

Summary of a Talk by Canon Chris Sugden on November 8th 2006:

BENEATH THE ISSUE OF SEXUALITY

In the Anglican Communion we have seen the growth what are really of two different religions- one based on revelation especially Jesus' life and teaching, his death and resurrection. The other is based on a progressive view of revelation- that God is gradually showing his church new truths which may supersede older teaching. So you may believe more or less what you like- although at the same time there is usually demanded a strict conformity to church regulations (a sort of canonical fundamentalism).

Why then remain an Anglican (if you take the first view)? Why not "go to Rome" or join the Baptists or one of the independent churches?

Behind the contemporary Church of England is the Book of Common Prayer and 39 Articles, which are still our foundation documents. They have a unique balance of Scripture first, but understood in engagement with contemporary culture, while maintaining our roots in the Early Church and the church worldwide. Anglican doctrine and practice is based on the triple foundation of Scripture, Tradition and Reason (not rationalism). It is a way of understanding Christianity.

So Anglicanism has been able to adapt to various cultures- for instance Kenya has a very African liturgy, but still Scriptural and Catholic in its approach. Do remember that the Anglican Church is now a global fellowship. The average Anglican is poor, black, living in the Third World and orthodox in his or her beliefs. We are not a sectarian, one-culture church.

This means the end of Western hegemony. American church leaders seem to assume that money rules. They pay- and so are able to call the tune. But the indications are that the Anglican Church in the Global South etc is no longer willing to accept this.

Paul shows how there can be no cultural or economic superiority in the church. Jews were frequently under attack in Rome, with low status. But those who had become Christians could hold up their heads to rich Roman Christians as equal children of God. At the same time, Paul insisted that Jews had no superior spiritual status- Jews, Gentiles, slave, free, men woman were all one in Christ Jesus. The Church is thus the true "rainbow coalition". It is the principalities and powers who seek to turn differences into division.

You see the effects of the Gospel in reconciliation. The West Indies, not so many generations away from slavery, welcome British visitors with no hint of resentment. (The conversion of the inhabitants to enthusiastic Christianity is almost unique as an example of the oppressed adopting the religion of their oppressors). Indian Christians similarly hold little resentment over colonialism.

This unity of faith- "*one, holy, catholic and apostolic church*" is a necessary corollary of one Gospel. The American Bishop Griswold has suggested that the more conservative Christianity may be alright for Nigeria, but not for the United States. You go your way, we shall go ours. But that will not do. Churches are part of communion and should not hinder

other parts of the communion. To achieve this, Paul says in Romans 14, over the question of food offered to idols, that in matters that are secondary (adiaphora) those who are not concerned over an issue should give way to those who are. Jesus said that the truth shall make you free- not that freedom comes from each having his or her own truth.

The Anglican Communion is on the verge of a great future- and is best placed of all churches to engage with the power of Islam in the Third World. It is there that the church is growing fast. For instance, there has been great revival in the Church in Nigeria- in 1998 there were 8 million Anglicans, today there are 18million, with a target of doubling in the next few years. Contrast this with the US Episcopal 2.4 millions.

So you can see why the church in the Nigeria etc is now determined to go ahead without reference to Canterbury of the USA. The bishops of the Global South issued the Kigali Communiqué in September saying that they will proceed with mission, establishing new bishoprics and theological education. They met at Kigali deliberately to support the fact that Archbishop Kolini of Rwanda had consecrated alternative orthodox bishops for dissenting parishes in the USA back in the early 90s.

Will there be an Anglican Communion in the future. Yes, but 70% of it will be in the orthodox South- along with orthodox Christians in the church of England, and that of New Zealand, the USA etc.

As for the Gay issue, little has been said about ex-gays. There are wonderful testimonies of those who have found from the Lord release, as one remarked "from the prison I was in". As with most issues, there are 15% firmly for change in the church's discipline and teaching, 15% against, and 70% unsure. Unless taught otherwise, they are likely to assume that the church leadership (ie bishops, synods etc) are right. So it is a fight among the leadership and over leadership. There were similar proportions in the Thirteen Colonies over independence in 1776- a small number of loyalists, a small number of revolutionaries. The revolutionaries gained the upper hand because of the leadership of Washington and others.

What we need in our Anglo-Saxon culture is a Biblical and reformed but catholic church. The Bishop of Winchester has issued an excellent statement outlining how we can pray for such an outcome, which can be found on his Diocese's website.