

# Approaching an Evangelical Anglican concept of authority

**Robert S. Heaney**

*Robert S. Heaney is an Anglican priest and member of Regent's Park College, University of Oxford. At present he is doing research on post-colonial theology in Africa.*

Keywords: Anglicanism, Authority, Bebbington, Bishops, Catholicity, Evangelicalism, *The Windsor Report*.

## 1. Introduction

*The Windsor Report (TWR)* identifies authority as 'the key' to the crisis regarding human sexuality in the Anglican Communion.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is therefore twofold. First, a definition for evangelical Anglicanism with specific reference to the issue of authority will be submitted. Second, given this definition, a practical understanding of authority within the context of recent controversy will be approached. This article will not seek to defend an evangelical understanding of Anglicanism nor will it seek to critique *TWR*. Rather, given an evangelical identity, the task will be a constructive one. That is to say, the purpose of this study is to propose an understanding of authority that might cohere with the evangelical tradition's belief and practice.

## 2. An understanding of Evangelical Anglicanism

Much evangelicalism arose from within Anglicanism. Equally, because of evangelical convictions some seceded from Anglicanism.<sup>2</sup> It can be argued therefore that what continues to distinguish evangelical Anglicans from others in the evangelical tradition is a sustained commitment to a particular form of ecclesiology. Despite shared convictions within the evangelical tradition, evangelical Anglicans are committed to the Anglican expression of Christianity as an eminently effective model to serve the mission of God in the world.<sup>3</sup> For this reason,

- 
- 1 Robin Eames, 'Foreword' in *TWR*, 4. See *TWR*, 23-42; Anglican Mainstream UK and The Church of England Evangelical Council, *Repair the Tear: The Windsor Report: An Assessment and Call for Action*, 2004 (*RTT*), 9; Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Authority in the Church*, 1976 (*AIRC*), I:2, IV:18; Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Authority in the Church II*, 1982 (*AIRC-2*), 23-24. Other issues are at stake in the current crisis including understandings of communion and sexual ethics. However, to consider these is not the task of the present study.
  - 2 Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 391-98.

the tradition under consideration here will be described by the noun *Anglican* and only adjectivally as *evangelical*.

In tracing the genesis of the movement, David Bebbington identifies *bibli-ism*, *crucicentrism*, *activism*, and *conversionism* as foundational characteristics of evangelicalism.<sup>4</sup> Despite the wide acceptance of Bebbington's characterisation there is rightly, however, some unease amongst evangelical Anglicans that their understanding of the Christian faith is to be demythologised simply as 'created by the Enlightenment' or reduced to four attributes.<sup>5</sup> This study will accept that, in broad terms, Bebbington's quadrilateral, beginning as it does with historical practice, is helpful in providing a framework for understanding evangelicalism generally and evangelical Anglicanism specifically. However, as will be demonstrated presently, Bebbington's thesis will not go without critique and where necessary, it will be supplemented with specifically Anglican material.

### 2.1 Scriptural authority

*Contra* Bebbington, Kenneth Stewart is right to argue for an evangelical identity which he calls 'successionist'.<sup>6</sup> Because evangelical Anglicans remain aware of the charge that they are 'a new, and rather brash phenomenon' successionism is particularly important to them.<sup>7</sup> Thus J. I. Packer argues:

...[Evangelical] emphases mark mainstream Christianity across the board, more or less. All evangelicals could claim is that they maintain them more insistently and consistently than do others.<sup>8</sup>

Randle Manwaring is correct: evangelicals '...stand for what they regard as historic Anglicanism with their emphasis upon the veracity of Scripture as the sole authority for faith and life.'<sup>9</sup> For evangelicals, the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* means that the Bible is sufficient for the church's knowledge of God, it possesses inner clarity, it reveals God's will for life, and therefore medi-

3 Paul Gardner, Chris Green and Chris Wright, 'Introduction' in Paul Gardner, Chris Wright and Chris Green (eds.), *Fanning the Flame: Bible, Cross and Mission: Meeting the Changing World: Resource Materials for NEAC 4 2003* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 7-9.

4 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-4.

5 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 74. David Wells, 'On Being Evangelical' in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk (eds.), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 389-410.

6 Kenneth J. Stewart, 'Did evangelicalism predate the eighteenth century? An examination of David Bebbington's thesis', *Evangelical Quarterly* 77 (2005), 135-53.

7 Peter Ackroyd, 'Anglican Evangelicals and the Cross' in *Fanning*, 151.

8 J. I. Packer, 'Maintaining Evangelical Theology' in John G. Stackhouse (ed.), *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; Leicester: IVP and Vancouver: Regent College, 2000), 183.

