

TRADITION AND ITS ACCEPTABILITY: DETERMINING LIMITS OF CULTURAL BELIEFS AND ANGLICAN NORMS

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***Abstract:** Anglican Communion appears increasingly vulnerable to changing schools of thought and traditions. Schools of thought and traditions introduce cultures that suit their philosophies. Now cultures that keep changing have elements that go against biblical teachings. This has caused disagreement among provinces that consider themselves orthodox and the ones that see themselves as liberals. This article explores the question of how the limits of an acceptable tradition are to be determined and who determines them. It aims at contributing to academic debate introduced by Samuel, Sugden and Eddy in an article entitled: "Kigali trumpet's uncertain sound." They recommend a council that should convene and work on the solution to the impending separation in the Communion. The literature in this article shows that cultures that come from different schools of thought and traditions have strong influences on different provinces in the Communion. This will make it difficult for a council to narrow the gap of disagreement among provinces. The starting point should be an academic debate that will define what the unifying culture of the Communion shall be in today's Church.*

Key Words: Anglican Communion, Culture, Church Disagreement, Same-sex Marriage, Tradition.

Introduction

Traditions and cultural beliefs appear to threaten the unity of the Anglican Communion. Some church leaders in the Communion believe that the love taught by Jesus should make us tolerant and accommodating to people who disagree with us. These include the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. Others, instead, argue that our tolerance should not include condoning sin. These leaders include the Chairman of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GFSA), Justin Badi Arama of the Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan.

Therefore, Church leaders in the Anglican Communion think that it would be hard for them to sit down as the opposing sides to determine what the future of the Communion should look like since the gap

between the two sides is growing wider each year. There must be something more than what appears on the surface. Underlying values other than biblical ones could be at play.

Probably the above-mentioned positions are influenced by traditions and beliefs that form the central values of senior leaders in the Anglican Communion. Central values come from norms that people are exposed to at an early age.¹ For example, a child who grows up in a conservative family will have conservative values in his or her central value systems. The same is true of a child who grows up in a liberal family. Central values resist values that conflict with them. Beliefs influenced by one's central value systems can even prevent the use of acceptable ways of decision-making. Nonetheless, it is hard to notice this in the Anglican Communion now because each side is already immersed in local traditional values and cultural beliefs other than the shared Anglican norms and practices.

Since traditional beliefs take precedence in people's feelings, it is often difficult to reason in a manner that would lead to better conclusions. Notably, theologians on both sides of the Anglican Communion's divide have been silent on the theological and ecclesiological means that church leaders and theologians in the Early Church considered as priorities in their decision-making in theological and ecclesial disagreements. It is this silence that Samuel, Sugden and Eddy² break by introducing what will later become an academic debate. This paper, therefore, contributes to the debate by examining the limits of cultures and traditional beliefs concerning Christian values. The question to be answered is: How are the limits of an acceptable tradition to be determined and who determines them?

The above question came from my former doctoral professors, Canon Dr. Vinay Samuel and Canon Dr. Chris Sugden, from the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life (OCRPL). They sent me some questions in April 2023 after we concluded the conference convened by

¹ Zechariah Manyok Biar, *Church, State and the Ethical Imagination: A Phenomenological Study of Christian, Cultural and Constitutional Value Clashes in South Sudan* (Osborne Park: Africa World Books, 2022).

² Vinay Samuel, Christopher Sugden, and Paul Eddy, "Kigali Trumpet's Uncertain Sound," *Anglican.Ink*, March 23, 2023. <https://anglican.ink/2023/05/23/kigali-trumpets-uncertain-sound>

the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in Kigali, Rwanda. The above-mentioned scholars are evangelical Anglicans who never agreed with the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury and other Bishops in the Church of England who resolved in their General Synod of 2023 that same-sex couples could be blessed in churches when they get married. They got concerned after the participants in the conference resolved that the Archbishop of Canterbury would no longer be recognised as the first among equals in the provinces that refer to themselves as orthodox Anglicans. They wanted to hear theological and ecclesiological arguments that would go beyond mere convictions. For this reason, they wrote an article in May 2023, entitled: “Kigali trumpet’s uncertain sound,” and shared it with top leaders of GAFCON and GFSA. They also shared it with me as the Diocesan Bishop in the Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Anglican Communion and as their former doctoral student at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life in England and at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The third person who wrote the article with my former professors was Paul Eddy, Convenor of Anglican Orthodox and former Public Relations Consultant to the Primates of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches.

