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## **FUTURE SHOCK A WAY FORWARD FOR ANGLICAN EVANGELICALS?**

A presentation by the Rev Canon Jim Rushton to the Blackburn Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship Annual General Meeting 30/3/09

If you're an active church member in our Church of England, and if you're not feeling under pressure, then I wonder which world you're living in! We're never out of the news, and nearly always, we're presented in a negative light. The contrast between today and 1964, the year I was ordained, cannot be exaggerated. So, as I honour the promise given two years ago to stand down as your Chairman, what better time for me to reflect on where we are today, and what hope we can have for the future. My aim this morning is to raise issues that are part of the disturbing church situation before us, knowing that there will be a variety of views about them.

It might well be asked 'Who is Jim Rushton to attempt such a task?' I can only answer that I have been a life-long Anglican with 45 years of experience in the ministry, all of it spent in the Northern Province. What have been the most formative influences on my life and ministry? There are three.

First, a Sunday evening, on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1953. I had no idea when I walked the two miles from my church to the young people's meeting at the vicarage that my life was to be irrevocably changed. That night I was arrested by the realisation that I was lost and under God's judgment. As I knelt down in my bedroom later and begged for His forgiveness, I knew what it was to have become a Christian. Nothing more fundamental has ever happened to me from that day to this.

The second was an interview two years later with the CPAS Candidates Secretary about a calling to the ministry. It led to attending a camp outside Oxford for two successive years, as a result of which, I was sure of this call, and was determined to go to St John's Durham to begin my training. The Candidates Secretary was Dick Lucas, and I'm delighted to say I formed a life-long friendship with a man whose background was totally unlike mine.

The third was a June day in 1959. It was the end of my first year at university. I was reading for a general degree and the day had come for those who had qualified to continue the course after the first year exams to be posted. In my anxiety I arranged for a friend to check the university notice board for me. I did qualify and later that day I was summoned to see the Professor of Psychology. To my amazement I was offered an Honours degree course. From that moment on I knew I would be able to fulfil the academic requirements for ordination.

The CU was the most important body I belonged to in Durham, and I served on the exec. committee, after which I represented the northern universities on the national student executive of the IVF, now UCCF. These were some of the happiest days of my life, times when my spiritual understanding and life matured, and when I was prepared for the ministry that began in 1964. Just to give you a flavour of what drove my outlook in those days three people stood out as having most influence on me. The first was Iain Murray, a former member of DICCU, and the founder of the Banner of Truth. The second was Martyn Lloyd Jones whose example of expository Bible preaching was a revelation to me, though I later came to see that his fierce Independency was mistaken. The third was Jim Packer whose leadership, along with Alec Motyer, enabled me to see how the theology of the Reformers could be applied in contemporary terms.

I share all this because I want you to know how strongly rooted I was in what is now called Conservative Evangelicalism. It is where I stand intellectually and emotionally. But

of course, what was a wonderful ideal, developed on a university campus, had to be worked out at the coal face of Church of England reality. I attended the very first NEAC at Keele in 1967, and attended every subsequent one including the November meeting in London last year. I was on General Synod from 1985-90. And I concluded my full time ministry as Area Dean of Preston, mixing with our diocesan senior staff. I can't believe that a lad from the cotton mills of Oldham could have had such a wealth of experience of our church, and made so many wonderful friends along the way. But what does all this mean for us today?

## **THE QUIET REVOLUTION**

Psychology is one of the youngest academic disciplines, often regarded as a soft option, and neither a science nor an arts subject. I had a reason for wanting to get to grips with its approach and it was this. Margaret Knight, an academic and Psychology lecturer, had appeared on BBC television, and given a public lecture at Durham, under the heading of 'Morals Without Religion'. It was my first encounter with what we now call secularism. I wanted to read Christian books on psychology, only to find that IVP had just one monograph that remotely touched on it. If I was to understand and answer people like Margaret Knight, I had to do it on my own!