9 Randle Manwaring, *From Controversy to Co-Existence. Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1914-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xi, see 43-44, 191.

ates the sovereign authority of God to the church (Article VI).<sup>10</sup>

For John Stott, evangelicalism is '...original, apostolic, New Testament Christianity.'<sup>11</sup> Apostolicity is therefore a key concept closely intertwined with an evangelical understanding of biblical authority:

...Jesus, the true Israelite and the new Adam, sums up the law and the prophets. We find an order in creation which the resurrection of Jesus renews and confirms. The apostolicity of the church of Christ is accountable to this doctrinal and ethical tradition – departure from that means departure from real catholicity...The picture of the church constantly moving from the past into the future, making new syntheses as she progresses, may fail to give sufficient weight to the normative phase of the apostolic tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Such a successionist view with its emphasis on the apostolic age results in a more nuanced evangelical Anglican understanding of biblical authority than is sometimes assumed. Such nuance will include a strong ecclesial understanding of authority. Hermeneutics are always carried out within the context of communities of faith placed in time and space.<sup>13</sup> An evangelical understanding of biblical authority should not therefore be seen as a naïve literalism or rejection of tradition. For evangelical Anglicans explicitly affirm that authority is never divorced from reasoned interpretation within the fellowship of tradition and contemporary belief.<sup>14</sup> Therefore authority should not be divorced from love. Unfortunately, this contextual and 'catholic' awareness of biblical authority has not always prevailed. There is little doubt that 'tribalism' is evangelicalism's besetting sin and tragically, it is often the issue of scriptural authority which creates the deepest divisions.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2 Cross-centred

10 Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty Nine Articles: A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986), 49-53. See Basil Meeking and John R. W. Stott, *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977-1984: A Report (ERCDOM)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 18-20.

11 John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity and Faithfulness* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 16. Cf. David L. Edwards with John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 37-39.

12 Timothy Bradshaw, 'Unity, Diversity and the Virginia Report' in Timothy Bradshaw (ed.), *Grace and Truth in the Secular Age* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 188-89.

13 Stephen Williams, 'The Theological Task and Theological Method' in *Futures*, 161-65. Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 55-66. *RTT*, 49-51, 93-94.

14 F. F. Bruce, 'Scripture in Relation to Tradition and Reason' in Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (eds.), *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Richard P. C. Hanson* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 35-64.

15 Gardner, Green and Wright, 'Introduction', 9-13. See *TWR*, 29, 50.

Evangelical *crucicentrism* should provide an appropriate corrective to the sometimes justified accusation of 'bibliolatry.' God became incarnate as a human being, not as a book.<sup>16</sup> Yet, evangelicals argue, the way in which contemporary believers come to know Jesus Christ is through the scriptures. Such knowledge of Christ can lead to fellowship with God through Christ's cross:<sup>17</sup>

[Jesus] suffers, dies, is buried and rises again as the one who, representing Israel, is fully fitted to stand in her place: and because Israel was God's means of saving the world, her anointed King dies and rises in the place of the world also...the Lion of Judah has stood in the place of all his 'brethren' the world over, and has taken upon himself the guilt, and the consequences, of their actual sin.<sup>18</sup>

A Bebbington-type thesis is correct in what it affirms at this point. However, it may undervalue the emphasis present also in evangelical thought that the cross should not be separated from the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Arguably, evangelicalism is crucicentric because it is first christocentric. Nonetheless, the fact remains that central to evangelicalism is the stress on the cross of Christ as the only answer to humanity's alienation from God and from each other.

The evangelical concern to keep the cross at the centre of religion fundamentally affects an understanding of authority. For such crucicentrism keeps religion under the authority and judgement of God:

...the gospel 'is not a truth among other truths'. If this is true, then the gospel sits rather uneasily with those styles of church life and theology which make a comfortable home for themselves in a particular culture...putting down roots and setting themselves the task of confirming, and perhaps ameliorating or even transforming, their environment. The sensitivity, good will and cultural and social scrupulousness with which such projects are undertaken may make it difficult for us to see how they always lie exposed to the very considerable danger of making the gospel about something less than God – and therefore something less than good news of God's utterly transformative action.<sup>19</sup>

Evangelical crucicentrism serves to remind the church that '...all history and culture and morals and religion are to be evaluated' by the gospel.<sup>20</sup> That all church practice takes place in the 'shadow of the cross' should not lead evan-

16 O'Donovan, *Thirty*, 50. Timothy Ward, 'The Bible, its Truth and How it Works' in *Fanning*, 18-19.

17 See Craig D. Allert, 'What Are We Trying to Conserve?: Evangelicalism and *Sola Scriptura*', *Evangelical Quarterly* 76:4 (2004), 332-46.

18 N. T. Wright, *Evangelical Anglican Identity: The Connection between Bible, Gospel and Church* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1980), 15.

19 John Webster, 'What Is the Gospel?' in *Grace*, 112.

20 Webster, 'Gospel', 113. See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (London: SPCK, 1995), 177-80; Rolf Ahlers, *The Barmen*

gelicalism into over confidence. Rather, that the judgement of culturally situated practices comes from beyond the church, should remind the evangelical that while one Lord of the church exists, diverse expressions of his church also exist. Church structures exist to serve the gospel. Church structures, while not unimportant for evangelical Anglicans, are relative to the climax of God's revelation in Christ's life, death and resurrection (Articles XXXIV, XXXVI).<sup>21</sup>

### 2.3 Mission-minded

Evangelical *activism* includes work in relief and development, publishing, broadcasting, education, music and evangelism. The inter-war period witnessed a decline in commitment to social responsibility. Manwaring overstates the issue, depicting evangelicals of the period as those who contributed '...little or nothing to political life or social well-being.'<sup>22</sup> Despite this, a belief that the gospel is about the transformation of societies as well as souls remained and was to be revived.<sup>23</sup>

