

St Aidans Fellowship August 2005
Where to now? – Living on the Edge

Introduction

When I sat down soon after Easter this year to prepare a paper for this meeting I had no idea what I was going to present. Searching for liturgical and church history resources on the Internet I came across Project Canterbury – a site with on-line reprints of papers, books and theses dealing with Anglicanism. Amongst those I downloaded was a thesis entitled, “Baxter to Cummins: The Debate Over The Language of Baptismal Regeneration in The Book of Common Prayer, 1662 – 1873” I remembered the accusation made by a cleric against a candidate in the recent election of a suffragan bishop. He accused his fellow clergy person of “believing the heresy of baptismal regeneration.” I suspect that most of the house of clergy had no idea what “baptismal regeneration” was, let alone whether it was a heresy or not. So I viewed it as being very disingenuous to throw technical terms such as “regeneration” at the laity most of whom have no theological education. So here was a subject that I could tackle, looking at the historical understanding of baptismal regeneration in the Anglican Church and how we understand it today.

But as I begun to read up on this matter, on the internet and in my own theological books, I realized that all the arguments for or against were based on semantics, merely different interpretations of the meaning of the word “regeneration” and if you were from the Evangelical wing of the Anglican Church you would interpret it differently from those belonging to the Anglo-Catholic wing and never the twain shall meet. I also came to realize that all too often the Anglo-Catholic wing was spending all its energies and efforts in getting involved in such defences of its theology at the expense of its own very existence.

When I downloaded the paper on regeneration I also downloaded a paper entitled, “The future of Anglicanism in Australia in the light of the decline of the Anglo-Catholic Movement” by Peter Corney¹. As I read this paper many of Corney’s arguments resonated with me concerning the decline in the Anglican Church here in South Africa although, as an Anglo-Catholic myself, I could not agree with all his conclusions. So I thought it might be worthwhile to look at his reasons for the decline in Anglo-Catholicism and see if they apply here in South Africa and then to see if there is another road for Anglo-Catholics besides capitulation and becoming Evangelicals as Corney suggests.

Trends in Anglicanism today.

Peter Corney is the Director of the Institute for Contemporary Christian Leadership, an interdenominational ministry, which aims to promote the development, training and encouragement of Christian leadership. He is from the Diocese of Melbourne in Australia. He begins his paper by listing seven trends in the Anglican Church in Australia today.

1. The Australian Anglican Church, like most old mainstream churches, is in numerical decline.

Currently in Melbourne they have 300 congregations. The total attendance for the diocese is somewhere between 20-25,000 on an average Sunday. That is approximately 75 per congregation. Of course they are not all evenly spread, in fact 128 churches have less than 75 attenders. The age profile is of great concern, 40% of all attenders are 60+ years and only 11% are under 30 years. Some other dioceses like Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane have even more serious problems with large numbers of congregations on the edge of financial viability and very high age profiles. The small rural dioceses are almost all in survival mode and struggling with declining populations. Some rural dioceses have been close to bankruptcy. This situation came about through very poor leadership. In each of the major dioceses there are exceptions to these trends with strong growing congregations scattered through them and some healthy youth and children’s ministry – but most of these are contemporary evangelical or charismatic in flavour and the largest Anglican congregations in the nation are all Evangelical in theology. The two largest and most vigorous theological colleges (in terms of staff and students) are also Evangelical – Moore and Ridley. The other exception to decline has been the growth of Anglican Private Schools. This is due

¹ Peter Corney, “The future of Anglicanism in Australia in the light of the decline of the Anglo-Catholic Movement” [The 2002 ICCL Lecture]

of course mainly to Federal Government funding, falling state education standards, and a growing preference for private education.

This sounds familiar to South African ears as well. Every point Peter Corney makes has a parallel in the CPSA and there is no need for me to spend time spelling them out.

