

# THEOLOGY TODAY

A Newsletter from the Institute of Anglican Studies at St George's Cathedral, Perth  
~ committed to building up a well-informed and thinking Anglican Community.

ISSUE 5 ~ SEPTEMBER 2010

## WHAT MATTERS MOST?

**Our Anglican Communion is in a bit of a muddle. We cannot decide on our priorities. Back in Elizabethan times Richard Hooker pointed out that there are doctrines fundamental to the Christian Faith and doctrines that are accessory to it. Which are which?**

The Bishop of Gloucester, renowned liturgist Michael Perham, believes the first order issues are expressed in the creeds, namely God as Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, the death and resurrection of the Lord, the role of the Spirit and so on. Given the lack of Ecumenical consensus on such issues as the ordination of women as bishops, or the admission of partnered gay and lesbian people to Holy Orders – these are matters that might well be considered accessory. They might well be decided (as they are currently) at provincial or national level.

However, as the Bishop of Gloucester goes on to point out in a recent address to his clergy, we should be holding our horses as the so-called moratoria demands until there is at least agreement Communion-wide. He agrees with the Archbishop of Canterbury that there should be an exercise of pastoral restraint. But it does not seem to be a likely scenario – given the consecration of Mary

Glasspool as an Assistant Bishop of Los Angeles, and the common practice of blessing friendships including those of same sex couples in some North American Dioceses.

On a recent visit to St Charles (Roman Catholic) seminary, your editor was asked to comment on the role of the Magisterium, or Teaching Office, in resolving differences of opinion in matters of doctrine in the Anglican Church. Many Anglicans would not want to answer the question and those who would answer might well agree with Canterbury, who seems to be saying: hold your horses as agreed or lose your membership of groups representative of the Anglican Communion.

The questions are whether this would tighten the reins and who should hold the reins anyway, and will this exercise of discipline stretch the “bonds of affection” too far? Time will tell.

Dr Andrew McGowan argues that the Canterbury stance will not do in the present dilemma. Dr Bruce Kaye gives a closely reasoned account of his rejection of the idea that if Anglican Provinces would all sign up to a Covenant or “Rule of Conduct” for the time being, difficulties might eventually be resolved.

Above all else we are all committed to the prayer that the Anglican Communion might be freed from such controversy as prevents us from sharing the Gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ that all might experience the unconditional acceptance and forgiveness that He has made possible.

*The Right Reverend Brian Kyme, Director, Institute of Anglican Studies*



*The consecration of Mary Glasspool as Assistant Bishop of Los Angeles in May of this year challenges the call for pastoral restraint.*

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# THE ANGLICAN BABEL: A VIEW FROM AUSTRALIA

**Although historians will point to Gene Robinson's consecration as a bishop in 2003 as the catalyst for the reconfiguration of global Anglicanism, Pentecost 2010 may turn out to have been a watershed of sorts too. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Letter, *Renewal in the Spirit*, and the responses to it, particularly that of Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of The Episcopal Church, have ushered in a new era not only of frank disagreement but of practical disengagement.**

Primate Phillip Aspinall plays a leading role in the Anglican Consultative Council, working to defend or create a centre for the global Communion; others have had significant roles in inter-Anglican bodies. Yet Archbishop Peter Jensen and his colleagues in Sydney, our most numerous and powerful diocese, are deeply involved in the GAFCON/FCA movement, and in the self-described 'Global South' (one of many signs that a particular conservatism and material resources are as good a ticket in to that company as any real issue of human and political geography – ask the Brazilians, Filipinos and South Africans).



*Dr Andrew McGowan*

Our divisions locally are arguably as deep as those in the Episcopal Church in the USA (TEC) a few years ago, but we Australian Anglicans generally believe in the Church. And in case or where we do not, the Australian Anglican Church is a fairly loose confederation of autonomous dioceses (which allows our spectacular diversity) and unlike our TEC sisters and brothers we do not have a strong sense of 'national' Church as an important ecclesiological category.

Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury is also held in real affection here, even in some (not all) of the more evangelical corners of the Church. Australian Anglicans have not wanted to weaken his position, and we – even those who disagree with him more and more about the Anglican Communion and its politics – still look to him for theological leadership. After these events however, I suspect there will be an increasing number here who look to Bishop Katharine and others for that leadership, as well or instead. I do hope it will be 'as well', myself; I think Archbishop Rowan is sometimes better at being wrong than Bishop Katharine is

at being right. This may be another sign that they need each other, and that the rest of us need them both.

