

Incompleteness, Imperial Legacies, and Anglican Fudge: How Concerns about Gender and Sexuality Affect How Anglicans Do Theology

Anglican Theological Review

1–27

© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00033286231209714

journals.sagepub.com/home/atr**Susannah Cornwall**

University of Exeter, UK

Abstract

Gender and sexuality are potent flashpoints showing up deep fissures in Anglican ecclesiology and identity. There has been growing attention to the power imbalances within Anglican hierarchies. Whether in African leaders' public disavowals of what they consider Western Christian backsliding, or in social media discussions about the Anglican churches' positions on their clergy's and ordinands' sex lives, old orders of authority are no longer operating unchallenged. Here, Anglican self-understanding of itself as a tradition characterized by comprehensiveness and broadness is assessed through the lens of decolonial theology, interrogating norms of power. In a context of continued dismantling of imperial structures of power and decreased toleration of the maintenance of old hierarchies associated with empire, the concept of unity as a good in itself is likely, where this is perceived to stem from a desire to uphold imperial control, to be challenged.

Keywords

decolonial, empire, gender, power, sexuality

Introduction

Gender and sexuality are not the only things that show up deep fissures in Anglican ecclesiology and identity, but they are nonetheless particularly potent flashpoints, because it is these that are often invoked in the rhetoric about culture wars, creeping secularization, and alleged moral degeneracy that characterize much political discourse today.

Corresponding author:

Susannah Cornwall, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4QJ, UK.

Email: s.m.cornwall@exeter.ac.uk

Have concerns about gender and sexuality actually functioned to promote what is sometimes thought of as Anglicanism's characteristic broadness?¹ On the contrary: it frequently seems, rather, as though it is on these matters that Anglicans are *most* likely to retreat to positions of suspicion and to appeal to orthodoxy and tradition in a way that rhetorically suggests their opponents on the other wing have been unorthodox and failed to live up to the tradition. These are, of course, deeply contested terms and may involve some equivocation and slipperiness in how their petitioners use them.² If deep (and likely very public) splits over matters such as gender and sexuality were to lead to further or more thoroughgoing schism within the Anglican Communion, it would be harder than it has been thus far to argue for an ongoing core of Anglicanism in any way different in kind from the commonalities that Anglicans share with many other Christians. What is at stake in the continued Anglican claim to unity? What might it mean if, taking discussions about sex and sexuality as a pressure gauge but not the whole machine, Anglicans had to face up to the fact that they were also less united in other ways than they purported to be?³

¹ Mike Higton is circumspect about characterizing Anglican theology and polity as *distinctively* broad and comprehensive in comparison with many other denominations. He is unpersuaded either that Anglican churches truly display "a balance and comprehensiveness lacking in other churches" (Mike Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020], 6) or that even if they did then their resistance to a systematization of their doctrine would be an evident consequence. Furthermore, he adds of the Church of England, "This is an idea that has roots tangled up with the imposition of royal power under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I; it gains purchase as a self-description after the Restoration, in the midst of a programme of the systematic exclusion and persecution of those who would not conform; it persists alongside the Church's involvement in colonialism; and it gains most prominence in the midst of fierce nineteenth-century controversy. The claim to doctrinal diffidence is part of the Church of England's habitual, polemical mythologizing of its own history and identity" (Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine*, 6). Thus, claims to comprehensiveness are evidently not either clear-cut or incontrovertibly morally innocent. Part of Higton's own motivation for his systematic examination of the function of doctrine in the life of the church—with the Church of England as his particular case study—is his interest in how the patterns formed institutionally interact with those in the lives of everyday congregations. He notes, too, that some of the same questions that inform his interrogations of doctrine also relate to his own convictions in favour of same-sex relationships and trans people's full inclusion in the church (Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine*, 9–10).

² I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for *ATR* for helping me to clarify this point.

³ This anxiety also underlies contemporary tensions in the Church of England grounded in a perception from some quarters that parishes are being financially and politically undermined to protect the existence of the central institution and its projects. However, if Paul Avis' account (see, e.g., Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008]) of Anglican ecclesiology as being distinctive in its operation at four discrete levels—the Church Universal, the Anglican church in a given province, the Anglican diocese, and the local parish or benefice—rings true for many Anglican worshippers, who yet identify most readily with their own local congregation and may have little or no time for the national and international church's preoccupations, this goes a long way toward explaining resistance to what are seen as attempts to eviscerate the local. Of course, appeals to "Save the Parish" are rhetorically appealing to many but do not tell the full story: more money for individual parishes, after all, potentially means less for diocesan racial justice advisers, national children's and youth leads, and other such strategic appointments.

I take it that readers do not require a rehearsal here of the well-worn *content* of theological disagreements about same-sex relationships, their implications for Anglican ordination and marriage, or theological arguments for and against women's ordained and episcopal ministry. Overviews and in-depth analyses of these discussions are available elsewhere: distinctively Anglican accounts from a range of perspectives include those by Adrian Thatcher, Harriet Harris and Jane Shaw, Fredrica Harris Thompsett, Geoffrey Kirk, Andrew Goddard, Alex Fry, and my own.⁴ Instead, I will be focusing here on some of the reasons *why* these disagreements occur. Inevitably, my approach is colored by my own context: an author writing in a different one would likely have a different view. In particular, I am aware that my British context gives me an outlook influenced by one small and divided country's negotiations of its ongoing interactions with the rest of the world, at a time when dynamics of post-imperial and decolonial politics are acute. I am merely an observer of Anglican churches elsewhere, including the Episcopal Church in the United States, and I am aware that Anglicans across the world read these discussions in light of very different pressures and preoccupations.

Anglican theology, gender, and sexuality: a broad church?

Comprehensiveness demands agreement on fundamentals, while tolerating disagreement on matters in which Christians may differ without feeling the necessity of breaking communion. In the mind of an Anglican, comprehensiveness is not compromise. Nor is it to bargain one truth for another . . . Rather it implies that the apprehension of truth is a growing thing.⁵

Clearly, it is not just gender and sexuality about which Anglicans have vehemently disagreed. Indeed, Anglicanism has always struggled with its identity, being a polity shaped by multiple and sometimes competing traditions. Gender and sexuality are, in

⁴ Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Adrian Thatcher, *Redeeming Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Adrian Thatcher, *Gender and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart, *People of Passion: What the Churches Teach About Sex* (London: Mowbray, 1997); Harriet Harris and Jane Shaw, eds., *The Call for Women Bishops* (London: SPCK, 2004); Fredrica Harris Thompsett, ed., *Looking Forward, Looking Backward: Forty Years of Women's Ordination* (New York: Morehouse, 2014); Geoffrey Kirk, *Without Precedent: Scripture, Tradition, and the Ordination of Women* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016); Andrew Goddard, "Sexuality and Communion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, ed. Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 413–26; Andrew Goddard, "Before and After Lambeth I.10: The Lambeth Conference on Sex and Marriage," in *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, ed. Paul Avis and Benjamin Guyer (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 205–33; Alex Fry, *Gender Inequality in the Ordained Ministry of the Church of England: Examining Conservative Male Clergy Responses to Women Priests and Bishops* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023); Susannah Cornwall, *Theology and Sexuality* (London: SCM Press, 2013).

⁵ Lambeth Conference, *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK, 1968), 140.

fact, only the latest in a line of things that sharply prompt the Anglican churches to re-examine just what it is that keeps them together and constitutes their common kernel. William L. Sachs concurs that, for Anglicans,

The crisis over homosexuality is not novel, for there are important prior instances of conflict over the moral nature of the church and its leadership. Nor is this conflict unprecedented for Anglicans. Tension between the local and the general aspects of Christian belief and practice is apparent in Anglican discussions of appropriate ways to adapt church life and leadership to new realities. Indeed the emergence of ideological factions against the backdrop of broad public uncertainty is also a recurring aspect of such crises; indeed, it is the most important of all. But the energetic focus on homosexuality at a time when Anglicanism is being reshaped by global South influences makes this conflict distinctive and profound.⁶

Sexuality and gender are, then, presenting issues: but, as Sachs hints, ones that starkly highlight some wider fissures in Anglican ecclesiology (which Sachs himself attributes to Anglicanism's longstanding desire not to allow itself to become diluted via "compromise with the world").⁷ We might trace these fissures much earlier, as seen all the way back in Richard Hooker's negotiations of which laws are eternal and unchanging and which necessarily shift in response to cultural contexts, via "the benefite of natures light"⁸ and "free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church."⁹ Thus, tensions over the relative status of human reason—especially as a signal of participation in the divine life¹⁰—and the authority of Scripture have underpinned Anglicanism over its many centuries.

It is not coincidental, then, that it was a crisis over sexuality—namely, the ordination of V. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire—which led to the Windsor Report's 2004 calls for an Anglican Covenant to hold together a Communion which seemed to be creaking at the seams.¹¹ The Anglican Consultative Council held that it was not for the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (TEC), or any other province of the

⁶ William L. Sachs, *Homosexuality and the Crisis of Anglicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 28.

