

The Reformation and its relevance today

The Reformation speaks to the Church today

The chief dangers to Christianity do not come from the anti-Christian systems. ... It is corrupt forms of Christianity itself which menace from time to time the life of Christianity. Why make much of minor points of difference between those who serve the one Christ? Because a pure gospel is worth preserving; and is not only worth preserving, it is logically (and logic will always work itself out into history) the only saving gospel.¹

Thus B.B. Warfield wrote in 1894 of the need to preserve the pure gospel, the only saving gospel.

The Reformation restored Scripture, the Word of God, to its rightful place as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Article VI declares:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

This principle is applied throughout the Articles, where we are told that matters are "to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture".² Similarly, a century later the Westminster Confession of Faith stated:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture:³

In restoring Scripture to its rightful place as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, because it is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, the Reformers came to a right understanding of the way of salvation. This was set out, for instance, in Articles IX to XVIII: "man is very far gone from original righteousness"; man "cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God"; "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings"; "Good Works ... are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification"; "Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ"; "When ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants"; "He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of himself once made, should take away the sins of the world"; "they are to be condemned, which say, they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent"; God "hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in

¹ B.B. Warfield, *Select Shorter Writings*, II (1973), 665-666.

² Article VII

³ Westminster Confession of Faith, I, 6.

Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation"; "holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved".

The ancient creeds - the Apostles creed, the Nicene creed, and the Athanasian creed - set down statements that are important and true, centring chiefly on matters that were long and vigorously disputed in the early church concerning the nature of the Godhead and the persons of the Holy Trinity. The creeds barely touch on the way of salvation; it is the Reformation confessions that deal with those essential truths. In this vital area the Reformation speaks to the Church today, setting out the answer to the questions "What is a Christian?", "How does a man become a Christian?" "What saith the Scripture?"

We cannot proclaim the Gospel unless we know what a Christian is; we cannot join with others in proclaiming the Gospel, unless we agree what a Christian is. Yet we find that time and again this question is avoided or not raised; and, in particular, that many will wish to work from an inclusivist position - that all who call themselves Christian are Christian. The Reformation speaks to the Church today of the essentials of the Biblical Gospel: the nature of sin, the powerlessness of man, the justifying of man by the imputed righteousness of Christ, secured by faith; the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world; and God's sovereignty in salvation.

This Gospel, recovered at the Reformation, provides a standard by which we should measure evangelicalism. The word 'evangelical' has become so widely and loosely used that it has become almost meaningless; indeed it is now usually used with a qualifying adjective, such as 'conservative', or 'liberal', or 'open', or 'charismatic'. We must not differentiate according to loose terminology: it is the attitude to Scripture that is the final dividing line. Thus Francis Schaeffer wrote:

Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world. The first direction in which we must face is to say most lovingly but clearly: evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical *unless there is a line drawn* between those who take a full view of Scripture and those who do not.⁴

The real chasm is not between Presbyterians and everyone else, or Lutherans and everyone else, or Anglicans and everyone else, or Baptists and everyone else. The real chasm is between those who have bowed to the living God and thus also to the verbal, propositional communication of God's inerrant Word, the Scriptures, and those who have not.⁵

The Reformation revealed a system of Biblical doctrine that is entirely distinct from the teachings of the Church of Rome. Those two systems remain entirely distinct and opposed in their presuppositions and their outworking. Rome claims to be *semper eadem* - always the same: its teaching has remained the same and must remain the same. Certainly, there has been a change of manner and attitude, particularly where Rome is no longer dominant: Protestants are no longer denounced as heretics, but wooed as 'separated brethren'. This change of stance has confused many; no doubt this confusion has often occurred because many Protestants are keen to perceive a change. The question we must ask is not 'Has there been a change of attitude?' but 'Has there been a change of doctrine?'

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (1984), 51

⁵ *Op.cit.*, 77

Vatican II stated:

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian but do not profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter. Those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.

These statements focus on communion with Rome as the benchmark, and leave aside the vital question 'What is a Christian?' - a dividing, not a unifying question. The distinction that emerged at the Reformation - is Scripture the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, or is the *magisterium* of the papacy the final authority? - is not addressed. The teaching of Trent on justification by grace alone through faith alone still stands:

If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.

If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which ... remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.⁶

The Reformed faith and the doctrine of Rome are two systems, logical and coherent according to their premises, but totally contradictory: there is no median position; but the desire to find such a position has led to various 'agreed statements' between Rome and other denominations.

The Agreed Statements produced by the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commissions since their first statement in 1971 have sought some bridge word or phrase, the ambiguity of which might allow the pretence that the disagreement between Rome and the Reformation teaching of the Church of England was an unfortunate misunderstanding, that both parties had been saying the same thing, or almost the same thing, but controversy had masked this. Thus the word 'memorial' was introduced as a bridge between the Lord's Supper and the Mass. In other statements the supposedly Protestant representatives agreed to propositions patently not in accord with the teaching of the Articles, as in the statement on Justification, where imputed righteousness and inherent righteousness are fused and confused. We must say again, there is no median position. The Reformation speaks to the Church today, by reminding us that Reformed Christianity derived from Scripture and the doctrine of Rome remain two distinct and incompatible systems.

