Learning From Indaba: Some Lessons For Post-Pilling Conversations

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Abstract

The Church of England's Pilling Report recommends a series of 'facilitated conversations at a national and diocesan level' on the subject of human sexuality, similar to the Continuing Indaba Project in the Anglican Communion. In this article Goddard and Bridger, who were members of an independent ecumenical team that observed at first hand the work of Continuing Indaba over a period of three years, trace the history and working of the project. They offer a critical assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, drawing upon conflict resolution theories and setting indaba in the context of these. They argue that although indaba undoubtedly offers valuable insights and practices, it must learn from a wider body of knowledge and resolution approaches, and must be complemented by methodologies that give a sufficient place to theology. This is necessary in order to address fundamental questions involved in dealing with theological and cultural diversity. They conclude that only this will offer an adequate basis for the post-Pilling process to move forward.

Introduction

The publication of the Pilling Report[1] marks a significant new phase in the Church of England's discussions of human sexuality. The heart of its recommendations on the next steps for the Church of England is that 'the subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England needs to commit itself at national and diocesan level'. The Report places a strong emphasis on 'listening to each other'[2] and states that 'the kind of process we have in mind is not dissimilar to the 'Indaba' process adopted by the 2008 Lambeth Conference' and that the process 'should be developed alongside, and in partnership with the Continuing Indaba process within the Anglican Communion'. We were both privileged to be observers of Phase One of the Continuing Indaba Project (CIP) as members of an independent Ecumenical Observation Team. In this article we write as those who believe that the Anglican Communion is better off as a result of CIP, but we also suggest that there are important lessons to be learned both from its achievements and its shortcomings. These carry implications for the proposed facilitated conversations proposed by Pilling.

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[1] Church of England. (2013). *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*. London: Church House Publishing.

[2] Church of England. (2013). *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*. London: Church House Publishing, paras 55-84, 352-368.

Introducing Continuing Indaba Phase One
Sources

In developing the kind of process recommended by Pilling (building on the Continuing Indaba Process), it is important to recognise that CIP had a number of sources which contributed theologically and conceptually to its birth and development.

First, the Anglican Communion's Listening Process (2006-09) constituted the main public official initiative. This originated in 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10 and, following a request of the Primates, was established by the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in 2005. Canon Phil Groves, Facilitator of the Listening Process, became CIP Director and the Listening Process website states that the work of Mutual Listening would be 'taken forwards in Continuing Indaba'.[3] In answer to the question 'Is this the same as the Listening Process?' the Anglican Communion website stated that 'Continuing Indaba is concerned with mutual listening.'[4]

Second, CIP was shaped by a research exercise in 2008 sponsored by the Archbishop of Canterbury and coordinated by the Centre for Anglican Communion Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena. This produced a recommendation to Archbishop Rowan Williams that he consider a new initiative based on a methodology known as consensus process which had been used to bring together opposing parties around issues of sexuality and public health in the United States.[5] Such a process would need to be adapted in the light of the intercultural and other particular features of the Communion.

Third, the most obvious precursor was the use of Indaba at the 2008 Lambeth Conference. The Lambeth Design Group, at the suggestion of Thabo Makgoba, a South African Bishop (current Archbishop), introduced *indaba* as the way to achieve the goal of 'a new, more relational and conversational process' to engender 'mutual understanding and common commitment to God's mission across the Anglican Communion'.[6] In his account of *indaba,*[7] Makgoba explains that it is a Zulu word 'for a gathering for purposeful discussion' and is 'both a process and a method of engagement as we listen to one another concerning challenges that face our community and by extension the Anglican Communion'. Indaba primarily acknowledges that 'there are issues that need to be addressed effectively to foster on-going communal living' and that everyone needs to be aware of these 'without

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[3] Anglican Communion (2007). *The Listening Process*. Retrieved February 5, 2014, from http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/index.cfm. The official announcement of the project called it the Continuing Indaba and Mutual Listening Project.

[4] Retrieved February 5, 2014, from http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba/whatis/faq.cfm.

[5] The National Center for Primary Care (2006). *Interim Report of the National Consensus Process on Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior.* Retrieved February 5, 2014, from http://www.msm.edu/Files/CESH_NCP_InterimReport.pdf.

[6] Douglas, I. (2009). 'Equipping for God's Mission: The Missiological Vision on the 2008 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 33(1), p 4.

