

Variety is the Spice of Life!

East Window, July 2000

I was enjoying a chicken curry recently when I remembered that it wasn't long ago when an English person would have blanched at eating food that was not conservatively "meat and two veg". Our food, like much else about us, was all rather bland and predictable. But what a wonderful change has come about now that the Empire has come home to the "mother country" to share its delights. Curry has now been voted the national favourite, our modern music derives its beat from African and Asian sources, we have B-B-Qs like Australians, watch TV programmes from around the world and bump into differences every time we walk down the street. And as our worlds come together in our everyday life, so too our denominations are learning from closer communion and finding out just what delights the other traditions have to offer. What an exciting and fascinating world we now live in!

It was as if we once believed that everyone was supposed to be just like us and that differences between people were really a design fault in God's creation. But God has created difference for a very good reason - so that we can learn that truth is not a statement at all but a relationship. It also helps us not to be blinkered from wider truth but open to different insights. Some Christians major on the Bible as the most important aspect of our faith, while others will stress Tradition. Others again will say that God's gift of Reason must be our directing influence. We sometimes call the groups who share these particular insights, the "wings" of the Church, but we must remember that if a bird has only one wing it flies round in ever-decreasing circles. Thank goodness then that we belong to a Church where all three perspectives are welcomed as important influences upon the whole Body of believers. For then we can each bring our contribution and learn from each other that to be a Christian Church we will need to bring Bible, Tradition and Reason together - and the treasuring of all three has always been fundamental to our Anglican inheritance.

But dealing with our differences is not easy. It requires a sensitivity to the fact that God is present in people different from ourselves. This in turn requires prayer and an openness to how mysterious and wonderfully surprising God is. If we fail to recognise the gift of God in others then we run into an important danger - we might find ourselves treating our own perspective as more important than God! If we treat the Bible as fundamental we can make an idol of it. If we treat Church Tradition as the basis of faith, then we may fail to see God outside it. If we hold Reason as our only arbiter, we are holding up a human attribute as our God. It is all so easy for our own blinkered perspective to become our idolatry, and to demonise those who have a differing perspective.

One sure answer to idolatry in religion and to fascism in our nation is to recognise the Mystery of God's presence in our amazing variety.

+Laurie Bradwell