

AFI 2018 Fuerteventura – Spain

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN ON THE EARTH:

The church as an instrument of God's voice on issues of morality in the light of the changing times

LESSONS FROM MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES D.Olowu, RCCG, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Introduction

I have read the three articles sent to us with great interest and would like to add this piece which focuses on lessons from some of the largest denominations of Christianity throughout our world on the challenges that confronted the church in serving as God's voice in changing times. We then place this side by side with the prophetic insights of the Lord Jesus Christ and His eschatological explanations on what exists in our world presently and some coping strategies He proposed.

1. EXPERIENCES OF SOME SELECTED MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS

The Roman Catholic Church and Compulsory Celibacy.

Besides the news of the Pope—his travels or messages—the next most high trending issue on the global church in the secular print and online media are the cases of sexual misconduct among the top echelon of the leadership of this premier global denomination, some going back to several decades before now. The question is how did this denomination arrive at this present juncture today? The clear answer is doctrinal misdirection based most likely on pragmatic considerations of the day. In the years before the Protestant reformation scripture was the exclusive preserve of the top clergy and was not accessible to the masses of the laity. The doctrine of compulsory celibacy is clearly in contradiction to the clear new testament teaching that celibacy is a gift and that ordinarily the bishop must be the husband of one wife.

It is indeed one of the heresies of the last days would be that forbid marriage (1 Cor. 7: 7-9; 1 Tim.3.2, 4:3).

The issue remains contentious among different factions of this global denominational community till today, with some making a case for marriage of the clergy. In some extreme cases in several parts of the world, some members of this denominational clergy have been compelled to live double-lives (official celibacy; unofficial monogamy).

An assessment by a secular print media of the first year in office of the present Pope is revealing on the subject-matter of the church's voice on social justice and morality:

No one can dispute the fact that Jorge Mario Bergoglio has had an extraordinary year since being elected to lead the Roman Catholic Church last March. Every gesture, from [his choice of the name Francis](#) to his [penchant for cold-calling parishioners](#), has endeared him with a most unusual fanclub, including atheists and gays. He has been on the cover of the Advocate and Rolling Stone and he was [voted Time's Man of the Year](#). He also attracts tens of thousands of Catholics and curious onlookers to his weekly Sunday blessings and Wednesday audiences in St. Peter's square—something that hasn't been seen in Rome since the early days of John Paul II. He even has [his own fanzine](#) and [smartphone app](#).

But just as the Pope's pedestrian popularity grows, bolstered no doubt by a savvy public relations move from within the Vatican to get the 'good news' message out to the mainstream press, there are a growing number of dissident voices from deep within the Catholic community who aren't exactly impressed with the so-called "[Francis effect](#)" on the church as a whole.

In fact, toeing the new party line instilled by Francis is proving to be the greatest challenge for conservative Catholics who are quite used to a prudent and predictable Pope. Francis's comments about showing mercy to divorced couples, [not judging gay priests](#) and even toying with further examination of civil unions outside the church have proven to be tough for conservative Catholics to swallow. John Vennari, noted Catholic observer and editor of "The

Catholic Family News," has been pounding a steady drumbeat on the danger of Francis's widespread populist appeal since his election a year ago. "He seems to have a good heart and some good Catholic instincts, but theologically he is a train wreck—remarkably sloppy," Vennari [wrote in a recent blog post](#). "Though this might shock some readers, I must say that I would never allow Pope Francis to teach religion to my children."

The Baptist Church and Homosexuality

The issue of homosexuality has divided the Baptist church which is especially popular denomination in the United States of America. A release by a segment of the leadership at the end of the church's annual conference reads:

A coalition of over 150 evangelical leaders released a manifesto on Tuesday reiterating their belief that marriage should be between a man and a woman.

Titled the "[Nashville Statement](#)," the document also asserts that God created two distinct sexes, that sex should only occur within the bounds of heterosexual marriage, and that "it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism."

The statement emerged out of a meeting convened by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood on Friday at the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's annual conference in Nashville. It consists of 14 statements of affirmation and denial relating to human sexuality.

For instance, Article 7 of the statement reads:

WE AFFIRM that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture.

WE DENY that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.

Among the signers were many prominent and influential evangelical leaders, including Steve

Gaines, president of The Southern Baptist Convention, Russell Moore, president of the SBC's

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council. Perkins was also reportedly one of the architect's behind President Donald Trump's ban on transgender service members.

CBMW president Denny Burk said the statement aimed to mitigate Christians' "confusion" over issues of sexuality.

"The spirit of our age does not delight in God's good design of male and female.

Consequently, confusion reigns over some of the most basic questions of our humanity," he told HuffPost. "The aim of The Nashville Statement is to shine a light into the darkness – to declare the goodness of God's design in our sexuality and in creating us as male and female."

Though several Christian denominations, including the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), have affirmed same-sex marriage in recent years, the Southern Baptist Convention has been squarely and unwaveringly opposed to anything other than heterosexual marriage.