The Reformation restored a Biblical perspective as to the true character of Christian unity, which may involve separation from those in error. In the middle ages the true spiritual unity of all those chosen in Christ and redeemed by him was confused and fused with the outward unity of the Roman Church. The Reformers recognised that an outward unity of itself signified nothing. Hugh Latimer set out the character of true unity and the peace that issued from it:

⁶ Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Canons 11 and 12

St. Paul to the Corinthians saith, ... "Be of one mind:" but he addeth, "According to Jesus Christ;" that is, according to God's holy word; else it were better war than peace. We ought never to regard unity so much that we would, or should, forsake God's word for her sake. ... For peace is not to be redeemed ... with loss of the truth; that we would seek peace so much, that we should lose the truth of God's word.⁷

The ecumenical movement distorted the teaching of Scripture, by suggesting that the Lord Jesus Christ's prayer in John 17: 11 - "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" - was setting forth a unity that we should strive to bring about, by constructing an outward and visible union of those claiming to be Christians, whereas, in Dr. Lloyd-Jones' words:

the whole of our Lord's statement is not an exhortation to us to do anything, but is a prayer to His Father asking Him to preserve this unity that is already in existence. Moreover that unity is essentially spiritual, is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the act of regeneration, and shows itself in a common belief and reception of the teaching concerning our Lord's Person and work. Any 'unity' which lacks these characteristics is not the unity of which our Lord speaks in John 17.⁸

The ecumenical movement works on an inclusivist principle - it seeks to comprehend all who call themselves Christian. It has not begun by defining the word Christian according to Scripture and then identifying those who are Christian. The supposed unity thus achieved is a man-made synthesis, not a unity according to the Word of God. There is a unity which exists among all those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God and who are thereby members of the invisible Church; this exists regardless of any outward unity of visible churches, and despite any outward disunity of visible churches. Dr. Lloyd-Jones commented:

The same mistake of starting with the visible institution rather than the truth was also made at the time of the Reformation. What Luther was enabled to see, and what accounted for his courageous stand, was this self-same point. ... he saw clearly that truth must always come first. It must come before institution and traditions, and everything - every institution, even the Church - must be judged by the word of truth. The invisible Church is more important than the visible church, and loyalty to the former may involve either expulsion or separation from the latter, and the formation of a new visible church.⁹

The Reformation recognised the essential importance of doctrinal truth as the basis for a church.

The Reformation was an era of confessionalism. It was necessary for a church to define the truths that it was proclaiming. Thus there were set down the great Reformation confessions, examined at last year's Conference, the Articles of Religion, the Second Helvetic Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Within the Church of England there was increasing restlessness during the twentieth century with the form of assent to the Articles. Dr. J.I. Packer and the Rev. E.M.B. Green were members of the Archbishops' Commission on Doctrine that in 1968, in *Subscription and Assent to the 39 Articles*,

⁷ Hugh Latimer, *Sermons* (Parker Society; 1844), 487. Cf. John Jewel: 'Of a truth unity and concord doth best become religion; yet is not unity the sure and certain mark whereby to know the church of God. For there was the greatest unity that might be among them that worshipped the golden calf, and among them which with one voice jointly cried against our Saviour Jesus Christ, "Crucify him." ' (John Jewel, *Works*, III (Parker Society; 1848), 620)

⁸ D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity* (1962), 15

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 60

unanimously advised a new preface and formula of assent. In its final (1975) form the Preface was, as it continues to be:

The Church of England ... professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

Though many of the historic beliefs of the church are paraded in this Preface, the minister addressed is not required to assent to any specific doctrine, but invited to "affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance", a singularly vague statement (no doubt intentionally so) of a loose connection to an historical stream. The Declaration made is one with this:

I ... do so affirm, and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness

The minister is declaring his belief in the faith revealed in Scripture and in the catholic creeds, a formula to which the Bishop of Rome might gladly assent, though he would wish to add to it. The historic formularies are not a requirement, but merely a witness to this inheritance. The Church of England has departed from its confession. Its foundations have been destroyed: a building without foundations must in due course collapse.¹⁰ As Bishop E.A. Knox wrote in 1933: 'Can a creedless Church be a teacher of a nation and of the world?''¹¹

More broadly, we must note that what is termed Anglicanism - that wider grouping of churches, spread across the world, that has grown from the Church of England - is doctrinally an undefined entity. The various churches that belong to this grouping have their own doctrinal standards: there is no common belief system. The only links are being 'in communion with' the Archbishop of Canterbury and an episcopacy which historically derives from Canterbury. Increasing dissatisfaction with the leadership of Canterbury and the lack of a common faith has already brought serious fragmentation, and can only bring more. 'Can two walk together unless they be agreed?'

