

# Catholic Authority in the Anglican Church

As an Anglo-Catholic, I was interested in the canonisation of John Henry Newman, the famous Anglican convert to Catholicism, on October 13. Bishop Robert Barron of Word on Fire asks us to read Newman on his own terms, without looking for conservatism or progressivism, Right or Left, and predicts Newman will be a Doctor of the Church one day. Barron calls the immensely learned Newman a fulcrum figure between Catholicism and Anglicanism. The change Newman would inspire, after his death, is gradually beginning to unfold, and with it comes the inevitable drama and uncertainty of change.

In September 2019 New College hosted a series of conversations between the two Archbishops of Sydney, Anglican Glenn Davies and Catholic Anthony Fisher, recorded by the ABC. Over three evenings, they shared their thoughts on Faith, Hope and Love. The series was a most encouraging first step in the New Evangelisation, inspired by Vatican II, with its focus on mission to cultural Christians who've left the Church under the influence of secularism.

Soon after this, Davies fearlessly made himself a lightning-rod in his presidential address to diocesan synod. 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 isn't the message progressives want to hear, in those parts of the Church hostage to intersectional identity politics, but the Church must focus on its mission.

Davies's synod address, available online, should be widely read. He spoke as a man of authority who knows that, in spite of the culture wars engulfing us, God's word can't be changed by identity politics or opinion polls. Doing what a bishop (ἐπίσκοπος = overseer) is meant to do, his address began with a neat overview of the episcopal role in the Anglican tradition. The apostolic mantle doesn't pass by per-

sonal 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 prophecy against the shepherds feeding themselves instead of the sheep. God's message here is clear. Feeding the zeitgeist means starving the sheep.

The crisis facing global Anglicanism mirrors the crisis facing the West, including the perpetual tragedy-comedy of the enlightened West colonising the Rest and the Rest's suspicion of that enlightenment. To paraphrase Orwell, there are a number of smelly little postmodern orthodoxies now contending for our souls. Most Anglican provinces in the Anglosphere have compromised their Christian mission by embracing the diktats of progressivism and a puzzling array of new and untested heuristics: female headship, same-sex marriage, 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. Even gay rights groups like Stonewall weren't in favour of it. A few years down the road and it has been made into a foundational value of modern liberalism." To object, for any reason whatsoever, even for rational reasons, is to place yourself beyond the pale.

Although gay himself, Murray obviously doesn't like smelly little postmodern orthodoxies. He's suspicious of the identity politics that: first, splinters society into interest groups according to sex/gender, race and sexual preference; second, assumes being female, black or gay brings heightened moral knowledge; third, weaponises identity for Cultural Marxist purposes; fourth, makes everything political. This is the space in which minority groups atomise, organise and pronounce.

Murray draws our attention to a paradox. Just as the train carrying all the hard-won civil rights of the twentieth century appeared to be reaching its desired destination, "it suddenly picked up steam

and went crashing off down the tracks and into the distance". Truths accepted as true, until just the other day, are now untrue, and the lives of good people are destroyed. As the saying goes, you can't make a socialist omelette without breaking eggs.

Immediately after lamentations about Davies's address appeared in the media, a petition from Change.org appeared at the back of our parish. It was started by a chirpy band of the happy few called "Equal Voices" who've adopted the prophetic mantle of God's love. You can see them on their website, holding signs with the message, "Sharing God's love for ALL". Smiling their carefully staged Christian smiles, Equal Voices tries to occupy the moral high ground, on history's right side, while mourning Davies's insensitive attempt to exclude and divide Anglicans. They ask the Church hierarchy to affirm LGBTIQ+ Anglicans.

This kind of useful idiocy is easy to recognise. There's no such thing as an LGBTIQ+ Anglican. The letters in the initialism have little in common. Most of them have nothing in common. Like so many other aspects of the culture wars, the initialism is a calculated attempt to weaponise identity for political purposes. Murray makes a compelling observation about this: "there is something demeaning and eventually soul-destroying about being expected to go along with claims you do not believe to be true and cannot hold to be true". The belief that all people have equal value and equal dignity is true. Still:

If you are asked to believe there are no differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality, men and women, racism and anti-racism, then this will in time drive you to distraction. That distraction—or crowd madness—is something we are in the middle of and something we need to find our way out from.

