

TRADITION, CHANGE AND THE NEW ANGLICANISM

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been deep disagreement among Anglicans on a number of issues. This has sometimes been portrayed as a conflict between ‘conservatives’ and ‘liberals’. Yet those arguing contrary views tend to emphasise some aspects of tradition and reject others: both could be regarded as conservative in certain ways, liberal or radical in others. And there are churchgoers who are quite conservative on many matters yet who are far from happy with the approach to Anglicanism adopted by some reform movements seeking to rid the church of ‘liberalism’.

For instance, in early 2008 an interim report on an Anglican Catechism in Outline was issued by a task force of Global South Anglican, which vigorously campaigns for ‘conservative’ dominance. The chair of this task force had earlier announced that the ‘draft of the theological framework for an Anglican catechism’ would be ‘a unitive and building document for the whole Communion... We took particular care in defining orthodoxy in the Anglican Communion in the document’, which ‘has important ramifications for Christian discipleship throughout the Communion’.¹

In a much-publicised communiqué in 2005, Global South Anglican had announced its commitment to ‘the concept of an Anglican Covenant (rooted in the Windsor Report)... It is envisaged that once the Covenant is approved by the Communion, provinces that enter into the Covenant shall be mutually accountable, thereby providing an authentic fellowship within the Communion.’ The ‘unscriptural innovations of North American and some Western provinces’ on human sexuality were condemned, and a warning issued that ‘the path to restoring order requires that either the innovating provinces/dioceses conform to historic teaching, or the offending provinces will by their actions be choosing to walk apart’.²

In 2006, Global South Anglican celebrated ‘the gift of Anglican identity that is ours today because of the sacrifice made by those who have gone before us’ and expressed dismay at the failure of the Episcopal Church to abide by ‘the historic teaching of the Church’.³ A Statement from the Global South Primates Steering Committee in March 2008 declared: ‘We see a increasing conviction and confirmation of the prophetic and priestly vocation of the Global South in the Anglican Communion... We resolved, and urge all in the Global South and other orthodox constituencies of the wider Communion to strengthen our hearts and wills to work together for the fundamental renewal and transformation of the global Anglican Communion... We are looking forward to offer the fruit of the labour on the Anglican Catechism in Outline to the Anglican Communion in June 2008.’⁴

The Anglican Catechism in Outline takes a more scholarly and less polemical approach than Global South Anglican communiqués. Nevertheless the Catechism’s intended use, to define orthodoxy for Anglicans in general and so, by implication, rule out alternative views as unorthodox, supports the drive to set clear boundaries and discipline or exclude those who do not conform.

Yet what is supposedly ‘the historic teaching’ is, in some ways, very different from that which many middle-aged and older Anglicans will remember from their own youth, and which can be found by reading historical documents. It would appear that some leading ‘conservatives’ have discarded certain beliefs of earlier generations of Anglicans, including those still held by many so-called innovators, who may be more conservative than they recognise!

Change occurs in all earthly institutions and communities, and Anglicanism is no exception. Yet, if movements such as Global South Anglican are determined not only to practice their version of orthodoxy but also to impose this on other dioceses and provinces, serious problems may arise. For the superiority of the new Anglicanism of the ‘conservative’ reformers to that prevalent in the last century is likely to be strongly contested by many Anglicans, not only in North America but also in other parts of the world.

Two examples of comparisons between the proposed new catechism in outline and Lambeth Conference resolutions from the middle of the last century are given below. Some may claim that this was relatively modern, and that change from the ‘historic faith’ was already underway; if so, it would be helpful for them to be clear about just when was the ‘golden age’ to which the present should be compared.

Lambeth resolutions are not binding on dioceses or provinces, and few observe them consistently. Moreover there have long been different strands of Anglican thought and practice on all manner of things, and trends and developments among Wesleyans, neo-Calvinists, ritualists, charismatics and so forth might not always be shared by those in other wings of the church. However, discussions and resolutions at Lambeth, and later the Anglican Consultative Council, give some idea of the broad consensus of Anglican thought at the time.

The Bible and the Word made flesh

The vital importance of the Bible is generally acknowledged by Anglicans, but there are wide variations in how it is read. This is in part due to its rich variety of styles, settings and perspectives reflected in its pages. It has inspired and guided, but also sometimes puzzled and provoked, listeners and readers through the ages.