In the article, Samuel, Sugden and Eddy³ argue that the issues facing Anglican Communion, especially the controversy related to same-sex blessing in the Church of England, can hardly be solved in isolation. They believe that the solution must involve macro issues that encompass the identity of Anglican Church and its ecclesiology. For them, the Anglican is a Communion that consists of autonomous provinces or national churches. These provinces are autonomous in that they are self-governing. The Communion is also more Conciliar than confessional in nature. What each autonomous province cannot do is to come out unilaterally and introduce prayers that are not in conformity with matters of faith that are central to the Communion. The scholars argue in their article that failure to understand the principle of Anglican fellowship may lead to misconception of a localised or national nature of the Communion. They also noted that the misunderstanding of the national and conciliar nature of the Communion would lead to a lack of reasonable strategies for the solution to its problems.

³ Samuel, Sugden and Eddy, “Kigali Trumpet’s.”

In line with Acts 15, Samuel, Sugden and Eddy⁴ maintain that challenges that relate to differences in traditions or cultural beliefs should be addressed in manners that put Christian identity as the new Israel and their salvation into consideration. Christians who are ‘the new Israel’ must follow the teaching of Jesus Christ when it comes to ethical matters. Even though burdens may not be put on believers by changing their local cultures completely, they point out some exceptions. They cite Acts 15:14-20 in which what the Gentiles should not do are specified. Gentiles should “abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.” This passage makes it clear that not everything people practise in their local cultures is acceptable in the ‘new Israel’ or the Christian community. In line with the above, the scholars conclude that there is a need for a global council that leaders of different groups in the Anglican Communion should convene to address challenges created by fast-changing cultures.

By examining the limits of cultures and traditional beliefs concerning Christian values, this article aims at contributing to academic debates introduced by Samuel, Sugden and Eddy.⁵ It will do this by pointing out cultural differences that may make it harder for the suggested council to solve the problems facing ‘the Communion’. I will argue that the difficulty with the current cultures and traditions is that they make the Bible fit in them instead of them being shaped by the Bible. The Gentiles in Acts 15 knew they were not Jews; they were Christians included in the community of believers. The ‘Gentiles’ of today, however, seem to consider themselves genuine Jews, making them adamant to respect the Bible that they consider foreign to their new ways of thinking. They seem to ignore the limits of their Gentile cultures. This paper will, therefore, help readers to understand the traditional and cultural differences and limitations clearly to deal with issues just as the Apostles dealt with the problems narrated in Acts 15.

⁴ Samuel, Sugden and Eddy, “Kigali Trumpet’s.”

⁵ Samuel, Sugden and Eddy, “Kigali Trumpet’s.”

Jews or Gentiles?

How the Apostles solved cultural controversies in Acts 15 seems to be the best model for solving cultural problems in the Church today. However, solving cultural controversies in line with Acts 15 should start with an understanding of what the current beliefs and worldviews of people are in comparison with the beliefs of Jews and Gentiles at the time of the Apostles. Jews and Gentiles at the time of the Apostles firmly believed in the Supreme Being or God of Israel before and after the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not all the Gentiles, however, understood God the way that the Jews understood Him. Nevertheless, they never doubted the existence of the Supreme Being who created the universe. They were not like the modernists and postmodernists of our current age. Modernists believe in nature as the creator, though it may not necessarily be the Supreme Being that is non-material. Postmodernists believe in God but rely on individual self-consciousness more than they rely on the Supreme Being who created the universe out of nothing. The problem between the Jews and the Gentiles was ethical behaviours. The Gentiles were considered sinners because they never followed the same moral rules that God had given the Jews in His covenant with them through Moses.

