THE YOUNG CHURCH RISES

Posted on January 18, 2016 by Eddie

This is the first step towards a re-orientation in global Christianity away from the domination by the liberal, intellectual, critical and relativistic Northern establishment and the fresh expression of a young, orthodox, vibrant and dynamic Southern Christianity.
Category: Church: World

I'm not an Anglican, and IÂ take only a passing interest in the internal politics of the CofE. The recent Primates' conference was a case in point; my twitter timeline and even the news media were full of stories and speculation about what was going on in Canterbury, but I really couldn't summon up much enthusiasm to read much of what was written.

However, what is of interest to me is the way in which the church is changing around the worldÂ and as the Primates' meeting provided an excellent example of some of the changes that are happening, I couldn't ignore it altogether. I've been pondering how to blog on this for a couple of days, but as it turns out, a couple of other bloggers have done a much better job than I would have done, so I'm going to nick some of their stuff.

Fr. Longenecker points out the way in which this recent meeting marks a shift in influence in the life of the church.

> *1. The pressure on the Anglican Church to adhere to historic Christian teaching regarding marriage was undoubtedly led by the Africans. This means young, orthodox and majority church of the developing world has formally flexed its muscles. The Africans have stood up to the historic churches of the Northern, developed world. In global terms this is very, very important.*
>
> *Any reader of John Allenâ€™s brilliant bookÂ The Future ChurchÂ will understand that Christianity is most vibrant in the global South. The church in Africa is young, dynamic, orthodox and growing compared to the aging, liberal, declining church in Europe and North America. This success by the Africans on controlling the direction of global Anglicanism is the first real sign that power is shifting away from New York and Canterbury to NigeriaÂ and Kenya.*
>
> *This means that the churches in the developing world have effectively established an alternative power structure that has successfully challenged the liberal, ruling establishment elite.*
>
> *2. This is the first step towards a re-orientation in global Christianity away from the domination by the liberal, intellectual, critical and relativistic Northern establishment and the fresh expression of a young, orthodox, vibrant and dynamic Southern Christianity.*

(I'm not sure it's the first step, but it is an important one.)

Cranmer, while pointing out that - despite all the coverage - the meeting was not about sexuality, also highlights some of the tensions in this shift in influence.

> *As Bishop Alan Wilson explained on the BBC Radio 4â€™s Today programme (1.50):*

> *"If you go into your local church in England, you go to a place thatâ€™s probably very much more like a church in America actually than one in Uganda or Nigeria, and the betting is youâ€™ll find love and tolerance, acceptance, youâ€™ll be received as an equal. So the real church, the grassroots church, is actually in a very different place."*
>
> *The inference is clear: there is no love, tolerance or acceptance to be found in those backward and barbarous Ugandan and Nigerian churches. The devil lurks therein. Whether that is a cultural truth for African homosexuals or a racist slur on black churches is for you to decide.*

According to Bishop Wilson, the "real church, the grassroots" church is a very different place to the church in Uganda or Nigeria. Excuse me, but what planet is he living on? The grassroots church, the thriving and growing Anglican church is in Uganda and Nigeria, not in the leafy suburbs of Buckinghamshire. There are far more people attending Anglican churches in Africa than in the UK and to imply that, somehow, these are notÂ *realÂ* smacks more of the British Empire in Victoria's day than it does of modern attitudes to race and diversity. Fr. Longenecker has a story which catches this attitude rather well:

> *I remember one of the stories that came out of a Lambeth Conference (the once a decade meeting of all Anglican bishops in Canterbury)*
>
> *An Episcopalian bishop got into an argument with an African over homosexuality. He finally said to the African in a patronizing, snooty Anglican way, â€œWhen you Africans become a bit more sophisticated and educated you will also come to a more subtle understanding of human sexuality.â€*
>
> *The African retorted, â€œYou are being racist! You think because I have black skin that I am an uneducated jungle man. But we African bishops have our PhDs. We have studied theology at Oxford and Cambridge. We have been to Harvard and Yale. We are not uneducated natives!â€*
>
> *The Episcopal bishop (for whom racism was the unforgivable sin) was duly chastened.*

Whether we in the West like it or not, the future of the Church will be shaped by Christians in Africa and (increasingly) in Asia and their concerns are not our concerns. We have no grounds for feeling superior or looking down on Christians in the other parts of the world; those who are quick to say that the African church is a mile wide but only an inch deep need to take a long hard look at the church in the UK before they think about condemning others. Specks of dust and planks.

Please note; this post is about the shift in the global balance of the church. It is not about sexuality. If you feel that you would like post a long comment justifying your views on human sexuality, please

feel free to do so, just don't do it here. It's an important issue, but one which is tangential to the concerns of this rather niche blog. Comments which I deem to be off topic will be deleted.