That interpreting Scripture is not a straightforward task has long been recognised by the church. In the fourth and fifth centuries, it was an issue considered in some depth by eminent North African theologian Augustine of Hippo, who warned that ‘Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens... and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics... If they find a Christian mistaken in a field in which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?’⁵ If Christians insist that others accept their interpretations on matters which are not central, claiming that this is what the Bible teaches, they risk alienating people who might otherwise be drawn to the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Augustine's view, 'Whoever thinks he understands divine scripture or any part of it, but whose interpretation does not build up the twofold love of God and neighbour, has not really understood it.'⁶

Anglican thinkers have tended to emphasise the interplay of Scripture, tradition and reason (to which experience is sometimes added). Eminent sixteenth-century theologian Richard Hooker warned of the risks of reading one's own biases into Scripture and then condemning other Christians for supposedly not following the Bible.⁷ Almost inevitably, people will read the Bible in the light of the beliefs of their day and their own circumstances, but if they have the humility and openness to recognise that their interpretation may be flawed and to enter into dialogue with others, they may get closer to the truth.

Theologians through the ages have continued to seek key themes and interpretive principles so that, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Bible can continue to benefit listeners and readers. International Anglican gatherings do not determine doctrine – wide variations in belief and practice have persisted through the centuries – but their records reflect some of the developments in the mainstream of Anglican thought.

In 1930, the Lambeth Conference indicated that readers of Scripture should focus on the understanding of God revealed, in particular through the life of Christ, with the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit:

We affirm the supreme and unshaken authority of the Holy Scriptures as presenting the truth concerning God and the spiritual life in its historical setting and in its progressive revelation, both throughout the Old Testament and in the New. It is no part of the purpose of the Scriptures to give information on those themes which are the proper subject matter of scientific enquiry, nor is the Bible a collection of separate oracles, each containing a final declaration of truth. The doctrine of God is the centre of its teaching, set forth in its books "by divers portions and in divers manners." As Jesus Christ is the crown, so also is he the criterion of all revelation. We would impress upon Christian people the necessity of banishing from their minds the ideas concerning the character of God which are inconsistent with the character of Jesus Christ. We believe that the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is continued by the Holy Spirit, who not only interpreted him to the Apostles, but has in every generation inspired and guided those who seek truth.⁸

The 1958 Lambeth Conference affirmed:

that our Lord Jesus Christ is God's final Word to man, and that in his light all Holy Scripture must be seen and interpreted, the Old Testament in terms of promise and the New Testament in terms of fulfilment.⁹

The reference to Christ as God's Word comes from the beginning of John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth... The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.¹⁰

That year the Conference also gratefully acknowledged 'our debt to the host of devoted scholars who, worshipping the God of Truth, have enriched and deepened our understanding of the Bible, not least by facing with intellectual integrity the questions raised by modern knowledge and modern criticism.'¹¹ There was similar acknowledgement of the work of scientists, and Christian people were called on 'both to learn reverently from every new disclosure of truth, and at the same time to bear witness to the biblical message of a God and Saviour apart from whom no gift can be rightly used.'¹²

The 1968 Lambeth Conference likewise welcomed 'the increasing extent of human knowledge' and 'the searching enquiries of the theologians,' calling the Church to 'a faith in the living God which is adventurous, expectant, calm, and confident'.¹³ The Conference recommended:

that theologians be encouraged to continue to explore fresh ways of understanding God's revelation of himself in Christ, expressed in language that makes sense in our time. It believes that this requires of the theologian respect for tradition and, of the Church, respect for freedom of inquiry.¹⁴

The prevailing view of Scripture among Anglicans in the middle of the last century can perhaps be summed up by famous twentieth-century theologian and archbishop William Temple, from his introduction to the magnificent 1938 Report of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England: 'Everyone knows that it is possible to quote texts which, torn from their context, may be presented as supporting entirely un-Christian opinions... Our attention must be fastened upon the trend of scripture as a whole and upon its climax in the record of the Word made flesh, by the light of which all the rest is to be interpreted'.¹⁵

The Bible: 'God's own voice speaking'?

