

## Lectures in Contemporary Anglicanism

George Whitefield College, Cape Town, May 2014

### Credo: Shadow and Substance in Contemporary Anglicanism

‘They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.’ Jeremiah 8:11

#### Lecture 3

We have seen how the Hegelian shape of Rowan Williams’ thought came to be expressed in official Anglican statements and policy as the crisis in the Communion over the understanding of Scripture and homosexuality deepened. The contrast with Thomas Cranmer brought out the extent of what I call Williams’ hermeneutic pessimism, his lack of confidence that God through his Word can actually address us in clear and decisive terms. Biblical revelation is not, in other words, oracular but experiential. It is discovered in the ecclesial process by which human lives are transformed through the events of the gospel to which Scriptures bear witness.

#### Reinventing Revelation

So in what sense can Scripture still be understood as revelatory? How can the idea of Scripture as ‘The Word of the Lord’ be extricated from the illegitimate attempt to ‘take God’s point of view’, what Williams describes elsewhere as a form of ‘intellectual totalitarianism’.<sup>1</sup>

A helpful starting point is his very apt summary of his own theological method, that the best theology is ‘like the noise of someone falling over things in the dark’<sup>2</sup>. There is definitely something there, but it is in darkness. God, the Trinitarian God, is real, but how can we give a coherent explanation of what we have bumped into? Clearly it can’t be an exhaustive description because we are ‘in the dark’, but there is still something to say and hermeneutic pessimism need not, he believes, tip over into hopelessly subjective nihilism.

In his essay ‘Trinity and Revelation’ Williams draws on the work of hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur to propose a poetic understanding of revelation. Ricoeur

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<sup>1</sup> On Christian Theology, p 133

<sup>2</sup> Rowan Williams, *Telling the Christmas Story Like it is* quoted in ed. Matheson Russell *On Rowan Williams: Critical Essays*, p66.

accepts that there is no given grand narrative for human self-understanding; with Wittgenstein, we simply begin where we are and recognise that we live with particular self-understandings. These are essentially imaginative interpretations to which he brings a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' because they have the capacity to both conceal and reveal. In this perspective, revelation can only make sense if it is understood as poetic rather than propositional; poetry can be revelatory because it invites the reader into a world that he or she did not create. It does not set out to establish a truth claim, but simply to manifest a reality which is independent of the reader.

Revelation in this poetic sense provides an approach to Scripture which is entirely consistent with Williams' methodology. The recognition of a text as a prior reality to myself – something given – undercuts the modernist assumption that human beings are the fully autonomous creators of their own reality through their own consciousness. Yet it does not mean that we have to look to the text for definitive norms that are independent of human experience and context. While the revealed reality is a given that we do not initiate, we enter that world as those who exercise a creative freedom within it. So he can claim:

'Revelation, on such an account, is essentially to do with what is generative in our experience – events or transactions in our language that break existing frames of reference and initiate new possibilities of life'.<sup>3</sup>

It is this capacity to be 'generative,' a continued creativity patterned on the foundational event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, which – at least in theory – prevents Williams' model of revelation from simply degenerating into religious myth and it builds on his apophatic understanding of the Trinity. Within the Trinity, the Son and Spirit are both uncreated yet dependent. It is through this relationship within the Godhead that God's grace comes to be at work in the world bringing new creation – through the unique historical event of the incarnation and through the continued creative presence of God in the Church by his Spirit. And as the Son and the Spirit are not autonomously creative, but act within the interdependence of the Trinity, so this provides a model for how we understand revelation. Everything we say about God must be subject to God's initiative in Christ, but within that constraint we have a derivative freedom to articulate our response to that initiative in the myriad historical contexts in which the Church finds itself. So it follows that:

We could say that revelation decisively advances or extends debate, extends rather than limits the range of ambiguity and conflict in language.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rowan Williams *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2000) p134.