[7] Makgoba, T. (2013). *Essence of Indaba*. Retrieved February 5, 2014, from http://continuingindaba.com/2013/09/18/essence-of-indaba. The quotations which follow are taken from this document.

immediately trying to resolve them one way or the other'. Thus, in *indaba*, 'we meet and converse, ensuring that everybody has a voice, and contributes (in our case, praying that it might be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) and that the issues at hand are fully defined and understood by all'. The goal is 'to find out the deeper convergences that might hold people together in difference and come to a deeper understanding of the topic or issue discussed' through understanding others' thinking. As he explained post-Lambeth, much in this approach resonates with Christian teaching and, contrary to some claims, 'Indaba is not an interminable talking shop. Indaba can and does impose sanctions, including the ultimate sanction of expulsion, on those who transgress the life of the community – but only after every other possible option is fully explored'.[8]

Fourth, while serving as Facilitator for the Listening Process, Canon Groves was completing his unpublished 2009 doctoral thesis. This distilled a model of partnership for mission from Paul's relationship with the Philippians, using it to examine the Anglican Communion's past and present practice and propose new ways forward. Groves notes that 'the Philippian Model is being used as basis for planning in the development of the Continuing Indaba and Mutual Listening Project. The Model has made a significant contribution to planning.'[9]

Structure

The first phase of the Continuing Indaba Project (May 2009 to March 2012) constituted a complex international experiment in cross-cultural dialogue that, according to its own self-description, sought to intensify relationships across the Communion so genuine conversation could take place across difference in order to foster energy for global and local mission. Its conversations involved over 100 participants from twelve dioceses drawn from Asia, Africa, India, the Caribbean, North America and the United Kingdom. Having observed its development, we are clear that CIP is significant in terms of its scale and aims. It has developed an approach to dialogue that in important respects has proved distinctive and imaginative and needs to be more widely known and appreciated.[10]

Continuing Indaba comprised four pilot projects, each involving three dioceses from around the globe, each of which sent eight representatives. Prior to the climactic facilitated Final Conversations, there were a number of key components. Firstly, in 2010, diocesan convenors, usually the bishop, met together and identified three or four key areas and issues to be explored together by their group of three dioceses. It is important that, contrary to some perceptions, CIP was not focussed on sexuality but on aspects of mission which covered such areas as social justice, youth alienation, pluralism and land reform as well as

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[8] Makgoba, T. (2010). *Addressing Anglican Differences - Spirit and Culture at the Foot of the Cross.* Retrieved February 5, 2014, from http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2010/06/addressing-anglican-differences-spirit.html
[9] Groves, N.P. (2009), 'A Model for Partnership'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham. p. 283. Available from http://ethos.bl.uk.
[10] For more information see http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba. See also http://continuingindaba.com.

sexuality. Secondly, in July 2011, facilitators for the final conversations were selected and equipped. A third major component was nine theological hubs around the Communion (October 2009 to June 2011) bringing together theologians to resource CIP. Some of the resultant papers were published and contain much helpful material.[11]

Crucial to the Final Conversations was that they were the culmination of a year-long process of relationship-building through Encounters. Within each group, twenty-four participants spent a week together visiting each others' dioceses (at roughly three to four monthly intervals) between May 2011 and Feb 2012. Immediately following the third visit there were three days of facilitated '*indaba*' conversations.

The basic structure of all four conversations was similar. Participants and facilitators (meeting for the first time) introduced themselves, often by sharing why they had joined Indaba. They shared hopes and fears and reached agreement on rules for conversation and subjects for discussion. Around a day and a half was usually then spent discussing the subjects in a mix of small groups and plenaries, using various forms of facilitation, before moving to closure and looking ahead. All conversations included time in diocesan groups, a daily Bible study using *lectio divina,* and regular daily worship together ending with a closing Eucharist.

Learning from *indaba*

Participants in CIP clearly benefitted in multiple ways[12] and there is much of value to be learned from the Project. However, at the same time, our observations suggest that if CIP is to be regarded as an exemplar for post-Pilling facilitated conversations in the Church of England, it will be important to attend to a number of critical aspects.

First, as the brief summary above makes clear, CIP required much time in preparation and planning to succeed. There is here a tension between the Pilling Report's call for consultation 'without undue haste but with a sense of urgency, perhaps over a period of two years'[13] and the need for a carefully designed process which is fit for purpose. In particular, our experience of CIP was that the quality of facilitation was crucial to the relative success of each final conversation.