The Jews paid much attention to issues concerning purity; most of their rituals aimed at purifying the community or individuals. Activities of the flesh signified impurity. Apostle Paul seems to be ‘liberal’ in Galatians in that he discourages laws that thwart Christian freedom in Christ. However, he warns the Galatians against the use of “freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal. 5:13). He argues that “the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). Apostle Paul was not a person who would leave his point hanging; he spells out the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21. They are: “...sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” He states that people who engage in these activities will never enter the Kingdom of God. The above works of the flesh are opposed to the works of the Spirit which are: “...love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Gentiles were considered by the Jews as people who indulged in the flesh. It is along this line of thought that Apostle Paul warns Christians not to behave like the Gentiles who never knew God (1 Thes. 4:5). The Jews believed that God told them in the Scriptures not to be like the Gentiles. For example, God warned them in Lev. 18:3: “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.” Loader summarises what follows in Lev. 18:6-23 as behaviours and practices that God hated among the Gentiles.⁶ These practices were mostly related to sexual impurity. They included “incestuous marriage, intercourse during menstruation, same-sex relations, and bestiality.” Paul considers these behaviours as ungodliness (cf. Rom. 1:18).

People who engage in the above practices are disowned by the Almighty God of Israel. God, according to St. Paul, gave up ungodly people because,

their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26).

Paul is even harsher against people who condone the above-mentioned practices. He affirms, “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:32).

One would assume that the Bible is clear against impure practices. Yet, it depends on who reads the Bible. People today would jump into the argument for the freedom of conscience in support of what they do. But it was not the case in the time of the Apostles. The Jews believed there was no freedom in engaging in impure practices. It was not the will of God to do so. It was partly for this reason that the Jews were expected to safeguard their identity as the people of God. They

⁶ William Loader, “‘Not as the Gentiles:’ Sexual Issues at the Interface between Judaism and Its Greco-Roman World,” *Religions* 9 (2018): 1.

could not give up their identity even when they were in foreign lands. As Loader points out,

Maintaining one's Jewish identity in foreign cities was paramount for most and included closely knit settlement patterns, careful observance of rituals and laws that reinforced Jewish identity, such as the sabbath observance and food laws, and the rejection of what were perceived as the dangers to which they were exposed, including idolatry and what they saw as sexual immorality.⁷

Circumcision, for example, was a symbol of Jewishness. Anybody interested in converting to Judaism was required to be circumcised to acquire a Jewish identity. It was part of the laws of purity and distinctness from ungodly people. Paul questions the importance of circumcision for the Gentiles simply because becoming a Christian never required a Jewish identity. Christians assumed a different identity through the blood of Jesus.

The laws of purity remain crucial even in the letters of Paul, as shown above. Those who kept themselves pure even if their practices were below those of the Jews found favour with God. Some Gentiles like Ruth found favour in the God of Israel because of purity in their hearts. Moreover, Gentiles like Cornelius were sometimes chosen by God because they feared Him and performed good works (Acts 10:1-2). It was against that background that God warned Simon Peter not to regard what God had made pure as impure or unclean (Acts 10:15). It was not Cornelius alone, nonetheless, who was chosen because of his dedication to the Highest Being. Abraham himself was chosen in his homeland of Ur of Chaldeans because of complete dedication to the Highest Being who was not necessarily the God of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3).

When the issue of circumcision came up as written in Acts 15, the Apostles had to differentiate the laws of Jewish identity and the general laws for salvation. Circumcision was given to Abraham by God as a sign of covenant between Him and Abraham's descendants (Gen. 17:9-14). For this reason, the Apostles chose the laws for salvation to apply to every follower of Jesus Christ. However, they decided that the laws of Jewish identity should remain only for the Jews as a sign of their covenant with God. This resembles how Gentile cultures that

⁷ Loader, "Not as the Gentiles," 2.

never violated the laws of salvation could not be changed. The laws of salvation prevented any follower of Jesus from engaging in “things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). Since God hates idolatry, He also hates cultic meals. Eating what had been strangled and blood was common among the Gentiles who enjoyed meals polluted by idols.⁸ What is polluted by idols can prevent anybody from getting into salvation because God never associates Himself with idols. It is for this reason that the Apostles mentioned these elements as forbidden, not only for the Jews but also for every believer in Jesus Christ for the sake of salvation.

The eschatological reason is connected more to the biblical prohibition of misuse of sex than it is to its dehumanising nature. Loader argues that in Jewish writings, issues to do with the shameful act of males assuming female roles and vice versa in homosexuality are common. However, in the Bible, the argument is that perversion or distortion in sexuality angers God because He did not design it that way. Because of this, Nolland argues that “We should not think of Paul drawing his views of homosexuality from his understanding of nature, but rather from revelation, in particular from Lev 18 and 20 in connection with Gen 1.”⁹ Sex is unnatural only when it is against the plan of God. Engaging in anything against the plan of God would then qualify as a rebellion against God. Rebellion against God destroys one’s chances for salvation. It is for this reason that sexual laws or norms are connected to salvation more than they are connected to shame and honour or even to the need for procreation.