⁷ Sachs, *Homosexuality*, 55.

⁸ Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, I.14.4; see Georges Edelen, ed., *Richard Hooker: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Preface and Books I to IV* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 129.

⁹ Hooker's Laws III.4.1; see Edelen, *Richard Hooker*, 213. For further discussion of this negotiation in Hooker see Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Reformed Theologian of the Church of England?* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997); Egil Grislis, "Scriptural Hermeneutics," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. W. J. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 273–304; W. J. Torrance Kirby, "Reason and Law," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. W. J. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 251–71; A. J. Joyce, *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Paul Dominiak, *Richard Hooker: The Architect of Participation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020).

¹⁰ Dominiak, *Richard Hooker*, 92ff.

¹¹ Anglican Consultative Council, *The Lambeth Commission on Communion: The Windsor Report* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004), 65–71.

Communion, to make such a weighty decision as to consecrate an openly gay and partnered cleric without the assent of the other Anglican churches.¹² The Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church rejected the proposal for the Anglican Covenant outright; some other provinces, including TEC, Robinson's own church, elected to neither reject nor accept it. It was in the aftermath of Robinson's consecration that some Anglicans seceded from TEC to form the theologically conservative Anglican Church of North America (ACNA).¹³

Anglicans clearly differ in their theological accounts of sexuality and of the nature and significance of marriage, with some, especially Anglo-Catholics, understanding marriage as a sacrament, and others understanding it as closer to a secular social institution (with these differences sometimes, though not always, mapping again onto the varying emphases given to biblical and other forms of authority). Where marriage *is* understood as sacramental, this evidently has effects on Anglicans' convictions about how far shifting secular accounts of marriage can or must map onto religious ones. As Jeremy Bonner and Mark D. Chapman note, Robinson's consecration was a particular touch-paper for those sensitive to perceived undermining of the authority of the Bible, because Robinson "actively lived out behaviour deemed by many to be contrary to Scripture and, necessarily, un-sacramental."¹⁴ However, they continue, it is not that all conservatives believe marriage is a sacrament and all liberals believe it is not: "For those like Robinson seeking to develop the sacrament of marriage to include same-sex relationships . . . the intent was not to devalue but to enhance its application."¹⁵

When, in the 2010s, there were debates about the introduction of same-sex marriage in England and Wales among other jurisdictions, the Church of England was insistent that there was only one, single institution of marriage, with different ways into it, namely, via a religious service or via a civil ceremony. There was not, however, they claimed, a difference of kind between "religious marriage" and "civil marriage" as institutions, as they believed the Westminster government was suggesting.¹⁶ It was not for humans, claimed the Church of England, to change the institution of marriage: it was recognized

¹² This echoed Paul Avis' characterization of Robinson's consecration as insular and wilful on TEC's part and taking too little account of the implications beyond TEC itself—see Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 78.

¹³ ACNA understands itself as Anglican by tradition, and is in communion with the Global South Provinces of the Anglican Communion—among them the Churches of Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Congo, and Myanmar—but is not itself a member church of the Anglican Communion.

¹⁴ Jeremy Bonner and Mark D. Chapman, "Introduction," in *Costly Communion: Ecumenical Initiative and Sacramental Strife in the Anglican Communion*, ed. Mark D. Chapman and Jeremy Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1–10, here 3.

¹⁵ Bonner and Chapman, "Introduction," 3.

¹⁶ General Synod (Church of England), "GS Misc 1027: A Response to the Government Equalities Office Consultation – 'Equal Civil Marriage' – from the Church of England," 2012, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201027%20government%20consultation%20on%20same%20sex%20marriage.pdf>, 4–5.

across a range of societies and cultures as being contracted between a man and a woman, not two people of the same sex.¹⁷

Not all Anglicans who made this kind of argument did so on the grounds that marriage was a sacrament: some did so because of what they deemed an unacceptable discontinuity with historical understandings of marriage if it were expanded to include same-sex couples, with John Milbank arguing that once the definition was changed, it was changed for everyone, such that, thereafter, everyone who married would be entering a “same sex marriage”—that is, an institution which permitted of marriage between same-sex couples—whether they were heterosexual or not.¹⁸ For Milbank, this represented an unacceptable loss of a solely heterosexual historic institution.¹⁹

Anglicans have frequently struggled to show that despite their diverse history, and disagreements over sundry matters, they are fundamentally united. Issues that seem to pose a particular threat to this appearance of unity—sexuality among them—might therefore be particularly freighted ones. Anglican theologians have appealed to “mutual flourishing” and “good disagreement,”²⁰ with a sense that unity-in-diversity does not mean everyone has to do exactly the same things in exactly the same ways despite a non-negotiable common core. Thus, it has proven possible in some jurisdictions for Anglican clergy to opt out of marrying divorced people, or those who have transitioned gender, on the grounds of conscience, even though other Anglican clergy will happily celebrate such marriages and they have been deemed licit within the polity of that jurisdiction. Anglicans with very different convictions about the legitimacy of women’s ordination as priests and bishops also manage to coexist: the provision in the Church of England of alternative episcopal oversight beyond traditional diocesan lines means, for example, that parishes which do not recognize women bishops’ episcopacy may receive alternative provision, even if the processes to allow for this are clunky at best.

¹⁷ General Synod, “GS Misc 1027,” 3. Commentators at the time noted that the Church of England’s understandings of marriage already had changed theologically, not least to permit of remarriage after divorce and marriage to one’s deceased spouse’s sibling; furthermore, it was clear that marriage has not always been understood as necessarily monogamous – see further my discussions in Susannah Cornwall, *Un/familiar Theology: Reconceiving Sex, Reproduction, and Generativity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

¹⁸ John Milbank, “Gay Marriage and the Future of Human Sexuality,” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 13 March 2012, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/gay-marriage-and-the-future-of-human-sexuality/10100726>.

¹⁹ Writing prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage in England and Wales, Milbank argued, “*The intended change in the definition of marriage would mean that marriage as traditionally defined no longer exists*. Thus heterosexual people would no longer have the right to enter into an institution understood to be only possible for heterosexuals . . . In effect, if marriage is now understood as a lifelong sexual contract between any two adult human persons with no specification of gender, then the allowance of gay marriage renders *all* marriages ‘gay marriages’” (original emphasis) (Milbank, “Gay Marriage”).

²⁰ See, for example, Faith and Order Commission (Church of England), “Communion and Disagreement,” 2016, https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/communion_and_disagreement_faoc_report_gs_misc_1139.pdf; Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine*.

It is not an original observation that, in broad-brush strokes, men appear to carry more anxiety about non-traditional patterns of sexuality, gender, family, and church leadership than women do. Thus, while disagreements about women's ordained leadership and the status of same-sex relationships in the Anglican churches are clearly not identical, they are underpinned by some related dynamics. In general terms, both represent systems and institutions coming to terms with their own relativization and decentralization, with some backlash against what might be considered an erosion of "traditional" assumptions about authority and hierarchy in the best ordering of society. When considering negotiations of how power struggles underlie conflicting positions on sexuality, then, we can reflect on how power informs responses to women's leadership too.

It is worth dwelling on the Church of England's response to opposing views on women's episcopacy as an instance of a compromise recognizing differing convictions on the issue, not least because, as a piece of polity, it has so far survived for a decade despite its inelegance. We might well ask how far it represents a coherent theological method as opposed to classic Anglican pragmatism, often called fudge. Legislation to allow women to be consecrated as bishops was passed in England in 2014. The Church of England issued five "guiding principles" for those going through the process of discernment for ordination after 2014, which required candidates to recognize that anyone appointed to any order of ministry by the Church of England was a true and lawful holder of that office but also said,

Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures . . . Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.²¹

Anglicans in England are, by this logic, endeavoring to create circumstances that ensure mutual flourishing. However, Enya Doyle argues that a position such as that articulated in the Five Guiding Principles, which effectively sets up a conservative view and a progressive one as two opposite but equivalently licit extremes, distorts the fact that the conservative position on women's episcopacy is in fact a minority one. In practice, she says, this false equivalency amplifies the minority conservative view, lending it institutional legitimacy.²² Thus, she holds, "in trying to balance the extremes, the *via media* approach serves the traditionalist viewpoint above all else."²³

²¹ Stephen Ferns, "The Five Guiding Principles: Guidance for Candidates for Ordination in the Church of England," 2014, https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/the_five_guiding_principles.pdf. A far more expansive guide to the principles followed several years later as Faith and Order Commission (Church of England), *The Five Guiding Principles: A Resource for Study* (London: Church House Publishing, 2018).

²² Enya Helen Lauren Doyle, "Let My Voice be Heard: Barriers to Gender Diversity and Inclusion in Anglican Cathedral Music," PhD thesis, Durham, University of Durham, 2020, 68.

²³ Doyle, "Let My Voice Be Heard," 82.

