

Below is the Address given by Dr Gavin Ashenden, at a recent Oxford Conference.

Dr Gavin Roy Pelham Ashenden (born 1954) is a British Anglican clergyman. He was an Honorary Chaplain to the Queen from 2008 until his resignation in 2017. He was ordained in the Church of England, but left it in 2017. That year was consecrated a missionary bishop by the Christian Episcopal Church, a continuing Anglican jurisdiction outside of the Anglican Communion

A Conference On Anglican Patrimony

On The 50th Anniversary of The Publication of Archbishop Michael Ramsey's 'Gospel And The Catholic Church. Secularism & the Church of England: The Future For Orthodox Anglicans Committed to the Gospel and the Catholicity of the Church.'

'The Gospel and Catholic Church'.

This conference has rightly set out to look both backwards and forwards. Back to the inspiration of Ramsey's interpretations of the symbiotic mutuality of Gospel and Catholicity, and forward to discern how Gospel and Catholicity can be faithfully expressed in a culture that has begun to turn aggressively on both Gospel and tradition.

My own experience of both began when I grew up in the Cathedral precincts of Canterbury when Michael Ramsey was Archbishop. It was he who confirmed us in the mother Church of the Cathedral, and he who prowled around the precincts among us, not unlike an ancient benign Patriarch, blessing shyly whatever or whoever he came across.

Through a kind of peripatetic osmosis, I picked up something of a love of the Catholic Church from what he represented, and was later to respond to the gospel when I heard it at university in the mouth of the Anglican evangelist David Watson.

But there was one more formative experience Canterbury left me with. I had the habit of sitting next to the flagstones where Becket was assassinated, and found myself musing often on his own stand against the state and the secular culture on behalf of the Church and the faith. Becket was and is a reminder that the State can grow violently impatient with those who set out to challenge and transform it.

Later I was to train at a theological College that prided itself in its understanding of the Gospel. And by some clerical error, I was sent to spend vacations in a Greek Orthodox monastery where I learnt to marry my commitment to the 'Evangelion' with a love of the Church 'Catholikos' of the first millennium.

And that brings us to today. For there has been a tumultuous change in our own culture over these last 40 or so years.

Stephen Rutt has very skilfully helped us look through the prophetic eyes of Roland Allen. I won't repeat what he has so skilfully said, but the effect has been to present us with a question; one both he and Allen lay clearly before.

Given that like Roland Allen, we see a fracture opening up between church and state, Christian value and secular antipathy, the Kingdom of heaven and

the prince of this world, what are going to do, and where, inside or outside the Church of England, are we going to do it?

The Church of England is 'doing the splits' as it bestrides the opening ethical, political and cultural chasm, and will shortly, if I may use the language of pantomime, fall flat on its face, or more seriously, tumble into the chasm.

As + Bishop Michael Nazir Ali has reminded us, "Erastianism is the Church of England's Achilles heel".

Posing us different versions of the same question, we have Niebuhr and Newbiggin, the 17th Century divines, and Roland Allen.

It was in 1929 that a Lieutenant Colonel J. L. Schley, of the Corps of Engineers wrote in *The Military Engineer*:

"It has been said critically that there is a tendency in many armies to spend the peace time studying how to fight the last war."

The danger that we face is to look back at creeping secularization we have known, and imagine that the challenges the Church has engaged with in previous decades are the same as we face in 2018. But they are of a different order now.

The war today is a different one.

Indeed, it's easy to be confused; because we are engaged in a conflict with a thought system that tell us there is no serious conflict to be engaged in, only an invitation to adopt values we already agree with like 'justice and equality and fairness and compassion for victims'.

But this is not a WYSIWYG process. There is some deception involved.

Stephen Rutt referred to Professor Jordan Peterson as an interpreter of the struggle, and he is lucidly clear that we are facing a totalitarian challenge that seriously threatens both democracy and freedom of speech. And without freedom of speech, our opportunity to share the Gospel is seriously circumscribed.

