



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.

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THE ECUMENICAL WINTER

Perhaps the best known quotation from Shakespeare's *Richard III* is this one:

*"Now is the winter of our discontent.
Made glorious by this sun of York."* (1.i.1)

I have had an experience of ecumenical winter by accepting a position as President of the Council of Churches in Western Australia. It may have been thought that an elderly man had experienced more winters than many. But that the ecumenical movement has cooled off is very evident. The striking thing is that very few in the Church seem particularly discontented about it.

When I have discussed this with church leaders, some of them have suggested that the very idea of Christians being united in one church is passé. It was reported in the press recently that an Archbishop of one particular Christian communion has withdrawn his representatives from an ecumenical council because he believes the day has passed for that sort of thing! And all this despite Our Lord's Prayer in John 17, where Jesus prays that his followers may become completely one so that the world may believe.

It has never been easy to maintain the unity of the Church. There have been problems from the earliest times. In New Testament days, one of the issues had to do with how much of Judaism needed to be accepted by Gentiles who wished to be disciples of Jesus. In Acts 15, we read about the Council of Jerusalem held to thrash things out. And of course, there are many cultural and political factors involved. This became apparent in the British Church following Augustine's arrival in Kent in 597 C.E. Augustine proved to be an agent of God in the conversion of King Ethelbert of Kent, much to the delight of Ethelbert's Christian Queen, Bertha.

And as time went by, and the Italian Mission enjoyed some success, it became apparent that there were already British

Christians who had been converted by Celtic missionaries, and it was obvious they had different points of view about a number of matters not least the date of Easter! When the leaders of both parties met at Hilda's Abbey at Whitby, and the differences were debated, it was decided the most practical way forward was to go the Roman way. The Church in England, as it had now become (see Magna Carta), became part of the Western Church, and if there was any doubt about that, the Norman conquest in 1066 had the result of making things clear.

The great schism of 1054 between East and West was not, of course, the last rupture of unity in the Christian Church. The result of the calls for reform by people like Martin Luther and John Calvin led not only to the formation of reformed churches, but also challenged traditionalists. The Roman Communion in time moved to hold the Council of Trent to review and reform much of its theological position.

In England of course, things were somewhat different, since Henry VIII, while having his problems obtaining Papal dispensation to remarry and secure continuity of succession for the throne of England, was a strong proponent of Catholic orthodoxy who was rewarded in the fullness of time with the title "Fidei Defensor". But after the turmoil of Mary's reign, it was left for Elizabeth I and her Divines to frame something of a settlement, expressing the classic Anglican triad of scripture, reason and tradition.

In recent times, Samuel Wells, an English scholar who is now Vicar of St Martin's in the Fields in London, has published a helpful little book called *What Anglicans Believe* (Canterbury Press, London 2011). Wells believes that the really big issues are not the gender of ordination candidates, or whether homosexuality should or should not be tolerated. He believes the real issue is what we understand by salvation. Our African Provinces are asking us just how much of our idea of salvation is realized today. To what extent do we promote healing or wholeness? How dependent are we on

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the Providence of God? The crisis in the West, some of our African brothers and sisters are suggesting, is that we need to find a language that expresses what salvation means for the world today. Samuel Wells believes that the Provinces of the Anglican Communion need one another more today than at any time in our history, to get our thinking straight and our faith strong.

The same might be said of our different brands of churchmanship. It seems to me that we must agree that our relationship with God through Jesus Christ matters most. If that is so, there is hope that Shakespeare's words, with slight amendment, might well be apposite:

"Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this Son of God."

The Right Reverend Brian Kyme, Director, Institute of Anglican Studies, St George's Cathedral.

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NOBODY CAN LIKE AN ANGLICAN

Reflections from a Cathedral Scholar

It is possible to read the title of this piece in two ways. The first is with the emphasis on the word "like", treating it as a verb with the meaning "to have affection for or attraction to". In this reading, the sense in the sentence is that Anglicanism in general is so odious that it is impossible to feel any real affection or empathy for it. It is a postcolonial hangover, the last gasp of the British Empire feebly flapping, like a dying fish, on foreign shores. Or it is a tradition in search of a dogma, summed up and dismissed by foe and friend alike as "salvation by good taste". Or it is a nest of vice, a safe haven for sexual predators who have been given license to prey upon children and then hidden away through fear of scandal and litigation.

