

Justin Welby Explains Anglicanism's Leadership Failure

In February 2023, Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, used his presidential address to the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Accra, Ghana, to remind those assembled that the Church's life is lived at the local level, where "people live the lives they are given. They think the ways they have learned growing up." At this level, echoing Paul in Romans, there is no distinction between the episcopate, the clergy and the laity: "For we all begin as Christians in the same way. We need to admit our sin, we need to believe Christ died for us, and we need to confess his Lordship over our lives individually and across society." This has been the task of the Church since the first Pentecost.

Yet the Church is a body of different parts (1 Corinthians 12) and Welby reminded the meeting that no part may say to any other, "I have no need of you". This Church is scandalous to those outside it—non-Christians and anti-Christians—and to many within it too:

The scandal of grace is that God forgives sinners. God forgives terrible sinners, and if we are like Jesus with Zacchaeus up the tree, or like the woman caught in adultery, or all those in the churches to which Paul wrote his letters, or the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 addressed by the glorified Christ, then we seek to welcome sinners, saying they can attend the Church before they believe in the God of the Church, knowing they will believe before they begin to behave, to learn Christian behaviour. We do not seek good people to come to church, we seek sinners who are finding that journeying with God requires them to allow themselves to be transformed by the Spirit into the pattern of [life] which God calls.

To those outside the Church this grace of forgiveness from God and to one another is appalling, a scandal, for it seems to deny our right to justice or revenge. But when a person realises that we worship a crucified God, it

makes sense to forgive in the same way as we have been forgiven.

Welby illustrates this scandal with the conversion of Abraham, who had to learn that God's hope comes only when we rely exclusively and entirely on Him:

Abraham cannot have children, has no land, has nowhere that is home. His life is without fruit. He obeys God without evidence that it is reasonable. He does no reconnaissance. He does not send people ahead of him to see what the land is like. He does not have a strategic plan.

Abraham's first test is famine, so he leaves the land and fails in faith, but he is not condemned and trusts the God who has promised to give him what he seeks.

A second scandal—the fact that we live by gift alone—is illustrated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" The contrast here, Welby explains, is between God's economy, where everything is based on gift, covenant, and failures forgiven, and the economy of contract and exchange. "The Church must reflect God's world, not the contractual world around us. And the contractual world sees God's world as scandalous, for it depends on the God we cannot see. It depends on grace and generosity, not obligation and contract."

A third scandal—humanity's unity and interdependence—is worse in many parts of the financially rich world, because we live in a culture where community and mutual responsibility have been eliminated, philosophically, over the last seventy-five years. These senses of unity and interdependence have not vanished, they are still found in families and small communities, "but they are no longer the main way we relate to each other,

and to others around the world. We love those close to us, not those further away." While there is often compassion, there is also an absolute individualism, a sense of not accepting any authority outside oneself. Welby attributes this to the fact that in the UK and Europe, most people now belong to no faith at all:

They're not Christians. They're not Muslims. They're not pagans. They're not Jews. They're not Hindus. They do not belong. For years I've been told by principally Christians around the world that Islam would take over Europe. I've always said that would not happen. The greater danger was the secular "nones". I mean those who when asked about their faith, say "none". "I have no faith."

Here Welby's focus shifts to the consequences of the marriage between secularism and individualism, providing glimpses of what being spiritual head of the Anglican Communion is like behind the scenes.

Whenever the Church's rules on sexuality are discussed, Welby is open about the Church of England's interdependence with all Christians, not just Anglicans, particularly in the global south where there are majorities of other faiths. For such openness, he admits to being summoned to Parliament, twice, and threatened with "parliamentary action" to force same-sex marriage on the Church. When he expresses concern about actions by the Church of England having an impact on the broader Anglican Communion, those concerns are dismissed, not by all, but by many in the General Synod. "And remember," he said pointedly, "in the Church of England, Archbishops do not chair the General Synod and do not organise its business or its debates."

