



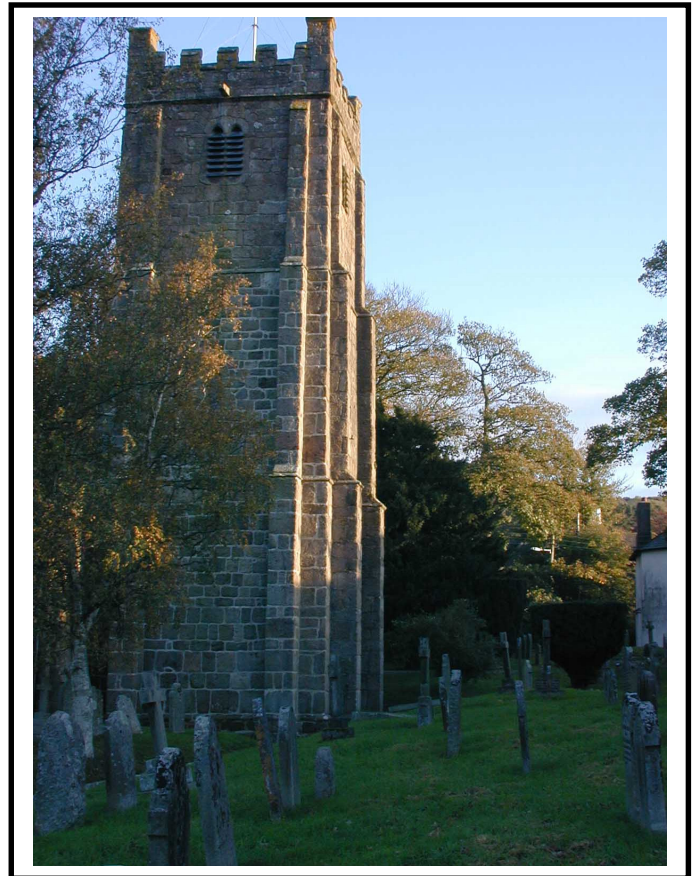
Latimer Focus

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Challenges for the new
Archbishop of Canterbury

Archbishop Rowan Williams
letter to the Primates

Is Your Church an Ageing
Beauty?



The Future of the Anglican Church

Report from the Oxford Consultation

....especially critical of western Anglicanism's relentless conformity to western cultural norms..

Tom Wright

Pauline reflections on Tolerance and Boundaries.

Issue 8
August, 2002

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Opinions expressed are those of the writers of individual articles, and are not necessarily those of Latimer Fellowship

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Latimer Fellowship has great pleasure in introducing Professor Marva Dawn who is the Orangememorial lecturer for 2002.

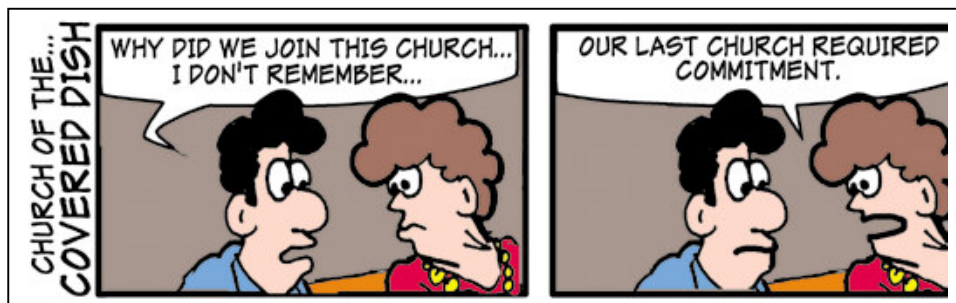
Marva Dawn is an author, educator and theologian with Christians Equipped for Ministry. As Teaching Fellow in Spiritual Theology, she is a perennial favourite at Regent College's Summer School in Vancouver. She holds a PhD in Christian Ethics and exercises a global ministry on topics such as worship, community, ethics, spirituality and pastoral ministry. Teaching is the passion of Marva Dawn's life but she writes extensively because 'the word is "fire in my bones" and I cannot hold it in'. Professor Marva Dawn is a Lutheran and, despite diabetes significantly affecting her health she has a remarkable production of books and teaching load.

Marva Dawn is in New Zealand at the invitation of Carey Baptist College, Auckland. We appreciate her being made available for this lecture.

Marva Dawn's other engagements may be found on the Carey Baptist College web site.
<http://www.carey.ac.nz>

Books by Marva Dawn:

To walk and not Faint – Meditations on Isaiah 40,
The Unnecessary Pastor (with Eugene Peterson),
I'm Lonely Lord - How Long? Meditations on the Psalms,
Keeping the Sabbath Wholly,
Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down,
Powers, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God





‘The Future of Anglicanism’

The Rev'd Dr Bob Robinson reflects on the Consultation held in Oxford in July. It brought together some of the foremost Anglican evangelical scholars and thinkers from around the world.

1. Background

As part of the 125th anniversary of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, its staff decided to call an international conference on ‘The Future of Anglicanism: Recapturing the Vision of our Gospel, Identity and Mission’. The gathering has recently been held, 30 June – 5 July 2002, with the larger meetings held at the refurbished St Aldate’s Church in central Oxford. Running alongside the conference was a theological consultation called by the Wycliffe Principal, Professor Alister McGrath, to work away at the more weighty theological issues facing Anglicanism today.¹

2. Theological consultation

This was an invitation-only event designed to give more attention to specific issues. One pleasing feature was a determination to give appropriate weight to the numerical realities of global Anglicanism. So, the 76 delegates came from: Africa and the Middle East – 21; South Asia – 2; South East Asia – 8; Australasia – 5; North America – 20; Latin America and Caribbean – 7; UK – 10. Exactly how the delegates were chosen is somewhat mysterious – but the final decisions were made by Wycliffe Hall staff and a generous grant from an American parish helped to subsidise airfares for those attending from the two-thirds world. Those attending were not directly representative of their regions but were seen as a kind of cross-section of leaders,

¹ New Zealanders among the 300 or so attending the open conference were Dale and Marie Oldham, Derek and Alice Eaton, Ron Taylor. Attending the theological consultation were Bob Robinson and Andrew Burgess (and, for much of the time, Bishop Derek as well)

decision-makers and theological educators. They were: Archbishops – 3 (Tanzania, South East Asia, Caribbean); Bishops – 17; theological educators – 33; other church leaders – 23. There was a punishing schedule (tough for the jetlagged!) that left virtually no time to see anything of Oxford, though we were able to attend choral evensong at a number of nearby colleges.

3. The Purpose of the Consultation

The gathering was called by Wycliffe and its Principal, Alister McGrath, to do several things:

- to recapture and sustain a vision of Anglicanism as a dynamic global orthodoxy – seen as the preservation and revitalisation of the ‘great tradition’ of the Christian faith
- to explore ways in which the dynamism of Anglicanism from the two-thirds world can help arrest the decline in western Anglicanism
- to address the challenges posed by what McGrath called in a preparatory paper ‘the liberal theological isolationism and revisionism of North American Anglicanism’. (His description proved all too true as the events in Vancouver unfolded during the week we met – much to the distress of the Canadian delegates.)

It would be a tedious (and lengthy endeavour) even to summarise all that we heard but I will outline what, for me, were the more significant of the issues and presentations.

4. Parallels with New Zealand ‘AFFIRM’

From public statements by Alister McGrath it was clear that the consultation intended to gather more than traditional

evangelicals. In a private conversation he saw a parallel with AFFIRM in New Zealand – and remembers his visits here. So, those attending might best be described as embracing dynamic orthodoxy or what McGrath himself defined at one point as “a generous dynamic orthodoxy concerned to remain faithful to Scripture and the Creeds.”

5. Alister McGrath on contemporary tensions

I must admit that McGrath was a surprise to me. I had only met him through the intellectual power of his theological writings and had not expected the sharpness and vigour of his protest against current Anglican revisionism. He was especially critical of western Anglicanism’s relentless conformity to western cultural norms (as seen, for example, in acquiescence to the gay agenda) and its latent disrespect for the pain and sense of betrayal caused by those dioceses in the West that behave simply as they wish – in, as he saw it, a maverick way that signals self-evident cultural superiority. I was also impressed by his comments on evangelicalism, ecumenism and the near-complete ‘denominational mobility’ of the under 40s who will gravitate to – or leave – Anglicanism in direct proportion to the presence of (a) excellent preaching; (b) doctrinal orthodoxy; (c) the quality of relationships and pastoral care. I’m sure that’s true in NZ as well.

6. Professor John Webster on ‘What is Orthodoxy?’

Of all the academic heavyweights at the consultation, John Webster, holder of the prestigious Lady Margaret Divinity Chair at Oxford, was among the most challenging – and no less critical than McGrath of the bankruptcy of Anglican

liberalism. His eight page paper (available from me: see below) is too complex to summarise, but here are some pertinent quotes.

- “Orthodoxy is what happens when the gospel of Christ, in all its evangelical force and catholic scope, is the centre from which everything in the church flows, and the norm by which everything in the church is measured.”
- “An orthodox church is not just one kind of church ...; it is just the church. And, moreover, ‘heterodoxy’ is not another way of being the church, any more than a lie is another way of telling the truth.”
- “In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ the Lord of the church establishes and preserves the church’s orthodoxy through canon, creed, sacraments and order, renewing the church’s unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Orthodoxy is an act of submission, confession and repudiation of falsehood.”
- [On false teaching] “If the church fails to make its judgments – whether from fear, indifference, vacillation, or a prizing of peace above all things – then it has ceased to live from the truth, and so ceased to be orthodox.”
- “Orthodoxy has hit hard times, though things have been worse... The supremacy of private judgment and individual conscience in modern culture has eaten its way into the church’s mind and ways of working. Add to that the non-dogmatic temper of much modern evangelicalism and the practical priority of music over Scripture in much evangelical worship.”

Having said these and other very helpful things, Webster was not too concerned about schismatic North American liberal Anglicanism: “there is no battle of consequence that we will lose.” Because Christ has rescued us from all darkness, orthodoxy will always mark the true church, but not the false – which was reassuring in its own way but left us a little short of advice on what actually to *do* apart from reasserting orthodoxy and declaring it’s opposite to be untrue.