This understanding of revelation underpins the lesson he draws out in 'Arius: Heresy & Tradition'<sup>5</sup> about the nature of heresy – that it is not so much concerned with the correct exegesis of Scripture as avoiding an inappropriate tidying up of theological discourse. Arius' fault was that he was too 'conservative', wanting to narrow down our language about God in way that no longer recognised that we are talking about a reality beyond capture by human rationality, whereas Athanasius preserved that openness by recycling the previously suspect term 'homoousios'.<sup>6</sup> While there is a helpful insight here about the way in which Unitarianism developed in the eighteenth century, it is not at all clear how this model can help when the problem is to do with the modern claim about 'new truth', rather than the attempt to 'rationalise' old truth. The problem we face today is not so much Pelagian rationalism as post-modern syncretism and moral relativism.<sup>7</sup>

If Scripture cannot be appealed to as a source of authority in any straightforward sense, how does the church avoid descending into chaotic disorder? Here we need to turn from Williams' hermeneutic pessimism to the compensating factor of his ecclesiological optimism. The nearest we have in William's writing to a statement of methodology is in his prologue to 'On Christian Theology' when he writes:

The meanings of the word 'God' are to be discovered by watching what the community does – not only when it is consciously reflecting in conceptual ways, but when it is acting, educating or 'inducting,' imaging or worshipping.<sup>8</sup>

Williams' hermeneutic pessimism leads him to put much more weight on the role of sacraments as a kind of visible language, and here he is very much indebted to Wittgenstein's awareness of the anthropological significance embodied in ritual.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Williams *Arius: Heresy & Tradition* (London DLT 1987; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn SCM Press 2001)

<sup>6</sup> 'homoousios' had been rejected at the Council of Antioch in 269 because it was associated then with Sabellianism.

<sup>7</sup> In fact this 'generative' model of revelation seriously subverts propositional revelation as becomes clear in Williams' address 'Different Christs?', on dealing with disagreement in the setting of a theological college. He affirms that 'truth matters and doctrinal indifferentism is abhorrent' – yet he also claims 'Christ can bear all sorts of interpretations and we can't expect him to tell us what he likes' and if we somehow appeal to him for answers and support for our ideas about him 'all we meet is silence, a kind of annihilating judgement in all we say. Rowan Williams *A Ray of Darkness* (Cowley Publications 1995) p90.

<sup>8</sup> *On Christian Theology* pxii.

Reality is seen most clearly in what the church does, rather than what it says. So this entails that the church, as it is, should be seen as a gift, not something we create by human ingenuity and creative thought.

Accordingly, it is in the sharing of eucharistic fellowship of the Lord's Supper that we come together under the authority of Christ in a way that all can acknowledge, and even though that may in fact be 'fairly notional and almost empty of content' nonetheless 'some objectivity, some common sense of being under judgement'<sup>9</sup> is preserved.

Because Williams sees conflict within the canon of Scripture, he believes this provides a model for how the church can contain within itself those who have deep seated differences, for example on homosexual relationships, without having to force closure by 'appeal to what is commonly taken as "the literal sense of Scripture" (i.e. particular clusters of quotations)' because:

'the existence of conflict and even conscientious division may not be a sign of eschatological polarization, but a necessary part of that movement of the story of God's people and their language towards the one focus of Christ crucified and risen that is the movement of Scripture.'<sup>10</sup>

This is an important quote – hermeneutic pessimism is compensated for by heroic ecclesiological optimism expressed in the Hegelian hope that even principled division is not final. The underlying 'grammar' of Scripture reveals a pattern of death and resurrection which gives us hope of unity even when confronted by the deepest divisions of conscience. This optimism is truly heroic; it is not simply the idea that there will be a constructive dialectic in the clash of opinions, but that participants should be willing to be 'dispossessed' of their moral and theological commitments. In this, Williams is influenced by the British academic Gillian Rose whose interpretation of Hegel held that truly dialectic exchange can only happen when participants are willing to let go of pride in their innocence. A refusal to consider one's position as non-negotiable is, he writes 'precisely one of those claims to power that dialectic's business is to dismantle, or at least put to the test'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> On Christian Theology, p 57.