Given that evangelical Anglicans accept that the church exists across denominational boundaries, it was inevitable that such activism would be transdenominational. While there is no small amount of debate and fragmentation within evangelicalism, its ecclesiological relativity has been translated into practical partnerships in the form of, for example, the Young Men's Christian Association (1844), the Evangelical Alliance (1846), Inter-Varsity Fellowship (1928), Tearfund (1968), the Shaftesbury Project (1969) and Jubilee 2000 (1994).<sup>24</sup>

Evangelicalism is at times depicted as standing against dialogue with non-Protestant expressions of Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Manwaring, however, sees the Congress on World Evangelism at Lausanne (1974) as marking '...the end of the dichotomy

*Declaration of 1934: The Archaeology of a Confessional Text* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 121-30; Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 93, 112-13.

21 The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *The Virginia Report (TVR)* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1997), I:1.11; *ERCDOM*, 81-82. See Colin Buchanan, *Is Papal Authority a Gift to Us?* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003), 7.

22 Manwaring, *Controversy*, 54.

23 David Bebbington, 'The Decline and Resurgence of Evangelical Social Concern 1918-1980' in John Wolfe (ed.), *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980* (London: SPCK, 1995), 177-94. Manwaring, *Controversy*, 19-20, 38-39, 48-49, 54-56.

24 Bebbington, 'Decline', 185. There is some disagreement about the genesis of the Jubilee 2000 movement. See Madeleine Bunting, 'Jubilee 2000' [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000\\_01/uk/dossier/txt08.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/2000_01/uk/dossier/txt08.htm).

25 If it is not justifiable, such ecumenical reluctance is understandable given the *Malines Report* (1928) and other developments. See Manwaring, *Controversy*, 30-38, 67, 81, 157-63, 184, 191-92, 206-208; Buchanan, *Papal*, 12-21; *ERCDOM*, 48-52; Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 342-50.

between Evangelicalism and ecumenism...'<sup>26</sup> Especially since that time there has been fruitful engagement with Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> In such practice, the theological conviction that church unity does not come primarily from denominational or ecumenical structures is confirmed. Unity exists as a result of faith placed in Christ and the shared experience of discipleship. *Koinonia* has an objective quality for evangelical Anglicans. Consequently, what will be of chief importance for them is not the ecclesiastical source of beliefs and practices, but whether such convictions are submitted to the lordship of Christ (Article XXXIV). Authority will not be understood or exercised primarily in managerial or *organisational* terms. Rather, authority will serve gospel activism thus *organically* growing to suit the circumstances and context of witness.<sup>28</sup> What is received by the church as authoritative must at least not interfere with the church's mission, and at most, should aid the church in its mission.

#### 2.4 Faith-inducing

*Conversionism* is the motivation behind much evangelical activity. John Stackhouse illustrates this vividly when he writes, '...evangelicals affirm that Christ has built the church on earth and maintains it here not merely, or even primarily, to praise, or to think, or to garden, but to make disciples.'<sup>29</sup> At worst, a conversionist emphasis denigrates any type of ministry other than evangelism.<sup>30</sup> At best, it promotes a holistic approach to ministry refusing to undervalue the psychological searching and questions that humans have. Orlando Costas, whilst an exponent of serious social engagement, is in no doubt as to the response needed to the gospel:

---

26 Manwaring, *Controversy*, 197. See Lukas Vischer, 'Major Trends in the Life of the Churches' in John Briggs et al. (eds.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: Volume 3: 1968-2000* (Geneva: WCC, 2004), 30-33; Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200-209; *ERCDOM*, 9-10, 29.

27 See Philip Crowe (ed.), *Keele '67: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress Statement* (London: Falcon, 1967), 36-40; *ERCDOM*, 1-12; Michael J. Christensen, 'Evangelical-Orthodox Dialogue in Russia on the Eve of the Tenth Anniversary of Chernobyl', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33 (1996), 82-86; Bradley Nassif, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: the Status of an Emerging Global Dialogue', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18 (2000), 21-55.

28 Timothy Bradshaw, *The Olive Branch: An Evangelical Anglican Doctrine of the Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 43-147; *RTT*, 79. See A. M. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* 2d ed. (London: Longmans, 1956), 47-50.

29 John G. Stackhouse, 'Evangelical Theology should be Evangelical' in *Futures*, 42. See Derek J. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 11-14.

30 'Social and philanthropic effort...have their places...but such is secondary to that which is spiritual.' I. R. Govan (founder of The Faith Mission) cited by Bebbington, 'Decline', 175.

