

Communion in Crisis: the Way Forward for Evangelicals

2. Evangelicals: Have we a plan?

Archbishop Peter Jensen's second address to
the Latimer Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, May 2006.

A new Reformation?

The present crisis in the communion is only the presenting issue of a set of deeper and more significant problems revolving around authority and mission.

In effect the church in the west is being strained by significantly different theologies: the question is, will it be strained to breaking point? Will there be a new Reformation?

Furthermore, although we can all see that this is an international problem, it plays itself out at the national and local arenas even more sharply. In due course, many of us are going to have to face quite painful questions arising from our fellowship with those with whom we differ profoundly.

Let me say that I am rather ill-informed about the situation in New Zealand on these matters. I am not suggesting that you need to accept or follow my thoughts in your situation. But you know, as I do, that in other parts of the world tumultuous events are occurring and it is wise for us to think about them, to have some understanding of what is going on and to have a plan of action.

A plan of action

Let me illustrate. Whenever I try to crystallise the issues, my mind turns to Vancouver and the situation in the Diocese of Westminster. Several years ago, the diocesan synod approved the blessing of same-sex unions. As a result, several parishes left the synod and have virtually declared themselves to be out of communion with the Bishop and the Diocese. I understand that they have also refused to pay their Diocesan contribution. This makes biblical sense since one of the ways we fellowship with our fellow Christians is through money. The largest of these parishes is St John's Shaughnessy. It is a famous evangelical parish. While being out of communion with their Diocese, however, they claimed to be still in communion with the Anglican Church world-wide, a claim supported by visits and assurances they have received from Primates and others.

These events are paradigmatic, and in a sense more important than the more talked-about events in the US. Put yourselves in the shoes of those from that parish. Like many evangelicals, their church was one of the best attended in the Diocese and paid more than its dues in supporting the Diocese financially; like most evangelicals they were not in a majority in the Diocese, but were accustomed and indeed content to remain in fellowship with a Diocese dominated by theological views and liturgical practices very different from their own; like many, part of what made them content was the well-founded view that evangelicals and their forerunners have had a long and satisfactory existence in the Church of England and its off-shoots, and that at the very least the Prayer Book and the Articles of Religion can be read as supporting their theological position. Who has a better claim to be 'Anglican' than evangelicals?

Now, however, they have attempted to disconnect from the Diocese, at least until there is a change of mind from the synod and Bishop. It is a risky strategy, one that exposes their future to grave uncertainties. Will they be able to retain their building? Will they be able to retain their evangelical succession? Where do they look to for oversight? Are they still Anglican? Why has this subject been one which they have taken a stand on? Furthermore, has the strategy they have adopted, of appeal to international Anglicanism for recognition and support, any validity?

In asking these questions, I am hoping to go deeper on a number of subjects we need to think about as we consider the way forward in our own church and in the Anglican Communion. Let me make the following points:

There is a limit to diversity in Christian fellowship

It is often said that one of the glories of Anglicanism is its comprehensiveness and, inclusiveness and tolerance. There is some truth, in this although I fear that much of it is also romantic wishful thinking, or the dream-world of a majority which fails to see how they are treating the minority. Certainly, however, in the twentieth century in a number of places we learned to get on with each and to recognise the valid existence

of other points of view within the church. It helped to have a poor historical memory. We learned to live with a fair degree of pluriformity.

But comprehensiveness has never included every available option. The idea that a church has truth-commitments which it will ignore in the interests of inclusion is likewise a dream. To state the obvious such a 'structure' could not survive. I state the obvious, but I sometimes wonder how obvious this is. On the other hand, I think that I could gain support on this, for example: if a vicar declared that he would not baptise infants any longer, most people would think that he could no longer remain an Anglican. He would be asked to find another denomination to belong to. If a vicar said that he was in favour of polygamy and practised it, he could no longer stay an Anglican. I don't think that our inclusiveness extends to anabaptists or polygamists in ministry.