Welby is alluding here to his spiritual role as Archbishop of Canterbury, how the authority of his office is circumscribed, and how his ability to hold a Communion of autonomous Churches together is limited. The Church is only established in England, where it remains vulnerable to democratic whims. The contemporary West is now post-Christian. Christianity is now understood by many as "a superstition left behind, or even not seen at all, simply unknown". The Bible has been alienated from the culture it created:

We replace morality and Christian faith with personal control over our bodies. Birth with genetically designed babies is not far away. And death is something that so many believe we have a right to choose in the way and at the

time we want. For we are told that that is our right and no one, least of all Christians, may take that away from [us] ...

Modern European global north moralities, a morality for the wealthy, the powerful and the intellectually well educated, is a morality that does not believe in human sinfulness and failure. It does not believe in forgiveness. It does not believe in hope.

This is where the Church struggles.

People think of the Anglican Communion as one body and so we are. We are also one body with all Christians everywhere. Of all churches.

Here Welby shifts focus again to the seemingly unbridgeable tensions between the global north and the global south: "the Communion is made up of remote parishes in Papua New Guinea and huge churches on Wall Street. The Church is prayed for ... by Christians in the plains of Africa, the villages of England and the jungles of Amazonia and hundreds of other places." It is there in the local church that profound transformation happens every day. Christian discipleship is necessarily lived differently in each place because of different cultures, "we are not the same although we are one".

As Welby warms to this theme, he stresses there is no good reason "why one group in one part of the world should order the life and culture of another". This kind of control was colonial abuse, which we now seek to avoid, because such control can easily become a form of neo-colonial abuse:

Money, power, access to resources should never call the tune. Yet such is the lust for power ... that one group always seeks to tell another what to do.

That is why in a post-colonial world, where every day we face more attacks on Christian faith and Christian churches, we have to find marks and signs to show we are one and yet marks and signs that do not result in the imposition of one powerful group's values on another.

The Anglican dilemma is authority, wherever it is located: "Any submission to the will of those outside our own province must be voluntary, never compelled." For Welby this is central to what being Anglican means, in the sense of both catholic and reformed, but he poses the question: "How can we bridge the gap between interdependence and autonomy without the abuse of power?"

Noticing the link between post- and neo-colonialism is crucial, as both will abuse power in their pursuit of temporal authority, and both will

be hostile to any manifestation of Church that inhibits their pursuit of absolute individualism. Nevertheless, following Christ is different from following the World, it is diametrically opposed to absolute individualism. This has always been so, whether the collapsing empire is ancient or modern or postmodern.

The British Empire has passed away. It was replaced after the Second World War by a seventy-five-year period of relative peace and prosperity underwritten by American power. That period is also passing away and what comes next remains to be seen. Welby is in a unique position to notice how this transition is shaping global Anglicanism. While his role is spiritual and his authority is nominal, his message about the tension between Anglican belief, Anglican behaviour and Anglican organisation is timely.

The bases and boundaries of Anglican belief are set out in the Lambeth Quadrilateral of the 1880s: (1) the Scriptures “properly interpreted” contain everything necessary for salvation; (2) the historic creeds (particularly the Nicene and Apostle’s Creeds) are sufficient statements of Christian faith; (3) the two Dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion (“some provinces believe in more”, Welby notes, “but none believe in less”); (4) the historic Episcopacy, locally adapted.

The orientation of Anglican behaviour and signs of their character are described in *Five Marks of Mission*, a 1984 report based on Jesus’s own summary of his mission: *To tell*, proclaim the good news of Jesus. *To teach*, baptise and nurture new believers. *To tend*, respond to human need by loving service. *To transform*, transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind, pursue peace and reconciliation, and “have the capacity to disagree without hatred”. *To treasure*, strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The Instruments of Communion set out how Anglicans are organised, how they are brought together. These are: First, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops which first occurred in 1867. Second, the role of Archbishop of Canterbury, originating in 597 AD and evolving into its post-reformation form from the 1530s but always subject to development. Third, the Anglican Consultative Council from the 1960s. Fourth, the Primates’ Meeting from the late 1970s.

Welby believes the Instruments of Communion are much less important than the bases of Anglican belief and the signs of Anglican character, because the Instruments are simply about organisation, how Anglicans relate:

The Instruments have grown and changed over the years. They’ve responded to changes caused by wars, colonialism, decolonising, corruption and failure, heresies and schisms, technological and scientific advance. They have never had the character of Synods with either doctrinal or ethical authority over the Communion, but they do have moral force.

