



ANGLICAN
NETWORK
IN EUROPE

Press Release – Response to ThirtyOne:Eight Independent Learning Review

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For immediate release.

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The Anglican Network in Europe (ANiE) welcomes the ThirtyOne:Eight Independent Learning Review concerning Jonathan Fletcher and Emmanuel Wimbledon and takes seriously their recommendations, in particular, their identification of fear as a key problem within the wider Anglican Evangelical constituency. We look forward to studying the report and its recommendations in detail.

Some of us have been part of this deeply flawed culture and we must repent of any complicity, deliberately or inadvertently, with past or present abuses of power contrary to our calling as disciples of Christ.

Every victim's experience, every exposed fact, every discovered sin, every distorted value points us to our need for the grace and truth of Jesus as revealed in scripture, and for our systems and culture to be continually re-assessed and intentionally re-shaped by the teaching of Christ.

As a new Anglican structure, the ANiE is committed to ensuring that we have the highest standards of safeguarding expressing our gospel values and we are determined to learn and nurture an open culture of gracious but clear accountability.

First, we need to learn that ***light matters***. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and Jesus came as "the light of the world" (John 8:12). Living under his rule makes us "children of the light" (1 Thessalonians 5:5) and he calls us to have nothing to do with the darkness. The church should never be a place for secrecy, cover-up, concealment or behind-the-scenes manipulation. Rather, difficult and painful as it may be, we are called to drag the things of darkness into the light: "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Second, we need to learn that ***God's impartiality matters***. "God shows no partiality." (Acts 10:34). He's not swayed by reputations, respectability, appearances, contagious personalities, 'strategic' ministries, establishment elites, big budgets, or packed buildings. His justice doesn't yield to influence and popularity. We must therefore repent of partiality, cronyism, tribalism and discrimination.

Third, we need to learn that ***the mercy of God matters***. The suffering and trauma of those who have experienced abuse may sometimes appear to go unnoticed and unaddressed but it's never unseen or ignored by God. His mercy is towards the suffering. "The LORD works righteousness

and justice for all who are oppressed” (Psalm 103:6), and “he rebuked kings on their account” (Psalm 105:14). God is glorified as the abused take refuge in him and receive justice as those who misuse power face proper scrutiny and sanction.

Fourth, we need to learn that ***the protection of the weak matters***. Severe judgement faces those who ruin and harm the most tender of his flock. Jesus doesn’t mince his words: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6). The church should be a place where the weakest and most vulnerable are protected and all members flourish in a context of wholesome relationships.

In short, the church needs to be a place where the light exposes the darkness, where impartiality blinds us to earthly influence and power, where mercy is not withheld from victims, and where the weakest are protected by any and all lawful means.

We call for a time of deep corporate reflection and real repentance, rejoicing that the Lord Jesus Christ, in his mercy, may graciously use this to reconcile and restore relationships. However we acknowledge this will be dependent on individual, specific apologies that own the harm done and address the needs of survivors.

As one who has come to terms with elements of spiritual manipulation in his own life - a hard and painful process - the ANiE Presiding Bishop, Andy Lines, especially understands the trauma experienced by other victims of spiritual manipulation, coercion and control. He expects all ANiE churches under his oversight to lovingly serve and properly support all survivors of abuse.

(A version of the four learning points originally appeared in an article by Kyle Borg on gentlereformation.com)