan bishop will have the discretion to make a general policy whether or not to entertain new applications for ‘Communion before Confirmation’ to take place [in] his diocese. If he decides to do so, individual parishes must seek his agreement before introducing it. The bishop should satisfy himself that both the incumbent and the Parochial Church Council support any application and that where appropriate, ecumenical partners have been consulted. If the parties agree, the bishop’s direction shall be followed. (Admission of Baptised Persons to Communion before Confirmation: Guidelines agreed by the House of Bishops (GS Misc 488), para A).

Remarriage in church after divorce was also handled in different ways by different bishops before a national policy was agreed. The report [Marriage in Church After Divorce](#) (2000) noted that when the working party asked diocesan bishops to indicate their policies, “the majority who responded....indicated that they did operate guidelines setting out the circumstances in which an incumbent could take such services, most of these being based on those put forward by the House of Bishops in 1985. There were nevertheless considerable variations in practice both between and within dioceses” (Para 6.1, p37).

Despite these precedents, there are more serious challenges, given the strength and divergence of opinions in the church, if we enter a situation where

- bishops teach contradictory doctrines of marriage and sexual ethics and each claim they are representing the Church’s doctrine, *or*
- a number of bishops prevent or limit use of commended prayers in their dioceses *or*
- some bishops commend prayers which other bishops view as indicative of a departure from doctrine *or*
- bishops pursue different policies on whether they commend those in a same-sex marriage or a sexual relationship other than marriage for ordination training or licence them.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that, whatever stance they take, every bishop will have clergy and parishes who strongly disagree with their own decisions. Some of these may view themselves as in impaired communion with their bishop and seek episcopal ministry from another bishop with whom they are in full communion.

Possible Pathways & Frameworks

A number of possible pathways then need to be considered where there are at least the following six broad options with potential overlaps between them and multiple variations within them:

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1. A uniform national approach which all bishops have to follow in their ministries. This refuses to permit any pattern of episcopal ministry other than that in line with the majority view. This is the current model in relation to past pastoral statements from the House, *Issues in Human Sexuality* etc. In the light of our disagreements and to prevent the legal disputes seen in other churches, this might be combined with some agreed way of separation for those unable to accept the majority view that enables them to continue their current ministry but transferring out of the Church of England to align with Anglicans elsewhere in the Communion. For those wishing change this could involve transferring to a province which has already embraced developments in these areas (we have three adjacent to the CofE – [TEC’s Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, Wales & Scotland](#)) while for those wishing to uphold current teaching it might involve aligning with provinces in GSFA and/or GAFCON.
2. A “local option” where the bishops, clergy and parishes of each diocese (while retaining the right not to participate personally in actions they conscientiously objected to) would be expected to accept the decision of the ordinary leading to different policies in different dioceses and no structures of alternative episcopal oversight. This is how [communion before confirmation](#) was introduced.
3. A diversity of episcopal practices acceptable within the same diocese enabling diocesan unity but with different parishes serving under different bishops, each ministering in accordance with their conscientious convictions. This could be seen as extending and developing the approach of [the London Plan](#) in relation to the Bishop of Fulham for those opposed to women priests and bishops.
4. An option for clergy and parishes in impaired communion with their bishop (because of their bishop’s decisions) to receive episcopal ministry from a bishop serving another diocese in the geographical area whose ministry they can accept. There are already regional groups of bishops and dioceses and these could form the basis for such a development. A [form of this](#) is what was developed (building on earlier DEPO arrangements) within TEC in 2018 (by [Resolution B012](#)) in relation to marriage policy for parishes under bishops unwilling to authorise same-sex marriages (although Bill Love, Bishop of Albany, [could not in conscience accept this development, was disciplined](#), eventually [resigned as bishop](#), and [ultimately left The Episcopal Church](#) and joined ACNA).
5. An option for clergy and parishes in impaired communion with their bishop (because of their bishop’s decisions) to receive episcopal ministry from a bishop whose ministry is extra-diocesan and serves a number of dioceses. This could extend or adapt [the current model of Provincial Episcopal Visitors](#) for those who are opposed to the ordination of women.
6. An option for clergy and parishes to realign with bishops who share their conscientious convictions in order to constitute a province with its own diocesan structures. This would be a province within the CofE either restructuring the existing two provinces on non-geographical grounds or creating a third province. The fullest account of what this might look like is found in work done for CEEC in 2019-20 and published as [Visibly Different](#) (Chpt 7) with additional [introduction](#) and [updating addendum](#) from 2022.

