

To Be Anglican: Our Past and Path for Justice

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I've been an Anglican now for 20 years, so given my increasing preponderance of gray hair and the decreasing amount of it, I guess that tells you I found my way home to this Christian tradition as an adult. Or more accurately, God led me to it, and it felt like home upon arrival.

I grew up in 70s and 80s in Wheaton, Illinois, in a conservative evangelical home, fundamentalist perhaps, and then in college was wonderfully formed in a very reformed Baptist church. And then I became exposed to and involved in the inner-city of America, and saw poverty really for the first time and began to understand the systems of inequity and injustice that are all too operative in America. Then right after seminary I had the opportunity to travel literally around the world for 18 months, and became exposed and involved in the real crushing poverty, and saw the even darker systems of injustice and oppression that typifies so much of our globe. I took that trip with a backpack and a Bible (and a Sony Walkman!), wanting to see what the Bible had to say to what I was seeing. It says a lot.

By the end of that journey, having seen so much, I knew with crystal clarity what kind of Christian tradition I wanted to be in, I just didn't know if it existed. I wanted to be in a Christian tradition that:

- upheld the authority of Scripture and submitted to it and
- recognized the value of beauty in worship and
- was open to mystery and
- would allow me to ask real questions without being looked at with suspicion and
- really believed that the church existed before 1517 and
- would allow me to connect with and even submit to Christians the developing world and
- would allow me to be passionate about justice without being branded a liberal precisely because it did take the whole Bible seriously...

I just described Anglicanism, though I didn't know it then. But within a couple of months after returning God led me like a laser beam to The Falls Church Episcopal outside of Washington DC in 1996. I literally had never been in an Episcopal church before the first time I walked in and met John Yates, and two weeks later I was hired as the Director of Outreach. In this evangelical Episcopal church, I found my home of Anglicanism. Ten years later I was ordained. It can take a while for a Baptist to feel OK wearing robes and a collar, and even longer to submit, at least in my case! As you know from your own story, stuff happened, and The Falls Church Episcopal became The Falls Church Anglican. That's actually a helpful transition of language when we consider our own heritage and inheritance.

The Anglican tradition has many heroes of the faith who are at the same time heroes of the deed, men and women who were committed to Christ and serious about the Scripture and



earnest in prayer and passionate about both mercy and justice in their society and are Anglicans. You know many of them, some of them quite well.

We could talk long about early opponents of slavery and the slave trade like John Newton and John Wesley.

We could talk longer about William Wilberforce, the great abolitionist in the late 1700s and early 1800s in Britain, whose efforts led not only to ending slavery in Britain but also the abolition of the slave trade decades before it ended in the States and it happened through his efforts without a civil war.

You've heard of Wilberforce's friends who became known as the Clapham Sect because they lived in community in Clapham: Henry Thornton, Hannah Moore, John Venn, Granville Sharpe, and others, all of them Anglicans. These men and women explicitly spoke out for, protested about, and acted on behalf of the poor and oppressed, whether they were talking about slavery in England, the slave trade from West Africa, atrocities in India, or many many domestic injustices of their day like unjust labor laws or inadequate provision of education for children. They did not merely talk about engaging their world, they absolutely did it, in their specific, historical context and they engaged the world by working on specific issues in their city, in their country, and in their world. Why? They did it because they were a biblical people, a prayerful people, and kept their eyes open to the reality of the world around them.

We could talk long about another Anglican who took on the mantle of Wilberforce in the mid-1800s, Anthony Ashley Cooper, better known as Lord Shaftesbury. He took advantage of his aristocratic and political status to work for 60 years for the underprivileged of London, basically because he believed that God loved the people whom He had created with dignity, and was concerned for the eternity of all people. In the awful conditions for the working class in Victorian England, through his efforts child labor was eliminated, coal mining conditions were regulated, schools were set up for street kids, and a number of other reforms were passed and helping organizations were established.

It's noteworthy that it was the evangelicals who led the way and called the Anglicans in England to justice in the 19th century.

In the 20th century, we could talk long about Sam Shoemaker, the priest whose heart was so broken for people trapped in addiction that he founded Alcoholics Anonymous. We could talk long about Jonathan Daniels, the seminarian and civil rights worker who lost his life in 1965 because he stepped between a white man with a shotgun and Ruby Sales, a young black woman.