So also the Lambeth Conference, usually convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury every ten years, has no constitutional authority, only what some would like to call a 'moral authority'. In 1888 the Lambeth Conference discussed the issue of reunion (the amalgamation of denominations, not the unity, already existing, that Christ prayed the Father to preserve) and enunciated four points (since known as the Lambeth Quadrilateral) as the basis for such reunion: the Holy Scriptures; the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed; the two dominical sacraments; and the historic episcopate. The Church of England, and the Anglican Communion, may decide that episcopacy is an appropriate way of having all things done decently and in order; but historic episcopacy is not found in the New Testament. The *episcopoi* or overseers of the New Testament were presbyters, perhaps with some additional responsibility; but

¹⁰ Cf. the drift from the truth in confessional Scottish churches in the nineteenth century, excellently analysed in Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy* (second edition, 2010)

¹¹ E.A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement 1833 - 1845* (1933), 383

not as episcopacy historically developed. So, in answer to the question, Whether bishops or priests were first? Cranmer wrote: "The bishops and priests were at one time, and were not two things, but both one office at the beginning of Christ's religion."¹²

John Whitgift stated: "there is no one certain kind of government in the church which must of necessity be perpetually observed".¹³ By seeking to impose episcopacy as an essential element in any reunion of churches, the Lambeth Conference rejected the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. That Conference needs to return to the teaching of the Articles and require 'to be received and believed' only what 'may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'.¹⁴

The Reformation speaks to evangelicalism today. The evangelical movement has seen itself as the lineal successor of the Reformation, and when it has been in its right mind it has preached the scriptural doctrines recovered at the Reformation. This was particularly evident in the eighteenth-century revival, when the doctrines of salvation enunciated in the Articles were the message at the centre of the preaching. Many of the leaders of that revival justified their position to gainsayers by arguing, convincingly, that they, and they alone, were true to the Reformation doctrines enshrined in the Articles. There were some extraneous elements - the Arminianism of the Wesleys was unknown to the Reformers - but the argument that the revival was a revival of the Church of England's foundation tenets was compelling. Thus George Whitefield wrote in 1739:

O pity, pity the Church of England. See how too, too many of her sons are fallen from her Articles, and preach themselves, not Christ Jesus the Lord.¹⁵

From the eighteenth century to the twentieth century there was general continuity: at times there was a degree of doctrinal vagueness, and at times pietism overlaid rigorous Biblical thinking; the Moody missions, which brought modern mass revivalism from America to the United Kingdom and in the providence of God did much good, marked a loosening of ties with Reformed theology and practice. Evangelicals in the Church of England were an identifiable group, because they had a doctrinal identity: as summarised by J.C. Ryle, evangelical religion was identified by the absolute supremacy it assigns to Holy Scripture; the depth and prominence it assigns to the doctrine of human sinfulness and corruption; the paramount importance it attaches to the work and office of our Lord Jesus Christ; the high place which it assigns to the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man; and the importance it attaches to the outward and visible work of the Holy Ghost in the life of man.¹⁶

The gangrene of the Oxford Movement spread relentlessly in the Church of England through the nineteenth century, with its quasi-Roman doctrines and practices; and liberalism, as yet subordinate to Anglo-Catholicism, was also eroding Biblical Christianity. In the first half of the twentieth century, therefore, evangelicals were a minority, a remnant within the Church of England, faithful to Scripture, arguing with full justification that it was they, and they alone, who were faithful to the foundation documents, the Articles, Homilies, and Book of Common Prayer, to which all ministers were required to

¹² Thomas Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters* (Parker Society; 1846), 117

¹³ John Ayre, *The Works of John Whitgift*, III (Parker Society; 1853), 214

¹⁴ Cf. Article VIII

¹⁵ G. Whitefield, *Works*, I (1771), 93

¹⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Knots Untied* (1874), chapter I, Evangelical Religion

give solemn assent; the remedy for the Church of England's ills was a return to the position to which it was formally committed.

This position had an outstanding exposition by Dr. J.I. Packer in a lecture given in 1961. The lecture, recently republished by the Society, *The Theological Challenge to Evangelicalism Today*, argued that evangelicalism - Biblical Christianity - is issued with a theological challenge whenever the Church loses, or threatens to lose, its grip on the Gospel, or whenever Christians cease to walk according to the truth of the Gospel. The contemporary challenge, Dr. Packer declared, was the ecumenical outlook, that estimated evangelicalism as one among many traditions, due in time to be assimilated into the larger whole. Packer argued incisively that we should not accept this estimate, but maintain and vindicate two principles. First, that evangelicalism is Christianity. One cannot add to evangelical theology without subtracting from it. The way ahead was the way, not of synthesis, but of reformation. Second, we have to stand for the principle that evangelicalism is Anglicanism; it cannot be equated with whatever the Anglican Communion happens to have become. The religious position of the Church of England was essentially a confessional position, to be defined in terms of the Thirty-nine Articles. Anglicanism is evangelicalism, and evangelicalism is Anglicanism, inasmuch as the faith defined in the Thirty-nine Articles is the evangelical faith.