In contrast, the Anglican Catechism in Outline interim report¹⁶ takes the position (emphasis in original):

that Holy Scripture, in bearing witness to God's deed of salvation, is nothing less than God's own witness to himself. Scripture does not *come after* what God has done and said, as a kind of secondary report of it or reflection on it. In reading Holy Scripture we hear God's own voice speaking, while at the same time we hear the voice of human authors. These voices, human and divine, bear witness to God's work, and they agree. Human authors have been granted the grace to speak of God's work as God himself speaks of it...

The best term with which to describe the perfection of Scripture is, perhaps, that used by John Wyclif, when he spoke of Holy Scripture as 'in corrigible'. That is to say simply that no interpreter of Scripture can venture or presume to improve on it or to set it right, whether by excision, by correction, by privileging a canon within the canon, or by assigning certain ideas to primitive ignorance and others to the Spirit of God, etc, etc.

While a crudely literal approach is not recommended, and scholarship is valued, this should have strict limits:

Faithful interpretation has obedience to the word in view from beginning to end.

Many Anglicans will have grave difficulties with this approach, and not simply because they do not value the Bible. To some, it may seem far removed from the teaching in the Epistles that 'we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code';¹⁷ for 'the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life'.¹⁸

Instead, to quote Galatians, 'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."¹⁹ Many would regard this as one of the central themes in the New Testament.

Moreover, what does it mean to believe that the curse:

O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones
and dashes them against the rock!²⁰

is as much divinely inspired as the prayer that Jesus taught,

forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors²¹

and his teaching according to the Gospels: 'I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'²²?

Should those who have difficulty with this notion be barred from leadership in the Anglican Communion or, if they are not yet Christians, dissuaded from joining the church? The aim of the Catechism, in the context of Global South Anglican's general activities, is not simply to stimulate deeper reflection and debate – which would be extremely valuable – but rather to set the bounds of what is permissible.

To suggest that the more vengeful passages in, say, the Psalms reflect human fallibility rather than divine perfection is not to dismiss them – some might argue that honesty before God is to be encouraged and, unless flawed emotions and destructive tendencies in individuals and communities are brought to light, they cannot be healed. There are ways to derive spiritual benefit from Scripture which do not involve obedience to every text, if such a thing is possible.

In practice, almost everyone gives greater weight to some biblical passages than others, though some are open about their reasons and willing to discuss these. This selectivity applies

to the authors of the Anglican Catechism in Outline interim report, as their approach to specific issues demonstrates.

The Bible, tradition and the state

For example, the outline Catechism's use of the Bible on the matter of obedience to government is highly selective, and appears to lead to conclusions which many Anglicans in the mid-twentieth century would have found unscriptural, unacceptable and maybe blasphemous.

'We must obey God rather than any human authority,' declare Peter and the apostles in Acts,²³ and much of the Bible reflects a critical view of the state as well as of religious institutions.

While rulers may rule justly if they are open to divine wisdom,²⁴ it is recognised that many of those in power are far from just.²⁵ The book of Isaiah puts it graphically:

The Lord enters into judgement
with the elders and princes of his people:
It is you who have devoured the vineyard;
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
What do you mean by crushing my people,
by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts...
Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!²⁶

Even in the modern world, to the despised and dispossessed and those drawn by compassion to show solidarity with them, the picture drawn by the prophets of cruelty and exploitation is all too familiar.

Resistance is a central theme. At the beginning of the book of Exodus, the Hebrew midwives disobey the Pharaoh's command to kill baby boys at birth, and then his own daughter takes pity on and rescues little Moses.²⁷ As an adult he leads his people to freedom from oppression, by God's mercy and power.

At the beginning of the New Testament, in Matthew's Gospel, despite King Herod's murderous decree, baby Jesus survives because of others' disobedience.²⁸ In Luke's account, when Jesus' birth is announced Mary, his mother, praises God, who 'has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.'²⁹

Jesus' mission begins with his baptism by John the Baptist, a messenger of the coming reign of God who 'proclaimed the good news to the people' but is imprisoned and later executed because he has dared to speak out against the king.³⁰ Despite the risks, Jesus invites his followers to join him in the task of ushering in the kingdom of heaven on earth, urging them 'I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more.'³¹

At one point, those trying to trap Jesus ask him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, knowing that to say yes might lead the crowds to reject him as a collaborator and to say no might lead to his arrest as a rebel. In Mark's account, 'knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."³² While humans, made in God's image, may pay taxes to the state, it is ultimately to God, in whose image they are made, that they owe allegiance.