7. Other contributions were also excellent

- Two splendid sessions from Tom Wright – on Luke 24 and on how much diversity Paul allowed (and why – constructively drawing on aspects of the ‘New Perspective’ on Paul)
- Prof Edith Humphrey, Canada: a strong plea to restore a fully trinitarian devotional life and in traditional categories (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)
- Bishop Peter Lee, South Africa: a rich historical survey bringing out the mix of geographical and partisan influences on the global Anglicanism we now see. The past is still with us.
- Prof Richard Bauckham (St Andrews) on the trustworthiness of the NT message about Christ

8. Troubles in Canada and George Carey’s reaction

Although the consultation was not convened primarily to look at sexuality issues, the decision of the Diocese of New Westminster to sanction the blessing of homosexual partnerships and the subsequent threat of the Bishop to withdraw the licences of nine dissenting clergy if they would not assent to the Synod’s decision, was a painful reminder of disturbing issues. Three people from the diocese were at the consultation (Profs Jim Packer, Edith Humphrey and George Egerton) – and, reasonable academics though they are, were adamant that the actions were but the last in a long line of official ecclesiastical intolerance. Two of the threatened clergy visited us from the wider conference and pointed out the outrageous situation: orthodox faithful Anglican clergy about to be declared *persona non grata* and deprived of livelihood and residences while a Bishop, defiant of Scripture, orthodoxy and clear Lambeth and Primates’ directions, remains in full communion with the Anglican Communion. I asked Edith Humphrey if the Synod had been told by Ingham that he would act so harshly (and illiberally) against dissenters and her answer was a clear ‘no’.

Archbishop George Carey, speaking to the consultants, said he’s written to Bishop Ingham to tell him that he deplores his actions because they are (a) ‘schismatic’ (Carey’s word); (b) undermine the Christian view of marriage; (c) are

profoundly unhelpful ecumenically. But Carey also pointed out that he still needs to get clear answers to a number of questions about the decisions and whether the Province is or will be involved in any way – but even then his influence is decidedly limited. (He repeated these sentiments in his sermon available at the website: see #12 below.)

9. The nature of Anglican identity – the most difficult issue

Two specialist groups looked in some detail, and with papers prepared in advance, at the nature of Anglican identity. Many of the theological heavyweights gravitated to these groups (‘Faith and Order’ and ‘Theology and History’) – but their reports reveal the struggle. For example:

- Many churches in the global south and elsewhere do not to mention ‘Anglican’ in their titles.
- The Lambeth quadrilateral (Scripture, creeds, sacraments, episcopacy) seems insufficient on its own to define Anglican identity. One of the groups will sponsor an international conference on the quadrilateral; at present it is used even by radical revisionists to justify their actions.
- The ‘instruments of unity’ (Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council – very heavily criticised by the South, Primates’ meeting, Archbishop of Canterbury) seem unable to offer a means of bringing unity to situations of disunity. As the threatened clergy in Vancouver told us, the shibboleth of territorial jurisdiction means that they are disenfranchised while a schismatic bishop remains undisciplined and in communion with the rest of Anglicanism!
- The greatest threats to Anglican identity come from the erosion of our Christian distinctiveness by cultural accommodation. (To apply that to the issue of ‘gay rights’ in the church: the agenda of Anglican revisionists comes not from some discovery of Gospel or Biblical values but from a desire to accommodate to culture – in this case, to capitulate to it.) As an address from George Carey expressed it, the problem arises

when culture (rather than the biblical tradition) becomes the dominant hermeneutic.

- One way of elaborating Anglican identity is to distinguish between first and second order aspects. The primary identity comes from Scripture and the Gospel – those divinely given aspects of identity. Beneath that are those *voluntary* commitments that Anglicans embrace – eg episcopacy and the structural and accountability dimensions as seen in the ‘instruments of unity’. Then one issue becomes: how do we deal/cope with those bishops and dioceses that flout not only the great tradition but the supposed instruments of unity that hold us together.

10. Some more personal observations

- In the city of Oxford, 70% of Anglican church attendance is from four central churches, all evangelical (St Aldates, St Ebbes, St Matthews, St Clements).
- The leadership style of these churches (and people like the new General Secretary of CMS London and the leadership of the evangelical theological colleges) centres on *clarity*: clarity of conviction, of speaking, of articulation together with highly *relational* styles of teaching and worship leading. I was impressed and reflected on how muddled kiwis sound by comparison!
- For me it was moving to meet so many old friends from travels in Africa and Asia – either leaders I’d known from the past, or students I had taught in Singapore who are now leaders in the church in Singapore and Malaysia.
- The conference may have marked Jim Packer’s public farewell to global Anglicanism though he will work away in a group that want to produce a contemporary Anglican catechism.
- Having recently reviewed Dudley-Smith’s very long and comprehensive biography of John Stott, it was great to meet John again in person. At the age of 82, and still slightly affected by a small stroke suffered a few years ago, he gave an address of outstanding clarity and

insight on ‘The Cross and Revelation’. It was 40 minutes of pure gold – after which he left to rush back to London and a journey, the following day, to speak in Australia!

- We attended the occasional sung evensong. At one of them we heard a sermon with the phrase ‘a ghastly perspicacity’ (try saying that with a fruity Oxford academic accent) and that was followed by a hymn that included the line ‘And ne’er be touched by time’s rude hand’!
- The strength of English evangelicalism grows as seen in full evangelical colleges; very able (and youngish) academics at these colleges; a growing number of evangelical–orthodox bishops (eg the very able James Jones, Liverpool), one of the best conference presenters.
- My own paper on the uniqueness of Christ sparked an hour’s good discussion in the Theology and History group. That was pleasing and helped offset a degree of unease I felt after a previous spirited debate between John Webster and me on one theological issue.² I thought his response was rather negative and irritated in tone – not used to being challenged by colonials? – but the other British academics present pronounced themselves pleased with what they said was a genuinely typical (ie bruising) Oxford debate and the two Aussies were happy!
- Several interesting possibilities have opened up for study leave when next due of which the most significant might well be Myanmar (that’s sensitive) and Bangalore, India at a College that trains lecturers at Masters and PhD level for *fifty(!)* Seminaries/Colleges throughout India.

11. Some memorable quotations.

- We cannot have a worldwide Anglican communion and ignore what most of its members believe (McGrath)
- Anglicans from the South are grossly under-represented, even marginalised,

² I found it extraordinary that he could discuss ‘orthodoxy’ with no reference at all to his hearers and the way they ‘hear’ talk of ‘orthodoxy’, ‘truth’ and so on. He responded that I was Tillichian and so I pointed out how unbiblical (ie non-incarnational and non-contextualised) his stance was – and off we went!

in the global committees and centres of power of Anglicanism (McGrath)

- There is a future only if Western Anglicanism heeds the words of judgment spoken against it by the poor and non-white members of our communion (McGrath)
- Ecumenism is the last refuge of the theological bore (cited by McGrath) – ouch!
- Be wary of trimming orthodoxy to what we can cope with (Bishop Peter Lee)
- When I teach the history of Anglicanism I concentrate on the first 16 centuries; the rest is an appendage (Bishop John Chew)
- Faithful churches grow (George Carey)
- All things have come into being *to* and *for* Christ. Never have two prepositions carried so much weight (Bishop James Jones)
- Chilean: I would like, as a South American, to thank England for inventing a game so that the rest of the world can beat you at it(!).

12. Papers I can offer you

Send a self addressed envelope (204 Condell Ave, Christchurch 8005) if you want hard copy; note that there may be a delay while I check to see if revised versions are available.

- (a) What is orthodoxy? (John Webster). Hard copy only.
- (b) The ‘Faith and Order’ group’s ‘The Oxford Declaration’ - two carefully worded pages aimed at Anglicanism’s current contradictory approaches to issues of sexuality. Email or hard copy.
- (c) Report of Theology and History Group. Email or hard copy.
- (d) Report of Faith and Order Group. Email or hard.
- (e) Report of Theological Education Group. Email or hard copy.
- (f) Report of Islam and Christianity Group. Email or hard copy.
- (g) Report of Mission Group. Email or hard copy.
- (h) Report of Ethics Group. Email or hard copy.
- (i) Proposal for a New Anglican Catechism. Email or hard copy only.
- (j) Tom Wright on Luke 24: Easter and the launch of the Church (10 pp). Hard copy only.

- (k) Tom Wright, Paul on Tolerance and Boundaries (9 pp). Hard copy only.
- (l) Edith Humphrey, 'Trinitarian Spirituality' (16 pp). Hard copy)
- (m) Ng Moon Hing (Malaysian), 'Cell-based Mission and Ministry' (6 pp). Hard copy only
- (n) David Wenham (Wycliffe Hall), 'The Jesus of History and the Christ of Today' (9pp). Hard copy.
- (o) Graham Tomlin (Wycliffe), 'Anglican Identity: Scripture, Culture, Modesty, Politics and Community'. Good historical content (8 pp). Hard copy only.
- (p) George Sumner (Wycliffe College, Toronto), 'Theological Education in a Postmodern Era' (7 pp). Email or hard copy.
- (q) Paul Zahl, 'The New Perspective on Paul' (critical of it; 10 pp). Email or hard copy.
- (r) Patrick Sookhdeo, 'Christians Under Islam' (10 pp). Hard copy only.
- (s) Revd Mario Bergner, 'Pastoral Care and Healing for Homosexuality' (7 pp – seemed sensible and defensible to me). Hard copy only.
- (t) Christopher Seitz, 'Biblical Theology' (6 pp). Hard copy.

For some 30 pages of summary statements from the various study groups see:

<http://www.prayerbook.ca/cann/2002/07/oxonfinal.pdf>

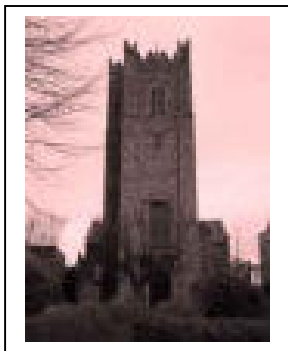
13. A final summary comment

- (a) The consultation's aims do seem to have been met. These were:
 - to provide significant, representative and theologically-informed conversation about the future of global Anglicanism
 - to promote a vision of a dynamic orthodoxy, faithful to Scripture and the great tradition
 - to strategise about the best practical ways of safeguarding and extending this dynamic orthodoxy within the official structures of global Anglicanism.
- (b) However, it is this last point that proved the most problematical. One of the virtues of Anglicanism is that it has chosen to be doctrinally modest – but this is not the same as being doctrinally loose. There was agreement that this latter option, as found in Western Anglicanism, continues to remain unacceptable.

