

## Welby has lost our faith over gay debate – it's time he stood down

Jayne Ozanne, Thursday November 9<sup>th</sup> 2023, The Times

In July 2022, Justin Welby stated that he would continue as Archbishop of Canterbury until retirement age in 2026 “if my health is good and people are happy that I’m still there”. I reflected at the time: how would he know if people were happy, and who did he mean?

The past few months have shown there are now many unhappy with his leadership. Indeed, there are calls for him to go, specifically over his handling of the interminable debates regarding gay Christians such as me and whether our love can be treated as “holy” or “hellish”.

For nearly a decade, Welby has pursued a “unity at all costs” strategy – with that cost squarely borne by the LGBT community, caught in the crossfire of a fiercely divided church. It seems he believes that if we could just sit down and talk we would accept each other, even if we don’t agree.

This is deeply flawed. You cannot reconcile two completely different understandings of Christianity; one that preaches hell and damnation to anyone who has sex outside holy matrimony and the other that seeks to honour love wherever it is found.

This has led to an entrenching of views, with traditionalists refusing to give an inch. Bishops have broken ranks and started, finally, to make their personal views known. This disunity at least allows for some honesty about where people stand – with The Times survey showing a large proportion of priests wanting to conduct same-sex marriages. The Church’s false unity is exposed, with many perceiving us as one of the most judgmental, hypocritical and abusive institutions in England today.

Welby is also confronted with the problem that few now believe or accept his apologies or promises. The Church of England has recently been beset by a series of scandals and cover-ups, some of which have led to independent inquiries and all of which have highlighted the level of abuse that has been rampant in the Church. While this continues, few will accept platitudes that appear hollow and meaningless.

The burden of office seems to be weighing heavily on Welby. In recent meetings he has appeared tired and short tempered. Surely it is time for him to step aside and allow someone with a new vision, who can embrace a new chapter led by a new supreme governor and so help shape an institution that can regain the trust and respect of the nation it is there to serve.

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