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# Anglican Identity and Mission

*A paper (with some modifications) delivered by Robert Forsyth, Bishop of South Sydney, to the Anglican Identity and Mission Conference, Adelaide, Saturday 8 August 2009*

I am very thankful for the invitation to speak at this conference and also for the interesting and helpful papers by Professor Martyn Percy, Principal of Ripon College, Cuddesdon, UK, and the Dean of St Peter's Cathedral, Dr Sara Macneil.

## Introduction to the question of Anglican identity and mission

### **(1) There are real reasons why agonising over Anglican identity is one of the markers, possibly the only marker, of Anglican identity (if not mission).**

Nobody invented Anglicanism. It is the result of over 1500 years of ups and downs, challenges, opportunities and disasters.

Even before there really were English, we have British Christianity, Celtic Christianity, then the coming of the English, the imposition of Roman authority, the changes of the churches under the Normans, and then profound change with the Reformation (or should that be Reformations?), the Civil War, the Restoration, and then, in the more recent centuries, the relentless breakdown of Anglican hegemony, and the arising of Anglican churches without the royal supremacy, without the English nation, often in situations of minority and competing relationships.

### **You ask the questions of identity most often under threat or question.**

There are at least four periods in the history of Anglicanism.

First, the Reformation and the massive shift in the English church from the authority of Rome, who in response attacked it as heretical. This provoked John Jewell in his *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* of 1562 to explain the English Church was simply the church that in faithfulness to the Scriptures and the fathers has "put ourselves apart, not as heretics are wont from the Church of Christ, but, as all good men ought to do, from the infection of naughty persons and of hypocrites":<sup>1</sup> nothing distinctive so much as the church of Jesus Christ cleaned up.

Second, the contest within the reformed Church of England over the extent and nature of reform that followed led a Richard Hooker to defend the Elizabethan settlement in his *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

Third, these were only arguments about the nature of the national Church of England. But the effective end of the monopoly of that Church in England and the establishing of it in other countries and places where it became just one church among others changed the terms of the debate. No longer the "continuing pre-Reformation church in a reformed state" it now becomes an "ism", an ecclesiastical option among many, "distinguished by its cultural style and its episcopal ministry, with the risk of simply attracting those who go for its specific culture".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Library of Christian Classics* Volume XXVI English Reformers ed T.H.L. Parker SCM Press 1967 p. 33

<sup>2</sup> Colin Buchanan *Is the Church of England Biblical?* DLT 1998 p.345

Fourth, now in recent times the debate in white-hot form is not over “Anglicanism vs. other isms” but what are the limits of being Anglican itself, although in a way it may be a debate about “Anglicanism vs. other new isms” as well. Radical proposals as to the nature of the Christian life of discipleship reflect profound new questions confronting the churches in late modernity in the West, all in the context of neocolonial and post-colonial growth and confidence in other parts of the Anglican world. The present issue presents such irreconcilable views as the following two statements:

The current debate in the Anglican Communion over sexuality is a contemporary example of the Holy Spirit leading us towards a fuller grasp of God’s truth.

It seems undeniable that he[the Apostle] would have viewed blessing same-sex unions as sanctifying sin, and thus as a denial of an essential ingredient in the gospel, namely repentance of all one’s sins and forsaking of them.

The first of these was Bishop Gene Robinson<sup>3</sup> and the second Dr James Packer<sup>4</sup>

We have a crisis in which some Anglicans have removed themselves from the Anglican Churches of their provinces or dioceses, claiming that in doing so they, not the province or diocese, embody Anglican identity. Or at least are still really Anglican despite the breach with their bishop or national church. Are they? How would we go about answering that question? That which the Archbishop of Canterbury has recently called “the broken bridges into the life of the other provinces” does not look like being repaired anytime soon, if ever.<sup>5</sup>

**(2) It is a mistake just to see the question simply as a reaction to a crisis.**

There is a question of Anglican identity that is less urgent but possibly more significant than international crises. There are long-term issues as well that we must keep in mind: of forgetfulness, of change of connection and even of the value of survival.

- Of forgetfulness of who we are: it can creep like rising damp or a shifting wall. Slow and relentless but fatal. And we find that we have become something else, maybe not even a real church.
- Of change: the long-term questions about where is this church going? Drifting away from Anglicanism as such? A good thing? Or a bad thing?

For example, I was disturbed when the archdeacon of another region than mine said the kind of church service my clergy son was running at his church plant in a local school was “not very Anglican”. But then in our 1500-year history or so didn’t every change once look “not very Anglican” in its day? How do you tell? Certainly it is not open to us to freeze our moment as “this is and will only be Anglican” but what is faithful change? I don’t think we can go as far one rector in my region who, bemoaning a change in Eucharistic practice, recently wrote in his parish magazine, “Like all innovations within the church this one is inconsistent and fundamentally flawed”.

- Of connection: in his book *Anglicans in Australia* Tom Frame gives a serious warning about the cost of lack of some real answers to our question for our association as a body, be it diocesan, national or international.