Today, psychological insights affect every part of life in the modern world. My thesis is that the reason for this is to be found in the philosophical thinking, begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, through men like Rousseau and Voltaire, producing what we call modernism. I owe an immense debt to Francis Schaeffer for his series of books that examined this shift in western thought. If only he had been around twenty years earlier! There isn't space to deal with the philosophical background here, but it's true to say that ideas, regarded as off the wall 250 years ago, are now the backdrop to most people's thinking in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. It's all summed up in that line from Porgy & Bess; 'It ain't necessarily so'. Our brave new world says, what western Christendom believed God had revealed in Scripture, is not necessarily true. This is the enemy we, as Bible believing Christians, fight today.

What did you think when Barak Obama was inaugurated as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the USA? Were you impressed by the clarity of his thinking; the eloquence of his oratory; the apparent clean lines of his personal and family life etc.etc.? He is the epitome of the American dream. And the States is the most overtly Christian country in the western world. He cuts a completely different image to George Bush about whom one American journalist said, 'The loudest cheer at the inauguration was when Bush left the platform.' Well I was captured by Obama from the beginning of his campaign, and I wanted a change in the American Presidency. But, whatever positives an Obama presidency will bring, these are two of his absolutes that will affect the western world for years to come; a woman's right to decide on abortion, and the right for all kinds of sexualities to be accepted as equal life-styles.

These are typical fruits of modernism. They rest on the belief that individual freedom is a fundamental right in life, and no society, whatever its religious outlook, has the grounds for setting laws to govern personal behaviour. Individualism is the order of the day. In the student unrest in America during the Vietnam War, a leading politician brought student leaders together to plead for a greater sense of responsibility to the nation. One of the students put the simple question to him, 'Why?' The politician couldn't give an answer. When we look at some of our problems within evangelicalism, as well as in the wider church and nation, I suggest the quiet revolution of thinking, outside of biblical norms, has a lot to do with it. It comes natural for us to demand our own freedom of action, whatever others might tell us.

Of course we are not living in a modern world view today. The west is now post-modern, and even post-post-modern, whatever that means. I confess I can't get my head around a world view where rationality no longer seems relevant.

## **GENDER ISSUES**

The bitter divisions within the Anglican Evangelical world began with the creation of REFORM. There was only one catalyst for REFORM, the passing of the legislation to create Women Priests. I was a founder member of this movement, and sponsored its first meeting in Carlisle Diocese. At the root, men like Jim Packer and Wallace Benn, were arguing that the Bible was being misinterpreted to support this innovation. It led to a major row in CEEC when certain leading proponents of the women's case publicly attacked Bp. Wallace. Today's complaints that CEEC is too weighted towards conservative evangelicalism stem directly from that confrontation. I'll explain why later.

But supporters of REFORM were definitely on the back foot. I well remember sharing with a group of northern REFORM clergy in Philip Hacking's vicarage just ten years ago. Philip said; 'I can't get my congregation worked up about women priests, but homosexuality, that's a different thing. 98% of the congregation is against that.'

During the debates leading up to the vote I tried to do my bit, including the final Diocesan Synod in Carlisle, before the national vote. I was followed in the debate by the Bishop of Penrith. He had only one main argument, and it was very easy to express. He said: 'Women's right to priesthood is a simple matter of justice.' I knew he had won the majority of the synod. It wasn't an argument from scriptural texts, nor in the classical sense a theological argument. It was an argument based on modernist thinking. Of course Evangelicals supporting women's ordination use biblical and theological arguments, and I have tried to understand them, but it's clear to me that support for the measure coincided with a tide of popular opinion.

As we know, the debate today is not about whether there are gender issues for leadership within the Anglican Church. The General Synod has voted that there aren't, despite there being a sizeable minority that disagreed. The debate is about whether those who believe the issues still exist have any right to protection and continued ministry in such a church. I've agreed with those who say that this is not a gospel issue. It's a matter of order and not of saving faith. However, if you believe that Scripture's witness is to human equality within the relationship of complementary roles, how can you remain faithful to that truth without standing apart in some way from the new order? That's my personal difficulty.

