

Submission regarding Proposed change to Canon 21

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1. Some of the core beliefs of the Anglican church are clearly articulated in our 39 Articles of Religion (Articles). Although all the Articles are important, I wish to point out a couple of the Articles pertinent to the proposed changes to Canon 21, Articles 6 and 20:

VI Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation.

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

XX. Of the Authority of the Church.

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

These phrases alone should caution us from moving toward this Canon 21 change. I hold to a very high view of Scripture, as do many other Anglicans, as articulated in the Articles and other Christian documents (such as The Westminster Confession; Lambeth Conference 1998, 3.1; The Lausanne Covenant; etc.). I believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God (as did Thomas Cranmer - *Confutation of Unwritten Verities*) and not simply some 'historical document' - one view presented in This Holy Estate (THE). If it is simply an 'historical document', who decides what sections of it are Truth?

Although the folks who favour this change to Canon 21 often claim to believe these same Articles and other fundamental Christian doctrines (they may or may not), the perception I am left with is not helpful. I am reminded of the words of CS Lewis when he said, 'Our [preachers] business is to present that which is timeless (the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow – Hebrews 13:8) in the particular language of our own age. The bad preacher does exactly the opposite: he takes the ideas of our own age and tricks them out in the traditional language of Christianity.' *God in the Dock* p 93.

2. Over the past several years I have become aware of a predominant ideology prevalent in many churches in the Western world. I wonder how many Anglican parishioners would identify with this set of statements:

- we teach and model a moralistic approach to life, that is being nice, kind, pleasant, respectful, responsible, working on self-improvement, taking care of one's health, etc.; we believe that religion should be centred in being 'nice' - a posture that many believe is directly violated by assertions of strong theological conviction;
- we believe in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs - especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved Most of the time, our God keeps a safe distance;
- we cherish the deistic God of the 18th-century philosophers. This is not the God who thunders from the mountain, nor a God who will serve as judge. This undemanding deity is more interested in solving our problems and in making people happy; we like deity because he does not challenge the most basic self-centered assumptions of our postmodern age. Particularly when it comes to so-called 'lifestyle' issues, this God is exceedingly tolerant and our religion is radically undemanding;
- we are heavily influenced by the ideology of individualism that has so profoundly shaped the larger culture which in turn leads into a reflexive non-judgmentalism and a reluctance to suggest that anyone might actually be wrong in matters of faith and belief;

- we also like the fact that we haven't even had to leave our church or denomination to adapt to these beliefs, in fact, to a large extent we have 'colonized' the Christian church.
(adapted from Dr. Christian Smith – *Soul Searching*; and Dr. Albert Mohler – historical theologian)

This is hardly a bona fide biblical worldview – so how did these folks arrive here? This view is commonly referred to by sociologists as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) and is a verbal cover for an embrace of relativism. Some Christian scholars such as Dr. Michael Horton (Westminster Seminary - California) have compared this condition to Pelagianism which is specifically condemned in Article 9 of the Articles. I would posit that MTD is the dominant view in many of our churches and is the result of inadequate teaching and preaching in the area of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics), and an overwhelmingly secular society, alongside other influences.

While some of the beliefs articulated in MTD seem to be the traditional teaching of the Church, and many have merit, they do not fully '...contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.' Jude 3. Most others miss the mark altogether. Here is the crux of the matter: **this radical transformation of Christian theology and Christian belief in many churches and with many parishioners replaces the sovereignty of God with the sovereignty of the self.** In this therapeutic age, human problems are reduced to pathologies in need of a treatment plan. Sin is simply excluded from the picture, and doctrines as central as the wrath and justice of God are discarded as out of step with the times and unhelpful to the project of self-actualization. Could this ideology be one of the underlying reasons for such willing approval to changing Canon 21?

3. Canon 21 change proponents base their view on the premise that affirming and traditional views on homosexual practice are equally legitimate options for Christians. As Rollin Grams and Donald Fortson (authors of *Unchanging Witness*) point out, 'The proposal that an affirming position towards homoerotic behaviour can be consistent with traditional Christian orthodoxy falters at the starting line. Nothing could be further from the truth according to official documents of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches around the globe. A study of the Christian tradition from Biblical times to the present offers an unchanging witness to the view that homosexual relationships are one of the sins for which Jesus died and from which believers need to repent and convert. Just because a handful of contemporary scholars in the West who claim to have 'a high view of Scripture' have abandoned historic Christianity does not mean that we now have to accept two possible views in the Church on homosexuality.' They further add, 'Agreeing to disagree in a 'respectful and humanizing' tone sounds pious, but it is misguided and unloving. It is never loving to confirm people in their sin - this is pastoral malpractice. It's time for the Church to rebuke professing Christians who have embraced this false teaching about homosexuality.'

One might be able to claim that the Bible allows homosexuality – through some creative theological gymnastics (see THE) – but it is very difficult to explain away 2000 years of incredibly consistent church history. What this forces the pro canon change folks to claim is that only in the very recent past have Christians, for the first time, really understood what the Bible teaches regarding homosexuality. This would mean that every other Christian generation for 2000 years has been mean-spirited, intolerant, and prejudiced. I would argue that this could be seen as an arrogant and presumptive position.

In the context of Western society's cultural marxism (political correctness), one would think that the least a parishioner in a fair-minded Christian church could expect from their leaders would be an intellectually rigorous search for objective truth. My perception is that most of what we hear from proponents regarding changes to Canon 21 are subjective concepts, with not very much rigour. Lord have mercy.

Can a person, can a church, that walks apart from the objective truth of Scripture and from 2000 years of church history still be called 'Christian'?

Respectfully submitted