But history shows us that when times change, so must the Instruments of Communion. The post Second World War era is ending. It is collapsing around us, as we sit here.

The international order is ending. Wars and technological destruction are growing. Climate change is increasing. The power of international bodies like the UN is failing. Commerce and modern economics [are] losing the fight to grow faster than the populations and to meet increasing needs.

Not least because of human selfishness. The future of this world, the world in which we live, the world in which the church lives, is for shaping.

It may be wonderful and generous particularly if the two billion Christians act as one, declare the beautiful, support the generous, love one another. We can play our part as the Anglican Communion. A crucial part. That is God’s call. Bless. Be a blessing to the world around us.

It has been so since Abraham was called as a blessing.

This is an expression of frustration mingled with hope, and a warning that the centre cannot hold and something must give. “When times change,” Welby insists, “so must the Instruments of Communion”:

If we have another world war, of which many are talking, the Instruments must be capable of keeping us linked and seeking peace. If climate change brings natural terror, after terror, the Instruments must be effective in promoting mutual hope and advocacy for those who suffer most.

If one part of the world, the richest part, seeks to keep the rest at bay, behind fences and wires and walls, and refuses those who need to move to survive the hope of asylum, the Instruments must give us the tools for mutual help. Tools which mean that we consciously, explicitly say that obedience to God comes ahead of loyalty to country.

Many find this message unpalatable. Nevertheless, Welby wants to be clear about one thing before people tell him what he must do:

I will not cling to place or position as an Instrument of Communion.

The role of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the See of Canterbury, is an historic one. The Instruments must change with the times.

I will not cling to place or position. I hold it very lightly, provided that the other Instruments of Communion choose the new shape, that we are not dictated to by people, blackmailed, bribed to do what others want us to do, but that we act in good conscience before God seeking a judge that is not for our power, but exists for the new world with its extraordinary and terrifying threats. To proclaim Christ and turn our opportunities into realities to bless the world.

That is the test.

We are in a true world crisis, in which global south although economically poorer is in many ways richer in culture and community.

A crisis is a moment of decision, Welby insists. The Church must listen to the Holy Spirit. For Anglicans, what they believe and how they behave—the Quadrilateral and the Five Marks—must stay the same, because they are foundations, as Welby stresses: “The Instruments may change. Sin is to be condemned. We are to seek Christ and to obey.”

Welby is explaining why he has not been bolder in holding the Anglican Communion together in schismatic times. Absolute individualism has become hegemonic in the West, where Christianity is no longer tolerated in the public square and concepts like sin and obeying Christ are anathema to the zeitgeist. This has left a religion-shaped hole Western democracies seek to fill with an incoherent hybrid of green ecopaganism, indigenous spirituality, white guilt, and a sexual revolution enabled by advances in medicine and the welfare state. How is Christian leadership exercised in such a post-Christian culture?

Welby is an “open” Evangelical, sympathetic to Evangelicalism, but his role is meant to be above churchmanship. He is bound by convention to remain neutral, although he has been known to express sympathies in private which he does not express in public. This can seem frustrating and disloyal until one performs acrobatics on the same tightrope, where the Church can be threatened with “parliamentary action” unless it obeys demo-

cratic whims.

The historic Episcopate—locally adapted—is integral to what Anglicans believe, not only to how they are organised. When Australian bishops are consecrated, they assent to the Church’s constitution and take an oath of obedience to “the canons, statutes, ordinances and rules, however described, from time to time” by a diocesan synod, and the general and provincial synods which have force in that diocese. The tension in synodical Church government is always the degree to which the fundamental bases of Anglican belief can be adapted to suit the secular culture in which Anglicans live.

In his 2019 presidential address to diocesan synod, the Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, made himself a lightning-rod when defending the biblical view of marriage as a union between a biological male and a biological female. He said the Church must focus on its mission, while refusing to succumb to “constant pressure to change our doctrine in order to satisfy the lusts and pleasures of the world”. This is not a popular message to those who believe the Church must adapt to the zeitgeist, however deranged it might be.