Second, it is very clear the final conversations were valuable because of the many months of building personal relationships, literally journeying together in one another's dioceses, and gaining understanding and insight through cross-cultural contextual engagement with

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[11] The main publication is Draper, J and Groves, P (eds). (2010, revised 2011). *Creating Space*, London: Anglican Communion Office. This is available at http://continuingindaba.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/creating-space.pdf.
[12] The CIP's own final report is available at http://continuingindaba.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/continuing-indaba-report.pdf and includes a summary of the findings of its Evaluation Team.
[13] Church of England. (2013). *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*. London: Church House Publishing, p 149.

differing contexts of mission and ministry (with many participants also learning new things about their own diocese). Although cultural and theological differences within the Church of England are not as great as across the Communion, CIP shows the need for time-consuming (and sometimes painful) encounters with those who are 'other' if real listening and dialogue is to happen.

Third, the centrality of worship and spiritual reflection and a focus on mission were unquestionably key strengths of *indaba* that set it apart from non-religious dialogue processes and give it a distinctive and positive edge. However, one area which remains unclear but important for discussion on sexuality is the role of corporate Bible study. In the final conversations biblical reflection was supplied by the method of *lectio divina* in which it was emphasised that participants should not discuss the meaning of the biblical text but rather share personal reactions to hearing the passages. There is perhaps, then, a question of whether and how *indaba* can enable a group to grapple together with their different, perhaps incompatible, readings of biblical texts rather than simply hear one another's reactions to particular texts.

Fourth, issues of power are always present in such conversations. On the whole, CIP was structured in such a way as to prevent inbuilt power dynamics distorting the Conversations. Reference to the reality of such dynamics was also often made by facilitators or participants. However, those with positions of authority – notably bishops – can, even if not consciously, affect the dynamics, not always constructively. In relation to sexuality, any future dialogue process will need to recognise that there will be those who feel vulnerable, both LGBT Christians (not least clergy) as well as those wishing to articulate a clear counter-cultural conservative position.

Fifth, a notable feature of the Conversations was the thinness of explicit biblical and theological input, even on the rare occasions when a task was framed with reference to these. The conversations tended to be more expressive and existential, drawing on personal experiences and individuals' own views rather than engaging in *theological* reflection drawing upon Scripture, tradition or Christian doctrine: this despite CIP's declared intention to reflect theologically in the Anglican Way, using Scripture, Tradition and Reason to generate genuinely theological discussion in depth.

We believe a number of factors contributed to this feature of the conversations:

1. Many of the participants may have lacked training and ability in theological reflection and CIP did not seek to provide any.

2. Facilitators were largely unprepared or unable to facilitate *theological* engagement and so plenary sessions were often little more than recapping what had been said in small groups, or amounted only to a superficial noting and naming of theological questions without exploration. Plenary sessions proved not so much a *discussion* across difference as a *listing of issues* across difference.

3. The more focussed discussions in small groups were not facilitated and were not set up to encourage consideration of resources in Scripture or tradition alongside personal experience. Although there were occasional sparks of theological reflection, the appearance of a resource person who could enable such discussion was rare.

4. The theological work of the hubs was never really connected to the Final Conversations in order to shape and resource their discussions.

5. The framing of *indaba* in terms of creating space for mutual listening did not give weight to the theological and educational element of corporate dialogue and reflection within the Final Conversations.

If facilitated conversations on sexuality seek to facilitate theological reflection or education then they need to address these gaps. More training or preparation in theological reflection will be essential and/or some level of briefing or preparation for the discussion of the identified issues. This will enable a much richer and deeper discussion resourced by more than the participants' necessarily limited experience and personal outlooks.

Related to these issues of theological substance and methods of reflection is the question of how *indaba* frames difference and disagreement. There was no attempt to articulate or delineate areas of agreement or disagreement beyond unsystematically listing them; nor did the approach aim at discerning any kind of consensus. It was therefore at times unclear how much people experienced genuine talking 'across difference' as opposed to simply noting that 'difference' existed. The method we observed seemed to be concerned only to allow differing views on subjects to be put alongside one another without knowing then what to do with them. But simply to acknowledge that differences exist is not the same as articulating what underlies them or has given rise to them, or the structure of their reasoning, let alone addressing them or developing a means of allowing them to interact substantially and creatively. This observation raises the deeper questions of what process is needed in any particular context of difference and conflict, how *indaba* approaches the key issues of diversity and consequent disagreement, and how we might think theologically about the task of facilitated conversation across difference.