Doyle, writing about the Church of England specifically, suggests that it is precisely because the Anglican churches have attempted to hold together people with convictions that seem incommensurable that “a process of *incoherent* equilibrium has come to define the Church.”²⁴ What Doyle calls the Church of England’s “historical vacillation and aspiration to achieve balance”²⁵ risks leading to ever-more partisan attempts to hold that one’s own expression of Anglicanism is the most authentic one, with others tolerated only on sufferance. This partisanship on sexuality is seen elsewhere in the Anglican Communion: in 2019, for example, the Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, told the diocesan Synod, in response to moves by some Australian Anglican dioceses to bless same-sex unions, that “If people wish to change the doctrine of the church, they should start a new church or join a church more aligned to their views—but do not ruin the Anglican Church by abandoning the plain teaching of Scripture. Please leave us.”²⁶

Comprehensiveness as an ambition is double-edged: on one hand and at its best it is characterized by generosity of spirit, a desire to include those of diverse traditions; yet, on the other hand, it can tend to a kind of assimilationism and can fail to properly interrogate whether inclusion is a bold enough aspiration if it means that those at the “margins” are drawn to a “centre” which remains reluctant to be a party to its own relativization. It can also, as I will show below, risk mainstreaming very niche positions by giving them airtime in the interests of even-handedness. “Comprehensiveness” might, in more contemporary parlance, be a cousin to “inclusion,” yet inclusion has its own drawbacks, not least the fact that, within the Anglican churches, it has too often meant a redrawing of boundaries such that there is a somewhat bigger tent but still plenty of people shivering outside because they were just too challenging to fit within the newly extended shelter.

Sexuality, gender, empire, and the colonial legacy

Anglicans are increasingly aware of the ongoing impacts of empire on their place in the church and in the world.²⁷ This is particularly heightened in the context of establishment: the Church of England is the only established Anglican church,²⁸ and ongoing links between church and state continue to be colored by affinities and tensions during the age of empire. Historically, it is clear that many Anglicans within the Church of England itself as well as beyond it have recognized a tension between Anglicanism and “Englishness,” including on mores surrounding sex. It was partly for this reason, for example, that in the 1850s John Colenso as first Bishop of Natal (at the time a British

²⁴ Doyle, “Let My Voice Be Heard,” 65, original emphasis.

²⁵ Doyle, “Let My Voice Be Heard,” 65.

²⁶ Davies quoted in Michael Koziol, “‘Please Leave Us’: Archbishop Tells Same-Sex Marriage Supporters to Abandon Anglican Church,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/please-leave-us-archbishop-tells-same-sex-marriage-supporters-to-abandon-anglican-church-20191015-p530tk.html>.

²⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, *The Anglican Tradition from a Postcolonial Perspective* (New York: Church Publishing, 2023).

²⁸ The Church of England is established in England, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man, the latter being British Crown dependencies.

colony) was reluctant to insist that new Christians there abandon their practices of polygamy.²⁹ Just as the Windsor Report and calls for an Anglican covenant were precipitated by a crisis over Gene Robinson's sexuality, so the first ever Lambeth Conference, in 1867, was called in response to another crisis over sexuality: the refusal of the London-based Privy Council³⁰ to anathematize Colenso because of his views on polygamy, and the Privy Council's ruling that Robert Gray as Bishop of Cape Town had no authority to depose Colenso in Natal. Colenso's unpopularity with many fellow clergy both in South Africa and in England also stemmed from his advocacy with indigenous people in Africa and opposition to the British and other European colonial regimes.³¹

Has English-inflected reticence about sexuality, and an unwillingness to discuss human sexuality in its entirety rather than implying that only homosexuality is a sexuality at all, fed into a more widespread Anglican discomfort with the theological implications of gender and sex? In 2014, half the serving bench of Church of England bishops had attended an independent school (mostly single-sex) prior to university, and only 13 percent had been educated at a state comprehensive school.³² Since then things have shifted somewhat, and the consecration of the first women bishops in England in 2015 is just one factor to have diversified the pool, along with the growing number of bishops who have been state-educated and have undergone non-traditional ordination training. However, it is likely that many English bishops continue to feel most at home in circles where same-sex desire does not tend to be openly acknowledged despite its ubiquity.

This makes for an odd kind of cognitive dissonance, and, even more, for coded language which conceals as much as it reveals. Interviewed at the 2022 Lambeth Conference in a session on Safe Church initiatives (improving safeguarding and outlawing abuse by clergy and church leaders), the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby made a telling remark: "Safe Church is nothing, nothing, *nothing* to do with human sexuality; the biggest scandal I have been dealing with is from a married conservative Evangelical." It seems likely that he was referring to John Smyth QC, a former chair of Iwerne Trust who was accused of carrying out brutal beatings on numerous boys and young men from independent schools but who died before he faced formal charges. It is debatable whether

²⁹ John Colenso, *Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Cases of Polygamy Converts from Heathenism* (Natal: May and Davis, 1855).

³⁰ The Privy Council functions as a court of appeal for matters pertaining to British dependencies.

³¹ All that said, Willie James Jennings sounds a salutary note of caution, holding that Colenso himself was insufficiently critical of how his own cultural context impacted on his attitudes to the cultures he encountered in Africa—see Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 145ff. In Jennings' view, Colenso was ostensibly happy to hold that the gospel relativized cultural specificity elsewhere, but did not really interrogate what it meant for his own identity and its influences by empire. As sundry postcolonial theologians have noted, the call to set aside one's history and allegiances in favor of a new identity in Christ (or else as part of the long salvation history of Israel) can be understood as deeply democratizing, but it can also be understood in a more sinister way as an erasure of ties and loyalties to one's culture of origin.

³² Madeleine Davies and Tim Wyatt, "Half the Bishops in the CofE were Educated Privately," *Church Times*, 5 September 2014, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/5-september/news/uk/half-the-bishops-in-the-c-of-e-were-educated-privately>.

Smyth's activities had a sadistic sexual motivation,³³ but his enforcement of communal nudity at camps, punishment of adolescent boys for wearing underwear,³⁴ and insistence that young men describe their sexual habits in depth to Smyth as their self-declared spiritual father,³⁵ have at least family resemblances to forms of sexual humiliation. It is striking that Welby so unequivocally sought to distance Smyth's activity, involving naked beatings and massage on the buttocks, kissing young men "softly" on the neck,³⁶ graphic discussions of masturbation habits, and fixation on young men's sexual fantasies, from "human sexuality." To cast this in its most positive light, it is of course possible that Welby was eager to communicate to the bishops of the Anglican Communion that sexual abuse should not be considered something coincident with same-sex activity, and wanted them to be mindful of the fact that abuse is more about power than about sexual desire. Yet by making "human sexuality" code for "homosexuality" (and hinting that, as a married conservative evangelical, Smyth could not have been homosexual), Welby rendered the sexual aspects of this abuse (ironically) less visible and less speakable, as well as severely narrowing the reach of what constituted human sexuality.

"'Anglican' is no longer in 'English captivity,'" holds James Tengatenga, formerly Bishop of Southern Malawi;³⁷ yet it is clear that reflection on Anglicanism and sexuality today cannot but be shaped by reflection on the colonial legacy. The ongoing inheritance of empire, and in particular, the efforts to work out the significance of the history of the Anglican Communion today (especially the relationships of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Church of England to Anglican churches in formerly colonized countries), is deeply significant. As Kwok Pui-lan noted more than two decades ago, given that the Anglican churches are in practice characterized and held together as much by their liturgy as by their doctrines, it is crucial to be mindful of the ways in which the liturgy itself (and especially the Book of Common Prayer) has created and reinforced a set of linguistic and cultural assumptions.³⁸ These, we might remark, in turn, continue to inform what is understood to be licit knowledge and whose perspectives are considered trustworthy. In a postcolonial context of increasing disquiet about modes of authority which take for granted the superiority of imperial powers, there is, understandably, hesitancy about appearing to impose Western norms and expectations on Christian communities in the majority world—particularly given that more than half of all Anglicans worldwide are now in Africa. Global South Anglican primates during the twenty-first century have tended to set out their stalls on the incontrovertibility of biblical teaching against

³³ Andrew Graystone, *Bleeding for Jesus: John Smyth and the Cult of the Iwerne Camps* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2021), 201.

³⁴ Graystone, *Bleeding for Jesus*, 95.

³⁵ Graystone, *Bleeding for Jesus*, 58.

³⁶ Graystone, *Bleeding for Jesus*, 54.

³⁷ James Tengatenga, "Afterword: God's Gift in Every Voice," in *Twentieth Century Anglican Theologians*, ed. Stephen Burns, Bryan Cones, and James Tengatenga (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 226–37, here 227.

³⁸ Kwok Pui-lan, "The Legacy of Cultural Hegemony in the Anglican Church," in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2001), 47–70, here 59ff.

homosexuality clearly and emphatically (in line with what Bonner and Chapman call “a robust leadership style” coupled with “a predilection for local autonomy”).³⁹ A notable exception was Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who was said to have told then Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey that he was ashamed to be an Anglican given the Anglican churches’ inadequate responses to homosexuality,⁴⁰ and who based his inclusive theology of sexuality in his convictions about the equality and dignity of all humans regardless of race or orientation.

