

Review of CTE Forum 2018 by Andrew Dodd joint Minister at Hawkshead Hill Baptist Chapel

It is over 9 years since I went to a CTE forum when I was ecumenical officer to Churches Together in Cumbria. What a change and world of a difference from what I recall were my past experiences.

I want to approach my review from Baptist principles which I summarise as the priesthood of all believers, the independence and autonomy of a church, centrality of the word of God and the openness to the Spirit to lead

My recollections of past meetings of forum were of earnest conversation and 'men in black' dealing with weighty matters of church structure and with tense formality in the air. Cordial and positive, they were good meetings and no doubt helped bring relationships to their current status. Forum 2018 was not like this! It felt like a people's forum. There were 'men in black', but it was the kaleidoscope of age, ethnicity, gender, and the life of the church in all its grass roots diversity which struck me. This led to open honest and lively conversation exemplified by two sessions when presidents of CTiC took part in panel discussion on the theme of their experience of the transforming presence of Christ. Here we saw the presidents speaking of their personal experiences and struggles in life. They are 'just like one of us' was an appropriate comment by someone. There was no sense of superiority or separation of 'the great and good' with weightier matters to deal with in corridors of power. These were priestly presidents for the priestly people of God and the atmosphere they created pervaded the whole conference

48 Churches and many independent bodies in association make up CTE and most were represented in some way each having its own identity, emphasis and character. There was no sense of competition between the delegates, it felt a safe space to be who one is and then explore differences with interest and respect. Whilst we could not share communion together, in our small groups, seminars and meal times I believe we were held in a form of sacramentality. The way of being a wide spectrum/ rainbow church was expressed through accessible times of worship which represented many traditions. I worshipped next to tongue speaking, hand raising Pentecostals, 'New Church' charismatics' and deeply reflective Taizé singing contemplatives. I believe respect for each believer's integrity and their faith expression, acknowledging and learning from the differences of each church represented, very much reflects Baptist convictions

It was interesting to see how the Forum moved from the variety of experiences and life as I describe above to biblical exposition on the final morning and not the reverse. Some might argue that the word of God was not central? I would seek to disagree. Scholarly reflections on the Emmaus road encounter by Roman Catholic, Quaker and Pentecostal theologians were rich and complementary, our walk with Christ in the midst of learned comment. David Cornicks reflections on his retirement from CTE would be seen as a prophetic and Christ centred word in any theological context and in my opinion need reading publically in all churches! This was a forum which was open to the wind of the Spirit who speaks to us today.

CTE Forum 2018, challenged and encouraged me to celebrate even more our own Baptist heritage amongst God's diverse Church in God's kaleidoscopic world.

Andrew Dodd

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