BLOG OF THE YEAR 2014

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My somewhat controversial take on the best blog of the year and an interesting shepherd who doesn't fit into the usual church narratives.
Category: Observations

It's that time of year again, the time that all good bloggers have been eagerly anticipating; the award for the Kouyanet blog of the year.

The criteria for the award are the same as they have been for the last seven years:

1. They must post regularly
2. They must be consistently interesting
3. I must like them more than other blogs for whatever subjective reasons I choose.

It should be noted that these criteria are pretty strict. The first one rules out a lot of blogs that I thoroughly enjoy, but which only feature a post every week or so. The second one rules out even more, at least as far as I am concerned. I follow quite a lot of biblical studies blogs, but while I thoroughly enjoy much of what they publish, a good deal of it is beyond my realm of interest or competence. The last criterion is the most exigent of all. There are a lot of high profile Christian blogs, which win awards at ceremonies in London which simply fail to capture my interest on any level at all. Either I'm getting picky in my old age, or the quality of Christian blogging has declined seriously, while the quantity has increased. I'll leave you to judge on that one.

However, despite these reservations, there are a few blogs that deserve an honourable mention.

- Antony Billingtonâ€™s blogÂ continues to be the place to look for news about new journals and books. I mention this blog every year, but the lack of regular posts means that it is unlikely to actually get into the top spot. But it is still excellent.
- Rob Bradshawâ€™s siteÂ BiblicalStudies.org.uk, while not a blog as such, is a wonderful resource for online journals and serious theology.
- Simon Cozens' blogÂ is always a good read, with thoughtful posts on mission and culture. However, he posts too rarely to merit the blog of the year award. That being said, what he lacks in quantity, he makes up in quality!
- Rollin Grams is another mission scholar with an excellent blog. His posts are few and far between, but they are always excellent. More like extended essays than short posts.
- The Beaker Folk of Husbourne CrawleyÂ were the last winner of this award (in 2012) and continue to produce more (and funnier) posts than any other blog I have met.

However, this year there is a clear contender for the award; a blog which has recently been relaunched, with a broadened editorial team and a new focus. Ladies and Gentlemen, I bring you (cue music and dramatic pause) Archbishop Cranmer.

I suspect this will surprise a few people and may well annoy a good number of others.

Cranmer is politically Conservative (with a large C) and ecclesiastically Anglican; neither of which term could really describe me.Â He is also, so my history books tell me, dead. However, his untimely demise has not stopped him writing extensively, from a Christian standpoint, on a range of

contemporary issues. He is always interesting, sometimes infuriating and without a doubt, worth reading. His championing of the cause of persecuted Christians around the world has been an excellent example of what a good blog could and should contribute to the national debate. Though I've read Cranmer's blog for many years and corresponded with His Grace from time to time, I've not really seen this blog as a contender for the illustrious Kouyanet award. However, two things have changed over the last year. Firstly, Cranmer's blog has merged with the God and Politics blog, bringing Gillan Scott on board as deputy editor. This has brought a welcome breadth to the coverage. However, even before the merger, I had discerned a shift away from the previous rather narrow Conservative Party/CofE focus. The blog is still Anglican and still Conservative, but these are the prisms through which a range or issues are addressed, not the primary subject matter of the blog.

You don't have to agree with Cranmer to benefit from reading him. I am not aware of a left-wing Christian blog which addresses issues as well as Cranmer does, which is a great shame. Far too many left wingers can't seem to get beyond the "#cameronmustgo", "Thatcher was evil" school of political discourse.Â Having always voted for left-wing parties, I find this rather discouraging. Can someone point me to a good left-wing blog?

***Update**: In the light of this morning's rather gratifying, but slightlyÂ embarrassingÂ post on Cranmer's blog, I should point out that I wrote this 'blog of the year' post a couple of week's ago. There has been noÂ collusionÂ or corruption!*

A quick note for those on Twitter (follow me at @kouya); my tweeter of the year is not a theologian, missionary or church leader. He is a shepherd. Not a churchy-shepherd, but a man who works on the hills with sheep. HerdyShepherd1 posts great photos of his dogs, his sheep and the Lake District fells. He also does a great job of explaining the pressures faced by Britain's hill farmers. If you are on twitter and you don't follow him, you are missing a treat.