

Reconfiguring Anglican Leadership for the Twenty-first Century

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As Anglicanism seeks to identify the *missio Dei* in the world today, it finds its guidance in Scripture interpreted by tradition, reason, and experience. This gives Anglican leaders a distinctive Christian voice that is flexible and provisional, yet authentic. Thus through its particular methodology, Anglicanism offers both the wider ecumenical church and other faith traditions insights and wisdom that can provide an enlightened, dynamic, and challenging understanding of what the purposes of God are today. Scripture invites the church to discover the activity of God where there is:

- Reciprocal, covenant love, fidelity, and trustworthiness;
- Deliverance from oppression and evil;
- Judgment, particularly against greed, selfishness, and injustice;
- Justice and freedom for all humanity;
- Deliverance from discrimination and hatred;
- Holiness and the quest for the presence of God;
- Awareness of and commitment to the sacredness of the created order;
- Forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing;
- Effective communication where humans actually hear one another;
- Redemption and transformation from what has been marginalized, detested, and rejected to something or someone that is valued, loved, and welcomed;
- Healing and the restoration of life;
- Resurrection—where new life reverses what has been death-inducing.

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The Christian community can often fail to recognize God's activity in the world because of its own preoccupations. So Anglican leaders must enable the ecclesial community to discern where there are contemporary signs of God's kingdom; to participate in such activity through prayer and action; and to celebrate the possibilities of God in a world where it is easy to focus on the seemingly overwhelming abundance of evil. This is not to deny the prevalence of evil and its destructive consequences, but rather to point to the present reality of God that offers redemption and the hope of ultimately overcoming evil with good and hate with the power of love.

In the last twenty-five years, there have been tremendous advances in medicine, food production, and the provision of education for children. Millions have been lifted out of poverty in India and China. South Africa has been delivered from the evil of apartheid; the conflict in Northern Ireland has ended. In the developed world, racial, gender, and sexual discrimination have been challenged and to some degree overthrown. As Anglican leaders point to these blessings, the goodness of God is highlighted and there are glimpses of the possibilities of God's kingdom here on earth.

The Judeo-Christian tradition asserts that everything and everyone is created for the glory of God and that they have the capacity, through God's grace, of realizing their full and perfect potential. However, this possibility is marred primarily through the prevalence of evil and by the participation and cooperation of humanity with evil, both consciously and unconsciously, so that, for example:

- The earth, instead of fully reflecting the glory of God, is trashed for unsustainable, consumerist lifestyles.
- The world economic system is so distorted that in order to maintain current lifestyles the future has been mortgaged, both financially and environmentally.
- Billions live a subsistence existence with no hope of sharing in the world's abundance.

Anglican leaders need to be aware of their own cultural conditioning that can make them, together with their society, blind to the often hidden and unconscious collusion with a present world order that is far from the intentions of God's kingdom. Through prayerful engagement, effective listening, dialogue with other Anglican leaders

worldwide, and prophetic witness, leaders need to alert others to adopt a concern for the whole of humanity, and particularly highlight the radical call to sacrificial Christian discipleship that this involves.

Anglicanism works in very different contexts throughout the world as it seeks to be a distinctive, authentic expression of Christian faith. There are parts of the world where the church is flourishing and growing. The Diocese of Trichy, South India, for example, where Anglicans are part of the Church of South India, is experiencing encouraging numerical growth: the Diocesan Conference meeting in January 2009 has committed the diocese to doubling the number of Christians in five years. Here a commitment to evangelism, combined with existing investment in medical facilities and schools, reveals a church confident in its capacity to grow. The Church of England, on the other hand, is wrestling with the problem of declining and aging congregations. Traditional ways of being church no longer seem to work; here the church is challenged to reinvent itself, to discover afresh how to diversify and be creative in providing worship that is attractive and faith exploration that is deemed relevant to people's lives. There can be little doubt that God is at work in both situations: in the exponential growth and energy of the Church of South India, and in the painful reorientation of the Church of England with its innovative experiments with church as an interactive, participatory experience—Messy Church, Café Church, Youth Church, Alpha. What is surprisingly difficult, and where good leadership is required, is to enable both these Anglican churches to listen and understand each other, in a spirit of mutual respect and collegial support. While both churches have a deep regard and affection for each other, communicate regularly, and engage in exchange programs, the incarnational nature of the gospel places a trust and confidence on Anglicans in the local context to read the culture and to present in that location an authentic understanding of the Christian faith. That some values, particularly those of sexual and social ethics, should be so different in different contexts causes puzzlement: some ask why isn't there one overriding meta-narrative, while others claim that there *is* such a meta-narrative, only that one church is ignoring it. Such exchanges sharpen the feeling of otherness, create alienation, and strain *koinonia*. A wise leader will seek to ponder on this, to engage in deep listening before interpreting what it may signify in terms of the kingdom of God.