In this section, it is clear that the Jews regarded the Gentiles as impure people. Because of this, any Gentile who wanted to convert to Judaism was required to acquire the signs that would make him a Jew. Gentiles understood that it was important to follow the will of the Supreme Being. It was for this reason that some Gentiles could find favour in the sight of the God of Israel. Gentile cultures that never conflicted with the will and natural plans of God in creation were later accepted in Acts 15. Today, schools of thought and traditions shape

⁸ Loader, “Not as the Gentiles,” 2.

⁹ John Nolland, “Romans 1: 26–27 and the Homosexuality Debate,” *HBT* 22 (2000): 54.

people's understanding of Scripture. The Council that dealt with controversies in the Church understood the points Paul, Barnabas and James made. Councils may not solve the same controversies in contemporary times because the theological issues are different. Freedom of the will, for instance, is interpreted in diverse ways by different people because of their philosophical or ideological views.

Different Concepts of the Freedom of the Will

Some people would argue that Gal. 5:1 states clearly that Christ has brought freedom to Christians. For this reason, they should stand firm and let no one burden them again by giving them the yoke of slavery. These people understand freedom as "The fundamental empowerment of the baptised through Jesus Christ to a new lifestyle and a new way of thinking and living."¹⁰ Why is it that there seem to be people who go against this freedom in the Anglican Communion? Do Anglicans not have free will to choose how to follow their faith in Christ? I will draw from the exegesis of Gal. 5 in an article written by Kirchsclaeger to answer the above questions.

The above questions are interesting, and we should not ignore them. In answering them, we should state that understanding of freedom and free will depends on a tradition that forms one's central value systems. Nonetheless, this is not relativism. Relativism is only the concept of postmodernism. Even though there are two concepts of free will today, the focus of the will would fall into one of three categories that come from three worldviews. The first is the view that free will focuses on what is material and worldly. The second is that free will focuses on reason alone. The third is that free will inclines towards the ultimate good. The third position is the one that is held by the premodern tradition which situates the free will within the ranking of beings.

The ranking of beings in the premodern tradition puts God on top of all beings. Every being focuses upward towards God. In God is the truth and the ultimate good. As Kunat points out, the good is understood "as the ultimate end of man's life and as the criterion for the

¹⁰ Peter G. Kirchsclaeger, "The Relation between Freedom, Love, Spirit and Flesh in Galatians 5:13," *Acta Theologica* 19 (2014): 131.

moral evaluation of an act.”¹¹ Those who do good look upward towards God. Any being that focuses downward loses its likeness to God who is the Good. It is along this line that Paul in Galatians contrasts the Spirit with the flesh. Those who aim upward in their choices focus on the Spirit. The ones who aim downward in their choices focus on the flesh. This section will show how freedom of will is defined by different schools of thought. Before we turn our attention to the concept of freedom in Gal. 5, let us briefly explore the understanding of freedom and free will in the above-mentioned traditions.

Postmodern and modern traditions consider free will as something independent of any cause. The will in these traditions is not directed or influenced by anything other than the one who is willing. Postmodernists believe in an individual or an agent as the ultimate creator and upholder of his or her end. The purpose to which the will aims in postmodernism is not outside an individual who chooses. The agent only considers alternative possibilities in his or her choices and is responsible for such choices.¹² The focus of the will is downward on the individual self. The choices are not influenced by any ultimate good.

Even though postmodernists believe in free will as operating in a vacuum, they still direct it to an object of desire. However, objects of postmodernists’ free will are contingent. They are things that do not aim at anything higher than the human self. As Forghani, Keshtiaray and Yousefy point out, “Postmodernism considers humans as the centre of all realities, knowledge, and values, and rejects any belief in paranormal and metaphysical truth.”¹³ Because of this, what motivates their will are things that have immediate ends such as the need for individual autonomy, personal achievements, creativity, individual dignity, and self-gratification, among others. The free will of postmodernists rarely inclines towards God as the Ultimate Good because

¹¹ Natalia Kunat, “The Good as the Motive of Human Action According to Mieczyslaw Albert Krapiec,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3 (2014): 155.

¹² Robert Kane, “Rethinking Free Will,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 381-404.