<sup>11</sup> Rowan Williams *Hegel and the gods of post modernity* in *Wrestling with Angels: conversations in Modern Theology* pp28,29

Do you see where this way of thinking leads? It maybe harmless enough if we are arguing about where the Sunday School should meet, but it implies that even what we are inclined to think of as primary matters of principle are heavily laden with moral and theological vanity. I do not think Bonhoeffer could have ever seen his opposition to the Third Reich in this light.

### **Reinventing Orthodoxy**

It is tempting to explore the possibility that such a surrender of innocence seems to serve the rather more mundane interests of institutional pragmatism, but let us persevere in tracing how this dialectic hermeneutic might work.

Here we see Williams' Hegelian confidence in progress as the dialectic proceeds though the hermeneutical spiral in the Church with all its divisions and differences to experience what Williams describes as a 'relearning of Jesus'. With a hat tip to Ricoeur he explains that:

'the constant re-learning of Jesus' significance has to do with an honest awareness of the strain and conflict presently experienced in the Church. Problems such as the ordination of women, the revision of liturgy, the place and function of the episcopacy, baptismal policy in secularized areas, and so on, are essential stages in the 'hermeneutical spiral' where the significance of Jesus, the divinity (the decisive generative quality) of Jesus is recovered'<sup>12</sup>

So what matters is not so much faithfulness to a received deposit of faith, but the way in which theological reflection proceeds. In his preface to 'On Christian Theology' Dr Williams identifies three styles of discourse – 'celebratory,' 'communicative' and 'critical' which when held in creative tension are claimed to preserve something distinctively Christian while guarding against the inappropriate 'tidying up' of religious language – which as we have seen is supposed to be the essential characteristic of heresy. This is how the Church's 'grammar' works:

The celebratory style is the language of praise and proclamation. It does not attempt to sustain an argument so much as to magnify the glory and beauty of God, which may nonetheless be deeply persuasive. One of the clearest explanations he gives occurs in a lecture on the creed and liturgy in the early church when he claims:

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid* p143; it is clear that Williams could quite consistently have included the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same sex unions in this list.

‘The pre-Sanctus acclamations spell out exactly why God is worthy of praise, in terms of what he is as well as what he does: doctrine seeks to display a God who in his very essence merits our utmost adoration, both because of his irreducible transcendence – so that we can never speak adequately of him – and because of his unreserved self-giving in the life of the Word and the power of the Spirit – so that we can nonetheless speak truthfully of him.’

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The communicative mode is the attempt to inhabit and speak through the thought forms of the surrounding culture so that the Church does not become sealed off and unintelligible to wider society. Both the early Church’s use of Stoic and Platonic thought and the development of liberation and feminist theologies are cited as examples and Williams himself writes extensively in this mode.

The critical mode interrogates both the celebratory and the communicative styles, teasing out that which is fundamental to the continuity and integrity of Christian faith. Williams observes that negative or apophatic theology was the earliest form of critical theology, a reminder that the Trinity is

‘neither three nor one “in our sense of the words” and continues to have an essential role in ‘sounding a warning note against the idea that that we could secure a firm grip upon definitions of the divine.’<sup>14</sup>

Theology in this critical mode can develop in two directions. It may take a terminally negative turn and lead in its most extreme form to ‘death of God’ theologies such as that promoted by John Spong and Don Cupitt, or it may return to the celebratory style.

In this scheme of things, what is it that determines whether a theological idea continues along the hermeneutic spiral? It seems that a dead end is reached only when a proposal cannot be expressed in the celebratory mode. It is for this reason that Dr Williams writes that Don Cupitt’s non-realist theology leads him ‘to a quite definite and trenchant ‘No’’.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in his essay ‘Between the Cherubim’, he decidedly parts company with the reductionist interpretation of the resurrection

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<sup>13</sup> Rowan Williams *The Creed and the Eucharist in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries*. A lecture given at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, Bonn, 10 March 2004  
<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1174>