In an interview with LBC Radio in 2014, Justin Welby (as a subsequent Archbishop of Canterbury) responded to an allegation that the reason why the Church of England would not endorse same-sex marriage was because of what the interviewer called “the connotations it would give to some . . . dare we say, less enlightened people in Africa.” Welby responded,

Well, I *don't* think we dare say less enlightened, actually. I think that's a sort of neo-colonial approach and it's one I really object to. I think it's not about them having connotations, getting irate, that's nothing to do with it. It's about the fact that I've stood by a graveside in Africa of a group of Christians who'd been attacked because of something that had happened far, far away in America, and they were attacked by other people—because of that a lot of them had been killed . . . I was in the South Sudan a few weeks ago and the church leaders there were saying, “Please don't change what you're doing, because then we couldn't accept your help and we need your help desperately.”⁴¹

It is clear that, in 2014, Welby did not feel at liberty to disregard the broader context of anti-homosexuality feelings in parts of Africa or to abandon Christians there (which he perceived that publicly siding with US liberals would entail). His remarks chimed with the statement in the 2013 Pilling Report that “The Church of England . . . needs to recognize that any change to the Church's stance [on same-sex relationships] in one province could have serious consequences for mission in some other provinces of the Communion.”⁴² However, where hesitancy is grounded not in humility but in fear, that can itself perpetuate harm: doing nothing is also an active choice. Welby's lack of condemnation in the radio interview of those perpetuating violence supposedly in response to actions elsewhere in the world might be held as a tacit endorsement of the logic that says the right response to a threatened attack is to mollify the potential attacker.

More recently, however, Welby has been more outspoken about pronouncements from his fellow primates in other provinces. When in 2021 Henry Ndukuba, Archbishop of Nigeria, said, “The deadly ‘virus’ of homosexuality has infiltrated ACNA [Anglican Church of North America]. This is likened to a yeast that should be

³⁹ Bonner and Chapman, “Introduction,” 4.

⁴⁰ Adriaan Van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, *Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 28.

⁴¹ Justin Welby, “Ask the Archbishops: Justin Welby Live on LBC,” 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGdBTMx1Vgo>.

⁴² Archbishops' Council (Church of England), *Report of the House of Bishops' Working Group on Human Sexuality (The Pilling Report)* (London: Church House Publishing, 2013), 102.

urgently and radically expunged and excised lest it affects the whole dough,” Welby’s response was forthright: “I completely disagree with and condemn this language. It is unacceptable. It dehumanises those human beings of whom the statement speaks.”⁴³ This latter remark echoes the earlier language from the 2005 Dromantine communiqué, issued by the first major gathering of Anglican primates after the 2004 Windsor Report’s publication, convened by the then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The communiqué noted the alarm expressed by those primates who believed that TEC’s consecration of Robinson, and the blessing of same-sex unions by Bishop Michael Ingham in the Diocese of New Westminster (Anglican Church of Canada), undermined Lambeth 1.10, the resolution on human sexuality made by Anglican primates at the 1998 Lambeth Conference.⁴⁴ However, the communiqué added,

In our discussion and assessment of the moral appropriateness of specific human behaviours, we continue unreservedly to be committed to the pastoral support and care of homosexual people. The victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us. We assure homosexual people that

⁴³ Ed Thornton, “Archbishop Welby Condemns Nigerian Primate’s Anti-Gay Language,” *Church Times*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/5-march/news/uk/archbishop-welby-condemns-nigerian-primate-s-anti-gay-language>.

⁴⁴ This resolution states, among other things, that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and a woman and that those who are not married should be sexually abstinent; that homosexual people are loved by God and full members of the Body of Christ, but that homosexual practice is not compatible with Scripture; and that neither blessing same-sex unions nor ordaining people in same-sex unions should be supported. The full text of Lambeth 1.10 is online at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1998/section-i-called-to-full-humanity/section-i10-human-sexuality>. Like other such resolutions made at Lambeth conferences, this one is in no sense legally binding on member churches, even if some other Anglicans would prefer that it incontrovertibly were. As Mark Chapman notes, “While the Lambeth Conference may not ever have been able to claim legal authority, the fact that its bishops have been invested with a supernatural authority means that it has taken on a quasi-conciliar structure and has sometimes been seen to be teaching ‘authoritatively’ rather than simply acting as an advisory body”—Mark D. Chapman, *Anglican Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 196. Summary records from the 2022 Lambeth Conference were referred to as “calls” to which primates were invited to offer their commitment, rather than “resolutions.” The *Church Times* quoted Rt Revd Tim Thornton, in his role as Archbishop of Canterbury’s Advisor on the Lambeth Conference, as saying, “It was felt that the phrase ‘resolution’ was sometimes a bit confusing for some people because it could possibly suggest that decisions at the Lambeth Conference in some way do impinge or impose on Churches, which, of course, they don’t do” (quoted in Francis Martin, “Lambeth ’22 Will Look Outwards to Global Mission, and Address Sexuality, Media Told,” *Church Times*, 1 July 2022, 10). For further analysis of Lambeth 1.10 as a landmark in Anglican discussion of sexuality, see Goddard, “Before and After Lambeth I.10.” For an overview of Lambeth Conference resolutions on gender and sexuality in the century from 1888 to 1988, see Charlotte Methuen, “The Lambeth Conference, Gender and Sexuality,” *Theology* 123, no. 2 (2020): 84–94.

they are children of God, loved and valued by him, and deserving of the best we can give of pastoral care and friendship.⁴⁵

This was, though, the same communication which called on the TEC and the Anglican Church in Canada to voluntarily withdraw from the Anglican Consultative Council: essentially, to sit in the corner and think about what they had done—so it is in itself another example of the tensions visible even in “official” positions within Anglicanism. As Andrew Goddard notes, even Lambeth 1.10 itself was not unanimous, and at least some of those who voted it through must have been among those who openly offered pastoral support to LGBT Christians soon afterward.⁴⁶ Goddard also notes that, since the 1960s, there has in effect been some divergence between Lambeth Conference resolutions on sexuality and the polity of individual Anglican churches as they negotiate their relationships to secular marriage law in their own national contexts, with questions about (for example) remarriage after divorce devolved to the various provinces.⁴⁷

Lambeth 1.10 reared its head again in July 2022 when, shortly before the Lambeth Conference convened, it appeared in the published text of one of the “Calls” to which attending bishops were invited to assent⁴⁸ despite the fact that, as revealed by Kevin Robertson, a Canadian bishop who was a member of the drafting group for the Call on Human Dignity, it had not been part of the text the group had seen or approved.⁴⁹ Critics took particular issue with the Call’s evidently inaccurate claim that “It is the mind of the Anglican Communion as a whole that same gender marriage is not permissible.”⁵⁰ The version of the Call eventually presented at the Conference had

⁴⁵ Primates’ Meeting of the Anglican Communion, “Communiqué” (commonly called the Dromantine Communiqué), 2005, https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68387/communique_-_english.pdf, 2.

⁴⁶ “Following a difficult debate [at the 1998 Lambeth Conference], the motion as amended was overwhelmingly carried by 526 votes to 70, with 40 abstentions. However, in the following weeks a total of 185 bishops from 14 provinces (76 from the USA), including 9 primates and some future primates such as Rowan Williams, signalled their support for ‘A Pastoral Statement to Lesbian and Gay Anglicans.’ This revealed that for many bishops, despite its clear reaffirmation of traditional Christian sexual ethics, Lambeth i.10 was not going to be received as the final word” (Goddard, “Sexuality and Communion,” 415). The amendment to which Goddard refers explicitly stated homosexuality practice was incompatible with Scripture, making the resolution more acceptable to conservative primates, notably those from Africa (Goddard, “Sexuality and Communion,” 415).

⁴⁷ Goddard, “Before and After Lambeth I.10,” 220.

⁴⁸ Pat Ashworth, “Draft Lambeth Conference ‘Call’ Threatens to Reignite 1998 Row over Homosexuality,” *Church Times*, July 22, 2022, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/29-july/news/world/draft-lambeth-conference-call-threatens-to-reignite-1998-row-over-homosexuality>.

⁴⁹ Pat Ashworth, “Lambeth Resolution 1.10 ‘Was Not Discussed’ in Human Dignity Drafting Group,” *Church Times*, July 25, 2022, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/29-july/news/world/lambeth-resolution-110-was-not-discussed-in-human-dignity-drafting-group>.

⁵⁰ Lambeth Conference, “Lambeth Calls: Guidance and Study Documents,” 2022, <https://www.lambethconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lambeth-Calls-Study-Guide-English.pdf>, 32.

been redrafted to acknowledge that “Many Provinces continue to affirm that same gender marriage is not permissible . . . Other Provinces have blessed and welcomed same sex union/marriage after careful theological reflection and a process of reception,”⁵¹ and it no longer explicitly called for a reaffirmation of Lambeth 1.10 as the first version had done.