Speaking of Anglican martyrs, we could talk long about we could talk long about Janani Luwum, the archbishop of Uganda in the 1970s who stood up to the political abuses and oppressions of Idi Amin, and was killed.



Speaking of Africa, we could talk long about Anglicans who have made an enormous impact for justice and racial reconciliation by talking about leaders like John Rucyahana, the Bishop of Rwanda, leading reconciliation work after the 1994 genocide or the Anglican church leaders helping broker the end of apartheid in South Africa.

If we're talking about Africa and Anglicans and justice and mercy, well then we could very long about the heroic efforts of Bishop Mouneer Anis right now trying to assist with Syrian refugees and refugees from other war-torn regions.

We could talk long about the statements that come from the Global South Anglican leaders that almost always has something to say about the turmoil that has been our denominational history in the last decade in North America, and just as frequently will have something to say to challenge the injustices in their own context, though these words garner less attention.

These things are very present day, and if we're talking about the present day and Anglicans and justice, well then we could long about Gary Haugen, the founder of the International Justice Mission, and an Anglican. And Stephan Bauman, the current president of World Relief, and an Anglican. And Todd Deatherage, a peace-maker in Israel/Palestine, and an Anglican. And Sami DiPasquale, who we'll hear from tomorrow, showing compassion to immigrants on our southern border, and an Anglican.

And, my brothers and sisters, if we're talking about the present day and Anglicans and justice and mercy, well then we could talk long about each of you, every one of us gathered here on February 17, 2016 in Austin for this conversation. That's why you're here, and that's why you were invited, because you've read the Bible carefully and know that God is a God of justice and mercy, you know his heart, you love the people that he loves (which is each one on the planet), you've lived the life and walked the talk, and each have been drawn to this tradition that has a place for you, and has for centuries.

So I hope we get to talk long, and these next three day are a start.

And if we're talking about Anglicans and justice and mercy, then there's no way we cannot talk about one man, and we should talk a little longer about him—John Stott—the godfather of biblical orthodoxy for the evangelical tradition, and an Anglican. It's a longer conversation, but I think a strong argument can be made that if it weren't for John Stott, the Anglican Church in North America wouldn't exist, and that most of us here would either have moved on from Anglicanism or never joined it all.

It was Stott who made sure that social concern for justice and mercy based on the clear teaching of the Bible was on the agenda at the historic gathering of evangelical Christians in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974 and would find prominent language in the final version of the famous Lausanne Covenant, the evangelical's creed.



He was working hard to fix a wrong. He would write 10 years later, “[From the 1920s to the 1970s] evangelical Christians were preoccupied with the task of defending the historic biblical faith against the attacks of theological liberalism and reacting against its ‘social gospel’. But now we are convinced that God has given us social as well as evangelistic responsibilities in his world. Yet a half century of neglect has put us far behind in this area. We have a long way to go to catch up.” (Human Rights and Human Wrongs)

In another book he would write, “Authentic Christian mission is a comprehensive activity which embraces evangelism and social action, and refuses to let them be divorced...This polarization has been a disaster.” (The Contemporary Christian)

In another book he would write, “The cross is a revelation of God’s justice as well as of his love. That is why the community of the cross should concern itself with social justice as well as with loving philanthropy. It is never enough to have pity on the victims of injustice, if we do nothing to change the unjust situation itself. Good Samaritans will always be needed to succour those who are assaulted and robbed; yet it would be even better to rid the Jerusalem-Jericho road of brigands. Just so Christian philanthropy in terms of relief and aid is necessary, but long-term development is better, and we cannot evade our political responsibility to share in changing the structures which inhibit development. Christians cannot regard with equanimity the injustices which spoil God’s world and demean his creatures. Injustice must bring pain to the God whose justice flared brightly at the cross; it should bring pain to God’s people too. Contemporary injustices take many forms. They are international (the invasion and annexation of foreign territory), political (the subjugation of minorities), legal (the punishment of untried and unsentenced citizens), racial (the humiliating discrimination against people on the ground of race or colour), economic (the toleration of gross North-South inequality and of the traumas of poverty and unemployment), sexual (the oppression of women), educational (the denial of equal opportunity for all) or religious (the failure to take the gospel to the nations).” (The Cross of Christ)

Now that’s an Anglican talking. That is us. That needs to characterize the Anglican Church in North America, if we are going to Anglican, if we are going to wise stewards of our inheritance.

