

## **Anglicanism and the Sexual Revolution**

IN a 1911 lecture about the Church's relationship with the World, WR Inge, Dean of St Paul's warned: "there are many spirits of the age, most of them evil". Later he cautioned: "If the Church marries the spirit of this age, she will be a widow in the next". Justin Welby's recent resignation is an example of what happens when the Church negotiates with evil spirits. Welby was made aware of John Smyth's long history of sadistic child abuse when he assumed office in 2013 but failed in his duty of care to act. In evaluating this failure, the context in which he was made aware became irrelevant. He had no option but to resign.

The recent Makin Report into the Church's handling of abuse allegations made recommendations relating to the abuse of power, accountability and safeguarding. Smyth's abuse was "hidden in plain sight" and a culture of "cover up" ought to be dismantled. Like other churches and institutions, the Church of England failed spectacularly.

Australia had a similar culture of failure until the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended a statutory reporting system. Also, much anti-church animus arose from the belief that someone should be held responsible, even if they did not perpetrate the abuse. The questions then became, who heard, and who had not acted when they heard? The context of how they heard was irrelevant.

Many Anglicans—among the laity as well as the clergy—are aware of abuse they did not perpetrate. Many of them have been held accountable for not reporting what they heard, despite the context. Welby's claim that the police "had been notified", and that he assumed "an appropriate resolution would follow" were insufficient.

MOVING forward will be hard, given Inge's caution against negotiating with evil spirits. When it became the Church of England at the Reformation, its fate as a universal Church was inevitably aligned with the fate of national identity. During the imperial era, it effectively defended its claim to be part of "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic" Church. But this claim was fatally compromised when it chained itself to the logical fallacies of the sexual revolution—the straw man arguments and whatabouteries around the belief that we can do anything we desire, sexually, with no negative consequences for ourselves, or others, or society.

In the secular world, the moral consequences of doing anything we desire, sexually, are evaded by advances in medicine, social welfare, and human rights, to the point where many believe moral consequences no longer exist or matter. But imagine what a life of sexual freedom looks like without managing its unwanted effects. These include—for both sexes—the results of interfering with biological reality, and the results of sexually transmissible infections.

By tradition, Anglicans intuit morality from biblical revelation and natural law, the latter defined as the ability to deduce moral behaviour by human reason apart from the biblical canon. This allowed them to harmonise the creation mandate in Genesis with science and evolution, so reinforcing the Christian anthropology of personhood—the complementarity of man and woman—before the long march through the institutions and its identity politics.

After the secular successes of feminism and gay liberation, two issues have come to dominate the Church of England, the issue of female headship, and the issue of homosexual relationships. In courting these spirits of the age—over and against the biblical canon, natural law, and the theological instincts of most Anglicans globally—the English House of Bishops is paying too much attention to progressive evil spirits while ignoring its core mission.

THERE is no shortage of women who, energised by the success of progressive secular politics, feel called to headship in the Church (which increasing numbers have achieved). Likewise, there is no shortage of practising homosexuals in the Church who, for the same reason, want their sexuality recognised as wholly compatible with the biblical canon and natural law. While these issues are separate, both are artefacts of the sexual revolution and its progressive politics. The question is whether—and how far—Anglicans can or should accommodate these secular spirits without compromising their claim to be part of the universal Church: “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.”

To date, the most senior appointment of a woman to a headship position has been Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church in the United States (2006–2015). Her leadership style was radically feminist. Her policies were unusually cruel, bankrupting and deposing those who disagreed with her. Her theology was heterodox, the cause of global schism.

To date, the most senior appointment of a practising homosexual has been Gene Robinson, Bishop of New Hampshire (2003–2013). Robinson married his husband in 2008 and they divorced in 2014. Apart from the damage done to sacramental marriage—for the sake of progressive secular politics—Robinson’s consecration brought ARCIC dialogue to an immediate end. This was the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (1967–2003), which had been working on agreed statements to advance the cause of unity. Theological recognition of practising homosexuality in the Church was a bridge too far for Rome.

The Episcopal Church has chosen to sacrifice itself on the pyre of secular identity politics and the English House of Bishops has chosen to follow suit. The optics of this are clear, Anglicans in the Anglosphere prefer to follow the evil spirits of the age than the gospel of Christ.

ANGLICANS are told to test the spirits to see if they come from God or Antichrist (1 John 4). The tests are against the biblical canon and the natural law, neither of which can be gainsaid. Biblical ideas about female headship are not as narrow as many claim them to be, since the Old and New Testaments offer many examples of women in leadership roles. Natural law is another matter, as Nature obeys her own laws and the differences between the sexes have complementary roles in evolutionary biology. This objective truth has become harder to grasp because the evil spirits of the age insist that objective truth no longer exists.

Not long before his resignation, Welby advised that the Church of England was abandoning its doctrine on marriage. Sexual intimacy outside marriage is now morally acceptable—in homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships—providing a “stable, committed and faithful relationship” exists. This is disingenuous. The Church cannot change Christian doctrine, either by synodical consensus or popular vote. Anglicans must test the spirits of the age against the biblical canon and natural law.

Jesus kept pointing beyond the Law to the creation mandate in Genesis and to the indissolubility of what God ordained. A “stable, committed and faithful relationship” can mean many things, particularly in a secular age where women are taught to believe they can be anything they desire and do not need men for anything—at all—even for insemination. This kind of postmodern moral relativism is now deeply entrenched, even among conservatives.

Welby became titular head of a Communion already divided by tensions beyond his control. In the Anglosphere, Anglicans had already chosen to identify with the sexual revolution rather than the universal church. But most Anglicans do not live in the Anglosphere, and do not believe we can do anything we desire—sexually—without negative consequences for ourselves, or others, or society.

AS the fortunes of transgender activism wane—because of hubris—those in thrall to the secular zeitgeist fall back on the idea that homosexuality is normal by comparison. Many have fallen for the logical fallacy that homosexuality and heterosexuality are functionally equivalent. When this is tested against the biblical canon, some want to argue that God is winsome, does not judge, and his love is easy-going. This is also fallacious. God is not winsome, does judge, and his love requires believing loyalty.

When the fallacy is tested against natural law, many facts confound. There is no gene to explain homosexuality, scientifically. It is an evolutionary variation; gays have male and lesbians have female sexual responses. Because these responses are different, homosexual relationships do not have the same complementarity as heterosexual relationships. The liberal tendency to equalise homosexual and heterosexual relationships is counterintuitive and is only possible by ignoring reality's nature and structure.

There is no evidence of any kind to suggest male homosexuals are capable of monogamy. It is lying to say they can be. Further, the push to legally recognise same-sex relationships is predicated on the assumption that cures and treatments can be found for the consequences of male-to-male sex—like HIV, syphilis, and mpox—because this population has significantly higher rates of STIs. Here we come to a fundamental reality: The legacy of the sexual revolution depends entirely on a civilisation's ability to neutralise its unwanted consequences.

The progressive politics of female headship and practising homosexuality are deeply entrenched in the Anglicanism of the Global North. This is putting extraordinary stress on its relationship with the Global South, and with the universal Church. In practical terms, the difference between the English House of Bishops and the Ladies of *The View* is of degree rather than kind.

THE END

Byline

Michael Giffin is an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Sydney. His latest book *Interpreting Literary Texts: A Post-Kantian Approach* was released in September 2024 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.