¹³ Nooshin Forghani, Narges Keshtiaray, and Alireza Yousefy, “A Critical Examination of Postmodernism Based on Religious and Moral Values Education,” *International Education Studies* 8 (2015): 100.

they “seriously reject theological beliefs in divine religions and all propose that are based on them.”¹⁴

Modernists believe that morality should not be based on the phenomenal world. According to modernists like Kant, “the ultimate moral principle must be established by reason alone, specifically reason in its ‘a priori’ form.”¹⁵ Reason, which they consider higher than the subjective experience of an individual, is the guide to human choices. Freedom is important to modernists in that it is “the postulate of pure reason in its practical function.”¹⁶ Kant in this tradition believes that free will could be moral or immoral depending on how one uses reason to guide the choice. For example, the will is flawed when it “is influenced by inclinations and tendencies of human nature, that is, it is still tied to the phenomenal world.”¹⁷ The opposite is true.

Free will in modernism is not disconnected from morality. It makes morality possible because what guides it is reason, not emotion. Pure practical reason enables the will to focus on something higher than the individual self. As Rowan points out, “Kant claims there are three postulates of pure practical reason: freedom of will, immortality which is linked to the notion of eternal happiness, and God.”¹⁸ Yet, the focus on free will in modern tradition is still lower than on God. Kant, for example, believes that the autonomous will can be good only if it follows the law. However, the law is still guided by reason. For instance, “we in fact obey our own principles of action to the extent that they are purely rational.”¹⁹

Premodernism is on a higher level than the above two traditions in its concept of free will. Premodern thinkers define the will as a “rational appetite.”²⁰ That is, “will as ‘appetite’ is the form of desire, but, as rational, will is guided by intellect.”²¹ Guided by intellect, the will inclines towards the ultimate good.²² The ultimate good is one of

¹⁴ Forghani, Keshtiaray and Yousefy, “A Critical Examination of Postmodernism,” 100.

¹⁵ Anna M. Rowan, “The Relationship between Will and Reason in the Moral Philosophies of Kant and Aquinas,” *Logos_i_ethos* 1 (2015): 97.

¹⁶ Rowan, “The Relationship,” 98.

¹⁷ Rowan, “The Relationship,” 104.

¹⁸ Rowan, “The Relationship,” 104.

¹⁹ Rowan, “The Relationship,” 105.

²⁰ Tobias Hoffmann and Cyrille Michon “Aquinas on Free Will and Intellectual Determinism,” *Philosophers' Imprint* 17 (2017): 2.

²¹ Rowan, “The relationship,” 106.

²² Forrester E. Baird, *From Plato to Derrida*, 6th Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

God's attributes in premodernism. God is the ultimate end of human actions. Yet, God does not coerce the will. In other words, "divine foreknowledge and God's 'efficacious will' do not necessitate human choices."²³

Premodernism seems to consider the will as free in some respects, and not free in others. As Rowan notes, "The will is free but its freedom, as Aquinas explains later, is not the freedom concerning its last end but the freedom to choose the means to reach the end of an action."²⁴ It is the appetite that desires the good which is pleasing to God. Human beings have a built-in inclination towards the good in general. Mostly, "As the rational appetite, the will has the capacity to regard the universal and perfect good, therefore its capacity is not subjected to any individual good."²⁵ In our rational appetite, we are attracted generally by good things and dispirited by bad things. It is for this reason that there are two conceptions of free will. The one that is directed and the one that is not directed by any cause.

Considering Galatians as written in premodern tradition, it is easy to understand why Paul warns Christians in Galatia not to use their "freedom to indulge the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). That is, "Freedom may not be used as a false pretence or as an opportunity for the fleshly human being to follow her or his instincts."²⁶ A Christian who has been baptised should focus on the Spirit instead of the flesh. The hope that begins in baptism will be complete in the end time. Focusing on the flesh threatens one's future in the Kingdom of God because it means that such a person is failing to be like God. He or she is focusing downward. As Kirchsclaeger points out, "Paul adds a comment at the end – referring to the future – that the reality of baptism has no effect without an affiliation with Christ (3:29) and childhood of God (4:7)."²⁷ Affiliation with Jesus Christ implies one's becoming like God.

²³ Hoffmann and Michon. "Aquinas on Free Will," 2.

²⁴ Rowan, "The relationship," 116.