2. The decline of uniformity in worship and liturgy

Corney states that most Anglican churches are still discernibly Anglican but there is now enormous variety in the style and level of liturgical content in services. This process began with the liturgical experiments prior to the Australian Prayer Book of 1978 and has continued apace. Many places now use no Prayer Books at all in their main worship service: everything is on card or overhead projector or PowerPoint. The current Australian Prayer Book (1995) says in its cover page: "Liturgical *resources* authorised by General Synod", "...for use together with The Book of Common Prayer 1662 and An Australian Prayer Book 1978". For Corney, this is a long way from "The Book of **Common** Prayer'. There is now a 'cut and paste' liturgy and many contemporary services are pretty minimalist. The use of robes is also very varied: from Catholic vestments to no robes at all and in terms of music there is enormous diversity again, with widespread use of contemporary Christian music.

Certainly this compares to the situation in Cape Town Diocese. I am not sure if Corney is approving or disapproving of the new liturgies etc. Unfortunately, unlike new pharmaceutical drugs, there is no double-blind trial to see if the numbers attending church in the 1950s would remain constant if the old 1662 Prayer Book had been retained until today. Personally I doubt this very much as even our current Prayer Book is seen by many young people as "too wordy" to understand fully.

3. The increased level of lay participation in ministry – both in worship and in paid ministry.

Corney's third point is that ministry teams are made up of lay and ordained, men and women, fulltime and part-time, early retirees, youth and children's workers and other specialists. Once again we see this here in Cape Town but it is hard to see if Corney is approving or disapproving of this fact.

4. The inability of our governmental [synodical] structure to effect changes that would bring major new initiatives or arrest decline.

Synods in Australia have tried, but basically have become talk-fests that achieve little and are very frustrating for most people. Some years ago the Diocese of Melbourne attempted to reduce its numbers from its present unwieldy size. It appointed a committee to bring back a proposal the next year, which it did and then the Synod promptly rejected it! The whole parliamentary nature of Synods is cumbersome and poorly placed to deliver creative initiatives and major change in today's world, and the inherited structure of ordinances and ecclesiastical law are inappropriate for today's rapidly changing world.

It can be seen in Cape Town Diocese that Synods with their parliamentary type structure, makes them too slow to respond to the needs of the rapidly changing world and leads to autocratic decision making by bishops and chapters.

5. Along with many other mainstream denominations is the trend that as the resources have become scarcer, the central Diocesan services have shrunk.

For example, in Melbourne the Departments of Christian Education, Youth departments and children's ministry support services etc. have disappeared. Sydney is the only exception because of their financial resources and, Corney adds, "the very shrewd and creative way they have stewarded them", though quite what he means by this I do not know.

Once again we in Cape Town as well as Provincially are in the same boat.

6. Many of the reasons for the Anglican church's decline and difficulties are shared with other older mainstream protestant denominations in Australia like the UCA and the Presbyterians.

Peter Corney lays these problems at the door of the following:

- The process of institutionalisation.

- Over-centralisation and the compliance and control syndrome that aging institutions develop to cope with anything outside the institution's cultural framework.
- Loss of passionate evangelism
- The dominance of the pastoral-maintenance-model of ministry
- The slowness of the majority of local congregations to contemporise their worship style and music
- The failure to plant new churches and adopt new models of church planting.
- Theological Reductionism and the cave-in to secularism and modernity. Many of Australia's current Church leaders were trained in the 1960s when the loss of confidence in orthodoxy reached its peak. The pattern of reducing the gospel to fit the prevailing plausibility structure of society became entrenched and historic, credal Christianity was profoundly weakened.