It is in the United States and Canada—both sites of former British colonies—that some of the Anglican churches most progressive on matters of gender and sexuality are operative today. Some primates from some African provinces have, then, expressed resentment at what they see as revisionist North Atlantic attempts to move away from traditional Anglican teaching on sexuality and gender, hinting that for US Episcopalians or Canadian Anglicans to unilaterally change their practices is nothing but a form of imperialism. All this is complicated, of course, by the fact that although the United States was itself at one time colonized by British imperial powers, that history preceded the more intensive age of empire in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the United States itself functions today as a worldwide imperial power culturally and economically,⁵² and a sense of resentment at the United States’ international hegemonic power may inform the reluctance of Anglicans in countries such as Uganda and Kenya to go along with what they see as overly-lax moral teaching on sexuality⁵³ and the unwanted imposition of liberal Western cultural norms.

Yet, as commentators have noted, many laws against homosexual activity that still exist today in countries such as India, Malaysia, Brunei, Uganda, Kenya, Jamaica, and Guyana (all of which above-named have Anglican churches, though in none of which they are established or state churches),⁵⁴ were introduced during the period of British colonial rule.⁵⁵ To hold, therefore, for instance, that homosexuality is

⁵¹ Lambeth Conference “Lambeth Call: Human Dignity,” 2022, https://www.lambethconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/LC_Human-Dignity_ENG.pdf, 2.

⁵² Joerg Rieger, “Christian Theology and Empires,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 1–14.

⁵³ Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan, eds., *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2001).

⁵⁴ The Church of South India and the Church of North India are both united Protestant churches within the Anglican Communion. Malaysia and Brunei are part of the Church of the Province of South East Asia. The Anglican Church of Kenya in its most recent incarnation was created when the Province of East Africa was separated out in 1970. Similarly, the current Church of the Province of Uganda was separated out from the former Province of Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi in 1980. Jamaica and Guyana are both part of the Church in the Province of the West Indies. See <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/member-churches.aspx>.

⁵⁵ Enze Han and Joseph O’Mahoney, *British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality: Queens, Crime, and Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

“un-African”⁵⁶ and nothing but a Western cultural transplant does not do justice to the history of same-sex love that existed on the continent long before nineteenth-century European missionaries arrived and certainly well before the twentieth-century spread of North American popular culture and media. Indeed, Christians in African countries, Anglicans among them,⁵⁷ are reclaiming links between their LGBTQI+ identities and their African ones. Desmond Tutu, perhaps the most high-profile African Anglican advocate of same-sex relationships and LGBTQI+ equality, was clearly motivated by a desire to do justice to distinctively African theologies (such as the principle of *ubuntu* or the necessarily communal nature of flourishing personhood)⁵⁸ as well as those he took from African-American liberation theology in his open and inclusive approach to matters of sexuality as well as of racial justice.

However, in addition, Esther Mombo argues, many African Christians—especially lay women—are simply not all that alarmed about or interested in homosexuality, being more concerned with questions of economic and gender inequity.⁵⁹ African Christians’ beliefs and convictions about sexuality are, she holds, more nuanced than the loudest voices (often those of the conservative bishops) may imply, and there is a large silent middle who would rather that energies were directed elsewhere. Mombo is critical of those Global North Episcopalians who claim to be members of Global South Anglican provinces but only on their own terms: who are happy to claim conservative African views on homosexuality as the “true orthodoxy,” but who retreat back to their privileged Western lives when the conversation turns to Global South churches’ other struggles.⁶⁰ Thus, Western bishops who align themselves with Global South provinces,⁶¹ she holds, “appeal to the

⁵⁶ This claim is made frequently: just one example from an Anglican bishop is that of Peter Akinola, Archbishop of Nigeria in 2009 when Nigeria was making its anti-homosexuality laws even more stringent, that “Same sex marriage, apart from being ungodly, is unscriptural, unnatural, unprofitable, unhealthy, un-cultural, un-African and un-Nigerian. It is a perversion, a deviation and an aberration that is capable of engendering moral and social holocaust in this country. It . . . should never be allowed to take root in Nigeria. Outlawing it is to ensure the continued existence of this nation” (Akinola quoted in Andrew Brown, “The Latest Hate Speech from the Church of Nigeria,” *The Guardian*, 13 March 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/mar/13/religion-anglicanism-akinola-nigeria?commentpage=2>).

⁵⁷ This is demonstrated in texts such as Adriaan Van Klinken, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019); Adriaan Van Klinken, Johanna Stiebert, Sebyala Brian, and Fredrick Hudson, eds., *Sacred Queer Stories: Ugandan LGBTQ+ Refugee Lives and the Bible* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2021).

⁵⁸ See Van Klinken and Chitando, *Reimagining Christianity and Sexual Diversity*, 33ff.

⁵⁹ Esther Mombo, “The Windsor Report: A Paradigm Shift for Anglicanism,” *Anglican Theological Review* 89, no. 1 (2007): 69–78, here 77.

⁶⁰ Mombo, “The Windsor Report,” 75–76.

⁶¹ At the time Mombo was writing, sixteen Americans had recently been consecrated as bishops by Anglican churches in Africa, and about 250 congregations in the United States were affiliated to a Global South Anglican province rather than to TEC (Simon Sarmiento, “Global South Reaches into the United States,” *Church Times*, September 12, 2007, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2007/14-september/comment/global-south-reaches-into-the-united-states>).

autonomy of the provinces while they violate the very autonomy they claim to support.”⁶² Why, asks Mombo, do some African bishops spend so much time discussing homosexuality if, as they claim, homosexuality is not really their issue but a Western imposition? Whose agenda are they really serving?⁶³ And, we might add, what else is not perhaps being given due interrogation while so much attention is focused on homosexuality? For Mombo, it is a keen awareness of systemic gender inequalities and the ways that women—especially poor women—get a raw deal that prompts her theological commitment to practical action. Mombo’s ecclesiology is one of life on the ground, an insistence that there is something seriously wrong in places, like parts of her homeland Kenya, where there are more church buildings than functioning toilets.⁶⁴ It is not, of course, that there are not poor men as well as poor women in Africa; rather, it is that poverty is stratified and is exacerbated by those at the bottom of the pyramid of patriarchy and that there are still certain privileges attached to masculine gender and age even within communities with universal poverty relative to the West. Thus, Mombo’s account of contested power provides crucial insight into the dynamics operative when certain issues are weaponized and used to deflect attention from questions of corruption and of institutional and structural sin.

For Kwok Pui-lan, Anglican theology and ecclesiology have the potential to avoid reinscribing sex and gender hierarchies, but only if Anglicans come to recognize that other forms of imperialism (including their own addiction to control) are just as insidious. It is because Kwok is so keenly aware of the interactions between gender and empire, with particular regard to the associations between imperial conquest and the conquest of indigenous women’s sexuality by colonizers,⁶⁵ that she appeals to a more thoroughgoing disruption of Christianity’s alliances with empire. In the early 2000s, she showed that it was Western colonial-missionary teaching on marriage and sexual behavior that had led to the then-contemporary “narrower understanding of sexual propriety and acceptable code of conduct.”⁶⁶ Thus, she asked presciently,

How can we avoid reinscribing the cultural superiority of the West on the one hand and uncritical acceptance of cultural authenticity of former colonized peoples on the other? . . . If the Anglican Communion has benefitted from colonial expansion, what kind of roles can it play in the new processes of global restructuring and cultural formation?⁶⁷

In her more recent work, Kwok has shown that race, colonial desires, and sexual theologies intersect and that the legacy of Victorian Western Christian mission continues to underlie tussles over homosexuality and power in Africa, and, in a country like China,

⁶² Mombo, “The Windsor Report,” 76.

⁶³ Mombo, “The Windsor Report,” 77.

⁶⁴ Esther Mombo, “Religion and Materiality: The Case of Poverty Alleviation,” in *Religion and Poverty: Pan-African Perspectives*, ed. Peter J. Paris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 213–27, here 216.

⁶⁵ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005); Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 53ff.

⁶⁶ Kwok, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology*, 64.