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<sup>3</sup> Gene Robinson. *In the Eye of the Storm: Swept to the Center by God*. Canterbury Press 2008 p.61

<sup>4</sup> J.I Packer “A Personal Response to the St. Michael Report” Accessed from [http://www.anglicanessentials.ca/st\\_michael\\_response\\_jip.htm](http://www.anglicanessentials.ca/st_michael_response_jip.htm) on 4.08.09

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Williams “Communion, Covenant and our Anglican Future” 27 July 2009

While this assessment may sound glib, Church history suggests that where there is a lack of theological unity among associated congregations, absence of a clearly articulated understanding of the uniqueness of Christianity, and a poor grasp of the distinctive contribution that their particular association makes to Christendom, the bonds of fellowship will unravel and the association will eventually dissolve.<sup>6</sup>

- Of the value of survival: is there a distinctly Anglican way of being Christian that has something important to offer our world, and will it survive?

Against the great church of Jesus Christ the gates of Hades will not prevail. But individual expressions, outcrops, of that one great church can, and have, disappeared.

Will Anglican Christianity go the way of the churches that historian Philip Jenkins has recently described, that vast and forgotten network of the world's largest and most influential Christian churches that existed to the east of the Roman Empire for a thousand years and yet died.<sup>7</sup> And if Anglican Christianity does die, is the world worse off and why?

### **In passing we should remind ourselves of the present world context, "God is back".**

We are having this discussion in the midst of a significant growth in religion in the world's history and certainly at a time when there are more Anglicans alive than ever before. In the words of Micklethwait and Wooldridge, "God is back".<sup>8</sup>

The question is, what kind of religion is in our churches, what kind of Anglicans?

There is strong evidence that it is those churches which vitally engage actively in a world of religious competition, not those who have relied upon the security of being a state or established church, which are thriving. Those which are vibrant, creative and vigorous. Yes, Anglicanism too. Although others may have seen it at last year's Lambeth, I was impressed with what I saw at GAFCON. Not just with the exciting African Christians (though as we know there are more Anglicans in churches in Nigeria on a Sunday than the entire England, American, Canada, New Zealand and Australia), but strangely enough, the Americans. These were members of the Episcopal Church or those who have just left it, painfully, but were full of joy and vigour and excitement about the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Global Anglican Future Conference, whatever you may think of the occasion of its calling, was mission-focussed in a way that left a deep impression.

### **(3) What kind of answer may we find? Some four possibilities come to mind.**

#### **a. Could it be that there really is no such thing as "Anglican identity" at all?**

Maybe Anglicanism isn't at all, but just a common derivation from Church of England ancestors.

(But then why not include other descendants, like the Methodists whom Martyn Percy has suggested might be the first continuing Anglicans.<sup>9</sup>)

But we cannot give in too quickly to such counsels of despair

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Frame *Anglicans in Australia* University of NSW Press 2007 p.265

<sup>7</sup> See Philip Jenkins *The Lost History of Christianity: the thousand year golden age of the Church* Harperone 2008

<sup>8</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge. *God is back : how the global revival of faith is changing the world* New York : Penguin Press, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Martyn Percy *Clergy: The Origin of Species* Continuum 2006

**b. Could it be there is no core concept of Anglican identity as such?**

Maybe the answer is not to be found in a “core concept” of common characteristics or an identity, but as Ludwig Wittgenstein put it, merely a “family resemblance”.

In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) Wittgenstein discusses, for example, what is the core of the concept of a game.

66. Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? -- Don't say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’” --but look and see whether there is anything common to all. -- For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.

67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.-And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family. . . <sup>10</sup>

I wonder if that is where we are heading. A family of resemblances rather than an identity.

**c. Certainly a technical or merely institution answer will not do.**

- It is true, as Rowan Williams has recently written:

As Anglicans, our membership of the Communion is an important part of our identity.

Though he is aware that the nature of the Communion is a disputed matter:

[Some want to] re-conceive the Anglican Communion as essentially a loose federation of local bodies with a cultural history in common, rather than a theologically coherent ‘community of Christian communities’.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly the furor of 2008 about who was and wasn't invited to the Lambeth Conference and who attended and who did not, as well as the whole Global Anglican Future Conference movement attests the significance of the Anglican Communion to Anglican identity.

But the formula “in the Communion therefore Anglican” is not adequate as it begs the questions of identity in the first place; better “what kind of Anglican can be in the Communion”, whatever kind of communion it is or should be. And that is contested.

- However I am sure that whatever comes of the Anglican Communion in the future will have an impact on Anglican identity and self-understanding, even if it is not decisive. I often remember the comments in 2006 with which Andrew Brown of the *Guardian* summed up the whole Covenant issue:

before they can get round to the business of throwing out the Americans, if that's what they're going to do, they're going to have to organise the Anglican communion into the sort of body out of which you can be thrown. Which at the moment it isn't.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed not. In fact I think we are now seeing the creation of a messier and less institutional-centred Anglican Communion forming before our very eyes as some provinces recognise others which others will not. And in which it is coming and now is that Church A recognises Church B, and Church B recognises Church C, but Church A does not recognise Church C!

<sup>10</sup> Aphorism 65-69 from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* with commentary on the right by Lois Shawver Accessed from <http://users.rcn.com/rathbone/lw65-69c.htm> on Thursday, July 23, 2009

<sup>11</sup> Williams “Communion, Covenant and our Anglican Future” 27 July 2009

<sup>12</sup> ABC Radio National “Religion Report” 5 July 2006

In response to the decisions taken at the recent general convention of the Episcopal Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury has outlined a "two-track" future for provinces in the Anglican Communion, with a choice of covenantal or associate status. One track is for those who are willing to intensify their relationships of interdependence in the Communion, through signing the proposed Anglican covenant, and the other is for those who prefer federal autonomy, not signing the covenant. As Bishop Kings of Salisbury has written this week.