In a preamble, the leaders explained that the document is a response to what they feel to be an "increasingly post-Christian" culture.

"This secular spirit of our age presents a great challenge to the Christian church," they wrote.

But critics in the Christian community noted the bizarre and even "callous" timing of the document's release and warned that it would do more harm than good.

Brandan Robertson, a Christian pastor and LGBTQ activist who helped organize a protest at the Ethics and Religious Liberty Conference last week, said the statement will further marginalize sexual and gender minorities in the church.

The Anglican Communion

The Church of England has also been split down the middle on this same issue—with the liberals in the western world seeking total separation from the conservative members of the Anglican communion. It took the courage and wisdom of the current Archbishop of Canterbury to have a formulation that continues to hold the whole communion together as

one entity. This report on the Anglican Communion conference in Lambeth, England in 2016 is instructive:

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby is the Anglican communion's spiritual head

This week could mark the last rites for the Anglican communion as a truly global Church.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has called the 38 Primates or leaders from the global communion to a make-or-break meeting in Canterbury, where the bitter divides over gay rights and same-sex marriage are expected to dominate discussions.

The main question ahead of the meeting is not whether but when church leaders from up to six African countries may choose to leave the summit.

The communion itself has been likened to a lengthy marriage that is now coming to an end, with many wondering whether this is the time to move into separate bedrooms, and tell the children, or to decide to file for a divorce - and whether that split can be managed amicably.

Gay priests

One Church of England source has termed it 80% likely that some will walk out of the meeting after the agenda has been agreed, as those who - on Biblical grounds - are firmly against accepting homosexuality want an apology and repentance from the liberals within the US Church for appointing openly gay priests and bishops.

After years of sniping and sometimes open warfare, the Most Reverend Justin Welby is keen to move the Anglican Church - and the more than 80 million followers that it claims around the world - beyond the issue of sexuality to focus on what he and others see as the real challenges - global violence in the name of religion, climate change and poverty.

In the face of such intractable differences over Christians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, Lambeth Palace may well suggest that the communion reshapes itself into a loose confederation of churches, which can be joined by those who wish to do so, rather than trying to shoehorn radically different world views into one grouping led by Canterbury.

'Open depravity'

The current disagreement boiled over into open hostilities when the Episcopal Church in the US consecrated the openly gay (and non-celibate) priest Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003.

Image copyright PA Image caption The consecration of openly gay American Bishop Gene Robinson proved controversial

That split the Church openly in the US, with the breaking away of the traditionalist Anglican Church of North America (ACNA).

Its Archbishop, Foley Beach, who termed that consecration "open depravity" and "sin", has also been invited to parts of the meeting in Canterbury, although ACNA is not an official part of the Anglican communion, to the dismay of some liberals.

Anglican Communion

The key meeting will take place in Canterbury

- *Made up of 38 autonomous national and regional Churches plus six Extra Provincial Churches and dioceses*
- *The Archbishop of Canterbury is the Communion's spiritual head*
- *There is no Anglican central authority such as a pope. Each Church makes its own decisions, guided by recommendations from the Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates' Meeting and the Archbishop of Canterbury*
- *In 1968 those gathered at the Lambeth Conference decided the individual churches needed more regular contact than a once-a-decade conference of bishops. The Anglican Consultative Council, which features laity, priests and deacons, met for the first time the following year*
- *The Primates' Meeting was established in 1978 by Archbishop Donald Coggan (101st Archbishop of Canterbury) as an opportunity for "leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation" and has met regularly since*

Archbishop Beach's views are likely to find an ally in Archbishop Stanley Ntagali - the leader of the Anglican church in Uganda - where active homosexuality is a criminal offence.

Last week, Archbishop Ntagali warned on his website that he would walk out of the meeting of Primates if "discipline and Godly order" were not restored to the communion.

Likewise, Archbishop Eliud Wabukala of Kenya has warned against the global "ambitions of a secular culture", calling for a return to Gospel beliefs.

Both are members of the group of conservative Anglican churches known as GAFCON (Global Anglican Future), whose General Secretary Peter Jensen has said that "truth matters even more than institutional unity".

GAFCON's members see themselves as "authentic" Anglicans who follow Gospel values, and the group could ultimately form the leadership of those conservative churches if this meeting leads to a formal schism - although that would be a lengthy bureaucratic process, needing agreement from church members in the relevant Anglican province.

Given the fractious Primates' meetings of the past, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has done well simply in persuading all 38 Primates to meet around one table this week, using much of the personal capital he built up during his visits to every single Anglican province around the globe.

Anguished discussion

Whatever happens at the meeting itself, he has done all he can to make the relationship work, although it is increasingly clear that the current institutional arrangement is no longer fit for purpose, given such deep disagreements over a fundamental issue.