But moreso, and so much importantly moreso, we gathered here, and all of ACNA, don’t want to be people of justice because we want to be Anglican. NO!! We want to be people of justice because we are a people of the Book! We are the people of God, and specifically the God who has revealed himself in the Holy Bible. We are a people of the Book that has over 2000 references to the poor.

We are a people who are committed to be like God through Christ.



Love, the Bible says. Why? Because God is love. Be merciful, because God is merciful. Forgive, because God forgives. Be holy. Why? Because God is holy. Do justice. Why? Because God is just, and God does justice.

Now we talk a lot about the call to Christians to be loving, and forgiving, and merciful, and holy, and we should, because God is. These three days we're talking about justice and mercy, and we should, because God does. Among those 2000 references, here's one:

Psalm 146. 7 The LORD executes justice for the oppressed,
and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

If God does justice, God's people get to. It's our calling because it's God's nature. When we work for justice, we're doing God's work in the world, we're being biblical Christians, and we're being Anglicans worthy of the name.

From these reflections tonight, I only ask one thing, and it's a very small thing. Very small, a word of only two letters that I ask you to remember and hold dear and let guide us.

This past January, just three weeks ago, I attended the "Summit for Life" near Washington DC, sponsored by my ACNA Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic and Anglicans for Life, our denomination's leading pro-life organization, and it's a really good organization, thanks be to God. And it was a really good summit, very important, and unfortunately always relevant.

It was convened to consider our call to protect unborn human life and to value the dignity of each life at the end of life. These things matter. Our ACNA knows they matter, and so have put it clearly in our canons, and this Summit was a direct action to help us be faithful to one of our canons in particular.

(Canon II.8.3) "All members and Clergy are called to protect and respect the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death."

We spent the morning talking about the value of human life up to conception, and talked about how to push back on the evil that is abortion. And it is evil. We had lunch, then in the afternoon we heard about end of life issues, natural death. Premature death however you slice it is also evil.



And throughout the day my mind kept circling back to that small word in the middle, the small word “to”. T-O. To. What happens after a person is born, and then between all the way to their hopefully natural death.

We are Anglicans. We care about the “to”. We are people of the Book. We care about the “to”, because our God cares about the “to”. God wants every human being alive at any age—unborn, born, young, a little older, middle-aged, old, older still, elderly—to be who he made them to be, to live into his design for them specifically, and to be in a real relationship with him through Christ, to flourish, and to know his Shalom and be a maker of it for the sake of his Kingdom.

And so, as Anglicans second and as people of the Book first, we care about the “to”. We are pro-life before a person is born, and after they are born, for their whole life, and we fight against anything that threatens their being able to be who God made them to be, and there are lots of threats. So as Anglicans second and as people of the Book first, the people of the God, we are concerned about...

- Refugees
- Community Development
- Homelessness
- Immigration
- Racial Justice
- Human Trafficking
- At risk youth and education
- Hunger and Creation Care
- Women, after they’ve had a baby and that baby after its born
- People with Special Needs
- Those enslaved to Addiction/Substance abuse
- Peacemaking
- Sanctity of Life, against abortion and for Adoption and Foster Care
- Prison Ministry and the system that perpetuates Mass Incarceration
- And more...

As Anglicans and more so as Christians, we’re consistently pro-life¹.

My bishop, John Guernsey, gets this. He convened the Summit for Life in Washington I mentioned, and two weeks later wrote this, reflecting on Lent and Isaiah 58, a treasured passage

¹ Other historic Christian traditions are also working towards this coherence, see <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2016/02/08/how-pope-francis-shakes-up-what-it-means-to-be-pro-life/>



for us, “The prophet Isaiah points us to the importance of fasting with a rightful humility that manifests in a concern for the poor.” Amen.

If that Summit for Life in February 2016 in Washington, DC focused on the commitments in our canons calling all Anglicans in North America to protect and respect the sanctity of every human life” and focused on life from conception with a natural death, I’d like to think of our gathering here in Austin as the “Summit for Life” in the South focusing on that small word “to”. The “Summit for Life in the South” focusing on that small word “to”.

That’s what we’re here to talk about, learn about, pray about, be together with, be strengthened for as God has called each of us, and discern what it means for us as Christians, and specifically as Anglicans, and more specifically than that the Anglican Church in North America.

We’ve got a great God with us, so many people who he loves who need to know him and that he loves them, we’ve got a calling, and a great and mighty heritage. This is what we do.

We are followers of Jesus the Christ.

We are Anglicans.

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