

The Global Anglican Communion

Contending for
Anglicanism
1993-2018

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against his people, and he will contend with Israel. (Micah 6:2)

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

I am not a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I have been a watchman of Anglican affairs over the past quarter century, first in the Episcopal Church USA, then in the wider Anglican Communion, and I do have a dispute with the Church establishment. Much of what I have observed and commented on over these years can be characterized as a battle for the soul of our Anglican heritage. Hence I have described these essays as *contending* for Anglicanism.

Being contentious does not necessarily mean being merely contrarian. Thankfully, we have the example of Martin Luther, whose Ninety-Five Theses led to a revival of Gospel faith and a reform of the church throughout Europe. Again, I am no Luther, but I do hope that my theses in these essays may build up even as they tear down. St. Paul advises: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Rom 12:9). My hope is that readers will find in these essays not only warnings against false teaching but also loving witness to the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and to the Lord of the Church.

In particular, I want to commend to readers the vision of a renewed and reformed Global Anglican Communion, a communion of churches which builds on the heritage of the Church of England and represents the emerging leadership of formerly colonial Anglican churches, with the oversight of doctrine and discipline shifted from Canterbury to the Global South.

I am contending that the providential judgment of God has fallen upon the Mother Church and her North American enablers. I am not the first to foresee this eventuality. Five hundred years ago, the poet and Anglican priest George Herbert wrote of the “Church Militant”:

Religion stands on tip-toe in this land,
Ready to pass over to the American strand.

And so it happened, largely propelled by marginalized English Puritans, Methodists and Baptists. Herbert went on to note:

Yet as the Church shall thither westward fly,
So Sin shall trace and dog her instantly.

Herbert may have foreseen the inevitable rise of American power and corruption, but I doubt he imagined the advent of a global Communion, which is in fact something of a miracle.

Why did the nations of the Global South not expel the Anglican churches along with the colonial governors? The reasons are complex, but one central reason is that Anglicanism, outside its external trappings, contained the Word of God in Scripture. “When the [Church Missionary Society] came, they came holding the Bible,” one delegate to Lambeth 1998 argued. “Therefore, we accept the Scripture as the most authentic we should follow.” This conviction lies behind the prophetic indictment of the 2008 Jerusalem Statement. Having detailed the crisis that has

torn the fabric of the Communion beyond repair, it goes on to say:

Our fellowship is not breaking away from the Anglican Communion. We, together with many other faithful Anglicans throughout the world, believe the doctrinal foundation of Anglicanism, which defines our core identity as Anglicans, is expressed in these words: *The doctrine of the Church is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular, such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal.* We intend to remain faithful to this standard, and we call on others in the Communion to reaffirm and return to it. While acknowledging the nature of Canterbury as an historic see, we do not accept that Anglican identity is determined necessarily through recognition by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Ten years on, I believe the indictment remains true. The stubborn refusal of Canterbury to recognize GAFCON and the vicious legal pursuit of our clergy and churches in North America by the Episcopal Church confirms the judgment. They will not repent. They will not change. But neither will the bold statement I heard repeatedly while in Jerusalem change: “We are not leaving. We *are* the Anglican Communion.”

I am not a prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I can refer to the prophets of old. In the late 8th century BC, Amos saw judgment coming upon the idolatrous and iniquitous kingdom of Israel:

This is what he showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” (Amos 7:7-9)

Where there is prophetic judgment, there is also prophetic hope. “The seed is the stump,” says Isaiah (6:13). Western Anglicanism is being cut down to the roots; the seed of the Anglican future lies in the Global South. That seed has taken root and flourished in many ways. Will it continue to grow to revive the Communion? I cannot see the future with certainty, but I believe the opportunity is there, and the fields are ripe for harvest.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This volume is an anthology of my writings addressing various situations and audiences over the past twenty-five years. It is not intended to be read through cover-to-cover, except by OCD-prone Anglicanophiles. Several essays were written for bishops and other church leaders (Essays 1,9,10,11, and 12). Others were presented to a non-specialist but well-informed audience (Essays 2,3,4, and 7). Still others were aimed at a more general audience (Essays 5,6, and 8). Some were previously published.

The ordering of these essays is generally but not necessarily chronological. The logic of the collection is this:

SECTION ONE

Identifies three essential doctrines – paving stones on the royal way – that have come under attack in the modern-postmodern era, and have precipitated the crisis of Anglican identity:

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

- The doctrine of Scripture (inspiration and interpretation);
- The doctrine of human nature (anthropology), especially of sexuality and marriage; and
- The doctrine of the church (ecclesiology).

SECTION TWO

Describes the two historic conferences in contemporary Anglican history – the 1998 Lambeth Conference and the 2008 Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem; and it explains the two principal documents that emerged from each conference – Lambeth Resolution I.10 on Human Sexuality and the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration.