There is, however, something a little strange about this. If I were to preach on Sunday that the bodily resurrection of Jesus was 'a conjuring trick with bones,' and unbelievable, it would cause a ripple, but I would not be drummed out of the Anglican church. But if I refuse on principle to baptise infants, I would not be able to stay, although there is a perfectly respectable and non-heretical Christian denomination which takes the same position. Why?

I judge that the difference lies in this: the bodily resurrection can be seen as a matter of opinion. The baptism of an infant is something decisive. You either do it, or refrain. Furthermore, it is to do with little human beings who will be deprived of this sacrament. It looks like an injustice.

Now in one way this helps explain the amount of difficulty we encountered about the ordination of women. People who call it a 'second order issue,' or a 'non-gospel issue' are right at one level. But the strength of feeling was in part due to the fact that we are dealing with a necessarily decisive situation – you either do, or you do not ordain women – and secondly because it was a justice issue involving real, live people, who can be hurt or not hurt as the case may be.

Once more, in thinking about issues to do with homosexuality we have a similar set of circumstances. We have situations in which we either do or do not take an action, in, for example, the blessing of same-sex unions, or the consecration of a gay bishop. And we seem to have a justice issue to do with real persons. Justice issues certainly arouse strong emotions.

It is at this point that it is worth distinguishing comprehensiveness from unity. That we are a comprehensive denomination is, on the whole, a good thing, even though members of the same network believe opposite and irreconcilable things at times. But Christian unity is based on shared truth, and there are distinct limits to the unity we can share when matters of truth are at stake. We need to bear witness to the fact that truth really matters, while also being willing to compromise at various points in order to sustain unity. Part of that compromise is a concession that some truths are more vital, more central, than others.

Take our differences over women's ordination. Despite appearances, a large amount of the Anglican world, and of course the vast majority in the Christian world, does not ordain women to the priesthood. For the reasons I have given above, this issue has been a specially painful one in the Anglican church. On the one side there has been a conviction that this is a matter of sheer justice, with no theological or scriptural barrier standing in the way. Others, however, are convinced that the very character of Anglican orders and so sacraments is at stake here. Others still regard this development as an act of disobedience to scripture. So the stakes are quite high on all sides. Quite a number have left the church because of it. But the church has not split.

The denomination has not split, but the nature of its fellowship has been altered necessarily. Whereas there was in a previous day in principle interchangeably of clergy through immediate recognition of orders, it is sad but true that there are now no-go areas for some clergy based on the gender of the person involved. My way of describing this is to say that our communion has been loosened, or that the Anglican communion has taken a step towards becoming a federation of churches. This is all the more clear when arrangements are made, as they have been in the UK, for 'flying bishops' to exercise a degree of non-geographical supervision.

As you know, I am opposed to the ordination of women, on scriptural grounds. I realise that many will disagree with me and argue the case differently. The ordination of women posed a special problem for someone like me. Up to that point, although I knew that there were all sorts of practises within the Church with which I did not agree, none of them had become the official policy of the church. This is no longer the case. Here is something official which I believe to be non-scriptural. How then could I stay an Australian Anglican? I can remain an Anglican, for three reasons: first, because of the strongly diocesan base of our church, my conscience has not been compromised by being forced to take part in activities which I think are unscriptural; second because the ordination women can be seen as a

matter of order rather than salvation; and third because I have been able to continue to make my dissent clear and so to distinguish myself from others in the same denomination.

On the last point, I realise that at one level I am linked to those who think and act differently, and I regret our lack of unity at this point. But I do not think our fellowship is a scandal. This is all somewhat easier in that we do not have women bishops in Australia. The bishop's role affects everyone in a Diocese as well as those who have to relate to the Diocese, and creates a difficulty for those who reject the ordination of women, if they live under her jurisdiction.