But there was also a mixture of disagreement and felt powerlessness about what needs to happen. Perhaps it is helpful to distinguish both:

- short term and 'second level' issues (such as the gay agenda) that need to be tackled but without giving liberal revisionists the satisfaction of remaining the centre of attention and without implying that these are as important as
- long term and 'first level' issues: the continuing assertion of living orthodoxy.

So, rather than being diverted into the somewhat negative task of criticising the denials of faith that irritate us – though these do need to be refuted – it is, ultimately, far more important to centre on the church-building affirmation of a joyful and liberating dynamic orthodoxy. Those attending certainly felt encouraged along such a path.



Is Your Church an Ageing Beauty?

By Richard Kew

Richard Kew, an English priest who has spent most of his working life in the United States, reflects on the implications of the demographics on the life of the church.

There is a fascinating article by Peter Francese in this month's American Demographics (July-August 2002). It is written with retailers in mind, but it makes a lot of sense to churches, as well. During the next ten years we will see a decrease by 12% in the number of households in the age range 35- 44, while at the same time there will be an increase by 10% of the number of households in the under 35 range.

The reason for this, of course, is that the "Baby Bust" is now working its way through the system, while the

Millennials, sometimes known as an echo of the Boomers, are themselves coming into adulthood. The result of this is that those industries that depend on families with growing and teenage kids at home will feel the economic draft in the years ahead, while those meeting the needs of single adults and young households will rise.

What does this mean for congregations? It means that while you have to keep your Christian education program in the finest fettle possible, it might be worth looking very seriously at the ways you minister

among young adults and those forming their households for the first time. The nursery is going to be extremely important in your future, as is the kind of ways that you help the young, who might be unfamiliar with church, to get over threshold shock.

This also ties in with what Chris Findley shared about the mindset of those who are deeply shaped by postmodern culture -- our churches have to be authentic communities, not make-overs of yesteryear's way of being church, often perceived by younger people as being hypocritical.

The best place to park at the Hickory Hollow Mall in Nashville is the covered parking area beneath Dillard's department store. This means that you come up an escalator into the store where the cosmetic counters are. While I don't go there often, whenever I do I find myself fascinated by the efforts taken by certain members of the gender with XX genes in their effort to modify their appearance! I am sometimes tempted to lurk to see the various layers of make-up being applied, and



then the mascaras, lipsticks, blushers, and goodness knows what else. Of course, I don't, because I would be as embarrassed as the women I was staring at!

Much of what we do to upgrade our own appeal in the churches is similar to the manner in which aging beauties use cosmetics to disguise the ravages of time, crows feet, wrinkles, and a whole variety of what they consider to be unsightly blemishes. The postmodern generation can see through this, which means when we reach out to them what is demanded is a lot more than a make-over, but a remaking of the church so that there is a genuine community with integrity and grace into which they can be welcomed.



But at the same time we should have the best nursery facilities, staffed with people who really love the kids. It means that we should have good-looking landscaping and parking around our churches, and perhaps instead of the rector having his parking

space just by the door, that should be reserved for pregnant mothers with small children, as in the case of many mall parking lots. It should be easy for people to find where the church office is, and there should be places where people can relax and enjoy one another's company.



One favourite gripe of mine is that in these days of Starbucks and designer coffees, the worst coffee is still served at churches. I refuse to drink church coffee in most places, it is like sipping vinegar after having tasted the finest vintage. Today's young adults like freshly brewed fine coffee, teas, herbal teas, iced bottled water, and fruit drinks like Snapple. These folks are used to more choice than the acidic stuff that comes out of the average church coffee pot. These are the kind of refreshments should be available in our churches if we want to be young adult/young family friendly.

Yes, older people will gripe, and you will hear things like, "Well, it was good enough for us, why isn't it good enough for them?" This points up another great challenge of ministry in the 21st Century, that you are likely to have as many as five generations in a well-established congregation these days. Generations are like ethnic groups in their tastes and the influences that have shaped them, so we cannot expect what speaks to one generation to speak meaningfully to another. This is where teaching about the changes in society are important.

If I was the rector of a parish at the moment I would begin leading us toward investing heavily in the possibilities that go with reaching out to young adults who will soon be forming families. This would be a long-term investment that might not reach fruition for 5-10 years, but by

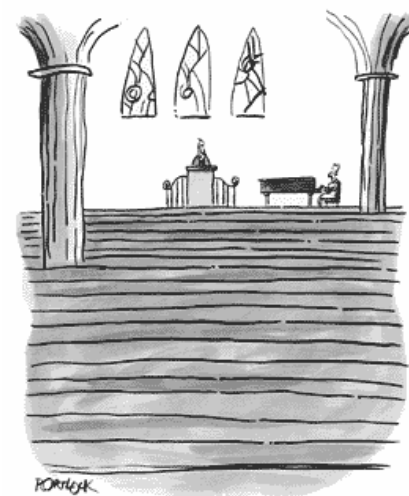
failing to do it, the opportunity is missed.

The other evening I met a young father from a small congregation in this diocese. He and his wife had moved



into the area four years ago and after having been disconnected from church for a while had found their way toward this little Episcopal church because they were looking for something more for their children. I hazard that there will be a good few more like him in the next few years.

From Towards 2015
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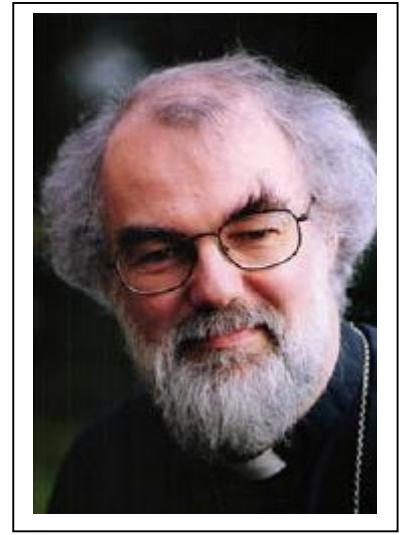
Welcome to our first early morning service

What Next?

Theological Challenges facing the new Archbishop of Canterbury

by Peter Carrell

The Rev. Dr. Peter Carrell is Director of Studies at Bishopdale College



Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury-elect, has been described as the greatest theologian in Britain today. I have no reason to doubt the accolade is well deserved.

What theological challenges does Rowan Williams face?

I suggest three prime challenges.

First, to speak the language of God and the gospel in a manner which is understandable to the public of Britain and the world.

One unique advantage of the position of Archbishop of Canterbury is that its holder is one of the few religious leaders in the world whose words the media will communicate to the world (the others being the Pope and the Dalai Lama). This particular challenge

involves moving beyond clichés and trite sound-bites to new ways of prophetically speaking God's word into issues and events in today's world.

The next challenge is to use understandable language to articulate God's message to the world.

In a post-modern world it is recognised that many stories attempt to explain the point and purpose of life. Some of these stories have been found to be seriously inadequate (e.g. Marxism), some are adequate for some, but frightening for others (e.g. fundamentalist Islam), and some are dangerously illusory (e.g. each individual can create their own meaning of life). The Christian story (of creation, redemption, transformed life, and a fantastic future) is the best story, and the only one which is true

for all people all the time. But it's a story which is hard to tell because many people have been hurt by distorted versions of the story or confused by conflicting versions of the story. The Archbishop of Canterbury must tell the Christian story well, encourage the church to be united around the story, and committed to living the story by its loving example.

The third challenge is to have a sense of humour.

That will help Rowan Williams to remain humble. The position of Archbishop of Canterbury is important, but not that important. It is on God that the future of the church depends

From the Witness
With permission

New Archbishop says he' ll abide by Lambeth Resolution on Human Sexuality

Archbishop Williams letter to the Primates of the Anglican Communion.

From the Most Revd Dr Rowan Williams
Archbishop of Wales and Bishop of
Monmouth

Tuesday, 23rd July

My dear friends,

You will be hearing today the news that I have accepted appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury. My first reason for writing is to ask for your prayers; I am deeply thankful that we are not strangers to each other, and I hope that the friendships formed in the Primates' Meetings will continue and flourish as we work together under God. At the moment, I am chiefly conscious of bringing to the task only the fear, the confusion and the sense of inadequacy that come from my

personal resources. I have to trust that God will give (not least through your fellowship and intercession) what is needed - and that I shall have the grace to receive and respond to what he gives.

I also write because I know that some disquiet has been expressed over the possibility of my appointment because of what are believed to be my views on certain questions, in particular on human sexuality. On this matter, I

wish to say two things. First, an archbishop is not someone elected to fulfil a programme or manifesto of his own devising, but to serve the whole Communion. He does not have the freedom to prescribe belief for the Church at large. I have indeed in the past written briefly on the subject of theology and sexuality, and hope that what I have written has contributed to the continuing discussion; but my ideas have no authority beyond that of an individual theologian. Second, the Lambeth resolution of 1998 declares clearly what is the mind of the overwhelming majority in the Communion, and what the Communion will and will not approve or authorise. I accept that any individual diocese or even province that officially overturns or repudiates this resolution poses a substantial problem for the sacramental unity of the Communion.

In both respects, I have to distinguish plainly between personal theories and interpretations and the majority conviction of my Church, and have always tried to make such a distinction when I have been questioned on this subject. Since the Lambeth resolution also commends continuing reflection on these matters, my main hope will be to try and maintain a mutually respectful climate for such reflection, in the sort of shared prayerful listening to Scripture envisaged by Lambeth. I hope too, very earnestly, that we can hold to the urgent common priority of mission and evangelism, and avoid the temptation of becoming trapped in questions where the politics of our culture sets the agenda. I believe with all my heart that through Christ we are given a unique and immeasurable gift, and that all our work as apostles and

pastors and teachers must grow from our thankfulness to God.

Once again, I ask your continuing prayers, and hope that we shall be able to work together in love and trust. I rely on all of you to 'speak the truth in love' to me and to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to me so that I may be strengthened to speak for Christ to others. This comes with warm affection and gratitude.

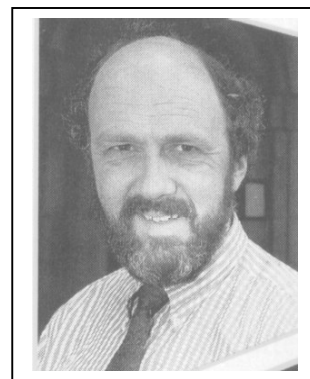
In Christ,

Communion and Koinonia: Pauline Reflections on Tolerance and Boundaries

(or: 'From Corinth to Vancouver, With Love')

by N.T Wright

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Introduction: Paul's Context

From the very beginning, the church was faced with the problem of different cultures coming together. Even in the earliest days, when all Christians were Jews, there were Greek speaking Jews and /Hebrew-(or Aramaic-) speaking Jews, and problems arose between them. Even during the public career of Jesus, there were different reactions to him, including among his own followers, and we may suppose that these were sometimes to do with what we would call culture just as much as

they may have been to do with personality, preference, temperament, level of faith, and so forth. Once the Christian message reached the Gentile world, not least in a swirling pluralistic metropolis like Antioch, all the cultures of the Orient would be jostling together, and the impact of this rich mixture on the church was bound to be considerable.

