

‘What is the Good of the Church?’: A Series of Reflections on Ecclesiology for Advent 2021

Session II: ‘Learning from History: Select Visions of the Church from the Constantinian Settlement through the English Reformation, and to the Great Renewal Movements of the 19th Century’

(with Professors Sarah Coakley, Hannah Matis, and Benjamin J. King)

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The material in this video covers a large range of historical issues and themes. Here are three *Questions* which might be fruitful for general discussion about contemporary Episcopal ‘ecclesiology’ after watching it, regardless of your previous knowledge of the historical details covered in the video:

1. The ‘Constantinian Settlement’ (Edict of Milan, 313) made an alliance between the Roman Empire and the new Christian religion, releasing it from a condition of a persecuted, minority, sect. Do you think there is an intrinsic *problem* in Christianity being supported by an official arrangement with the state (as, again, was renegotiated with the monarch at the English Reformation)? Do some of the same problems recur, even in a ‘Republican’ situation (as in the USA) in which there is a separation of church and state but Christianity still has an implicit form of cultural mandate? Depending on your answer, what does this mean for how we think of ‘Church’ in relation to ‘secular’ culture today?
2. What do you think of the understanding of the relation of the authorities of Scripture, tradition and ‘reason’ (including a newly-enunciated understand of ‘natural law’ as *developmental*) which emerged from the English Reformation, and was expressed classically in the work of Richard Hooker (1554-1600). Do you think this particular understanding of how ‘reason’ can negotiate profound differences of opinion, both political and ecclesial, has continuing significance today? How could it be consciously revived?
3. The Oxford Movement’s view of the Church in 19th-century England was mirrored by an Episcopalian ‘Catholic’ vision of unity and egalitarianism for all, enthusiastically taken up by forces within Afro-American clergy and lay-people. Their protest met, at the time, with racist side-lining in the Episcopal Church. Does this historic vision of a ‘Catholic’ and ecumenical church in which all are ‘one’ still have hope for today?

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A. The Early and Medieval Church in the West and its emerging ‘Ecclesiology’ of the Papacy (Hannah Matis):

1. The Edict of Milan (313)/Council of Nicaea (325): from persecution to establishment. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 210-258), cp. Augustine of Hippo (354-430); 2. Gregory the Great (c. 540-604): formalizing the relation between monks, clergy and Roman aristocracy; 3. Innocent III (1161-1216) and the 4th Lateran Council (1215): systems of penance and purgatory; theory of transubstantiation in the eucharist affirmed; yet also confirmation of the new Franciscan and Dominican forms of religious life.

B. The English Reformation and its Ecclesiological Outcomes (Hannah Matis):

1. Henry VIII (1491-1547) as ‘Defender of the Faith’, replacing the power of the Papacy;

2. The central significance of the *Book of Common Prayer*, first two editions 1549, 1552 (Thomas Cranmer [1489-1556]) – vernacular English, poetically powerful, expressing liturgically the biblical theology of the English Reform and its relation to the state);
3. Richard Hooker (1554-1600) and his *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*: a distinctive and novel understanding of the authorities of Scripture, reason and tradition, and their relation

C. The 19th Century and Its Anglican and Episcopal Revivals: Implications for Ecclesiology (Ben King)

1. John Wesley (1703-1791) as background to the later, 19th-century Evangelical revival; the English context of industrialization, urbanization, social deprivation, and world-wide colonial and missionary ambition;

2. The Evangelical Revival (see esp. Charles Simeon [1759-1836] in Cambridge), in cp. with the Oxford Movement (see esp. John Henry Newman [1801-1890], Edward Bouverie Pusey [1800-1882], and John Keble [1792-1886]): the emphasis of the latter on the authority of bishops as guardians of tradition and interpreters of Scripture; the embracing of a ‘neo-Gothic’ aesthetics to emphasize continuity with the pre-Reformation church;

3. *Second-generation* English ‘Anglo-Catholicism’: ‘high’ liturgy combined with remarkable commitment to the poor in areas of deprivation (Fr. Charles Lowder [1820-1880]);

4. The American/Episcopal early parallels to the ‘Oxford Movement’: John Henry Hobart (1775-1830), and then influence from the Oxford Movement’s *Tracts for the Times*. The Afro-American pressure for a ‘Catholic’ view of the Church: its unity and egalitarianism. Alexander Crummell (1819-1898), rejected for training at General Theological Seminary, but subsequently first Rector of St Luke’s, DC.

Final *Question*: What do you think of Hannah Matis’s and Ben King’s concluding accounts of what constitutes ‘The Good of the Church?’