But when is the limit of comprehensiveness reached? I think that you can see that I would be troubled by a development which –

- (a) Forced me to do what I believe to be unscriptural,
- (b) involved a matter of salvation,
- (c) so involved me in the actions of others so that it appears that I agree with the development because I do not protest or withdraw.

And that now brings us back to the parish of St John's Shaughnessy.

Human sexuality is such a limit

Given the variety of theology and practice within Anglicanism, it is legitimate to ask why this issue was chosen as one over which to break fellowship.

One answer is to say that evangelicals (and other Christians too) are obsessed with sex and have elevated sexual sin above all others.

This response hardly merits attention. We already live in a sex-obsessed world; but in any case, it is also true that our sexual lives are highly significant to us and to God as witnessed by the attention paid to it in his word (1 Cor. 6). But the objection fails because, after all, the blessing of same-sex unions is a complete innovation and if you wanted a useless tit-for-tat, you could say that those who have brought it forward are the ones obsessed. All in all, it is an *ad hominem* argument with little to commend it from either side. It is better to listen to the arguments advanced by people themselves, rather than to attribute motives.

I think that the real reasons have to do with the teaching of scripture. As I have already noted, the Bible is not prudish. It often refers to sexual matters and it gives us a picture of God's ideal for the way in which our sexual

natures are expressed. That ideal does not include, indeed, it specifically excludes, same-sex activity. Furthermore, the biblical teaching makes this a matter of spiritual life and death. So much is clear from the Old Testament, but so too is it crystal clear from the New Testament: 'Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of heaven' (1 Cor 6:10, NRSV).

Of course the Apostle is not talking here of those who have same-sex feelings; he is not talking of those who have had same-sex experience; he is not even talking exclusively of same-sex activities – robbers and adulterers and the greedy are also warned. But he is talking about same-sex practice consistently entered into, as we would say as a life-style. And in this passage he says, 'and such were some of you'. That is to say, he regards this life-style as inherently unchristian; he says that the gospel of Jesus liberates you from it. There are those, of course who argue that Paul was not aware of the possibility of a same-sex orientation and so could not be condemning a faithful same-sex union. But the idea that there were those with such an orientation was known although described differently in the ancient world, and in any case the Bible condemns behaviour of this nature.

Here indeed is a salvation matter. This life-style is spiritually very perilous. Encouraging it or allowing it is endangering the lives of those involved and is inconsistent with the duties of being a minister of God's word. It is a matter of a different nature to such issues as infant baptism or the ordination of women. It is no wonder that it created for St John's (and the other parishes involved) an immense crisis of conscience. To remain silent and inactive would have been to say that they were complicit in an activity of such significance that the eternal salvation of souls was at stake in a direct way. The whole culture is heading the wrong way – of which this is a symptom. It is anti-human and de-humanising.

I think that advocates of same-sex blessings and ordinations have been surprised at the response in the churches. It may be that, having seen that women's ordination has come relatively painlessly, although it is apparently a justice matter, they thought that this development would be accepted widely also. It is also the case that the higher leadership of many of the churches has been more liberal in theology than the people in the pews. Likewise the cultural flow is with them – the roar of approval of sex outside marriage has been deafening. The theological appeal to tolerance, to rights, justice, individual liberty have all had the approval of the cultural elites in the western world.

Any opposition to theological liberalism has is easily labelled with the dreaded words 'homophobic' and 'fundamentalist.' Of course we should regard such abuse as irrelevant.

As we now know – and the matter of Dr Jeffrey John in Oxford illustrates the point – this is not the whole story. Many people, have been passive, it is true. They do not go to church in order to engage in conflict. But from within the western churches there has been an outcry and, of course, from the churches of the Global South there has come a storm of criticism and concern. The fact is that human sexuality is immensely important to our sense of self and further that it touches on the authority of scripture in a profound way. For the moment, we merely need to observe that there is very considerable group of people who say that this is the point where we must take a stand. If we are not prepared to stand here, we will stand nowhere. Defending such doctrines as the uniqueness of Christ will prove impossible: the culture will see to that, and the church has developed a habit of succumbing.