The other reading is exactly the opposite. If one places the emphasis instead upon the word "can" as a verb in its meaning of "to be able to" and uses the word "like" in its function as a preposition denoting comparison the second meaning emerges: that there is something unique in Anglicanism, something implicitly praiseworthy and vaguely wonderful, that the smells and the robes and the prayers and Bible readings, the music and poetry, the street ministries, the schools and refuges, the healing of medicine and sacrament, are all uniquely and genuinely wonderful.

Religions, and sub-groups with them, such as the Anglican communion is, all commence and define themselves in what might be called a "foundation myth". Whether it is the commissioning of Peter by Christ, or Luther nailing the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral, or John Calvin in Geneva, or the itinerant revivalist ministry of the Wesleys. For Anglicans, that foundation myth has far less to do with the Thirty-Nine Articles or the evolution of the

Book of Common Prayer than it does with the urgent desire of a monarch to beget a male heir. Such an unseemly origin is much known but scarcely mentioned; it is Anglican history's dirty laundry. Often packed away in that smelly washing basket is the life and ministry of Thomas Cranmer.

In 1532 Henry made him Archbishop of Canterbury. The King demanded of him that he find a way to enable Henry to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. Cranmer not only complied but also crowned Anne as England's queen, then celebrated the baptism of the infant Elizabeth and stood as her godfather.

It was Cranmer who crafted the Book of Common Prayer and drafted articles of belief, themselves heavily influenced by the religious reformers of Europe, particularly Martin Bucer who was a direct collaborator. After Henry's death, Cranmer grew a beard in imitation of these reformers. Cranmer's reframing of the Church that he governed was authoritarian. It was underwritten by the authority of the king, and enforced by Parliament. None of this was in any way a consensus or even consensual process. Cranmer's church and democratic process were strangers. Such concepts are modern, and contrary to the way in which power and its uses were effected in early modern Europe. They also have their consequences. During England's brief counter-reformation in the time of Henry VIII's eldest child, Mary I, Cranmer was burned at the stake, notionally for Protestant heresy, but really for treason. Cranmer was a reluctant martyr, and very nearly recanted but the power of his convictions won out in the end.

Cranmer's equivocal martyrdom symbolises both the push-me-pull-you foundation myth of Anglicanism, and the ambiguity which has characterized it ever since. It is a communion that is simultaneously liberal and conservative, authoritarian and consensual, catholic and protestant. Moreover, it has resisted every attempt at self-definition since Cranmer's later successor as Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, presented the Thirty-Nine Articles to Elizabeth I, bishops and Parliament in 1571.

That does not mean that attempts have not been made from time to time to give the Anglican communion some coherence. There is, at least, some consensus that Anglicanism represents a *via media*, a middle path, between Catholicism and Protestantism. It is a path, however, that has resisted any kind of mapping. Most recently, a simmering controversy about the church's stance on homosexual practice led to an attempt to develop such a map. This was not a revelation, or the product of prophetic insight. Rather, it was called a "covenant", in other words a kind of treaty, a document negotiated through long and painful discussion. Its intent was to ensure that provinces did not "go rogue" and introduce practices which others in the Church found so offensive that division might occur. The process began in 2003 after a meeting of primates at Lambeth Palace and a text was produced for the churches to ratify in late 2009. To date, only a few have.

The covenant process ought to have been unremarkable. It ought to have resulted in a framework where diversity could be preserved within a unitary communion. It came well recommended. Rowan Williams, until recently Archbishop of Canterbury, leant the great weight of his office in its support. Williams, an outstanding scholar and intellectual, yet was unable to restrain many in the theologically conservative wing of the communion to have a conference of their own, the Global Anglican Futures Conference (or GAFCON), held in Jerusalem in 2008.

Other considerations motivate Williams' successor as Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. While Welby might lack the weighty archepiscopal demeanor that Williams brings to an occasion, he does have some things that just might help him heal the breaks in the Anglican Communion. To begin with, he is an evangelical – that is, a biblical conservative who can talk the language of biblical conservatism. His credentials here are impeccable. He was, before his ordination, a prominent member of the congregation of Holy Trinity Brompton (or HTB as it now quaintly calls itself), a robustly successful evangelical community. English Anglican evangelicalism is different to the Australian variety: English evangelicals tend to support the ordination of women as priests and as bishops; they have no objection to the exercise of the gifts of the spirit, and many English evangelicals manifest such gifts. Archbishop Welby is one. He has been quoted as saying of speaking in tongues: "It's just a routine part of spiritual discipline – you choose to speak and you speak a language that you don't know."