In all of these there would remain a national House and College of Bishops and a General Synod of the Church of England. In all of them except (1) there would be a recognised

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diversity of episcopal teachings and practices within those bodies. How these elements of both unity and diversity would be worked out geographically in relation to existing diocesan structures and the relationship between bishops and clergy and parishes is what would vary.

In relation to options (3) to (5) numerous questions would need to be addressed concerning continuity of episcopal representation for both views and the reassignment of episcopal duties, perhaps particularly in relation to jurisdiction. Here there may be value in revisiting the attempt by Archbishops Williams and Sentamu to develop [a form of co-ordinate jurisdiction](#). These arrangements could be supplemented by the creation of a recognised, national, episcopally-led but non-provincial structure which held a clear position on the contested questions and to which clergy, parishes and individuals could be affiliated. This could take the form of developing existing networks which have a clear position they seek to commend to the wider church (such as [CEEC](#), [Inclusive Church](#) or the [Society of Catholic Priests](#)) into a mission order (like [The Order of Mission](#) or [the Community of St Mark in the New Zealand Anglican Church](#)), an [acknowledged religious community](#) within the Church of England, or something similar to [The Society](#).

Although options (2) to (5) have the attraction and merit of maintaining close working episcopal relationships even amidst episcopal differentiation, there are questions as to how stable and theologically coherent and acceptable these options would be. It also remains to be seen whether they would establish sufficient differentiation for those needing it even though they would all (with the exception of (2)) secure them a bishop with whom they are in full communion. In particular, these solutions appear to require acceptance of developments within the current structures that are viewed by many as contrary to the church's doctrine. They also permit bishops serving side by side formally to teach contradictory doctrines within the same legal provincial structure and to practise them in their ministries without the church's doctrine having formally been changed. There are risks that among those wishing to distance themselves from their bishop there will be a range of views as to how serious their bishop's error is with people consequently looking for a range of different forms of differentiation, some content with (3), others only with (5) etc. This will likely lead to no single form of provision being sufficient and so greater fragmentation and complexity.

Furthermore, given the desire of many for the church to permit same-sex marriages, there is also likely to be continued pressure for further developments requiring in turn still further and more significant differentiation. This means any solution may prove only temporary and so these options could not be treated as permanent provision but would need to be revisited in the future, perhaps inexorably moving us over time towards either the strongest internal differentiation at a provincial level (6) or the need to negotiate a formal separation as in (1). Faced with these challenges, the two alternative options of (1) and (6) which would create less diverse structures with a united episcopacy and a single pattern of ministry may appear more attractive. They face, however, the challenge that in many, perhaps most parishes, benefices and teams, there are a range of views present and a desire to minimise differentiation and make decisive choices. This will often make it difficult to effect such a clean break into two internally coherent bodies and could signal that although messier in

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many ways (both theoretically and practically) options (2) to (5) may be more realistic options – at least as first steps – given the complex realities on the ground.

How should we interpret our situation and discern a way forward together? Three models

How we discern which of these paths is the best way forward depends to a significant degree on how we describe the situation we find ourselves in and the doctrinal and liturgical boundaries that are set for the Church of England as a whole. Here there appear to be three broad understandings or models at play:

We could, on the *first* understanding, acknowledge that we have two incompatible doctrines of marriage – that which we have received which restricts it to one man and one woman and sexual intimacy to marriage and that which wishes to extend this to include two people irrespective of biological sex and/or permit sex outside marriage. Each of these is held by a significant proportion of the church and, it could be argued, needs to be given space. If this were to be done, then in terms of continued unity and walking together the best we could currently hope for would appear to be a provincial restructuring. To try to enshrine both contradictory doctrines within the teaching of the same province of the Church of England would appear both theologically incoherent and politically impossible. The choice would then appear to be either to divide into total separate ecclesial bodies (as has happened in North America among Anglicans and currently within the United Methodist Church and as suggested in option 1 above) or to re-imagine our current two-province structure within the Church of England (as in option 6 above).

We could – as appears to be the major approach at present—argue for a *second* understanding: that we are not changing doctrine but simply being more generous pastorally and liturgically. All that is therefore needed are forms of “pastoral reassurance” which seek to provide sufficient legal protections for those clergy whose consciences do not permit them to be as pastorally and liturgically expansive as the Church of England will allow in future. This might lead to option 2 (or option 1) above or a minimalist form of alternative episcopal oversight within the range of options 3 to 5. There are at least two major problems with this approach:

1. many do view the current proposals as representing a change in doctrine and thus crossing a red line and would be even clearer about this were sexual relationships other than marriage to be given approval. This means their need is not simply for reassurance and legal protection for their personal conscience. Their concern is avoiding participation in what they see as serious theological and moral error being introduced into the church. This leads to them being in impaired communion with those who embrace the changes in their own ministries. Where their bishops do so, CofE clergy and parishes will find themselves being deprived of what they can recognise and receive as faithful episcopal oversight in line with church doctrine.
2. were any bishops to refuse to allow use of prayers or to follow new guidance this would have an effect on their clergy and parishes and lead to much greater episcopal differentiation than we have experienced before.

