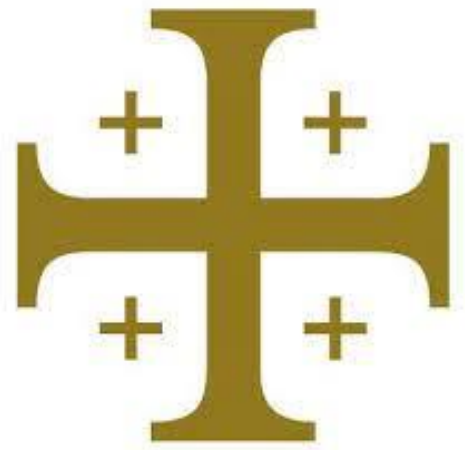


The Jerusalem Declaration: **a summary of authentic Anglicanism**



Gafcon's foundational document from 2008 remains powerful, prophetic and relevant today as faithful Anglicans seek to "proclaim Christ faithfully to the nations".

This collection of short studies uses reflection on the articles from the Jerusalem Declaration to re-state classic orthodox Anglican Christian teaching, and comment on issues facing the church. They are taken from original editorials in the monthly online circulars from Gafcon Great Britain and Europe.

The Jerusalem Declaration:

a summary of authentic Anglicanism

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The Jerusalem Declaration¹

29th June 2008

The participants in the first Global Anglican Future Conference met in the land of Jesus' birth. They expressed their:

- i. loyalty as disciples to the King of kings, the Lord Jesus;
- ii. joyful embrace of his command to proclaim the reality of his kingdom which he first announced in this land;
- iii. acknowledgement that the gospel of the kingdom is the good news of salvation, liberation and transformation for all;

And, in light of the above, we agree to chart a way forward together that promotes and protects the biblical gospel and mission to the world, solemnly declaring the following tenets of orthodoxy which underpin our Anglican identity.

1. We rejoice in the gospel of God through which we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God first loved us, we love him and as believers bring forth fruits of love, ongoing repentance, lively hope and thanksgiving to God in all things.
2. We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading.
3. We uphold the four Ecumenical Councils and the three historic Creeds as expressing the rule of faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
4. We uphold the Thirty-nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God's Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today.
5. We gladly proclaim and submit to the unique and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humanity's only Saviour from sin, judgement and hell, who lived the life we could not live and died the death that we deserve. By his atoning death and glorious resurrection, he secured the redemption of all who come to him in repentance and faith.
6. We rejoice in our Anglican sacramental and liturgical heritage as an expression of the gospel, and we uphold the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer, to be translated and locally adapted for each culture.

¹ <https://www.gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-declaration>

7. We recognise that God has called and gifted bishops, priests and deacons in historic succession to equip all the people of God for their ministry in the world. We uphold the classic Anglican Ordinal as an authoritative standard of clerical orders.

8. We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.

9. We gladly accept the Great Commission of the risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, to seek those who do not know Christ and to baptise, teach and bring new believers to maturity.

10. We are mindful of our responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation, to uphold and advocate justice in society, and to seek relief and empowerment of the poor and needy.

11. We are committed to the unity of all those who know and love Christ and to building authentic ecumenical relationships. We recognise the orders and jurisdiction of those Anglicans who uphold orthodox faith and practice, and we encourage them to join us in this declaration.

12. We celebrate the God-given diversity among us which enriches our global fellowship, and we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters. We pledge to work together to seek the mind of Christ on issues that divide us.

13. We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed. We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord.

14. We rejoice at the prospect of Jesus' coming again in glory, and while we await this final event of history, we praise him for the way he builds up his church through his Spirit by miraculously changing lives.

Gafcon² calls for a return to faithful Anglicanism

We rejoice in the gospel of God through which we have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because God first loved us, we love him and as believers bring forth fruits of love, ongoing repentance, lively hope and thanksgiving to God in all things.

[From Jerusalem Declaration, Article 1]

The energy that drove the formation of Gafcon in 2008 came from a protest of righteous anger against injustice and wrongdoing, and against a lie originating in human philosophy infiltrating and endangering the church. The Jerusalem Statement³, of which the Declaration forms the main part, talks about the crisis facing world Anglicanism:

“...the acceptance and promotion within provinces of the Anglican Communion of a “different gospel” (cf Galatians 1:6-8) which is contrary to the apostolic gospel. This false gospel undermines the authority of God’s word written and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the author of salvation from sin, death and judgement...”

The story of how Anglican leaders from around the world formed the new movement of ‘confessing Anglicans’ which became Gafcon, is told in the book *Being Faithful: The Shape of Historic Anglicanism Today*⁴ (Latimer, 2009).

Despite gracious and patient advocacy by faithful Archbishops, predominantly from the global south, during the 1990’s and early 2000’s, events such as the consecration of Gene Robinson in the US (2003) and the presence of unrepentant bishops at the Lambeth Conference (2008) were said to have “torn the fabric of the Communion”⁵. Arguments about sex and marriage were not in themselves the main issue, but the most obvious symptom of departure from biblical Christianity, resulting from the influence of Western secularism in the church.

However, while concern about the threat of false teaching, and determination to resist it, has united Gafcon, this is not the main vision and message. Rather, “Gafcon is a spiritual movement to preserve and promote the truth and power of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ as we Anglicans have received it” (Jerusalem Statement, opening paragraph). In other words, Gafcon stands for the making of disciples on a global scale in ways that are biblical and Anglican.

The rise of a different gospel means urgent action needs to be taken to protect the integrity of the message and the freedom of the messengers. Gospel ministry is about both “guarding” and “heralding” the gospel. So, the Jerusalem Declaration begins, in its opening Article, with rejoicing and thanksgiving, focussing on God and what he has done. Hence the positive start to the document: “We rejoice in the gospel of God”.