Within the DEF we live with this tension. It is an area where Bible believing Christians differ, and I must respect those who sincerely believe that the Bible supports equal opportunities at all levels of ministry. I've always tried to maintain fellowship with Christians who take a different view from me, and in fact, to be honest about my own inherent male prejudices. I see no prospect of a resolution to this issue, and therefore I can only plead that all sides of this debate seek for fairness to everyone who is faithful to Anglican doctrine, and who wish to continue in ministry within the one church.

## **HUMAN SEXUALITY**

Psychology is a kind of hybrid discipline. At one end of its spectrum there is the scientific understanding of biology, particularly human biology. At the other, there is philosophy where ideas such as the relationship between the mind and body are puzzled over, to no satisfactory conclusion! I focussed on three areas; social psychology, i.e. how humans act in communities; abnormal psychology, i.e. psychiatric illness; and psychoanalysis, begun by Freud and adapted by his many followers. Though many of his theories are now under serious question there's no doubt that he has had a massive influence on current western thinking.

Put simply, Freud believed the patients he saw were crippled by the overload of guilt that came from the expectations of parents, society, and above all religion. And at the root of that guilt was the frustration of not being able to exercise the sex drive without inhibition. So a kind of slogan developed that said 'Sex is good for you'. Sexual gratification is essential to your mental well being, rather than something created for a marriage bond for the procreation of children and the strengthening of that bond.

I can give you a perfect example of this. In the 1970's I was helping a Christian young man with bi-polar symptoms. His psychiatrist was using drug treatment to control them, and his dosage was so large that he regularly fell asleep at work. I arranged to meet his

specialist and it was agreed to take him into hospital with a view to weaning him off these drugs. Wonderfully this lad was off the drugs in a week and suffered just a day of severe vomiting. However he was then counselled. He was asked, 'Why don't you go into town and find a girl to have sex with?' This was pure Freudianism. The staff exemplified this advice for, during his stay, there was a party at which condoms were liberally handed around. Well my friend survived the experience and I'm happy to say that he is now successfully married with a family.

When we look at the issue of homosexuality, as Christians, we have to put it in this broader context. And we have to admit most of us have a much more open and positive attitude to sexual behaviour than did our parents. We've all been sexualised in some way or another. Of course it's all been made possible by the development of reliable and acceptable contraceptives. We all know that state sex education programmes give full and frank information on what is available, on the basis that it's unlawful to use them under sixteen, but in the awareness that they will be used. For a majority today, having sex is a major driving force in living. When we see this is so we can understand the strength of the homosexual lobby. Why should those who experience same sex attraction be denied sexual pleasure?

From all that I have read I have come to the conclusion that people find themselves on a spectrum of sexual desire. For some, there's no doubt they're inclined towards a same-sex attraction. The reasons for this are still uncertain. I don't accept the theory that it's genetically pre-determined. I do believe factors during childhood development can play a major part. So, as Bible believing Christians, we are faced with this massive reality. Modernism has taught people that they can and must have sex, and it's their right to have it in the relationships they choose.

I believe this poses us with a number of questions that lie at the heart of the difficulties in the Anglican Communion today, and which exist as much in Britain as they do in California.

- a) Is the ideal described in Genesis 2, and affirmed by Jesus, the basis for sexual morality?
- b) Is the condemnation of homosexual behaviour in Romans 1 inclusive of all such activity, or is it restricted to certain gross behaviours in Roman society?
- c) Is the invention of contraception part of our freedom to use the creation for the betterment of the human condition?
- d) If we agree with ©, should our morality require that it is only used by married couples?
- e) Is it right to single out homosexual life-styles for criticism, or should our Christian witness be against all forms of immorality by the standards of (a)?

## **ANGLICAN WITH INTEGRITY**

We're nearing the end of this survey of the pressures facing Evangelicals in the Church of England in 2009. Before looking at the disturbing events of recent days, I want to look more generally at the grounds for an Anglican Evangelical ecclesiology. And as we do, let's be honest. There have always been powerful arguments against one. I love history, and I was privileged to study the Tudor and Stuart eras for A level. From the very beginning there were those that wanted to revise the Prayer Book more conservatively, and of course the Puritans had their opportunity of creating a completely different ecclesiastical scene during the Commonwealth. My parents were Methodists, my older sister is in the Glanton Brethren, and some of the people I most admire are not Anglicans, so I must have some reason for being an Anglican.