Although I agree with many of these points there are a few that I find uncomfortable to accept. Whether this uncomfortableness is due to a sense of "guilt" because Corney is touching my own sore spot and whether there is an alternative answer I hope to explore here:

- Yes, the Church, like any organisation goes through stages in its life when it becomes moribund and institutionalised.
- Yes, such an organisation often believes that the world revolves around it and not the Church being part of the world.
- Yes, the constitution in South Africa, where freedom of religion is paramount, might have caused some to believe that passionate evangelism is inappropriate.
- I do not believe that the pastoral maintenance model of ministry is dominant in South Africa although as I examine my own ministry perhaps I see a strong leaning in that direction.
- In South Africa with its diverse population and language groupings it is interesting to see how worship styles are similarly diverse. Is this a good or bad thing for Church growth? Many more conservative parishes are attracting those who feel drive away from their old parishes by this very contemporary worship and music. Although in the short term this is a good thing what about the long term? Perhaps those parishes who do "move with the times" in terms of music and worship might become the "stuck-in-the-past" parishes in 20 years time while the others change as their older congregants die off?
- The planting of Churches does happen in development areas of Cape Town but perhaps we could be more proactive and not reactive in this area. Models of Church planting do need to be streamlined as far as church canonical requirements go.
- Theological Reductionism is perhaps the area where I feel the most "guilty". Those who know the Enneagram will have realised that I am a Number Five, a "head" person: therefore for me to say that there are certain things in our orthodox faith that I do not "feel" in my heart of hearts to be what God wants, will be surprised. I have wrestled with this over many years – perhaps that is why I was ordained only after my 46th Birthday. I have been encouraged however through the writings of theologians such as John McQuarrie and spiritual writers such as Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen. Whether these writers "were trained in the 1960s when the loss of confidence in orthodoxy reached its peak" and whether in their writing they reduce "the gospel to fit the prevailing plausibility structure of society" and whether through their writings "historic, credal Christianity was profoundly weakened", I have my doubts.

Peter Corney then gives his seventh trend that he views as the most important:

7. But with Anglicanism there is another unique and very important factor that has accelerated and contributed to our decline – that is the role of the "Anglo-Catholic movement", sometimes referred to as "Tractarianism".²

Corney points out the historical importance of this movement that had been greatly influential in Australian Anglicanism. By the 1960s it had become the dominant force in most dioceses in Australia, even assuming its style as the "Anglican norm". Certainly this is the case in South Africa too.

² This statement is incorrect. There is a huge difference between the Tractarian or Oxford Movement and the Anglo-Catholic Movement. See discussion below.

Corney continues to say that at its most vigorous and vital, its influence was profound – theologically, liturgically, architecturally and aesthetically, pastorally, governmentally, and particularly on the way the nature and role of ordination and ministry was understood. It developed at its height, numerous institutions, para-church organisations, orders and societies for education, welfare and mission. But in the late 1960s it began to run out of steam as a movement and has now lost its vitality and momentum.

For Peter Corney this is the significant point. Having developed such influence, its decline and loss of vitality at the very time the church was under so many other pressures from the late 60s and 70s onwards has had very serious consequences for Australian Anglicanism.

Corney gives a brief and rather inadequate and inaccurate history of the Tractarian movement and its link to Anglo-Catholicism. Most historians today will say that although the one led to the other, there is very little in common between the two. But Corney uses this very fact as an argument against the Anglo-Catholicism as found in Australia before the 1960s. He says that the founders of the Tractarian movement would be shocked at the attitudes and views of the Anglo-Catholics of the 20th Century. Of course they would, because the Tractarians were conservative reactionaries to some of the very sort of changes that Corney has listed previously as necessary for Church growth. If anything, the Anglo-Catholics of the late 19th Century are more like the Evangelicals of the 20th Century in their attitude to Church structures if not in theology.

Corney points out that outstanding and inspirational leaders and thinkers are no longer being raised within the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church. This vacuum of leadership is also sadly reflected today in the quality of leadership that has risen to the top of the dioceses that Anglo-Catholics have dominated for so long in Australia and the bigger tragedy is that they have taken large sections of the Australian Anglican church down with them.

Why? What happened?

For Peter Corney the answer to what happened is that the movement gradually embraced a series of theological trends that eventually sapped its vitality. It lost touch with its theological and ideological core – the very things that had produced its energy and passion. I feel that perhaps he is right in this so as he goes on to give a brief summary of these trends that “ate the heart out of the movement” we in South Africa need to look at and see if we can stop the same rot and if so, how.