No neutrality is allowed. One must choose whether or not to accept God's offer of grace...No half way is possible. One must repent, change his or her mind, abandon the old order of life, accept a new perspective on reality and adopt a new lifestyle. And one must believe in the good news – that is, trust in, adhere to and accept what God has done in his Son.<sup>31</sup>

While great importance is placed on the 'conversion experience' in evangelical Anglicanism, there is too a strong sense that 'coming to faith' is very often a gradual process.<sup>32</sup> There is, nonetheless, the consistent affirmation by evangelicals that each believer must appropriate the benefits of the cross-work of Christ. In light of this belief, evangelicals hold to the image of the church being both visible and mystical.<sup>33</sup>

Visibly, the covenant historical community of the church is made up of the baptized who are on their way to faith, in faith, on the periphery of faith, and those who are apparently abandoning the faith.<sup>34</sup> While such an understanding of ecclesiology creates an inclusive and broad church, too often for evangelicals it creates the opportunity to stand in judgement of those with different views. Especially in the recent crisis, evangelicals would do well to hear again Richard Holloway's challenge: "Amazing Grace" used to be the great love song of evangelicalism. What happened to it?<sup>35</sup>

Mystically, the church is the fellowship of those who are trusting alone in the merits of the unseen Christ for communion with God and his saints. Evangelical Anglicans have at times separated the mystical understanding of the church from an understanding of the church visible. This has led to ill-informed and theologically confused practices amongst them such as refusing to have infants baptized or re-baptizing those who were baptized as infants. But the mystical and invisible church is simply, 'the church as known by God.' It numbers those enjoined to the community of faith by baptism, and those joined to God through Christ by faith. An evangelical catholicity depends largely on this mystical understanding of the church where, 'The spiritual church is the church, united with the Lord and, leaving aside the unseen "cloud of witnesses" who are with God... this spiritual church is the physical, tangible and audible family of God.' It is this church catholic, from all denominations and none, involved in daily renewal which awaits its recreation and reunion with the head of the church.<sup>36</sup>

---

31 Orlando E. Costas, *The Integrity of Mission: The Inner Life and Outreach of the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 8-9.

32 *ERCDOM*, 57. See Orlando E. Costas, *Liberating News: A Theology of Contextual Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 112-30.

33 *ERCDOM*, 58.

34 Articles XIX; XXVI.

35 Richard Holloway, 'Evangelicalism: An Outsider's Perspective' in R. T. France and A. E. McGrath (eds.), *Evangelical Anglicans: Their Role and Influence in the Church Today* (London: SPCK, 1993), 183.

36 Bradshaw, *Olive*, 142-43. See Ramsey, *Gospel*, 34-54.

### 3. An Evangelical Anglican practice of authority

The proposed definition of evangelical Anglicanism brings together theological convictions arising from lived practice and a conviction that Anglican ecclesiology is missiologically effective. Arising from such a definition and the already identified implications such characteristics might have for authority, this section will explicitly establish four principles that might be included in an evangelical Anglican understanding and practice of authority.

#### 3.1 Ecclesial hermeneutics: apostolicity

Because evangelical Anglicans argue that the scriptures are sufficient, clear and authoritative (2.1), hermeneutics are democratised. Apostolicity is therefore not inherently related to office or hierarchy, but to understanding and submission to scripture in fellowship. Evangelicals welcome *TWR's* call for ECUSA to justify its actions in relation to scripture.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the response of ECUSA in *To Set Our Hope on Christ (TSOHOC)* is weak. For example, it understands St. Paul's letters as, 'advice from a trusted apostle':

...members of the churches who received them probably felt free to argue with him about what was natural and unnatural...Does this mean we can no longer engage with Paul if he were a living conversation partner? We do not believe so.<sup>38</sup>

For evangelical Anglicans, such an assessment of the apostle's writings falls short of what would be expected of a church affirming the Lambeth Quadrilateral<sup>39</sup> and convinced that 'The Holy Scriptures...are the ultimate standard of faith...'<sup>40</sup> In place of the primacy given to scripture there seems to be in *TSOHOC* 'Criteriologically...a shift of emphasis, from the normative function of antiquity, to that of the living voice today.'<sup>41</sup>

Evangelical Anglicans would no doubt argue that this apostolic primacy is not

37 *TWR*, 135, 141. See *To Set Our Hope on Christ: A Response to the Invitation of Windsor Report ¶135 (TSOHOC)* (New York: The Office of Communication, 2005), I:1.1; Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions, *The St. Michael Report (SMR)* (Toronto: The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 2005), 9-11.

38 *TSOHOC*, II:2.21b.

39 Robert B. Slocum, 'The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral Development in an Anglican Approach to Christian Unity', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33 (1996), 473.

40 House of Bishops (ECUSA) statement, *Moral and Theological Principles* [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress\\_release.pl?pr\\_number=83189](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/ENS/ENSpress_release.pl?pr_number=83189). At its founding ECUSA stated that '...this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship...' *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 11. See Frederick V. Mills, *Bishops by Ballot: An Eighteenth-Century Ecclesiastical Revolution* (New York: O.U.P., 1978).