There's no difference between Equal Voices signalling their virtue and the madness of the crowds—deranged by #MeToo—who tried to block Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the US Supreme Court; who chanted "Love is Love" so mindlessly during the same-sex-marriage postal survey; who persecuted George Pell with such revolutionary zeal.

Newman was proficient at Patristics, the branch of Christian theology dealing with the lives, writings and doctrines of early Christian theologians, or Church Fathers. This gave him a canon, a measuring stick, to test the truth-claims of Anglican and Catholic authority. In *Tract Number*

*Ninety* (1841), for example, he demonstrated how the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church could be read from a Catholic perspective. In *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), he drew from his knowledge of Patristics to trace the development of doctrine, through the dialogue of Scripture and Tradition, present from the beginning.

Since the French Revolution, Christian doctrine has been regularly attacked for impeding whatever vision of progress is fashionable at the time, yet the Church Fathers show us what orthodox belief looks like and why it must be defended. Newman became Catholic, not Quaker, Unitarian or Presbyterian. Why? The question Anglicans have faced, ever since Paul spoke out against un-Christian behaviour, is how to preserve a sense of what the faith does or doesn't allow and what can or can't be changed. This cannot be separated from what Davies means by "consistent with the teaching of the Bible" and "the commands and doctrine of Christ".

According to the Nicene Creed, and re-affirmed at every Sunday Eucharist, Anglicans believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. According to its ordinal, the Anglican Church, being apostolic, "receives and retains the Catholic faith, grounded in Holy Scripture and expressed in the Creeds, and within its own history, in the Thirty-Nine Articles, in *The Book of Common Prayer* and in the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons". This is the faith Davies undertook to guard and protect at his episcopal consecration. So how different is his understanding of Catholicity from my understanding as an Anglo-Catholic, or Fisher's understanding as a Roman Catholic?

In the Nicene Creed, some Protestant confessions replace *Catholic* with *Universal*, to maintain a distance from what Rome came to represent in the centuries before Vatican II. The Anglican Church never did this, even in its Evangelical expressions, which makes it apostolic in a "Reformed Catholic" sense. Rome recognises this apostolicity, which is why it participated in unofficial conversations to promote unity with Canterbury. The first of these, which paradoxically occurred just before the bull *Apostolicae curae* (1896) declared Anglican orders to be "absolutely null and utterly void", failed because England's Catholic hierarchy, restored in 1850, saw unity a threat to its existence. The second, the Malines Conversations (1921 to 1927), failed to produce concrete results but paved the way for more official discussions to explore common ground.

These discussions were conducted at arm's length by the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), which began preparatory meetings soon after Vatican II. Over the years,

official statements were produced 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 official discussions in 2003 after the consecration in the US of Gene Robinson, a practising homosexual, as bishop in The Episcopal Church (TEC).

Robinson's consecration was presented as a social justice issue; a hill of rights upon which TEC chose to exhaust its moral capital and compromise its claim to Catholic authority. Ironically, when Robinson divorced his husband a few years later, TEC remained silent. What could it say? This left many scratching their heads, given how TEC's dogmatic pursuit of LGBTIQ+ issues was tearing Anglicanism apart. The only apparent message here—apart from the trite mantra “Love is Love”—was a vague principle of privacy. Should the Church stay out of the bedroom? Is this no one's business except those in the bedroom? Is every Christian, lay or ordained, gay or straight, allowed a private life? Does it matter whether they behave in ways incompatible with Scriptural mores? Clearly, same-sex divorce, like same-sex marriage, is one of those untested new heuristics described in *The Madness of Crowds*.

Female headship, another untested heuristic, would take Anglican disunity to a whole new level. Under Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop from 2006 to 2015, TEC conducted the largest exercise of penal discipline in Anglican history. At Schori's direction, TEC rolled out its radical program of LGBTIQ+ inclusion and spent vast sums of money on lawsuits prosecuting clergy, parishes and dioceses that objected to her radicalism and sought to join more conservative Churches. She established a policy whereby the properties of departing congregations could not be sold back to them. Some of these properties were sold to Muslims, below market price, and turned into mosques, while the former Christian owners were forced to relinquish their equity and buy new property elsewhere. Having inflicted enormous damage upon the Anglican Communion at a critical moment, Jefferts Schori is an object lesson for what happens when feminists obtain real power.