SECTION THREE

Examines the after-effects of the “sea change” in the Anglican Communion:

- The reform of the Communion governance, including the role of Canterbury;
- The realignment of the Global South and Gafcon movements; and
- The call to the church to contend for the faith as she awaits Jesus’ coming in glory.

Readers may find parts of these essays overlapping and redundant, as I have rehearsed the history and principles of contemporary Anglicanism in different times and contexts. Some of the following essays in this volume were published previously. If there is any lesson in such repetition, perhaps it is that my vision of God’s activity in the Anglican Communion has been consistent.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Here are a few editorial comments about the essays:

- Apart from the introductions to each essay, I have not sought to update the original texts in light of subsequent events. I have made a few minor edits and additions for the sake of brevity and clarity.
- These essays were written for various audiences, and I have retained the original British and American orthography and honorifics for God (He/His/Him). I have relegated footnotes to endnotes for the sake of continuity of my argument. I have the typography, terminology and references of the original essays that reflect American, British and African peculiarities.
- The term “Global South” is inexact. It is more a *cultural* than a political, economic, or even geographical marker. Hence it is most often contrasted with the “West.” From this perspective, Singapore is part of the Global South, while Australia is part of the “West.” While I generally follow this terminology, in some earlier essays I speak of the “Third World.”
- I shall refer to the “Global South Anglican Network” or “South-to-South network” for the association of Anglican churches that has met regularly since 1994. Originally a Communion-sponsored entity, it has become increasingly independent of Canterbury, with its own governance structure. All GAFCON provinces, including the Anglican Church in North America, are also members of the Global South Anglican Network, and the leadership of both groups are working toward further unity.
- “GAFCON” originally referred to the Global Anglican Future Conference in 2008, whereas the legal entity

that emerged from it was called the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA) and then the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GFCA). The name “Gafcon,” however ungainly, has stuck and is commonly used for the entire movement that began in Jerusalem in 2008. While most Gafcon Provinces are located in the Global South, the movement is not regionally focused and includes branches in the West.

MY ROLE

I am not a bishop, nor a bishop’s son. Hence my role in the events of this period has been not that of a decision-maker but of an observer, scribe and sometime advisor.

I came to Christ - rather He came to me – as a university student, and I was baptized, confirmed, married and ordained in the Episcopal Church. I had an active five years of ministry in a charismatic renewal parish and returned for doctoral study with the hope of strengthening the renewal of the Episcopal Church through biblical and theological teaching. I was fortunate that Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry had opened in 1976 and offered me a position in 1979. I went on to be Professor of Biblical Studies and Academic Dean there.

It was in those roles at Trinity that I entered into my first skirmish in the Episcopal Church. In 1987, the Episcopal Church began drafting “inclusive language” (for God) liturgies and sought to employ the seminaries as boosters for its agenda. We at Trinity concluded that we could not in good conscience worship with these rites and were therefore excluded from the survey –“How can you critique Baal-worship if you haven’t experienced it?” I did, however, write a faculty critique of the theology behind the proposed revision, arguing that biblical language for God was not revisable.

I became involved again in 1992, when the Episcopal House of Bishops Theology Committee chose four seminary professors to write position papers on the interpretation and authority of the Bible. That led to my essay “Reading the Bible as the Word of God” (Essay 1). Once again in 1997 the Episcopal House of Bishops sought guidance from the seminaries on a Resolution calling for “rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex.” On behalf of the Trinity faculty, I produced a book-length reply: *Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Marriage*, excerpted here (Essay 2).

Earlier that year, I had been asked to help write legal briefs in the church trial of Bishop Walter Righter, who had knowingly ordained a practicing homosexual. The trial ended in his exoneration and coincided with the formation of a confessing body, the American Anglican Council, of which I was a founding board member. Through the AAC, I wrote articles and pamphlets leading up to and reporting from the Lambeth Conference in 1998 (Essays 5 and 6). I was also a founding member of a group of Anglican scholars – “Scholarly Engagement with Anglican Doctrine” (SEAD) – and on occasion I addressed its offspring the Mere Anglicanism Conference (Essay 4).

In 1999, my wife and I sensed a missionary call to move to Uganda, where I became the first Vice Chancellor (President) of Uganda Christian University. From 2000 to 2010, I worked closely with leaders of church and state in forming a university that was noted for its academic and professional excellence and for its unapologetic Christian character. While there, we hosted a variety of Anglican dignitaries to the campus, including Rowan Williams, George Carey and Frank Griswold.