² <https://www.gafcon.org/about>

³ <https://www.gafcon.org/about/jerusalem-statement>

⁴ <https://www.latimertrust.org/product-page/being-faithful-the-shape-of-historic-anglicanism-today>

⁵ The phrase “tear the fabric of the Communion” was first used in a statement by Anglican Primates in 2003 <https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/primates2003lambeth.pdf>

This phrase echoes the first verse of Romans. The Good News is *from God*; it is his message, not something the apostles or the church have invented. It is supernatural; it is about being “saved...by the power of the Holy Spirit”. In some Anglican circles this language might cause embarrassment, but for Gafcon the gospel is deliberately described in evangelical and Pentecostal terms, set against nominal, ritualist or liberal ‘social work’ Anglicanism.

Why do we need to be “saved”? Article 5 explains more, mentioning sin and judgement. In Article 1, the gospel of salvation is presented as God’s gracious work, rather than good people adding some spirituality to their lives. And salvation is “by grace through faith in Jesus Christ” – not through baptism. The sacraments are referred to in Article 6 and seen as important as a means of grace to believers, but they do not save in themselves.

“God first loved us” is another phrase which reminds us of the contrast between the biblical world view, and secular corruptions of Christianity which put human thought and activity first. We do not find out what God is like from our own experiences of love; nor is our love a ‘work’ to get us closer to God. Rather, human love is derived from God’s character as Father; our love for him and others is a response to grace, and a fruit of the Spirit.

Gafcon is sometimes accused of “hate” and “self-righteousness”. These terms of abuse are familiar to all in the West who retain conservative views on sex and marriage, and they can intimidate faithful believers into silence. But Article 1 of the Jerusalem Declaration makes it clear that Gafcon is a fellowship of those who seek to respond to God’s love and to show it to others, and to do so in an attitude of “ongoing repentance”, as we are all sinners.

God’s love brings “lively hope”, because “Anglicanism has a bright future!” (Jerusalem Statement, opening paragraph). There is a crisis, but Gafcon aims to “make disciples of all nations and to build up the church on the foundation of biblical truth”. And we are committed to this with an attitude of “Thanksgiving to God in all things”!

What Anglicans believe about the Bible

*Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end.
Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.
Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.
Turn my heart towards your statutes and not towards selfish gain.
Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.*

Psalm 119:33-37, NIVUK

Psalm 119 is rightly seen as a poem about the wonder of actual communication from almighty God to human beings, which has been written down and can be shared, memorised and above all obeyed. In this long prayer, the writer expresses his love of God's gift of speaking to humanity, and his pleas for help with continued learning and daily obedience.

In the section quoted above, the writer wants help with grasping the meaning and the implications of God's individual laws. He asks for the right attitude, or 'heart', to delight in carrying out what is required. But he also makes clear that the Scriptures are not a series of disconnected sayings and instructions. They are part of the same overarching vision, in which together the 'decrees' and 'commands' indicate a 'way' or a 'path'. And since he sees the word of God setting out a general trajectory, he wants God's assistance in following it, rather than the routes that the world offers, which are enticing but ultimately selfish and worthless.

So today, the most fruitful Bible study looks at individual texts, seen in the context of the arc of Scripture as a whole, for understanding about God's character and ours, salvation in the Lord Jesus, and how we should live. Underlying this is an attitude of submission to Scripture's authority as God's truth, and also a sense of gratitude and security that God has spoken and speaks to us as communities and to me as an individual. Then, every command or lesson or precept from the Bible is turned into prayer to the Holy Spirit to help put it into practice, and to orient our hearts in the right direction. A 'long obedience' in relationship with Christ based on a biblical worldview: this is the path of discipleship for us as individuals and as a church.

In recent years many Anglicans, particularly theologians and leaders in the West, have cast doubt on this understanding of Scripture, and have seen it instead as an ancient text like any other, to be respected for spiritual insights, but to be judged by the standards and thought-fashions of the contemporary world rather than seen as having ultimate authority. The most obvious contemporary expression and symptom of this departure from historic Christian teaching has been the approval of same-sex relationships, but prioritising the world's understandings and concerns over the Bible manifests in many other ways as well, such as denial of the uniqueness of Christ, and the shifting of the church's mission focus away from evangelism.

As a result the Anglican Communion is divided. At the time of writing⁶ the Lambeth Conference 2022 is taking place, but because of a perceived revisionist trajectory, three whole Provinces and hundreds of bishops have not come, and many others attending from the Global South have publicly called for a return to submission to God's word⁷ in direct opposition to the agenda of some of the conference organisers and funders. Different views on sexuality are the 'presenting issue' of this conflict, but underlying this is different understandings about the Lordship of Christ, and the authority and sufficiency of the Bible in guiding how we order our lives.

The 'About' section on the Gafcon website⁸ begins: "The Gafcon movement is a global family of authentic Anglicans standing together to retain and restore the Bible to the heart of the Anglican Communion". Being aligned with Gafcon means joining with others all over the world who echo the words of the Psalmist: "Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees...direct me in the path of your commands."

Article 2 of the Jerusalem Declaration states:

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God written and to contain all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed in its plain and canonical sense, respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading.

This is authentic Anglican faith. It affirms the inspiration, authority and sufficiency of Scripture, and notes the need in every generation to interpret and proclaim its message of salvation faithfully and carefully. Because God initiated communication with us through his word, we should have confidence that the Bible's plain meaning is accessible. We should be wary of secular theories of literature which see any claim to inherent, unchanging meaning in text as a power-play, and attempts to divide God and his word using spiritual language, for example by giving more authority to what we "feel the Holy Spirit is saying" than to the Scriptures.