Gender dysphoria or transgenderism—a sociological rather than a scientific issue—is another

untested heuristic, so unsettled we still don't know what we're dealing with. In July 2017 activists in the English General Synod asked the House of Bishops for liturgical resources to affirm transgender people in their new identities. In January 2018 the bishops released the document “Welcoming Transgender People”, which stopped short of providing the requested liturgies but included the statement: “The House of Bishops welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equal with all people, within the Church, the body of Christ.” Instead of this fluff, the bishops should have requested further information before proceeding. A working definition of the term “trans person”, and how it relates to Christian anthropology, would have been useful.

Murray makes a significant point about intersectionality: the interlocking oppres-

sions of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. They don't all lock together neatly but “grind hideously and noisily both against each other and within themselves”. Behind all this there's a progressive metaphysics “which a new generation is imbibing and everyone else is being force-fed” with its many points of instability. It's grounded in a desire “to express certainty about things we do not know, and to be wildly dismissive and relativistic about things that we actually do know”. We ignore the obvious Cultural Marxism of this metaphysics to our peril.

Both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches have always ordained homosexuals but

traditionally have expected them to remain celibate. It's misleading to claim otherwise. The question of whether the Christian faith allows homosexual clergy to express their sexuality, in public or private, is a test of Christian unity and the Church's ability to adapt to new social norms while still claiming to be what Paul calls “in Christ”.

According to Davies's benchmark of orthodoxy, the question boils down to whether homosexual practice is “consistent with the teaching of the Bible” and “the commands and doctrine of Christ”. While many logical fallacies and false equivalences are applied to it—Love is Love! Jesus doesn't judge, why do you?—it's really about what Christ's death means. Is this meaning an objective reality, subjectively apprehended? Can lobby groups of Anglicans or Catholics make up their own meanings about Christ and insist they have authority?

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To put these questions in their bluntest form, which will offend many, did Jesus die for gay sex? If he did, then what kinds? We don't hear the details of various gay sex practices in media reports, lest they undermine the inclusion narrative being constructed and promoted. According to Murray, this is because society has arrived at an industrial-strength denial about the complexities of homosexuality and every other progressive issue. We've chosen to forget, edit out, or push aside the complexities, assuming they've all been overcome, but they haven't.

From Fisher's perspective, resolving complexities is what apostolic authority is for. In ecumenical dialogue, Rome needs to know who it's dialoguing with and what authority they have within the dialogue. In a 2016 interview with Peter Seewald, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI reflected on ecumenical dialogue during his pontificate:

I have been difficult to disappoint here, because I am simply familiar with the reality and know what one may and may not expect concretely. The situation between us and the Protestants and us and the Orthodox is very different. The obstacles are also very different. With the Protestants, I would say the internal disagreements are the really big problem. One is always speaking only to a partial reality, which then excludes another partial reality. They themselves are in a major crisis, as we know.

Whether Benedict makes a distinction here between Anglicanism and what was once known as OPDs (Other Protestant Denominations) is unclear. Anglicans of all stripes know their apostolic claims make them unique within Protestantism. Since the nineteenth century, the Vatican has given Anglicans the benefit of the doubt. When demonstrating Catholicity, the ball has remained in the Anglican court. Paradoxically, Archbishop Davies has provided the only real defence of his Church's claim to Catholic authority, while those who disagree with him do nothing but groan, complain, dissemble and face-palm. Their small-mindedness is saddening yet predictable.