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Select Bibliography:

Brown, Peter, *The Rise of Western Christianity: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000*

Wilken, Robert Louis, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*

Madigan, Kevin, *Medieval Christianity: A New History*

Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*

MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*

Ryrie, Alec, *England’s Reformations and Their Legacies* <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/series/englands-reformations/>

Chapman, Mark D., *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction*

_____, *Anglican Theology*

Williams, Rowan, *Anglican Identities*

Brown, Stewart J. and Peter B. Nockles (eds.), *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World*

Lewis, Harold, *Yet With a Steady Beat*

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Selected Quotations:

Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. XIX, chapter 17

While this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws, and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved—not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains them and follows them (for whatever divergences there are among the diverse nations, those institutions have one single aim—earthly peace), provided that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped. Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man, so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety. In fact, that City relates the earthly peace to the heavenly peace, which is so truly peaceful that it should be regarded as the only peace deserving the name, at least in respect of the rational creation; for this peace is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God. When we arrive at that state of peace, there will be no longer a life that ends in death, but a life that is life in sure and sober truth; there will be no animal body to ‘weigh down the soul’ in its process of corruption; there will be a spiritual body with no cravings, a body subdued in every part to the will. This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and it lives a life of righteousness, based in this faith, having the attainment of that peace in view of every good action it performs in relation to God, and in relation to a neighbour, since the life of a city is inevitably a social life.

Bede, on Gregory the Great, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bk. II, chapter 1

We can and should by rights call him [Gregory] our apostle, for though he held the most important see in the whole world and was head of Churches which had long been converted to the true faith, yet he made our nation, till then enslaved to idols, into a Church of Christ, so that we may use the apostle’s word about him, “If he is not an apostle to others yet at least he is to us, for we are the seal of his apostleship in the Lord.”

...This much may be said of his immortal spirit, which could not be quenched by so much bodily pain [Gregory suffered from chronic illness]. Other popes applied themselves to the task of building churches and adorning them with gold and silver, but he devoted himself entirely to winning souls. Whatever money he had, he took diligent care to distribute it and give to the poor.

Selected Collects, 1549 Book of Common Prayer

God, the protector of all that trust in Thee, without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that Thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, Heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ’s sake, Our Lord.

Grant, Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that thy congregation may joyfully serve thee in all Godly quietness, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Blessed Lord, which has caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant us that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that by patience and comfort of Thy holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Richard Hooker on Scripture, Reason and Tradition (and Church Authority):

... what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgements whatsoever.

All things cannot be of ancient continuance, which are expedient and needful for the ordering of spiritual affairs: but the Church being a body which dieth not hath always power, as occasion requireth, no less to ordain that which never was, than to ratify what hath been before ... The Church hath authority to establish that for an order at any time, which at another time it may abolish, and in both may do well. But that which in doctrine the Church doth now deliver rightly as a truth, no man will say that it may hereafter recall, and as rightly avouch the contrary. Laws touching matter of order are changeable, by the power of the Church; articles concerning doctrine not so. (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Bk V, VIII, ed. John Keble, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*, vol. II, 1845, pp. 34, 33)

Newman on Scripture:

It is antecedently unreasonable to suppose that a book so complex, so systematic, in parts so obscure, the outcome of so many minds, times, and places, should be given us from above without the safeguard of some authority; as if it could possibly, from the nature of the case, interpret itself. Its inspiration does but guarantee its truth, not its interpretation. How are private readers satisfactorily to distinguish what is didactic and what is historical, what is fact and what is vision, what is allegorical and what is literal, what is idiomatic and what is grammatical, what is enunciated formally and what occurs *obiter*, what is only of temporary and what is of lasting obligation? ('On the Inspiration of Scripture', *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 15, No. 84, Feb. 1884)

Newman on Charles Simeon:

Doubtless Mr Simeon is ten thousand times more attractive [a preacher] than I, but not than the Church I serve. [John t]he Baptist is but friend of the bridegroom – and hath not the bride, and speaketh (so to say) of the earth. It is as a Priest that I should have influence – i.e. in the sacraments, ordinances etc. of the Church – and since the divinely ordered system is (alas!) but poorly developed among us, no wonder I seem cold and uninfluential. (Letter to Samuel Wilberforce)

Fr. Charles Lowder on the growth of the urban poor and the parish system's inability to cope:

... in the presence of such utter destitution, it was simply childish to act as if the Church were recognized as the mother of the people. She must assume a missionary character, and, by religious association and a new adaptation of Catholic practice to the altered circumstances of the nineteenth century and the peculiar wants of the English character, endeavour, with fresh life and energy, to stem the prevailing tide of sin and indifference. (Quoted in Maria Trench, *Charles Lowder: A Biography*.)

Memorial presented to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in New York, 1889:

We would respectfully, yet most earnestly, represent to your honorable bodies that we, as Clergy and Laity engaged in the work of the Church among Colored People, have been trained in the Protestant Episcopal Church, or have entered that Communion with the understanding,—*First*, That it was a valid branch of God's Holy Catholic Church ... *Second*, That as such the Church knew no difference of *race* or *condition*. *Third*, That it is the doctrine of this Church, that its Priesthood is one, and that it is not her intention to discriminate in her legislative capacity against any of her Ministers on the sole ground of color; yet action has been taken in various parts of the Church which has either already deprived Colored Clergy of rights which we supposed they possessed by virtue of their Apostolic ordination, or which is likely to result in such deprivation, as, for example, the movement which has been made in more than one Diocese looking towards *Separate Organization* for Colored People. ...

