

Is the evolution of the Lord's Church on earth perhaps inevitable?

Same sex marriage

One of the biggest challenges our church has been confronted with, and which our ministry has been asked to deal with, is the subject of same-sex marriage. A big part of the reason this subject has been so difficult for the ministry to deliberate on and come to a consensus, is due perhaps to our teaching on the marriage between goodness and truth and how this relates to the feminine and masculine elements of marriage. Many Ministers feel that the Writings are not explicit on the teaching of same sex marriage and how this relates to the external aspects of marriage. After decades of discussions on the subject the ministry has concluded that there is never likely to be an overall consensus on the matter. We recognize that we are all created to be different parts of one whole, and therefore, we are all bound to have differing views on the subject. We therefore found that it might be more productive if we were each able to present our own varied views and allow our members to form their own conclusions on the subject. As there will also, perhaps inevitably, be differing opinions among the members, then it is thought that a democratic process would be the only way for us to be able to move forward on the question of whether or not we should allow only those Ministers who feel called to do so, to marry same-sex couples. From my own perspective and as part of my contribution to this debate, I offer the following thoughts:

History

Looking back on how the Christian Church has changed over the years, few people would argue against such change having been for the better. From burning "witches" to slavery, to imprisoning, demonizing and ex-communicating dissenting voices, the church has mostly looked back with regret in the way it has resisted change. Almost all change within the church has come on the back of strong resistance and struggle. Many of the changes made within the church have led to division, entrenchment and schism, before eventually becoming more universally implemented. Interestingly, the schisms often remain long after universal acceptance has arrived! The philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is often quoted in saying "*the only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history*".

Today

In our modern age, we stand on the precipice of changes that would have been utterly unthinkable just a decade or two earlier. The question then perhaps is, how will history judge us in regard to the decisions we may make today? One way to look at this is perhaps to ask ourselves "what would Jesus do?". This may seem like a very obvious and simple way of making decisions, but how often do we remember to do it? What, for example, would Jesus have said about the burning of "witches", taking Africans away from their homes and families and keeping them as slaves in our homes. These things were done and at one time they were thought well of by most. There is no getting away from it. I wonder, how many back then asked "what would Jesus do?". Again, how will history judge us on the decisions we make today and how often do we ask today "what would Jesus do?".

Tomorrow

Moving faster than ever into the unknown, our church needs to make some very important decisions. The question is, do we continue to do what we have always done in the past? Or do we try doing something else? In a passage from John's Gospel (21:1-14) the disciples had returned to their fishing boat after the resurrection. They had been out all-night fishing and caught nothing. They were deeply despondent thinking all hope had gone; even the Lord Himself, they thought, had deserted them. Suddenly the voice comes from the distant shore: "Try throwing your net over the right side of the boat!". They didn't realise at first that it was Jesus (that is important!). Having just witnessed His crucifixion though, it's hardly surprising! Yet, perhaps in desperation, they cast

the net on the right side anyway! The results were amazing and completely unexpected. Notice though, it was only then that they realised it was Jesus. It is often only in hindsight, having implemented the Lord's teaching on putting love first, that we see in the clearer light of truth. Perhaps we can identify with the disciples' position with the issues the church is facing in today. The apparent decline of the church could easily leave us feeling deeply despondent, with none or very little hope for the future. Since the church began to decline, does it feel to us as though we have been fishing all night and caught nothing? What if the Lord was standing on the shore right now shouting: "Try throwing your net on the right side of the boat!" Would we recognize Him. If not, should we do it anyway? And, what might happen if we did?

The right side of the boat

If we do identify with how the disciples would have felt that night, having been out all night and caught nothing, and having thought that the Lord had left them all alone, despite all the effort they put in and the promises that were made. How might we decide to go about "*throwing the net over the right side of the boat*," and what might that look like for us today? The story of the miraculous catch of fish holds a deep spiritual meaning that we may wish to think more about when making such important decisions. Spiritually, the "net" stands for the means of gathering knowledge or truths, information etc.¹, particularly those suited to the natural conscious, everyday level of the mind. The act of fishing represents the instruction and transformation of people who are in natural good, as the fish themselves symbolise knowledge of truth and the affections for knowing². The specific command to "cast the net on the right side" holds particular significance. The "right side" in the Word represents the good of love, or the good of life, kindness, empathy, compassion etc. In this context, the Lord's command signifies that teaching and gathering people to the church should not be done from truth alone, truths of doctrine, beliefs etc. but from the good of life—that is, from love and charity, being virtues of the heart. The right side thus represents acting from love and integrating truth with a life according to it, a balanced interplay between our heart and mind. "To cast the net on the right side," therefore, means to teach the good of life, to model and embody love, sensitivity, tolerance, respect, compassion, empathy and so on—living what is true and good, not merely understanding it on an intellectual level.³

Deciding the future

Some of the things that may then be helpful to us in making such important decisions would be to, a) think about how Jesus would deal with the issue, and b) thinking about how history might judge us decades from now. In meeting challenges that require change, we might also ask ourselves: are we being asked to hold fast and resist change? Has this been an effective strategy in the past? A Rita May Brown quote (often attributed to Albert Einstein) tells us that: "*Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results*". Are we perhaps being asked by the Lord to do things differently by throwing our nets over the right side of the boat?

Respectfully submitted March 2026 , Revd Jack Dunion – Spiritual Leader

(¹ *Arcana Coelestia (Secrets of Heaven)* 2831, 9726). (² *Apocalypse Explained* 513[16]; *Arcana Coelestia (Secrets of Heaven)* 40, 991). (³ *Apocalypse Explained* 600[6])

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You can also visit our website <https://www.generalconference.org.uk/same-sex-marriage-consultation/>, which we will regularly update with helpful resources from ministers i.e., films, written materials and details of workshops.

Whatever your questions or reflections, you don't have to navigate them alone.