⁶⁷ Kwok, “The Legacy of Cultural Hegemony,” 65.

the simultaneous denial of diverse sexual practices and same-sex relationships that existed before the missionaries arrived, and problematic exoticization by Westerners of Asian women's sexuality.⁶⁸

Both William Sachs and his reviewer Gavin Hyman identify that the presence of Anglican churches beyond the West, and an upsurge in focus on local circumstances and personal experience, exacerbates the friction. Sachs says, "This local emphasis elicits tensions that frustrate Anglican unity beyond conflict over homosexuality. Are Anglicans able to balance local and general dimensions of church life?"⁶⁹ Is it even possible for Anglicanism to claim it has a theological method with appropriate room for diversity of practice, or is its theology simply more hodgepodge than that? For Hyman, part of the context is the fact that while some aspects of Anglican polity translated well into contexts beyond the West, what he considers characteristically Anglican toleration of apparently clashing doctrinal positions did not; thus, "The proliferation of a plurality of indigenous forms of Anglicanism . . . was set to become dangerously divisive in the absence of any overarching authority that could adjudicate between them."⁷⁰ There is a real ambivalence here in a postcolonial context: Hyman notes that what might have looked like a latitudinarian attitude from the Church of England toward Anglican plants in British colonies (allowing for plenty of variation in local practice rather than the violent imposition of a one-size-fits-all model) actually had a more sinister flip side:

Politically, it seemed to reflect the process of imperial expansion itself . . . The British Empire traditionally sought to work with local customs, tribal leaders, and indigenous structures in a way that was perceived to be a more effective method of imperial control. By encouraging the development of "indigenous" forms of Anglicanism, therefore, ecclesiastical policy was developing with—rather than against—the grain of wider imperial policy.⁷¹

Furthermore, he holds, Anglican churches beyond the West saw the Church of England's appeals to doctrinal comprehensiveness and unity-in-diversity as "attributes of the Church of England in its peculiar status as a national church, rather than an integral aspect of Anglican identity as such."⁷²

Of course, geopolitical empires are not the only ones that exist, and in our own day are perhaps not even the most insidious.⁷³ Empires can also be conceptual, economic,

⁶⁸ Kwok, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology*, 53, 62–63; Kwok, *The Anglican Tradition*.

⁶⁹ Sachs, *Homosexuality*, 28.

⁷⁰ Gavin Hyman, "Review Essay of William L. Sachs' *Homosexuality and the Crisis of Anglicanism*," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11, no. 2 (2011): 240–54, here 249.

⁷¹ Hyman, "Review Essay," 247.

⁷² Hyman, "Review Essay," 251.

⁷³ "Current structures of empire are more all-encompassing than anything that has gone before . . . One of the things that distinguishes contemporary empire from past empires is that its pressures appear to be more overpowering, even as the structures of empire are less visible than ever before . . . The invisibility of the *broadening* influences of empire . . . makes resistance much more difficult since most people never realize what it is that shapes them, that reaches all the way into and creates their deepest desires"—Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 4–5.

and ideological. There has been growing attention to the power imbalances that exist within Anglican hierarchies, sometimes visibly and sometimes less so. It is clear that, whether in African leaders' public disavowals of what they consider Western Christian backsliding, or in the public and sometimes freighted discussions on social media about the Anglican churches' positions on their clergy's and ordinands' sex lives, old orders of authority will henceforth no longer be allowed to operate unchallenged. Thus, we might surmise, in a context of continued dismantling of imperial structures of power, and decreased toleration of the maintenance of old hierarchies associated with empire, we are likely to see further querying of unity as a good in itself where this is perceived to stem from a desire to uphold imperial control.

Relationality in Anglican theologies

Many Anglican theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have emphasized the importance of relationality for building communities of disciples, especially in contexts of increasing secularity. Relationality is also significant in another way, namely, the close ecumenical partnerships and allegiances of many Anglican theologians. Some of those who have contributed in the richest and fullest way to Anglican discussions of gender and sexuality have not been lifelong Anglicans: Esther Mombo has a Quaker and Seventh-Day Adventist background; Adrian Thatcher was a Baptist minister before joining the Church of England; Kwok Pui-lan grew up in a family which practiced Chinese traditional religion before she joined the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Hong Kong Anglican Church) in her teens. An emphasis on relationality goes hand in hand with a social-Trinitarian bent among some Anglican theologians but has also grown in significance in parallel with a greater recognition of the significance of gender identity and sexuality as key aspects of individuals' self-knowledge.

Relationality also informs the theology and ecclesiology of other Anglicans whose work on sex and gender has been significant. From Josephine Butler⁷⁴ in the nineteenth century to Ann Loades⁷⁵ in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Anglicans have shown that once injustice and inequity have been exposed in sex and gender relationships (particularly, e.g., in the treatment of sex workers and victims of child sexual abuse), they are also increasingly visible in other power structures within religious institutions and beyond (branching right out, as for Carter Heyward,⁷⁶ to just accounts of the spirituality

⁷⁴ Josephine Butler, *The Constitutional Iniquity of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869* (London: National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, 1871); Josephine Butler, *Some Thoughts on the Present Aspect of the Crusade against the State Regulation of Vice* (Liverpool: Brakell, 1874).

⁷⁵ Ann Loades, *Thinking About Child Sexual Abuse* (London: University of London Press, 1994); Ann Loades, "Dympna Revisited: Thinking About the Sexual Abuse of Children," in *Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology*, ed. Kathleen O'Grady, Ann L. Gilroy, and Janette Gray (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 40–58; Ann Loades, *Feminist Theology: Voices from the Past* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001).

⁷⁶ Carter Heyward, *Keep Your Courage: A Radical Christian Feminist Speaks* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011).

of non-human animals). For Loades,⁷⁷ the lack of proper attention to child sexual abuse that occurs in Christianity is a result of two things: the absence of reflection on children's full personhood prior to puberty and the relegation of matters concerning children to the realm of women, who are themselves frequently not deemed able to speak theologically. Thus, she holds, theology fails to take either women or children seriously as each is tainted by association with the other, and women's and children's agency continues to be subsumed to the desires and reputations of men. The church's tendency to focus too much on personal sin and not enough on systemic and institutional sin exacerbates a tendency to blame victims of sexual abuse rather than hold their abusers accountable. Awareness of power in sex and gender relationships thereby becomes a lens through which interrogations of power in other contexts are brought into focus.

It is for this reason, for example, that Linn Marie Tonstad is so critical of Anglican social Trinitarians such as Graham Ward and Sarah Coakley. Much of Ward's earlier work from the 1990s and 2000s focuses on sexuality, erotics, and the interpersonal through the lens of mutual participation in relationship by the Triune God and human persons.⁷⁸ However, Ward, holds Tonstad, gives an account of the Trinity which, because it is prompted by a desire to "generate the ethically and imaginatively constituted *human* subjects he wants to produce,"⁷⁹ does not adequately distinguish between what love looks like within the Godhead and what it looks like for humans living in a finite world marked by sin. Ward, like several of the Anglican theologians mentioned thus far, is prompted in his theology by dissatisfaction at unjust structures of relationship, which is laudable: however, Tonstad fears that Ward's Trinitarian theology actually does too little to disrupt the hierarchical model of the persons of the Trinity which has so often been used to justify quietism among those less powerful in human societies.

Similar reservations motivate Tonstad's engagement with Sarah Coakley's work. Much of Coakley's theology, notably the "*théologie totale*" the brief program for which she sets out in the first volume of her proposed four-book systematic theology,⁸⁰ is grounded in the assumption that, just as humans are vulnerable to one another in their sexed, gendered, and sexual relationships, so the most fundamental state of all humans is in their vulnerability to God. Coakley does not consciously mean this in a masochistic, self-flagellating sense, and, indeed, she gives short shrift to those she believes are "stuck" in their own "victimhood."⁸¹ For Coakley, vulnerability means something like openness to being changed by encounter with the divine, and a recognition that all knowledge of God and the self is partial. Contemplation is radical attention to the other: our proving ground is

⁷⁷ Loades, "Dympna Revisited."

⁷⁸ See Graham Ward, "Divinity and Sexuality: Luce Irigaray and Christology," *Modern Theology* 12, no. 2 (1996): 221–37; Graham Ward, "Theology and Masculinity," *Journal of Men's Studies* 7, no. 2 (1999): 281–86; Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000); Graham Ward, "There Is No Sexual Difference," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 76–85.

⁷⁹ Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 83, original emphasis.

⁸⁰ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 88–92.

⁸¹ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 74–75, 84–85.

practicing this with relation to other humans, the better to be able to attend to the divine.⁸² Thus far, she has gone a long way with those apophatic theologians who are her inspiration, such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, as well as with contemplatives who were more direct interlocutors of Anglican theologians, including Evelyn Underhill: though, as Ashley Cocksworth hints, the fact that Coakley and Ward do not necessarily characterize what they are doing in their systematic theological work as distinctively Anglican is itself significant.⁸³ Coakley and Ward are both, notes Cocksworth, of a generation inclined to be circumspect about the possibility and good of all-encompassing systematic projects, and while Coakley situates her theology in patterns of prayer and clearly sees the centrality of prayer as Anglican, this, argues Cocksworth, functions not in a totalizing but a destabilizing way.⁸⁴ However, Tonstad has held that Coakley may be insufficiently reflexive about the ways in which such obedient receptivity-in-contemplation can become weaponized by rapacious institutional machines such as the prison system,⁸⁵ even if Coakley's purported intent is to recognize God's profound distinction from human structures.