<sup>14</sup> On Christian Theology p.xv

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pxxiv

that David Jenkins, former Bishop of Durham, notoriously popularised in the early 1980s. Noting how John's account of the empty tomb with the angels at the head and at the foot of the grave slab evokes the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant with cherubim on either side, he argues that just as the ark was the focus of God's unseen presence, so also the empty tomb tells us something essential about the resurrection; just as Yahweh was beyond domestication by the people of Israel, so Jesus is beyond domestication by the Church and to reduce the resurrection to merely a spiritual experience is simply a modern form of that domestication, even if this is 'a deeply unfashionable conclusion.'<sup>16</sup>

So here we have the contours of a theological grammar which operates as a conceptual filter. The celebratory mode guards against radical 'godless theologies' and more commonplace reductionist accounts, while the critical mode with its apophatic sensitivity filters out over-systematised theologies with their appeal to human pride. We can see value in this, but the hermeneutic pessimism that informs it means that Scripture itself no longer functions as a criterion of propositional truth. It is, to take a musical analogy, not longer a score to follow, but a theme which can be endlessly improvised upon.

This matters. The classic example is the case Williams made for same-sex relationships as an expression of grace in his essay 'The Body's Grace' of 1989 which gave the Lesbian Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) theological respectability and became hugely influential. As a starting point he takes an episode in modern literature, from Paul Scott's 'The Raj Quartet,' in which one of the central characters, Sarah Layton, is the victim of a calculated seduction, yet nonetheless experiences what Scott describes as 'her body's grace', the realisation that her body can give pleasure and a sense of delight to another in a life otherwise devoid of intimacy on any level.

This may seem a somewhat flimsy basis for rethinking sexual ethics, but despite the abusive nature of Sarah's experience, Williams recognises something in it that goes beyond mere gratification, at least on her part. It is the insight that the sexual act is not simply about physical pleasure, but the joy of self-giving in an act of personal intimacy. So he writes:

'To desire my joy is to desire the joy of the one I desire: my search for enjoyment through the bodily presence of another is a longing to be enjoyed

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid p194

in my body. As Blake put it, sexual partners 'admire' in each other 'the lineaments of gratified desire.' We are pleased because we are pleasing.'<sup>17</sup>

With this it would be difficult to disagree, but the problem arises when Williams detaches this celebration of grace and sexuality from its specific Scriptural context which he dismisses as 'reliance on an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous text' and on this basis he can then claim:

'Same-sex love annoyingly poses the question of what the meaning of desire is in itself, not considered as instrumental to some other process (the peopling of the world); and this immediately brings us up against the possibility not only of pain and humiliation without any clear payoff, but – just as worryingly – of non-functional joy: or, to put it less starkly, joy whose material 'production' is an embodied person aware of grace.'<sup>18</sup>

So Dr Williams gives a theological basis for the perverse conclusion that homosexual sex, that which is prohibited by the actual text of Scripture, has the intrinsic capacity to be a higher expression of grace than heterosexual sex with its connection with procreation. This is what happens – and the process could be a solvent for much more of the Church's moral and doctrinal teaching – when orthodoxy becomes the shadow gospel of 'process' rather than apostolic faithfulness. Williams has consistently developed his theology along the lines he set out as long ago as 1983 when he wrote:

'We may need to develop an understanding of 'orthodoxy' as a tool rather than as an end in itself, a tool for discovery rather than control. Like any language it is unintelligible without some idea of grammar – necessary rules and regularities. But it is there essentially as something both functional to the life of the community, and necessarily bound up with – grounding perhaps – the identity of a community.'<sup>19</sup>

This is a hugely significant shift – orthodoxy is reinterpreted not as those truths that can be propositionally expressed as a deposit of faith, but as a process – and after sixteen years of intensifying conflict in the Anglican Communion, we now know it to

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<sup>17</sup> Eugene F Roberts ed. *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p 313

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p 320.

<sup>19</sup> 'What is Catholic Orthodoxy?' in *Essays Catholic and Radical*, ed. K. Leech and R. Williams (London: Bowerdean Press, 1983), p 13.



be a failed process. The ecclesiological optimism it embodies, for all its conceptual sophistication, has failed to deliver that sense of grounding and identity which Williams envisaged. What this paradigmatic change has achieved though is the authentically biblical antithesis of truth and falsehood being so pushed to the margins as to become practically irrelevant for the Lambeth leadership.