1. It drifted away from the credal and biblical orthodoxy of its founders and gradually embraced a **reductionist liberal theology**.

Corney says “Most people in ministry now who have been influenced by this movement could be more accurately described as ‘liberal catholics’. The gist of Corney’s argument is that Liberal Catholicism retains the outward expression of Christianity but has lost the core of the Anglo-Catholic movement’s theological idea. He feels that parishes who have highly symbolic and formal liturgical expression of faith end up with ‘religion’ that appears to be Christianity but without its essence. He accuses Liberal Catholics of pretending to be open and broad while they are really intellectually narrow and provincial. This, he says can be seen by interpretation of scripture, tradition and creeds being over influenced by the spirit of the age and the host society in which it operates. The danger for Corney is for the laity because it is attracted to something that appears to be Christianity when it isn’t and thus damage done by stealth.

2. The second trend Corney brings up is that A-C has allowed the recovered **incarnational theology** to become **unbalanced**. One of the good points of A-C is the idea of the importance of “presence”, particularly presence among the poor. But for Corney this eventually over-powered the importance of proclamation. So instead of a balance of “the whole gospel for the whole person”, importance in preaching was diminished and the link between word and deed fatally weakened until eventually preaching, evangelism and proclamation were devalued.

Historically the very opposite trend happened in many parts of evangelicalism before and after WWII. It wasn’t till the Lausanne Movement in the early 70s that evangelicalism recovered a proper emphasis on social justice and restored the balance of deed and word. This was largely due to the influence of evangelical leaders like John Stott in the UK and Ronald J Sider in the USA.

Corney also gives two other negative results for Anglo-Catholicism that came from its unbalanced incarnational theology. **The first** was an untaught laity. For a long time in liberal catholic parishes, the standard sermon fare was a ten-minute light-weight meditation on the Gospel. Because Bible teaching and preaching was diminished, this produced a poorly taught laity. I have tended to agree with this view here in Cape Town. There is a vast crowd of Anglicans studying under TEE most of whom are not ordinands but lay ministers and leaders who want to know more about their faith. John Stubbs used to say that this was because of the fine preaching and teaching they experienced in parishes, rather sarcastically I say it is because of the bad preaching and teaching or lack of teaching forcing laity to turn else where.

For Corney the development of pre-Reformed liturgical practices like the Gospel procession subtly implied a division in the unity and authority of the whole Bible. The symbolic elevation of the Gospel reading subtly devalued the Old Testament and Epistles and eroded the critical idea that Christ and the Gospel are central to and woven through the entire Bible. I find this argument lacking in substance as in most sermons we hear on Sundays the connection between all three readings are brought out and it is only with the new prayer books that Old Testament lessons and psalms are included in the Eucharist.

The second result of an unbalanced incarnational theology for Corney was the development of an insipient “Pelagianism” – salvation by good works. Being good and kind to others came to be seen as the essence of the Gospel. We need to balance this with the April edition of “Prayers for Parishes” where the entry for St John Parish, Wynberg tells us that the “essence of the Gospel is evangelism.” Surely it is both, as expressed by Corney a few paragraphs before.

3. Corney’s third point is that distinctiveness of Anglo-Catholicism was left to depend more and more on its particular liturgical, symbolic and cultural expressions. This has become a so-called “**High Culture**” of classical music and art. It is viewed as a more cultured and sophisticated form of faith expression. The result of this was that it began to attract people and clergy who were more drawn to its style than to the core ideas and earlier passions of personal holiness and a desire to evangelise and care for the poor and marginalized. Corney calls those attracted to this as “effete” recruits and to ensure that he is not accused of homophobia he puts a footnote after “effete” telling us that it means ‘too refined’. My Oxford dictionary describes “effete” as *‘No longer fertile; past producing offspring. Of a substance or object: that has lost its special virtue or quality, exhausted, worn out. No longer vigorous or capable of effective action; decadent, degenerate. Weak, ineffectual; effeminate.’*

I think what Corney is really saying is that this ‘High Culture’ is not “Aussie” enough and is out of step with ordinary Australians and further marginalized Anglicanism from the mainstream of Australian life. ‘We were fast becoming a boutique church,’ Corney says.