In 2006, Archbishop Peter Akinola commissioned me, along with Archbishop Nicholas Okoh and Bishop Zac

Niringiye, to work up “The Road to Lambeth” statement. This statement, which was sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury, was the warning shot across the bow that led ultimately to the rival conferences in 2008, one in Jerusalem and one in Canterbury.

Beginning in 2007, I was a member of the Theological Resource Group that prepared materials for the Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem. At the Conference I led a session with Dr. Ashley Null on Anglican Ecclesiology and served on the group that produced the conference statement, including the Jerusalem Declaration (Essays 3 and 8). At GAFCON 2013 in Nairobi, I wrote a preparatory article on Communion governance (Essay 9), moderated a session on “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit” and helped write the conference statement.

During the time in Uganda and subsequently, I participated in meetings of the Global South network: in Cairo (2005, 2016), Kigali (2006), and Singapore (2010). I have been concerned throughout this time to promote the harmony and ultimate union of these two parallel and overlapping constituencies (Essay 10). On my return to the USA in 2010, I continued to travel internationally and gave two plenary addresses in Nigeria (Essay 11).

I was present to vote with my Diocese of Pittsburgh to depart the Episcopal Church in October 2008, the very month I was awarded an honorary doctorate (Essay 12). I am now a priest of the Anglican Church in North America and Chairman of the Task Force on Marriage, the Family and the Single Life. In 2013, Archbishop Robert Duncan appointed me Special Advisor to the Archbishop on the Global Anglican Future and ACNA member of the Gafcon Theological Commission. In 2014, the Gafcon Primates authorized a “Task Force on Women in the Episcopate” to

address an important issue which has divided the Communion, and I was named Convener along with the Chairman, Bishop Samson Mwaluda from Kenya. The Primates received our initial recommendations in April 2017 and authorized further consultations with regional provincial bodies leading up to GAFCON 2018.

Section One

Preparing the Way

Bible, Marriage and Church

A Roman road or *via* was known for two features; it was straight and it was well paved. Many of these Roman roads, wonders of ancient engineering and construction, are visible today. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the desert: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his way straight” (John 1:23). John was pointing to the Lord Jesus, who says: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). The early church was known first as “the Way” (Acts 9:2), which spoke of the believers’ single-minded commitment to the Good News of salvation in Christ and founded on the apostles’ teaching and fellowship. This Good News was carried by St. Paul and other Evangelists along the Roman roads of the Mediterranean world “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

The church in our day has been challenged to maintain that way. Since the 1960s, the Episcopal Church and other Western churches have been undermining the road, removing the ancient paving stones, and leaving behind huge potholes for people to stumble into. Three of those paving stones are *the*

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authority of the Bible, the divine institution of marriage, and the doctrine and discipline of the church. On three occasions, I found myself in the position of contending for these foundation stones of the Way.

ESSAY 1

READING THE BIBLE AS THE
WORD OF GOD

(1993)

At the 1991 Episcopal General Convention, Bishop William Frey had proposed a canon that “all members of this Church shall abstain from genital relations outside of holy matrimony.” The proposal failed to carry. Opponents claimed that this proposal derived from a defective “hermeneutic” of Scripture. The task of solving this defect was referred to the House of Bishops Theology Committee. The bishops appointed four writers – a liberal low-churchman (Professor Charles Price of Virginia Theological Seminary), a liberal high-churchman (Professor Richard Norris of the General Theological Seminary), a feminist liberationist (Professor Ellen Wondra of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School), and a conservative (yours truly). We were asked to define our doctrine of Scripture and interpretation and to relate it to the contemporary church and issues facing it.

In September 1992, the four writers presented their papers to the House of Bishops at their annual meeting. The bishops met and discussed the papers in table groups (this is now known as “indaba”). When the table groups reported back, they came to a happy consensus about the rich diversity of opinion in Anglicanism. Or as the Dodo puts it in *Alice in Wonderland*: “Everyone has won and all must have prizes!” In my view, this “rich diversity” fulfilled J. V. Langmead Casserley’s critique of biblical criticism: “We are confronted with the paradox of a way of studying the Word of God out of which no Word of God ever seems to come.” The net result of this exercise was to liberate the Episcopal leadership to do whatever

they wished concerning any issue arising from the culture – and they would have no trouble finding some distinguished biblical scholar to support them.

In my essay, I chose to defend the “literal sense” of reading the Bible. Many colleagues urged me not to use this term on grounds that it would tar me as a “fundamentalist.” I chose to accept that risk because to me it raised the issue of whether the Bible is God’s Word written (Anglican Article XX). In my critiques, I argued that each of the other writers in one way or another claimed an alternative authority – agape, conversation, imagination – which allowed them in effect to undermine the authority of God’s word in the Bible.