Bishop Katharine is right, I believe, in her more expansive articulation of the Spirit's work as ongoing and dynamic. She is also right to reject centralisation as alien to our Anglican heritage and to the roots of our more modern attempts to create a Communion.

Katharine is still right here, however, and Rowan wrong. He is wrong in a tragic way – seeking, doubtless at great personal cost, a unity in the terms that existing Anglican Communion structures assume or require, but which in fact has now escaped us.

Not all blame should be laid at the feet of the Archbishop of Canterbury or of the Anglican Communion Office. It is patronising to conservatives in the 'Global South' and elsewhere to absolve them of responsibility. But here is where the singling out of TEC, at least as it appears in Canon Kenneth Kearon's subsequent letter, becomes inexplicable. Most groups who have disregarded the other moratorium, of cross-border interventions, have not been mentioned in the prescriptions for dis-inviting participation in international bodies.

From this southern vantage point, I cannot hear the events of Pentecost 2010 either as a new centralising will-to-power or as a rallying-call to liberal or progressive indignation. Rather, in a perverse reversal of the original Pentecost, we see ourselves further reduced to Babel, scattered abroad and unable or unwilling to understand one another's speech. If the Anglican Communion's central instruments are bound by circumstance to provide us with less than they were intended to, Australian Anglicans will not abandon them; but we will not abandon sisters and brothers in TEC or elsewhere either, as we all begin the long slow work of finding common language by other means, in the Spirit's power.

*Dr Andrew McGowan,  
Warden of Trinity College, University of Melbourne,  
and the author of abmcg.blogspot.com*

## THE COVENANT IS COMING, READY OR NOT

**The crisis in the Anglican Communion is being handled, if at all, by trying to manage people's actions. No attempt has been made at serious conflict resolution and management has been conceived in terms of controlling people by means of a covenant. The covenant is about to go to the 34 provinces in the Anglican Communion. This is a rush job, it almost certainly won't work and in any case the horse has already bolted.**

The Anglican churches around the world are both numerous and independent. Just like the Anglican Church of Australia they have their own constitutions and individual procedures for decision making. The constitutions differ somewhat but in general they provide for synodical governance with bishops, clergy and laity all involved. Our own General Synod meets every three years and the Standing Committee twice in each year. This is typical of other churches around the world, except the Church of England whose General Synod meets twice each year on average.

At the international level these churches keep in touch with each other in a multitude of ways. One of the most important is through organisations like the Mothers Union and the mission societies. The bishops have held a conference at the initiation of the archbishop of Canterbury every ten years since 1876 and in 1971 these churches (Provinces) set up The Anglican Consultative Council whose basic task was to consult and to keep the provinces in touch with each other. The ACC has lay, clerical and Episcopal representatives from the provinces and generally meets every two years. In recent times the Primates of the provinces have decided to meet for mutual consultation, generally every two years.

In 2003 a crisis blew up over homosexuality in the public life of the church because a man in an openly gay relationship was consecrated the bishop of New Hampshire and the Anglican Church of Canada agreed with the authorisation of blessings for same sex relationships first conducted in the diocese of New Westminster. Many people objected to these developments and institutional tit for tats began.

The institutional response has been to manage this conflict by containing it through institutional means. The chosen mechanism was to be a covenant that would state what Anglicans believe. The covenant would also provide for some sanctions against those who stepped outside the stated terms, or an interpretation of those terms made by one or other of the new meetings, now called "Instruments of Unity", - Primates, or the ACC and maybe the archbishop of Canterbury with the Lambeth Conference in the background.

An undated response to the St Andrew's draft of the Covenant is posted on the web site of the Anglican Church of Australia which clearly sets out the kinds of constitutional and procedural difficulties of making the kinds of decisions the covenant document envisages.

The idea that a covenant can override the terms of the constitution of the ACC and the responsibility of provinces to be present at meetings of the ACC is simply naïve.

Now the ACC in May has made some decisions on this draft of the covenant. The first section of the covenant has been approved to be sent to the provinces, but section 4 was the subject of a good deal of argument and confusion about meeting procedures and what was actually being decided. They resolved to "ask the archbishop of Canterbury to

form a working group to consider and consult with the Provinces on Section 4 and its possible revision, and to report to the next meeting of the Standing Committee and asks the Standing Committee, at that meeting, to approve a final form of Section 4." It is suggested that this process might be concluded by the end of this year. At which point the Covenant including the revised section 4 will be sent to the provinces for adoption.



*Bruce Kaye*

Thus we have moved from a first draft text in 2007 to a final text in 2009 on the most revolutionary development in relations between Anglican provinces in their history. It may not have been an express train, but it has surely been something very like one. Next year the covenant is coming to a synod near you ready or not and it will prove to be a disaster or damp squid. It was a bad idea from the beginning and should be dropped in favour of more appropriate mechanisms for dealing with conflict in the church.

