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# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## The Brexit Stalemate: No one is listening anymore. Could the UK actually learn something from its Church?

Mia Forbes Pirie (Jurit LLP) · Friday, October 28th, 2016

It is unusual times when the Church can be seen to be more progressive in certain matters than the State but this may actually be such a time.

The UK has reached a stage in its history where polarized views and a lack of respect between the people who hold those views predominates. As the country seeks to find its feet in the wake of this unexpected outcome, we are all showing our uglier sides. The Head of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury recently referred to: ‘the thin crust of the politeness and tolerance of our society, through which since the referendum we have seen an outwelling of poison and hatred that I cannot remember in this country for very many years.’ At the moment, it seems that little is being done to deal with this.

At the same time, the Church of England has recently taken over 1300 of its members through its own two year process, in which I, along with around 20 other mediators and facilitators, helped people who felt passionately understand those who felt very differently from them. We did not set out to change anyone’s views, just to change the conversation: to help people disagree well. And that made all the difference.

The parallels between the Church’s issues over gay marriage and the State’s Brexit dilemma are emerging. For the time being the Church, surprisingly perhaps, seems to be doing rather better than the State at dealing with these difficult matters.

On the one hand, there is a sense that the Brexit vote, to some degree, affirmed those with racist tendencies, and gave them greater courage not only to share their views but also to act on them. This was not necessarily intended; but it seems to be an unfortunate consequence for a small minority at the far right of the Brexit vote. This can be likened to those within the Church who turn their backs on the LGBTI community, see them as a problem and exclude them. In both cases, these are by no means mainstream views but their shock-value and in some Brexit cases, the violent actions associated with them has them front and centre in the public perception.

A new ‘liberal extreme’ has sprung up which looks down on people who voted Brexit and unabashedly calls them ‘idiots’. They have forgotten the liberalism that inspired their ideas and have entered the debate as dogmatists, no longer concerned for inclusion and tolerance of those who do not share their views. This liberal extreme does not always recognize itself as such. It simply assumes that it is right. Don’t we all? And nobody wants to feel looked down on. In the

case of the Church, its liberal extreme equally has a tendency to take the moral high-ground and not investigate further the views that it abhors.

The problem in these two cases is that everyone at the extremes just thinks they are right – and the few lonely voices in the middle get drowned out. The debate has become polarized and people do not see a need to listen to each other and discuss. The idea that there is nothing to talk about is often a key indicator that a really good conversation is needed. Not, any conversation but an Intelligent Conversation.

So perhaps, this is a time when the State can learn from the Church, and the Nation needs a conversation to help understand each others' views. In order to do that, we need to understand where people who think very differently from us are coming from. We need to take the time to get to know them as people before we then understand what brought them to their viewpoint. If we persist in throwing words and ideas at each other, rather than engagingly wholeheartedly with our fellow countrymen and women, our Nation will be weaker, more brittle and more fragile. The UK needs its own version of the Church of England's Regional Shared Conversations so that people all over the country can disagree with respect and move forward united, instead of developing more hatred, division and contempt.

*(Modified for Kluwer Mediation Blog from the original version published on the Huffington Post)*

*Mia is a Mediator, Facilitator and Coach. You can find out more about Mia and Mia's work on her [personal website](#) and at [Jurit.com](#).*

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