Before it wilfully turned itself into an OPD—a partial reality excluding another partial reality—Anglicanism's claim to Catholic authority existed somewhere between the Roman practice of magisterium, where authority is vested in the historical episcopate, and the Orthodox practice of conciliarism, where authority is vested in church councils. Because it wilfully chose to conflate Enlightenment ideals of freedom and individualism with God's will, TEC has led the way in adopting progressivism—

first, in placing women in priestly and episcopal authority over men; second, in placing practising homosexuals in priestly and episcopal authority over heterosexuals—with the rest of the Anglosphere not far behind. As the English bishops have declared transgender and cisgender to be equal, in the sense of equivalent within Christian anthropology, the Anglosphere is falling into line against the Global South. This is simply a postmodern form of cultural imperialism in a progressive religious disguise.

As Murray suggests, while women's rights, racial equality and minority rights such as gay rights are among the best products of liberalism, they make destabilising foundations, because each is profoundly unstable in itself. While each issue is presented as settled and agreed upon, their contradictions, fabrications and fantasies are visible to all. Unmasking the untruths isn't just discouraged, it's outlawed. As a result, we're forced to agree "to things which we cannot believe". Hence our cultural derangement, even in the Church, where we're asked to unsee what we've seen, unlearn what we've learned, and unknow what we've known, lest we be labelled hateful and bigoted.

While it's understandable for Anglicans in the Anglosphere to see themselves as divine protectors of the Enlightenment, this is hubris. The Enlightenment is incomplete. Any freedoms it bestows are meant to be guaranteed by secular authority. That's what the separation of church and state is supposed to be about. Apart from this, individualism isn't a characteristic of Catholic authority.

Ultimately, for Christians, all authority comes from Christ: who he is, what he does, what he asks us to be and become. How is Christ known and mediated? The traditional Catholic answer is through the Church. The traditional Protestant answer is through Christ himself, via individual believers as free-will agents. Of course, this is complex, and history is littered with spectacular failures from both sides. Hopefully, we'll get the balance right someday. That won't be easy.

What's the role of God's word—Sacred Scripture—in mediating God's will? For Davies, the function of episcopal authority must be "consistent with the teaching of the Bible" and "the commands and doctrine of Christ". Inevitably, this view is mocked as biblical literalism or belittled as Christian fundamentalism. The historical reasons for this should be noticed. For most Anglicans, the claim to be anti- or non-Evangelical is often an ambit claim to Catholicity.

Of course, this isn't true—disdain for Evangelicals is never a *de facto* mark of Catholicity—and the claim comes from an unfortunate place. To a large degree, the identity of non-Evangelical Anglicans—



including Anglo-Catholics—depends on a grammar of disdain, still reserved for Evangelicals, which in some respects parallels the teaching of contempt once reserved for Jews. As with anti-Semitism, this grammar is unconscious, like breathing. If we couldn't use it, it's doubtful we'd have any Anglican identity at all.

What's the role of God's *pneuma*—the Holy Spirit—in mediating God's will? Traditionally, Anglicans and Catholics kneel during ordinations to the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate, while a hymn invoking the Holy Spirit is sung. This Holy Spirit—the Third Person of the Trinity—was poured out upon the disciples in the upper room at the first Pentecost, the Church's official birth date. Of course, the Church places boundaries around manifestations of the Holy Spirit, for practical reasons, because anyone can claim to be inspired. Divine inspiration can seem fickle, when it tells one person one thing and another person something else entirely. Interpreting God's will, in the power of the Holy Spirit, must be an authoritative process if the interpretation is to have authority. The biggest challenges to clerical and episcopal authority have been the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse, followed by the #MeToo movement and its push to believe the testimony of women, without evidence, simply because they're women.

What's the role of democracy—or synodical government—in mediating God's will? Wherever it exists, Anglicanism has developed governing structures for the Church that parallel the governing structures of the state. What happened in TEC under Jefferts Schori would be harder to accomplish in, say, Australia or England, given their Westminster structures. Still, Anglican churches have always been structured around bishops, without whom they couldn't function, even in Evangelical dioceses. There seems to be a widespread assumption that Anglican governance is democratic, which is somehow a manifestation of God's will. This is a strange assumption, as Christ's parables reveal God's will, like God's kingdom, to be filled with a love that isn't democratic.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference passed Resolution I.10 on Human Sexuality by a large majority (526 to 70). To paraphrase, the resolution:

- upholds faithfulness in marriage between a

man and a woman in lifelong union and believes abstinence is right for those not called to marriage;

- recognises there are among us persons with a homosexual orientation who are members of the Church. We wish to assure them they are loved by God. All baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;

- calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals;

- cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions, nor the ordination of those involved in such unions.