A theological method which makes a virtue out of embracing contradiction serves to reinforce a culture in the Church and society at large in which people are desensitised to the crossing of doctrinal and moral boundaries. The language of orthodoxy remains so the landscape seems familiar, if a little misty, but the mood created is one of practical pluralism. It has been disastrous because it disarmed the Churches of the West just at a time when they needed greater, not less, vigilance as the ambient culture drifted further and further from its Judaeo-Christian identity. As the 1998 Lambeth Conference gathered, the ecclesiastical historian Professor Edward Norman warned:

‘what, in the political sphere, used to be called ‘entryism’ will be a major threat to the integrity of religious institutions. Alien ideology and secular moral orthodoxy may identify themselves with Christian ethical teaching, and there will be those inside the Churches who may, correspondingly, associate basic Christianity with various enthusiasms for humanity.’<sup>20</sup>

This was of course precisely what happened and we have already tracked the way that the ground gained at the 1998 Lambeth Conference was subsequently given up. The Episcopal Church of the USA and the Anglican Church of Canada led the way in providing textbook examples of successful ‘entryism’. Wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15) infiltrated their church hierarchies and replaced the gospel of Jesus Christ with an ideology of radical inclusion, one of the most fashionable ‘enthusiasms for humanity’ in secularized Western culture. Then, since 1998, those churches in turn have practised a strategy of ‘entryism’ in the Anglican Communion with minimal resistance and often even welcome from those who should be guarding the flock, not least, sad to say successive Archbishops of Canterbury.

### **A Sleeping Giant Stirs**

In my first lecture, we noted the paradox of theological sophistication and practical failure during Rowan Williams tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury. Now we turn to look at the way his optimistic ecclesiology foundered on the rocks of hard ecclesial reality as he experienced an unprecedented failure to gather the Communion.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/misc/norman98.html>.

Despite the strenuous efforts of Williams and the Anglican Communion Office, the Global South Primates insisted on the closure that he had been so anxious to avoid at the Dar es Salaam Primates Meeting held in February 2007. The Windsor Covenant process had by then developed to the point that the Primates were able to consider the first 'Nassau' draft and review the progress of the Windsor process. The American response was deemed to have been inadequate and the Primates' communiqué of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2007 gave the TEC House of Bishops a time limit of 30<sup>th</sup> September to respond to two specific requests - that they should both 'make an unequivocal common covenant... not to authorise any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions' and confirm that no further candidates for episcopal orders living in a same-sex union would receive consent 'unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion'. The Primates added that:

'If the reassurances requested of the House of Bishops cannot in good conscience be given, the relationship between The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as a whole remains damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion.'<sup>21</sup>

This deadline had fateful consequences. The Americans ignored it and to underline the point, Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori pledged that the Episcopal Church's policy on homosexuality would 'not go backwards' on the very day of the Primates' deadline.<sup>22</sup> However, before the deadline had passed, the Archbishop of Canterbury had already issued invitations for the 2008 Lambeth Conference which included those bishops who had participated in or voted for Gene Robinson's consecration. Speaking at a press conference in New Orleans shortly before 30<sup>th</sup> September, Williams asserted that 'Despite what has been claimed, there is no "ultimatum" involved'<sup>23</sup> and that the Dar es Salaam communiqué was 'a place to start',<sup>24</sup> but to key Global South Primates, this looked like a betrayal. Their patience was finally exhausted. The sleeping giant of Anglican evangelicalism, so long taken for granted by Anglican Communion officialdom, finally roused,<sup>25</sup> leading not only to an unprecedented boycott of the Lambeth

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.aco.org/communion/primates/resources/downloads/communique2007\\_english.pdf](http://www.aco.org/communion/primates/resources/downloads/communique2007_english.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [http://articles.sfgate.com/2007-10-01/news/17264820\\_1\\_same-sex-unions-anglican-communion-bishops](http://articles.sfgate.com/2007-10-01/news/17264820_1_same-sex-unions-anglican-communion-bishops)

<sup>23</sup> Episcopal Life Online, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007  
[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901\\_90264\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901_90264_ENG_HTML.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Ref to JSC report on 2/10?