Locating Continuing Indaba in relation to models of conflict resolution: a perspectival analysis

CIP was conceived at a time of (and in response to) an acute crisis for Anglicanism. Many throughout the world believed that the Anglican Communion would be torn apart by the conflicts that had developed around sexuality. In what sense, therefore, should Continuing Indaba be seen as a process designed to address or resolve conflict? The answer to this question is important in arriving at a reasoned assessment of *indaba* both in its own right and as a potential model for dealing with contentious issues in future.

CIP has been spoken of in various ways at various times: as conflict *resolution*, conflict *management* and as conflict *transformation*. Whatever the precise terminology, the underlying intention was clear from the beginning: *indaba* was to be a means towards the reduction of tension and the engendering of civil discourse within the Communion under the banner of 'enabling mission.' Whether or not this could properly be described as a form of conflict resolution is perhaps a secondary (though significant) issue. But whatever 'conflict' label is attached to *indaba*, the fact remains that it presented itself as a new way forward – a way of breaking the relational deadlock in which Anglicanism found itself.

But how new was it? Certainly for Anglicanism the *indaba* method represented a novel experiment both in scale and method. At the same time, it is important to appreciate that although the *indaba* 'brand' was new, in practice CIP drew upon well-established approaches and ideas which were then given an Anglican twist. In assessing its value for the kind of facilitated conversations proposed in the Pilling Report – or for comparable processes – it is instructive to locate *indaba* in relation to this body of knowledge and practice.

Although approaches to dealing with conflict share a number of common features, they nonetheless vary according to two significant factors: the theoretical assumptions that underpin them and their practical orientation and methodology. Consequently, they are best analysed by viewing them as representing differing perspectives ranging from (a) approaches that give most weight to conversation and dialogue as goals in themselves, irrespective of whether they in any sense produce a resolution of the dispute, to (b) those which emphasise the importance of solving the problem(s) which gave rise to the dispute and producing some kind of mutually acceptable agreement. In practice, all but the purest examples embody both kinds of perspective to a greater or lesser extent. The key issue is: which perspective is the dominant or controlling one in any given case?

In attempting to locate CIP in relation to this perspectival model, for the sake of simplicity we shall use the term *conflict approaches* as a general term to describe all approaches to dealing with conflict, though, , within both theory and practice important terminological distinctions should be made between them, not least between conflict *resolution* (in a narrow sense), conflict *management* and conflict *transformation*.

Dialogue

The concept and practice of dialogue centre on the notion of structured conversation as the fundamental instrument for dealing with conflict. Accordingly, conflict is seen as a result of relationship breakdown (whether at the individual or group level) and the concomitant communication failure that is both cause and effect of that breakdown. Consequently, the end goal and proximate task of dialogue must be to restore relationships and enable effective communication between conflicted or estranged parties:

> As the dialogic perspective makes clear, in communication the participants must collaborate to create meaning, and one reason that communication between

> conflicting parties so often is unavailing is that the parties are unable to collaborate to that degree.[14]

Thus,

> The emphasis is… on improving the way in which people with significant differences relate to each other. The broad aim is to promote respectful inquiry and to stimulate a new sort of conversation that allows important issues to surface freely.[15]

Central to this model is the recognition that it does not aim to produce specific outcomes or 'products' other than openness to hearing the points of view of others and a willingness to continue in conversation. It is essentially a hermeneutical journey in which participants seek mutual understanding and the creation of new horizons of shared meaning rather than concrete resolution of a dispute as it is commonly understood. Dialogue *per se* is not the same as negotiation, mediation or arbitration. It does not require that the process end in an agreement which satisfies the interests of the conflicting parties and thus result in some kind of 'solution': it merely requires that parties continue on the conversational journey together. (This has given rise among practitioners to the question whether, strictly speaking, dialogue should be regarded as a method of conflict *resolution*, but this need not detain us here). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that 'dialogue facilitators do not look for or highlight areas of common ground [for negotiation purposes], nor do they push parties towards settlement.'[16]

Dialogue means we sit and talk with each other, especially those with whom we may think we have the greatest differences. However, talking together all too often means debating, discussing with a view to convincing the other, arguing for our point of view, examining pros and cons. In dialogue, the intention is not to advocate but to inquire; not to argue but to explore; not to convince but to discover.[17]

Dialogue, then, as a matter of principle, does not aim to 'fix things'. Resolving disputes, in the sense of arriving at agreements, decisions, statements or specified outcomes is not its required outcome. Its aim is to create conditions for civil discourse and the airing of differences in a respectful manner. If it happens that a dialogue results in an agreement or

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[14] Krauss, R.M and Morsella, E. (2006). Communication and Conflict. In M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman and E.C. Marcus (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, p.153.