The books of the Bible, with different histories and human authorships, work together as a canon, where one part interprets and clarifies another. The teachings of the Bible need to be contextualised in every culture, but this "does not mean modifying Scripture to suit our culture; we should, instead, be bringing every aspect of our culture under the authority of Scripture"⁹.

Restoring the Bible to the heart of our churches and our societies will require investment in the training of those who teach, and in the development of biblical literacy among the whole people of God. It is challenging to us in the affluent north to see (for example on the Gafcon website Prayer section) how churches in much poorer contexts are developing appropriate theological training at all levels, often running alongside practical help for the needy.

⁶ This article first appeared in August 2022. Some commentators have said the 2022 Lambeth Conference may be the last such global Anglican event, given the divisions which were evident, and subsequent growing tensions within the Anglican Communion.

⁷ A brief summary of key events and responses at Lambeth 2022 can be found here <https://gafcongb.org/news-and-items-prayer-7>

⁸ <https://www.gafcon.org/about>

⁹ Being Faithful, a Commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration, Latimer, 2009, p31

Questions for further reflection:

- Gafcon has come into being to promote the biblical gospel in the Anglican Communion, and to refute false versions of Christian faith. Why is this necessary? Wouldn't it be better to promote peace and understanding between those with different views?
- In what ways does "the Gospel of God" differ from other human philosophies and teachings?
- Can we think of examples where the church might "modify Scripture to suit our culture", or where we ourselves might simply disobey what the bible clearly says we should or should not do?
- What are some good ways of "developing biblical literacy among the whole people of God"?

Prayer points

Let's pray together: for the Bible to be restored to the heart of the Anglican Communion; for our own walk with Christ to be strengthened by renewed delight in his Word; for Bible-based training of pastors, evangelists and lay leaders in all Anglican churches.

Orthodox Anglicanism is both traditional and innovative

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;
He set my feet upon a rock, and gave me a firm place to stand.*

Psalm 40 v1-2

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Hebrews 11:8

The Spirit-filled church has always been innovative, yet settled. The witness of Scripture shows how God desires a relationship with his people which roots them in his love as they trust and obey him. And yet God keeps his people on the move. This can happen because of disobedience and the need to learn lessons, as with Adam and Eve, or the exile of the nation of Judah into exile. Movement and change can also be very difficult, but positive in the long term, as when Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and travel long distances over many years. The rescue of the people of God from slavery in Egypt, such a powerful picture of our salvation from sin, evil and death, involved physical uprooting and travel to be settled in a new land.

In the New Testament, after Pentecost, God did not allow the new believers in Christ to physically put down roots in Jerusalem, but pushed them out in mission to the world. At the same time, they passed on the stories and teachings of Christ verbally and in written form, and the apostles provided additional authoritative material to help ground the new churches in what to believe and how to live.

As the years passed, disputes arose on essential matters of doctrine and ethics. Councils of mature leaders would meet, guided by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, to agree on these contentious issues, reaffirming the truth and rejecting any errors which were creeping into the life of some churches. And yet there was always freedom and innovation in how churches worshipped and engaged in mission locally, including preaching in different languages and developing structures and forms to suit different cultures.

The Anglican Church has always reflected this character of the church. A movement with mission in its DNA, creative in methods and adaptive to different cultures around the world. And yet, settled and at home in shared faith in Christ based on the Scriptures, and shared traditions of order and polity – where the church has come from and how it is governed.

Article 3 of the Jerusalem Declaration firmly roots Anglicanism in the line of mainstream Christian tradition going back to those meetings of the early church:

We uphold the four Ecumenical Councils and the three historic Creeds as expressing the rule of faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

Looking at these Councils now, some of the discussions can seem obscure, but what emerged were clear affirmations of the gospel message, the truth about the person and work of Jesus, and the Creeds which we still use today as summaries of our faith.

The Jerusalem Declaration goes on in Article 4 to refer to part of the original 'constitution' of the Church of England:

We uphold the Thirty-nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God's Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today.

This founding document, written by Cranmer in a particular context, is not on a par with the Scriptures, but it is honoured as something more than just part of our shared tradition – or a historical relic. It contains "the true doctrine"; it is a witness to God's revelation, and that must be the foundation of our 'settledness' in our Anglican home.

Where can we find a model of a church that is rooted in the person of Christ, the teaching of the apostles, the wise controls of the early church leaders, and the sacrificial stand for truth of the Reformers? And at the same time, a church reflecting the dynamism of Spirit-inspired mission which is already multi-cultural and continues to take the gospel faithfully to all nations of the world? Attending a large global gathering like the recent Lambeth Conference should be an example of such a church. But today, the Anglican Communion is not settled. Many leaders, especially in the West, have applied the notion of innovation to those things which should be unchanging and stable. The result is instability, confusion and disunity.

But as we see in the Bible and church history, God is not taken by surprise by this. He is using those faithful leaders, and millions of lay people, to take the worldwide Anglican church on the move again, to new initiatives of fellowship and mission across cultures, and new structures and expressions of Anglicanism from a firm shared base of biblical truth and historical traditions witnessing to it. The global Gafcon gathering in Kigali being planned for April 2023 will be a wonderful way of appreciating this unity-in-diversity.

The church must proclaim the unique Christian world view

[Editor's note: This piece was first published in early October 2022. The main news for the past weeks had been the life and death of Queen Elizabeth II. The extended reflection which follows should not be taken as "UK-centric" but instead uses a major world event to comment on how Christian faith displayed in a public figure contrasts with the assumptions of the surrounding secular culture.]