Coakley's theological accounts of sex and gender clearly interact with her wider theological concerns. For Coakley, God is Father more truly and profoundly than any human father is a father, and it is in and through this recognition that all inadequate modes of fatherhood are shown up as such—so feminists not only *can* but *must* call God their Father.⁸⁶ In other words, what looks like a quietist reinforcement of an unremarkable convention can actually be read as subversive. That pragmatic form of working from the inside might function as a cipher for much of contemporary Anglican adherence despite the fact that people on various sides of the gender and sexuality debates hold the mainstream institutional line to be inadequate.

However, the problem is always that it is frequently hard to discern the difference between remaining within an institution to subvert it and remaining within an institution to uphold it. While Coakley wants to hold that there is an important distinction between “the voluntary silence of attention” and “*being silenced*,”⁸⁷ I suspect, with Tonstad, that thus far she has not done enough to interrogate the real and pervasive structural sin which makes it impossible to identify oneself out of one's oppression. While Coakley may accuse some feminist theology of “remaking God in its own image,”⁸⁸ the risk is the implication that—invocations of apophasis aside—Coakley knows the *real* nature of God more authentically than these feminist theologians do. And, after all, if feminist and queer theologies (for example) were really happy to worship a God of their own construction, made in their own image, as Coakley hints they do, there would be far less pain and anxiety among feminist and queer theologians attending how to continue in

⁸² Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 83.

⁸³ Ashley Cocksworth, “On Prayer in Anglican Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 22, no. 3 (2020): 383–411.

⁸⁴ Cocksworth, “On Prayer.”

⁸⁵ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 120.

⁸⁶ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 367.

⁸⁷ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 84, original emphasis.

⁸⁸ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 76.

relationship with, or deal with the legacies of, a tradition which has so often been abusive and toxic yet also contained flashes of life-giving sustenance. I do not really recognize from Coakley's account those theologies that take most seriously the pains and tensions of abiding with a tradition that has done oneself and others harm,⁸⁹ working out (per Judith Butler) what it might really mean to make a "livable life" in their context.⁹⁰ Indeed, while Coakley calls for renewed attention to hope, she has perhaps missed how profoundly and complexly this is operative in queer accounts of survivance, which acknowledge that hope is cold comfort for those who have (as in contexts of literal or cultural genocide) seen their entire communities eradicated.⁹¹

Coakley ostensibly comes to matters of sex and gender only *after* she has attended to questions of the divine: Tonstad observes, "it is on grounds of a particular account of the trinity that Coakley sees gender becoming fluid inside divine desire."⁹² Thus, Coakley can almost sidestep attention to matters such as homosexuality by asking, rhetorically, "What orientation could be more important than the orientation to *God*, to divine desire?"⁹³ Yet, of course, holding such things as secondary is in some accounts a luxury affordable only to those whose legitimacy is not continually threatened on their grounds. Even if Coakley's stated intention of "putting desire for God above all other desires, and . . . judging human desires only in that light"⁹⁴ is worthy, it is not unproblematic: such a strategy has been used by others to tell LGBTQI+ people that their deepest loves and flashes of self-knowledge are ultimately empty, in a way that very rarely happens to straight and cis people.

Coakley wants to hold that desire is a divine quality before it is a human one,⁹⁵ but it seems to me that it is her prior recognition and awareness that many theologies have *not* done justice to the goods and needs of poor women (for example) that leads her to such

⁸⁹ This is what Lauren Berlant describes as "cruel optimism": our ongoing attachments to and longings for things we know are bad for us, such that "the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially"—Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

⁹⁰ Butler's concept of livability is most clearly set out in Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 19ff, and Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009). While both texts are most explicitly about the context of war, notably, the neoliberal "war on terror," they more generally contend that the conditions for livable life include being recognized and comprehended by others. Thus, the good life is predicated on one's creating conditions which render others intelligible, even as we might seek to deconstruct the social norms which meant that only certain forms of living were deemed intelligible in the first place.

⁹¹ Compare Laurel C. Schneider, "More than a Feeling: A Queer Notion of Survivance," in *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies*, ed. Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchal, and Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 258–76, here 270, building on Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

⁹² Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 101.

⁹³ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 10.

⁹⁴ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 11.

⁹⁵ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 10.

a keen awareness of desire's freighted, Janus-faced nature. Tonstad, too, remarks on the centrality of sexuality for Coakley's account of the Trinity, and "the focus on marital relations as paradigmatically and particularly indicative of the divine-human relation,"⁹⁶ even where Coakley would want to hold that these things are actually subsidiary. Coakley means the immanent Trinity to come first and sexual-gendered metaphors just to be a way into them, yet I wonder whether, like Barth, she risks mixing up the recognizable normative gender relationships of her time with the best or only possible arrangements, thus giving them alone a cosmic significance that may be unjustified.

Ward and Coakley are two examples of Anglicans whose work on sexuality, gender, and desire has fed into their awareness that tradition must remain open to new insights and must show a capacity for critical self-interrogation (as seen also, e.g., in Ward's own more recent discussions of decolonizing theology, developed in conversation with Australian and South African theologians).⁹⁷ Tonstad's critique of their work is a salient reminder that sexuality and gender are areas so resonant with the potential for exploitation and imbalances of power that it is particularly important that theological reflection on them continues its own self-scrutiny as well as speaking out when it sees injustices elsewhere.

Anglicanism and incompleteness

"Incompleteness," hold Stephen Burns and Bryan Cones following Michael Ramsey, "is a merit of Anglicanism."⁹⁸ For Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury during the 1960s and 1970s, kenotic, self-giving love should mark all Anglican Christian action. Thus, despite his theological emphasis on glory, this meant not triumphalism or self-aggrandizement, but a recognition of the inversion of honor that has come about in Christ.⁹⁹ That, he insisted, went just as much for individual churches' self-understandings as for those of individual humans. The idiosyncratic or too-localized interest in a particular congregation or denomination had to cede ground to the Church universal, not holding too fast to or setting too much store by its own importance or exceptionalism.¹⁰⁰ Mike Higton, however, urges a certain caution about supposing that such incompleteness as identified by Ramsey is actually any truer of the Anglican churches than of plenty of other churches, and Higton notes that his own Anglican denomination, the Church of England, "is not especially good. It is not especially moderate, not especially peaceable, not especially innocent. We are one more messed-up church among others."¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 104.

⁹⁷ Graham Ward, "Decolonizing Theology," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (2017): 561–84.

⁹⁸ Stephen Burns and Bryan Cones, "Un/Usual Suspects," in *Twentieth Century Anglican Theologians*, ed. Stephen Burns, Bryan Cones, and James Tengatenga (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), x–xxi, here x.

⁹⁹ A. Michael Ramsey, *God, Christ and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 100.

¹⁰⁰ See discussion in Lizette Larson Miller, "Arthur Michael Ramsey (1904–1988)," in *Twentieth Century Anglican Theologians*, ed. Stephen Burns, Bryan Cones, and James Tengatenga (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 65–72, here 71.

¹⁰¹ Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine*, 18.

That said, incompleteness can still be a good for Anglican churches even if it is not a uniquely or even particularly distinctively Anglican good. An ecclesiology informed by Ramsey's account of incompleteness might, then, need to recognize the reality of the possibility of a given church's impending death. If in Christ there is a new creation, with the old having gone and the new having come; and if in the sacraments those who are in Christ continue to die with and be resurrected in him; then we must take seriously the possibility that there will sometimes be what feel like brutal breaks from our common pasts. Anglicanism often seems to be characterized by a kind of cultural nostalgia. One thing with which it struggles to come to terms is the loss of moral authority attending Christian churches in general in many jurisdictions, exacerbated in those quarters such as England where secularization is well-advanced and disestablishment seems ever more plausible. Anglican Christians' responses to matters of gender and sexuality have frequently been marked by pragmatism, as with phenomena such as the ordination of Florence Li Tim-Oi to the Anglican priesthood in China in 1944 because of a shortage of suitable male candidates during wartime, long before women were ordained elsewhere (as Kwok Pui-lan notes, "As always, such an innovative attempt began at the periphery, but had rippling effects in the whole church").¹⁰²

Charlotte Methuen holds that Anglican bishops making resolutions on gender and sexuality at the Lambeth Conferences have "generally proved responsive to the same trends which were shaping the secular laws of the world in which they lived":¹⁰³ yet it is clearly not as simple as saying that more liberal views on sex and gender in the world are mirrored by those in the church, for church leaders often specifically seek to stand over against what they consider too-liberalizing shifts and make the church a beacon in the darkness. Figures such as Donald MacKinnon and John Robinson recognized in the 1960s that the Church of England's power was fading, and that establishment was a poisoned chalice, whereby "those involved in ecclesial structures cling obstinately to the fading memory of a position they once enjoyed."¹⁰⁴ This has only accelerated in the intervening years, with the church having singularly failed to come to terms with the fact that it has lost both cultural cachet and moral authority. This is particularly striking when it comes to the church's capacity to contribute to, let alone to shape, discussions on gender and sexuality in wider society. Accelerated by abuse scandals across a range of denominations and traditions, Christian clergy—Anglican bishops among them—are increasingly likely either to be viewed with more suspicion than deference, or—more likely—disregarded entirely.