Pluralist environment

Coping with a pluralist environment was not, of course, anything new for Jews, and early Christianity remained

very firmly Jewish. Diaspora Judaism had faced the challenge of the pagan environment for many centuries; nor was there an iron curtain screening off Palestine from pagan influences. 'Galilee of the Gentiles' may have been home to many zealous and Torah-observant Jews, but it also contained many Gentile institutions, and, ever since the time of Alexander the Great, Hellenistic culture had been the backdrop for ordinary life in the Middle East. Sometimes this culture had forced itself on Judaism, as under Antiochus Epiphanes, persuading some to compromise their Judaism, to go

along with the pagan ways, and others to take to the hills, plot revolt, and prepare for martyrdom. The folk memory of this and other clashes were alive and well in the first century, not least among those who, like Saul of Tarsus, were 'zealous for Torah'.

The problem of what counts as compromise, what is perfectly acceptable, what must be resisted at all costs, and what you may get away with for a while but should expect to tidy up sooner or later – all of this is therefore familiar ground to most Jews of the first century, certainly those who did any travelling. And that, of course, is what Paul spent a lot of time doing, living for a while not only in Antioch but also in Ephesus and Corinth, with shorter stays in other places around the Mediterranean and Aegean seaboard. He was thoroughly familiar with the different customs of different places, and with the problems of Christian behaviour that arose from them. His letters, particularly those to Corinth, reflect exactly this set of questions, and are a goldmine for those prepared to work at finding out what he really had to say.

Tolerance

One theme of Paul's letters, particularly those to Corinth and Rome, is his emphasis on the need to tolerate, within the Christian fellowship, those who have different opinions on contentious issues. 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14 stand out here; though, from a somewhat different angle, Galatians 2 is also extremely relevant, and as we shall see Colossians 2 and 3 need to be factored into the picture as well. But it clearly will not do to simply say that Paul advocates 'tolerance', and leave it at that. In the same letters there are a good many passages in which he shows himself robustly intolerant of all kinds of types and modes of behaviour. How can we give an account of this? Was Paul just inconsistent, trying to get people to put up with one another's foibles but insisting that his prejudices at least were sacrosanct?

This highlights our central theme, which is *koinonia*, 'fellowship' or 'partnership', and what it means in practice. Paul is our earliest Christian

writer. He preached the gospel in a radically plural world, with every variety of culture, religion, politics, and ethics. He did indeed insist on justification by faith, and on the unity of Jew and Gentile, and by implication everyone else too, in Christ. What did he mean by this? What was the basis of his 'tolerance'? How do we explain the times when, despite urging tolerance and unity, he lays down firm rules, even to the extent of insisting that people who break them should be put out of Christian fellowship?

Perspectives on Paul, the Law 'Tolerance' and Ethics

As most of you will know, there has been a remarkable shift of opinion in Pauline scholarship over the last generation. The massive though uneven work of Ed P. Sanders, mainly in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), heralded what was quickly called 'the new perspective on Paul'. The very phrase has become something of a red rag to several bulls over the last two or three years, and this is not the time to enter into the current debate in any detail. I want to state two things very clearly: first, that the so-called new perspective on Paul, with its main exponents as Sanders and Dunn, has made two or three important, accurate and theologically fruitful points; second, that it has also got quite a lot of things wrong, and has in certain cases not followed through its own insights where they properly should have gone. I am thus a critical insider to the New Perspective, supporting some of its main thrusts but remaining deeply critical at certain other points. If you want to see how this works out in practice, read my new commentary on Romans, which is due out any day now in volume 10 of the *New Interpreter's Bible*. It simply won't do to wave the New Perspective away, as some have tried to do, and to go back to Martin Luther as though he solved all our problems. Luther got some things gloriously right and other things gloriously wrong. If, for instance, you have to choose between Luther and Calvin in New Testament theology, in my judgement you should normally go with Calvin; that, in fact, was where I myself came in, wrestling with Charles Canfield's essentially Calvinistic interpretation of Paul and

Romans, knowing that it was superior to the Lutheran and evangelical commentaries I was used to, but discovering at an exegetical level it didn't quite work. It was in that context, in the mid-1970s, that I read Sanders, and found that, though there was much I didn't agree with at the time and still don't, there was also much that was helpful in the essential task: allowing the text to speak for itself, instead of imposing our traditions upon it.

'New Perspectives'

So what are the true insights of the 'new perspective', and how may they help us in thinking about *koinonia*, tolerance, and related issues?

Works - Righteousness

The main thrust of Sanders's work, which I endorse, is that first century Judaism was not a system of Pelagian-style works-righteousness. First century Jews were not imagining that they had to earn 'righteousness', that is, basic membership in God's people, membership in the covenant, through doing moral good deeds. They did not regard the Torah, the Jewish law, as a ladder of good works up which they had to climb, with salvation as the reward at the top. On the contrary. As any good Calvinist could have told Sanders, they regarded the Torah as a good, lovely, God-given thing, not a ladder of good works for eager merit-earners, but the way of life for the people already redeemed. God chose Israel; God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt by an act of sheer grace and power; and God then gave Israel the Torah, not to earn their status with God but to *demonstrate* it. Now it is true, of course, that the Mishnah and Talmud, the codified commentaries and elaborations on Torah-keeping which grew up over the half-millennium after Paul's day, do indeed look like the kind of casuistical law-mongering which many people think of today when they hear the word 'legalism'. But Sanders's point here stands, despite many attempts to dislodge it. The main motive for keeping the law in Judaism was not to earn membership in the people of God, or justification or salvation, but to

express one's gratitude for it, to demonstrate one's membership, and ultimately to become the sort of person God clearly intended you to become. In Lutheran terms, it was *tertius usus legis*. In Calvinist terms, this was why God gave the law in the first place.

Works of the Law

What then about the famous Pauline phrase, 'works of law'? Here is the second insight of the 'new perspective' that comes into play, which I shall argue is the key one for discussion we need in today's Anglican communion in discussions of *koinonia*, tolerance, and boundaries. James Dunn has argued strongly, following the line of thought which I myself pioneered but taking it a stage further, that 'the works of the law' which Paul declares do not justify are not in general moral principles, a 'law' in that sense, but 'the works of the law' which marked out Jews from their pagan neighbours. They are, in other words, circumcision, the food laws, and the sabbaths – the three things which every Jew in the ancient world, and many pagans in the ancient world too, knew were the boundary-markers between Jews and pagans. The point in keeping these was to say, 'We are Jews, not pagans outside the Torah. We are God's people; he has made his covenant with us; we are called to be the light of the world, and by keeping God's law we will keep ourselves separate from the world and show the world who God really is'.

Paul's critique of Israel

The third insight which I myself bring to, and take from the New Perspective has to do with Paul's critique of Israel. Paul's critique of Israel is not that Israel is guilty of the kind of legalism of which Augustine criticised Pelagius, or Luther criticised Erasmus. Certainly Paul is not accusing Israel of the half-hearted moralistic Pelagianism of which, it used to be said, the average Englishman was guilty of most of the time, doing a few good deeds now and then and hoping God would notice and give him a pat on the back at the end of the day. (There aren't so many people like that around today, as you may

have noticed.) Rather, Paul is criticising Israel, his own former self included, for saying that God was exclusively Israel's God. Israel, he says, is ignorant of God's righteousness, and is *seeking to establish her own*, a 'righteousness' which would be for Jews and Jews only; whereas, in Jesus' Jewish Messiah, and by the cross and resurrection, God has thrown open covenant membership, 'righteousness', to all who believe (Romans 10. 1-4)

This very brief account of three points where I believe New Perspective has its finger on a key issue which is of enormous help exegetically and theologically. It does not, as is sometimes suggested, mean losing anything from the cutting edge of the gospel as we have traditionally understood it; on the contrary, it sharpens it up. But there is no time to develop this here. Rather, I want to indicate the enormous gain, precisely for the debates which face us in the Anglican Communion, in understanding Paul this way. The point is this: when Paul appeals for 'tolerance' in the church, the issues over which he saying there should be no quarrels are precisely the issue where there were cultural boundary-markers, especially between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He is not being arbitrary in selecting some apparently 'ethical' issues to go soft on, while remaining firm on others. *The things about which Christians must be prepared to agree or disagree are the things which would otherwise divide the church along ethnic lines.*

Ethnic divisions

This point is sometimes missed because of the clever writing of the key chapter, Romans 14. Nowhere does Paul mention the word Jew and Gentile, though it eventually becomes explicit in the next chapter. He doesn't want them to focus on the fact that some of them are Jewish and others of them are Gentile. He wants them to say to themselves, 'Some of us in this new movement are happy eating any meat at all, others prefer to stick to vegetables.' (If all the meat you could get in a pagan city had been sacrificed to idols, and if all the cheap meat you could get was pork, obviously people

with Jewish scruples, or with tender consciences of young ex-pagan Christians converted after years of assiduous idol-worship, might well decide to go the vegetarian route instead.) 'Some of us', he wants them to say, 'like to observe special days in honour of the Lord; others of us are happy to treat all, days the same way.' Then, in 1 Corinthians 7, he says, in effect, 'some of us are circumcised and are happy to be that way; others of us are uncircumcised and should be happy to stay that way.' In all these things he wants Christians to stop thinking of themselves as basically belonging to this or that ethnic group, and to see the practices that formerly demarcated that ethnic group from all others as irrelevant, things you can carry on doing if you like but which you shouldn't insist on for others.

This, too, is what underlies the debate about justification and circumcision in Galatians 2. The question underneath the passage is not, 'Do we have to perform good moral deeds in order to get to heaven,' but rather, 'Are Jewish Christians allowed to sit down and eat at the same table as Gentile Christians, when the latter have not been circumcised?' For Paul this is a central issue; the heart of the gospel is at stake. When Jesus Christ died and rose again he transformed the covenant people of God into a single, worldwide family for whom the only defining badge is faith, not just any old faith but the very specific faith that Jesus is risen from the dead as Messiah and Lord of the world. This, indeed, is the meaning of 'justification by faith'; that it is this faith, and this faith alone, that marks out God's people in the present time.