Keele

The Reformation speaks to an evangelicalism which, particularly in the Church of England, has since the 1960s lost its way. It is, to use the title of Iain Murray's excellent book, an *Evangelicalism Divided*. The origin of the new evangelicalism was manifested in a major gathering held at the University of Keele in 1967, called the National Evangelical Anglican Congress, at which a thousand participants were present. To a great extent the congress was taken over by a small group of younger activists, who made the production of a substantial Statement the focus of the Congress; but its leaders, too, adopted and advocated a new stance. Thus the Rev. J.R.W. Stott wrote:

Keele expressed the formal public, penitent, renunciation by evangelical Anglicans of that pietism which for too long had marred our life and our testimony. ... Pietism is an immature protective attitude of those who have not yet attained their majority. ... the Keele Congress marked the coming of age of the current generation of evangelicals. Keele was the conscious emergence into maturity in the wider life of the church and the world. Keele marked for many of us our conversion from the negative and the defensive ... The opposite of pietism is involvement. We must say, therefore, that pietism is not the hallmark of true evangelicalism but rather a denial of it.¹⁷

Respect for Mr. Stott as a gifted Bible expositor must not keep us from realising how extraordinarily inaccurate was this evaluation both of the past and of the significance of the Keele Congress. The picture of evangelicals in the past is a mere caricature; no doubt they had imperfections, but they were faithful men who were fully involved in the life of the Church of England, whose true sons they claimed to be. Keele did not mark an emergence into maturity, but rather the as-it-were teenage immaturity that wished to cast off its shackles so that it could sow its doctrinal and ecclesiastical wild oats without restraint. The use of the word 'pietism', with a somewhat elusive meaning, assisted in giving an apparent respectability to this rejection of the past, as did the professions of the "need to repent and change".¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Evangelicals in a changing world', *Church of England Newspaper*, November 1st., 1968, 12

¹⁸ (Ed.) P. Crowe, *Keele '67: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress Statement* (1967), 8

There was a radical difference, indeed a serious dichotomy, between the position set down in 1961 by Dr. Packer in *The Theological Challenge to Evangelicalism Today* and the character of Anglican evangelicalism in 1967, as evaluated by Mr. Stott. This extraordinary change was made plain by the inviting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, a liberal Anglo-Catholic, to give the opening address of the Congress. Dr. Samuel's analysis was perceptive:

The old position of affirming that evangelicalism was the true churchmanship of the Church of England was no longer regarded as tenable. ... The best hope for evangelicalism, it was argued, was to cut loose from its historical moorings in the Articles and Prayer Book ..., and take its chance in the ongoing life of the church, in the changes and reorganisation that were coming about. ... To do this evangelicalism had to be free from the commitments and restraints of the old position. Thus ..., policy and expediency became paramount over principle and doctrine, even though doctrine may be retained as a formal statement of belief.¹⁹

Here is the kernel of the matter: "policy and expediency became paramount over principle and doctrine". Dr. Samuel pointed out an apparent anomaly in the Keele Statement, and the Nottingham Statement ten years later: "First there is an unimpeachable statement of doctrine, but the working out of the policy afterwards appears to bear no integral relation to it."²⁰

Loyalty moved from doctrine to denomination; all who described themselves as Christian were accepted as Christian; confessionalism had given way to mere inclusivism. Thus, in Dr. Samuel's words:

This new policy for evangelicals was variously described as one of co-operation with all traditions within the Church of England, involvement with ecumenism, serious commitment to dialogue, evangelicals coming of age, and full participation in the life of the Church of England.²¹

This new perspective soon became the accepted wisdom. A reviewer in the journal *Churchman*, referring to the authors of a then recently published book, wrote:

They all seem committed to the myth of Keele. Before ... 1967 all was chaos and darkness; pietism, parochialism and isolationism reigned unchallenged. Then a thousand evangelicals met, and there was light! They bathed the church, the world, cultures and structures with instant illumination. ... Writer after writer now passes it on, with no suggestion of anything lost in the process and no trace of the shudder among Free Church evangelicals. One day someone will write the story differently!²²

By alienating evangelicals from their history and their heritage, Keele left evangelicalism a prey to novelty and passing fashion. Having destroyed the foundations and committed themselves to the ebb and flow of politics and expediency, those who took the name evangelical were no longer an identifiable group: they lacked a shared belief system. Dr. Packer, who had characterised the identity of evangelicalism and of the Church of England with such clarity in 1961, published in 1978 *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem - an Analysis*: from identity to identity problem!

¹⁹ (Ed.) David N. Samuel, *The Evangelical Succession* (1979), 98-99

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, 98

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Churchman*, 107 (1993), no. 3, 279; a review, written by the Rev. C.M. Idle, of (edd.) R.T. France and A.E. McGrath, *Evangelical Anglicans: Their Role and Influence in the Church Today* (1993)

To such an extent did this severance from historic doctrine occur that in the Nottingham Statement of 1977, a document of over seventy pages, there was no reference to the Articles. Of the third NEAC at Caister-on-Sea in 1988 John Stott shrewdly commented: "an assembly of Anglican evangelicals in 1987/8 would not be sufficiently definite or united to make a Congress Statement possible."²³

This confusion and accommodation to error was not confined to evangelicals in the Church of England. Francis Schaeffer's last book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, is a compelling survey of the wider, parallel decline of evangelicalism, particularly in the United States. He wrote:

Here is the great evangelical disaster - the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this - namely *accommodation*: the evangelical church has accommodated to the spirit of the age. ... there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth the Bible teaches - truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality.²⁴

The self-confidence of a movement that thought it was about to gain the ascendancy in the Church of England caused Keele to put its trust in numbers and policy rather than faithfulness to revealed truth. Fifty years ago Dr. Samuel wrote:

the policy has been disastrous for the Reformation teaching of the Church of England. All the principal doctrines of the Reformation have been, if not actually compromised, then blurred and confused by this approach. ... if this line is further pursued by Evangelicals, ... then within a generation they will cease to have a definite doctrinal position at all²⁵

It is indeed time for evangelicalism to repent, not of its historic past, but of its trust in the schemes and policies of man manifested at Keele, and to return to the Biblical heritage of Reformation doctrine enshrined in the Articles.

The Reformation speaks to the Church, and to evangelicalism in particular, today, when it is failing to stand for truth as truth by entering into groupings in which the sole, final authority of Scripture is not recognised by all parties, and where, therefore, there is no agreement as to the essentials of the Gospel - what is a Christian? how does a man become a Christian?

Fear of liberalism has led to the establishment of co-belligerence by parties whose agreement is in the negative one of a rejection of liberalism, particularly in its more extreme outworkings, which have adopted the ethics of the pagan world. Co-belligerence in matters of common grace is acceptable; but co-belligerence in matters of special grace - in the preaching of the Gospel, in teaching men the way of salvation, of instructing believers how they may grow in grace - is only true and faithful between those who accept the supreme and final authority of Scripture, which defines that Gospel and that way of salvation. Fear of liberalism has obscured the basic principle: the great watershed is between those who accept the supreme and final authority of Scripture and those who reject or subvert that authority. Catholicism, so called, and liberalism are equally subversive of Biblical Christianity.

²³ T. Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (2001), 276

²⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (1984), 37

²⁵ David N. Samuel, *The Reformation and the Church of England Today* (1973), 6-7

Growing into Union

The growth of this confusion can be traced over the last fifty years. In 1970 in the aftermath of the rejection of the Anglican - Methodist Unity Scheme two evangelicals (Dr. J.I. Packer and the Rev. C.O. Buchanan, the latter one of the activists behind Keele) and two Anglo-Catholics (the Rt. Rev. G.D. Leonard and Dr. E.L. Mascall) produced proposals for forming a united Church in England, *Growing into Union*. It built on doctrinal confusion, with such declarations, on Scripture and Tradition, as:

The supreme importance of Scripture as the normative element in the Church's tradition arises from its character as, so to speak, the verbal precipitate of the Church's primordial life and, therefore, as keeping the Church true to its historical roots as nothing else, except perhaps the Eucharist, can.²⁶

The authors concluded: "Scripture and Tradition are thus from every standpoint not antithetical, but complementary as leading us to Christ."²⁷

On Justification too there was confusion.²⁸ The teaching of Hans Küng that the declaration of acquittal is not merely a forensic pronouncement but is also a creative word which effects subjective righteousness was at work. Dr. Samuel commented:

It is a perfectly obvious case of trying to have it both ways at once, in that justification is *both* a pronouncing righteous and a making righteous, and this is always what Catholics have desired and what Evangelicals have resisted.²⁹

Evangelicals and Catholics Together

In 1994 a statement was published in the U.S.A. entitled: "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium". The statement, issued by a number of evangelicals and Roman Catholics who had met together at the invitation of Mr. Charles Colson, carried with it on its publication the endorsement of various leaders, including Dr. Os Guinness and Dr. J.I. Packer. The Statement, with six essays by individuals, was published in 1995, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together - Working Towards a Common Mission*.

The Statement declared:

We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ³⁰

This apparent affirmation of justification by faith was carefully crafted so that its generality might be endorsed by evangelicals and Roman Catholics alike. Justification and grace are not defined; we note the proximity of the reference to faith working by love - Galatians 5: 6 is a favourite verse, though only through misinterpretation, with those who wish to fuse imputed and inherent righteousness. The

²⁶ C.O. Buchanan, E.L. Mascall, J.I. Packer, G.D. Leonard, *Growing into Union* (1970), 36

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, 38

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, 41-45, 47-48

²⁹ David N. Samuel, *The New Evangelicalism in the Church of England* [1973], 45

³⁰ C. Colson and R.J. Neuhaus (eds.), *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (1995), xviii

'alones' that would sharpen and guard the definition are omitted. Dr. Packer glided lightly over this when he stated:

ECT lets go Protestant precision on the doctrine of justification and the correlation between conversion and new birth, just as it lets go the Roman Catholic dogmas of baptismal regeneration and the sacramental structure of the doctrine of grace.³¹

Dr. Packer wrote elsewhere that the signatories could not 'all be relied on to attach the same small print to "we are justified by grace through faith in Christ"³²: but can Protestant evangelicals be faithful to the Gospel and at the same time 'let go precision on the doctrine of justification'?³³ Is horse trading with divine truth acceptable?