He with others, calls it 'Cultural Marxism', and warns and demonstrates how ambitious it is and how dangerous it is.

He is not a Christian, but rather a sympathetic fellow traveller; a Jungian with the qualities of both the clarity of thought and personal courage.

Every so often Google sends me an alert if my name is spotted by its search engine in the news.

Not long ago, the Toronto Globe and Mail published an article about me, ridiculing me for what I had written about 'Cultural Marxism'. "This idiot has made it up", the scornful journalist said, "he is an empty headed fool. Marx wrote nothing about gender or sexual ethics. There is no such thing as cultural Marxism."

Only in the most superficial sense was he right. Marx was determined to bring in a form of social egalitarianism by force based on the struggle of the proletariat and a particular reading of economics.

But it was already clear to a number of Marxist thinkers that his grasp of economics might have been flawed, and that his revolution might fail (as became clear in 1989).

So a group of his sympathisers known as the Frankfurt School, put together a different strategy for imposing this new egalitarianism on society if Marxism 1.0 was to fail.

It looked not the violent rising of the proletariat in class war, and a particular reading of economics, but a shift in cultural values instead; which is why it is called either neo-Marxism or cultural Marxism.

In Marxism 1.0 one of the primary enemies of the project was the Church and the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the family. It was the ambition and intention of the Marxist regime to replace the nuclear or extended family with the State. And in the Soviet Union it did so by force, by revolution.

But cultural Marxism is setting out to achieve the same end by stealth; by political and cultural evolution rather than the direct immediate revolution as it did the first time round.

So we are faced with the subversion of our culture through steady process and progress, rather than direct assault.

THE PROCESS

The process may be said to begin with Feminism. Each of the categories of evolution have a benign face and a malign centre.

The benign face of feminism is its call for fairness and equality.

Who can be against such attractive ethical values?

First wave feminism was about the franchise – and achieved the vote for women. An essential blow in favour of social justice.

2nd wave feminism achieved an open work place, and access to equal wages, albeit at the cost of a mother being present at home to raise her children.

But 3rd wave feminism ushered in the process by which the Judaeo-Christian revelation of God's intention for men and women made in his image called together in a self-giving mutuality, with the intention of becoming co-creators, would be subverted by treating gender as a political construct.

It becomes a malleable tool of the imagination. In this perspective the social construct of gender needing to be rescued from its role as an agency of patriarchal oppression, and becomes capable of being changed or superseded by subjective re-imagining.

At the same time we had slowly moved from a Freudian culture to a Jungian one.

With early Freud religion was a form of neurosis to be ridiculed and cured; but with Jung spirituality replaced religion, and was a vital component in the realisation of the potential of the emerging Self.

At first sight this looks like just a psychotherapeutic narrative similar to Christianity. But like all Gnosticism it looks similar but is very different.

We moved from religion as neurosis to the idolatry of the self – the sacredness of the subjective.

The sacredness of the subjective is of course a form of narcissistic idolatry. And it was in this new psychological climate that the undoing of the Christian narrative was to take place.

SAME SEX RELATION.

Perhaps like me you have been surprised that one of the tests of orthodoxy as a citizen in progressive society has been the acceptance and promotion of gay sex.

Of all the tests of social orthodoxy that Christians have been put to in the past, from the sprinkling of incense at the foot of a statue of the emperor, to the oath taken for the King's supremacy, this is not a matter at first sight of the greatest importance.

Except that it has become so.

Perhaps after all, the given-ness of gender and the practice of holy gender relations bears more theological and spiritual weight in the context of revelation than we knew. After all, it has become the place of a full frontal metaphysical assault on Judaeo-Christian culture.

You don't need me here to remind you of the need to defend the children whose first and last place of sanctuary ought to be in the arms and hearts of their biological parents, rather than become the purchased commodities in a new experiment of same sex marriage and gender fluidity.