[15] Maiese, M. (2003). 'Dialogue.' In G. Burgess and H. Burgess (Eds), *Beyond Intractability.* Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted September 2003 at http://beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/dialogue.

[16] Conflict Research Consortium (1997). *Dialogue*. Retrieved February 5, 2014 from www.colorado.edu/conflict/transform/dialog.htm.

[17] Louise Diamond, co-founder of The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, Arlington VA, quoted in Maiese, M. (2003). 'Dialogue.' In G. Burgess and H. Burgess (Eds), *Beyond Intractability.* Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. For the work of Louise Diamond, see www.imtd.org

other collaborative result, this is useful but, in and of itself, agreement is not the goal. The purpose is the creation of conversational space.

Problem solving

An alternative - though not necessarily contradictory - perspective is offered by those approaches that view conflict in terms of what might be termed 'problem-solving'. These are designed to lead to a 'solution' that resolves the dispute in question. Dispute arbitration and mediation would be the clearest examples. On this model, dialogue, though valuable, is essentially instrumental towards a greater end. It is ordered beyond itself towards resolution of the conflict. The assumption is that by framing a dispute as a specific problem to be solved, it becomes possible for parties to engage in constructive shared activities and develop intentional strategies designed to arrive at an agreed solution that goes beyond the opening up of dialogical space. In this way, the conflict moves from conversation to resolution (or something akin). Such approaches share with dialogue the belief that civil discourse is crucial, but understand this as a prelude to, and a context for, arriving at concrete outcomes – either the resolution of the dispute or an agreed step towards it. This is the intentional end product.[18] In contrast to dialogue, discussion within a problem-solving framework does not merely aim to open up discursive possibilities but to produce results other than the continuation of conversation. '*Developing mutually acceptable solutions* is the hallmark of problem-solving approaches.'[19] By this means, disputants are drawn into a process that actively moves them forward in collaboration rather than competition or mutually assured obstruction.

From a problem-solving perspective, the process can be divided into specific stages. The first two are analytical:

- Diagnosing the conflict
- Identifying alternative pragmatic solutions

These must in turn lead to concrete decision-making if they are to lead to any kind of solution. Thus two further stages are necessary:

- Evaluating and choosing a mutually acceptable solution
- Committing to the mutually agreed solution and implementing it

Such a process, its advocates argue, will inevitably require the collaboration of conflicting parties to develop a shared strategy. This, in turn, will embed participant ownership of the process in such a way that issues of relationship and communication will be addressed *by the*

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[18] Depending on the dudration of the process, there may, of course, be interim products along the way such as statements of agreement; but the aim is that the final product will be the ending of the dispute.
[19] Weitzman, E.A. and Weitzman, P.F. (2006). The PDSM Model: Integrating Problem Solving and Decision Making in Conflict Resolution. In M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman and E.C. Marcus (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, p.201.

act of problem-solving rather than through the creation of conversational space for its own sake. The need for a solution drives the conversation rather than the other way round. *Ipso facto,* the process itself becomes both the arena and mode of civil discourse by virtue of its focus on *the pragmatics of problem-solving and generation of solution-oriented outcomes*. This is a very different approach from dialogue *simpliciter*.

From this standpoint, then, if conflict resolution is viewed as a cooperative endeavour in which the parties see their respective desired outcomes as positively correlated, people tend to work hard to create a resolution that maximises *both* parties' outcomes. The goal becomes *to do as well as possible for both self and other*, rather than to engage in the kind of destructive win-lose struggle that exemplifies competitive, contentious conflict.[20]

If a perspectival analysis of the sort we have offered here is accepted, it provides a clear differentiation between approaches that give primacy of place to conversation / dialogue and those that give the central role to active problem-solving or solution-finding. This distinction is crucial to understanding the nature and practice of *indaba*. It is also crucial in deciding upon a post-Pilling process.