4. Corney’s next point is similar but this time relating Anglo-Catholicism to a backward looking movement being a very late-19th Century English expression of Anglicanism with the model of the English village church. Corney views this as ‘a sentimental and anglophile vision’. Although this is often the case here in South Africa the diverse nature of cultures prevent this to a greater extent. It is what Corney calls “The Vicar of Dibley Syndrome.”

For the founders of the Tractarian or Oxford movement, (but as I said above not necessary the Anglo-Catholic movement in the church) Newman, Pusey and Keble would have found it better, “To be violently disagreed with; to be a challenge to people’s beliefs; to hold views and ideas and behaviour that people find confronting and disturbing; to be a John the Baptist to Herod; to be a Paul before Felix; to be a Christ before Pilate than be dismissed as a trivial, harmless and amusing anachronism like ‘The Vicar of Dibley.’”

5. Corney’s fifth point is that the A-C movement focused on a **pastoral-maintenance-model of ministry** and so did not grow churches. The emphasis on the priestly role fed this trend. This certainly does seem to occur in the more traditional A-C parishes but I would say not so much in the “Liberal Catholic” Parishes. This is an area I

think we could work on as a diocese but it depends on good self-esteem among clergy, willing to accept that they might not be the 'Numero Uno' within a parish and not spend their time playing "The Priest".

6. Corney's sixth point is about music and worship styles and in spite of changes to Prayer Books this has all to do with words and not feelings. The A-C parishes were very slow to embrace contemporary and informal styles in worship and music. They were totally unprepared for the rejection of formality in the 70s and 80s by the "Baby Boomers" and very few ever worked out how to minister to them effectively. They completely misunderstood the fundamental change that had taken place in the minds and emotions of the average person as to how the style and ethos of the service should be set and the worship conducted. Pentecostalism and contemporary evangelicalism understood this and swept the field.

It is interesting to see how there is also a return to more formalised worship. It is occurring, certainly not in their thousands, but from what I see at St Paul's and among students at UCT it is a significant number. Similarly, the number of people at St George's Cathedral for Evensong during the recent visit of Chichester Cathedral choir in April 2005 showed a large number of young people attending. Are these merely "high cultured" Anglicans? And if so shouldn't we cater for them somehow?

7. Corney expresses concern that the Eucharist has become the main service on a Sunday and often the only form of service available. This prevents 'seekers' feeling comfortable at normal worship as they feel excluded from receiving communion. I can sympathise with this view and perhaps special seekers services need to be organised or the use of something similar to Alpha Course be adopted.

Corney also feels that the Eucharist as the main service has led to Sunday Schools being down played and undermined and children's and youth ministry suffering. A generation of clergy had little interest in either, and this was a disaster for the future. Perhaps here, I am 'Guilty as charged'! I have no experience of a parish with a large 'youth' component that have admitted children to communion so I cannot really comment here.

8. Corney's final point is the issue of women's ordination that created a crisis in the Anglo-Catholic movement. The traditionalists were opposed but their offspring, the liberal Catholics, were pro. As the traditionalists are now a minority, their bitter rearguard action failed. In Australia, this has left many unhappy legacies and further weakened the movement. The issues surrounding gender and sexual politics have been a major pre-occupation of the movement in recent times, and so it has had little energy for other fundamental issues.

To conclude

Peter Corney concludes: "Anglicanism is essentially protestant and its formularies were forged on reformed anvils. The Anglo-Catholic movement, for all its early achievements in ministry, really took Anglicanism too far to the Catholic right – we are now seeing a major correction to that trend. The great lesson to be learned from the demise of the Anglo-Catholic Movement is that if you depart far enough from the theological roots from which a movement springs, eventually the passion dies and the plant dies."