The Anglican communion is involved in "intensifying" its current relationships and those who do not wish to continue on that "intensifying" trajectory may remain where they are, which will become track two, while the centre of the Communion moves on with glacial gravity into track one. Not exclusion, but intensification: not force, but choice.<sup>13</sup>

I wonder what long-term effect this will inevitably have on Anglican identity itself.

**d. Or we may find that, for all the difficulty, or because of it, there is a distinctly Anglican way of being Christian that has something important to offer our world.**

This is my belief and hope.

**So, a suggested way forward?**

I hope you don't think me too postmodern when I say that there is no uncontested place, no Archimedean point from which to answer the question put to this conference. Every answer will to some extent be question begging, just as every version of "real Anglicanism" reads the history of our movement to select one period or players as the benchmark to be valorised, be it the Reformers, the Celts, the Caroline Divines, the Victorian Liberal Catholics or whatever. This doesn't mean that we give up, but that we do proceed with a certain humility and caution.

I have a suggestion, a start for a model for Anglican identity and mission. What about the Fundamental Declarations of the Anglican Church of Australia which are the unalterable foundation at the beginning of the 1961 constitution?

Why them? The Anglican Church of Australia took well over half a century of struggle to be formed out of the distinct dioceses of the then Church of England in Australia and Tasmania, which was sort of still part of the Church of England. It was the struggle of how to deal with:

1. the end of the Royal Supremacy in Australia and yet still having legal links to the Church of England which was by law established;
2. no longer being the monopoly church of the nation but a church amongst others, and yet in a real sense still the church of the English or the British, and yet to become a relevant church of a very different changing Australia;
3. since arriving in this country, experiencing a relentless and constant decline in power over society and its institutions, while watching the rise of other churches especially the Roman Catholic and other Protestants as well as the general secularisation of public life;
4. emerging out of a time when the Church of England was undergoing significant challenges and changes, when Anglicanism in England was becoming significantly

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<sup>13</sup> Bishop Graham Kings "Federation isn't enough" guardian.co.uk Accessed from [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/aug/05/anglican-communion-covenant](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/aug/05/anglican-communion-covenant) on 6 August 2009

more diverse and splintered with anglo-catholicism, liberal Catholicism and evangelicalism.

Something of the struggle with diversity of those times is best shown in a line from a poem, probably penned during the difficulties by a Bishop of Newcastle, Francis deWitt Batty.

A few more efforts made  
To please the Sydney group  
And we shall very likely be  
Completely in the soup.  
And on the other hand  
If Queensland sets the pace  
The Reformation might as well  
Have never taken place.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless in 1961 a constitution was enacted which brought about an autonomous Australian church and which had these as the unalterable Fundamental Declarations:

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed.
2. This Church receives all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by the inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.
3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

I offer them for your consideration and will take each in turn.

### **First Fundamental Declaration, the Church of Christ, and the Christian faith**

1. The Anglican Church of Australia, being part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed.

I have three points to make

#### **(1) To be being part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ first.**

- There is a warning from Jesus to all reflecting over identity questions, who are we?

“Whoever would save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it”. Mark 8.35

We find our identity in being his, not just looking at ourselves.

- And our identity and our mission are involved in the Christian faith above all else.

The Anglican Church of Australia, being part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, holds the Christian Faith . . .

We are not different from others but the same. There is a danger that “identity questions” will focus on difference questions, which may be gnats compared with the camel of being faithful to Christ, to be discussed further under the third declaration.

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<sup>14</sup> Cited by John Davis, *Australian Anglicans and their Constitution* Acorn 1993. p.116

- Above all else Anglican identity is being part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ identity. So unless that is secure then all is lost. The question is not just “what is Anglican?” but more profoundly “what is truly Christian?”.

## **(2) A given. Not a made up.**

The Anglican Church of Australia, being part of the . . . Church of Christ holds the Christian Faith as professed by the Church from primitive times

- A historic faith in historic community (as Lesslie Newbigin pointed out years ago):

[God’s purpose for the world] necessarily requires that men’s salvation should be not by an unmediated act of God directed to each individual human soul in isolation, but by the operation of a love that works through the plane of human history, mediated by the concern of man for man into a visible community.<sup>15</sup>

So in a deep sense we have to be told , to be told by others

- A sense of history and being an historical church.

An esteem for the old but freedom to change what can be changed is an Anglican feature as we will see.

This is not a claim to be original, or first, or the best, but part of an historic community with an historic faith: “the Christian Faith as professed by the Church from primitive times”.

## **(3) The unique place of Jesus Christ in our identity and mission**

This is to state what is implicit in what we have seen already, but it is good to highlight it, as we will in a moment at the third fundamental declaration.

- Unique in our identity because we confess him to be unique in God’s purposes and truth.

The creeds

[The Christian faith] in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed.

It is profoundly triune and Christocentric expression of faith.

I have found that the opening of the Windsor Report to be the best bit by far.