Blended approaches and conflict transformation

This delineation of conflict resolution models might at first sight suggest only a binary or bipolar understanding. However, that is not the case. While 'pure' examples of both dialogical and problem-solving approaches can be found, most in practice seek to blend the two, depending on which is given primary emphasis. In all cases, dialogue is essential, but approaches that stress the importance of arriving at a 'solution' view it as essentially a *prelude* to problem-solving, a trust-building step *prior to* embarking on the identification of problems and all that follows in the problem-solving paradigm. Others, while advocating the importance of moving beyond conversation, nonetheless recognise that establishing conversation may itself constitute an interim goal. Dialogue and problem-solving taken together give rise to a blended model. In the development of conflict approaches, this has led to the rise of a particular kind of approach, namely *conflict transformation.* To this we now turn.

According to the Search for Common Ground initiative, conflict transformation 'aims at shifting how individuals and communities perceive and accommodate their differences, away from adversarial (win-lose) approaches toward collaborative (win-win)'.[21] It is significant, therefore, that the Mennonite John Paul Lederach of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (perhaps the leading exponent of conflict transformation theory and practice) while recognising the necessity of dialogue, argues that by itself it will not

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[20] Weitzman, E.A. and Weitzman, P.F. (2006). The PDSM Model: Integrating Problem Solving and Decision Making in Conflict Resolution. In M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman and E.C. Marcus (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, p. 214.

[21] Search For Common Ground (2014). *Commonly Used Terms*. Retrieved February 5, 2014 from http://sfcg.org/resources/resources_terms.html. See entry for Conflict Transformation.

accomplish genuine, sustainable transformation. What is needed is a process that incorporates dialogue alongside 'creative problem-solving… and nonviolent mechanisms of social change.'[22] Conflict transformation must achieve *structural,* as well as personal, transformation. A change in the systemic conditions that have given rise to conflict remains a *sine qua non*. Any process that claims to be transformational must develop intentional strategic means for achieving this. Specifically, he contends, change must apply in all dimensions of a conflict – personal, relational, structural, and cultural. Within these, any process that aims at transformation must carry out four specific tasks:

1. deal with the immediate conflictual situation
2. work on deeper relationship patterns that require long-term change
3. develop a platform that addresses the content, context and the structure of relationships within the conflict; and
4. deliver this through the design and implementation of intentional change mechanisms within an intentional strategic framework.

And central to transformation is building a base that generates *processes* that

- provide adaptive responses to the immediate and future iterations of conflict episodes, and
- address the deeper and longer-term relational and systemic patterns that produce violent, destructive expressions of conflict.[23]

Although space prevents extensive discussion of conflict transformation models, one critical question stands out: can any process that aims to transform a situation succeed on the basis of a dialogical approach alone? Lederach's insistence on the need for sustainable, long term, strategic change mechanisms suggests not. Creating the conditions for civil discourse and improved relationships is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for genuine conflict transformation. Conversation is a first step but must be integrated within a deliberate *strategy* for change that goes beyond intensified subjective relationships between conflicted parties to encompass intentional systemic and structural change. Such an approach will above all address fundamental issues: power relations within organisations, the distribution and dynamics of power, and constitutional reform. These are relevant both for the Anglican Communion and for the Church of England. Without such a 'thick' account of transformation, in which strategy is essential, conflicts are unlikely to be resolved, as opposed to managed. This is especially the case with intractable conflicts where parties may settle into a mode of unresolved co-existence. Underlying issues are not addressed but the tension is controlled or tolerated until an event causes the conflict to break out again. The Cold War is an obvious paradigm case but it is arguable that the Anglican conflicts over

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[22] Lederach, J. P. (2003). *Conflict Transformation*. Retrieved February 5, 2014 from http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/transformation.
[23] Lederach, J. P. (2003). *Conflict Transformation*. Retrieved February 5, 2014 from http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/transformation.

sexuality represent the same pattern.[24] Moreover, as studies show, Lederach's writings and work in conflict situations around the world have been developed at considerable length explicitly as an alternative to 'pure' dialogue and 'pure' problem-solving approaches. Conflict transformation represents the paradigm case of a blended model.

Locating Continuing Indaba

How, then, should we locate CIP in the light of these models? Is it reasonable to do so? We would argue that it is; for identifying the category into which *indaba* falls must be the first step towards establishing reasonable expectations of what it can accomplish. Given that Continuing Indaba has grown out of the Listening Process and describes itself in dialogical terms (albeit dialogue with a purpose – 'to foster energy for mission'), the broad category into which it falls seems clear – and it by this that is should be judged. It would be disastrous if the Church of England, in the wake of Pilling, were to adopt a dialogical process such as *indaba* in the belief that it could achieve problem-solving results. The design of a process must follow clearly from the hoped-for outcomes and the nature of a process itself. Put simply, it would be unreasonable to expect *indaba* to deliver what it cannot.