It is important to note that this would be the virtually unanimous verdict of Christians in space and time. It is odd that modern western culture so easily trumps theology in a church which has always prided itself on its respect for tradition. When we ask ourselves about the tradition of Christian teaching concerning homosexual activity or fornication the answer is plain and firm. There is no sustained and authoritative teaching which countenances it at all. Likewise, in a church which spent most of the twentieth century actively pursuing ecumenical partnerships and in which many regard the visible unity of all Christians as a supremely desirable goal, it is odd that these ambitions can be so easily put aside when it comes to same-sex unions. For it is likewise clear that neither the orthodox nor the Roman Catholics – nor indeed the vast majority of the world's Anglicans are in favour of these developments.

I realise that it is part of the propaganda war entered into over these issues to label those who take my point of view as obsessed, fanatical, homophobic, negative, fundamentalist and puritan. Let me quote someone who cannot by any stretch of the imagination be thought of in these terms, Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg:

'Here lies the boundary of a Christian Church which knows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm. and recognised homosexual unions as partnerships of love equivalent

to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.'¹

I don't think that many of us are naturally combative. All sorts of things may go on in the churches of which we are members without us investigating or complaining. Indeed, rumours of openly irregular behaviour in ECUSA churches were about in the 1980s and 90s without action being proposed. But it is one thing for those responsible to take no action when the law is broken. It is another thing when a Diocese officially adopts a policy which is contrary to Scripture and touches a matter of salvation, or when a Bishop is appointed who, in his own person, exemplifies this problem. When such things occur at an official level, and I am part of the institution, then I am involved whether I like it or not. Of course, such developments have been some time coming and the fact is that protests should have been made long before, to serve at least as a warning that they would constitute a schismatic offence. The present situation has arisen out of thirty years of neglect of discipline and unwillingness to speak out.

That is why St John's was forced to take the action which it did. Dioceses and Bishops around the Anglican world have to realise that an official endorsement of sex outside of marriage will lead to disturbances and problems. It is a bridge too far. Evangelicals – and many others – will not be able to acquiesce, as a matter of conscience, and they will see this as being far more significant than the ordination of women. Their consciences and responses are likely to be very awkward for those who are pressing for this innovation. There will be permanent disruption in the affairs of the church. It will become ungovernable. What sort of strategic options are being followed around the world?

Strategic options

Think again of St John's. It has to signal disapproval of and disengagement from the diocesan policy. How does it do so? What are the potential strategies for a church in this situation, bearing in mind that it will want to serve the gospel and protect the people. I am not talking now how St John's did manage its situation, but about the options open to a church like it.

Engagement

We ought to observe in the first place that situations like this do not arise overnight. They are usually preceded by much discussion and also actions at a local level. Both of these can be ignored, the first because it is only

talk and the second because it is only local. But this is a poor strategy.

It is poor, fundamentally, because it is unloving. When an innovation is being proposed, whether good or bad, it will often be talked about and be trialled locally. To ignore it at that stage makes it difficult later when you may wish to disagree. Classically, evangelicals have been removed from church politics. They tend to flourish best at local level and to be very full engaged in pastoral ministry. But if we wish to be heard, if we wish our view to be respected, we must make it known and engage in the discussion. We need to be more active in theological and pastoral writing and more active at the level of synods and conferences. In my view this is what we are trying to do in Australia, and I think that there is a fairly high level of understanding of the nature of our fellowship and the issues which my severely test it. Of course I could be proved wrong, and certainly we could do a great deal more and do it in a better spirit.

One important consequence of an engaged strategy is that the local people are kept fully informed and well in advance of emerging difficulties. It is all very well for clergy to be ready to take a stand at some crisis point, but if their people have not been alerted and well trained, the church itself may well prove reluctant to take steps to protest. One of the great weaknesses which evangelicals must address as soon as possible on all fronts is the lack of theological education of the laity in our churches. Good biblical preaching is indispensable; but even it can never be the sole means of training the church. Frankly, we are doctrinally very weak, and the culture does its best to make sure that we remain like that. Conversion is not enough – understanding must follow.