I believe Cranmer was right to seek reformation of the historic church thus keeping a sense of continuity. His careful and painstaking changes were not the work of a revolutionary. In so doing his fundamental leaning was towards an Augustinian rather than an Arminian theology, which is sound. The 39 Articles are not only true to the

Creeds. They describe the human condition as helpless, and see salvation as a free gift of God. And I believe Cranmer's doctrine of Scripture is right in not taking the regulatory stance of the Presbyterians, but judging all things by whether they are agreeable to the scriptures. All this theology is wonderfully expressed in Cranmer's liturgy. If I have one regret during my lifetime it is how our church has handled liturgical reform. I'm all for contemporary worship, but oh how anaemic are some of the services that now replace the Prayer Book!

I also have come to value the concept of a national church made up of pastoral centres in every part of the country, linked together by the leadership of senior priest/presbyters whom we call bishops. I know we are easy targets for criticism from those who believe in a 'pure church' who ask why the C of E has always been so broad. But the purists have their own problems, and I simply don't see independency in the New Testament, nor especially in the formative early centuries when Christian doctrine was hammered out. On the other hand, historically, the established church has had a major role in influencing our national life for the good.

So my belief is that my conservative evangelicalism is at the heart of what the C of E was designed to be, and I refuse to be intimidated by Anglo-Catholic or Liberal Churchmen, who have sometimes spoken as if we neither have a sound ecclesiological understanding, nor a theology that is truly catholic in the original sense of that word. I say this being fully aware that in numerical terms Conservative Evangelicals are a minority grouping today. I was never more aware of this than when, as vicar of the most independently minded church in our diocese, I was asked to serve Preston as its Area Dean. I was warned in my early years by an old school Evangelical that taking up posts within the church structures were slippery places. The implication was clear, don't do it, or you'll go off! I certainly had to pray and think hard but it was a joy when I was asked to preach to all the Area Deans and Senior Staff at one of their meetings. At least I had gained some respect and a hearing among them.

## **NEAC5, CEEC, AND THE FUTURE**

May I thank all those who responded to the Questionnaire circulated in September. Over twenty of you did which is probably about an average sample. Quite clearly the majority had no desire to leave the Church of England and found the question about schism difficult to deal with. However, grave concern was also revealed, with a realisation that the Anglican Communion faces serious problems. I was grateful to all who came to the June meeting with Bishop Nicholas and Chris Sugden. It was easily the most satisfying DEF meeting for me in the two years of my Chairmanship. It was held just days before the GAFCON gathering in Jerusalem. The outcome of GAFCON lies at the heart of the failure of the NEAC5 meeting on November 15<sup>th</sup> last year. I hope to explain just why our constituency seems to be in such disarray.

Let's begin by acknowledging that we all now belong to various Evangelical tribes. Togetherness has never been our strong point. Get two Evangelical clergymen together and you'll get three opinions! Bishop Stephen Neil, a sympathetic and astute observer, once said: 'Evangelicals in the Church of England have never been a party. They have always been obstinate individuals – this is their strength, but also in part, their weakness.' In 2006 we had a meeting in which four members spoke from their standpoints representing the positions of Fulcrum/Open Evangelical, Charismatic, North West Partnership and Anglican Mainstream. I confess when I suggested holding the event my motive was to let it be seen how diverse the DEF membership is, but also to give assurance that we stand as a fellowship on a common core belief. It was never meant to lead to separation between ourselves. Two things became clear to me from that morning; first, that there is considerable overlap between the various groupings, and second, that there are subtle differences within them.

This was made obvious when NEAC4 was held at Blackpool. For the first time the leadership of New Wine joined with leaders from CEEC in planning the event. That coalition was carried over into GAFCON. Meanwhile Nicky Gumble and HTB remained apart. Fulcrum was created on the eve of NEAC4 in opposition to the perceived conservatism of the planning group. Strong feelings were expressed for and against inviting Rowan Williams to the congress, and at one stage the whole thing could have

collapsed. In the event Archbishop Rowan was invited and some stayed away as a result. I hope this helps us all to see the reality of the difficulties within Anglican Evangelicalism. Thankfully we don't feel these tensions in Blackburn as much as in some other dioceses.