The Statement not only claimed that 'We Contend Together' (for common-grace issues in a morally degenerate North American society), but also that 'We Witness Together'. Thus the Protestant signers wrote of "parachurch cooperation with evangelically committed Roman Catholics for the pursuit of agreed objectives"³⁴. Dr. Packer stated: "Despite the shortcomings of Rome's official teaching, there are many Roman Catholic Christians".³⁵ His use of the word 'shortcomings' in relation to Rome's official teaching might be considered an evasion of its radical perversion of the Gospel.

Members of the Church of Rome may indeed be true Christians by what has been termed a 'felicitous inconsistency'³⁶ - they believe the Biblical teaching about salvation, but in doing so they are not being consistent Roman Catholics. It is not our place to judge anyone. How Dr. Packer could state so clearly that there are *many* Roman Catholic Christians - ones whom he described as evangelically committed - is not explained. He argued that "to want to see such Catholics and evangelicals standing and working together to ... spread the news about Jesus Christ is surely a natural and ... a necessary desire."³⁷ But again, we must ask, What is a Christian? and What exactly is 'the news about Jesus Christ' that is to be spread? Unless we agree on the message of the Gospel and can tell others clearly what a Christian is, it will not be news but confusion that is spread. It is fear of liberalism that has led to this confusion. Dr. Packer wrote:

Today ... the deepest and most hurtful division is between theological conservatives ("conservationists", as I would rather call them), who honor the Christ of the Bible and the historic creeds and confessions, and theological liberals and radicals who for whatever reason do not³⁸

But, the only great watershed is between those who accept the supreme and final authority of Scripture and those who reject or subvert that authority; the Church of Rome and liberalism belong equally to the latter category.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, 167

³² 'Why I Signed It', *Christianity Today*, 12 December 1994

³³ Cf. "domestic differences about salvation and the Church should not hinder us from joint action in seeking to re-Christianize the Northern American milieu." C. Colson and R.J. Neuhaus (eds.), *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (1995), 172

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, 161

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, 163

³⁶ Cf. 'believing Roman Catholics'; *op. cit.*, 149

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, 164. In response to critics, Dr. Packer wrote: "task-force cooperation with Roman Catholics on the basis of shared loyalty to undisputed biblical teaching and to the Christ of Scripture has brought me pleasure and profit, and I have found working in Catholic-Protestant, charismatic-ecumenical networks for the faith of the creeds and the vitality of Christians consistently enriching." (*Op. cit.*, 167)

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, 171-172

Global Anglican Future Conference

The Church of England and the loose affiliation that is the Anglican Communion are being torn apart by the rejection by many of Biblical sexual ethics. When it was clear that bishops who rejected Biblical teaching on sexual ethics would be invited to the Lambeth Conference of 2008, a Conference was arranged in Jerusalem for those who wished to affirm that teaching and distance themselves from the godless liberalism that had infiltrated the Church of England and its associates: the Global Anglican Future Conference - GAFCON. The Jerusalem Statement that was issued by this gathering set out several tenets of orthodoxy, among which were:

2. We believe Holy Scripture ... to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation.
4. We uphold the Thirty-nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God's Word and authoritative for Anglicans today.
6. we uphold the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer
7. We uphold the classic Anglican Ordinal as an authoritative standard of clerical orders.
12. we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters
13. We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith.

These were fine principles, though one would wish to have seen an explicit commitment to the Bible as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct and a more central recognition of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. The significance of this was underlined by the presence of a number of Anglo-Catholic sympathisers, of some who favoured the ordination of women, and of some who embraced a neo-pentecostal / charismatic theology. These were attracted to the Conference as it was the only international grouping addressing the revisionist agenda.

It was good that there were many who wished to distance themselves from the anti-scriptural inclusiveness that the Lambeth Conference, under the leadership of Dr. Runcie, was endorsing. Yet the difficulties inherent in any negative co-belligerence were in place; and, in practice, the GAFCON movement, even if often heavily influenced by evangelical thought, has been a broad traditionalist grouping against extreme liberalism. The movement abounds in the use of such phrases as confessing Anglicans, faithful Anglicans, and orthodox Anglicans, and speaks of planting Gospel-centred churches: but it is clear that the various affiliates to the movement mean different things by these phrases. Again, the watershed has been wrongly placed: it has not been fully recognised that the only great division is between those who accept the supreme and sole final authority of Scripture and those who reject or subvert that authority.

The second GAFCON was held at Nairobi in 2013: there were some ordained women present, a charismatic element was evident, especially in worship, and a significant number came from North America who were of Anglo-Catholic persuasion. The third GAFCON, at Jerusalem in 2018, evidenced division amongst UK evangelicals regarding the position of women as church leaders.

The fourth GAFCON occurred in April 2023 at Kigali. Representatives of around 85% of global Anglicanism affirmed their commitment to God's Word and the supremacy of Christ to rule his church. But, we must ask, will the Gafcon provinces apply the rule of Scripture and the norms of orthodox Anglicanism, the 39 Articles, to their teaching and their practice? There continues to be a strong strand

of Anglo-Catholicism present in the movement, not least conspicuous in the Anglican Church in North America. The ACNA 2019 Prayer Book contains repeated prayer for the dead.