God's kingdom is dramatically different from those of the world. As Jesus tells his followers, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'³³ While those holding state power are all too often willing to demand that their subjects give up their freedom and dignity, even their lives, to benefit those in charge, in God's reign things are turned upside down.

Later, the Gospels tell of Jesus' death on the cross, executed by the government with the complicity of religious leaders – and of his resurrection, opening the door to new life for humankind. In the risen Christ, still bearing the marks of the nails in his hand and the wound in his side,³⁴ the limits of worldly power have been exposed, and death itself defeated.

Early Christians had mixed attitudes to the state.

The book of Revelation, for instance, written against a background of persecution, took a particularly bleak view of the powers-that-be:

I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names.... It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.³⁵

Ultimately, in this book, the defeat of all worldly authorities who resist the truth is confidently predicted, with eternal life for those who have stayed faithful to God amidst persecution.

Paul, however, took issue with those Christians who believed they were exempt from the usual social obligations, pointing to the more constructive aspects of governments' work:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay

taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.

Immediately after this passage, Romans 13.1-7, Paul goes on to argue that Christians have obligations to ordinary people, not just rulers, and to reinforce a non-legalistic approach:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.³⁶

Underpinning Paul's writings is a vivid sense of the transformation of society, indeed the cosmos, through God's grace: 'God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.'³⁷

Paul himself is widely believed to have been martyred, as were the apostle Peter and numerous Christians through the ages who refused to obey state decrees which they regarded as seriously wrong on matters of great importance. Giving ultimate allegiance to anything or anyone other than God might be regarded as idolatry.

Yet over the centuries, as governments sought to co-opt the church and use Christian texts and imagery to bolster their own power, Paul's words in Romans 13.1-7 were repeatedly quoted out of context and in isolation from the rest of Scripture and tradition. However those who resisted tyranny included Christians faithful to one Ruler above all others. Widely differing views were expressed by theologians and church leaders on proper relationships between governments and the governed.

The dangers of unquestioning obedience to authority

As entrepreneurial classes challenged the existing power structures and working people struggled for greater rights, slaves rose in revolt and the colonised sought independence, a more critical attitude to government became common. State officials might command respect, but this could be forfeited if they misused their power, and unjust laws might not be fully observed.

To some who clung to the belief that unquestioning obedience to the state was a Christian virtue, the events of the 1930s and 1940s came as a shock. The ascendancy to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany, his alliance with Benito Mussolini in Italy and Francisco Franco in Spain, and the horrors inflicted by his regime at home and abroad before his defeat in 1945 profoundly affected people throughout the world, and caused much soul-searching. Other governments too resorted to measures such as the bombing of civilians to which some Anglicans objected.

Many German pastors had drilled into their congregations the importance of Romans 13 and the need to obey authority,³⁸ though some courageously took a different position. Hence many Christians played their part in the government's programme of repression and genocide, in

which dissidents and minorities suffered terribly and millions of Jewish people were murdered, as well as probably hundreds of thousands of disabled people.

Many older people will still remember their horror when they found about the death camps, barbaric experiments and other atrocities, and their bewilderment that civilised people could behave that way, or in some cases their guilt when they realised what they had helped to do to fellow-humans made in God's image. Afterwards, Anglicans as well as members of other denominations were prompted not only to mourn but also to seek to ensure that in future churches would be better able to resist attempts by murderous dictators to make them complicit in appalling crimes against humanity and God. There was intense study and discussion of theological approaches to the use and abuse of power, including in ecumenical circles in which Anglicans played an active part.