The day comes, however, when a decision of this magnitude is taken. What then?

Withdrawal

One option is simply to leave the Anglican church. Indeed that is what some congregations have done in the US, in Canada and elsewhere in similar situations. This route leads either to independence, or to an existing denomination, or to a coalition of similarly minded churches. Similarly, individuals may take the same route with the same result. I understand that there has been something of a flow of congregations and individuals out of ECUSA. This is, of course, a tragedy for all involved, and the future is by no means assured.

Thus, the coalition idea sounds good, but has often proved to be unstable; once a church feels that division is possible, there is a tendency to divide further. As well,

it leaves the existing denomination weaker through the loss of some of its best people – and yet, paradoxically untroubled. After all, the assets usually remain, and it means that the awful day when the mainstream churches have used up all the assets left to them by faithful people over the years will have been delayed for some time. Nonetheless, sometimes, however painful it may be, withdrawal is the only option. I could imagine some developments in our denomination which would mean that I would have to leave it for conscience sake. It may well be a good time for you to consider what the line would be for you.

Internal Withdrawal

This would imply an internal non-alignment with the Diocese or denomination. There have been cases in history where a parish has simply become a no-go area for the Diocese! It may, for example, not pay its assessments and not attend the Synod. It is helped when a parish owns its own property and has some significant say in the succession of ministry. The danger is that the protest achieves little and the parish becomes inward looking. Often the original cause of dispute becomes lost in history.

Sometimes it is possible for a scheme of alternative episcopal oversight to be worked out, but again this seems like a temporary solution, and a great deal depends on the powers of the alternative bishop. In theory this could work satisfactorily, as it is becoming clearer to all that geographical boundaries are not the only way in which episcopacy can work – there is the possibility of an ethnic episcopate for example and there are also cases in history of ‘peculiarities’ – institutions or churches which exist in one Diocese but are under the oversight of a bishop from elsewhere. There is no reason in principle why two Anglican churches could not occupy the same space: we almost have that situation in South Africa and Europe.

Networking

Withdrawal is a difficult and painful option, necessary as it may be in some circumstances. I myself would always hope to avoid it, whether we are dealing with a local church, a Diocese, a national church or the Communion itself. In one sense this is because of a certain stubbornness in me. After all, with an innovation as profoundly unscriptural as the blessing of same sex unions, I am not sure why I should leave the church and suffer all the disadvantages, when I have retained the original position! A better part of me is also wanting to remain in the highest level of communion with all Christians and especially my fellow Anglicans. This is a good ambition.

Nonetheless, if I still wish to be called 'Anglican' with some degree of authenticity, something must be done to make sure that scripture is honoured, conscience satisfied and it cannot be said that I am passively acquiescing in something that I regard as spiritually devastating behaviour at an official level of the church. I believe that, faced with such a challenge, we need to reform and renew our networks. These will help us to see who we are in fellowship with – and who not. The Anglican church world-wide has already entered into a period of fractured relationships across networks, although it is not true of the church in Australia, I am glad to say.

Thus I have made it clear that I am not in fellowship with Bishop Gene Robinson; I have also made it clear that I remain in fellowship with the parish of St John's Shaugnessy, even though it may not be in fellowship with its own Diocese.

On the other hand it may be that some with whom I am in communion, are also in communion with Bishop Robinson. Naturally none of these commitments involve the Anglican Church of Australia or even the Province of New South Wales. They are personal to Sydney.

What I am saying is this. Whether formally or informally, it must be clear that evangelicals are caring for one another, recognising each other, standing up for each other across all ecclesiastical boundaries. Let us create new structures of fellowship where necessary. We have been too slack, too individualistic, too touchy about the issues that divide, too parish-focussed. Evangelical people everywhere need to unite around the issues which are at the heart of what we believe and make us what we are. At the same time, if and when necessary, and with a heavy heart, they must clearly and corporately dissociate from developments which are unscriptural and spiritually dangerous.