The Kigali Commitment appears to have moved from uncertainty about the ordination of women to a position of acceptance. It identified one of its priorities as: "We will affirm and encourage the vital and diverse ministries, including leadership roles, of Gafcon women in family, church and society, both as individuals and as groups." Encouraging 'Gafcon women' in 'leadership roles' 'in family and church' allows for women to be ordained to the presbyterate and the episcopate, even if it fights shy of explicitly stating that. The section of the Commitment headed 'The Authority of God's Word' declares that "The Bible is God's Word written ... It carries God's own authority, is its own interpreter, and it does not need to be supplemented, nor can it ever be overturned by human wisdom." Yet God's Word written declares:

I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.³⁹

GAFCON was formed to oppose liberalism in the church, but in this priority it is adopting human wisdom - liberalism!

Whatever encouragements there may have been in its rejection of error and in its strengthening of fellowship, GAFCON is in fact a house divided against itself. In seeking to comprehend disparate and mutually exclusive strands, it has lost coherence and failed to follow the tenets that were agreed as its basis: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"⁴⁰

To be a Christian: the Catechism of the Anglican Church in North America

As a striking example we may take the Catechism produced by the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). That church is a leading member of GAFCON and of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches. In 2014 it approved a working edition, and in 2020 a final edition, of *To be a Christian - an Anglican Catechism*. The Theological Editor of this work was Dr. J.I. Packer. The Introduction, signed by Dr. Packer, lists the guidelines that were followed, the first of which was:

Everything taught should be compatible with, and acceptable to, all recognized schools of Anglican thought, so that all may be able confidently to use all the material.⁴¹

The recognised schools of Anglican thought are evangelicalism, Anglo-Catholicism, and charismaticism, but not extreme liberalism. The edifice was to be built on a foundation of inherent contradictions: it is not surprising that the result cannot be deemed acceptable to all schools of thought, certainly not to those who recognise the sole, final authority of Scripture.

In their preface the ACNA Archbishops list a number of 'classic sources for the explication and elucidation of scriptural doctrine', including the following: the Early Church, the Articles of Religion, the King James Bible, the Book of Common Prayer (1549 - 1662), music and hymnody, the Lambeth

³⁹ 1 Timothy 2: 12-13

⁴⁰ Amos 3: 3

⁴¹ *To be a Christian - An Anglican Catechism* (2020), 14

Quadrilateral, and the Jerusalem Declaration.⁴² What an extraordinary 'combination of antithetical elements', to quote W.S. Gilbert! The Articles are not central to the Catechism's teaching: the reference to them in Appendix 5 appears anxious to set them in an historical context as *a* norm, not *the* norm: they expressed

the Anglican response to certain doctrinal issues controverted at that time, as expressing fundamental principles of authentic Anglican belief, and as one of the elements characteristic of the Anglican way⁴³.

'Fundamental principles of authentic belief'; yet only 'one element characteristic of the Anglican way'!

There is confusion about the sacraments. The disciple is told that "A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward grace", as the Prayer Book Catechism teaches. But then there is added: "God gives us the sign as a means by which we receive that grace and as a tangible assurance that we do in fact receive it." The new catechism moves from the sacrament being an 'effectual sign of grace', its benefit being received by faith, to teaching that the benefit is automatic, the *ex opere operato* teaching of Rome - it is "a tangible assurance that we do in fact receive it".⁴⁴

The two sacraments ordained by Christ are enumerated - baptism and the Lord's Supper. Then five called "sacraments of the Church" are added - confirmation, ordination, marriage, absolution, and anointing of the sick; making the seven sacraments of Rome and Anglo-Catholicism. The catechumen is to state that "God clearly uses them as means of grace"⁴⁵ and to give Article 25 as support for this teaching. But what does Article 25 say?

Those five commonly called Sacraments ... are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures

As the other five are not sacraments of the Gospel, the problem was solved by calling them sacraments of the Church. The inconvenient contradiction, that they 'have grown partly from the corrupt following of the Apostles', has been ignored.

Article XXVII teaches that Baptism is

a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed

Baptism is an effectual sign of grace, by which the person baptised is made a member of the visible church and receives the covenantal promises of God as by an instrument. *To be a Christian* makes baptism an essential part of becoming a Christian, simply by the performance of the rite:

Baptism, which is the rite of entry into the Church's fellowship, marks the beginning of this new life in Christ⁴⁶.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, 7 - 9

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, 133

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, 55-56; Qu. 121

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, 56; Qu. 125

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, 20; Introduction. Cf. also:

Here entry into the outward fellowship of the Church and beginning new life in Christ are made identical and simultaneous.

The Prayer Book Catechism, referring to the outward effect of the covenant sign and to its benefit to those who receive baptism rightly, states: "in my Baptism ... I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven". The ACNA Catechism couples the inward gifts of faith and repentance (in the wrong order) with baptism to produce:

Through faith, repentance, and Baptism, I am made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven⁴⁷

Teaching about the Lord's Supper also is stated in terms of automatic benefit - *ex opere operato* - rather than of signs that are effectual to the believing. Thus:

As my body is nourished by the bread and wine, my soul is strengthened by the Body and Blood of Christ. I receive God's forgiveness, and I am renewed in the love and unity of the Body of Christ, the Church.⁴⁸

Article XXVIII stated the truth correctly and clearly:

The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith.

