

EDITORIAL

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Division and disagreement are part of the condition of a fallen humanity. Jesus commanded that his disciples love one another (John 13:34), a command taken up in the Epistles of John (eg 1 John 4:7: ‘Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God’) and amplified by Tertullian in his oft-quoted statement put into the mouth of pagan observers of Christians: ‘See . . . how they love one another’. Yet it did not take long for disagreement to take hold in the Church, which, as we are all too painfully aware, is a human institution as well as a divine one and thus subject to all the foibles of its human members.

The Church has, though, since earliest times, adopted a mechanism for the resolution of division and disagreement and that is by prayerful discussion and by taking counsel together. The disagreement over the treatment of gentile converts that we read about in Acts 15 and in Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians was solved by discussion and prayer in what became known as the Council of Jerusalem. Further disputes over the centuries were brought to Councils and the mechanism of prayer, discussion and the search for consensus prevailed.

Division is never far away. In recent months societal divisions within UK society have been much talked about. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the President of the Methodist Conference issued a joint statement in January 2019 expressing their shock at the ‘anger and vitriol that has surrounded so much public discourse’. Looking east, the dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Patriarchate of Moscow over the status of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has led to a breaking of communion, the effects of which could prove very serious indeed. In response to this the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, John X, has said that ‘there may be a discord, but the appropriate way of healing a problem that has arisen in a family is through dialogue’.

This issue of the *Journal* touches on a number of matters where there has been disagreement. Charlotte Smith looks at the long process of discussion of questions surrounding human identity and sexuality through which the Church of England is presently going. As someone on the inside of this process, I have found a very important feature of it to be the importance placed on ensuring that those who disagree are enabled to talk to one another with honesty and trust. Such space has not always been available, and Diarmaid MacCulloch’s magisterial Lyndwood Lecture points us to Richard Hooker,

who lived through another period of discord in the Church, famously being subjected to theological criticism from the puritan minister who shared his pulpit in the Temple Church. Peter Edge recounts and analyses the debate in the Isle of Man legislature over the place of the Bishop of Sodor and Man in the Tynwald. Parliaments and other deliberative bodies enable the airing of differences, receptive listening to the views of others and a trustworthy mechanism for coming to decisions.

Dialogue can be difficult, uncomfortable and exposing. But, as a method for dealing with difference, it has stood the test of time.