41 Nicholas Lash cited by Tim Bradshaw, 'Primacy and Authority in the ARCIC Report', *Theology* 89 (1986), 25.

synonymous with a static understanding of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the world. Rather, apostolic primacy is the indispensable root at the base of the church.<sup>42</sup> In sum, a faithful understanding of the biblical text will need to be informed (dialogically) not only by the clerical 'crown' of the organism, but by the lay branches. Practically, this will mean an affirmation of the local church as a place where understanding is sought in the context of sacrament, word and service.<sup>43</sup> If this indeed reflects an evangelical Anglican understanding of the practice of scriptural authority, it is surprising that they have followed the bureaucratic pattern where authoritative texts are produced primarily by clergy and professional theologians.<sup>44</sup> It would appear to be more consistent with an evangelical understanding of authority to also establish predominantly lay and theologically non-professional commissions on matters of importance. All Christians, by virtue of baptism, share in the apostolic ministry of the church.<sup>45</sup>

An understanding of authority consistent with a definition of evangelical Anglicanism will include a dynamic understanding of the *sensus fidelium*. That is to say, in applying an evangelical understanding of authority there will be a methodological balance between a deductive and inductive approach. Issues relevant, in this case to authority, arise inductively from the believers' lives in a given context. As with other methods, an evangelical method will often begin with *praxis* and move to reflection. The deductive pole of the method exists as believers seek to identify the will of God from text to context. If it is possible in such a method to give laity and clergy distinctive functions then the deductive role will be the primary concern of the clergy and especially the episcopate.

Bishops and priests do not function as individual believers representing individual views on theology and practice. The authority of the priesthood and episcopate is therefore not inherent, it is derived. Authority resides in the function the clergy play as embodiment of the tradition. Bishops represent a link with the apostolic age. The evangelical argues this link is primarily a hermeneutical one

---

42 TSOHOC argues that Peter was led by the Holy Spirit to overcome the exclusion of the Gentiles. The implication made is that ECUSA, like Peter, is being led to overcome the biblical prohibitions on homosexual activity. Evangelical Anglicans will argue this is misleading. On the one hand, it seems to give primacy to the apostolic age, yet on the other, it fails to make the argument in relation to the nature of authority. For what makes the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church authoritative is that God's will was revealed to an Apostle, it was subsequently recorded in scripture, and it can be argued theologically that such inclusion was always part of God's intent (Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 67:1-2). In sum, there are *apostolic, textual and theological* reasons for Gentile inclusion. Evangelicals will argue that at the very best, ECUSA can claim to have some theological authority, but no apostolic or textual authority.

43 Contrast Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) 1999, *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* (GOA), 25-26, 29-30, 44.

44 See Michael Banner, Markus Bockmuehl, Timothy Bradshaw (chairman), Oliver O'Donovan, Ann Holt, William Persson, and David Wright, *St. Andrew's Day Statement* (SADS) 1995, [www.ceec.info/documents.htm](http://www.ceec.info/documents.htm) and *RTT*.

45 Slocum, 'Quadrilateral', 481.

where the bishop gives primacy to apostolic teaching. In reference to current lived practice, regardless of the presence or absence of theological justification for active homosexuals in the priesthood, it is not the role of a bishop inductively to validate such a lifestyle. His or her role is in large part to represent the apostolic tradition (deductively) to the believing community. Evangelical Anglicans will argue bishops do more than represent apostolicity: in ecumenical fellowship, they should seek to submit their teaching and lifestyle to it.

### 3.2 Ecclesial passivity: diversity

Evangelical Anglicans should be committed to theological diversity. For they are committed to the relativity of any tradition to the gospel and, more fundamentally, as this section will argue, diversity may be a logical consequence of crucicentrism (2.2).

First, crucicentrism will result in a passivity towards the role of the church in its relation to the revealed will of God.<sup>46</sup> For if the nexus of the realization of the divine will was a moment of passivity (the cross), then an evangelical understanding of authority will include an emphasis on the submission of the church to God. In the debate on human sexuality, if the case is being made for celibacy amongst homosexual priests then there will be a sense that evangelicals proposing this are 'victims' of God's will. This stands in stark contrast to posturing which conveys a certain gratuitous zeal for the denial of a person's sexuality. In the shadow of the cross all believers are the victims of the judgement and will of God. Discipleship, fundamentally, is a 'killing' of self-centredness and a Spirit creation of self-denial (Mark 8:34-35).<sup>47</sup>

Second, crucicentrism engenders a passivity towards a plurality of Christian expressions for the cross judges all traditions and claims to truth.<sup>48</sup> To accept diversity is not synonymous with a rejection of the evangelical Anglican call for ongoing reformation (3.4). However, it is to say that evangelicals should refrain from too quickly declaring themselves out of communion with other parts of the church. Evangelicals have affirmed the reality of the historically grounded church while affirming the mystical identity of the church of Christ. It is the case, and always will be the case, that certain believers within the church will wilfully distance themselves from the apostolic faith. The task of 'the overwhelming majority' is, in large part, to seek to model a faithful ministry in submission to God (that is, dialogically balancing the inductive with the deductive) while seeking reconciliation between those who have departed from 'orthodoxy'.<sup>49</sup>

46 Contrast with *TSOHOC*, IV:4.2.

47 Ramsey, *Gospel*, 31-34.

48 Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Inter-Faith Dialogue', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977), 269.

49 Peter Walker and Andrew Goddard, *True Union in the Body? A contribution to the discussion within the Anglican Communion concerning the public blessing of same-sex unions: A paper commissioned by the Most Revd Drexel Wellington Gomez Archbishop of the West Indies* 2d ed (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2003), 40.