Making this distinction between 'works' in general, 'lawkeeping' in general if you like, and the more specific 'works' which mark the distinction between Jew and Gentile, frees us once and for all from the tyranny of that vague liberalism which holds that Paul played 'faith' off against 'law' or 'works', and which then uses that as a way of avoiding the sharp edges of every ethical issue in sight. **If you want to know why Paul insisted on tolerating some differences of opinion and practice within the people of God, and on not tolerating others, the**

answer is that the ones that were to be tolerated were the ones that carried the connotations of ethnic boundary lines, and the ones that were not to be tolerated were the ones that marked the difference between genuine, living, renewed humanity and false, corruptible, destructive humanity. This is my shorthand for a range of issues which he deals with in several passages. I take one classic example, from Colossians.

In Colossians 2 Paul insists that the Jewish law has nothing to say to you if you are in Christ. If with the Messiah you died to the elements of the world, why should you submit to mere human regulations – touch not, taste not, handle not! These, he says, all have an appearance of wisdom and of promoting ascetic discipline, but they are of no real value. You don't need Jewish law, particularly food laws, in order to define who the people of God are and build them up as God's truly human people.

What then? Shall we do as we please? Certainly not! In Colossians 3 Paul instructs us to 'seek the things that are above'; and when he spells out what this will mean in practice the list in verses 5-11 boil down to two areas of life in particular: sexual malpractice, and anger, malice and so on. **(It is interesting, and important for debates within our Communion, that we note how he places these two side by side; there are many churches where immorality would not be tolerated but where anger and malice reign unchecked, just as there are many which are full of sweet tolerance and people being nice to each other but where immorality is rife and never rebuked.)** The key to it all comes in verses 9-10: you have stripped off the old humanity with its practices, and have put on the new humanity, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. At this point there can be no dispute, no room for divergent opinions: no room, in other words, for someone to say 'some Christians practice fornication, others think its wrong, so we should be tolerant of one another,'

or to say 'some Christians lose their tempers, others think its wrong, so we should tolerate one another'. There is no place for immorality, and no place for anger, slander and the like. And then, immediately, as though to emphasize the point I'm making, Paul concludes the passage by saying (v.11) that 'in that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but in Christ is all in all.' **Paul is absolutely clear about the standards expected of the new humanity, and equally clear that distinctions relating to ethnic, social and cultural origin become irrelevant.**

Christian distinctives

Of course, if someone were to say, 'Because I'm a Scythian, and we Scythians simply lose our tempers a lot, that's part of our culture,' Paul would respond, 'Not now you're a Christian you don't.' If a Corinthian were to say, 'Because I'm a Corinthian, I have always had a string of girlfriends I sleep with, that's part of our culture,' Paul would respond, 'Not now you're a Christian you don't.' This is where the word 'culture' lets us down, because it covers so many things. We need to make a clear distinction between the aspects of a culture which Paul regards as morally neutral and those which he regards as morally, or immorally, loaded. And we need to note carefully what Paul's reaction is when someone disagrees at either side of his balance. When Peter and the others tried to insist on keeping their Jewish distinctives, i.e. only eating with other circumcised people, in Antioch, Paul resisted him to his face. The word 'tolerance' runs out of steam at this point. What mattered was the gospel, the message of the cross, the doctrine of justification by faith, the promises to Abraham, the single family God intended to create in the Spirit. Like a great chess player, Paul saw all those pieces on the board threatened by this one move of Peter's to insist on maintaining Jewish boundary-markers, and he moved at once to head it off. And when someone disagreed with Paul's clear rules on immorality or angry disputes, the matters he deals with in Colossians 3. 5-10, he is equally firm, as we see dramatically in

1 Corinthians 5 and 6. There is no place in the Christian fellowship for such practices and for such a person. Not for one minute does he contemplate saying, 'some of us believe in maintaining traditional taboos on sexual relations within prescribed family limits, others think these are now irrelevant in Christ, so both sides must respect the other.' He says, 'throw him out'.

I hope it is clear from all this that Paul is thinking with entire consistency. Of course, if we come to him with a less than adequate frame of reference, such a low-grade protestant understanding which has downgraded free grace into cheap grace, it is easy to get muddled and then, projecting our problems onto Paul, to accuse *him* of the muddle, as though he had simply decided to hold onto some bits of an ethical code and go soft on other bits. No: when we get to know Paul better we see what is going on.

Transforming Grace

In particular, we may remind ourselves of the towering significance, in his thought, of Romans 6. 1-11. Having just expounded the gospel of grace, God's rich, welcoming and forgiving love meeting us where we are, helpless sinners (5. 6-10), he faces the question: if God's grace meets while we are sinners, must we therefore stay as sinners so that God's grace can go on meeting us there? He knows the answer as soon as he has asked the question, but a great many people in today's church do not know it and cheerfully answer, 'Yes!' instead. **It is one of the most important principles of biblical ethics, and one trampled in the mud again and again in contemporary debate: that God's grace meets us where we are, but God's grace, thank God, does not leave us where we are; that God accepts us as we are, but that God's grace, thank God, is always a transforming acceptance,** so that in God's very act of loving us and wooing our answering love we are being changed; and, more dramatically, in baptism and all that it means we are actually dying and rising, leaving one whole way of life and entering upon a wholly different one.

Let us hear no more, then, of the sub-Pauline idea that since we are justified by grace through faith there is no need for a life of holiness, and that to insist on one is to smuggle 'works' in by the back door. Another potential great gain of the so-called 'new perspective', though not usually worked out by its major exponents, is the fact that it allows Paul's own emphasis on final judgement according to works, which he insists on again and again, to emerge into its proper light without damaging or endangering in any way the basic principle of justification by faith itself. (See, for instance, Romans 2. 1-16; 14. 10-12; 2 Corinthians 5. 6-10; and compare e.g. 1 Thessalonians 3. 19-20; see my Romans commentary on the key passages.)

This, indeed, is the principle that underlies some of the most subtle and joined-up thinking in that subtle and joined-up letter 1 Corinthians. When Paul writes a long chapter on the resurrection of the body (chapter 15), this is not simply because he has been working through a long list of topics and has now decided to deal with this one. It is because the resurrection of the body has been basic to his understanding throughout, not least his understanding of ethics, not least his view of sexual ethics. The argument of 1 Corinthians hinges on the fact that what you do with your body matters, since God intends to raise it from the dead. Paul faces moral relativism in this chapter and names it for what it is: it is dehumanizing and degrading. The body of the Christian is already the temple of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit will be God's agent in raising the body from the dead. The continuity, therefore, between the present body and the transformed, resurrected body lies at the heart of Paul's appeal here and elsewhere in the letter. When final judgement occurs, it will not be arbitrary; it is not the case that God has made up a list of rules upon some kind of whim. Final judgement will be according to genuine humanness, and genuine humanness is what truly reflects the image of God. That is why the language of imagebearing, and other related concepts, are found in Paul, at several key points. We have already noted Colossians 3. 10, which is itself

dependent on Colossians 1. 15-20; and we should add Romans 8. 29 and 2 Corinthians 4. 1-6 as other obvious examples.

My argument, then, is that if we learn to read Paul aright, taking the best of contemporary scholarship while refusing some of the follies into which it sometimes falls, we have a sharp tool with which to understand why Paul says what he does about tolerance of different view points on the one hand and why he says what he does about not tolerating immorality on the other hand. And this leads to my final section, in which I want to reflect on where we are as a culture in handling these issues, and then to say some Pauline things about three issues currently before us.

Current Issues in Pauline Perspective

Let me first reflect on our own cultural climate. The fact that our early twenty-first century instinct is to analyse Paul in terms of prejudices and inconsistency shows well enough what sort of intellectual – or perhaps we should say anti-intellectual – climate we now live in within the western church at least. We have allowed ourselves to say 'I feel' when we mean 'I think', collapsing serious thought into knee jerk reactions. **We have become tolerant of everything except intolerance**, about which we ourselves are extremely intolerant. If someone thinks through an issue and, irrespective of his or her feelings on the subject, reaches a considered judgement that doing X is right and doing Y is wrong, they no sooner come out and say so than someone else will accuse them of phobia. If someone says stealing is wrong, we expect someone else to say, 'You only say that because you're kleptophobic.'

You will see easily enough where this argument is going. In order to have any serious discussion about ethical issues, we need to remind ourselves the whole time of the importance or Reason (along with, and obedient to Scripture and Tradition) as one strand on the classic threefold Anglican cord. The current fashion for substituting 'experience', which all too easily

means 'feeling', or 'reported feeling', is simply not the same sort of thing. Experience matters, but it doesn't belong in an account of *authority*; Put it there, and the whole notion of 'authority' itself deconstructs before your very eyes.

Another major feature of our contemporary culture must be put on the table from the start. We are in the middle of a painful and complex transition, in the western world at least, from what is often called 'modernism' to what is loosely called 'postmodernism'. In very broad, general terms, modernism was the philosophical and cultural movement that came from the European Enlightenment, and produced not only the French but also the American revolution. One of its primary moves was rebellion against authority – in the French case, against the church and crown, in the American case against England – and the proclamation of freedom against constraints of systems, including ethical systems, that were perceived to be outmoded, unnecessary, or repressive. A great deal of our prevailing cultural, moral and political rhetoric still appeals to this matrix of thought, within which one of the greatest terms of abuse is of course 'mediaeval'.

This modernist/Enlightenment movement has produced large syntheses of thought, including the split, inherited from Deism, between God and the world, making religion a matter of private opinion and ethics a matter of private feeling (see above), and insisting that everybody's religion, and way of life, was more or less as good as everybody else's. At least, the Enlightenment insisted on this in theory; many prejudices remain intact in practice. That is another story. Equally, modernism has bequeathed us what now appears to most people a standard mode of political discourse, with a right/left split in which all kinds of political and even theological judgements are ranged across a spectrum in which, once you have discovered where someone is located on one issue, you can more or less guess what other views he or she will hold. This suggests, in fact, that these are not views which have been thought through, but are simply the assumed

posture for someone who 'feels comfortable' (note the language) at that point. The Age of Reason has thus begotten the Age of Feeling, as Romanticism has taken a ride on the back of revolutionary thought. **'What Many of us Feel' is thus elevated to the moral high ground, without noticing that the Holocaust itself, that ethical (or anti-ethical) benchmark of the twentieth century, was perpetrated by people who were doing What Many of Them Felt.**

Romanticism in turn has undergone a transition into existentialism, where the quest for personal authenticity has become self-justifying. Being true to oneself, discovering 'who I really am', 'getting in touch with my inner identity' and phrases like this have also become ways of claiming a moral position to which there is no allowed answer. If a murderer or child-molester turns out, on careful interviewing, to have been expressing and living out who he or she truly was, then of course we quietly demur and hope that there is a psychiatric ward secure enough, if it cannot cure them, to keep them off the streets. Our society does not choose to notice that there is no obvious break in this respect between different types of behaviour, some of which are deemed completely unacceptable socially and some of which are not. And we should not be surprised that the rhetoric of existentialism has made room for a sharp rise, in the West, of a now very fashionable neo-gnosticism. Discover that you have an inner spark, underneath the layers of learned or imposed morality or convention, and then you must be true to it, whatever it takes, so that you can be truly free, truly yourself. Why do you think that The Gospel of Thomas has suddenly returned to vogue?