God has unveiled, in Jesus Christ, his glorious plan for the rescue of the whole created order from all that defaces, corrupts and destroys it.

And what of the church?

The excitement and drama of that initial achievement and that final purpose pervade the whole New Testament, and set the context for understanding why God has called out a people by the gospel, and how that people is to understand its identity and order its life.

So understanding our identity and life must occur in the context of God’s glorious plan and achievement in Jesus Christ, “the excitement and drama of that initial achievement and that final purpose”.

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<sup>15</sup> J.E. Lesslie Newbigin *The Household of God* London SCM 1953 p.101

- The test in current controversies will be Christ.

When in August 2006 Archbishop Rowan Williams replied to a question from a Dutch journalist that “it was time for the church to accept gay relationships in an inclusive church”<sup>16</sup> he gave a profound answer:

I don't believe inclusion is a value in itself, welcome is. We welcome people into the church, we say you can come in and that decision will change you. We don't say come in and we ask no questions. I do believe conversion means conversion of habits, behaviours, ideas, emotions. The boundaries are determined by what it means to be loyal to Jesus Christ. That means to display in all things the mind of Christ. Paul is always saying this in his letters. Ethics is not a matter of a set of abstract rules, it is a matter of living the mind of Christ. That applies to sexual ethics. That is why fidelity is important in marriage. You reflect the loyalty of God in Christ.

This centrality of Christ is spelt out more as we will see in a moment at the third fundamental declaration where we state we will as a church “ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion and follow His discipline”.

## **Second Fundamental Declaration, the ultimate rule and standard of faith**

2. This Church receives all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by the inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation.

This picks up the language of Article VI, *Of the sufficiency of the Holy Scripture for Salvation*:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

and the questions to the priest at ordination. This is a distinctively Anglican emphasis.

### **(1) Salvation is a key category for Anglican identity and mission.**

The first point is not about Scripture but something even more important.

It is often said that the incarnation is a distinctive Anglican emphasis.<sup>17</sup>

Maybe, in some derived sense.

(Most often they mean God's providential work in the world, which isn't the same thing.)

But when you look at classic Anglican principles you find another emphasis: the Holy Communion service in the Book of Common Prayer. It is salvation.

The doctrine of the place of Scripture immediately involves questions of what are *those things necessary for salvation*.

#### **a. Let me take you to the first of the Homilies, “A Fruitful exhortation to the reading of holy Scripture” which begins**

Unto a Christian man, there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable, than the knowledge of Holy Scripture;

Then a little later

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<sup>16</sup> Reported by Robert Tong: “As recently as (19th) August 2006, Archbishop Rowan Williams in reply to a question from a journalist (Interview with Wim Houtman, Religion Editor *Nederlands Dagblad*)

<sup>17</sup> As, for example, Bruce Kaye *Church without Walls* Melbourne Harper Collins 1995



For in holy Scripture is fully contained what we ought to do, and what to eschew; what to believe, what to love, and what to look for at GODS hands at length. In these Books we shall find the father from whom, the son by whom, and the holy Ghost, in whom all things have their being and keeping up, and these three persons to be but one GOD, and one substance. In these books we may learn to know our selves, how vile and miserable we be, and also to know GOD, how good he is of himself, and how he maketh us and all creatures partakers of his goodness. We may learn also in these Books to know GODS will and pleasure, as much as (for this present time) is convenient for us to know. And (as the great Clerk and godly Preacher Saint John Chrysostom saith) "whatsoever is required to salvation of man, is fully contained in the Scripture of GOD".

That is what "necessary for salvation" is about. An understanding of God and human need and God's provision in Christ. A reminder of the importance of that father of the Eastern church, "the great Clerk and godly Preacher Saint John Chrysostom" in Anglicanism.

**b. Salvation emphasis is no passing commonplace. A key Anglican emphasis here.**

I have always been struck by a particular passage in Ashley Null's *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance*.

Despite the pressures of his office and his era, Cranmer's most striking characteristic was to forgive his enemies ... his customary response to personal wrongs was unmerited forgiveness, often to the irritation of his friends and the delight as well as the abuse of his enemies [...]

Cranmer was certainly not unique in his day for emphasizing the love of enemies as the essence of true Christianity ... What set Cranmer apart from his former Catholic humanist colleagues was his mature theological understanding of this command. For Erasmus, Gardiner, and traditional Catholicism in general, love of enemies was a matter of obedience, a necessary condition for salvation. For Cranmer, such unmerited love for others was necessarily a response to and the inevitable result of receiving the assurance of unmerited salvation. Consequently, he intended his well-known reputation for giving grace to the unworthy to be a cardinal signal, a scarlet cord hung openly from the window of Canterbury, so that in the midst of the battles of his times and since, those with eyes to see should spot where the wall of the old order was first breached in England and recognize as comrades those in the household where the gospel conspiracy was first forged.

For Cranmer's commitment to love his enemies was more than just the outward fruit of his living Protestant faith. It was its very foundation. The logic is breathtakingly simple. Christ commands us to love our enemies so that we show ourselves sons of our Father in heaven. If the highest expression of divine love is to love one's enemies, that must be the very same kind of love by which God saves sinners. And that, in fact, is what the apostle Paul himself wrote in Romans 5:10 - 'when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son'. Since God loved those who had not a right to be loved, Cranmer reached out to his opponents with unmerited forgiveness and favour in hope that they would realize that God did likewise when he brought salvation. This emphasis on God's love for the unworthy is the common thread which runs throughout Cranmer's theological writings.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ashley Null *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance* Oxford 2000 p.21

Sure, some of Cranmer's theological writings are just his, one theologian of many, but some by God's providence became foundational through the various Books of Common Prayer, especially the Communion Service, and to a lesser extent the Homilies.

