

The next Archbishop of Canterbury – old problems but new opportunities?

So one of the worst kept secrets of recent years is out and the much-leaked name of Durham's one-year tenure bishop has proved to be that of the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

Justin Welby is a fifty-six year old Eton and Cambridge educated, relative newcomer to the Church of England's episcopal benches. A great nephew of a former conservative deputy prime minister, he is well connected in what is often described as the British or more precisely the English Establishment.

He is also what is described as an evangelical, a position that is epitomised by the London church of Holy Trinity Brompton, where Welby was once a member. A stress on biblical teaching, a lack of formality and a tendency to exuberance mark this the more Protestant wing of the Church as today's success story in terms of numerical growth and increasing influence, often at a very conservative level.

Welby has not only worked as a parish priest, for eleven years he worked in the oil industry with *Elf Aquitaine and Enterprise Oil* when he became especially familiar with Nigeria, a country that currently boasts the largest Anglican Province in the world. Whilst at Coventry Cathedral which is renowned for its post Second World War work of reconciliation he became Canon and Dean for their renowned Ministry of Reconciliation. This was rounded off before the see of Durham by a spell as Dean of Liverpool Cathedral where again his skills as a reconciler were employed in the wider Anglican Communion.

He is a man who has packed a lot into a relatively short time in the Church. This has included a particular interest in the financial world as featured in his publication *Can Companies Sin? : 'Whether', 'How' and 'Who' in Company Accountability*.¹ This interest has led to a vigorously critical approach to the banking sector and an appointment on the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards.

He has, at his first engagement with the press when his name was officially announced, declared that he is in favour of women bishops but not 'gay marriages'. At the same time he pointedly indicated that he was in favour of civil partnerships and promised 'prayfully and carefully' to reassess his line on the latter.

Regarding the former, the failure of the General Synod of the Church of England on Tuesday 20th November, by a tiny margin in a single House (Laity), to endorse a motion to proceed with the ordination of women as

¹ *Can Companies Sin? : 'Whether', 'How' and 'Who' in Company Accountability*. Justin Welby (Grove Books, 1992) Ironically now out of print but available in PDF format at:
http://www.grovebooks.co.uk/cart.php?target=product&product_id=17578&category_id=373

bishops, will at best embarrass him and at worst seriously complicate his tenure as Archbishop. This General Synod, seemingly tribal in its church party mentality over and against the wider Church of England, which had voted in favour of women as bishops in 42 of its 44 dioceses, seems to have moved the Church of England away from its role as the Church of the English nation to something rather more sectarian.

Beyond the Church of England and in the wider spectrum Welby has not as yet addressed the Anglican Communion *per se*.

Nevertheless, there is a degree of irony given what has happened in the Synod of the 'mother church' in that the issue of the ordination of women, whether to the priesthood or the episcopate is increasingly a 'received' concept in Anglicanism. Twenty-eight of the thirty-eight provinces of the Communion now ordain women to the priesthood and seventeen of those have removed barriers to women in the episcopate.

Most recently Ellinah Wamukoya was ordained as bishop in the diocese of Swaziland, South Africa the day before the English Synod rejected the idea, and in October this year Canon Margaret Vertue was elected to be bishop of False Bay, again in South Africa. They join at least another twenty-seven of their sisters serving or now retired in the episcopate in countries including, Australia, New Zealand, Cuba, and the United States.

It is to be hoped that the English General Synod vote is only a (although potentially five year) temporary setback for women and that Justin Welby is on sure ground in supporting them as bishops. Nevertheless, much of the opposition to women as bishops that has tipped the vote against in the House of Laity has come from Welby's own party brand of conservative evangelicalism.

It seems that one problem for Justin Welby regarding women is to be followed by an even more difficult one. It is sexuality of one kind or another that has exercised the Church over the ages, although curiously Jesus Christ himself is silent on the matter, confining himself to comments only about marriage. The new Archbishop is unlikely to be allowed to remain in that position. North American cultural wars that have caused a rupture in the American Episcopal Church have spilt over divisively into some other provinces.

Herein lies one of Welby's biggest difficulties, one that ultimately defeated his predecessor, what to do about those provinces that often under the influence of schismatic groups in the United States, regularly threaten to break communion? An example to be singled out, as but one amongst several breakaway factions, is the self-styled Anglican Church in North America. The ACNA is a somewhat disparate group of conservative elements gathered under 'Archbishop' Robert Duncan. The grouping is not a member of the Anglican Communion, although it claims to be in full communion with the provinces of Nigeria, Uganda and the Sudan.

Indisputably, the ANCA and some others of like-minded conservative theology in the United States also desire full communion with Canterbury. This is, from their point of view, over and against the Episcopal Church of the United States from which they have acrimoniously split.

A definition of Anglicanism lies in being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This will be visibly evident at the enthronement of the new Archbishop sometime in March 2013. In this context the invitation list will be scrutinized carefully. The primates of the thirty-eight provinces will be invited but will we see a Robert Duncan sitting alongside his nemesis the current Presiding Bishop of the American Episcopal Church Katharine Jefferts Schori? Will the primates of conservative provinces such as Nigeria and Uganda absent themselves in solidarity? Who will refuse communion, who will greet whom at the exchange of the peace? Thanks to modern communication the world will have a front pew to watch the Anglican Communion in concert or disunity.

Similar considerations of communion and conciliarity have bedeviled the archiepiscopate of the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury at what must have been immense personal cost. His successor is a relatively young man who has potentially quite a long incumbency ahead of him, but for now, he will have a short window of opportunity to assert his authority before familiarity weakens him. Whether the rich and diverse Welby *curriculum vitae*, as listed at the beginning of this editorial, will enable him to succeed in the task of 'sorting out' the Anglican Communion, including issues of, women, sex and membership, will depend on what he asserts as his view in the near future. Sadly, the General Synod of the English Church has not helped him even before he has got the key to Lambeth Palace.

Nicholas Henderson
November 2012