

## Order for Baptist Ministry 2022 Convocation.

### Daring to Disagree: “Valuing dissent and freedom of conscience.”

In a session of community discernment, members of the Order for Baptist Ministry gathered in Convocation in November 2022, discussed ways in which good practices in ecclesial disagreement and dissent might be achieved, with the aim of ‘disagreeing well.’ We recognise that disagreement between Christians is unavoidable, but the way in which that is undertaken can either hold fast to the unity we have in Christ, or lead to breaks in fellowship and relationship. What might the life of the Order, with its valuing of a more contemplative spirituality, offer to the wider church (and, indeed, itself, should a major disagreement arise within the Order — something that we have not encountered since its foundation 12 years ago)?

We recognised:

1. The need to resist the pressure to close down dissent
2. Convictions should be held humbly, with a resistance to dogmatism
3. Our Dream document speaks about ‘our hearts set on pilgrimage’, and that implies living with the unknown, requiring trust in God and love for one another
4. There is a place for justice, but this must not be idolised.
5. Today Baptists are often unaware of their ‘dissenting tradition’, and what that means, and where Baptists disagree, it is not the same as the old historic dissent
6. There is a spectrum of responses — those who collude with the status quo, those who are adversaries and those who dissent
7. Holding diversity well requires strong relationships, with the focus on those relationships taking priority over the issues at stake.
8. Christians are called to be ambassadors of peace
9. Waiting is an active spiritual practice, and not the same as procrastination
10. We need to learn how to negotiate our way through conflicting virtues and that requires a community to do so.
11. A priority for those who want to learn how to disagree well is ‘the journey inwards’, addressing our own internal conflicts in order to offer something that helps rather than hinders. A contemplative spirituality aids that journey, while activists can move too quickly to find a resolution that leads to schism.
12. We need to maintain the centrality of Jesus Christ (we noted how the Barmen Declaration illustrates that) and keep asking the question, what does it mean to follow Jesus Christ?
13. Dissent could be re-imagined as a communal activity that is a ‘long, loving, look at reality, together in Christ.’

In short, we emphasised the importance of looking at disagreements **together**, rather than in ideological echo-chambers, with the **relationships** we have in Christ, and the maintaining of the unity of the Spirit, as the way of being disciples of Jesus that guides us as we find disagreements emerging.

We want to question whether an insistence upon one's own views being adopted as policy by a wider group experiencing disagreement, to the exclusion of other views, is a biblical or Christ-following way. St Paul seems to have encountered such intransigence within the churches he cared for, and emphasised repeatedly the importance of unity within the body. Finding ways today to disagree, but remain in fellowship and love for one another, draws upon biblical virtues of humility, patience, compassion and kindness. Instead of loud dissent, we advocate quiet and humble listening to one another, accompanied by a prayerful exploration by each participant of their own inner journey that has led to those convictions being held.

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