²⁵ Rowan, "The relationship," 117.

²⁶ Kirchsclaeger, "The Relation between Freedom," 134.

²⁷ Kirchsclaeger, "The Relation between Freedom," 137.

Anglican Communion seems to be vulnerable to different traditions and schools of thought than any other denomination. Their understanding of freedom in Gal. 5 seems to follow whatever school of thought is dominant in a particular jurisdiction in the Communion. Those influenced by premodernism connect freedom to purpose, leading to salvation. Those influenced by modern and postmodern traditions regard purpose as secondary to whatever they choose to do. They are guided by the mechanical science of modernism in which operations of entities relate only to forces of nature that have nothing to do with God. Adherents to modern and postmodern traditions may claim strong faith in God. Yet, they still think there is no single way of following the will of God because the grace of God still directs believers to God's will. They argue that God is good without qualifications or conditions. Anyone claiming to follow the will and the laws of God does not appear to understand the grace of God which covers all, including sinners. It is this notion of grace that we now examine.

Grace and Love of God

Increasing disagreement among Provinces in the Anglican Communion is mainly on what biblical teaching entails regarding sin. Some Church leaders are regarded as conservatives because of their views against what they believe as sinful practices, such as the blessing of same-sex couples in the Church.²⁸ The conservatives argue that condoning sin would go against the principles of salvation. They mostly hold the belief that “God, who created the world, saves sinners from among the human race that has turned away from him.”²⁹ Because of this, Christians should not engage in intentional sin. Other Church leaders in the Communion are seen as liberals because they are lenient towards sinful practices. This elasticity towards sin seems to come from the postmodernist's belief that “everyone may uphold his own personal philosophy of life, including pursuing the lifestyle that corresponds to that philosophy.”³⁰ Although leaders who might be postmodernists never see anything wrong with practices that are considered sinful by leaders who sympathise with premodernism, some postmodernists believe in sin. Yet, they argue that the grace of God is

²⁸ Harriet Sherwood, “Anglicans Angry at Same-sex Blessings Question Justin Welby's ‘fitness to lead.’” *The Guardian*, February 10, 2023.

²⁹ Pieter de Vries, “Living in Truth: Unmasking the Lies of our Postmodern Culture,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19 (2015): 137.

³⁰ De Vries, “Living in Truth,” 136.

sufficient for all, including sinners. They see conservative Church leaders as legalistic in their understanding of biblical teaching. For postmodernists, the law does not save. It is the grace of God that leads to salvation. For this reason, postmodernists believe it is wrong for some Church leaders to suspend Christians or prevent some of their activities in churches in the name of sin.

The notion of grace and the love of God in postmodernism is that God accepts each believer as she or he is. Therefore, no one should judge anyone for being sinful since the grace and the loving kindness of God are sufficient for such a person. For postmodernists, preventing some Christians and their practices in churches in the name of sin is exclusionary and God in His grace and loving kindness does not exclude any person. However, Christians who sympathise with premodern conception of grace argue that God does not exclude any person “from the call to faith and repentance.”³¹ Nevertheless, this inclusion does not “mean that the Lord Jesus accepted people just as they were in terms of their lifestyles; they were to ‘go thy way and sin no more.’”³²

Despite differences in the above-mentioned beliefs and traditions, many Christians agree that the grace of God still involves focusing on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an agent of Divine grace. He allows the normal operation of human nature. However, He adds to human nature what it cannot do by itself. Yet, the Holy Spirit aids human nature when a person focuses upward towards God. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the Holy Spirit to add to nature what can make a believer speed his or her way downward towards indulgence in the flesh. It is for this reason that the grace of God presupposes repentance or willingness to repent from sin or sinful practices to add to nature what nature is unable to achieve alone.

God’s love for His people has nothing to do with allowing Christians to do as they want. This is because “freedom is dependent on the Spirit for the enjoyment of love, since the Spirit serves as the point of reference, guiding freedom towards a life of love.”³³ The love of God is expressed in the way that Jesus came into the world to save those who

³¹ De Vries, “Living in Truth,” 140.

³² De Vries, “Living in Truth,” 140.