Theological reflections

Theological and faith dimensions and presuppositions distinguish CIP from non-religious dialogue processes making it more than simply a matter of dialogical techniques applied in a religious setting. There is something unique about *indaba* that flows from its belief that God is at work within it. This leads us to offer some concluding theological reflections on *indaba* and some challenges now facing us post-Pilling.

Conversation as theological task

The centrality of conversation must take God as its starting point. Drawing upon social Trinitarian models in recent decades, this theme emphasizes that the true model of human relationality is to be found in the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. As distinct but interdependent persons, they are bound together in a communion of mutual love, respect and self-giving, represented in the idea of *perichoresis* or interpenetration. This carries significant implications for human dialogue, for if 'it follows that relationality lies at the heart of a Trinitarian theological method' then 'this in turn demands a willingness to enter into, and a desire to sustain, relationships with others… even if we profoundly disagree with them.'[25]

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[24] On intractable conflicts, see the website www.beyondintractablity.org. Also Coleman, P.T. (2006). Intractable Conflict. In M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman and E.C. Marcus (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, pp. 533-559.

[25] Bridger, F. (2006). *Fulcrum Newsletter.* http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/revisioning-the-evangelical-centre quoted in Groves, P. (Ed). (2008). *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality.* London: SPCK, p.7.

Dialogue (with or without problem-solving) should also be seen as grounded in a Christological understanding of Jesus as the incarnate Word. A theology of the Word, beginning with the intra-Trinitarian 'conversation' of Father, Son and Spirit, leads inexorably through the Incarnation to a theology of Word-in-action. The Word made flesh is God's own conversation turned outwards towards others, the Trinity's externalized discourse in which humanity is invited to participate with the Incarnation as the connecting bridge.

Incarnation also points to the importance of *embodiment* as critical in the dynamics of dialogue. We have highlighted the centrality in *indaba* of 'real' – as opposed to 'virtual' – meetings of (embodied) persons gathered together in the same locations, eating, drinking and sharing together in human relationships. But the goal of this extra-Trinitarian conversation is not only the intensification of the human-divine relationship. Its purpose is cosmic renewal. Incarnation leads to redemption: to personal and structural transformation. In Christ, all creation is made new (2 Cor. 5:17), a point St Paul significantly makes in the context of reconciliation. This belief points to a model of dialogue that goes well beyond merely creating space for conversation to the radical transformation of both individuals and socio-institutional structures.

The centrality of grace
This model also correlates inescapably with a theology of grace. In *indaba* we witnessed a deeply moving graciousness between participants, even where views held were diametrically opposed. What aspects of *indaba* enabled this? As noted, one major factor was rooting dialogue firmly within corporate prayer. This placed grace decisively at the centre as these acts of worship were in themselves means of grace as well as symbols of it.

It is also possible to speak of grace at work within the acts of dialogue themselves. CIP was predicated on the shared faith of the participants, and therefore a doctrine of charitable assumption and gracious generosity undergirded its ethos: divine grace was at work within the participants by virtue of their membership of the redeemed community. At the same time, however, there remained a very real awareness of the Anglican Communion as a *fractured* expression of the Body of Christ. The participants' and organizers' willingness to hold together both the recognition of this brokenness and the capacity to be one body together kept people committed to the whole process and to future possibilities for continuing dialogue.

This perspective offers positive hope but what if such a view were not shared by all participants? Suppose participants held radically different assumptions about the relationship between grace and truth? What if some participants viewed others as so severely in breach of divine morality that they stood in need of repentance, forgiveness and restoration (in other words as in need of redemptive grace) rather than being seen as *fellow bearers* of divine grace?

There is, of course, no easy answer. Theologically and practically the question is complex and multi-layered, requiring a careful and nuanced response that reflects grace's equally complex and nuanced nature. But since grace lies at the centre of any Christian peacemaking process, the question of *what kind of* models of grace are presupposed is crucial. Without such discernment, any process that attempts to deal with conflict runs the risk *either* of depending upon uncritical and unexamined assumptions about human nature and divine activity that inform practice unawares, *or* of comprising little more than a *smorgasbord* of techniques drawn from the dominant cultural milieu behind the process. If a process designed for Christians is itself to be seen as gracious gift – a response to God's gracious calling rather than mere *techne* – it must have developed a critically self-aware understanding of the ways in which the process can embody and reflect God's gracious activity.