¹⁰² Kwok, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology*, 59.

¹⁰³ Methuen, "The Lambeth Conference," 94.

¹⁰⁴ Donald M. MacKinnon, *Kenotic Ecclesiology: Select Writings of Donald M. MacKinnon*, ed. John C. McDowell, Scott Kirkland, and Ashley John Moyses (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 169–70; see discussion in John C. McDowell, "Donald M. MacKinnon (1913–1994)," in *Twentieth Century Anglican Theologians*, ed. Stephen Burns, Bryan Cones, and James Tengatenga (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 73–81.

Outside England, the largest Anglican churches in the world are those in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, South India, and South Sudan. With the exception of South India, all these provinces' leaderships are distinctly conservative on matters of sexuality and gender. Bishops from Nigeria and Uganda (and Rwanda) declined to attend the 2022 Lambeth Conference, and some conservative leaders from other Provinces chose not to take communion at the Lambeth Conference Eucharist services. As the center of Anglican gravity shifts even more beyond the North Atlantic, it is likely that those Anglican voices which oppose the consecration of same-sex relationships and which remain circumspect about women's leadership will become even more significant within the Anglican Communion. It is no coincidence that, as Andrew Goddard observes, the Anglican Communion's most sustained discussions of same-sex relationships began to occur in the 1980s and 1990s which was "also the period of its geographical and theological reconfiguration through the rise of the southern, and generally more conservative and evangelical, churches."¹⁰⁵

Charles Erlandson suggests that such reconfigurations may go hand in hand with a certain Anglican diffidence about admitting that Anglicanism has a viable future at all.¹⁰⁶ Over-anticipating one's shortcomings and failures can be a defense mechanism—one cannot easily diminish someone by pointing out their flaws if they have already pointed out their own—but this can function in a deeply passive-aggressive way so as to actually head off and deflect further criticism. Erlandson's characterization of those Anglicans who do not accept the legitimacy of same-sex marriage as the orthodox ones shows his hand clearly. He has a point that in this context a desire to show that one camp is distinctively different from the other when it comes to beliefs about homosexuality has led to more entrenched positions in how so-called "traditionalists" otherwise do their theology. Thus, he asks, "Is it possible . . . that what primarily unites orthodox Anglicans, in addition to their allegiance to the Bible, is a shared rejection of homosexuality and liberalism?"¹⁰⁷ Indeed, he suggests that it is *specifically* in response to what he holds to be the overly-liberal positions on sexuality held by TEC that what he characterizes as "orthodox," "traditionalist" Anglicans are undertaking both theological and ecclesial realignment.¹⁰⁸ This is a strikingly self-aware observation and one which I am not sure that most of those Anglicans who are either vocally for or vocally against same-sex marriage and the consecration of people with same-sex spouses as priests or bishops have really reflected on. While I do not share all of Erlandson's theological convictions by any means, I think he rightly identifies that wrangles over sexuality are actually really to do with contested norms of power, scriptural authority, relationships in and to real and perceived hierarchies, and questions about the possibility of a continued coherent Anglican

¹⁰⁵ Goddard, "Sexuality and Communion," 422.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Erlandson, *Orthodox Anglican Identity: The Quest for Unity in a Diverse Religious Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 1. Erlandson's own denomination is the Reformed Episcopal Church, a denomination with Anglican heritage and sensibilities but at the time of writing not a member congregation of the Anglican Communion.

¹⁰⁷ Erlandson, *Orthodox Anglican Identity*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Erlandson, *Orthodox Anglican Identity*, 5.

identity (and on identities for particular churches based more in geography than in interests and convictions).¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Mike Higton holds that disagreements between (Anglican) Christians, including those on which people with different convictions are most intransigent, should not become grounds for separation:

We . . . need to shift from a pattern of imagination in which doctrinal decisions mark out ever more precisely a territory of true theology separated from error, and towards one in which those decisions, even if we continue to think them necessary, mark out divisions across the body of Christ. They always involve complex gains and losses; they always leave misapprehension, disappointment and failure on both sides of the divide.¹¹⁰

There might, indeed, be an argument for making failure a more central part of any reflective theological method realistic about human beings and their social worlds.¹¹¹ Still, sympathetic as I am both to the rigor of Higton's work and the irenic, humane manner in which it is always conducted—which supposes the best of all interlocutors, and which resists playing the player rather than the ball—I want to sound a note of caution about the language of “both sides,” for similar reasons to Enya Doyle.¹¹² In other contexts, this has been shown up to be an insidious means of granting more viability and more heft to an argument (or to a group of its supporters) than it can really stand on intellectual grounds. After all, those scientists who deny that there is a human element to climate change during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are in a tiny minority worldwide: thus, setting them up in opposition to the overwhelming weight of the science as two perspectives with equivalent value risks misrepresenting the actual situation. It is not, of course, that the majority is always right: rather, it is that the very structure of formal debate is set up so as to give a falsely equal platform to perspectives of quite different kinds, often obscuring the weight of support and rigor that lies behind each. When an institution gives a public platform to a given belief, it lends credibility to that belief: in short, by showcasing it, it makes it more thinkable,

¹⁰⁹ Erlandson, *Orthodox Anglican Identity*, 166.

¹¹⁰ Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine*, 80.

¹¹¹ Appeals to failure are on the ascendant within Anglican and other theologies, often influenced by the turn to failure in queer and affect theory, notably in Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, and J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). They tend to be more apocalyptically-inclined, and with less sense of a possibility of redemption, than Higton's own work. See, for instance, Miguel De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); Marika Rose, *A Theology of Failure: Žižek Against Christian Innocence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); Marika Rose, *Theology for the End of the World* (London: SCM Press, 2023); Jarel Robinson-Brown, *Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer: The Church and the Famine of Grace* (London: SCM Press, 2021).

¹¹² Doyle, “Let My Voice Be Heard.”

such that it may gain more traction simply through its familiarity. Flat-earthers may be considered harmless cranks in most circumstances; those who hold that mass vaccination programs such as that rolled out during the COVID-19 pandemic are a cynical ploy on the parts of governments to secretly implant microchips in their recipients and thereafter harvest their data are less benign, given that the snowballing of such beliefs has a detrimental impact on society as a whole by significantly decreasing the take-up of the vaccine. Thus, there might in principle be matters which are so evidently matters where there are *not* two “equal sides,” but rather positions differentially marked by their communication of an external gauge of justice and rightness, that it is not possible to hold space for both within a given institution.

It remains to be seen whether the discussion on sexuality and gender will become yet more polarized within the Anglican Communion, even if entrenched positions lead to an ever-widening gulf between popular social attitudes to matters of gender and sexual equality and Anglican ones. While Ian T. Douglas argued in the early 2000s that Anglicanism “up until very recently, has rested on the philosophical and theological formularies of the Enlightenment that value either/or propositions, binary constructs, and dualistic thinking,”¹¹³ even more recently than *that* we have seen greater appeal to fluidity, uncertainty, and ambiguity, informed by proper engagement with these themes in a wealth of feminist and queer theologies by and informed by women and LGBTQI+ people.¹¹⁴ If Anglicanism is able to survive beyond the death of Enlightenment certainties, this will be in part thanks to those Anglicans and others who have shown that this death is no more the end than Christ’s own death was but rather heralds a new creation and renewed way of being in the world. Here Anglicanism’s own serious conversations with those whose insights are explicitly informed by gender and sexuality concerns—especially as these pertain to equality and justice—are coming to inform its doctrine, worship, and liturgy too. If Paul Avis¹¹⁵ is right that in such a broad church doctrinal agreement is likely to remain elusive but modes and patterns of liturgy and organization may continue to hold Anglicans together nonetheless, the question of how resilient is a distinctively Anglican polity remains live.

¹¹³ Ian T. Douglas, “The Exigency of Times and Occasions: Power and Identity in the Anglican Communion Today,” in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2001), 25–46, here 30.

¹¹⁴ Some of the best, from both within and beyond the Anglican tradition, include Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Heyward, *Keep Your Courage*; Tonstad, *God and Difference*; Thelathia Nikki Young, *Black Queer Ethics, Family, and Philosophical Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018); Robinson-Brown, *Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer*; and Anna Mercedes, *Interrupting a Gendered, Violent Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022).

¹¹⁵ Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*.

Author's Note

I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for *Anglican Theological Review* for their constructive comments and feedback on this paper, which helped me to strengthen the discussion in several areas.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author biography

Susannah Cornwall is Professor of Constructive theologies at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom, and Director of EXCEPT, the Exeter Centre for Ethics and Practical Theology. Her books include *Constructive Theology and Gender Variance: Transformative Creatures* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), *Un/familiar Theology: Reconceiving Sex, Reproduction, and Generativity* (Bloomsbury, 2017), *Controversies in Queer Theology* (SCM Press, 2011), and *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (Routledge, 2010). She was a member of the Theology working party for the Church of England's Living in Love and Faith project on human sexuality.