You don't need me to expound Romans chapter 1 to you, and make the metaphysical calculus in which we are reminded that the deeper the social idolatry the more disordered the sexual identity and behaviour becomes in a developing spectrum of disobedience and degeneration.

What is presented as an exercise in fairness and compassion for the 'different', is in fact a full-frontal assault on the sanctity of revelation and the gates of the Kingdom of heaven; made so much harder to articulate and defend, because who would not be in favour of fairness, and compassion for the 'different'?

And yet this staged cultural revolution has some way to go.

It moved from the redefinition of marriage, and with redefinition, the abolition of the Judaeo-Christian concept of marriage which had the co-creation of children at its very heart, to the promotion and celebration of gender-fluidity.

In an act of great cruelty, it has taken gender dysphoria, an aspect of mental unease and dis-ease carried so painfully by some deeply confused and wounded children, and turned it into a weapon to disorientate our social expectations of gender and sanity.

Is the cultural assault finished?

No not yet, the next step will be the promotion of paedophilia.

Already the research papers are being written suggesting, beginning with boys, that the age of consent should be significantly lowered. That paedophilia, in the same way that justified the beginning of the validation of homosexuality, involved victims who cannot help themselves because they were both that way, and should be understood, and validated, not criminalised.

And when the battle is won, the "I was born this way" argument will be dropped in favour of "this is our life-style choice", as it was with gay marriage.

Because the driving ideology that is intent on destroying the Church and the values of the Gospel sets power relations at its Centre. As always in human affairs, both personal and political, power sets itself against love.

Cultural Marxism is yet another child, like the French Revolution, of a secular utopianism that looks to create its own dystopian vision of heaven on earth. It sets out to do it by identifying a hierarchy of power relations that requires inverting. At the top of this hierarchy, due to be displaced and cast down to the bottom is Christianity and the Church. Along with all things white and male.

The 'white' need not delay us here much, but the male does.

For unlike the accusations of the 19th Century intellectuals, Freud, Durkheim and in particular Feuerbach, it is not we who have made God 'male', it is God the Father who has imaged himself in a complimentary humanity that is both masculine and feminine.

Gender is not a psychological construct, it is an accurate component in revelation. As CS Lewis put it so succinctly, "A mother god would produce a very different religion and relationship from God the Father".

Consider the spiritual implications for a moment, If Jesus came to show us and reconcile us to the Father, (with the consent and obedience of the new Eve, Mary Theotokos as the means of allowing the incarnation of the Word, envisaged from the beginning of time and beyond)what happens if society has developed a disgust for the father, and a hatred of the patriarchy? How do you do your evangelism then?

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES.

In the face of this full frontal ideological assault on all that the Gospel and the Catholic Church stands for, the law and the legal system have been amended to include the new and disastrous concept of hate crime.

If you speak out, indeed if you question this new hierarchy of values, you are assaulting the victims of the old Christian, white, elderly, colonialist, oppressive patriarchy, and since the new order claims to love the victims, you must be guilty of hate.

And the state will threaten to fine or imprison you for your hate crime.

And thus the body politic offends the living God in the way Isaiah foresaw: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." Isaiah 5.20

The revolution hidden in the process of cultural evolution has begun to devour its own children.

James Caspian, an LGBT activist, working as a therapist helping people on the journey of gender transition, was doing postgraduate research at the University of Bath. In his research he began to document the scope of regret after gender change. His membership of the university as a research student was terminated. The truth about those who were casualties of the terrible experiment was suppressed and censored.

Recent legislation now allows social workers to remove children from parents who supposedly in the eyes of the state exhibit homophobia and engaged in emotional abuse by raising their children with traditional biblical values if issues of gender dysphoria arise.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

Through the eyes of both Michael Ramsey and Roland Allen we have warned ourselves of the danger for a church that becomes nationalised instead of rising to the challenge to both repudiate and evangelise a culture that initiates the undermining of the Gospel and the Catholic Church, but, as we saw in Marxism 1.0, intends its total destruction.