So I believe that God's love for the unworthy is a key Anglican emphasis important for our identity.

It would be better if I allow Null to slightly expand what he calls the heart of Anglican theology gleaned from the Book of Common Prayer.

Divine gracious love, constantly communicated by the Holy Spirit in the regular repetition of Scripture's promises through Word and Sacrament, is to inspire human love, drawing believers towards God, their fellow human beings and the pursuit of lifelong godliness.<sup>19</sup>

**c. Which, if true, leads to a question of what happened to this.**

How do we account for the recognition we feel when we hear Oscar Wilde's famous quip<sup>20</sup>

[The Roman Catholic church was] for saints and sinners alone - for respectable people, the Anglican Church will do.

Which raises the problem of the possibility of a shadow Anglican identity.

An identity that is a sad caricature of us that we deny.

Moralism in the face of doctrinal indifference? That comes down respectability?

It reminds me of the famous *Yes Prime Minister* about appointing a bishop in the Church of England:

*Sir Humphrey Appleby.* The church is trying to be more relevant.

*Hacker:* To God?

*Sir Humphrey* Of course not minister, I mean relevant in sociological terms.

A caricature of course. But a spark of truth? For respectable people?

**• An aside on moralism**

One reason for the crisis in the Anglican Communion is that I think that one of the shadow identities was of an Anglicanism that contented itself with broad low-grade theology with an emphasis on good works and good behaviour, rather than theological truth.

It may well be that such a concern for providing a faith that at least helps people to be good has been a long term feature of Anglicanism, at least going as far back as the Reformation with a bruised England recovering from the disastrous 30 years War of the Roses.<sup>21</sup> Certainly there have been other occasions where theological or social conflict may well have led to Anglicanism in its various forms to agree that, whatever else it the Christian faith has to offer, first and foremost it is, as the words of the famous Victorian children's hymn also describe the death of Jesus, "to make us good".<sup>22</sup>

But what happens when the take it for granted moral consensus collapses and becomes as fraught as theology?<sup>23</sup> Moralism as a way to keep peace fails.

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<sup>19</sup> Ashley Null "The Classical Anglican Understanding of Salvation and its Decay" Unpublished paper from GAFON Jerusalem 2008 p.11

<sup>20</sup> Accessed from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/the-vatican-wakes-up-to-the-wisdom-of-oscar-wilde-1750093.html> on 21 July 2009

<sup>21</sup> A point suggested by Ashley Null in his unpublished Moore College Annual Lectures for 2009 "Renewing the Power to Love: Repentance in Classical Anglicanism"

<sup>22</sup> "There is a Green Hill" Cecil F. Alexander 1847

<sup>23</sup> A point explored at depth by Oliver O'Donovan *A Conversation Waiting to Begin* SCM 2009, Chapter 1 "The Failure of the Liberal Paradigm"

This point cuts to both sides of the division over same-sex relationships, as Null himself pointed out at when addressing GAFCON in June last year.

[U]nless GAFCON can identify a common theological basis, we will have only a common morality to hold us together, and I fear that will not be enough for us in the future as it has not proved enough for the Anglican Communion.<sup>24</sup>

**(2) “Sufficiency” of Scripture is a claim against those who say that Scripture is not enough and that more is needed like “the church or the Pope”.**

**a. Anglicanism had a war on two fronts with regard to Scripture.**

**First front the Roman Catholics**

The place of Scripture is central and foundational in the self-understanding of the Church of England that has renounced the Pope. That first homily is not backward on this point.

Let us diligently search for the Well of Life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to the stinking puddles of men’s traditions (devised by men’s imagination) for our justification and salvation.

The whole break with Rome of was, whatever you think of the divorce and the Tudor imperialism, theologically grounded on the appeal to Scripture against the Pope.

According to John Jewel, *An Apologie of the Church of England* (1561):

We receive and embrace all the Canonical Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, giving thanks to our God, who hath raised up unto us that light which we might ever have before our eyes, lest, either by the subtlety of man, or by the snares of the devil, we should be carried away to errors and lies. Also, that these be the heavenly voices, whereby God hath opened unto us his will; and that only in them man’s heart can have settled rest; that in them be abundantly and fully comprehended all things, whatsoever be needful for our salvation, as Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Cyrillus have taught; that they be the very might and strength of God to attain to salvation; that they be the foundations of the prophets and apostles, whereupon is built the Church of God; that they be the very sure and infallible rule, whereby may be tried, whether the Church doth stagger or err, and whereunto all ecclesiastical doctrine ought to be called to account; and that against these Scriptures neither law nor ordinance, nor any custom ought to be heard; no, though Paul his own self, or an angel from heaven, should come and teach the contrary.<sup>25</sup>

**Not just our identity from a controversy that defined us in a negative way.**

The identity of the church as church, as Oliver O’Donovan has recently written, is dependent on Scripture in its midst:

when we read [this word] in public worship we confess that we have received it from a source we cannot ignore, from God, through the teaching of Jesus Christ and the testimony of his apostles, and that we cannot simply take it up and put it down, but read it *as the church*, depending on it for our identity. . .