Yet, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, not everyone in the world shared the popular revulsion at the racism, brutality and misuse of religion by the Nazi regime. The apartheid system took hold in South Africa, administered largely by those who considered themselves devout Christians.³⁹ Again, Romans 13 was used to justify obedience to the authorities as they treated large parts of the population as sub-human, divided families using the notorious pass laws and imprisoned or killed protestors. There were however Christians, including prominent Anglicans, who resisted what they regarded as an inhumane and ungodly system.⁴⁰

Even in the 1980s, as the South African regime became increasingly shaky, premier PW Botha continued to insist that 'The Bible ... has a message for the governments and the governed of the world. Thus we read in Romans 13 that every person be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God. Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad conduct. Do what is good and you will receive the approval of the ruler. He is God's servant for your good'.⁴¹

To quote the 1985 Kairos Document, 'a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa' which became widely known internationally:

The South African apartheid State has a theology of its own and we have chosen to call it 'State Theology.' 'State Theology' is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonizes the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy.

How does 'State Theology' do this? It does it by misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes. In this document we would like to draw your attention to four key examples of how this is done in South Africa. The first would be the use of Romans 13:1-7 to give an absolute and 'divine' authority to the State. The second would be the use of the idea of 'Law and Order' to determine and control what the people may be permitted to regard as just and unjust. The third would be the use of the word 'communist' to brand anyone who rejects 'State Theology.' And finally there is the use that is made of the name of God...

'State Theology' assumes that in this text Paul is presenting us with the absolute and definitive Christian doctrine about the State, in other words an absolute and universal principle that is equally valid for all times and in all circumstances. The falseness of this assumption has been pointed out by numerous biblical scholars...

In the present crisis and especially during the State of Emergency, 'State Theology' has tried to re-establish the status quo of orderly discrimination, exploitation and oppression by appealing to the consciences of its citizens in the name of law and order. It tries to make those who reject this law and this order feel that they are ungodly. The State here is not only usurping the right of the Church to make judgments about what would be right and just in our circumstances; it is going even further than that and demanding of us, in the name of law and order, an obedience that must be reserved for God alone. The South African State recognizes no authority beyond itself and therefore it will not allow anyone to question what it has chosen to define as 'law and order.' However, there are millions of Christians in South Africa today who are saying with Peter: 'We must obey God rather than man (human beings)' (Acts 5:29)...

The oppressive South African regime will always be particularly abhorrent to Christians precisely because it makes use of Christianity to justify its evil ways. As Christians we simply cannot tolerate this blasphemous use of God's name and God's Word.

It was against this background that Anglicans in the last century reflected deeply on the proper limits of obedience to the state, and Christians' duty to protect the defenceless and resist oppression. In 1948, the Lambeth Conference endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (then in draft form),⁴² and resolved:

The Conference believes that both the recognition of the responsibility of the individual to God and the development of his personality are gravely imperilled by any claim made either by the state or by any group within the state to control the whole of human life. Personality is developed in community, but the community must be one of free persons. The Christian must therefore judge every social system by its effect on human personality.⁴³

Indeed:

The Conference affirms it to be the duty of the Church constantly to proclaim the sovereignty of God who is the Father of all and whose law is above all nations; it condemns the concept of the unbridled sovereignty of the nation and such usurpation of power by the state as is opposed to the basic truths of Christianity; further, it denies that the individual exists for the state...⁴⁴

As the apartheid regime in South Africa continued to insist on its Christian credentials, and the Prime Minister of what was then racially segregated Rhodesia claimed to be 'fighting for Christian Civilization',⁴⁵ the 1968 Lambeth Conference endorsed a World Council of Churches statement condemning racism as a:

blatant denial of the Christian faith.

- (i) It denies the effectiveness of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, through whose love all human diversities lose their divisive significance;
- (ii) it denies our common humanity in creation and our belief that all men are made in God's image;
- (iii) it falsely asserts that we find our significance in terms of racial identity rather than in Jesus Christ.

...the Conference calls upon the Churches to press upon governments and communities their duty to promote fundamental human rights and freedoms among all their peoples.⁴⁶

Another resolution stated:

The Conference, profoundly aware of the effect on human life of the responsible and irresponsible use of power at all levels of human society, considers that the Church should address itself energetically to the range of problems arising in this area.⁴⁷

The first gathering of the Anglican Consultative Council, held in 1971, sent 'warm greetings to the Churches engaged in the common struggle to combat racism and segregation in southern Africa and the United States of America, assuring them of our continuing prayers and encouragement' and discussed the use of power and social and political change.⁴⁸ The next gathering, held in 1973, resolved:

The Council calls upon its member Churches:

- a. to be sensitive to the violent dehumanization of minority peoples in their midst;
- b. to acknowledge the Church's vocation to side with the oppressed in empowering them to live their own lives in freedom, even at some sacrifice to itself, while at the same time seeking in the power of Christian love to bring about the true liberation of the oppressor...⁴⁹

The 1978 Lambeth Conference further discussed Christian social responsibility, and the need to support those courageously resisting grave injustice by the state:

The Conference regards the matter of human rights and dignity as of capital and universal importance. We send forth the following message as expressing our convictions in Christ for the human family world-wide.