Third, crucicentrism establishes a relational concept of authority. For the cross reveals the relational intent of God. Issues of authority therefore are seldom removed from issues of pastoral care. Passivity includes a commitment to genuinely seek to hear the voice and experience of others. In reference to the recent crisis, this will not only mean listening to gay Christians, it will also mean helping to redress the dominance of the debate by the West by listening cross-culturally. It may be the case that provinces from the Two Thirds World see more clearly that diversity can sometimes mask divergence from the apostolic faith (see 3.4).

Fourth, crucicentrism demonstrates that diversity may result in enforced passivity. For the cross establishes that suffering can be inextricably linked to submission to God's authority. For example, in recent disputes there seems to be evidence that 'orthodox' Anglicans have been penalised by their diocese for taking a contrary position to that of their bishop.<sup>50</sup> Diversity therefore not only becomes something which evangelicals bear, it is something which they will need to contend for, as in the cases where it is alleged that clergy suffer discrimination in North America. Evidence suggests that in parts of ECUSA and ACCan there is a danger of genuine diversity being diluted because of a particular illiberal practice of authority.

Fifth, crucicentrism implies that Christ is the only worthy Lord of the Church. Practically, such christological authority is mediated presently through the 'illocutionary acts' of God in scripture.<sup>51</sup> The logical corollary of such exclusivist belief and pluralist practice is resistance to the centralisation of authority.<sup>52</sup> That is to say, because Christ alone is Lord of the church, 'Authority is not embodied, it is dispersed' in diversity.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, synodality not centralism is the preferred model. Despite this, some evangelicals have already shown their support for a model of authority where the Archbishop of Canterbury would exercise a greater influence and where a quasi-legal covenant would ideologically bind the Communion.<sup>54</sup> It appears to be the case that support for such proposals does not arise necessarily from an understanding of evangelical Anglicanism. This is un-

---

50 *RTT*, 80, see appendices 51-60. See *TSOHOC*, IV:4.1-4.2; Peter G. Bolt, Mark D. Thompson, and Robert Tong, *The Faith Once for All Delivered: An Australian Evangelical Response to The Windsor Report (TFOFAD)* (Camperdown: The Australian Church Record, 2005), 24-25.

51 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13-18. The adoption and adaptation of speech act theory is one promising means by which evangelicals have explicated a detailed understanding of how Christ's authority might be mediated to current church practice through scripture. See Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: IVP and Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 182-203.

52 *TWR*, 109-112. See S. W. Sykes, *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London: DLT, 1995), 156-57, 195; Buchanan, *Papal*, 25-27, 32-33.

53 Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbray, 1978), 99.

54 *RTT*, 55. See *GOA*, 53, 55-56; *TFOFAD*, 34.

fortunate testimony to the tendency within evangelicalism to be reactionary.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.3 Ecclesial activity: receptionism

...the church must avoid being lulled by the vague idea that there is a transparent and necessary progress of thought working itself out in history, with which it has only somehow to keep abreast.<sup>56</sup>

A concept of ecclesial activity will demonstrate that inherent in an evangelical Anglican concept of authority is the idea that diversity is apostolically conditioned. This section will argue that activism (2.3) will help inform what the church should receive as authoritative. For *The Gift of Authority* rightly argues, 'The authority which Jesus bestowed on his disciples was, above all, the authority for mission...'<sup>57</sup> By implication, that which does not serve this mission is not to be received as authoritative by the church.

ECUSA and ACCan should be commended by evangelical Anglicans for recognising the need for relevant mission.<sup>58</sup> However, that the actions leading to the crisis on human sexuality are justified in terms of 'missionary requirement' is, argues the evangelical, to misunderstand the nature of mission.<sup>59</sup> At best, such justification is based on an incarnational understanding of mission.<sup>60</sup> Thus *The St. Michael Report (SMR)* from ACCan states, 'The incarnation is a radical affirmation of the possibility of the sanctification of the flesh...human sexuality is cradled within the *imago dei*.'<sup>61</sup> However, the evangelical will argue that the purpose of the incarnation was not inactive affirmation of the *imago dei* but deification (that is, redemptive transformation).<sup>62</sup> Missiological justification must serve the salvific and transformative intent of God.<sup>63</sup> It is unlikely that an evangelical Anglican will accept subjective criteria where:

...the needs and conditions of a local community, and their discerning familiarity with their candidates for ministry, guide them to recognize in one person the personal qualities that could lead their community into the fullness of Christ's saving holiness; whereas even quite similar personal

55 For example, see the argument of the Sydney diocese for lay presidency. In logic not dissimilar to *TSOHOC*, Peter Jensen argues for lay presidency not only on the basis of the New Testament, but because 'the needs of the modern world, particularly in urban settings' demand it. Peter Jensen, 'Theological Reflection on Lay Administration' [www.sydneyanglicans.net/mindful/theological\\_reflection\\_on\\_lay\\_administration/](http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/mindful/theological_reflection_on_lay_administration/).

56 *SADS*, 3. See Bradshaw, 'Primacy', 25-29.

57 *GOA*, 32. See *TVR*, II:2.21-2.23, 2.25.