<sup>25</sup> "All around the world the sleeping giant that is evangelical Anglicanism and orthodox Anglicanism has been aroused by what happened in Canada and the United States of America. It was an act of folly." Archbishop Peter Jensen Address at GAFCON 2008, 27<sup>th</sup> June.

Conference, but also to the emergence of the GAFCON movement in Jerusalem during its Conference of June 2008.

So planning began in December 2007 for what Nigerian Primate Peter Akinola would later describe as a 'rescue mission',<sup>26</sup> the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), a global gathering of Primates, bishops, clergy and laity independently of the Lambeth hierarchy just weeks before the Lambeth Conference, to provide the leadership and order which was so evidently lacking from the traditional centre. The depth of their disappointment was clearly reflected in the subsequent GAFCON Jerusalem Statement which describes 'the manifest failure of the Communion Instruments to exercise discipline in the face of overt heterodoxy' as an 'undeniable fact'.<sup>27</sup>

So the structural realignments in the Anglican Communion which Williams had strived so hard to avoid began to take shape and 2008 became a tale of two conferences. Although GAFCON was not promoted as an alternative to the Lambeth Conference and some bishops attended both, the non-attendance of some 230 bishops at Lambeth, representing some 40 million Anglicans out of a total of 77 million<sup>28</sup> worldwide was hugely significant.

This emerging Global Anglicanism finds its identity not so much in connection to Canterbury, although the significance of the historical link is acknowledged, but in a return to Anglican doctrinal roots, the common confession of the faith handed down by the English Reformers. And by setting up its own Primates' Council the movement gave itself a clear conciliar leadership structure. The Primates Council meets every six months and part of its remit is to 'authenticate and recognise confessing Anglican jurisdictions, clergy and congregations'.<sup>29</sup> This it has done with the formation of a new Province the Anglican Church in North America, and the sponsorship of a new missionary body, the Anglican Mission in England (which includes a number of clergy who have been ordained in England by CESA/REACH SA!). It has also withdrawn recognition of TEC and the ACoC as an expression of that discipline which has been lacking from Canterbury.

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<sup>26</sup> "A Rescue Mission" - Archbishop Akinola's Opening Address, GAFCON, 22.6.08  
[http://www.gafcon.org/news/a\\_rescue\\_mission\\_-\\_archbishop\\_akinolas\\_opening\\_address/](http://www.gafcon.org/news/a_rescue_mission_-_archbishop_akinolas_opening_address/)

<sup>27</sup> Being Faithful: The Shape of Historic Anglicanism Today, Latimer Trust 2009 p 4

<sup>28</sup> This includes 26 million baptised members of the Church of England, but annual Sunday attendance in the Church of England has now dipped below 1 million making an effective worldwide total of some 55 million.

<sup>29</sup> Be Faithful, p8

The GAFCON movement is growing strongly and held a successful conference in Nairobi last October attended by over 1,300 delegates, including nearly half the Anglican Communion's bishops, and representing 37 different countries. In the statement issued by the conference, GAFCON was referred to as a 'fifth instrument of unity' and is now organising itself to play a much more proactive role in Communion leadership.

Meanwhile, the Lambeth leadership has adopted an increasingly pragmatic approach under the leadership of Archbishop Justin Welby. The Anglican Covenant project, which was Rowan Williams great hope for restoring unity as proposed by the deeply flawed Windsor Report, has found little support and after even the Church of England itself rejected it in March 2012, the project is now generally considered to be dead.

In Justin Welby, we have an energetic Archbishop from an evangelical background, but who shows no signs of deviating from the ecclesiological framework he has inherited. More Continuing Indaba would simply stall that necessary and fundamental realignment of Anglican structures which is now underway to release global Anglicanism from the hegemony of what is looking more and more like a counterfeit of true communion.