Reading and listening to many of the comments about the late Queen Elizabeth, it was noticeable that her Christian faith was mentioned repeatedly – and by the secular media, not just evangelical churches. And it seemed, for a few days, that the idea of God as the ultimate authority was formally acknowledged in the United Kingdom, beginning with the Declarations of King Charles and the herald to the Accession Council, and other ceremonial events. Then, in commentary about the symbolism surrounding the monarchy at the funeral: the crown, the orb with the cross on top, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's address¹⁰. This focussed not on a long list of achievements by a famous earthly leader, but a brief and clear message about the resurrected Christ as universal judge and Saviour, and a much-loved woman's faith in this God motivating her to a life of service.

We should give thanks for the way the national Church was able to witness in this way when given such an opportunity. But there have been times in recent history when the late Queen seemed to be consciously taking the initiative to talk directly to the nation about Christ while at the same time, the church had appeared to lose confidence to proclaim the gospel in the public square. In contrast to the Queen, has the church been afraid of a hostile reaction, or even unsure of the content of this gospel?

With a high-profile death, and funeral rites full of tradition, something in the psyche of the population which is much deeper and older than recent secularism has been stirred, which links monarchy, values of national and community heritage, and death of a beloved grannie, to the idea of the transcendent and the stories about the Christian God remembered from pre 1990's Religious Education lessons and even Sunday School. As many churches have found in recent days, people might, for a short time, be open to a conversation; they might read a booklet; they might even accept an invitation to a church service.

But there are also challenges. As we talk about the Queen's faith, the danger is that it is presented as a gift she had, not open to all, like an ear for music. Or it is seen as a hobby which helped her to cope with life, like some people go cycling or collect stamps or do cross-stitch. At times of emotion when there are mass gatherings, everyone is a believer – in the sense that they can buy in to something temporarily which they consider as just make-believe and which will dissipate in the morning.

¹⁰ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishop-canterburys-sermon-state-funeral-her-majesty-queen-elizabeth-ii>

Instead, true faith is based on the conviction in the cold light of day, that it is God who is real, and the fantasy is the idea that my conscious self is the centre of things.

Repentance, then, means turning away from this profoundly wrong worldview of secular humanist individualism, and turning to the worldview of the Bible, to which the Queen's public utterances and displays of faith and the ancient Christian trappings of monarchy bear witness. We reject the idea that God, the structures of the natural world and human authority represent something inherently oppressive, from which the self must break free to be 'authentic'. Instead we affirm that God has enthroned his anointed Son in Zion, that all human authority derives from him, that the correct response of human sovereigns is to bow before him, to model servanthood in power; that all humanity regardless of status can "take refuge in him" (Psalm 2). God is our creator, and we derive our purpose and identity from relationship with him through Christ and in him by the Holy Spirit, not from inside ourselves.

The Christian message is always presented in a context. The late Queen, in planning her funeral, no doubt was determined to remind the world of the gospel message in a secularised culture where it has been hidden. Similarly, the summary of biblical faith presented in Article 5 of Gafcon's Jerusalem Declaration comes into sharpest focus when seen in the context of the secularising of theology in the West:

We gladly proclaim and submit to the unique and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humanity's only Saviour from sin, judgement and hell, who lived the life we could not live and died the death that we deserve. By his atoning death and glorious resurrection, he secured the redemption of all who come to him in repentance and faith.

The gospel of Jesus Christ unites Anglicans from across the world in believing and proclaiming this message about Jesus. It remains a message that divides opinion but which alone can give eternal life: human beings are alienated from God by sin, and face judgement and hell, but God has provided a Saviour who took the penalty for our wrongdoing in his body on the cross, and then defeated death and opened the gate of glory to all who believe.

The purity and power and glory of the gospel is seen at its best when lived out by ordinary individuals in the home, workplace and church. This contrasts with human attempts to make sense of life without the biblical God, and the false counterfeit gospels in many churches. As we have seen at the recent Lambeth Conference, innovations which deny God's word cause division in the church, "tear the fabric" of the Anglican Communion, and do not offer eternal hope, while mutual submission to Christ as presented in Scripture, which Gafcon stands for, brings unity and security in troubled times.

Prayer point: Let's continue to pray for our civic and political leaders, especially those who profess Christian faith.

We are Anglicans!

What is an Anglican? For many, the word conjures up the Church of England, pictures of beautiful historic buildings, the Vicar of Dibley¹¹, robes and choirs, occasional religious services for marking milestones of life or annual seasonal events. For some, 'Anglicanism' is a 'brand', managed by a complicated institution, connected to a place (Canterbury), and usually linked to the values of the ruling establishment.

Gafcon since its inception has sought to shift these understandings of Anglicanism away from visible symbols and impressions to being about beliefs, history and people:

- An expression of authentic Christian faith
- Shared structures of governance and forms of worship and discipleship
- A global communion of culturally diverse churches

Continuing our series on the Jerusalem Declaration, we're now looking at clauses 6 and 7:

We rejoice in our Anglican sacramental and liturgical heritage as an expression of the gospel, and we uphold the 1662 Book of Common Prayer as a true and authoritative standard of worship and prayer, to be translated and locally adapted for each culture.

We recognise that God has called and gifted bishops, priests and deacons in historic succession to equip all the people of God for their ministry in the world. We uphold the classic Anglican Ordinal as an authoritative standard of clerical orders.

Most of the Jerusalem Declaration focuses on affirming the Bible-based Christian faith shared with all true churches. Here the document sets out concisely some Anglican distinctives that have nothing to do with the familiar caricatures mentioned above!

Many Anglican evangelicals in the West, perhaps wanting to avoid any association with ritualistic religion and seeking to attract a generation who might be put off by too much formality, have in recent decades kept sacraments and liturgy to a minimum. But this can lead to two-dimensional worship, missing out on the riches of the tradition. Symbols appreciated with all the senses, and the regular repetition of words crafted with poetic skill, are not an end in themselves but used rightly are "an expression of the gospel" and in fact a "means of grace" by which, with faith, we encounter the Lord himself.

The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal are based on patterns of worship and commissioning of church leaders which date back to the early church. Over the centuries, the gospel had become obscured, requiring the powerful theological correction of the Reformation. The rubrics and liturgies set out how we should approach God in worship and prayer, in learning from his word and receiving his body and blood, and in holding leaders publicly to biblical standards in ministry.

¹¹ A popular comic character in a long running British TV series, featuring a friendly clergywoman in a village parish.

But the 1662 documents are not like the Quran, seen as having almost magical properties only if used in unchanged form. They are to be continually “translated and adapted for each culture”, always expressing the central teaching of relationship with Christ through repentance and faith, and growing as disciples together through regular feeding on word and sacrament. It is not ‘Anglican’ to reverently repeat the words of Archbishop Cranmer while no longer believing in what they plainly signify and point to.

Anglicans structure their church life in a particular way, with local churches led by priests assisted by deacons, and overseen by bishops responsible for regions with groups of churches. The use of the word ‘priest’ here should not denote any kind of mystical spiritual ability, and certainly not being above correction. Christian leadership should be characterised by servanthood and humility, not abuse of power or pursuit of status. Cranmer used both words: ‘priest’ and ‘minister’; many evangelicals prefer to use the New Testament word ‘presbyter’; ‘pastor’ is increasingly being used. Hopefully, battles over whether or not to use words and symbols associated with ‘Anglo-Catholicism’ are a thing of the past, as faithful Anglicans unite around the gospel in the face of more serious contemporary theological threats.

Whatever name we give to those set apart to lead local congregations needs to be explained, and care needs to be taken to ensure that their origin and purpose is built into local church vision and practice. As Article 7 reminds us, those with responsibility to lead and speak in the church are a gift from God, not so they can take on the entire burden and status of caring for the flock, but to equip God’s people for ministry, in the church and as salt and light in the world.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. Can you give an example in your church where you have combined something stable and unchanging with innovation and adaptation?
2. In what ways have some key elements of the gospel message been ‘hidden’ in contemporary secular culture? How might the church put Christ back in the public view?
3. What are some advantages of liturgy in worship? How can we ensure that our worship remains fresh, inspiring, and led by the Holy Spirit?

The Bridegroom is coming for his bride: marriage and the Bible's witness

"...we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church".

Ephesians 5:30-31

Following the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith process, two senior Bishops¹² (at the time of writing¹³) have, with the support of other bishops, publicly and formally declared their wish to see the historic, bible-based understanding of the church about sex and marriage revised significantly, in favour of approving and celebrating same sex relationships.

There isn't space here to go over all the usual arguments against such proposals. It's assumed that the readers of this editorial will know the main points of the 'sexual revolution' ideology, contrasting with the 'conservative' position of orthodox Christians and many others, which have been rehearsed again and again over the years. The position of Gafcon is that the Church of England bishops currently advising General Synod to vote for change are wrong, because of the clear witness of Scripture and the agreement of the universal church down the ages, as summarised in Article 8 of the Jerusalem Declaration:

We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female, and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place of sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.

The clear articulation of the biblical and historic Christian view of sex and marriage is put forward in an attitude of humility. Awareness of our sin in the face of God's perfect standards should elicit repentance and reform of life, not an attempt to lower those standards. Then, the Gafcon clause should be set against false teaching on the subject, not on personalities. It is the false teaching which is dividing churches across the Communion. And the next question to ask is surely: why? Just as the surveyor looks below ground level to understand the cracks in the tower, and the farmer goes upstream to find out what has poisoned the sheep, so we need to understand clearly what has caused this erroneous new teaching to take hold to such an extent that senior church leaders can commend it confidently without fear of reprisal, and in doing so, give a steer to the governance of the church and the morality of the nation.

¹² Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/4-november/news/uk/bishop-of-oxford-calls-for-an-end-to-ban-on-same-sex-marriage-in-church-of-england> ; Christopher Chessun Bishop of Southwark <https://anglicanmainstream.org/c-of-e-another-senior-bishop-calls-for-change-in-sex-and-marriage-doctrine/> Since the article was written, a number of other bishops have also publicly affirmed their support for same sex marriage.

¹³ This article was first published in Advent 2022.

In most cases, false teaching is not something which is found only in the church, but reflects the worldview of the society outside the church. Ideas now taken for granted in society about sexual morality and about how I see myself as a human being come from secular humanist and neo-pagan worldviews – in fact the Bishop of Oxford admits as much¹⁴, when he says that the church must change in order not to be out of step with those worldviews.

The commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration in its introduction¹⁵ briefly describes some elements of this contemporary Western way of thinking. It does not name individuals, but says:

A significant number of senior leaders in the Anglican Communion have been shaped, influenced and even trapped by this culture...they have allowed the influence of this culture to intimidate them and in the face of this pressure...some have gone so far as to discern the activity of the Holy Spirit in the drives of this culture and its expressions in people's lives, against the plain and express teaching of Scripture.

Again, recognising that beneath the visible iceberg of a bishop's personal view is an enormous and dangerous block of ideas with sharp edges, the Gafcon commentary says:

"...the present day controversy over sexuality is intimately related to current Western thought, concerning the development and experience of identity, personhood and agency...[but]...in affirming the teachings from Scripture, the Church must offer a different view..."

There is now a "different view", in fact two or more fundamentally irreconcilable visions of what we mean by God, humanity, salvation and how to live, not just between the church and the world, but within the same church. What are we to do with that? The Living in Love and Faith project is an example of one answer: we say such difference doesn't matter, in fact it is an example of diversity which is enriching and which tells the world about solving conflict together in faith.

Another answer is to follow Article 8 of the Jerusalem Declaration. Submit to God's "unchangeable standard", repent of failures to maintain it, and support one another in our discipleship, whether married or single, because it's hard, but ultimately rewarding! God's pattern for marriage reflects the sweep of history on the cosmic level: his intention is union of himself with humanity. At Advent we remember how Christ comes as Saviour to deal with our unfaithfulness which causes separation; he will come again as the Bridegroom to claim his bride.

Those who align with Gafcon in Great Britain and Europe are trying to work out what commitment to this biblical orthodoxy means in practice and in terms of how we relate to particular church institutions and authorities. Much patience and understanding is needed in this process.

¹⁴ As pointed out by Ian Paul in his commentary <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/what-is-the-bishop-of-oxford-thinking/>

¹⁵ Being Faithful, a Commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration, Latimer, 2009, p18

Evangelism and Social Justice

Regardless of whether one likes football, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar cannot have gone unnoticed. The number of controversies surrounding it - allegations of corruption, deaths of migrant workers, UK advice for LGBTQ+ football fans - caused many to call for boycotts. The timing of the tournament, culminating in the final on Sunday 18th December, also generated discussion, with the CofE issuing guidance¹⁶ as to how to make the most of it, even suggesting that the timing of carol services should be changed.

Qatar is currently number 18 on the Open Doors World Watch List¹⁷, but the fact that this was the first time that the tournament had been hosted by a Muslim nation, and with the usual fan bases staying away due to boycotts and alcohol restrictions, meant that there were relatively large numbers of not only Qataris, but also Muslims from other countries, at the tournament. While some Christians, concerned about social justice issues, chose to personally boycott the tournament, others saw it as an opportunity for evangelism. A couple of men from a Gafcon supporting Anglican church in the UK, together with several other friends, took an evangelistic trip to the Qatar World Cup to see what might be possible in a country that is normally very opposed to any kind of Gospel outreach. You can hear the encouraging stories of what happened in this podcast episode¹⁸ from Frontiers UK.

In the U.K., the tense World Cup final may have led to a reduction in the numbers going to Carol Services, but Christmas is still the biggest evangelistic opportunity of the year, with multiple openings for outreach celebrating the birth of Jesus. In the U.K. we are blessed with the privilege of being able to send evangelistic cards, tracts and books. The “Love Christmas” campaign is growing in popularity across the denominations, opening up opportunities for evangelism, prayer and practical support, and many elderly, isolated or otherwise struggling people grateful to find that the local church cares for them.

Often there is a tendency to see evangelism and social action or social justice as polar opposites, with the stereotype that evangelicals concentrate on evangelism and liberals on social justice. John Stott wrote about this apparent dichotomy and the tendency to make social justice either superior or subordinate to evangelism in his book, “Christian Mission in the Modern World”, (first published in 1975, updated by Chris Wright in 2016). It is imperative that we are careful to distinguish the secular, voguish and confrontational ‘Social Justice’ (capital ‘S’, capital ‘J’) from biblical social justice (lower case ‘s’, lower case ‘j’). At first glance, ‘Social Justice’ may seem good, laudable and biblical, but its foundations are in postmodernism and relativism¹⁹. With its ever-changing parameters and lack of forgiveness, it is, for most people, the antithesis of Good News.

¹⁶ <https://www.churchsupporthub.org/sport-and-wellbeing-landing/article/making-the-most-of-the-world-cup-final-18thdec-2022.php>

¹⁷ <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/qatar/>

¹⁸ <https://rawmission.buzzsprout.com/1852871/11916006-in-qatar-for-the-world-cup>

¹⁹ See Pluckrose and Lindsay’s 2020 book ‘Cynical Theories’ or their 2022 book ‘Social (In)justice:.....’ for explanation of the foundations, outworking and pitfalls of the Social Justice Movement.

However, both Stott and the Jerusalem Declaration recognise the vital importance of both evangelism and caring for the materially disadvantaged in the Church's mission. Article 9 of the Jerusalem Declaration states:

'We gladly accept the Great Commission of the risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, to seek those who do not know Christ and to baptise, teach and bring new believers to maturity.'

And Article 10 states:

'We are mindful of our responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation, to uphold and advocate justice in society, and to seek relief and empowerment of the poor and needy.'

The Gafcon leadership, rooted for the most part in the thriving churches of the global south where there is significant social and material need, speaks with authority on the urgency of both evangelism and social action in the church's task. It is love and compassion that underpins and motivates them both. The Commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration reminds us that it is in love and by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are called and sent out to make disciples, preach the Gospel, proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins and that this Great Commission is a continuation of the mission of Christ, who came "to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18)

But we cannot go out and preach the Gospel if we don't believe the word of God is sufficient and necessary. And we can neither preach nor minister effectively in our own strength; we need to pray and trust in the Lord remembering Colossians 2:15, "and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." In our evangelism, social action and our prayers, let us remember that the battle has already been won. Let us not become discouraged, let us remember that this mission is God's mission: he has initiated it, he has sent Jesus to accomplish it, and he will ensure its completion. Through his Spirit, he sends, guides and empowers the Church in this mission. And, as some encouraging wag has said: "If God can use a donkey, he can use you!" (Numbers 22:21-39).

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. We are now seeing an active promotion of a positive view of same sex relationships in the church. Is it helpful to see this not just as a debate about sex and theology within the church, but a symptom of secular ideas about the nature of being human? Why?
2. How might we respond to those who say that the church's historic teaching on sex is unkind, and needs to be changed?
3. Why is it important for Christians to be concerned about social justice? In what ways will this concern differ from secular Social Justice movements?

Anglican diversity and unity

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:3-6

A frequently heard testimony from many white, Western Anglicans attending previous global Gafcon gatherings, is a discovery for the first time of a rich diversity of cultural expression within a shared unity based on a biblical world view and agreed understanding of the gospel. As our local churches in U.K. become more racially diverse, most of us are learning to appreciate new ways of worshipping and practising hospitality, and gaining new insights into the Bible, from those who previously would not have been considered part of our 'tribe'.

Gafcon seeks to encourage as much unity among Christians as possible, especially within the global Anglican family, allowing for maximum diversity within biblical boundaries.

On the other hand, when there is no longer a possibility of unity, because one group is, for example, consistently denying clear biblical truth, Gafcon stands with those who sadly see the necessity of a visible break in fellowship, and rejection of the spiritual authority of heretical leadership.

There are three clauses in the Jerusalem Declaration which explain this concept of unity in diversity, which uses differentiation, if necessary, to preserve authentic faith:

11. We are committed to the unity of all those who know and love Christ and to building authentic ecumenical relationships. We recognise the orders and jurisdiction of those Anglicans who uphold orthodox faith and practice, and we encourage them to join us in this declaration.

12. We celebrate the God-given diversity among us which enriches our global fellowship, and we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters. We pledge to work together to seek the mind of Christ on issues that divide us.

13. We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed. We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord.

Ecumenical unity

The word 'ecumenical' was hijacked by theological liberals, for example in the World Council of Churches in the 1960's and 70's, to mean "lowest common denominator" Christianity. The word 'interdenominational' has been more commonly used by bible-believing Christians. But ecumenical is a good word. It comes from the Greek word 'oikos', originally meaning the firepit or hearth around which the extended family gathers, and then coming to mean the family itself, or the household.

New Testament writers used 'oikos' to mean the local church, gathered around the spiritual hearth of word and sacrament, and the universal church, the wider family of God.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household ...

Ephesians 2:19

The unity exists, bought by Christ, but we need to make every effort to build and keep the unity of the spirit with all Christians, defined in the Jerusalem Declaration Article 11 as "those who know and love Christ". A clear definition of authentic biblical faith has already been outlined in the earlier clauses of the Jerusalem Declaration.

Anglicans in fellowship despite disagreement

From an expression of commitment to unity in general, Article 11 then focuses on unity among confessing Anglicans, and specifically the recognition of ordination in other jurisdictions. Once the principle was established that true Anglicanism does not come through Canterbury or affiliation with a specific group or organisation, but through shared Christian faith as defined by the Scriptures, it makes genuine fellowship and mutual recognition much easier.

Article 12 opens up the reality of diversity in God's church, not glossing over or discouraging the things that make us different, celebrating what should be a colourful variety rather than a bland uniformity, acknowledging that there are things on which we differ and where there could be division.

There's an excellent exposition of this in the book 'Being Faithful'²⁰, on the goodness of God-given diversity in the church as in creation, and the need to recognise limits of diversity. How do we know what opinions and practices are legitimate, and what might go beyond what's acceptable? How do we know what are primary and secondary issues? How do we resolve differences over matters which might be secondary but generating strong feelings and convictions? Article 20 of the Thirty-Nine Articles is helpful here: "It is not lawful for the church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's word written, and neither may the church expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."

There is humility in Article 12 of the Jerusalem Declaration. It's recognising that there are some secondary matters which are not cut and dried, and maybe we can learn something from engaging in mutual worship, prayer, discussion and witness with others from different cultural and church backgrounds. We don't just learn from what others do right, but in a different way; we also learn from what we get frustrated about because we think they're doing it wrong!

Serious disagreement – what then?

But Christian unity is only meaningful if there is some kind of boundary marking what is Christian from what is not. So, Article 13 says that where there is serious error and heresy in the church, it's not enough to simply re-state the truth and be left with

²⁰ Being Faithful, a Commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration, Latimer, 2009, pages 61-62,

competing plural truths in the same church. There must be a spiritual separation, which may require organisational separation. However, it's clearly a very serious thing to get to the point of saying to another person claiming to be a Christian, that unity has been strained or broken. It is particularly costly to say to those superior to you in status and institutional authority, that they are in grave error and spiritual communion no longer exists. Who or what gives us the right to judge another person like that? Doesn't Jesus warn against it? In Anglican terms, you're rejecting the authority of a bishop, so essentially you are in rebellion. Can that ever be right?

The Anglicans from all over the world who composed and endorsed Article 13 of the Jerusalem Declaration were not dealing with an abstract theory. They were responding to practical painful realities, especially in North America at that time, where the Anglican leadership authorised blessing of same-sex relationships and removed historically-agreed boundaries around sexual behaviour for clergy and bishops – a situation we have now reached in the Church of England.

In setting out Article 13, the first Gafcon meeting agreed:

- The Bible is a higher authority than church structures.
- Any decision to reject a bishop's spiritual authority should not just be an individual decision but part of a corporate process whereby the global church agrees that a line has been crossed, or usually many lines on primary issues have been repeatedly crossed.
- Separation is sometimes necessary to protect the flock and to ensure the continuation of faithful mission.

The book 'Being Faithful' is very helpful in giving some checks and balances when making the sad and desperate decision to separate from ungodly spiritual leadership. Here are some:

- Self-examination: are our attitudes and motives godly?
- Have we explained our decision clearly?
- Have we taken time to pray and consult?
- Has there been a call to repentance, and ongoing prayer for this?
- Is separation a last resort, not an immediate expression of anger?
- Have we come under new godly authority i.e. not independence?
- Is there a positive purpose: prophetic voice and mission?

In the short sentences of Articles 11-13 of the Jerusalem Declaration, Gafcon gives a great summary of the benefits of Anglican and wider Christian unity, the need to actively pursue what God has already given, how we can celebrate and learn from diversity, but at the same time recognise together with others the clear limits to diversity of belief and behaviour. Then, there is the need to take action to protect people from false teachers, and ensure it's the saving gospel of Christ we're sharing and not our own views.

Secular versions of Christianity must face the return of Christ

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

The secular worldview is not the same as atheism. The object of faith, a divine being, is seen by the atheist as a dangerous myth. By contrast, secularism does not necessarily deny the existence of God, or gods, but re-interprets the idea of the divine and the spiritual in human terms. Secularism can see value in faith: it provides people with emotional support; it motivates them to help the disadvantaged and serve their communities. The secularist might not regard belief in the existence of God as necessarily harmful, and is more interested in the psychology of faith, and whether it has a positive or negative effect according to what the secularist thinks is “good”.

It's not difficult to see, then, how secular thinking can infiltrate the church. If faith is seen only from the perspective of human feelings and activities, then religion and the church is not threatening to the secular worldview and its projects. In fact the church and its message can be reinterpreted to support common concerns: protecting the environment, promoting the visibility and care of minorities, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and so on. The presence of the church building and regular services of worship form part of an important bedrock of continuity and stability in communities; they provide a sense of peace and psychological uplift; they can help to build friendships and a sense of well-being. Because in the secular view, if religion, spirituality and faith are a matter of personal opinion, this will result in a variety of views, but the institution of the church can help people with these diverse feelings to live together in peace.

This is a view of Christian faith which does not consider aspects of objective metaphysical truth, but just looks at the perspective of visible benefits it might give churchgoers and local communities. The question of whether the God of the Bible actually exists objectively, outside human consciousness, does not need to be settled. Much of the recent debates on sexuality in the Church of England General Synod and other meetings have taken place with this background. Participants have said: “I am a member of the church; I feel this, and I think this”, and these testimonies have been accorded great weight. When other participants have urged a shift in perspective to look at what God thinks, according to his revealed will in Scripture, this has been viewed as simply another opinion, explainable by personal feelings or membership of a particular group.

So, the recent²¹ General Synod vote to permit blessings of same-sex couples²² should not be seen as a shocking, but single-instance and single-issue departure from orthodoxy, which can perhaps be reversed by legal procedures or changes in

²¹ This article was first published in early March 2023.

²² On February 9th 2023. <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/prayers-gods-blessing-same-sex-couples-take-step-forward-after-synod>

leadership personnel. Rather it is part of an entrenched pattern, another outworking, along with many other examples, of the institution operating from a default secular, instead of a biblical, worldview. If orthodox Anglicans see the problem in the Western church as the 'tree' of secularism in general, rather than a particular fruit (e.g. a decision by the Church of England leadership in February 2023) this will help us in our task of recovering and bearing witness to a fully-orbed understanding of reality as set out in the Scriptures and our Anglican formularies.

The meeting of the first Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in 2008 was a watershed moment in church history. Anglican leaders from around the world came together to reaffirm a biblical understanding of Christian faith, to re-commit to mission and evangelism based on the gospel of Christ according to Scripture, and to reject secularised versions of Christianity. The Jerusalem Declaration is a condensed expression of this shared faith. The final Article, number 14, is certainly a challenge to the secular worldview:

We rejoice at the prospect of Jesus' coming again in glory, and while we await this final event of history, we praise him for the way he builds up his church through his Spirit by miraculously changing lives.

Based on the consistent teaching of Jesus and the apostles, "the anticipation of the return of Jesus has been the centrepiece of Christian hope since the very beginning" (Being Faithful, p68). To meet face to face with our Saviour, to know that suffering is ended, to rest and be rewarded for our labours for the Kingdom, to experience God's perfect reign and justice and peace, will be a time of inexpressible joy. But in the present, reflecting on the return of Christ motivates us to godly living, and to support the Great Commission, to make disciples of Christ throughout the world.

We can easily become discouraged by our own sin and the apparent success of evil in the world and even in the church. We cannot do it on our own; we need God's grace continually. And he provides this by his Holy Spirit, sustaining his faithful people in their walk with him as they await the final Day. In particular, we are encouraged by answers to prayer, to testimonies of God "miraculously changing lives", and through news from around the world of the growth of God's church.

Keeping in mind the future return of Christ, and the present miracle of the real, faithful, spiritual (rather than institutional) Church, is an important antidote to secularism. But this is not pietism, retreating to an otherworldly 'churchianity' which has nothing to say to, and no impact on, the hard material world of politics, economics, struggles with day-to-day cost of living and concerns for our children's future. A biblical worldview means that we participate in these things, with faith, seeing and doing things God's way, enduring, being salt and light, pointing to Christ as the cosmic judge before whom we must all give account, and the Saviour who longs to include many more in his Kingdom before he returns.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. In what ways does global Anglicanism based on shared beliefs demonstrate unity in diversity? Why is this essential for world mission?
2. How do we know at what point unity is no longer possible between those who believe different things in the church? What should happen when leaders no longer accept the bible as their authority, and promote a different 'gospel'?
3. Why does the bible's teaching about the return of Christ challenge the secular worldview? How can we proclaim it more effectively?

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