58 *TSOHOC*, IV:4.3. Walker and Goddard, *True*, 2-3.

59 *SMR*, 15-16. *RTT*, 46-47.

60 *SMR*, 17-21. *RTT*, 47.

61 *SMR*, 19.

62 Wesley Carr, *The Pastor as Theologian: The Integration of Pastoral Ministry: Theology and Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1989), 85. John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 239-40. See *ERCDOM*, 41-44.

63 H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 192-97.

qualities might not serve the growth in holiness of another community in a different context.<sup>64</sup>

Ecclesial activity depends on ministerial interdependence. That is to say, the authority to minister does not primarily arise from the personal qualities of an ordinand. As has already been argued (3.1), a priest does not function with personal authority and autonomy in the church.<sup>65</sup> On the contrary, any minister of the church of Christ is called by Christ and is taken into the mission of God to the world. It is the characteristics of God (revealed in the scriptures) and the universal nature of his mission that determine whether or not a strategy is missiologically justifiable.

Ecclesial activity depends on catholicity. For given the inherent catholicity of the church (3.4), the nature of its mission in one part of the world affects its mission in another. Issues which have textual, apostolic and theological justification can be undertaken in a given province with minimal consultation.<sup>66</sup> However, the activity of a church or province which makes decisions in relation to its ministry with little theological justification and no textual or apostolic justification, it appears cannot simply proceed on the basis of an autonomy understood in terms of 'the needs and conditions of a local community.'<sup>67</sup>

What is of first order importance is that the mission of Christ is being served as is recognised by the apostolic witness and the church catholic.<sup>68</sup> While an incarnational model of missiology is vital, it must never be developed separate from or in contradiction to a transformative catholicity:

The Holy Spirit is an advocate of the Kingdom for all who seek so that all will come to know Him who is truth itself. Yet it is that truth which must always mean the church will be a challenge to society as we seek to bring people to the truth in Christ.<sup>69</sup>

Activism in mission is a clear characteristic of evangelical Anglicanism. Consequently, evangelicals may argue that what is to be adjudged as normative are not simply practices received by the passing of time through a creeping liberalisation. New strategies in relation to the ministry and mission of the church need to be textually, theologically and apostolically based. For when this is done the whole church and its ecclesial activity are served.

64 *TSOHOC*, IV:4.11.

65 See *ERCDOM*, 32, 68-69; Rowan Williams, 'Authority and the Bishop in the Church' in Mark Santer (ed.), *Their Lord and Ours: Approaches to Authority, Community and the Unity of the Church* (London: SPCK, 1982), 92-93, 98-100.

66 Article XX. Philip H. E. Thomas, 'Doctrine of the Church' in Stephen Sykes and John Booty (eds.), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London and Philadelphia: SPCK/Fortress, 1988), 222-23. Buchanan, *Papal*, 6-7. See Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2000), 65-73.

67 Walker and Goddard, *True*, 42-44.

68 See *TVR*, III:3.28 compare *AITC*-2, 25, 33.

69 Joel Edwards' sermon at the official opening of the ACC in Nottingham, June 20, 2005 [www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/75/acns3992.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/75/acns3992.cfm).

### 3.4 Ecclesial recreation: catholicity

This section will argue that an evangelical Anglican emphasis on conversion (2.4) engenders an understanding of authority which incorporates an ecumenical and eschatological concept of catholicity.

Catholicity is fundamentally *ecumenical*. For according to evangelical conviction, conversion is the means to reconciliation with God and fellowship with believers. A (recreated) believer is part of the world church which strives to be renewed and recreated in the likeness of her Lord. Fellowship therefore arises out of conversion and because the church transcends traditions, this fellowship will be ecumenical. The danger of the recent developments within the Anglican Communion is that they are based on a restricted notion of catholicity.<sup>70</sup> This is well observed by Timothy Bradshaw:

Can the Anglican communion claim an inner 'catholicity', say on approving homosexual practice within church life if that were to happen, when this breaks with the established pattern of the rest of the catholic church?<sup>71</sup>

In a bid to recover a catholic understanding of authority, evangelical Anglicans may argue that at least two things are required. Firstly, there is the need for continued dialogue with other traditions. Secondly, there is a need for provision to be made for those who fall victim to 'inner catholicity' within the Communion. For example, something approaching a court of appeal may need to be established. Evangelical Anglicans who seek to affirm a theologically 'orthodox' position on sexual ethics may need to appeal to an inter-provincial body (made up of clergy and laity) if they fall victim to the perceived illiberality documented by *Repair The Tear (RTT)*.<sup>72</sup> Equally, homosexuals who seek to live celibate lives may need the same appeal system if they, as a result of very conservative views, become victims of prejudice.<sup>73</sup> It is not necessary that such a body would have legal powers, but rather would have Communion recognition and therefore moral authority to publish grievances and suggest appropriate actions. The current trend to hold high level consultations (such as the ACC meeting in June, 2005) at best gives voice to those in power, at worst, it disempowers those who suffer as a result of putting into practice what the Communion has affirmed.