I do not think this covenant is a good idea for Anglicans for four reasons:

1. **It is against the grain of Anglican ecclesiology** (what we think the church is). Anglicanism has historically given priority to the local and never yielded jurisdictional authority beyond the province.
2. **It is an inadequate response to the conflict in the Anglican Communion.** There should have been facilitated engagement for those in conflict using well established conflict resolution processes.
3. **In practical terms it will create immense and complicating confusion about institutional relationships and financial obligations.** There will be various levels of acceptance of the covenant and some provinces may be in on one issue but out on another.
4. **It does not address the key fundamental issue in this conflict: how to act in a particular context which is relevant to that context and also faithful to the gospel.** That they do things differently in Nigeria from the US calls for understanding, not coercion.

*Adapted from an article by Bruce Kaye, Theologian, Founding Editor of the Journal of Anglican Studies and author of worldanglicanismforum.blogspot.com*

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

## FACING UP TO EXTREMISM

Wednesday 22 September, 5.15-6.15pm



Born in Pakistan, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali was Bishop of Raiwind until he was forced to leave when Sharia law was enforced. After a period as General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society in the UK, he became Bishop of Rochester.

Recently retired, Bishop Michael has forceful opinions on how the Church should face up to aggressive atheism and radical Islam.

Venue: Lower Burt Memorial Hall, 38A St Georges Terrace, Perth

Entry: \$10.00 at the door

## A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY - A BBC DVD SERIES PRESENTED BY DIARMAID MACCULLOCH

Mondays from 4 October - 8 November inclusive, 5.00 - 6.30pm

Over six Mondays, the BBC series, *A History of Christianity*, will be screened in reverse chronological order, followed by guided discussion.

This major six-part series is presented by Diarmaid MacCulloch, one of the world's leading church historians. It reveals how a small Jewish sect that preached humility became the biggest religion in the world. Most Christian histories start with St Paul's mission to Rome, but MacCulloch argues that the first Christianity stayed much closer to its Middle-Eastern roots.

The programmes show how weirdly different forms of Christianity can be because of their very different developments over time.

Venue: Lower Burt Memorial Hall, 38A St Georges Terrace, Perth

Entry: FREE - Donations invited

## THE DEAN OF GLOUCESTER



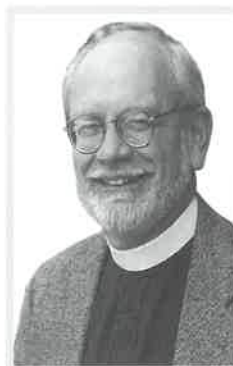
Sundays 7 and 14 November, 10.00am

From 27 October to 15 November, the Very Reverend Nicholas Bury, Dean of Gloucester, UK, will be visiting Perth. During this time, he will engage in study groups and seminars, and will preach on 7 and 14 November at St George's Cathedral.

Venue: St George's Cathedral,  
38 St Georges Terrace, Perth

## 'WHEAT AND TARES': LIVING FAITHFULLY IN A FLAWED AND FRAGMENTING CHURCH

Thursday 18 November, 5.15-6.15pm



Professor William Countryman teaches Biblical Studies at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific at Berkeley, California. He will discuss our current Christian and Anglican predicament in the light of similar concerns in the New Testament church, with particular reference to Matthew 13, Galatians 1-2 and 1 John.

Bring your Bibles and join in a conversation that will bring into play perspectives from biblical studies and spirituality, as well as our contemporary experience.

Venue: Lower Burt Memorial Hall, 38A St Georges Terrace, Perth

Entry: \$10.00 at the door

## AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS POETRY

Monday 22 November, 5.15-6.15pm:

'In a Strange Land': Religious poetry in Australia

Monday 29 November, 5.15-6.15pm:

'Poetry and the Sacred': Australian experience

Professor Andrew Lynch of UWA's Department of English and Cultural Studies will introduce a selection of religious poetry in modern and contemporary Australia, including writers such as Francis Webb, Judith Wright, Gwen Harwood, Vincent Buckley, Randolph Stow, and Les Murray.



"The mental environment of non-indigenous Australians is often regarded as intensely secular. Yet Australian poets have often explored religious territory, transforming traditions of the spiritual, and finding new locations of the sacred."

- Andrew Lynch

Venue: Lower Burt Memorial Hall,

38A St Georges Terrace, Perth

Entry per session: \$10.00 at the door

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