Add into this mix the ongoing tension over women's ministry. I mentioned the start of REFORM and the public attack on Wallace Benn. I came on to CEEC immediately after this had happened. CEEC has a large membership, designed to be representative of all Evangelical theological colleges, mission agencies, Evangelicals on General Synod, and the DEFs. As a conservative I sensed I was in a minority. It was decided that Wallace Benn and Graham Cray should lead a debate on the nature of the Bible. Wallace Benn's position came to be affirmed, and a number left CEEC including most of the Evangelical bishops. This is how CEEC came to have a conservative majority.

Related to this was Richard Turnbull's appointment as Chairman of CEEC. You may know he is the recently appointed Principal of Wycliffe Hall, where there have been a number of changes and public criticism from some involved in them. Richard is conservative in his theology but has not declared his position on women and ministry. There are women in training at Wycliffe and the faculty has divided views on the subject. Whatever, the troubles around his appointment to Oxford has mired him in the world of Evangelical politics.

NEAC5 turned on asking the assembled people to vote on a motion supporting the GAFCON Jerusalem statement, and affirming all efforts to proclaim the gospel in the Anglican Communion. As you probably know, the assembly refused to do so. There were at least three reasons why this happened. First, CEEC had not issued the wording of the motion prior to the meeting. Indeed I went not expecting there to be a motion. That was deemed to be wrong. Secondly, the Evangelical grouping supporting the ordination of women were distressed at not being formally invited to attend GAFCON and made it known during the plenary session. Thirdly, the leaders of Fulcrum led a protest against the motion. So, following General Synod rules, it was proposed that the motion be not put, and it was carried. Subsequently Richard Turnbull has resigned as Chairman of CEEC, though denying NEAC5 was the cause. I am given to understand that there are ongoing informal meeting leaders within the Evangelical movement with a view to finding a way forward in unity.

All this sounds very sad and negative. However I don't wish to end here. You may have read that the Archdeacon of Hampstead, Michael Lawson, has been elected as the new Chairman of CEEC. If my recommendation counts for anything with you, I have to say that I believe he is an excellent choice. I know Michael and have worked with him in the past.

I believe this brings us right up to date. The Anglican Communion continues to try to resolve the problems created by TEC and the Canadian Church. The recent Primates' meeting in Alexandria seems to have given some encouragement to those standing for orthodoxy. GAFCON continues with its own instruments whilst affirming its commitment to the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Covenant seems to be the only means of settling the Communion problems, but there are serious doubts about its final form, or when it will become operative. Meanwhile there is a lost world out there that needs the gospel. We must all feel the challenge of these things

### **A WAY FORWARD FOR ANGLICAN EVANGELICALS?**

I have tried to share honestly what I have learned and experienced over the past fifty years. It means more to me than I can tell you, and I can't explain why I feel as deeply as I do at this stage of my life. I can only hope that the Lord is with me as I seek to show how I think we should face our current challenge, and that it will help to galvanise the life and witness of evangelicals in this area of Lancashire. The title FUTURE SHOCK was not my choice, but that of your committee. It's rather dramatic, and suggests that truly dire things, or perhaps amazing things, lie ahead. The sub-title certainly suggests that the immediate future is uncertain. These are the signposts that I believe should guide us into the future.

- 1) The sovereignty of God.

I'm not only conservative, I'm unashamedly a Calvinist. I'm convinced that one of the greatest insights regained by Calvin and the Reformers was the vision of God in all His glory. We experience things that deeply trouble us. We can see evil raising its head and capturing the ground we wish the gospel possessed. Will the Christian tide run out completely, to use Matthew Arnold's image? To ask that question is to suggest that God has died. It's not true. He is sovereign, and He is working a purpose in history that will not be overcome. And, as believers, we are in the loving embrace of that sovereignty.