All of these – the age of reason, romanticism, existentialism – are in their various ways the products of the Enlightenment, and the revolutionary subtext they carry continue to be powerful. Don't try to stop us going this way, they all say, or we will declare that you are taking us back to the feudal age, trying to imprison us within old-fashioned categories. You are being 'mediaeval'. It is important

to say, right from the start, that none of these interesting lines of thought have very much to do with Christianity, with the gospel of Jesus Christ or with Christian behaviour. And it is also important to say that many people, not least in the Western world and church, do not realise this.

Over recent decades, modernism has had a bad press, particularly (and in my view rightly) because its grand scheme has allowed two centuries of western imperialism to proceed unchecked, on the assumption that since we have come of age it was our duty to bring the benefits of our new-found wisdom to the rest of the world. This, it has now been said, times without number, has simply served to underscore the arrogance and greed of empire. The so-called 'masters of suspicion' who arose within the Enlightenment project – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud – stuck pins into what looked like objective statements of facts and truth and discovered that they could usually be accused of being in someone's interests, whether sexual, political or financial. We now distrust everything, and indeed the erosion of trust within Western society has become such a feature that this year's Reith Lectures were devoted to the subject. The remarkable revelations about large-scale financial irregularities of some of the West's major companies makes one wonder how much further we have to go before we hit rock bottom and admit that we are all living simply by the law of the jungle.

Within this world, postmodernity has come to birth, overturning grand narratives ('metanarratives') by which people have ordered their lives and celebrating instead the small narratives, the little stories of this group or that, of this culture or that, claiming the right for them that they need not fit into anyone else's pattern, they must just be themselves. This too has become a fixed point of would-be moral discourse in western culture: if I can claim that this is the way my culture does something, you have no right of reply. Hence the anguished debates among feminists, for instance, about female circumcision, with the feminist instincts all being to say that such a practice is degrading and damaging to women's rights and the postmodern

instincts all being to say that if that's how they do things in that culture, we have no right to criticize. This is not to say, of course, that postmodernity has not elevated its own moral standards into high. Lofty principles, to offend against which is to be instantly outcast. But that, though ultimately very relevant to our subject, must wait for later.

All of these cultural forces shape the way that western persons have, for some time, been conditioning themselves to think and behave. These values are reinforced daily and hourly by the media, the movies, and the iconic celebrities of our culture. We should not be surprised when many within the churches conduct their discourse by appealing to these norms; it would take very serious Christian moral teaching to enable people to stand upright amidst these swirling hurricanes of fashionable opinion, and (with some notable exceptions) serious Christian moral teaching is not something we have had very much of in the West in recent years. In particular, **much of the Western church has learnt, partly by explicit teaching and partly, I think by a kind of happy-go-lucky blend of bits and pieces of Christian teaching and bits and pieces of the surrounding culture, a general attitude to faith and morals which functions as a low-grade, watered-down version of the gospel** announced by Jesus himself and applied by Paul. I hardly need to quote anyone in particular on this, because you have all met it again and again: every other day in newspapers someone comes out with it. Jesus, people say, was a very inclusive person; he never excluded anyone. He preached, therefore, a grand tolerance and acceptance of people. He welcomed sinners and outcasts. He found the people on the margins and brought them in. This is brought together into the standard street level version of liberal protestantism, which in North America at least owes a certain amount to half-understood (or perhaps more than half understood?) Paul Tillich. 'Accept that you are accepted' is the gospel message: God loves you as you are, God accepts and

welcomes you as you are. And the powerful second-order message for the church is therefore, God accepts people as they are, therefore you should accept them as they are. You shouldn't impose artificial, old-fashioned, unnecessary, let alone (heaven help us!) 'mediaeval' restrictions on people.

If, within this culture, people think to appeal to the apostle Paul, which they often do not, they will not have much difficulty bringing him onside. Justification by faith was what Paul preached, after all, as opposed to justification by works of the law; therefore Paul cannot have intended that the old moral rules and regulations would clog up the works of the free-and-easy Christian church, celebrating its freedom in Christ and discovering its true identity. Justification by faith clearly means, once more, that God accepts us as we are; so the church has no right to impose anything else on people. They must be allowed to be themselves, to find themselves, to do their own thing, and we must indeed learn from their 'experience' as they do so. They must maintain the unity of the church at all costs. That is what Paul is supposed to stand for. And, if proof of this remarkable thesis is required, it can, it seems, be found: Paul insisted, after all, in both 1 Corinthians and Romans that the 'weak' and the 'strong', those with radically different opinions about various different issues, should learn to defer to one another, and ultimately to live together in fellowship within one family. I hope I have said enough in the main section of this lecture to show that this way of reading Paul and early Christianity is entirely without foundation. We desperately need fresh and clear biblical thinking if we are to take on the casual assumptions of our culture, in both church and world, and point the way forward.

Homosexual Behaviour

So to our three issues; and first, the issue of homosexual behaviour. It is, of course open to anyone to say, on the basis of my argument so far, that they regard the distinction between homosexual and heterosexual behaviour as one of those cultural distinctives which are irrelevant in the gospel; that homosexual behaviour

simply is part of some cultures today, and that the church must respect, honour and bless it. You will not be surprised to know that I do not share this view. I am not an expert on current debates, and defer to two splendid books: Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, and Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. But I may perhaps, as a long-time specialist on the letter to the Romans, put in my small contribution.

Paul's denunciation of homosexual practice in Romans 1 is well known but not so well understood, particularly in relation to its place in the argument as a whole. It is too often dismissed as simply firing some Jewish-style thunderbolts against typical pagan targets; and it is regularly thought to be dealing only with the deliberate choice of heterosexual individuals to abandon normal usage and indulge in alternative passions. **It is often said that Paul is describing something quite different from the phenomenon we know today, e.g. in large western cities.**

This is misleading. First, Paul is not primarily talking about individuals at this point, but about the entire human race. He is expounding Genesis 1-3, and looking at the human race as whole, so here he is categorizing the large sweep of human history as a whole – not, of course, that any individuals escape this judgement, as 3.19f makes clear. Second, the point of his highlighting of female and male turning away from natural usage to unnatural grows directly out of the text which is his subtext, here and often elsewhere: for in Genesis 1 it is of course male plus female that is created to bear God's image. The male-plus-female factor is not of course specific to humanity; the principle of 'male plus female' runs through a great deal of creation. But humans were created to bear God's image, and given a task, to be fruitful and multiply, to tend the garden and name the animals. The point of Romans 1 as a whole is that when humans refuse to worship or honour God, the God in whose image they are made, their humanness goes into self-destruct mode; and Paul clearly sees

homosexual behaviour as ultimately a form of human deconstruction. He is not saying that everyone who discovers homosexual instincts has chosen to commit idolatry and has chosen homosexual behaviour as a part of that; rather, he is saying that in a world where men and women have refused to honour God this is the kind of thing you will find.

The fascinating thing is what Paul then does with this analysis of the plight of humankind. In Romans 4. 18-22, when describing the way in which Adam believed God and so was reckoned as righteous, Paul carefully reverses what has happened in Romans 1. 18-23. Abraham believed that God had power to give life to the dead; he honoured God and did not waver in unbelief. That is why he is reckoned within the covenant, as 'righteous'. And the result, of course, is that Abraham and Sarah become fruitful. Romans 1 is not a detached denunciation of wickedness in general. It is carefully integrated into the flow of thought of the letter. (See too 7. 4-6 for the contrast of sinful lives not fruitbearing, and the new covenant which is.) In particular, we may note the strong ethical imperatives of chapters 6,8 and 12, in each of which, but particularly in 6. 1-11 and 12. 1-2, there are echoes both of Romans 1 and Genesis 1 –3 which underlies it. **Paul clearly believes that the application of the gospel to human lives produces new behaviour, renewed-human behaviour, newly imagebearing behaviour.** It is not using Romans 1 as a proof-text, but as part of the tightly woven fabric of Paul's greatest letter, to say that he certainly regards same-sex genital behaviour as dehumanized and dehumanizing.

A footnote on sexual behaviour in Paul's world. If one looks at the ancient world there is of course evidence of same-sex behaviour in many contexts and settings. But it is noticeable that the best-known evidence comes from the high imperial days of Athens on the one hand and the high imperial days of Rome on the other (think of Nero, and indeed Paul may have been thinking of Nero). I have argued elsewhere, against the view that Paul was quiescent politically, that he held a strong

implicit and sometimes explicit critique of pagan empire in general and of Rome in particular; and clearly denunciation of pagan sexual behaviour was part of that (e.g. Philippians 3. 19-21). I just wonder if there is any mileage in cultural analysis of homosexual behaviour as a feature of cultures which themselves multiply and degenerate in the way that great empires are multiply degenerate, with money flowing in, arrogance and power flowing out, systemic violence on the borders and systematic luxury at the centre. **Part of that imperial arrogance in our own day, I believe, is the insistence that we, the empire, the West, America, or wherever, are in a position to tell the societies that we are already exploiting in a thousand different ways that they should alter their deep-rooted moralities to accommodate our newly invented ones.** There is something worryingly imperial about the practice itself and about the insistence on everybody else endorsing it. It is often said that the poor want justice while the rich want peace. We now have a situation where two-thirds of the world wants debt relief and one-third wants sex. That is, I think, a tell-tale sign that something is wrong at a deep structural level.