The medical logic of St Paul's warning to Timothy that the teaching of those who have 'swerved from the truth' will spread like gangrene' (2 Timothy 2:17,18) is unmistakable; a gangrenous limb must be amputated, but this possibility is simply ruled out by the dialectic approach to truth; it is a deadly experiment, but one to which many orthodox Anglicans still seem to be oblivious, not least in England itself. Whereas in North America, forms of institutional separation are already taking place, we have to reckon with the real possibility that unless similar principled action happens in England, the mother church of the Communion will itself finally become functionally, if not formally, captive to false teaching, with all the potential for confusion that would create within the Communion, especially in those Provinces which are not solidly aligned with GAFCON and the wider Global South movement.

## **Conclusion**

GAFCON is not, it has to be said, an exclusively evangelical movement, but it does seem to me the most hopeful place to look for the development of a genuinely evangelical Anglican ecclesiology. The Jerusalem Statement includes the wording of Canon A5 of the Church of England, the doctrinal canon, which states that

'The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found

in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.'

As a Confessing movement, GAFCON has the potential to recover an ecclesiology that is embedded in the grand narrative of Scripture and the teaching of the Reformers, notably in the authoritative role given by the GAFCON Jerusalem Declaration to the Thirty-nine Articles, rescuing us from an ecclesiological horizon that has become merely institutional and pragmatic. The need now is not just to secure safe places for the beleaguered orthodox, but to work through the implications of what it means to be a Confessing Anglican and establish a new vision of Anglicanism for the twenty first century. It is true that much of these three lectures has been concerned with the diagnostic task of how the current crisis has arisen, and am quite unapologetic about that. Many of our difficulties come about because theologians want to say something new, rather than devoting their energies to defending the old, but that is not merely a reactionary task. Athanasius and the Reformers were not just reacting against innovations and abuses, but is so doing refreshed and sharpened Christian belief in their times. So it is for us today in the Anglican context, that in meeting the challenge of false teaching we also refresh, recover and reinvigorate our Anglican and biblical inheritance.

So let me very briefly conclude with some pointers for the future shape of Anglican ecclesiology arising out of the analysis of these lectures.

In our current context, there needs above all to be a recovery of the conviction that Anglicanism is an expression of revealed religion and that revelation comes us to us through a Scriptural Canon which is divinely inspired and therefore fully trustworthy. From this basic imperative there seems to be a number of basic consequences:

Firstly, that we need to restore Scripture as the ultimate authority for the Church and see reason and tradition as subsidiary courts of appeal

Secondly that the process we are concerned with in the Church is not one of constantly reshaping orthodoxy, but of discipleship and sanctification as the bride of Christ. She is to be dispossessed of sin, not her dogmas.

Thirdly, a recovery of the biblical understanding that the Church here on earth is the Church militant wrestling with that unholy trinity of the world the flesh and the devil which always launches its most devastating attacks from within. This entails the need for effective church discipline.

Fourthly, the recognition that the church may be in error should lead us to both:

- a) a recognition of the value of dispersed authority in the Anglican Communion in which jurisdiction never exceeds the level of the Province (in contrast to the Pontifical system of Rome) but be held in tension with
  
- b) a recognition of the need for global conciliar leadership which supercedes that of Canterbury, not as a magisterium, but as a genuinely global forum which expresses the need for a global church to be 'a witness and keeper of Holy Writ' (Article 20) for testing where cultural adaptation becomes cultural accommodation and *in extremis* for decisions about the suspension of mutual recognition.

At the beginning of these lectures I noted that there are those who believe that what they call the Anglican Experiment has failed. If by that we mean a Communion that is decisively shaped by the domestication of the English Church to the English state, then, yes, I believe it has failed despite the best efforts of Rowan Williams to provide that project with some theological coherence. But if we mean a Communion which is now beginning to define itself by the history of God as revealed in Holy Scripture rather than the history of England, then I must say that the experiment is getting under way again with renewed vigour and, as an Englishman, that what I believe to be my country's greatest contribution to the world, the English Reformation, will only come to full fruition in the Anglican Communion when England is no longer at its centre.

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