

Article reprinted from *Cross†Way* Issue Winter 2010 No. 115

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

ANGLICAN ORTHODOXY

By James Crabtree & David Phillips

The recent offer made by the Vatican for disaffected Anglicans to be received into fellowship within the Roman Catholic church has brought into focus the relationship between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics.

Anglo-Catholics vary in their attitude to the Roman Catholic church. Some are distinctly in favour of the Roman Catholic church and many of these may well take advantage of the Vatican's offer. Others, while accepting Roman Catholic doctrine and practice, are less inclined to seek refuge within the Roman Catholic church.

Some Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England appear to have been looking to see what might emerge in the wake of the 2008 Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) which took place in Jerusalem. The inaugural meeting of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans UK (FCA UK) brought together on the same conference platform both leading Anglo-Catholics (mostly bishops) and conservative Evangelicals (mostly ministers of large churches). However, from comments heard both on the day and afterwards, it would seem that some Anglo-Catholics believe that the FCA UK is not going to deliver what they are seeking.

It is interesting that there were virtually no English Anglo-Catholic representatives at the GAFCON in Jerusalem. However, some of the prominent Anglo-Catholics who attended from north America (and who also attended the inaugural meeting of FCA UK) are decidedly Roman Catholic in both doctrine and practice. GAFCON therefore seems to have steered a course which defines Anglicanism in a materially different way from that which Evangelicals have recognised historically. Church Society's two predecessor bodies (Church Association and National Church League) came into existence to defend the Protestant and Reformed character of the Church of England and to point out that the Anglo-Catholic movement was plainly distorting the well known meaning of the formularies of the Church of England (the Thirty-nine Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal).

The Commentary on the Jerusalem Declaration ("Being Faithful : The Shape of Historic Anglicanism Today"), which was released recently by the GAFCON Theological Resources Group, raises afresh the issue of what it means to be Anglican and in summary, defines Anglican orthodoxy by reference to genuine acceptance of the historic Creeds. This entails an acceptance of the authority of Scripture, since the Creeds seek to articulate Scriptural truth. Genuine acceptance of the Creeds also involves acknowledging that the factual statements contained in them are historically true and accurate, for example, in their affirmation of the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection.

While the focus on credal orthodoxy has some attraction (not least marking a clear stance against the denial by some theological liberals of these historical facts), it does not address all relevant issues and therefore comes at a significant cost.

First, placing emphasis upon the third and fourth century Creeds seems to go hand in hand with bypassing the last 1600 years of history. Although British Christians were represented at some of the early church councils, the Anglo-Saxon tribes were still pagan and so the entire history of the English church since the fourth century is neglected if exclusive emphasis is placed on the third and fourth century Creeds.

In particular, the struggles of the Middle Ages are overlooked. One area of struggle concerned the growing temporal power of the Church of Rome and its claims to the obedience of not only those within the church but also political rulers. The decisive change in this struggle came with the Act of Supremacy 1534, which declared the English Crown and church free of Roman Catholic dominion. (The Act of Settlement 1701 remains an important safeguard of such freedom).

An exclusive emphasis on the Creeds also overlooks the fundamental issues which emerged during the Reformation as to the nature of authority and the means of salvation. As a matter of official doctrine and English law, the Church of England is unequivocally Protestant and Reformed and upholds the supreme authority of Holy Scripture (*sola scriptura*). No Council (or Pope) can therefore claim authority over Scripture. In addition, the Church of England affirms, consistent with Scripture, that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone and therefore rejects the whole panoply of Roman Catholicism, with its system of masses, confessions, penances, indulgences, transubstantiation and prayers to the saints (etc). Our Evangelical forebears of the 19th and 20th Centuries sought to defend the Protestant and Reformed nature of the Church of England against both Roman and Anglo-Catholicism, as well as to protect it against theological liberalism. These tasks must continue today.

The critical issue confronting us as a result of the GAFCON and the setting up of the FCA is whether classical Protestant and Reformed Anglicanism is being upheld or abandoned in favour of a new definition of Anglicanism which does not accord importance to salvation by grace alone through faith alone and which accommodates Anglo-Catholic (and even Roman Catholic) teaching at the expense of the supreme authority of Scripture.

The Jerusalem Declaration is unclear or silent on important points and while the Commentary on the Declaration rightly affirms that the doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and reflected in the Thirty-nine Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal, neither the Declaration nor the Commentary are consistent with this affirmation when articulating the nature of Anglican Orthodoxy. This has been highlighted by the Council of Church Society, and a copy of the Council's letter to the members of the GAFCON Theological Resources Group forms part of this issue of Cross†Way.

These are important issues, which go to the heart of what is true, Biblical Anglicanism and they are likely to be covered in discussion at Church Society's Conference in May 2010.

James Crabtree (Chairman, Church Society) & David Phillips (General Secretary)