An evangelical network can do the following —

First, speak for a large number, so that protests cannot be dismissed as isolated and unimportant.

Second, agree to defend and support any individual or church being disadvantaged because of a principled stand on an issue of the magnitude of homosexuality.

Third, enter coalitions with other like-minded groups without creating compromise on other subjects.

Fourth, speak for and with similar networks elsewhere in the communion.

Fifth, agree on a strategy by which it will be clear that the network is dissenting from an official but blatantly unscriptural policy.

Sixth, adopt policies for joint action where necessary.

Over-arching all, however, must be a commitment to the gospel, and hence to Mission world-wide and in the secular West.

An example of the last in some parts of the world would be for a network to agree not to baptise persons living in a same-sex relationship and to support those who operate on that principle. I don't know whether that would be needed here in New Zealand.

In a case as serious as that of St John's, other North American Anglicans and indeed leaders from the Global South have made it very clear indeed that they regard St John's as having done the right thing, and as being thoroughly Anglican. Indeed, they are prepared to provide episcopal ministry for the Church should it be necessary. Churches and individuals in New Zealand can do the same thing. We belong together – we have a world-wide fellowship of evangelical Christians inside and outside the Anglican church.

Because of our silence, and our lack of support for those who make a stand, those in favour of the innovations are sometimes able to treat this matter as though it is the sophisticated and wise West against the ill-educated homophobes of the Global South. We need to say that this is not true: in the first place it is demeaning, patronising and racist to dismiss the Global South in these terms, and second, that there are many in the west who reject these developments simply because they believe that the Bible is the word of God, and they know that it teaches against them.

Of course a church may lose its property. Of course a new church may be planted in the building by the Diocese, and the protesting church may be completely lost to the Diocese. But a networked church will remain recognised by Anglicans elsewhere as being authentic. Indeed you are probably aware that movements along these lines have begun in North America, with much support from the Global South. The aim of the network will be to ensure that everyone knows that there is a protest about policy, that there is a lessening of fellowship, that there is a willingness to support each other, that there is a hope for a new future, and that the fundamental unity of the church still matters.

But is this the end of our unity? Is this schism? I think not. A Diocese a national church, the communion itself is a network in which the reality and quality of

fellowship differ for all sorts of reasons, geographic, political, cultural, ecclesiastical, theological. As far as the Communion itself is concerned, if a new leader were to arise, supplanting the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, calling his own conference, setting up his own structures and also forbidding those in communion with him to attend Lambeth or take part in any of the structures of the existing communion, I suppose you could say that a split had occurred. In my view we are very far from this, as indeed we should be. Internal networks will relate differently and there will be – there now is – an evolution parallel to that of Empire to Commonwealth. But it would be very hard to split the Communion.

I seriously believe that we have before us a struggle for the soul of the Anglican church. It is not about homosexuality, though that is the presenting issue: it is about the clarity and authority of scripture and about the preaching of the gospel in a post-modern world. We cannot afford to stand aside and think that because the struggle is elsewhere it does not concern me. The Anglicans of New Zealand and not least the evangelicals can make their contribution by making their position perfectly clear, paying the price for holding it if necessary and offering all encouragement and support to those who stand with you. In particular there is a need to offer support and help to the Global South, who are our partners in the gospel.

Frankly, much of the issue is to do with leadership. For various reasons the leadership of Anglican evangelicals exercised by a John Stott has not passed to the next generation in an obvious way. Perhaps such a thing was not possible. But, let me say that the day is a new day. Leadership within the evangelical movement is not ever easy; we do not like papal figures with good reason. But for anyone to offer leadership today is triply difficult. The movement has been seriously divided for a generation over other issues. We have not produced well-thought our theologians who can also be statesmen and prophets. Furthermore, the level of vilification of leaders within the community, within the church and within the movement is horrendous. Few will want to be involved at any more than parish level. Unfortunately, without leadership which has widespread support and recognition it will be extremely difficult for evangelicalism to retain a significant place in any modern denomination which is not evangelical itself. Pray for courageous, biblical, recognisable leadership. When it comes, honour it and don't undermine it.