No collective spiritual exercise, no sacrament, no act of praise or prayer is so primary to the catholic identity of the church gathered as the reading and recitation of Scripture. It is the nuclear core. When Paul instructed his letters

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<sup>24</sup> Ashley Null “The Classical Anglican Understanding of Salvation and its Decay” Unpublished paper from GAFON Jerusalem 2008 p.16

<sup>25</sup> *The Library of Christian Classics* Volume XXVI English Reformers ed T.H.L Parker SCM Press 1967 p. 26

to be passed from church to church and read, it was the badge of the local church's catholic identity.<sup>26</sup>

This is no more than an expression of the Apostolic description of "the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2.20).

Notice that "the Christian Faith as professed by the Church from primitive times and in particular as set forth in the creeds known as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed" is not an exception to the supremacy of Scripture. Even they are brought to it.

*Article VIII Of the Three Creeds*

The three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius' Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.

**b. This specific sufficiency of Scripture is the limit over the authority of the church.**

*Article XX Of the Authority of the Church*

The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in controversies of faith; and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.

Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ: yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.

- The church is not to decree "anything against the same" because the church is a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ;
- and it is "not to enforce" anything as necessary for salvation without explicit authority of God's word written.

**• Contrast a recent statement by a bishop of the TEC.**

This sounds ok at first, but listen carefully:

Christians believe it isn't the Bible but the Jesus "event" – his life, death, and resurrection – that offers the perfect revelation of God. The Bible is the best and most trustworthy witness to that event, but it neither replaces Jesus as the Word nor takes precedence over Christ's continuing action in the world through the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

This sounds almost right, for a moment. Jesus is the word of God, image of the invisible God. And then you ask the big question. What is this "Christ's continuing action in the world through the Holy Spirit" which apparently has precedence over the Bible? How do you recognise it and test it? The issue of discernment becomes profoundly urgent if we were to take it as an authority that in effect, despite all the nice words, displaces the apostolic testimony.

We need to be clear about the promise Jesus made to the disciples gathered in that hidden room as he prepared for his going as described in John 16.12ff:

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<sup>26</sup> Oliver O'Donovan "The Reading Church Scriptural Authority in Practice" a lecture given at St Mary Islington, 27 April 2009, at the launch of his book *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: the Churches and the Gay Controversy* SCM Press 2009

<sup>27</sup> Gene Robinson. *In the Eye of the Storm: Swept to the Center by God* Canterbury Press 2008 p22

<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>  
When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

Of course the big question is who is the "you" that the Spirit of truth will guide into all truth? Not us. But them. Those in that room. The first disciples. Witnesses.

As shown in the context and in the special prayer John 17 prays for those "you given me".

"I have given them your word. Sanctify them in your word."

And then Jesus distinguishes them from us, whom he also prays for.

<sup>20</sup> "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one."

This is a text that enhances apostolic authority, not relativises it for the ongoing judgments of some part of the Christian movement

**c. This specific sufficiency of Scripture is a negative control over the authority of the human imagination and piety.**

Oliver O'Donovan recently wrote on the authority of Scripture and reality.<sup>28</sup>

All authority arises from mediation of reality. The free imagination and ranging purposes of the human mind are brought to heel by an interruption of something that simply and unnegotiably is the case.

And the authority of Scripture is the moment at which the attested reality of God's acts disturbs the ideal constructions and zealous projections of human piety. Those who are anxious about the church's weakening attachment to Scripture do not anticipate a loss of piety, but a rank growth of it; they fear the promiscuous multiplication of religious images in which history and fantasy are blended in equal measure, in which Star Trek and Jesus are equally apt for our devotion.

He later remarks:

The practices that acknowledge the authority of Scripture in the church arm it against the greatest danger of a culture that declares itself "post-modern", the loss of a sense of difference between image and reality.

**(3) There is a limit to Scripture's purpose and authority. Sufficiency for a purpose leaves freedom for authorities.**

**a. As said in the previous point, there was a war on two fronts with regard to Scripture: first front, the Roman Catholics and the second, the Presbyterians.**

The latter battle in the Elizabethan church with such as Richard Hooker (1554-1600).

Those who overplayed the role of Scripture he kindly rebukes as well intentioned but dangerously wrong.

Two opinions therefore there are concerning sufficiency of Holy Scripture, each extremely opposite unto the other, and both repugnant unto truth. The schools of Rome teach Scripture to be so insufficient, as if, except traditions were added, it did not contain all revealed and supernatural truth, which absolutely is necessary for the children of men in this life to know that they may in the next be saved. Others justly condemning this opinion grow

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<sup>28</sup> Oliver O'Donovan "The Reading Church Scriptural Authority in Practice" a lecture given at St Mary Islington, 27 April 2009, at the launch of his book *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: the Churches and the Gay Controversy* SCM Press 2009

likewise unto a dangerous extremity, as if Scripture did not only contain all things in that kind necessary, but all things simply, and in such sort that to do any thing according to any other law were not only unnecessary but even opposite unto salvation, unlawful and sinful. Whatsoever is spoken of God or things appertaining to God otherwise than as the truth is, though it seem an honour it is an injury. (*Lawes* II.8.6)<sup>29</sup>

He, like Cranmer before him in his dispute with Knox, held that Scripture was normative but not regulative in all matters other than what is necessary for salvation.