Davies spoke as a man of authority who knows that God’s word cannot be changed by opinion polls or democratic whims. Doing what a bishop (*episkopos* = overseer) is meant to do, he began his address with a neat overview of the episcopal role in the Anglican tradition. The apostolic mantle does not pass by personal authority, he said, it passes only through the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine “consistent with the teaching of the Bible, and specifically the commands and doctrine of Christ”. He cited Ezekiel 34:2, the prophesy against the shepherds

feeding themselves instead of the sheep. God’s message here is clear. To feed the zeitgeist is to starve the sheep.

Understanding marriage as a relationship between a biological male and a biological female is not only biblical. It is also central to the record of human evolution. Despite this, the West has embraced a puzzling array of untested new heuristics including same-sex marriage and transgenderism. The suddenness of this is disorienting, as Douglas Murray points out in *The Madness of Crowds* (2019): “A decade ago, almost no one was supportive of gay marriage ... A few years down the road and it has been made into a foundational

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value of modern liberalism.” To conscientiously object, for any reason, even for perfectly rational reasons, is to place yourself beyond the pale.

Gay liberation is about freedom from life in the closet, not about placing everything in the closet before God's altar and demanding it be declared holy. The West is just beginning to grapple with the problems of allowing same-sex couples to marry, have children, and pretend they are the same as heterosexual nuclear families (a hyper-novelty enabled by advances in science, medicine and public health). There is the problem of believing in the functional independence of sex and gender, and pretending men can become women or vice versa. History provides many examples where societies become obsessed with transgenderism just before they collapse.

Wherever such hyper-novelty takes hold, and set the agenda, bishops are tempted to equate the good of the secular state with the good of the universal Church. If they succumb, they participate in cultural hubris and post-colonial neo-colonialism. Robert Runcie—the last truly patrician Archbishop of Canterbury—alluded to this problem in his September 1985 address at the opening service of the triennial General Convention of The Episcopal Church (TEC):

The gospel is often most powerfully preached when it is related to a people's search for identity, justice and freedom. Such local expressions of the Church, however, can be limited in sympathy and partial in understanding. The Church is unavoidably conformed to the culture in which it is set and to which it must preach, and it is all too easy to identify the spirit of the age with the spirit of God. We have now come to recognise the insensitivity of much of the nineteenth century missionary movement with its disregard to ancient African and Asian ways of life. We exported too much Englishness with the gospel, and Christianity must have had all the appearance of a foreign religion. The Christian Church exists in many different cultures, and the gospel is proclaimed with the aid of many different philosophies, but it is not to be *identified* with any of them ...

History has set the see of Canterbury at the centre of our Anglican unity, but its role is to gather the family not to rule it. The power to decide matters of faith, order and morals remains with the local church. This could so easily be a recipe for incoherence and for that ecclesiastical isolationism which pays scant regard to the convictions of others. Much

therefore depends on what I can only describe as “a sense of Catholic solidarity” ...

In the end, we belong to the whole Catholic Church of God which has a breadth and an enduring strength greater than that of any individual or particular church. It is this “sense of solidarity” which has allowed the Church through the ages to deal with great questions in order to get on with its chief task of witness, mission and service.

During Runcie's incumbency, the Church of England was still mindful of Catholic solidarity, including its fraternal relationship with the Church of Rome. Discussions about possible reunion were conducted at arms' length by the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Over the years, ARCIC produced official statements on eucharistic doctrine, ordination, church authority, the doctrine of salvation, the nature of communion between the churches, and the role of Mary in the Church. Although ARCIC had just completed a major document on Marian theology, the Vatican suspended discussions abruptly in 2003 after TEC consecrated a practising homosexual as bishop, Gene Robinson, who would marry his husband in 2008.

The consecration of a practising homosexual was presented as a social justice issue, a hill on which TEC willingly chose to exhaust its moral capital. Given that TEC's dogged pursuit of feminist and LGBT+ agendas was tearing global Anglicanism apart, many were left wondering when Robinson divorced his husband in 2014. Whatever Robinson's same-sex marriage was about—absolute individualism, the virtue-signalling modern self—it became a textbook example of a neo-colonial mentality (now adopted by other Anglican provinces in the global north). The churches of the global north now push homosexuality and same-sex marriage as moral goods but the churches of the global south do not believe biblical morality and evolutionary biology are so easily gainsaid.

