

Transcript

Interview on Radio 4 “Sunday” 22 Jan 2023

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001hdm4> from 37:31

Interviewer (William Crawley)

We can speak now to the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell. Archbishop good morning.

Archbishop of York

Oh, good morning to you, William.

Interviewer

It does seem like you're facing both ways here, doesn't it? The church is saying “no” to gay marriage, but if you are gay and married, then you can receive God's blessing in the service. What is the theological rationale for that gambit?

Archbishop of York

Well, first of all, it's good to be with you to speak about this.

Unfortunately, ChatGBT wasn't available to the bishops when we were discussing this, [*joke referring to previous item on the programme*]

so I think we've come up with a way forward which I give thanks for though of course I recognise the disappointment that it causes, and indeed that the anxiety to many people. It's a human, but I think a godly way forward. Coming from a...

Interviewer

But it's sitting on the fence.

Archbishop of York

...Place where the church is divided and where there are differences between us.

Interviewer

Bishop, isn't it? Isn't it a bit of a fudge?

Archbishop of York

Well, that's not how I see it, no. I see it as a way of holding together a church which doesn't agree on this issue and it takes us to a place where LGBTIQ+ people, people entering into same-sex marriages, people in civil partnerships are able to come to the Church of England and those relationships and marriages can be acknowledged and celebrated. People can receive God's blessing, and that's a good thing. Yes, of course there are people who want more, but as we've just heard, there are people who want a great deal less. So yeah, I think it's something that, yeah, I think it's a new place that we're in.

Interviewer

It's certainly a new place, but it looks to some people like the ethical equivalent of the lowest common denominator. You know, you're gonna please some but not everybody.

Archbishop of York

I fully understand what it looks like to some people. I and my colleagues completely get this, but I want to emphasise the positives to you and to the listeners here. And actually, my sense has been in the last couple of days as more and more people have understood the challenge and the dilemmas of this, that they've understood how this can be a place that we can inhabit with generosity. But yes, with continuing sorrow for those who for whom this will not be enough.

Interviewer

Can we just clarify one point? Is it still church teaching that gay sex is a sin?

Archbishop of York

Well, what we are saying is that physical and sexual intimacy belongs in committed, stable, faithful relationships and therefore where we see a committed, stable, faithful relationship between two people of the same sex, we are now in a position where those people can be welcomed fully into the life of the Church, on their terms.

Interviewer

And given a blessing: you don't bless sin, right? So you must be blessing something you believe to be good.

Archbishop of York

As I say, we believe that stable, faithful, committed, loving relationships are good. They are the place for physical intimacy...

Interviewer

And not a sin?

Archbishop of York (40:49)

But well, that... that's what I'm saying... we're looking to focus on the good in relationships and we want people to live in good, stable, faithful relationships.

Interviewer

And what about priests, Bishop, who are in civil partnerships? I know you will be issuing new pastoral guidance in a few months. But will those priests be required to commit themselves to celibacy now and in the future? Or is there a change on that?

Archbishop of York

As you know this only came out on Friday and what we did on Friday was say there's going to be this suite of resources, we call them prayers of love and faith, which churches and clergy will be able to use if they want to use and nobody has to use them. But following on from that there will need to be some pastoral guidance because if we are saying that we want to welcome and acknowledge same-sex marriages in church, obviously we need to work out exactly what that means for clergy. We're going to do that quickly. So I can't give you chapter and verse exactly on what that would be right now. But we're gonna very quickly get on with that. And it does mean that the previous guidance, very shortly, will be rescinded.

Interviewer

I don't wanna put words in your mouth Archbishop, but it does sound given the logic of what you've said in this interview already. It does sound like the obvious next step is to remove from gay clergy the current rule whereby they have to remain sexually abstinent even though they're in the same sex civil partnership.

Archbishop of York

As I said, we will be issuing the pastoral guidance and we haven't yet had that discussion.

Interviewer

The prayer services that that we've seen in the past few days are permitted to include words of commitment and dedication by the couples where they can also symbolise their commitment with rings and words of blessing from the priest. This, to people who are there attending this prayer service, this will look and sound like marriage-light, won't it?

Archbishop of York

I believe this will be a good thing. We're offering a range of resources which I imagine different churches will use in different ways, which is which is, you know how we approach the life of worship.

I think again, what I want to emphasise is, you know, as we heard at the beginning of your piece, there's disagreement in our church and also we're a global church and a global faith. We have to think about other faiths. This is an issue. So what we offer here is a way that...

Interviewer

We've got to leave it there I'm afraid we're right out of time. But thank you very much. I really appreciate it, Stephen. Bishop of York. Stephen Cottrell. That is it from this week's Sunday.