Authority in the Church

Second, more briefly, a comment about authority in the church. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he seemed to be able, quite cheerfully, to tell the church what to do, including giving instructions about expelling a notorious offender. Subsequently, according to 2 Corinthians, he made a painful visit to the church, and clearly found things not as he would have liked. (2 Corinthians 1.23- 2. 11). Subsequently again, or perhaps at the same time, he became aware that there was a substantial body of opinion in the church, egged on by some newly-arrived teachers, who were stirring up trouble and opposition against him. He addresses this issue in 2 Corinthians; and I want to tell you, having recently completed a translation of both the Corinthian letters, that 2 Corinthians is so different in writing style that I am quite surprised some enterprising

scholar doesn't argue that Paul didn't write it. He has clearly been shattered in the exercise of his authority, but is continuing to exercise it through tears and prayers, with warning and irony. He has, of course, no official standing that would give him legal means, in local courts, of forcing his will on the church. He can only use moral persuasion. That puts him in a not dissimilar position to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has no official jurisdiction outside England – and precious little actual executive power here, if it comes to that. **I grieve for George Carey; he has been put in a virtually impossible position, where all a bishop's instincts for unity are matched against all a pastor's proper instincts for holiness, but where he is able to act neither as bishop nor as pastor, but only as long distance persuader.** It seems to me that we are being called in our day to rethink, hammer out afresh, what precisely authority consists in, and how it works within a differences of tone and style rather than of theological content, this gives me pause for thought as I reflect, too, on the difficult issues of authority and *koinonia* that we face in our community today. Let us not imagine that we simply have to quote 1 Corinthians and all will be well. We may have to live through the pain of 2 Corinthians as well.

Right-wing/Left-wing

This leads me, thirdly and finally, to plead with you that in taking a biblical line, as I hope you will in your consultations, you maintain the wisdom of the serpent as well as the innocence of the dove. **We cannot and dare not rely on the old shibboleths of Left and Right, of radical and conservative, that we have assumed with over the last two centuries. They are breaking down.** In particular, I appeal to my American friends to realise the political spectrum within which they live is not the same as the many different ones within which the rest of us live. Do not assume that if you are what is called right-wing on this issue you will be what is called right-wing on everything else too. Do not make this part of a

package of issues which will mean that many who might otherwise join with you find they cannot. There is a real danger that if those who campaign on the issue of homosexual behaviour are heard to be also denouncing moves to remit third-world debt, or are known to be staunch opponents of women's ordination, many who are eager to join you on this issue will turn away. As the Lambeth voting figures made clear, there must be many first-world bishops on both sides of the Atlantic who are not hard line right-wingers, who are not 'the usual suspects' on every political issue that comes up, but who are heartland Episcopalians who know in their bones that the gay agenda is leading in the wrong direction and will quietly oppose it. There is such a thing as strident right-wing agenda, and if we tackle this issue as one aspect of that we will lose support, and understandable so.

Instead – I don't want to finish on a negative note, since I've been talking about Paul, who is always positive and always gospel-oriented – I cast my vote for a fresh and biblically based way forward towards a *koinonia* characterised by faith, in which ethnic distinctions become irrelevant precisely because, together, we are becoming one body, one new humanity, in Christ. Our Communion is at a crisis point which should also be a growth point. We clearly need to learn new things, and like a child growing to adulthood we may have to put away childish things and acquire some more adult ways of going about how we 'do' *koinonia*. We may have to renounce our somewhat easy-going and informal structures. It is clear that not many people in North America want anyone East of the Atlantic to tell them what they can and cannot do, but they still want to be in Communion with Canterbury, and part of the task of the International Doctrine Commission, which I and others here belong to, is to hammer out what that means. But, as I say, I regard the present crisis, with its various different dimensions, as the kind of thing a Christian must expect from time to time, and must meet with courage, prayer, celebration of the gospel and a holy boldness in going forward to places we may not yet have been. I don't know whether I am optimistic or pessimistic about where

we are, and indeed I think those categories, like left and right in politics, may be far too over-simple. The late great Lesslie Newbigin was once asked whether he was an optimist or a pessimist about the future of the church; and I close with his reply, which I make my own. **I am neither an optimist nor a pessimist, he**

said; Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

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Focus on Books

The Incomparable Christ,

by John Stott
(IVP, 2001, 244 pages, GBP 8.99, ISBN: 0-85111-485-7)

A fine presentation by the 82 year old John Stott at the recent Oxford theological consultation shows that he continues to speak with authority, clarity and passion – especially about Christ. This is also apparent in his latest book. The work is in four parts with the first part a clear survey of how the New Testament witnesses to Christ. The second part demonstrates how the church, through its teachers and theologians, has presented him: from Justin Martyr and the early Fathers through Anselm, Martin Luther and many others down to the present - a dozen engaging chapters of 3-4 pages each. Then there's 'The Influential Jesus' – another dozen case studies of how he has inspired people through the ages: Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Barnardo, Kagawa of Japan, Wilberforce and a number of others. The last section, 'The Eternal Jesus: how he challenges us today' amounts to a 60 page commentary on the book of Revelation. (What better way to deal with Revelation than to make Christ the centre and focus rather than speculation and unwarranted application?) As Stott's own summary puts it about his book: 'My hope is that these studies in the Bible and church history will be seen to justify my title, *The Incomparable Christ*. There is nobody like him: there never has been

and there never will be." The book is outstanding and calls out to be turned into sermons and homegroup studies and to be used for personal reading.

Beyond "I Do": What Christians Believe about Marriage,

by Douglas J Brouwer
(Eerdmans, 2001, 203 pages, US\$12.00, ISBN: 0-8028-4806-0)

This is an outstandingly good book about marriage. It's not of the warm fuzzy 'how to' kind but a carefully written review of what the Bible says about married life. It is a fresh defence of Christian marriage in a world of shifting attitudes. Brouwer is an American Presbyterian minister and offers not only a satisfying theology of his subject but a pastorally informed discussion of issues such as power within marriage, the meaning and role of love, and the importance of spiritual compatibility. There are also good and relevant discussions of singleness and of divorce. The concluding chapter – '10 things I wish someone had told me about marriage' – might itself be worth the price of the book. Definitely worth recommending to your public library to buy as well.

Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism,

by Henry Rack
(Epworth Press, third edition, 2002, 673 pages, GBP 19.95, ISBN: 0-7162-0552-1)

This book is much more than a biography; it discusses not only the religious, social and political background to Wesley's extraordinary life and influence - ie the many more influences on Wesley's life than the 1738 Aldersgate conversion - but also the reasons for the growth of Methodism. As well as his undoubted strengths as the greatest evangelist, preacher and church planter that Britain has ever known, Wesley's weaknesses are also noted and discussed. A number of Methodist reviewers in Britain and the States have called this the finest biography of Wesley yet written and a third revised edition updates it in terms of recent writing about Wesley and early Methodism. The volume is said to be even better than its two rivals in the area: Rich P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists*, (Abingdon 1995) and John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans: Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002). The price is probably reasonable for a very large paperback. Again, worth recommending to your public library to buy.

Troubling the Church: Gnosticism - Ancient and New

by Viola Larson

Mrs. Larson writes for *Voices of Orthodox Women*. She is an elder of the Presbyterian Church in Sacramento, California.

Renewed Interest in Gnosticism

Today there is a renewed interest in Gnosticism due in part to the discovery in 1945 of a large collection of Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi. The renewed interest can be seen in several areas. The first area is among some Radical Feminist thinkers who look to Gnostic texts that feature women or feminine themes as proof texts for the validity of women's importance in early Christianity. They also insist that Gnosticism was simply one alternative view among many diverse Christian communities. The second area is the new quest for the historical Jesus as it is focused in the Jesus Seminar. They refer to the Gnostic texts as alternative forms of early Christian accounts. Also, many of the Jesus Seminar writers use the Gospel of Thomas, an early Gnostic text, as one of the earliest gospels. The theologians involved in the quest, probably unwittingly, have developed theologies with some similarities to docetic Gnosticism. Finally, there are groups and individuals who consider themselves to be Gnostics in the older sense of that word. They adhere to a kind of esoteric Christianity and even create liturgies using the Gnostic texts. They are either individual adherents or they belong to Gnostic Churches. In this paper I will explain the common features of Gnosticism, and then explain how such teaching affects both members of the new quest for the historical Jesus and Radical Feminism.

Gnosticism's Most Common Feature

Although ancient Gnosticism was diverse the different groups held some beliefs in common. The most common feature was a dualism that separates the material world from the spiritual. The material world was seen as evil while the spiritual world contained the good. This understanding affected much of

their worldview. It also affected how they related to orthodox Christianity. This understanding shaped their view of creation, Jesus Christ, salvation and death. It even affected their view of procreation and community. A great many of their creation stories are long and complex. Their main god is generally a spirit that is unnameable out of which all spiritual beings are emanated. In this view God does not create out of nothing, his creation comes from his own being. (In contemporary terms this is Pantheism; the understanding that the world is a part of God.) The creation stories are filled with hierarchies of spiritual beings usually referred to as aeons. On the other hand, all material creations, which they see as evil, are caused by the error of some of the spiritual beings.

For instance in The Apocryphon of John, Sophia of the Epinoia, an aeon, brings forth a creation out of herself without permission and the creation is named Yaltabaoth. He is a caricature of the biblical God, Jehovah. He is evil and an archon and with the help of other archons, which he created, forms a human. However, the human does not live until Yaltabaoth blows into his face. What Yaltabaoth does not understand is that his power to give life really belongs to Sophia who gave birth to him. The new man shone so from Sophia's power that a material body was made for him which imprisoned and hid the divine spark. This is then a stage set for a dualistic world. The human's exterior is created of lifeless evil material formed by an evil archon that ignorantly believes he is the only god. But within the human form is the spark of divinity blown there by Yaltabaoth who does not know the power of life really belongs to his mother.³ The entire material universe is seen by Gnostics as evil and a prison for the spark of divinity within humanity.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection Not Redemptive

The Gnostics believed the entire material world lies in ignorance and darkness. Humans are unaware that they are a part of divinity. They also believed that a kind of intuitive self-knowledge was required for salvation. This could be defined as a spiritual awakening in which the seeker realized their inner light or divinity. If Christ came to save it was by giving secret knowledge to his followers. The knowledge was to help them find the light within themselves. In the Gospel of Thomas when Jesus asks his disciples who he is "like" the answer of Thomas is the correct one. Thomas says, "Teacher, my mouth cannot bear at all to say whom you are like." Jesus then sees that Thomas has acquired the right knowledge for himself. He is not dependent on Jesus but rather has become like Jesus in his knowledge. Jesus tells him, "I am not your teacher. For you have drunk, you have become intoxicated at the bubbling spring that I have measured out."⁴ It is merely the words of Jesus that aid in knowing the self, His death and resurrection are not understood in a redemptive way. In fact, for the Gnostic, resurrection is equated with enlightenment. In the 51st saying of Thomas the disciples ask Jesus when the resurrection will come and he tells them, "That (resurrection) which you are awaiting has (already) come, but you do not recognize it."⁵

Not only did Christ's death not count for salvation from sin, but some of the Gnostic adherents believed that Christ did not die a physical death. In the Acts Of John, as Jesus is supposedly crucified, John runs to a cave where he encounters Christ who shows him a cross of light and tells him, "but this is not the cross of wood which thou wilt see when thou goest down hence: neither am I he that is on the cross, whom now thou seest not, but only hearest his (or a) voice."⁶ Other

Gnostics believed that Jesus Christ did suffer, however not for sin, but to impart knowledge and to overcome death, but not physically.