By any measure which isn't Cultural Marxist, this resolution is a sensitive pastoral response to a difficult pastoral situation. It's "consistent with the teaching of the Bible" and "the commands and doctrine of Christ". It understands that Anglicans must be in the world but not of the world.

The problem is that real power in Anglicanism is held by progressive elites from the Anglosphere, with vested interests, who set the agenda. As important as it is, the fact that most Anglicans, and most bishops, are from more conservative parts of the world is irrelevant. The bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference smelled a rat and passed Resolution I.10 fully expecting it to have authority. What's happened, instead, is that Resolution I.10 has been sabotaged consistently, making the Archbishop of Canterbury

Justin Welby look hapless and ineffective. In 2016 TEC was suspended from the Communion's standing committees for three years, for having changed its marriage canon without consultation, but that suspension has been circumvented and TEC, a church with a disproportionate number of bishops, will vote as a progressive block at Lambeth 2020.

For years orthodox Anglicans called on progressive provinces to accept the authority of Resolution I.10 to no avail. When bishops from these progressive provinces were invited to the Lambeth Conference in 2008, a group of 291 bishops and 1148 laity and clergy met in Jerusalem to consider how to take a stand against the progressive gospel being preached in the Anglosphere. At that moment GAFCON (Global Anglican Futures Conference) was born. The movement has grown steadily, as the progressive Anglosphere continues to compromise the truth of the gospel. I attended GAFCON in

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Jerusalem in 2018, with 1950 delegates from fifty countries, including 316 bishops, 669 other clergy (including many women) and 965 laity. The theme was “Proclaiming Christ Faithfully to the Nations”. I found it an exhilarating experience and, ironically, a profoundly Catholic one.

Newman is often called the father of Vatican II, as his inspiration is everywhere obvious in its documents. One of his influential writings was *On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine* (1859). What does this look like, in a Catholic Church where the Council of Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II created a more clerical and papal Church—dependent solely on bishops, especially the Bishop of Rome—despite what Catholic theology of the laity teaches?

While *Catholic* traditionally implied deference to authority, central control and rubber-stamping decisions already made, Pope Francis is trying to shift from a *conciliar* model, of pope and bishops,

to a *synodical* model—at the provincial and diocesan levels—with increased participation from laity and women. The relationship between Francis and the Synod of Bishops sums up the idea of reform in his pontificate. Francis believes Church reform begins with a change of mentality, spiritual change, not just legislative or institutional change. It means devolving responsibility to where it belongs—like Anglicanism—at the level of provincial and diocesan synods. Since the Reformation, conciliarity was framed in ways that prevented local or national synods from taking place. Francis’s vision of *synodality* is aimed at reshaping the way the Church conceives *conciliarity*.

Typically, conservatives see this model as too modern to be Catholic; progressives see it as too Catholic to be modern.

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## Amateur Theatrics 1

### Exit the King

Playing the King in Eugène Ionesco’s *Le Roi se meurt*

Occupying the space where self was king,  
other players fragments of that same self,  
relentless in filling the stage with life—  
then death, lingering in death,  
taking all with me. Erasing all life,  
(existentialist as nihilist).

Living and dying as king for a season,  
night after night for the play’s iterations.  
Ionesco’s the words, mine the soul  
that swelled to royal illusion.  
Masked as king, I drew all into my self  
and died. The collusion drained me.

## Amateur Theatrics 2

Playing *Le Malade imaginaire* (Molière)

French farce requires delicacy of timing,  
lightness of touch, intimacy of movement,  
the imaginary invalid and his maid  
locked in their choreography of satire.

The audience laughed on their wavelength,  
even those who didn’t follow Molière’s French,  
as the mad couple manufactured mock anger  
and traded magnified miscomprehensions.

Invisible to those in the auditorium  
behind the masks of farce  
were tiny hitches, hesitations,  
awkwardnesses of high significance.

The maid and the *malade* had just split up.

**Ted Witham**