The more liberal provinces that are open to changing Church doctrine on marriage in order to allow for same-sex unions include Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, Scotland, South India, South Africa, the US and Wales.

Image copyright Anglican Church in North America Image caption Traditionalist Archbishop Foley Beach will be at Canterbury

However, England is one of the countries where that bitter divide over sexuality is already at the heart of much anguished discussion and debate.

With equal marriage now part of civil law in England, the Church's insistence that it should not form part of Canon law is increasingly contested by some of its own clergy and members of its congregation.

But this church still has several other issues dividing it. One of these is women priests and polygamy.

2. CHRIST 'S EXPLANATION, PREDICTION AND CONTAINMENT STRATEGY

The most significant thing on the above matter is that the new testament especially predicted clearly that these types of developments would happen within the church especially in the latter days. See 1 Tim.4. 1-5, 2 Tim.3.1-5.

The Lord Jesus Christ devoted substantial portions of His teaching to this subjectmatter while He was on earth. His most memorable parables on this matter was recorded for us by Matthew—especially chapter 25 –although some others exist in other chapters of the book and of course in all the gospels.

The most astounding among these parables is the one on the TEN VIRGINS. The concept of virgin, represented the chaste church which the Lord Jesus Christ taught He would be coming for at His second coming.

Due to the long time it took for the bridegroom to return, ALL the virgins slept off. He had in other parables discussed the serious consequences of slumber and sleeping workers as it relates to the Kingdom of God. Mt. 13. 24-25, The enemy sows evil tares in the field to compete with the seeds. Moreover, when the demons are driven out of a person's life, these demons cross check to know if the life is occupied by someone else. Otherwise the demons look for 7 more wicked demons and aggravates and worsens their host's situation.

They were no doubt evangelical and possibly Pentecostal Christians—since they had their lamps—representing the word of God, Ps. 119.105, oil in the lamps-representing some

familiarity with the Holy Spirit and finally, were waiting for the bridegroom, the condition for rapture Heb.9.28.

But what saved the day for the wise virgins is the fact that they had extra oil. They were able to keep their lamps burning for a longer time.

The key question then is what does this extra oil represent...

We hazard to say that it represents five things:

1. Doctrinal fidelity...the closer our doctrines reflect the scriptures and especially the words of the Lord the better. He had said that all scripture speaks of Him. Jn. 5. 39. Besides there is a need for the resuscitation of meditation as consistently taught in the old and new testaments (Josh.1.8; Ps.1.1-3, 1 Tim.3.13-15, Rev.1.3).
2. Good Home Training or strong families...The minister must demonstrate good home training and must succeed first in his own home before he can lead the church of the Lord. This must be a litmus test according to 1 Tim.3.5. The wise virgins were taught at home on the need to prepare for the unexpected, including delays and challenges as Christ warns us all Jn. 16.33.
3. Gifts of the Holy Spirit –fire power, and 1 Cor. 12.1-14, 31.
The use of these gifts brings the miraculous and excitement into the work of the Lord...making it easier to have larger number of new converts to the faith. It has been one of the major ways by which the Pentecostal arm of Christianity has become the fastest growing branch of that faith (Haynes 2010)
4. Fruit of the Holy Spirit...wisdom power Gal. 5. 22–24, 16. These work on the character of the individual and the church. They are essential to keep the congregation and also for the individual Christian to make the rapture, an increasing reality of our day. They are wisdom fruit because they work on great principles—e.g. the mercy would experience mercy, peace begets peace just as love does the same.
5. Balancing the Person and Principles of Christ: Many post-Christian societies have benefitted greatly from the principles of Christ but have left the Person of Christ and of course His Holy Spirit behind. On the other hand, the centers of new Christian growth in Asia, Latin America and Africa, focus on the Person of Christ and less on His principles. It is clear that both are necessary for the church to continue to be relevant for the transformation of the society.

The above five elements would ensure that our fire would be forever burning on the altar when He arrives to take us away. In the meantime, the five ensures that we have impact on the environment we are located. The Christian church was extremely successful at this leading to publications with themes such as: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1958). Unfortunately, we lost this high ground. Our focus must be on how to re-occupy this higher ground in these last days.

Conclusion: The church is meant to be the salt and light of the world. The imagery is perfect. Only a little light is needed to drive away darkness just as only a little salt makes the soup tasty. As leaders, it is what we are that matters. This is our basis and locus for speaking with a voice that resonates honorably and powerfully to our world enabling us to transform our societies.

REFERENCES

Blumberg, Antonia (2017) Queer Voices-The Nashville Statement: Evangelical Leaders release Anti-LGBTQ Statement on Human Sexuality.

The Beast (2014), The Secret Pope Francis Haters, March 5.

Hanes, Jeffry Ed. (2010) *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, London

Weber, Max (1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York, Scribners

Wyatt, Caroline (2016) Anglican Communion's Bitter Divide over Gay Rights, Yahoo.News (January 11)