I argue in this essay that the “literal sense” of Scripture is not the same as a “literalist” reading. For instance, I reject the view that “if the whale did not swallow Jonah, then Jesus did not rise from the dead.” I make two main clarifications of the literal sense. The first is the idea that Scripture is a threefold cord having a “truth dimension,” a “poetic dimension,” as well as a “salvation-historical dimension.” One must consider, before pronouncing on its meaning, the genre of the Book of Jonah, Jesus’ use of the “sign of Jonah” as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and the attested fact of the Empty Tomb and his resurrection from the dead (Matthew 12:38-42; 27:57-28:8).

The second clarification is that the literal meaning of Scripture “maneuvers from the truth to the whole truth” (a phrase from Meir Sternberg). The depth of God’s Word means that its overarching message is available to the ordinary reader as well as to the scholar. The clarity of Scripture does not mean that every reader will come up with identical conclusions; the history of interpretation, even among those with a high view of biblical inspiration, belies this view. Having said this, Anglicans have agreed on understanding the Bible as “containing all things necessary to salvation” and as being “the rule and

ultimate standard of faith” (Lambeth Quadrilateral #1). They have also agreed on the unity of God’s Word, “marking” this text with that text. One may debate, for instance, how precisely to understand and apply St. Paul’s warning to “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18), but one cannot “imaginatively construe” it to say “free fornication” or “feel fornication”!

Let me note for the record that the GAFCON Statement Committee on which I served weighed how to formulate Anglican biblical authority and interpretation and came up with this clause for the Jerusalem Declaration:

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the historic and consensual reading. (Jerusalem Declaration, clause 2)

I find myself in full agreement with this statement.

WORDS AND THE WORD

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN CRISIS

As is now widely acknowledged, the fault lines that run through the Christian church on matters of theology and ethics, evangelism and apologetics, are manifestations of a tectonic shift in worldviews in which “hermeneutics,” or biblical interpretation, plays a central role.¹ To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, all interpret the same Bible, but the interpretation of all cannot be equally valid or the Bible ceases to have any coherent authority. Although hermeneutics since Schleiermacher has held out the dream of a path between ancient text and modern believer, it has produced instead a

dense undergrowth of theories whose applicability to central Christian affirmations is confusing at best.

My goal in this essay is to argue that the classic way of reading scripture is in terms of its *literal sense* and that this approach remains normative and credible for the church today. I am aware of the danger involved in attempting to rehabilitate the word “literal,” as its meaning is frequently caricatured or trivialized. Since the advent of the scientific revolution, “literal” has often been taken narrowly to mean “factual” or “empirically and historically verifiable.”² Hence some fundamentalists have sought to “prove” the literal character of Genesis 1 by means of “creation science.”³ Some liberals, on the other hand, have attacked plain biblical teaching as mindless “literalism.”⁴ For all this potential confusion of terminology, “literal sense” has a long and honorable place in the history of interpretation. Its very scandalousness points to crucial issues of the faith that face the contemporary church.⁵ Simply to grade the essays in this volume along a conservative-liberal-radical scale would miss the distinctive character of classical and modernist approaches to the Bible.⁶

I begin this chapter with a meditation on the Johannine presentation of Word and Spirit and its relevance for understanding the Bible as the inspired Word of God. I shall then survey the church’s tradition of literal interpretation as a more or less consistent application of this apostolic understanding. Finally, I shall return to a restatement of the approach to the literal sense of the Bible that is faithful to the past yet aware of problematic issues in modern hermeneutics.

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE LITERAL SENSE

The literal sense of scripture can only be rightly understood as a *reflex* of the Word of God, that is, the

appropriate medium of understanding that accompanies verbal revelation and inspiration. When after each lection in the liturgy we announce “the Word of the Lord,” we are attesting to the authoritative character of a particular text in all its specificity, even as we are also claiming that text as a part of the whole message of salvation received and proclaimed by the church in word and sacrament.

The prologue to John’s Gospel sets *Logos* as the supreme category of understanding the revelatory activity of the Triune God in his ordering of creation, his prophetic message to Israel, his incarnate Person and work, and in the believing response of the community to his revealed glory.⁷

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The inner-Trinitarian love of the Father and the Son is bathed in the light of the divine speech, what Athanasius called God’s “intimate locution.” As Pannenberg says: “The way in which Jesus speaks of the Father is the only access to knowledge of the Father, but also of the Son, for only through the Father is Jesus known as the Son (Matt. 11:27).”⁸

By Him all things were made... (John 1:3)

God’s Word upholds the cosmos in its orderliness, and humanity in God’s image participates *mirabile dictu* in created rationality. The Word of God not only forms us after himself but makes room for our free response. Psalm 19 captures the manifold wisdom of God’s Word:

“The heavens are telling the glory of God ... the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul... may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight.”