He also accepts the priestly discipline of the saying of the office, and finds comfort, beauty and presence in the celebration of the Eucharist. These are traditions that belong to the more catholic wing of the church, and his personal belief set has led the Archbishop to describe himself as "a spiritual magpie". What this means for the Archbishop is that, at the very least, he is equipped with the language and the experience to talk to all of the church, and cross its chasms of difference. He visited GAFCON 2 in Nairobi earlier this year, although only for a day, and has a strong relationship with the African churches, in particular the Nigerian church. He has a particular affinity for Nigeria, where he spent time as an oil executive before he became a priest, and more recently has consistently placed himself in considerable personal danger while trying to negotiate a peace agreement between the government and Ogoni militia.

For glass half-full types, his genuine bodily commitment to peace and reconciliation and his capacity to speak with all parts of the Anglican communion in a sympathetic way augurs well. He said recently, in an interview on Vatican radio:

"We exist in different church communities, different ecclesial communities around the world and the longer that goes on, the more our different communities embed their own institutions and put down roots. Some of them have

been putting down roots for centuries and that makes it harder and harder for us to say, well, actually, perhaps we need to reimagine what it means to look like the church and to surrender some of the things that give us our sense of identity in the cause of Christ. There are very fundamental and extremely important doctrinal and dogmatic differences that we have between us and they have to be worked on, as they are with Rome and the Anglicans with ARCIC, and we take those extremely seriously. It's absolutely essential that those are worked on. But we need to make sure we're working on them in the context of churches and ecclesial communities that say no sacrifice is too great to be obedient to the call of Christ that we may be one."

Rowan Williams once said that, to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, one required "the constitution of an ox and the hide of an elephant". This is still very much so. Moreover, as Archbishop Justin is now discovering, a dilemma can have more than two horns.

For there are those (too many) whose glasses are half empty, and the Archbishop's credentials work against him. Despite his many points of contact with the different wings of Anglicanism, there are those who prefer to emphasise his points of difference rather than his points of commonality. That has already begun with websites depicting his errors: some of these are aligned to the GAFCON movement, and some are even more on the theological right. It seems that the work of reconciliation and unity has a long way to go, and Archbishop Welby's task, no matter how well fitted he might be for it, remains beyond merely superhuman and requires something more miraculous. For his task is not to implement a universal covenant, or to declare victory of one side over another. It is to persuade us all to love one another and to listen to one another and to recognize that all of us are funny imperfect beings who struggle the same struggle – to be the words and the hand and the feet of Christ on earth – and we will always do that better when we are together than when we are apart.

Dr Bill Leadbetter, St George's Cathedral Scholar.

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MONDAYS IN JULY

Heretics Anonymous: Flashpoints of Faith

Mondays 7, 14 & 21 July at 5.15pm, in St George's Cathedral (Soldiers' Chapel).

Join the Very Reverend Dr John Shepherd, Dean of Perth, in an examination of some of the divisions in the church of the Victorian era that have influenced where we find ourselves today. Dealing with such issues as:

- I. *The Threat of Evolution*
- II. *The Threat of Biblical Criticism*
- III. *The Threat of Doubt*

SEPTEMBER

Who or what is an Anglican?

Mondays 1, 8, 15 & 22 September at 5.15pm, at St George's Cathedral (Friends' Meeting Room, Lower Burt Memorial Hall).

Are Anglicans Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or what? A study of great Christian Leaders will help us find an answer. Local theologians will explore the formative contributions of past Anglican identities.

I. **Thomas Cranmer**, Archbishop of Canterbury, guided Henry VIII in his assertion of royal authority over that of the Papacy, and created the style of liturgy that is the hallmark of Anglicanism. Presented by the Reverend Dr David Wood.

II. **Richard Hooker**, mindful of the Catholic heritage of the Church of England, was wary of the Puritans who did not think the Church of Elizabeth I had changed things enough. He promoted Anglicanism as a "via media" – a middle way between Papalism and Puritanism. Presented by the Reverend Professor Rowan Strong.

III. **The Evangelicals**: John Wesley was prominent amongst those who wanted the Church to devote its energy to social change and personal conversion. Others also worked to this end within the Church of England. Presented by the Reverend Dean Spalding

IV. **The Tractarians**: A cluster of leaders such as John Keble, John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey led the Oxford movement to promote the catholic heritage of the Church of England. Presented by the Reverend Toby Sherring.

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St George's Cathedral and the Sculpture 'Ascalon'

Photo: Andrew Day

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