

# ***Communion, Covenant and our Anglican Future: MCU's reply to Drs Williams and Wright***

## **Introduction**

This paper is a critique of two papers, by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Durham respectively. Both are responses to the decision by the Episcopal Church of the USA (TEC), at its General Convention in July 2009, to abandon its earlier moratoria on same-sex blessings and openly homosexual bishops.

*Communion, Covenant and our Anglican Future*, by Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, explains his disapproval of this decision, largely repeating arguments used in the Windsor Report, his own earlier statements and statements of Primates' Meetings. In reflective language it seeks to maintain the Communion's unity and expresses pastoral concern for both sides in the debate.

*Rowan's Reflections: Unpacking the Archbishop's Statement*, by Dr N T Wright, Bishop of Durham, is a longer paper, written in blunter language. In some places it agrees with Dr Williams, in many it claims to explain more fully what Dr Williams meant, and in a few it disagrees with him.

## **Summary**

- Both papers blame the American church for rejecting a consensus that homosexuality is immoral. There is no such consensus; there is only their dogma.
- Even if there were a consensus, the institutions of the Anglican Communion have neither legal nor moral authority to impose it on provinces which dissent. Their claim to have this authority is an attempt to introduce a new authoritarianism.
- The controversy about homosexuality can only be resolved by open, free debate about the ethics of homosexuality. These papers, instead of engaging in that debate, seek to suppress it.
- A great deal of scholarly literature has recently argued for a revision of the traditional Christian disapproval of homosexuality. These papers deny knowledge of it, thus implying that their position is uninformed.
- Both papers appeal to an idealising theory of the church in order to argue that it cannot ordain homosexuals or perform same-sex blessings. These theories neither describe what is happening in practice nor express characteristically Anglican views of the church.
- Both papers deny that they seek to centralise power in international Anglican institutions, while at the same time proposing innovations designed to have exactly this effect.
- Both papers look forward to an Anglican Covenant which would create a two-tier Anglicanism, such that only those committed to condemning homosexuality would have representative functions or be consulted on Communion-wide matters.

## **Who is to blame for the impasse?**

### **There is no consensus**

Williams and Wright both acknowledge that progress is not being made in the controversy over homosexuality, but blame TEC for this failure. Williams writes: 'a realistic assessment of what Convention has resolved does not suggest that it will repair the broken bridges into the life of other Anglican

provinces... The repeated request for moratoria on the election of partnered gay clergy as bishops and on liturgical recognition of same-sex partnerships has clearly not found universal favour.'

Wright puts his case more bluntly and reveals his impatience: 'the Communion is indeed already broken... the breach has already occurred. We are not, then, looking now at TEC choosing for the first time to "walk apart", but at the recognition that they did so some time ago and have done nothing to indicate a willingness to rejoin the larger Communion' (3).

Thus Wright declares with characteristic bluntness that authoritarianism which Williams shares but prefers not to advertise. Both insist there is an Anglican consensus that homosexuality is immoral, and on that basis blame the Americans for acting contrary to it. Outside the higher echelons of church bureaucracies this seems a bizarre claim: in normal English usage 'consensus' means 'general agreement (of opinion, testimony, etc.)' (Concise Oxford Dictionary) or 'general or widespread agreement among all the members of a group' (Encarta Dictionary). The current controversy is precisely about whether homosexuality is indeed immoral, and as long as debate continues nothing could be clearer than the fact that there is no consensus.

What Williams and Wright mean by 'consensus' is not in fact consensus at all; they make no attempt to appeal to a general agreement. They appeal instead to a few central authorities, chiefly Lambeth 1998, primates' meetings and the Windsor Report, plus what they claim the church has always taught. Far from being consensus this is better described as 'a principle, tenet or system', or perhaps 'a belief or set of beliefs that a religion holds to be true'. The word being defined here (Concise Oxford Dictionary and Encarta respectively) is 'dogma'.

From an empirical perspective large parts of the Anglican world have become more tolerant of homosexuality, believe this tolerance is a moral insight, and therefore think the church should abandon its former intolerance. From a dogmatic perspective the fact that many millions of worshippers dissent from official doctrine does not affect the duty of church leaders to teach it. On this point Williams and Wright represent a defensive, reactionary church leadership responding to new moral theories not by arguing that they are untrue but by suppressing them in the name of their dogmas.

## **Consensus cannot be imposed**

Furthermore, even if there were a consensus that homosexuality is immoral, their conclusions would not follow. Anglicanism does not have a papal magisterium: every province would be departing from the consensus as and when it saw fit. Neither the Archbishop nor the Primates' meetings nor the ACC nor Lambeth conferences has the legal or moral authority to impose a particular view – even a majority view – on the whole Communion.

Yet Williams and Wright both write as though this authority was already there, already competent to discipline the Americans for disobeying instructions. We must therefore ask why these two senior clergy, who know full well that Anglicanism does not have central authorities with that authority, condemn the Americans on the basis that it does. It is difficult to avoid the obvious conclusion: that (perhaps without realising it) they are in the process of *creating* an authoritarian centralised system, and are identifying themselves with it. The Americans are to blame for the controversy *only from the perspective of those claiming more authority than they have*.

## **The ethics of homosexuality**

Central to the debate, then, is the question of whether homosexual activity is immoral. The policy of TEC's opponents is to suppress this question. It was excluded from the remit of the Eames Commission; the

Windsor Report, which it published in 2004, took that exclusion to mean that as far as the Anglican Communion was concerned homosexuality was definitely immoral. Williams reaffirms this stance, warning against being

completely trapped in the particularly bitter and unpleasant atmosphere of the debate over sexuality, in which unexamined prejudice is still so much in evidence and accusations of bad faith and bigotry are so readily thrown around (3.11).

It is this strategy which enables them to present TEC as self-consciously deviant, and the debate as purely a question of how to discipline errant provinces.

Williams and Wright are of course aware of the common view that homosexuality is not immoral, but they claim to know little more. Williams thinks it is reducible to an appeal to human rights (2.4). To this he replies:

However, the issue is not simply about civil liberties or human dignity or even about pastoral sensitivity to the freedom of individual Christians to form their consciences on this matter... This is not a matter that can be wholly determined by what society at large considers usual or acceptable or determines to be legal... If society changes its attitudes, that change does not of itself count as a reason for the Church to change its discipline (2.6, 10).

Without more ado Williams dismisses all human rights discourse as though there was no proper place for it in Anglican ethics. Against it he presents what we might call 'the unchanging church argument'. The question

is about whether the Church is free to recognise same-sex unions by means of public blessings... In the light of the way in which the Church has consistently read the Bible for the last two thousand years, it is clear that a positive answer to this question would have to be based on the most painstaking biblical exegesis and on a wide acceptance of the results within the Communion, with due account taken of the teachings of ecumenical partners also. A major change naturally needs a strong level of consensus and solid theological grounding.

This is not our situation in the Communion. Thus a blessing for a same-sex union cannot have the authority of the Church Catholic, or even of the Communion as a whole (2.6-8).

Wright agrees and expands. He knows two of TEC's arguments:

Some in TEC insist that their theological position has in fact been argued, and that the rest of the Communion is ignoring these arguments. As far as I can discern, there are two main arguments routinely used (6).

He describes the first as 'the supposed modern and scientific discovery of a personal "identity" characterised by sexual preference, which then generates a set of 'rights'.' To this he replies:

the Christian notion of personal identity has never before been supposed to be rooted in desires of whatever sort. Indeed, desires are routinely brought under the constraints of 'being in Christ'. This quite new notion of an 'identity' found not only within oneself but within one's emotional and physical desires needs to be articulated on the basis of scripture and tradition, and this to my mind has not been done (6).

The other defence of homosexuality of which Wright is aware is what he calls 'the appeal to baptism':

It is now routinely said in TEC that all the baptised should have access to all the sacraments, on the apparent grounds that baptism indicates God's acceptance of people as they are. This appears to ignore the New Testament teaching about baptism, that it constitutes a dying to self and sin and a rising to new life with Christ, specifically characterised by a holiness and renewed humanity in which certain habits and styles of life are left behind. From the first century until very recently it was universally understood that this included sexual immorality, and that that included homosexual behaviour. To try to use a supposedly 'baptismal' theology to overturn the universal Christian tradition of the meaning of baptism, and with it the universal and biblically-rooted appeal for sexual holiness, is a bold move (6).

Later he argues:

The church has never acknowledged that powerful sexual instincts, which almost all human beings have, generate a *prima facie* 'right' that these instincts receive physical expression. Indeed, the church has always insisted that self-control is part of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (12).

He hammers home what Williams puts gently:

He basically reaffirms the church's traditional stance, articulated in Lambeth 1.10 from 1998 but universally held, prior to that, whenever the point had been raised. First, the church cannot sanction or bless same-sex unions. Second, since the ordained ministry carries a necessarily representative function for the life of the church, those who order their lives this way cannot fulfil this representative role – cannot, in other words, be ordained... This has of course always been the official position of the whole Anglican Communion, repeated again and again by Lambeth Conferences, ACC and Primates and never overturned (5).

These arguments, though expressed by senior figures of the Communion, represent only the more authoritarian elements of Anglican moral thought.

## Human rights

Human rights discourse has been immensely influential in Anglican discourse, at least since the seventeenth century, and should not be dismissed so peremptorily as alien.

## Changing with society

Williams and Wright tar it by association with the view that the church's teaching should change to reflect society's attitudes. This is of course a straw doll: the only people who hold such a view are secularists who simply want to use religion for their own purposes. It is in any case quite different from human rights theory. Nevertheless the fact that Williams and Wright argue this way is revealing: denying that the church should *always* change its doctrines to suit society, they jump to the conclusion that *in this instance* we should attribute no value to what society believes.

Church history tells a more modest story. There have indeed been times when, looking back, we praise church leaders for having resisted popular social trends, like racism and eugenics, which horrified later generations. However it is also true that nearly all changes to Christian ethical teaching have been influenced by wider social attitudes. Obvious examples are the collapse of Anglicanism's opposition to divorce and contraception in the early twentieth century, and more recently the abandonment of a very anthropocentric account of Christian ethics in response to the scientific evidence for climate change.

There is here a difference of opinion which goes back to the beginnings of Christianity: is the church the *only* source of truth in matters of faith and morals, or is daily life and the world around us also capable of revealing God's will for us? The *idea* of a self-sufficient church owing nothing to the big bad world outside has always had its supporters; but there never has been a time when any church did in fact rid itself of all external influence. If Anglicans now decide to abandon the earlier condemnations of homosexuality, the change will be typical of changes to church teaching which have taken place in every generation.

## Suppressing natural desires

Wright emphasises that being a Christian involves suppressing one's natural desires, and appeals to texts in Paul's epistles.

There are indeed many times when we need to resist temptation and suppress natural desires. Whether homosexual intercourse always needs to be resisted, even by those with a homosexual orientation, is precisely the ethical question at issue, and these quotations do not answer it.

A more frequent claim in the Bible is that obedience to God's law should bring *shalom*, which is often translated as 'peace' but has a wider meaning including 'harmony' and 'fulfilment'. It is because of this biblical belief that we have been made by a loving God who wishes us well, that people ask 'Why did God make me with such strong homosexual urges and then forbid me to express them?'

We are given the impression that Wright does not himself have a homosexual orientation. To impose lifelong celibacy on those who do does not distress him at all. In general, moral rules serve people in two

ways: to guide them in their own lives, and to give them bullets to fire at others. Wright uses the latter for all it is worth at no cost to himself.

## **What the church cannot do**

Williams and Wright both insist that the church *cannot* bless same-sex unions and that people in homosexual partnerships *cannot* be ordained to the church's ministry. Yet both know that these things happen. What is the meaning of this 'cannot'?

It is clearly not an empirical statement about any public ecclesiastical institution. Both are in fact appealing to a mystic 'true church', the institution desired by the mind of God, a kind of Platonic ideal describing what the public institutional church *ought* to be. Their 'cannot' therefore means 'ought not'.

Williams allows for change as a theoretical possibility but makes it impossible in practice, demanding 'the authority of the Church Catholic, or even of the Communion as a whole'. Williams' ideal church is Catholic. It seeks to incorporate all Christians, so each part of it consults with the others before making any innovations. Anglican Catholics have long argued that the Church of England should not have ordained women to the priesthood without getting the approval of the Vatican and the patriarchs of Orthodoxy. To Williams, TEC should have consulted in a similar manner before consecrating an openly gay man to the episcopate and introducing same sex blessings.

It is hopelessly unrealistic. The whole of Christendom will never reach agreement on anything. What makes this Catholic vision *seem* credible is two limitations which are in practice imposed on it, though they are rarely spelt out: that the agreement of the whole church really means only the agreement of archbishops, Vatican and patriarchs; and that Christendom-wide agreement is only needed on a small number of issues. Which those issues are is never spelt out.

Wright's vision is Calvinist rather than Catholic. In this tradition, the 'true church' is an invisible entity known to God alone. Although Calvinism varies, and Calvin himself changed his mind, the originating idea is that the true church consists of those who are predestined to salvation by God, and live upright moral lives following God's commandments as revealed in the Bible. It is thus a smaller body of people; only some Anglicans belong to it.

In this tradition there is no interest at all in the unity of the institutional church. What is of interest is the exact opposite: to clarify the distinction between true Christians and everybody else, and to ensure that one's own church is entirely governed by true Christians. It is this ecclesiology which responds to the fact that one of Anglicanism's 800 bishops is an open homosexual by treating it as urgent crisis needing to be resolved immediately.

Among Anglicans both these theories of the church have a following but neither is characteristic of Anglicanism. Others take a less idealist, more empirical view of it: God allows us to organise the church as we wish, so that what you see is what you get. It may be that a blueprint for 'the true Church' is no more part of God's mind than a blueprint for 'the true Post Office'.

Double meanings of words can pave the way to erroneous deductions. Their claim that the church 'cannot' do those things is true of their ideal church, but they argue as though it were also true of the church as it currently is. By allowing themselves to imagine that the church as it currently is cannot do these things, they conclude that when these things happen an innovation is taking place and the essence of the church is being undermined. In reality nothing of the sort is happening.

## **Ignorance of recent scholarship**

Perhaps the most telling aspect of their arguments is the openness with which they reveal their ignorance of the theological arguments in favour of accepting homosexuality. Williams reduces them to human rights.

Wright tells us that 'some in TEC insist that their theological position has in fact been argued, and that the rest of the Communion is ignoring these arguments.' He then immediately proves them right with his 'As far as I can discern, there are two main arguments routinely used', namely the human rights argument and the baptism argument.

Over the last generation there has been an immense amount of scholarly research challenging the anti-homosexual tradition. There are three main areas. Firstly, biblical exegesis reveals that the texts usually cited as condemnations of homosexuality are not all about homosexuality, and those which are turn out to be more nuanced. Other biblical texts are more sympathetic to it. Secondly, the teaching of the Christian church through its history has been nowhere near as monolithic as Williams and Wright would have us believe. Thirdly, the traditional 'natural law' argument has been turned on its head. No longer is it possible for Roman Catholics and their supporters to argue along Platonist lines that the purpose of the genitals is to produce children and that therefore they should not be used for any other purpose; on the contrary Darwinian evolution and zoological research show that some diversity of sexual practice is necessary to the survival of every species of bird and animal.

There is now a large body of scholarly literature in all three areas. We must accept Wright's admission that he is unaware of it. In Williams' case the matter is more complex. We know from previous publications that Williams the theologian is familiar with it; he could never speak of 'the way in which the Church has consistently read the Bible for the last two thousand years'. Yet Williams the archbishop writes it. As a theologian he would not tell us that 'a positive answer to [public blessings of same sex unions] would have to be based on the most painstaking biblical exegesis', because he knows the exegesis is proceeding apace; as an archbishop, though, he does tell us.

It is not for us to psychoanalyse what is going on in Williams' mind; but it does appear that he considers it his responsibility, as archbishop, to ignore the findings of theological scholarship until such time as they are formally accepted by church leaders as the official teaching of the church. This is to take an authoritarian, dogmatic view of Anglican doctrine. Through most of its history Anglicanism has not been so authoritarian; its mood has been far better stated by McAdoo's classic work *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, which argues that 'Anglicanism believes things because they are true, not because they are Anglican'. It appears that Williams believes the opposite.

## How centralised should the Anglican Communion be?

Williams and Wright both address the question of how centralised the Anglican Communion should be.

Williams, arguing that a new way of reaching a common mind is needed (3.12), defends it against sceptics:

This is not some piece of modern bureaucratic absolutism, but the conviction of the Church from its very early days. The doctrine that 'what affects the communion of all should be decided by all' is a venerable principle (3.13).

Comparing the homosexuality debate with lay presidency at Communion and admission of the unbaptised to communion (3.16), he argues:

To accept without challenge the priority of local and pastoral factors in the case either of sexuality or of sacramental practice would be to abandon the possibility of a global consensus among the Anglican churches such as would continue to make sense of the shape and content of most of our ecumenical activity. It would be to re-conceive the Anglican Communion as essentially a loose federation of local bodies with a cultural history in common, rather than a theologically coherent 'community of Christian communities' (3.18).

Wright emphatically agrees, stressing some of the points:

He insists that this is not (as is often sneeringly said) about bureaucratic or centralized 'control'... he warns against churches becoming 'imprisoned in their own cultural environment'... The key point then is this...: though some things can

indeed be decided by a local church, the decision as to which things can be decided locally is not itself one that can be taken locally (8).

Echoing Williams' concern about ecumenical work, he adds:

it is vital that our partners know 'who speaks for the body they are relating to'. If many Anglicans don't see why these presenting issues should matter, the same is not true for our ecumenical partners... What is at stake, as well as Anglican identity and ecclesial density (i.e. being a church with a high doctrine of Communion, rather than a loose federation), is ecumenical credibility (9).

Once again we find theory about an ideal church replacing realistic descriptions. Local churches do not always 'seek the judgement of the wider Church'. They relate to each other in a wide variety of ways. Roman Catholicism has a central authority with power to impose decisions; the Baptist Union is a voluntary federation which local churches can join or leave as they choose. The Methodist Conference does not feel obliged to consult the Church of England General Synod or the Baptist Union before making innovations, and the many independent charismatic churches which have arisen in the last generation certainly accept no obligation to consult in the manner Williams proposes. His assumption that they ought to do so expresses his theology, not the theology of all Anglicans let alone all Christians.

The doctrine that 'what affects the communion of all should be decided by all' may indeed be venerable but to call it 'the conviction of the Church from its very early days' ignores the historical reality of repeated controversy within and between denominations. It has never been a formal part of the Anglican Communion's governance and to introduce it now in the face of immense opposition would indeed be 'some piece of modern bureaucratic absolutism'.

For the Anglican Communion to be 'essentially a loose federation of local bodies with a cultural history in common' would be to keep it near enough as it is. Williams' hope of a 'global consensus' in a 'theologically coherent "community of Christian communities"' has never been the historical reality – especially if it implies agreement on ethical issues like homosexuality - and stands no chance of becoming so in the foreseeable future. To make the governance of the Anglican Communion fit this idea would, contrary to his claim, be a major innovation.

Similarly, when Wright argues that 'the decision as to which things can be decided locally is not itself one that can be taken locally' he is not making a factual statement about what normally happens at present; he is telling us what he thinks *ought* to be the case. To make it the case would be a major innovation. If there is any doubt that it would involve centralising power, his point about 'ecumenical credibility' makes it clear: he wants a small number of people who can attend meetings with patriarchs and cardinals and declare authoritatively what the Anglican position is. From this perspective it is easy to understand why this English bishop has no time for the more democratic American system with its Presiding Bishop instead of an archbishop and a governing body which only meets once every three years. Others think it is a price worth paying to avoid authoritarianism. Instead of trying to match the declarations of cardinals about what Roman Catholics believe, if we honestly told them that Anglicans disagree with each other this might help them reflect on the differences of opinion within their own denomination.

## **The Anglican Covenant and a two-track Communion**

As we would expect, Williams and Wright defend the proposal for an Anglican Covenant, and in these papers the emphasis is on the 'two-track' Communion' which would probably result.

Williams softens his position. In 'Challenge and Hope' (2006) he looked forward to a distinction between 'constituent' (covenanting) churches and 'churches in association', and suggested the relationship 'would not be unlike that between the Church of England and the Methodist Church'. In this recent paper however he stresses that churches which do not sign the covenant will not be treated as second rate Anglicans. The

aim of the proposals is 'to intensify existing relationships'. For those who do not sign the Covenant 'there is no threat of being cast into outer darkness – existing relationships will not be destroyed that easily' (21-22).

Nevertheless churches which do not sign the Covenant will be excluded from some activities. There will be a 'covenanted' Anglican global body, fully sharing certain aspects of a vision of how the Church should be and behave, able to take part as a body in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue; and, related to this body, but in less formal ways with fewer formal expectations, there may be associated local churches in various kinds of mutual partnership and solidarity with one another and with 'covenanted' provinces (22).

He calls this 'a "two-track" model, two ways of witnessing to the Anglican heritage, one of which had decided that local autonomy had to be the prevailing value and so had in good faith declined a covenantal structure.' When non-signatories are excluded from official roles, this will be 'simply because within these processes there has to be clarity about who has the authority to speak for whom' (23). This should amount to 'two styles of being Anglican'. 'The ideal is that both "tracks" should be able to pursue what they believe God is calling them to be as Church, with greater integrity and consistency.'(24).

Here Wright disagrees. The differences are too great:

Speaking of an 'ideal' whereby both 'Tracks' 'should be able to pursue what they believe God is calling them to be as Church, with greater integrity and consistency', will sound idealistic at best when several loud voices in TEC are saying that what God is calling them to is to spread the 'gospel' of 'inclusivity', and several other voices are saying that God is calling them to resist precisely this (12(iii)).

To Williams' appeal for 'mutual respect for deeply held theological convictions' he replies:

Did Athanasius respect the 'deeply held theological convictions' of Arius and his followers? Perhaps he did; certainly he took them seriously enough to refute them vigorously. If the separation of two 'Tracks' generated, at last, a full-scale theological and exegetical discussion of disputed points, rather than emotive sniping, we might all be better served in the long run (12(iv)).

In reality, he believes, 'schism has already happened'. It 'is not just a middle-distance possibility but an on-the-ground and in-your-face fact' (13).

An important strand of Wright's argument is the urgency of a solution. He writes at length about it. There is no time to wait for more committees to meet: the matter must be settled *now*. TEC's General Convention will not meet again until 2012, so this is the earliest time they can vote on a Covenant. Wright considers this a 'delaying tactic' which 'must be seen for what it is, and headed off':

The obvious way to do this is to declare that 'Track One' is open, right away, to Covenant signatories, and only Covenant signatories... it needs to be done, and done quickly (16).

The Lambeth Conference, the ACC and the Primates would become Track 1 institutions, raising the question of whether new institutions would be needed to relate Track 1 to Track 2 (18(i)).

These positions reflect their differing ecclesiologies. Williams, however much he softens his language, still looks forward to a tighter structure where covenanters commit themselves to agreeing with each other and non-covenanters are excluded from representative functions. Here we see two features of his catholic theology which conflict with each other: on the one hand the desire to retain as many people as possible within the church, and on the other the authoritarian commitment to its official teaching. Expressing the first he appeals for mutual respect for conflicting 'deeply held theological convictions'; expressing the second he has no doubts at all that as far as Anglicans are concerned homosexuality is immoral.

Wright shares the latter position but not the former. The schism has already happened, and he sheds no tears over it. Those as determined as he is to 'guard the faith, teach the truth and refute error' will not allow for new developments and insights. His expressed desire for 'a full-scale theological and exegetical discussion of disputed points' is less convincing: it is he and his supporters, from the Windsor Report

onwards, who have consistently blocked the attempts of his opponents to hold a public debate about the ethics of homosexuality and allow the church's leadership to be guided by it.

He adds other proposals for an immediate separation of the two. One is to enable individuals and parishes in Track 2 dioceses to opt into Track 1 by adopting the Covenant in some way. He proposes some kind of 'Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight' (11, 21). What the plans for a separation overlook is that if whatever is made available to supporters of the covenant in non-covenanting dioceses will also need to be available to opponents of the covenant in covenanting dioceses. The overall effect will be to drive a wedge between the two. If the Church in Wales votes against the Covenant, will the Diocese of Monmouth be able to vote in favour and transfer its allegiance to England? Will a group of villages in the Lleyn Peninsula be able to do the same? In a combined benefice will one parish be able to join England while the other stays in Wales? Will the 10 am congregation go one way and the 6 pm congregation the other? Or the organist one way and the choir the other? If, as Wright suggests, the answers to all these questions is 'yes', and if England does vote in favour of the Covenant, the same questions arise the other way round. Will the Province of York be able to vote against? The Diocese of Leicester? The Parish of St Luke's, Liverpool? The DCC of St Bride's within the Parish of St Luke's? One thing we can be certain of: if permission to accept the covenant is given to parishes in non-covenanting provinces, covenanting provinces will lose parishes to non-covenanters whether permission is given or not. We have seen how the 1993 Act of Synod had the unfortunate effect of producing a denomination within a denomination; the current proposals would be far more divisive.

Another of Wright's concerns is who will end up being in communion with whom:

Once Tracks One and Two have been identified, will there be mutual recognition of ministries? Presumably not if Track One is committed to Paragraph 8 of the Archbishop's paper while Track Two is committed to demolishing it. Will communicants be welcome across the gap between the Tracks? (15).

Once again we are reminded of that strange world of senior ecclesiastics. Fifty years ago Anglican priests were not permitted to give communion to Methodists, or Roman Catholics to Anglicans. Today, outside the hierarchy nobody bothers. A URC family move house and find that in their new area the only church with a youth group suitable for their children is the Anglican one. Just how many clergy, in Wright's view, would refuse them communion? No doubt he and his allies have drummed up a lobby who look forward to being out of communion with Track 2 Anglicans, but when the fires die down only a small number of extremists will carry on refusing on principle to attend the same church as active homosexuals and their supporters. We should not repeat the mistake of 1993, giving special favours to Anglicans who dedicate their efforts to condemning other Anglicans.

## Conclusion

Both Williams and Wright show themselves to be dogmatic authoritarians. Their appeal to consensus is really an appeal to an unreflective dogma which refuses to take any account of current beliefs. Their denials of a centralising agenda are only there to make their centralising proposals sound acceptable.

Williams' hierarchical, hieratic and dogmatic doctrine of the church, with no interest in what the laity think and no real place for change, is Anglican to the extent that it has its roots in the Oxford Movement, but has never characterised Anglicanism as a whole. Wright's equally dogmatic, but Puritan and schismatic, doctrine of the church is Anglican to the extent that it represents the Church of England in its sixteenth-century Calvinist phase and the minority of Anglicans who wish to reaffirm it today. The Calvinist threats to split the church mean little to them as they are forever splitting; but it means a great deal to Catholics, who are driven to submit despite the huge number of gay Anglo-Catholic clergy. The current alliance between these two theologies cannot be stable: they disagree with each other about too much.

Neither position is characteristic of Anglicanism. Other Anglicans, calling themselves open evangelicals, or liberal catholics, or broad church, or radicals, or liberals, have not been part of this programme to condemn the Americans and introduce an Anglican Covenant. Some believe there is nothing wrong with homosexuality. Others disapprove of homosexuality, but see no more reason for splitting the church over it than for splitting the church over anything else.

If there is a theology of the church which is distinctively Anglican, it is without doubt the tradition which traces its roots to Richard Hooker's writings and expects to hold a balance between scripture, reason and tradition. The interaction between the three, all playing a part because none is infallible, means that in ever-changing situations new judgements need to be made. While holding fast to tradition is sometimes the right thing to do, at other times we are called to welcome new developments and insights. If Williams and Wright had been truer to the central characteristics of Anglican theology, they would have been much more prepared to consider new ideas and challenges on their merits instead of rushing back to the comfort blanket of inherited dogma. It is a tragedy that this more open, tolerant, creative Anglican ecclesiology has gone too far in tolerating the intolerant and including the excluders. They have now taken many of the senior posts in the church, and seek to turn Anglicanism into an intolerant and exclusive sect.

Historians reviewing the church's past history often distinguish between times of decline and times of revival. Each has its own unique qualities, but there are common themes. Periods of decline usually contain two. One is the failure to communicate the faith in a way which helps people to make sense of their lives and develop a constructive sense of their spiritual nature. Teachings which once had provided this help become, in a later age, meaningless or oppressive dogmas. The other is an inward-looking mood in the church's leadership. Instead of paying attention to the society around them, and considering what kinds of spiritual help they need, church leaders busy themselves justifying and defending the institutions, teachings and practices they have inherited, thereby making it even harder for ordinary people to find any help in their teachings.

On both these counts we are now in a period of decline. These papers, like the whole anti-homosexual campaign, are a sign of it. They are not about helping homosexuals to live better lives: they are parts of an elitist power game for control of the Anglican Communion.

If there is to be a revival, the church must move in exactly the opposite direction. It must return once again to that balance of scripture, reason and tradition in which there are no infallibilities but there are countless opportunities for new life and insight. The church must be less obsessed with itself, more concerned with the society in which it is set; less determined to defend everything it has inherited, more open to discoveries from elsewhere; less threatened by new challenges, more excited by new possibilities.

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## References

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