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A *third* understanding is to acknowledge these problems. This may lead to acceptance that the changes do represent a *de facto* change in doctrine thus leading us back to the first understanding above and some provincial level solution. Alternatively, [as noted in Part Two](#), we could view ourselves as fundamentally disagreeing over the exact content and extent of our current doctrine and recognising that these different interpretations yield different implications in terms of what is and is not indicative of a departure from it. The question then becomes one of how best to proceed if we are to continue stating the doctrine has not changed but we are giving space to practices which in the past have been held to be inconsistent with that doctrine and a departure from it or at least indicative of a departure from it.

Two possible paths to good episcopal differentiation

This third understanding raises the question as to how one best moves from the *status quo* to some form of good episcopal differentiation. One path would be to say something like

the consensus of the current bishops, supported by a simple but not two-thirds majority in Synod, is that these developments are not indicative of departure from doctrine. We will therefore proceed with them but in order to enable us to continue to discern God's will and walk together as closely as possible we will make provision (in some form of options 3-5) for those who cannot accept them (and, where necessary, for those who wish to proceed but whose bishops cannot authorise such developments under their ministry).

Another path, learning from introducing communion before confirmation, would be to say something like

we recognise that these changes rely on novel interpretations of current doctrine in a number of ways, are changes which we have not previously been accepted as within the bounds of doctrine, and are viewed by a significant minority in the Church of England and the majority of the wider Communion as departing from doctrine. As we seek to continue to discern God's will and walk together as closely as possible we can therefore only currently permit them on a limited, experimental basis by providing (in some form of options 3-5) a way for those who in conscience feel bound to implement them and believe them to be acceptable within existing doctrine.

This latter path would – if it could be practically constructed with theological integrity and with clarity as to how and when the experiment would be evaluated and then developed, continued or abandoned – amount to testing a proposed development of doctrine by means of a form of pastoral accommodation, a phrase which has (after being given much attention at the time of the Pilling Report) been noticeably absent from responses to LLF.

Pastoral accommodation, in the words of Oliver O'Donovan, is an approach which “could allow for continuity with the doctrine of the church” even as one responds in new ways to fresh practical questions and pastoral challenges. Reflecting on the response of different

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churches to questions surrounding marriage and same-sex unions, and in particular that of the Scottish Episcopal Church which chose to change its doctrine of marriage, he wrote:

A pastoral accommodation has an experimental character; it seeks ways of ministering the gospel to particular needs, and waits upon the Holy Spirit for signs following – evident holiness, faithfulness, fruitfulness in the life of discipleship. A church may have good and sufficient pastoral reasons for engaging in an experiment, which fall far short of grounds for modifying its teaching. Of the future we know only this: we shall be led by the Holy Spirit into new understandings and new practices. When we have been led, we shall appreciate and practice those understandings together, in conscious obedience to Scripture and in the unity of a common mind. But until that happens, we cannot pretend to have been led. No one can programme the Holy Spirit to suit his or her convenience, which is the lesson taught by Simon the magician of Samaria, who, as Peter said, thought he could possess the gift of God ([Acts 8:20](#)).

The deep offence of what the Scottish Episcopal Church has done lies in its determination to conceal the tentative character of its action by rewriting the teaching of the church, as though Christian doctrine were nothing but church law under its control, an assumption made quite explicit by the theological paper produced to justify it. In response to any pastoral experiment involving a marriage-like ceremony with same-sex couples, we can only reply: So long as you clearly uphold the doctrine of the universal church, you are free in conscience to act experimentally as you believe the Spirit prompts you; and so is the wider church free to watch, form a careful judgment of the Holy Spirit's leading, and draw appropriate conclusions. But if you demand guarantees in advance that you will be proved right, you are a false prophet! ("The Christian Doctrine of Marriage" in Noble, Whittle & Johnson (eds), *Marriage, Family and Relationships*, pp. 201-2).