Let me now turn to one last major issue: theological education. Last October Bishop Derek Eaton and I had the immense privilege of attending the Third Global South Conference in Egypt. I think that it is true to

say that the phrase 'Global South' is not so much a geographic one as a theological one. In any case, it is a bringing together of Anglican Christian leaders from Africa, Asia, South and Central America and elsewhere. As we now realise, these churches represent the numerical bulk of world Anglicanism. They are where the action is.

It was an impressive gathering. The delegates gave themselves to the study of the Church, one, holy catholic and apostolic. Their papers were biblical: they endeavoured to relate the truth of the Bible to our present situation. There was no doubting the deeply conservative nature of almost all present when it came to theology. They admire western Christians from whom they have learned so much and from whom they have received so much support. But they have realised the significance of the shift to the South in world Christianity, and they are prepared to speak up with utmost clarity about the follies of the west, especially as those follies deny the gospel which they received from the west and bring trouble to their churches in their own cultures. It shames me that these leaders have been vilified in western church media; it shames me that we have given them a gospel which we are now wishing to deny; it shames me that we thought that we have a deeper spirituality and the right to tell them what to do and to believe.

Let me not be romantic. The Global South brethren have their troubles, their sins, their disagreements. They are in the first flush of enthusiasm about the number of people in some of their churches, and the recognition that they have been far more evangelistically successful than Christians in the west. But as their leadership itself points out, the sheer movement of people has its own difficulties and much of the Christianity is also shallow.

The needs of the Global South churches as they battle with the problems of poverty and sicknesses such as HIV/AIDS are immense. But of all those needs, there is none so great as the need for sound theological education. It is clear that the present leadership of most of the churches is theologically biblical. It is clear that they prize genuine Christian experience and fidelity to scripture. But the church wherever it is, is always one generation removed from disaster. Such is the pressure of globalisation, so extraordinary are modern methods of communication, that the sound and faithful churches of today may become the latest victim of liberalising cultural change tomorrow.

This has been recognised by liberal Christians in the west. They understand very well indeed the crucial role played by theological education in the health of

the church. They can see that the rejection of western ideas of sexuality has come from an understanding of the Bible which they would regard as pre-modern, not to mention pre-contemporary. I believe that they are determined to make sure that the next generation of ordinands in the Global South Churches are taught what they would regard as better ways of interpreting and applying scripture.

The irony of this is that the theological education of the west has, speaking very generally, enfeebled the churches, taken away the Bible and been the major source of the cultural captivity of the church. The very thing we do not want to export to the South is the theological education practiced in many standard western seminaries. Indeed, what we desperately need is the reform of theological education in our own seminaries. We need them to have as their goal the production of spiritually-minded, Bible-based, doctrinally sound, pastorally competent men and women. We need expository preaching and we need to ask ourselves what do we need to do to produce such preachers.

To sum up: the crisis in the communion is about the relation between culture and revelation, liberalism and the Bible. It may show itself in the area of human sexuality, but it really goes back to the authority of scripture and our willingness to be subservient to its teaching despite the unpopularity which this may bring in the world and in the church. In order to be obedient under pressure we are going to have to attend more than we have done up until now to the issue of depth in theological education in parishes and in the denomination. Especially we are going to have to care for each other, to encourage and strengthen each other and to support each other in unpopular stands, if these need to be taken. And remember, 'Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires. They will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears will want them to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.' (2 Tim 4:2-5).

Footnotes

¹ *Christianity Today*, November 11, 1996

Dr. Peter Jensen is the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney.