

USPG
at Lambeth



An Anglican Understanding of Mission and Evangelism

A contribution to the Lambeth Conference 2008

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Introduction

In preparation for the Lambeth Conference a number of people were asked to write papers exploring what might be said to be distinctive in the Anglican way of understanding various aspects of mission and ministry. This one looks at mission and evangelism.

Mission is of its very essence ecumenical in both method and goals, so it is not easy, and nor may it be desirable, to isolate let alone elevate very specific Anglican elements. However, from within our history and out of what is emerging from that today, the Anglican tradition does have some distinctive emphases and in this paper I have drawn out 12. They come with the usual health warning: despite the opportunities which being General Secretary of a mission agency gives to see other parts of the Communion, my thinking inevitably comes out of a British and Church of England background. Where the Anglican tradition has been growing in different settings in other parts of the world, that may also result in some different perspectives on mission and evangelism.

1 Missio dei

Anglicans believe that the source and goal of all mission lies in the nature and work of God.

Mission is the work of God – the missio dei – from Creation to that Consummation when Christ shall be all in all. ‘It is the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, the good news of God’s love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.’ⁱ

Anglicans are also likely to warm to those who would take us even deeper, from the work of God to the very nature of God, and see such mission as an expression of that communion, in its giving and receiving, its coming and going, which is at the very heart of the Holy Trinity.ⁱⁱ

As the last Lambeth Conference put it: ‘All our mission springs from the action and self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ... our call to mission and evangelism [is] grounded in the very nature of the God who is revealed to us.’ⁱⁱⁱ

2 Centrality of Jesus Christ

Anglicans believe that all mission should be centred on Jesus Christ.

We look to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to see how God is saving his world, calling us to respond and to join with him. Our response is not so much church-sponsored programmes to increase the number of Christians and/or to change the world, but more to be drawn into that life, death and resurrection of Jesus so that we become part of what God is doing. This, through the work of the Holy Spirit, then informs the direction and gives us the passion to speak and to act.

‘As Anglicans we are called to participate in God’s mission in the world, by embracing respectful evangelism, loving service and prophetic witness. As we do so in all our varied contexts, we bear witness to and follow Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour,’ says TEAC, the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion working group.^{iv}

The success of mission is determined not by measured results but by faithfulness to Christ, believing that in him God has won the victory and will overcome ‘the world’.

3 Holistic mission

Anglicans believe that mission must be holistic, or 'integrated'.

This is summed up in the Five Marks of Mission, agreed by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 and 1990:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptise, and nurture new believers.
- To respond to human need by loving service.
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society.
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

But are there any priorities here? Some would say that the first controls the rest, so that caring for others, action for justice, and safeguarding creation must be seen as part of the kingdom of God and as different ways of proclaiming it. Others would prefer a more 'pick and mix' approach, especially if they are keener on evangelism or feel more at home with social and political engagement. There have also been attempts to add new 'marks' from the life and worship of the people of God, taking us back to that question of what role the church plays in the mission of God.

Most Anglicans would now say: on the one hand, mission cannot be reduced to 'loving my neighbour', as some Christian charities may appear to suggest, but nor, on the other hand, can we any longer leave out social caring, action for justice and care for Creation from the very centre of what God is doing in our world.

4 Understanding mission needs scripture, tradition and reason

Anglicans believe that scripture is crucial, but we also need tradition and reason.

Anglicans believe that all things necessary for salvation are to be found in Scripture ^v, and when thinking about mission as about anything else, scripture provides the rule and standard ^{vi}, but we do not believe in the inerrancy of scripture. Scripture is indicative rather than imperative. 'Tradition and reason are also key aspects of how Anglicans "do" theology.' ^{vii}

Hooker's famous three-legged stool comprised of Scripture, tradition and reason, but without a central magisterium to decide between them. It was this lack of a determining authority which led Newman to desert what he had previously seen as a proper 'development' of doctrine.

The Virginia Report says that: 'Anglicans affirm the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures as the medium through which God by the Spirit communicates his work in the church and thus enables people to respond with understanding and faith.' But also: 'Since the seventeenth century, Anglicans have held that Scripture is to be understood and read in the light afforded by "tradition" and "reason".' ^{viii}

Archbishop William Laud put it more combatively, rejecting both 'the papists [who] believe in an infallible church and the puritans [who] believe in an infallible bible'.

i David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1991.

ii John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 1991.

iii Lambeth 1998: Resolution II.1.

iv *The Anglican Way: Signposts on a Common Journey: Report from the Singapore Consultation of the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion (TEAC) Working Party of the Anglican Primates*, 2007.

5 Theological diversity

Anglicans believe that theological diversity can be creative in understanding mission.

The 2005 IASCOME report says that ‘as Anglicans we believe that both commonality and difference are sustained by apostolic truth and the hope of the final unity of all things as expressed in our worship,’ and drew up its own Covenant for Communion in mission: recognising Jesus, the source and inspiration of our faith, in each other’s different contexts, we need to ‘look for, recognise, learn from and rejoice in the presence of Christ at work in the lives and situations of the other’. This will lead to exploring differences and disagreements, and being willing to change in response to critique and challenge from others. Above all we should ‘live in the promise of God’s reconciliation for ourselves and for the world’.^{ix}

In the same way, the 2008 report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission says that ‘Communion transcends and therefore can transform differences: networks of conviction tend merely to reinforce them. Living in a Communion justly embraces and celebrates people of differing cultures and worldviews makes a fresh apprehension of Christian truth possible’.^x

6 The role of the church in mission

Anglicans believe that the church is an integral part of mission and its delivery.

The church – and so, for us, our calling to be Anglicans – is not a voluntary activity but part of what God has done and is doing in Christ. According to the Virginia report: ‘Because the Church as communion participates in God’s communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it has an eschatological reality and significance. The Church is the advent, in history, of God’s final will being done “on earth as it is in heaven!”^{xi}

Some have sought to add the life and worship of the church as two additional ‘marks of mission’. We can certainly say that ‘maintenance’, in the sense of being the church, is not to be separated from mission, and this is particularly true of its sacramental life: ‘The mission of Christ and the Church is celebrated and proclaimed in the liturgy which shapes the Trinitarian faith of the people of God and empowers them for a life of ministry and mission. This is especially true of Holy Baptism and Holy Eucharist... to be baptised and to participate at the Table of the Lord is to be entrusted with Christ’s one, continuing mission through the Church.’^{xii}

v Article VI, Book of Common Prayer.

vi Lambeth Quadrilateral, Lambeth Conference 1888.

vii *Generous Love: the truth of the Gospel and the call to dialogue: Report of the Anglican Communion Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON)*, 2008.

viii *The Virginia Report, Inter-Anglican Theological & Doctrinal Commission*, 1997.

ix *Communion in Mission: Report of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism (IASCOME)*, 2005.

x *Communion, Conflict and Hope: Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission*, 2008.

xi *The Virginia Report*, op cit.

xii *The Virginia Report*, op cit.

xiii TEAC, op cit.

xiv TEAC, op cit.

xv *Generous Love*, op cit.

7 Incarnational

Anglicans believe that mission must be rooted in the incarnation of Christ.

Anglicanism began when European Christendom was still strong and as an English state church with all the compromises that brings, not least in identifying with the rich and powerful. But the Church of England has also shown a way of enriching the life of the nation through Establishment, and serving the local community through the parish system, which has kept it from being a mere chaplaincy to Christian congregations.

As Anglicanism has taken root in different cultural and political settings, this tradition has needed to be expressed in different ways: sometimes it has continued to provide a formal or more informal 'established church', sometimes it has been one church among many seeking to engage with national and community life, sometimes it is very much in the minority and even facing persecution from despotic regimes or other more dominant religions.

Today, in different ways, Anglican mission witnesses to the incarnation through social care, medical and educational institutions, community involvement and action for peace and justice. It does so because it sees Christ in the world and seeks to follow him in identification and service. As the TEAC report says: 'Confident in Christ, we join with all people of good will as we work for God's peace, justice and reconciling love. We recognise the immense challenges posed by secularisation, poverty, unbridled greed, violence, religious persecution, environmental degradation, and HIV/AIDS. In response, we engage in prophetic critique of destructive political and religious ideologies, and we build on a heritage of care for human welfare expressed through education, health care and reconciliation.'^{xiii}

8 Cultural sensitivity

Anglicans believe that mission must take its cultural context seriously.

Pope Gregory's original instructions were to 'tell Augustine [of Canterbury] that he should by no means destroy the temples of the gods but rather the idols within those temples... thus, if [the people] are not deprived of all the exterior joys they will more easily taste the interior ones'. Such respect for local culture, seeking ways to engage rather than supplant or impose, have marked Anglican mission at its best.

However, as TEAC has noted, sometimes our own culture – European, African or whatever – can blind us to our real calling. 'As Anglicans we are keenly aware that our common life and engagement in God's mission are tainted with shortcomings and failure, such as negative aspects of colonial heritage, self-serving abuse of power and privilege, undervaluing of the contributions of laity and women, inequitable distribution of resources, and blindness to the experience of the poor and oppressed. As a result, we seek to follow the Lord with renewed humility so that we may freely and joyfully spread the good news of salvation in word and deed.'^{xiv}

For many parts of the Communion today this includes responding to a culture of pluralism, where we may also draw on our tradition. 'Anglicanism responded in a distinctive way to the Christian plurality of the post-Reformation world,' says the recent report from the Inter Faith Network, 'and this heritage provides a particular instinct for responding to the religious plurality of our day.'^{xv}

9 Openness to truth and acceptance of our own incompleteness

Anglicans believe that in mission we continue to grow in our understanding of what God is doing.

Archbishop William Laud talked of ‘the potentiality of further evidence’, and his twentieth century successor Michael Ramsey was clear that Anglicanism is ‘not a system or a Confession but a method, a use, a direction’ so that ‘its greatest credentials are its incompleteness, with tension and travail in its soul. It is clumsy and untidy; it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to commend itself as “the best type of Christianity,” but by its very brokenness to point to the universal Church wherein all have died.’^{xvi}

This has marked our working with other faiths, beginning with the early attempt to face such issues at the 1897 Lambeth Conference, and the more recent statement from TEAC: ‘In our relationships and dialogue with other faith communities we combine witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ with a desire for peace, and mutual respect and understanding.’^{xvii}

10 Leadership and community

Anglicans believe that mission is the responsibility of all the baptised under the leadership of the bishop.

Mission is not a church activity, let alone an optional one, but integral to being the church. So the Anglican Church in the United States was set up in 1821 as the ‘Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society’. In 1922 the CofE Doctrine Commission described the universal church as ‘an ever-expanding missionary brotherhood’ and not just the locally gathered communities of believers.

‘The mission and ministry of reconciliation entrusted by God to the Church are given in baptism to the whole people of God, the laos,’ says the Virginia Report.^{xviii} The new liturgies being created in many provinces stress this in the commission which follows confirmation, and also in their ordinals where a primary role and responsibility of the bishop is to be the leader in mission.

The last Lambeth Conference said that ‘the primary task of every bishop, diocese and congregation in the Anglican Communion is to share in and show the love of God in Jesus Christ – by worship, by the proclamation to everyone of the gospel of salvation through Christ, through the announcing of good news to the poor and the continuing effort to witness to God’s Kingdom and God’s justice in act and word’.^{xix} And as that conference also said: ‘We are all missionary dioceses now.’

xvi The Gospel and the Catholic Church, Michael Ramsey, Longmans, 1936.

xvii TEAC, op cit.

xviii Virginia Report, op cit.

xix Lambeth Conference 1998: Resolution II.6.

11 Communion-wide Activity and Mutual Support

Anglicans believe that mission should be a shared activity across the Communion.

The IASCOME^{xx} report reminds us that: ‘The Anglican Communion grew out of a vision for world mission’. And from TEAC: ‘We celebrate God’s reconciling and life-giving mission through the creative, costly and faithful witness and ministry of men, women and children, past and present, across our Communion.’^{xxi}

Mission was once a north to south activity, but now the missionary response by each church in the place where God has called them needs to be supported by new patterns of mutual support through the exchanges of people, ideas and money. Mission agencies now have a different but still important role to play. In the words of the IASCOME report: ‘As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we embrace challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional, and international levels. In this, we cherish our faith and mission heritage as offering Anglicans distinctive opportunities for mission collaboration.’^{xxii}

This reinforces the belief that the Communion we share is God’s gift, not something to be shaped or divided up according to our own preferences, but rather expressed through generosity and mutual responsibility.

12 Ecumenical

Anglican mission should be part of a larger ecumenical giving and receiving.

Whatever Anglicans may bring to mission which is distinctive we are still only one part of God’s call to all his people – the church universal – to join in his activity in the world. The very first Lambeth Conference in 1867 called for the ‘maintenance of greater union in our missionary work’.

The latest version of the proposed Anglican Covenant says that ‘our common mission is a mission shared with other churches and traditions beyond this covenant. We embrace opportunities for the discovery of the life of the whole gospel and for reconciliation and shared mission with the Church throughout the world. It is with all the saints that we will comprehend the fuller dimensions of Christ’s redemptive and immeasurable love’.^{xxiii}

xx IASCOME, op cit.

xxi TEAC, op cit.

xxii IASCOME, op cit.

xxiii An Anglican Covenant, St Andrews Draft Text, 2008.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to describe the particular emphases and contributions which the Anglican tradition brings to an understanding of mission, including evangelism. It is a tradition which must be guarded while at the same time we continually check its application. At various points, from the Puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, through the revivalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the charismatic consumer-churches of our own time, there have been attempts to replace this inheritance with gathered congregations of born-again Christians whose primary mission is to add to their own number. There have been parallel attempts from the other, Catholic, side to prefer maintenance to mission, and so, for example, reduce incarnation to sacramentalism. Nor can one ignore the way that some more liberal Anglicans have succumbed to the temptation to prune and play down the mission of the church to something which can fit more easily into a secular and/or inter faith culture.

Anglicans of every hue must be continually challenged by Christ himself, from whom all mission must flow and end. The Anglican tradition, by its very nature, must engage with the local culture and therefore take on different forms. However the distinctive Anglican approaches to mission, which this paper has attempted to outline, are a vital contribution to our ecumenical understanding of where God is calling the church today. Bishops gathered for the Lambeth Conference bear the responsibility for guarding this inheritance and enabling it to shape our future.

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