It is generally recognized that the Anglican Church in recent years has faced unprecedented challenges in sustaining a global communion. The last decade has witnessed the emergence of new patterns of behavior, many of which have come about because of the instantaneous networking power of modern communications. This has led to:

- The emergence of power groups that through the internet become belligerent advocates of their particular standpoints. This leads to the creation of alternative networks and structures of like-thinking adherents.
- Commenting on, interfering with, and demonizing decisions made in other provinces. The Episcopal Church has been particularly badly treated in this regard.
- Less respect for a centralized authority automatically given to the Archbishop of Canterbury and difficulty in being loyal to a collegial mode of operating—the meeting of Primates, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lambeth Conference, and the proposed Covenant.
- A growing confidence on the part of some African provinces, such as Nigeria, to claim spiritual authority, coupled with a growing intolerance of western forms of Anglicanism that are dismissed as moribund and lax. This has led to the setting up of alternative structures in North America with scant regard to the damage which schism has historically brought to the church.

Despite all this, Anglican leaders have continued to listen to one another, and to dialogue. Some have exercised enormous restraint in order to preserve the bonds of communion. The listening process at the 2008 Lambeth Conference demonstrated the possibilities and necessity of mutual listening and learning. Sound leadership holds in tension the desire to meet local contextual needs and to maintain the cohesion of the wider Anglican Communion. A leader will need to explore why it is in the area of sexual ethics and practice that the greatest divisions and tensions begin to emerge. Ways of deflecting and minimizing the distortion that this causes need to be identified and implemented.

The specific context of the Church of England offers the Anglican Communion a range of areas regarded as essential for a church

to engage in mission. Each category draws upon the wellspring of the Anglican pattern of Scripture, tradition, and reason. They include:

- *Rediscovering worship*: There is a need to encourage people to experience prayer, praise, silence, contemplation, and beauty in music, art, and architecture, which nourish the human spirit and connect with the divine.
- *Creating good, healthy, and flourishing communities*: Christianity is a communal experience. Postmodernity has created individuals who are unskilled in social interaction. Creating communities of hospitality, mercy, trust, love, and forgiveness is a key requisite for the church today.
- *Helping the church to unlearn what being church is about*: In England, traditional patterns of being church are increasingly complemented by a creative diversity of innovation. This can often involve a painful unlearning of what church is about. Churches today need to be multifaceted, with church members involved as participants in a faith journey rather than passive recipients in a pew.
- *Affirming a faith that is intellectually cogent and engages with contemporary issues*: The biblical tradition has to be interpreted wisely. Christian faith benefits from valuing the insights of other disciplines. There needs to be a genuine attempt to make the paradigm shift from the premodern worldview of the Bible to the postmodern understanding of the world today. When this happens, Anglicanism can offer the possibilities of introducing people to a sense of wonder, healing, and wholeness in ways that satisfy the intellect and stimulate the spiritual imagination.
- *Developing effective discipleship programs*: Anglican churches need to attract newcomers, and to provide effective discipleship programs at all levels, from seekers to ordinands.
- *Training specialists in outreach to children and young people*: In England, churches have increasingly recognized that expertise is needed for this work. Christian faith needs to be shared in a language and medium to which children and young people can relate.
- *Offering prophetic witness*: Leaders are needed who will move the church from being exclusively parochial to engaging with wider national and international concerns. The local

church needs to be passionate about justice. This will involve speaking out against all forms of evil, oppression, and discrimination, and will require active participation in confronting such evils. This in turn should bring challenging and sacrificial changes in lifestyle.

For the Church of England, the last twenty-five years have been a painful reorientation that has nevertheless created exciting possibilities for its next generation of leaders. For them, leadership will involve:

- Recognizing that the future of the Church of England depends on growth. This means discipleship, faith exploration, evangelization, and conversion.
- Recognizing that while traditional patterns of church-going are still valued, new ways of being church need to be developed imaginatively and experimentally. To have the energy, time, and resources to do this, a good leader will have to choose where to disinvest, and will have to overcome hostility to such disinvestment.
- Creating and supporting Christian communities of wisdom, listening communities that have gained the trust and credibility of the local community.
- Training, equipping, and empowering the laity to be effective apostles in the world, and encouraging the clergy to model collaborative, relational leadership.
- Living an exemplary simple lifestyle that seeks to respect the sacredness and integrity of creation and to enable the church community to do likewise.
- Engaging with the media and addressing a secular, often agnostic, capitalist culture with an alternative Christian vision.
- Enabling the church *to be* by offering a stress-free model of apostleship in which leadership draws on a reservoir of faith rather than running on empty.
- Seeking to acquire humility and to discover that one's healing is ongoing. This sometimes involves being broken, and remolded by God.
- Locating the deep spiritual resources to feed others, and having the courage to take time out and have them replenished.

Anglican leaders are therefore called to be prayerful, scholarly, courageous, and creative in their advocacy of the Christian way of life. In a world which has changed dramatically over the last twenty-five years, such leadership can both navigate Anglicans through engagement with the great issues of the day, and provide a framework for thriving, confident, and growing local churches.