I could spend some time explaining how the present Church of England is slowly but certainly giving itself to the service of the zeitgeist having capitulated over gender and preparing to capitulate over gay marriage.

Whether with Michael Ramsey we trace the origins to the introduction of Synodical government that aped the pseudo-democratic model of the state, or the original act of disobedience, however well-intentioned, that repudiated the authority of Peter, we are where we are.

You yourselves would not be here at this conference if you had not perceived the new theological and spiritual Babylonian captivity of the church; a church that has lost confidence in both the Gospel and the Catholic Church, and preferred instead a place in the bosom of the State to the bosom of Abraham, and the affirmation of its secular neighbours, to the affirmation of Christ.

With the ordination of women and their consecration to the episcopate, the C of E has introduced a secularised ideological DNA into the Church. Not only by distorting the faith received and practiced since the apostles, but also by giving authority to a generation of people trained and committed to read the faith through the lens of secular feminism.

It was no accident that one of the first changes a new woman diocesan bishop explored in her cathedral was the eradication of the language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and its replacement with the gender free - gender neutral, creator, redeemer and sustainer.

Not that the Father is not the creator, but nor is the Fatherhood of God as toxic experience to the prodigal child as the secular narrative has it, and its feminist devotees within the Church also believe.

By surrendering to the ideological assault on gender as revealed in the Scriptures and lived and experienced in the holy tradition, the Church of England has opened the door to a thought system that is in its origin and practice wholly antithetic to the revelation of Scripture.

It is like a car sliding slowly down a slope, unaware that it has no brakes and has surrendered control of the steering wheel.

Confusingly at first, it is like a book where the dust cover remains apparently Christian, but the text within is slowly but surely being changed to a different narrative and a different religion.

In fact it is clear that the present strategy of those who direct the Church to spin the presentation of the church to offer the duster cover to those who look for it, and the changed text for those who love the zeitgeist.

The church is now committed to relativism, to the equality not only of all people but of all ideas, all ideas, all religions.

As Dr Rutt insisted, the Church of England has sinned by adopting Identity Politics. It has even set quotas of the ethnic backgrounds of the priests it wants the church to profile; as if the Holy Spirit too is into identity politics.

There is a spirit behind identity politics, but it is not the Holy Spirit.

It is the other spirit.

The scale of the disaster that has overtaken it is that in having reconfigured its theology to be relativistic and egalitarian, it cannot repent. It is organically committed to the new philosophy.

It refuses the orthodox invitation to metanoia. It is unable to turn round.

WHAT CAN WE – WHAT SHOULD WE DO.

The task is the gathering together of all those who identify as orthodox Christians committed to an understanding of the undivided Church of the first millennium.

We have been reminded (by + John Fenwicke) that we should rend both at least our hearts and perhaps our garments at our failures to mend the divisions of the Church.

We cannot revisit those moments of ecumenical hesitation and failure. But we can draw ourselves together in some orthodox collegial, ecclesial fellowship of a renewed commitment to the Gospel and the Catholic Church.

Such a movement of clear sighted rescue and commitment will need to be led by a gathering of orthodox bishops across the Anglican spectrum. They will need to gather round them orthodox priests, who want to relate to orthodox bishops, having lost them in the Church of England, and who will bring their orthodox people.

It will not be a new church, it will be a network, an association, a fellowship of orthodox believers committed to the Gospel and the Catholic Church.

Without it, those who continue to believe faithfully, will be even further marginalised and scattered than they now are.

This needs to be a centripetal act of gathering the faithful together to reverse the centrifugal scattering of the sheep that Jesus warned us would happen when the wolf got in amongst the fold.

The bishops must model themselves on the Good Shepherd who lays down his life to protect his sheep. The Anglican bishops of the Catholic Church must set out to gather the scattered sheep so that together we can remain collectively faithful to the Gospel in a society that has only just begun its assault on the faith and the faithful.

As we heard from St Augustine commentary on St John this morning during the office:

“Love renews those who hear, and those who obey.”