

## Are We Right To Pursue Endless Reconciliation Attempts? Is This *The* (Only) Christian Way?

### Reconciliation and Change

Recent events in the Church of England remind me of *Des Anonius von Padua Fischpredigt* ('St. Antony of Padua Preaches To The Fishes'). This is a song that forms part of composer Gustav Mahler's orchestral song-cycle *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* ('The Youth's Magic Horn')(1888-9). In the song (they are based on old German folk-songs) St. Anthony eschews the churches and goes down to the river and preaches to the carp, the pike, the crabs and the eels. The fish stop all the anti-social, divisive, things they have been doing, and listen to the preacher. They enjoy the sermon very, very, much - but when it is over, they go back straight away to exactly what they were doing before ("The pike remain thieves, the eels remain lechers"); they *change* not a bit.

Archbishop Welby has, apparently, recently hosted a conference aimed at creating reconciliation between different parts of the Anglican Communion, amongst which there has been much strife and disagreement. In particular, the Ecumenical Church USA (and other "liberal" parts of the Communion) have been promoting – that, surely, is the *mot juste* – practices and worship involving strongly post-Christian theology, and authorising many senior clergy in various stages and kinds of same-sex relationship. This work had been spearheaded by Archbishop Welby's newly-appointed Director of Reconciliation, David Porter, who has come from the home of C of E reconciliation ministry, Coventry Cathedral.

Apparently the event was a great success, and (like the *indabas*, and endless efforts, of Archbishop Welby's predecessor) it had much impact on the participants. Unity and Christian brotherhood were firmly established. But when the American Anglicans got back home, it seems, they resumed the kind of divisive practices that they had always indulged in, practices quite contrary to Christian truth and ecclesial order.

One might say – returning to the song (based on an old legend, surely) – that St. Anthony was ill-advised to make the *unrealistic* attempts that he made, that he should have known that the fishes were never going to change the way they behaved; that his energies and efforts might more usefully have been directed at some other audience, where they might have borne real fruit.

Of course, there will be many who will loathe the suggestion that I am seeming to make, claiming that reconciliation is at the heart of our faith, and to reject the possibility of change for the better – to abandon *hope* – is quite un-Christian, and my appeal to that which appears realistic is just ... just *evil*. We hear that Christians have endured hideous captivity, only for their wicked jailers to later come to share their faith, as a result of seeing their saintly example; surely I am closing the door to this blessed possibility? Well, I wonder if Mrs. Schori will be thus affected by the efforts of the Director of Reconciliation and Archbishop Welby? Being Christians, I fancy we must hope so.

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