The puzzle of other and conflicting worldviews
Perhaps the most exciting, moving and humbling aspect of observing *indaba* was witnessing the interaction of participants from a variety of cultures. The cross-cultural Encounters were epiphanic and with profound effects as diocesan groups experienced their partner dioceses' cultures. Yet the process of reaching across 'difference' presents intellectual and theological as well as emotional and empathic challenges. There is the challenge of entering the *life world* of another culture, simply understanding the social and cultural setting in which its members live. But, secondly, there exists the immense challenge of understanding and relating to others' intellectual, moral and spiritual *worldview,* the constellation of beliefs, practices and experiences by which they frame, interpret and act upon reality. In the nexus between life worlds and worldviews lies the challenge of moving from mutual listening to genuine engagement across diversity.

Here, the language of 'difference' can be both helpful and problematic. On one hand, its ordinary usage simply denotes what distinguishes one person, culture, belief system, situation and set of life experiences from another. *Inaba* usefully employed it in this sense. Drawing attention to cultural distinctions in this way brought enlightenment and emotional depth. On the other hand, there is an alternative sense in which 'difference' can be used that goes to the heart of the principal challenge facing *indaba* or any other conflict resolution/transformation approach.

One of the fundamental challenges facing Anglicans (arguably the most fundamental) is that of understanding and engaging with Anglican diversity, both its nature and its limits, and discerning what it means to live with difference. CIP clearly made people aware of this in new and deeper ways but it is unclear how much it enabled understanding of its causes. There was little sign of the processes used in the Conversations being able to address the crucial question of which differences *really matter* and which do not. As a result there is the risk that differences are seen as due simply to the variety of cultural contexts and personal experiences. What if there are more fundamental underlying theological differences that

require serious discussion and a discernment of what form of consensus, if any, might be possible? It remains unclear whether and how *indaba* deals with competing theological worldviews, or prevents a recognition and celebration of cultural pluralism becoming an uncritical theological relativism. To date, the *indaba* process appears to offer no acknowledgment of, or solution to, this problem.

In a postmodern worldview, both pluralism and relativism are aspects of the claim that all cultures are social constructions and that all language, truth and morality are likewise socially constructed products. It follows, accordingly, that religious and theological claims and systems must be seen in the same light. There is, for the postmodern philosopher, no totalising, objective truth 'out there' – merely a collection of competing (or coexisting) belief systems that are relative to the cultures that produce them. Stanley Grenz, reviewing the work of Derrida, Foucault and Rorty, comments that such a view 'reflects what seems to have become the central dictum of postmodern philosophy: "All is difference."' Pointedly, he goes on to observe that such a view 'abandons the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality. It asserts that the world has no center, only differing viewpoints and perspectives… In the end the postmodern world is merely an arena of 'duelling texts.'[26]

This gives a broader context to the language of 'difference'. It also reminds us that within CIP there were differing philosophical forces and assumptions at work that informed (for example) how participants used the Bible or did theology. The various hermeneutical assumptions and strategies employed, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect or resist the influence of postmodern assumptions. To claim that *indaba* operated (albeit unconsciously) in a predominantly postmodern mode would be to go too far. But the language of 'difference' and 'conversation across difference,' – as well as our experience of the process itself – contained echoes of this, not least in the absence of any methodological and theological resources that might enable participants to get beyond simply noting the existence of differences of view to engaging with the arguments and assumptions behind them.

The task, then, both for *indaba* and for any comparable process, is to gain traction when faced with a multiplicity of worldviews that are apparently irreconcilable. If it is to do more than merely note these differences then it must:

- recognise the problem posed by the existence of different worldviews, as well as differences held over particular issues;
- generate resources that will enable discernment of what differences are significant and what are not; and
- create a rigorous and theologically informed process that will empower its participants to makes such discernments and consider their implications particularly for how we live together as Anglicans.

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[26] Grenz, S. J. (1996). *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Michigan, p.7. Grenz accurately summarises the essential issue that persists into the twenty-first century.

If, as we have suggested, it is the deeper challenge of living with diversity rather than the presenting issue of sexuality that is the greatest challenge currently and prospectively facing the Church, then finding ways of responding to conflict which understand and address the challenges of pluralism and relativism must be seen as imperative. Pilling's proposal for facilitated conversations will succeed only when this is acknowledged.

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