Article XI gives a succinct summary of the doctrine of justification by faith alone - "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings" - and refers to the Homily of Justification for an extended exposition. There are two references only to justification in *To be a Christian*, though none to justification by grace alone through faith alone. There is a heading - "Justification and Sanctification: Living in forgiveness and healing"⁴⁹; and in answer to the question, How does God enable you to live in forgiveness? the catechumen states:

Washed of sin and united to Christ, I am "justified," being declared righteous by God, and I am given grace to live continually in repentance and faith.⁵⁰

Rome does not accept the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the Catechism holds back from teaching that, as the sinner's sin is imputed to Christ, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner.

"Through faith, repentance, and Baptism we are spiritually united to Jesus and become children of God the Father." (*Op. cit.*, 21)
"Knowing the Lord Jesus ... means surrendering your life to him through repentance and Baptism." (*Ibid.*)

"The communion of saints is the fellowship of all those, in heaven and on earth, who are united in Christ in one Body, through one Spirit, in Holy Baptism." (Qu. 102; *op. cit.*, 51)

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, 112; Qu. 360.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, 58-59; Qu. 134. Cf. "In the Lord's Supper, or Holy Eucharist, I ... receive the grace of the Body and Blood of Christ to continue following him in love and obedience." *Op. cit.*, 113-114; Qu. 366

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, 111

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, 112; Qu. 360

There is confusion about how a man becomes a Christian: the divine initiative is obfuscated. We are told that "As we come to the Father through Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts to know him, and we are born again spiritually to new life".⁵¹ And again,

by repenting and being baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, I am forgiven my sins and I receive the Holy Spirit, who gives me new birth in Christ and frees me from the power of sin.⁵²

But the Spirit is given to us to call us, not after we have come to Christ: we are born again that we may believe; we do not believe that we may be born again. The Catechism lacks the scriptural comfort and theological rigour of Article XVII - Of Predestination and Election.

The seminary of the Anglican Network in Canada, a diocese of the ACNA, has been named Packer College, after the late Dr. J.I. Packer. Its first stated value is:

Packer will be an Anglican diocesan college, proudly Anglican, that produces graduates for ordained ministry for the entire denomination – 3 stream, men and women – to fill Canada with the gospel.

The eighth founding principle makes explicit what '3 stream' means:

We affirm the principled comprehensiveness of the Anglican way, with its catholic, charismatic, and evangelical traditions. We celebrate unity with fellow believers in the essential matters of the faith, while respecting freedom of conscience in secondary areas.

Conclusion

The Reformation indeed speaks to the Church today. We must recover the principle of *sola Scriptura* and fully apply it; we must recognise that in theology and doctrine the only great watershed is between those who accept the supreme and final authority of Scripture and those who reject or subvert it. The Reformation martyrs understood the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Lord's Supper and died rather than deny it. Only when we bow before the inspired, infallible, and inerrant written Word will we know the way of salvation, and what a Christian is; only then will we have a Gospel to preach.

True unity exists only among those who bow before the written Word and accept the way of salvation published in it. Like the Reformers we must keep before us the distinction between the visible church and the invisible church so that we may make discerning judgements on contemporary teaching and movements. Co-belligerence in matters of common grace is acceptable, but in matters of special grace there can be no co-belligerence: those who do not agree on the nature of the Gospel cannot join together to proclaim it.

A synthesis of all who call themselves Christian is the creation of man and of no power. Those who walk together must truly agree. The inclusiveness of modern thought must give away to the confessionalism of the Reformation. There is therefore no hope for the Church of England unless she returns to the Reformation doctrine of the Articles. There may seem little likelihood of that happening;

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, 21

⁵² *Op. cit.*, 48; Qu. 88

rather an intention to disobey the teaching of Scripture, calling evil good and good evil. In that case she will be cast aside by the Lord whom she has rejected. J.C. Ryle, concluding his discussion of 'What do we owe to the Reformation?', wrote:

My own mind is fully made up. I say the Church of England had better perish and go to pieces than forsake the principles of the Reformation, and tolerate the sacrifice of the mass and auricular confession.⁵³

The call is to faithfulness. The Reformers followed the truth of Scripture faithfully wherever it led them. In the last sixty years evangelicalism in the Church of England has placed its confidence in man - in policy, in numbers, in expectation of worldly influence - instead of remaining faithful to God and his Word. This has not led to increasing strength, but to incoherence and weakness. The Reformers remind us of the scriptural injunction: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"⁵⁴; and that with faithfulness there must be a willingness to be separate.

May the Biblical Gospel - the pure Gospel, the only saving Gospel - recovered at the Reformation, again have free course and be glorified in our land!

Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.⁵⁵

⁵³ J.C. Ryle, *What do we owe to the Reformation?* (1877)

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 4: 2

⁵⁵ Isaiah 51: 1