We deplore and condemn the evils of racism and tribalism, economic exploitation and social injustices, torture, detention without trial and the taking of human lives, as contrary to the teaching and example of our Lord in the Gospel. Man is made in the image of God and must not be exploited. In many parts of the world these evils are so rampant that they deter the development of a humane society.

...we thank God for those faithful Christians who individually and collectively witness to their faith and convictions in the face of persecution, torture and martyrdom; and for those who work for and advocate human rights and peace among all peoples; and we assure them of our prayers

... we pledge our support for those organisations and agencies which have taken positive stands on human rights

... we urge all Anglicans to seek positive ways of educating themselves about the liberation struggle of peoples in many parts of the world

... we appeal to all Christians to lend their support to those who struggle for human freedom and who press forward in some places at great personal and corporate risk; we should not abandon them even if the struggle becomes violent. We are reminded that

the ministry of the Church is to reveal the love of God by faithful proclamation of his Word, by sacrificial service, and by fervent prayers for his rule on earth.⁵⁰

There was wide recognition among Anglicans by the latter half of the twentieth century that serious abuse of state power should be resisted, and this is still the mainstream position. While there are some churches which still embrace versions of 'state theology' in which Christians might be excused for beating, forcibly sterilising, evicting, unjustly imprisoning or massacring their neighbours on the grounds that they were 'only following orders', Anglican lay and clerical leaders have not on the whole argued publicly that this is the correct theological position. However the attitude of submissiveness to authority, even when this would seem to contradict love of neighbour, sometimes lingered on in Anglican and other Christian circles. For instance, it has been suggested that this was one of the reasons why so many Christians took part in genocide in Rwanda.⁵¹

Authority and obedience

Global South Anglican's 2006 Kigali Communiqué mentions the Rwanda killings, stating 'We were chastened by this experience and commit ourselves not to abandon the poor or the persecuted wherever they may be and in whatever circumstances. We add our voices to theirs and we say, "Never Again!"' Yet the outline Catechism reads as if the anguished reflection and self-examination among churches in the twentieth century in the light of Christian involvement in atrocities had never happened. The contrast to mainstream Anglican social theology of the mid-twentieth century is stark.

In Part A, on the contents of the catechesis, though issues such as 'Encouragement to Christians who experience persecution from an unbelieving world' and 'human suffering and exploitation' are mentioned, the section on how Christians should relate to the state reads:

Political order. Treatment on divine authorization of secular government. This would provide the basis in which Christians (both as individuals and as a community) are able to discern their proper tasks and calling in their particular contexts.

Government under and through law is God's will for the earthly protection of all people. Those who exercise political authority can rightly claim obedience and assistance from their citizens in upholding law, whatever the constitutional forms that support them (Romans 13:1-7). Democracy is one type of political constitution that aims to serve God's will in this respect.

Government entails heavy responsibilities to God for justice and protection of the needy (Psalm 72:4). It is a significant aspect of every Christian's public service to form a critical and well-instructed view of how the true good of the community is to be promoted. Public expression of thought is often stifled by prejudice and partisan division. Christians may sometimes need courage in defending public discussion on the moral and spiritual basis of societies against attempts to suppress or manipulate it.

Though love of God and neighbour is emphasised in the outline Catechism, this is primarily portrayed as obedience to God's commands.

This is not to suggest that the authors, or other prominent figures in Global South Anglican and associated reform movements, would wish Christians to obey orders involving enforced

racial segregation, ethnic cleansing or mass murder. However, the highly selective version presented of biblical teaching on the state, emphasis on obedience to the text and refusal even to acknowledge the arguments put forward by numerous theologians against ‘state theology’ could potentially encourage faithful Anglicans (however reluctantly) to participate in crimes against humanity.