2) The reality of revival

I've wanted to suggest that modernism and its off-springs have brought the developed world into a new dark age. Today is like the late mediaeval world, or how England was before the Evangelical Revival. Praise God for all gospel witness going on in our country, but let's be honest, it's like rowing against the tide in a howling gale. Secularism strides ahead despite all our evangelism and protests. The answer will only come when God please to work by His Spirit in such a way that our nation is made to tremble before revealed truth. It is a sovereign work of God. But we can read of what God has done in the past, and pray in hope. This is what godly people did in the past. And let's be clear, when God does this it will be in His way, not necessarily how we expect.

3) Be realistic about the Anglican Communion

I don't believe the Anglican Communion has ever been more than a mutual recognition of a common heritage. Let me explain. For most, belonging to the Commonwealth and being Anglican went together. The British Empire played a large part. The Scottish and American Episcopalians always had their own Prayer Book so have a different heritage. The Australian Provinces are based on the boundaries of the Federal States, have formal links through the Synod of All Australia, but complete independence of action. It's a pattern many Aussie Churchmen recommend for the whole Anglican Communion; a federal model. The Churches of North and South India are uniting churches and therefore have another history. In pre-modern Africa, where the church is growing phenomenally, and where atheism is virtually unknown, Archbishops and Bishops rule like tribal chiefs. And so I could go on. I believe it is a good thing to have the Anglican Communion, but I doubt if it can ever be more than a mutually recognised fellowship of churches within a theologically orthodox framework. As members of the Church of England our prime concern should be to work and pray for our own church's reform and renewal under the Word of God. If the Lord is pleased to do that in England it will have its effects on the rest of the communion. So let our focus be on the church we belong to and make it our supreme area of responsibility.

4) Take our diocesan responsibilities seriously.

If we are convinced about the kind of church bequeathed by Cranmer; Reformed, Episcopal and National, we won't simply want to care for the parishes in which we serve. This was the conviction of the Keele Congress and it was a radical departure from the ghetto mentality of the post 1928 evangelicalism. The local church is important. It's where clergy and people work out together their witness to the parish given to them. But this must be set within a vision of God working for the whole church, and the diocese is the immediate representation of that to us. It means being committed to diocesan committees, however dull they may seem, for it's in these councils, and through the Diocesan Synod, that the life of our church is shaped. And of course it's through taking diocesan responsibilities seriously that Evangelicals can serve in the highest councils of the Church of England, such as the General Synod.

5) Recognise the value of a Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship.

I've been glad to serve on the DEF committee and to be your Chairman for the past two years, but it hasn't been easy. Diocesan groupings are struggling in the main. It's one of the criticisms of CEEC that people are elected to the Council from DEFs that are often so weak. There are two related reasons for this that didn't exist thirty years ago. The first is the growth of sub-groups that enjoy first priority from their members. The second is our readiness to criticise those in other groups

than our own. When a DEF committee seeks to put together a programme that is informative, helpful and offering fellowship, it's all too easy to fall between the edges of these clearly defined groups. I know I will be criticised for calling Anglican Evangelicals to a realistic unity among themselves. The charge is always that you've gone soft on the truth. I deny that. There must be division when error raises its head. But if our DEF fellowship takes seriously the CEEC basis of faith, and our meetings are held within the spirit of that basis, I can't see why we can't all be committed to one another. Over the past two years this is what I have striven for more than anything else. If any of you have found me guilty of being as censorious as those I criticise here, then please forgive me. It was said at NEAC5 that GAFCON was everything that John Stott had worked for in his great ministry throughout the Anglican Communion. There were dissenting cries as John Stott, in his frailty, wasn't present to speak for himself. I can say, as one privileged to be present when he gave his last public address, that his call was an echo of the aged Apostle John in Ephesus. 'Little children, love one another, as Christ has loved you'; together with a call bear the likeness of our Lord in our lives. I pray that the future of our DEF will be characterised by Anglican Evangelicals who so do, as in faith, hope and love, they pray, witness and wait for the coming of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. For surely our saving God will be true to all He has promised us in Christ. Amen.