Catholicity is ultimately eschatological. For conversionism emphasizes the recreative work of the Holy Spirit in light of the ultimate recreation of all things.<sup>74</sup> Jürgen Moltmann illustrates this well when he writes:

...conversion [is] the fresh start...The gospel itself is the mediation between the coming kingdom of God and the person who is turning to free-

70 As is particularly demonstrated in ECUSA's understanding of the apostolic text (3.1) compared to the Lambeth Quadrilateral. See Slocum, 'Quadrilateral', 471-86.

71 Bradshaw, 'Unity', 187.

72 *RTT*, 52-53, 57-60. See Bradshaw, 'Unity', 184-86.

73 See *TFOFAD*, 37.

74 See *TWR*, 11. *SADS*, 3-4.

dom...The future of God set in the present Word is therefore at the same time the call to a new start...The turning away from this world of oppression, death and evil to the future of life, righteousness and freedom is in itself the anticipation of the kingdom of God...<sup>75</sup>

Conversion is a foretaste of God's will for all of creation. The present motivation for evangelism is, in part, motivated by such promissory eschatological transformation. Conversion is therefore a forward looking, progressive, and purposeful dynamic.<sup>76</sup> Conversion is a foretaste of the catholicity of God's redemptive purposes. Such foreshadowing reminds believers that God is beyond us. His final purposes are beyond the struggles of the church now and he himself is Lord of the church from beyond the church. This does not deny the work of the Holy Spirit within the church nor the profound belief that the church is the body of Christ. It does, however, deny a practice of authority which is primarily the coherence of faith with the mores of a particular culture. The recreative purposes of the God who is beyond us should make the church hesitant about introducing any doctrine which stands in opposition to past convictions and the catholic *sensus fidelium*. An evangelical Anglican understanding of authority will therefore have a strong conversionist dimension. Sometimes God's will stands in opposition to human culture and therefore the task is transformation.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

This article proposes that an evangelical Anglican understanding of ecclesial authority will include at least four practical principles. In practice, *apostolicity* is dialogic. Textual reflection with all its implied complexities informed by current practices and cultures is both inductive and deductive. In such dialogue, priests and especially bishops play the important role of representing, living, and expounding the tradition. The authority of the bishops is directly proportionate to their faithfulness as guarantors of the tradition. The bishop is not an individual believer free to introduce innovation independent of fellowship with the church catholic, other bishops, and the tradition. The bishops are to be living voices of the tradition. Consequently, they are key dialogue partners with and within the church and with the lived experience of contemporary believers.

The acceptance of *diversity* ensures that the process of decision making is genuinely consultative (for example, in the practice of synodality) and therefore authority is dispersed. Authority will not be exercised centrally nor from a culturally privileged perspective. For diversity arises not from a culturally conditioned understanding of human rights, but is affirmed because the cross judges

---

75 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 80.

76 Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 160-63.

77 Niebuhr, *Christ*, 192-97, 213-15. See Ahlers, *Barmen*, 123-27; *ERCDOM*, 74-78.

all tradition and claims to truth.

*Reception* is based not on a temporal progressivism, but on what best serves the transformative mission of God in each generation. It is a church which is active in seeking societal and individual transformation which is particularly aware of what is at stake.<sup>78</sup> In reference to recent debates, evangelical Anglicans seem right to argue that texts which seek transformation of certain (in this case, sexual) practices in antiquity remain apposite for societies today.

An evangelical Anglican understanding of *catholicity* can be seen to arise from a conversionist theology. The function of authority therefore is to bring societal and personal transformation. Practically, this means the recognition that any exercise of authority begins 'in the middle of things' and within the midst of people. Any proposed 'progress' will not wilfully leave aside the convictions of other Christian traditions, especially when such convictions have apostolic, textual, and theological justification.

Whether or not evangelical Anglicanism is ultimately correct in its assertions is left unanswered here. What is clear, however, is that in the crisis regarding human sexuality, evangelicalism finds itself in the majority position alongside different Anglican spiritualities, Christian traditions, and other faiths. What is uncertain is whether or not evangelicalism will continue to be committed to such ecumenical and inter-faith goodwill when the crisis reaches some form of resolution. If the goodwill ends, then the accusation of 'inner catholicity' rightly levelled at Anglicanism in general, will be true of evangelical Anglicanism in particular. More fundamentally, evangelicals will be guilty of the very sin they accuse ECUSA and ACCan of committing. Thus, like ECUSA and ACCan there would be the justifiable charge of heterodoxy laid at the feet of those who would cast themselves as defenders of orthodoxy.

### Abstract

Underlying much of the controversy within the Anglican Communion in relation to the debate on human sexuality is the issue of authority. Indeed, *The Windsor Report* identifies authority as 'the key' to resolving the issues. This article seeks to approach a definition of evangelical Anglicanism with specific reference to the issue of authority and to identify four practical principles arising from such a definition. It is argued that an evangelical understanding of *apostolicity* will be inherently dialogic. *Diversity* is accepted in the light of the cross. *Receptionism* will be practiced, not on the basis of a temporal progressivism, but on the basis of a transformative mission. *Catholicity* genuinely takes into account the lived experiences and insights of other traditions preventing counterproductive innovation and protecting those who are vulnerable to prejudice.

---

78 Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 598-602.