Conservatism, tradition and unity

These are just a couple of examples of how the theology promoted by Global South Anglican is not straightforwardly ‘Bible-based’, or ‘conservative’ in the sense of conserving the past. The Anglicanism of these reformers is radically different in some ways from that practised by many congregations half a century ago. Despite the intention to be faithful to the text, this theological approach involves selection and interpretation of Scripture, and chooses from and/or rewrites the past to fit present priorities. Indeed the denial that human choice is involved, and the claim that divine authority – as discerned and verified by the church through the ages – underpins this particular viewpoint, makes it harder to probe whether there are more fruitful approaches based on the Bible and tradition.

The approach of the Windsor Report is also problematic. This places particular value on institutional unity and proposes that it can be achieved by dividing issues into two categories. On inessential matters, *adiophora*, disagreement may be permitted, but on core beliefs, there must be uniformity of teaching and practice across all provinces. This begs the question of what happens when there is profound disagreement on matters which sizeable numbers of Anglicans regard as fundamental.

For many liberal and broad Anglicans, moderate or ‘open’ evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, it is acceptable to remain in fellowship with people whose views are profoundly different, even objectionable. From their perspective it is, after all, Christ’s table to which worshippers are invited, not theirs, and Christians can usually move together towards the truth by study, debate and prayer without creating separate institutional structures. Yet to ‘conservative’ reformers such as the leaders of Global South Anglican, essentials include agreeing to their own view of the Bible and the conclusions they have reached on certain matters on the basis of this approach. Anything less than submission on this is unacceptable.

There are differences in tactics among those seeking to centralise and ‘purify’ the Anglican Communion. Some believe that the concessions which have been made to their demands are too little, too late, and there is not enough common ground to remain in fellowship with those they regard as being in error. Others are willing to give their fellow-Anglicans a second chance to return to what they regard as the historic teaching of the church. From their viewpoint, the proposed Covenant and Catechism are part of their gift to the Communion, a way to bring those who have strayed back on to the correct path and strengthen mission.

Yet, to many of their fellow-Anglicans (including some in the provinces dominated by the reformers), to proclaim and live out views such as those on the Bible and obedience to the state which are contained in the Catechism would seem to be faithless to the gospel they have received, as understood by successive generations of Anglicans. This is not simply a matter of putting human reason above divine command, as it is sometimes portrayed, but about a profoundly different understanding of Scripture as well as tradition and reason.

The depth of feeling among numerous ordinary Anglicans, some far from trendy, should not be underestimated. To many who have given their hearts to Jesus, whether recently or many years ago, and who believe that ‘anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’⁵² and ‘The Father and I are one’,⁵³ it is impossible to accept claims by torturers or mass-murderers that they were obeying God. A number of these will have lived through, or listened to survivors of, atrocities committed in God’s name, or by people so conditioned to obedience that they forgot compassion. And to some Anglicans, to submit to what they regard as legalism would be a denial that ‘For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery’, and that in Christ Jesus ‘the only thing that counts is faith working through love.’⁵⁴

Indeed, unity or at least mutual understanding may be more likely to be achieved by acknowledging, rather than glossing over, the depths of differences. Those on different sides of various debates could be encouraged to explain more fully why they have reached the conclusions they have, including how they have built on, or moved away from, the foundations laid by earlier generations of Anglicans. It might also be helpful if individuals, congregations and organisations were to reflect more often on why they were drawn to particular views and practices: it is easy to assume that ‘our way’ is ‘the way’. In addition, it might be easier to grasp why others have a different approach if they were to share something of their journey of faith, which might also make it easier to identify what might be held in common.

And it might be useful if people and groups seeking to explain their opinions on the basis of concepts such as ‘progress’ or the ‘historic faith’ would explain exactly what they mean, since such terms might have different meanings to different Anglicans.

It seems unlikely that, in the near future, a Catechism based on the Global South Anglican outline will be adopted throughout the Anglican Communion as a basis for teaching and discipline. But the authors will have done the Communion a service if it helps to reveal the depths of the theological differences which exist among Anglicans.

Attempts to paper over the cracks and present a harmonious façade are not enough. It is perhaps time – where possible in the context of mutual respect and compassion – for deeper discussion on some of the fundamentals of faith.

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