The global north has been seduced by the sexual revolution, the lie that anyone can do anything—sexually—and nothing bad will happen to them or to their society. The lie is promoted by elites (cultural, political, academic) because it keeps them in power, but it can only be sustained as long as cures or treatments are found for the unwanted consequences of human sexual activity, homosexual and heterosexual. This is the real moral issue. Every Anglican in the Anglosphere must understand the politics behind their leaders' inability or unwillingness to recognise marriage as a union between a biological male and a biological female, except

those leaders aligned with the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON).

Runcie had to steer a Catholic path through the possible consequences of ordaining women to the priesthood. As an “open” Evangelical, Welby has had to steer a more challenging path, because the subsequent ordination of women sat uncomfortably within the later waves of radical feminism and had unforeseen and unintended consequences (all of which were entirely predictable). Pandora's Box has been opened, many evils have emerged, and the box cannot be shut.

The provinces of the global north are now ordaining practising homosexuals and are moving rapidly towards other hyper-novelties, like blessing same-sex unions, and rites of initiation to affirm gender transitions. These are being pursued in the sincere belief that the Bible is no longer God's word but, instead, a cultural artefact to be relativised and deconstructed. The Christian view of human anthropology—until recently focused on biblical revelation supported by evolutionary biology—is being replaced by a human-centred view of personhood mandated by the cultural elites who hold power in the global north. They no longer know what biological males and biological females are for, in biblical or evolutionary terms, or what being human means.

Welby's address in February 2023 has been interpreted as an admission that the role of Archbishop of Canterbury can no longer pretend to be an Instrument of Communion. Having thrown in the towel, so to speak, he is asking the other three instruments—the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting—to relieve his role of that pretence. As he insists, “The future of this world, the world in which the church lives, is for shaping.”

For Anglicans, the questions here are: On what foundation should this human-centred world be shaped? What role do bishops now perform, given that the historic episcopate, locally adapted, is a non-negotiable part of Anglican belief, a core element of One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church? As Glenn Davies has explained, the episcopal mantle does not pass by personal authority but by the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine “consistent with the teachings of the Bible, and specifically the commands and doctrine of Christ”.

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Under this rubric, it must be noticed that practising homosexuals have been appointed to high office in the See of Canterbury, under Welby's episcopal notice. His habit of prevaricating and dissembling about this—his refusal to admit in public what he knows in private—has been described as “disingenuous if not duplicitous”. Further, his call for the other three Instruments to determine the focus of spiritual authority within the Anglican Communion is an abrogation of his episcopal responsibility.

In 1998 the Lambeth Conference passed Resolution I.10 by an overwhelming majority (526 to 70), restricting marriage to a union of biological males and biological females, condemning homophobia, and calling for homosexuals to be treated with pastoral sensitivity and respect. This resolution has been consistently ignored by a global north whose mode of operation can only be described as a neo-colonial form of cultural imperialism. Having made a Faustian pact with the Devil, the global north is trying to use its great wealth and power to include the global south in its Faustian pact.

The fourth GAFCON conference was held in April 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda. It was attended by 1302 delegates from fifty-two countries, including 315 bishops, 456 other clergy and 531 laity. The conference theme was based on John 6:68: “To whom shall we go?”

As an orthodox Anglo-Catholic in an orthodox Evangelical diocese, I found GAFCON IV deeply moving and extraordinarily hopeful, particularly its persistent call to repentance as a necessary precondition to receive the Good News. As every committed Anglican knows—or should know—the Baptism of Repentance must do its work before the Baptism of the Holy Spirit can do its work.

The conference issued a statement—The Kigali Commitment—which elegantly summarised the current crisis in the Anglican Communion and ended with an elegant response to the conference theme “To whom shall we go?": “We go to Christ who alone has the words of eternal life, then we go with Christ to the whole world. Amen.”

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