The famous, and so often misunderstood “three-legged stool” of Anglicanism comes from this dispute, although for Hooker it was not three equal authorities, Scripture, reason and tradition, but a definite progression, Scripture, then reason and finally tradition. In book 5 of his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* he contrasts matters of order which are changeable and articles concerning doctrine which are not so, and then goes on:

Be it in matter of the one kind or of the other, what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgments whatsoever. (*Lawes* V.8.2)<sup>30</sup>

And by “force of reason” Hooker was not writing of post-Enlightenment autonomous reason but right reason by the grace of God.

**b. But this does leave room for adaptation and development of Christian practice and church life, within the overall limits of Scripture.**

Though in classic Anglicanism we find both freedom from and a respect for ancient and appropriate forms.

Article XXXIV *Of the Traditions of the Church*

It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly alike; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s word. . .

Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

### **Third Fundamental Declaration, to Obey Christ**

3. This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow His discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.

I have only two points to make.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). 3 vols. Vol. 1. Chapter?: *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Eight Books*. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/921/85476> on 4 August 2009

<sup>30</sup> Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). 3 vols. Vol. 2. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/922> on 4 August 2009

**(1) A big ask. To confidently declare that we “will ever obey . . . teach . . . administer . . . [and] follow” Christ’s command, doctrine, sacraments and discipline!**

Was there not a moment when our founders drew back at the audacity of this?

**a. Shades of Joshua 24**

when the people confidently declare they will serve the Lord as his people. Joshua warns them that they do not realise what they are committing to.

“You cannot serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” <sup>21</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!” (Joshua 24:19-21)

There is something of this in the third Fundamental Declaration.

**• But what else can a church that claims to be part of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ do?**

But what else can a way of being Christian be? After all we have heard the words of Jesus:

<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” [Matthew 7:21]

So we are committed, whatever diversity we allow and tradition we keep, to Christ, obeying him, teaching his truth, administering his sacraments and observing his discipline among us as his people.

**b. This is where the question of mission is clarified.**

To obey Christ will be, in love, to be active as a community in announcing and embodying the great news of his lordship, which is the power of God for salvation for all who believe.

**c. May I say that this is a crucial attitude to unite us in controversy as Anglicans.**

It at least recognises that if each of us is really taking this obedience and observing and teaching and administering the things of Christ seriously, then there is a ground to meet as fellow Christians and Anglicans, even if we do disagree about what some of those commands teaching and discipline are.

**(2) But there is one commitment that is the odd one out. Why is it just “the three orders” not His three orders!**

Bruce Kaye <sup>31</sup>notes how Hooker defended the Anglican settlement with regard to episcopacy by arguing that it was providentially arranged by God but not mandatory. This disappointed Keble who, in his edition of Hooker, commented that the obvious way to deal with the Puritans was to argue the case for episcopal succession. But sadly,

It is notorious . . . that such was not, in general, the line preferred by Jewel, Whitgift, Bishop Cooper and others to whom the management of that controversy was entrusted during the early part of Elizabeth’s reign. They do not expressly disavow but they carefully shun that unreserved appeal to Christian antiquity, in which one would have thought they must have discerned the very strength of their course to lie. It is enough, with them to show that the government by archbishops and bishops is allowable; they never ventured to urge its *exclusive* claim, or to connect the succession with

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Kaye *A Church without Walls* Melbourne Harper Collins 1995 p.126

the validity of the holy sacraments. And yet it is obvious that such a course of argument along (supposing it borne out by facts) could fully meet all the exigencies of the case.<sup>32</sup>

In writing the Fundamental Declaration as they did, the Constitutional fathers and mothers allow both the Kebles and the Hookers among us a place as no particular view is mandated. But it does declare that we will keep the three orders, even if we are not so clear if they are divinely mandated.

This is part of a broader Anglican way of esteeming some aspects of our providential past that identify us. It comes out further in the next chapter of the 1961 Constitution (that you will be relieved to know I will not be exegeting) entitled “Ruling Principles” and states that “this Church, being derived from the Church of England, retains and approves the doctrine and principles of the Church of England embodied in the Book of Common Prayer”, the ordinal and articles. It can move on from them but has bound itself not to “contravene any principle of doctrine or worship laid down in such standard”.

I am well aware that this focus on the declarations does not conclude the discussion of Anglican identity and mission. Much more can and will be said. Perhaps it never ends. Nor should it.

## **Conclusions: A Christianity that is . . .**

### **(1) A Christianity that responds to God’s love in Christ.**

- Distinctive as Christ is. Stand for something? A lot!

This principle is best summarised in a recent Anglican statement:

We rejoice in the gospel of God through which we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God first loved us, we love him and as believers bring forth fruits of love, ongoing repentance, lively hope and thanksgiving to God in all things.<sup>33</sup>

And:

We gladly proclaim and submit to the unique and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humanity’s only Saviour from sin, judgement and hell, who lived the life we could not live and died the death that we deserve. By his atoning death and glorious resurrection, he secured the redemption of all who come to him in repentance and faith. <sup>34</sup>

- Responsive to Christ in mission

Again, two further statements express this well.