No Physical Resurrection

Since Gnostics believed the material world was evil they saw no reason for a physical resurrection. The body was simply seen as a prison house in a world that held no beauty or goodness. As Elaine Pagels, Professor at Princeton University and author of *The Gnostic Gospels*, writes, "The resurrection, they insisted, was not a unique event in the past; instead, it symbolized how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present. What mattered was not literal seeing, but spiritual vision." 7 Pagels goes on to enumerate the various post crucifixion appearances of Christ in Gnostic texts.⁸ She explains, "What interested these gnostics far more than past events attributed to the 'historical Jesus' was the possibility of encountering the risen Christ in the present."⁹ Because of this difference of belief in the resurrection the Gnostics made fun of the early martyrs of the Church.

The Ideal of Androgyny

Gnosticism and its inherently strong disregard for the material world created problems in practical ways. Not only were Gnostic adherents unable to see goodness in the created world they were unable to affirm the birth of children. They did not affirm women as mothers. In many cases giving birth to a child was seen as trapping the divine spark within the prison of the body. The ideal Gnostic model seemed to be either male or an androgynous being complete within itself. The Gospel of Mary, which focuses on Mary Magdalene, places her as a leader of the Christian group and pictures her as a favourite of Jesus. However, although in the translation of the Jesus Seminar's *The Complete Gospels*, she and the other disciples are pictured as one in which "the seed of true humanity" exists; the text in the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (Akhmim Codex) translates that they are one in which the "Son of Man" exists. In *The Complete Gospels* Mary Magdalene tells the other disciples, "Rather let us praise his greatness, for he has joined

us together and made us true human beings." But in the former translation Mary says "but rather, let us praise his greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men."¹⁰ In the Gospel of Thomas when Peter asks Jesus to make Mary go away because, "women are not worthy of life." Jesus says, "Look, I will draw her in so as to make her male, so that she too may become a living male spirit, similar to you. (But I say to you): 'Every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'"¹¹ The female disciples function, as do the male disciples, as persons without physical attributes, needs or realities. The world of their visions is extraordinary; the material world they inhabit is sterile.

Radical Feminists Seek Affirmation in Gnosticism

Some Radical Feminists are seeking affirmation of women's experience and ministry in Gnostic texts. The debate is wide and varied. Two possibilities emerge. One is the belief that early Gnostic communities were part of a diverse Christianity thereby justifying alternative doctrines in contemporary Christian communities. The other is connected with the first; that Gnostic communities provided a place for women to hold leadership positions and that women were honored as persons of wisdom and divinity in the Gnostic texts. While Karen King, Professor of New Testament studies and the History of ancient Christianity at Harvard University, includes examples of women in leadership using both canonical scriptures and Gnostic texts, she nevertheless concludes that the Gnostic texts are not helpful. In *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, a book that she has edited, King makes the observation that "it seems to me that even when the feminine is highly valued, it is often done so at the expense of real sexuality. It also seems as though gnostic mythology and gender imagery often affirm patriarchy and patriarchal social gender roles."¹² The first possibility: "early gnostic communities were part of a diverse Christianity thereby justifying alternative doctrines in contemporary Christian Communities" is probably the direction radical Feminism will take. Radical Feminists believe they have the option of choosing alternative forms of Christianity based on

women's experience although not necessarily gnosticism. As Elaine Pagels at the end of her book suggests the question now is "what is the relation between the authority of one's own experience and that claimed for the Scriptures, the ritual, and the clergy?"¹³ It is well known that most radical Feminists pick from many religious texts those portions they believe affirm women and reject the rest.

The Jesus Seminar and Gnosticism are Similar

The more mythological and esoteric portions of ancient Gnosticism has fed into the more esoteric religious movements of the nineteenth century as well as contemporary movements including Theosophy and various Occult groups. Philip Jenkins, Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University, in his book *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost its Way* documents much of this in an interesting chapter entitled "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten."¹⁴ But there is a far more serious intrusion of Gnosticism into the theology of those who consider themselves biblical scholars. While not so flamboyant as occultism the move away from orthodox doctrine by the Jesus Seminar and others is more damaging to the Church.

The Jesus Seminar, founded by Robert Funk, consists of a group of professors from various universities who in the past have gathered to talk about and vote on the authenticity of Jesus' sayings. They not only include the canon of scripture but also the Gospel of Thomas, which many of them believe is older than the earliest canonical gospels. Their decisions are always publicized causing them to gain more attention than other scholars. In their books about Jesus one finds many of the same theological themes as the early Gnostics. The similarities consist mainly of their redefinition of the being of God and their docetic view of Jesus Christ.

Panentheism - All Creation is part of God

One widely read author, Marcus J. Borg, Professor of Religion at Oregon

State University, when writing about the being of God makes a case for a Panentheism. Insisting that the orthodox view of God, "affirms only the transcendence of God and neglects the immanence of God," he believes Christians should see God in terms of Panentheism. What he is saying is that orthodox Christianity only sees God as out there, (transcendence) but Panentheism sees God at work in the world caring for the world, (immanence).¹⁵ He really misrepresents both views since orthodox teaching affirms both transcendence and immanence while Panentheism sees God's presence in the world only because it defines the world as a part of God. Orthodox teaching insists that the Creator is not a part of His creation, but He cares and tends His creation. The theological belief in Panentheism is like Gnosticism in that the Gnostics believed the universe emanated from the Creator. For the Gnostic all existence was a part of God.

Panentheism limits the power of God since all of human experience is a part of God. On the other hand, in Biblical theology, Jesus Christ, fully human and fully God, has experienced what it is to be human. Thus one person has in His being shown the compassion of God while allowing God's power to work for humanity in His life, death and resurrection. Panentheism sees human experience as the shaper of God placing upon individuals the imperative to be moral for the sake of God's being. The biblical view allows the redeeming work of Christ to enfold sin weary individuals into the community of the Church that He alone is shaping.

Jesus Merely a Teacher of Wisdom

In the same way as the Gnostics, members of the new search for the historical Jesus tend to separate Jesus from Christ. They do this because they are basically religious. They want to hold on to the Christ but accept little of the scriptural understanding of Jesus. As Paul J. Achtemeier has explained about the early beginnings of the new search, they believe faith must be placed in the proclamation of the word but not in historical events, thus thwarting their own search.¹⁶ They feel that little of the sayings attributed

to Him in scripture are historically truthful. They see Jesus simply as a wisdom teacher who may have healed some people but who was killed for His concern with justice and who did not resurrect physically from the grave. But most believe in a post-resurrection Christ. As Borg explains:

My position is that experiences of the risen Christ as a continuing presence generated the claim that "Jesus lives and is Lord" and that statement "God raised Jesus from the dead" and the story of the empty tomb may well have been generated by those experiences. He goes on to explain N.T. Wright's orthodox position and then states, "but we both affirm the claim. This is who Jesus is for us as Christians." ¹⁷ Stephen J. Patterson, a pastor and assistant Professor of New Testament at Eden Theological Seminary, and author of *The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus & the Search for Meaning*, believes it was not the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that caused the disciples belief in the resurrection. He believes the Jewish understanding that God would raise in vindication the righteous who were killed allowed them to confess that God raised Jesus. But He also believes that the appearances of Jesus to His disciples after his death were really inner "revelatory experience."¹⁸ These writers fit neatly into Elaine Pagels' definitive words about the Gnostics. "The resurrection, they insisted, was not a unique event in the past: instead, it symbolized how Christ's presence could be experienced in the present. What mattered was not literal seeing, but spiritual vision."¹⁹ What should be emphasized here is that mythology and a worldview not grounded in either the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament informed the visions of the early Gnostics. A faith informed only by experience (and ecstatic experience at that) leads to extreme positions of faith. Mythology abounds and the real world is obliterated Heresy: Jesus and Sophia are Manifestations of The Cosmic Christ

The heresy grows deeper. One author, Sea Raven, writes, ""Jesus and Sophia are manifestations of the Cosmic Christ - possibly the most powerful and universal metaphor of all." And, "The man Jesus, the pre- Easter Jesus, was not the Christ. Jesus became the Christ

or was revealed as the Christ after his death."²⁰ Another writer, James M. Robinson, of Claremont University, quoting Mark 10:18 states: "Jesus apparently had no Christology." He goes on to suggest that we need to find a Christology that will fit our "often changed conditions. He then attempts to wed Sophia to Jesus in a chapter entitled "Very Goddess and Very Man."²¹

Conclusion

How different is the purity and truthfulness of the Word of God. To belong to the One who is both God and man, the Incarnate One who entered history for our sakes is the ultimate joy of life. Jesus Christ's willingness to live among us sharing our humanity gives affirmation to a loved creation. His awful death on the cross and His resurrection give hope to a fallen creation. (Rom.8:19-25) His redemption embraces all of our humanity forgiving our sins and giving us hope for a physical resurrection. (Phil. 3:7-21) He has gifted us with the Holy Spirit who comforts and guides by turning us toward Jesus Christ and away from the stranger's voice. (John 16:5-15; 10:27-29) Jesus Christ has given us His Word where we find a real picture of real people and the story of God's redemption. (Matt 5:1-20) He placed us in His Church, a community of the redeemed. And within that community He has provided for His creation by leading us in ministries of compassion and justice, evangelism and mission. (Matt 28:18-20)

It is the unanimous opinion within the Church, that God is never for us in the world, that is to say, in our space and time, except in this His Word, and that this Word for us has no other name and content but Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ is never to be found on our behalf save each day afresh in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. One is not in the Church at all if he is not of a mind with the Church in these things. Karl Barth, *Theological Existence To-Day*, 1933

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