In Australia, Sydney Diocese is the only one showing growth – 11%. Muriel Porter in an address to the Anglicans Together Movement, says that Sydney's particular "message" 'black and white certainties promulgated clearly and directly by dominant male leaders with a certain authoritarian charisma – is assuaging the anxieties and longings of many in our community.'³ Sydney also has the highest number of under 39y churchgoers. Porter attributes this to the fact that :

Sydney's message resonates best with the generations that have a deep psychological need for certainty. These are the generations most afflicted by divorce, family break-up, loss of father figures, frequent house moves, job dislocation, and the anarchic strains present in our contemporary culture at all levels. I have no evidence for this, but I suspect the under-40s being attracted to Sydney's proto-churches are people who are disillusioned with the party and drug scene, with rampant consumerism and recreational sex. While they are far wealthier in material terms than any preceding generation, their prosperity hangs on a thread: they have limited job security, but have

³ Muriel Porter, *Living on the edge* An Address to 'Anglican Together' Organisation – 27 October 2004

still over-reached themselves in terms of debt. With the zeal of converts, they are more than ready to embrace a cause that provides them with the psychic security of a concrete, conservative, and all-embracing system of meaning. The pseudo-contemporary entertainment events that package the take-it-or-leave-it teachings have made it easy for these seekers to approach the church. This is not unique to this diocese, of course. Pentecostal churches are successful in terms of attendance figures for the same reason.⁴

But what are our South African conclusions? Because SA Anglicans are not drawing in the crowds does this mean we have not found the Lord's favour? Do we view ourselves as protestants forged on reformed anvils? Looking at the goings-on in Sydney Diocese – doing away with robed choirs, removal of altars and replacing them with “The Lord's Table” on wheels to be wheeled in at communion time - I have to ask if this is not merely the pendulum swinging too far the other way? Is there a happy medium? Can some Churches retain the traditions of Anglicanism without be accused of 1. Papalism, 2. Anglophilia 3. non-orthodoxy 4. being non-Christian?

In South Africa we are in a unique situation with our diversity of Anglicans – both culturally and theologically. I do not believe that forcing us all to fit into a single model, using a single “common” prayer book will help to grow numbers in any way.

Two quotes from emails to finish the formal presentation. Firstly, from a Canadian organist (who calls himself “Director of Music & Liturgical Arts” at the Church of the Messiah in Toronto:

I see far more uniformity (at least in Canada) with the increased use of the contemporary rite. No longer do you have the extremes in Toronto of one parish with Matins on Easter Day with a Judas Walk at the end and another with a non-participating high mass. I went from the historically highest parish in the diocese to the lowest. Sure, there were differences in style and music, but there was no essential difference in the Eucharist. We are in fact approaching a uniformity which would warm the hearts of neo-Tudorists everywhere. By the way, it needs to be noted that pluralism in doctrinal and liturgical matters goes back to the apostolic age and the earliest strata of the New Testament. Raymond Brown's "The Churches the Apostles Left Behind" is a compelling argument that the early churches (note the plural) were diverse in belief and practice and that pluralism was no impediment to unity.

To which a wag replied:

An example of the new Sydney Liturgy:

V: Lift up your hearts.

R: Amen, Bro.

V: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

R: Oh yeah! Hallelujah!

V: Lord, we just wanna say that we're just glad you're here and we just pray that you would just bless us and that you would just guide our thoughts and actions, Lord, because in your perfect plan you know exactly what we need, and yes, Lord, we just praise you because you do have a perfect plan, Lord, it's so perfect Lord because it was made in your perfect will, and Lord we are weak vessels, but we know, praise God, that you will fill us to the brim with your spirit, and now Lord we just pray that you would just bless this bread and wine and while you're at it, Lord, send your curses on our heathen brethren in the cesspool that is the Northern hemisphere, thank you Jesus, we praise your precious name.

⁴ Porter, *ibid*