We gladly accept the Great Commission of the risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, to seek those who do not know Christ and to baptise, teach and bring new believers to maturity.

We are mindful of our responsibility to be good stewards of God’s creation, to uphold and advocate justice in society, and to seek relief and empowerment of the poor and needy. <sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> J. Keble *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*. Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). cited in Kaye *A Church without Walls* Melbourne Harper Collins 1995 p.126

<sup>33</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration point 1

<sup>34</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration point 5

<sup>35</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration points 9 and 10



**(2) A humble Christianity. Cautious in its claims and aware of human frailty.**

Humility before the reality of God and the intrusive and limiting authority of Scripture.

That sense of difference between our concerns and dreams and desires and God's.

We agree with Paul when he says "we know in part". That is why I am so uneasy for us to declare God's blessing on what we cannot be sure he does bless, and in the face of Scripture may even be lying on behalf of God.

While I admit it is in principle possible that the church has been mistaken in its long-held conviction that the two basic ways of life God blesses are sexual marriage and celibate singleness, the onus is very much on those who posit a third alternative of some form of committed homosexual relationship to make their case that it is compatible with Scripture. Something of the immensity of that task can be gauged by the conclusions of Robert Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a leading scholar this issue, which are at least a good statement of the *prima facie* situation.

The two-sexes prerequisite is no little "detail" in Scripture but a core value in sexual ethics. The universal witness of Scripture to a male-female prerequisite for valid sexual unions—the flip side of which is the witness of Scripture against every form of homosexual practice—is no little "detail." It is a core value among Scripture's sexual ethics. It is a value held: pervasively, that is, within each Testament and across Testaments; absolutely, that is, without exception; strongly, that is, as or more offensive than adultery and the worst forms of consensual adult incest; counterculturally, that is, in opposition to broader cultural trends.<sup>36</sup>

Gagnon may have it wrong, but he shows the seriousness of the issue for a Christianity that limits itself humbly to the limits of Scripture as Anglicanism does.

So there is a place for Scripture as supreme but not omniscient, and a place for what has been handed down to us to be tested by Scripture, and a place of human reason, both in reading and attending to Scripture and to what is learnt from the world around us. There is a great deal of freedom too.

Certainly Anglicanism has a heart with fuzziness at the edges.

**(3) A remembrance of things past. The catholic gospel past. Conservative in tenor**

This is the spirit of the preface *Of Ceremonies: Why some be abolished, and some retained*. A defence of keeping old ceremonies that meet the standard of being Christian and edifying makes a point that captures this spirit. Those who despise the retention of the old

... ought rather to have reverence unto them for their antiquity, if they will declare themselves to be more studious of unity and concord, than of innovations and new-fangleness, which (as much as may be with the true setting forth of Christ's Religion) is always to be eschewed.

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<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Gagnon "Case Not Made: A Response to Prof. John Thorp's 'Making the Case' for Blessing. Homosexual Unions in the Anglican Church of Canada" Accessed from <http://www.robgagnon.net/JohnThorpResponse.htm> on 10 August 2009 (Further significant material can be found at <http://www.robgagnon.net/>)

The church has a culture like that, although it can be destructive if it just becomes old-fashioned in church style. In fact the worst would be to keep the forms of an older church style and then change the content of the message of the faith. Exactly the wrong way round.

#### **(4) At home in the world (at times too at home)**

A legacy from its days as the national church of England that continues long after it has left England. Alister McGrath's<sup>37</sup> *via media* between fundamentalism and liberalism, though a little too cute, does have a point about Anglicanism's position as neither isolating Christianity from the world nor making Christianity indistinguishable from it.

The acceptance of God's work and providence in the world is a strength, though it collapses into a "blessing of what is" or the usurping of the gospel and the Scriptures.

The value of Anglicanism has always stopped evangelicalism in Sydney going fundamentalist and obscurantist.

Back in 1992 I wrote a "Bah Humbug" column on the diocesan newspaper *Southern Cross* in which I gave a number of reasons why I had been attracted to the Anglican Church back in 1972 when I moved straight from being a ministry candidate in the then Methodist church to a candidate for the Anglican ministry. The first two reasons I gave were:

1. The central issue was the clear commitment to the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Christ's cross and resurrection in the Christian life which I detected in Sydney Anglicanism.
2. (This will surprise many.) I was also attracted by the freedom Sydney Anglicanism's theological conservatism offered me as an alternative to fundamentalism. I was looking for an antidote to wishy-washy theological liberalism. I found in Sydney Anglicanism an intelligent and scholarly theological conservatism without the obscurantist or reactionary elements you can often find in some anti-liberal positions. Yes, folks, one reason I became a Sydney Anglican was to escape fundamentalism!

#### **(5) Not bossy**

I am thinking here about the concept of "dispersed authority" that gives freedom and responsibility to clergy and laity and bishops and parish priests and dioceses and the national church and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the different provinces and so on and so on. For those of a Myers Briggs type that is strongly "J" (let the reader understand) this aspect of Anglicanism will drive them crazy, but for others of us, it can be frustrating but also valuable.

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<sup>37</sup> A.E. McGrath *The Renewal of Anglicanism* Morehouse Publishing 1993 p129