Were this approach to be pursued it could be filled out for those bishops wishing to introduce new prayers and/or new guidance that others viewed as indicating a departure from doctrine in a range of possible ways including:

- each bishop could be allowed to decide how to structure their ministry, or to do so with the consent of their diocesan, enabling those they currently serve who disagree with their decision to receive episcopal ministry from another bishop in the diocese (option 3)
- allowing certain bishops within regional groups to take these steps and to minister to those clergy and parishes in their region who wished to follow their lead (option 4)
- transferring certain serving bishops or consecrating new bishops to function as PEVs (option 5) for those clergy and parishes wishing to take these steps.

The more radical solution would be to constitute a province (option 6) which would then be free, through its provincial synod, to go even further and revise the doctrine rather than push what is permitted within current doctrine to, or in the eyes of some, beyond, its absolute limits.

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Conclusion: Seeking settlement?

In his [speech at General Synod](#) the Archbishop of York spoke of the need for “discussions about some kind of settlement” and how “because we belong to one another in Christ we have to have these conversations which can and will hold us together”. He later explored some of these ideas in an [article for New Directions](#). In addition to his theological rationale rooted in our shared baptismal faith and his article’s argument that “we need to apply the same ecumenical theology to some of our own internal disagreements as members of the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion” there are also now strong political reasons for addressing the sort of questions explored above, whatever one’s stance on the matters in dispute.

To adapt the words of the [Global South Steering Committee after Lambeth 2022](#) (in para 6.79f), “biblical faithfulness and relational integrity now require us” within the Church of England “to speak of ‘degrees of communion’” (something we already do in relation to women priests and bishops as the Archbishop of York has highlighted). As a result, in any way forward, “we need to recognise the extent to which those degrees may increase and intensify or decrease and face temporary or permanent impairment”.

Those wanting change have, on the whole, accepted the bishops’ proposals, but only as a stepping stone to further changes and are especially eager for developments in relation to the new guidance on questions which others see as departure from current doctrine. Given the doctrinal questions raised, however, they face two main alternatives to that of seeking a settlement with restructuring and good differentiation:

- *either* they wait until there is greater consensus behind the view that proposals do not indicate a change in doctrine or behind an explicit change in doctrine, which would require the support of two-thirds of all three Houses.
- *or* they push on and risk creating (perhaps multiple) breakaways from the Church of England and/or deep bitterness and fracture lines within it.

Those opposed to the proposed changes and possible further changes in revised guidance because of what they see as their doctrinal significance also have unattractive alternatives:

- *either* they push back sufficiently strongly to defeat them but in so doing create deep bitterness and likely both departures from the church and more widespread and blatant disregard of current teaching and discipline by those who cannot in conscience continue to uphold it.
- *or* they accept within the Church of England (and in the case of bishops, they accept happening under their episcopal authority) authorised actions which they believe to be a departure from Church of England doctrine and, more seriously, a departure from Scripture in relation to marriage and sexual ethics.
- *or* they choose to engage in an ongoing rejection of and resistance against the changes and those bishops implementing them (which still leaves, as TEC has found, challenging questions about “Communion Across Difference”)

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- *or* they choose to walk away into a new province separate from the Church of England but recognised by many Communion provinces as has happened in other Anglican provinces.

While I and others may wish those pressing for change would follow the first option we also need to recognise that for them to do so would represent another major further sacrifice and frustrate what appears to be the desire of a simple majority in the church to proceed in a way they believe to be right. They would be required not to follow their consciences as to what the Lord requires of them because of those of us who view what they wish to do as creating a church which has departed from its current doctrine and from Scripture.

Faced with this reality it would be much better to find ways in which, as the Communion is now doing afresh, we can to some degree still “walk together” [as the Primates stated they wished to do in 2016](#), but in new structures. These would have to be structures which recognise that tragically our doctrinal disagreements mean this “walking together” has to be with some “significant distance between us” that embodies our impaired communion. Rather than following ways that will most likely yield the fruit of division and bitterness, can we not instead seek ways to continue “speaking the truth in love” to one another, “living a life worthy of the calling we have received” by being “completely humble and gentle...patient, bearing with one another in love”? Given we are bound to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” with all our fellow Christians should we not be seeking, with the Communion and the new work of IASCUFO and now the work of GAFCON/GSFA to reset the Communion, to find some structural ways of “good differentiation”? Rather than rushing forward with current plans and risking separation with little or no ongoing shared discernment within the Church of England, why not seek a pathway truly respectful of our different conscientious convictions?

There is no escaping the sad reality that in these matters the body of Christ is going to continue to have to bear the painful reality of “communion across difference”. The challenge is whether we in the Church of England can find a settlement that would enable us to continue to walk and work together as best we can, maintaining as high a degree of communion as possible, as we seek to “form a careful judgment of the Holy Spirit’s leading” and come, we hope and pray, by God’s grace, to a common mind once again at some point in the future.