

19th February 2024

Included

**"To be honoured, cherished and included
in a more gracious, spacious and compassionate embrace."**

Ken Wilber, *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber* (2000)

"Gentlemen, include me out!"

Sam Goldwyn, *attributed*

Reflecting yesterday on the danger of people feeling excluded when they aren't familiar with the basics of Church life, I wonder whether being "included" is the obvious opposite. If being *excluded* is a bad thing, surely feeling *included* is good, and creating an inclusive fellowship is our expected aim. Of course, this appears to be correct. Take the fraught issue of the acceptance of Gay people in our churches, which the Church of Scotland has wrestled with in the past decade. It's now accepted that "an inclusive church" is one where no distinction is made in terms of ministry, membership and involvement. "All are welcome in this place". Many churches are pleased to have "inclusive" as a label. And that's a good thing.

But a danger arises when people are, indeed, included, but are then expected to conform, accept and believe things in common. When faith systems are prescribed, and there is no room for questioning, debate or doubt, then being included can introduce negative feelings too.

The word "include" comes to us from the 15th century. The meaning was "to shut in (someone or something) materially, enclose, imprison, confine." It's from the Latin *includere*, "to shut in, enclose, imprison, insert." Here, therefore, is the difficulty. If inclusion is good, what if that inclusion hints at imprisonment, feeling confined, trapped or enclosed? Surely then, the goodness of inclusion is fundamentally compromised.

Let's create an environment where people *do* feel "honoured, cherished and included in a more gracious, spacious and compassionate embrace", in Ken Wilber's ideal world. For this is what any Christian community should be. But let's not create a prison of blind conforming and entrapment, where all the positives of inclusion might turn sour.

Wouldn't it be sad if anyone, having got over feeling excluded, and appreciating being included for once, found themselves made to cry with the movie producer, Sam Goldwyn, "Include me out."?

A prayer for today

If I feel included, I'm grateful. But please don't let me feel trapped by that.