³³ Kirchsclaeger, “The Relation between Freedom,” 139.

repent and turn away from their sins. It is this love that Christians show one another. It means that Christians prevent one another from engaging in intentional sin. You cannot love someone truly and encourage such a person to engage in what you know or believe may endanger his or her life now and in the future. Jesus did not come into the world to encourage human beings to rebel against God even more. No one would describe such as true love at all. Jesus is considered to love human beings truly because He taught them how to follow the will of God rather than their own will. Because of Jesus' true love for human beings, he offered his life to redeem them from sin. Therefore, "Christians should open themselves to each other and live their life in love as a basic relational category rooted in Christ."³⁴ They should not push one another to indulge in sinful practices under the pretext of love.

We have seen above that the grace and loving kindness of God have nothing to do with postmodernists' concept of freedom that is not guided by anything. The grace and love of God are guided by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit does not support indulgence in the flesh. He supports those who aim upward towards the Trinitarian God. Cultural beliefs that drag Christians downwards mostly influence practices in the Anglican Communion. Since cultural beliefs seem to define what Anglicans do or value, we now focus on who we are supposed to be as the Communion. We are the Communion of believers that should have its own culture that is distinct from the world, even though we live in the world.

The Communion of Believers in God, Not of the World

The Anglican Communion should be a community that is not of the world, but the one that is focusing on New Jerusalem. During the fourth Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) meeting in Kigali, Rwanda in the year 2023, what Anglican Communion should look like was discussed. It was agreed that the Communion should focus on Christ. This is the premodern concept of focusing on God who is on top of all beings. It is a concept contrary to focusing downward on the flesh or worldly things. This is manifested by the choice of Col. 1:18 as the beginning of the statement issued after the conference. The passage indicates that "(Christ) is the head of the body, the

³⁴ Kirchsclaeger, "The Relation between Freedom," 139.

church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Relying on the supremacy of Christ would show the Anglican Communion as a community of believers, not of the world.

The statement of GAFCON after the conference shows what conservative or orthodox Provinces in the Communion believe. According to the statement, “the purpose and mission of the church are to make known to a lost world the glorious riches of the gospel by proclaiming Christ crucified and risen and living faithfully together as his disciples.”³⁵ They believe that God is the one who unites them together in the Communion and to Himself. They may disconnect from one another as Provinces in the Communion, but not from God. What seems to be the case now is that Church leaders influenced by post-modern tradition are more willing to separate from God and hold on to their human communities instead of God. The postmodernist’s concept of a community is that it is a body brought together by individuals. These individuals are held together by social contract. Yet, the premodern tradition considers the substance as the unifying means of a community. In this case, God is the substance that unites a Christian community such as the Anglican Communion.

Given the above argument, traditions and cultural beliefs have certain limits. Certain cultural values are compatible with Christian values while others are not. In light of this, reason should always guide practices in Christian churches. Postmodern rejection of reason in favour of mere feeling is problematic. Reason helps in discerning which elements of culture should be part of a Christian community such as the Anglican Communion and which ones should be rejected. We are mindful that our reasoning or feelings are guided by the Holy Spirit. It was along this line that the Apostles made their decision in 1 Cor. 15. The Holy Spirit helped them in their reasoning, leading to the decision that they made. The problem with our Communion today is reliance on feeling as the only tool for decision-making.

³⁵ Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), “Conference Statement, GAFCON IV – The Kigali Commitment,” April 21, 2023.

Some Provinces in the Communion were disowned in GAFCON's meeting because they are considered as having 'been taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies of this world (Col. 2:8).'³⁶ Philosophies that GAFCON might be alluding to may include postmodernism. In postmodernism, the Bible is never the authority to direct human behaviours. It is "seen as an interesting book, but we are told, we must always keep in mind that it is a book describing the experiences of people who lived in times totally different from our own."³⁷ If the Bible is not an authority now, then Christians have no ground on which they stand. Their community is no better than worldly.

Conclusion

This article shows the limitations of tradition and cultural beliefs in that no one culture defines universal values. People's values are shaped by what they learn in their early ages in their local communities. Traditions and schools of thought that have shaped different Provinces of the Anglican Communion include premodernism, modernism and postmodernism. Concerning these traditions, some people in the Communion seem to focus on immediate goods, others on medium goods and still others on the ultimate good. Yet, it seems no single Province focuses on only one level of the good. What counts is the dominant tradition in a Province.

It is difficult for leaders of different Provinces to sit down in a council of leaders and patch their differences. The Lambeth Conference of the year 2022 would have narrowed the gap of disagreement among Church leaders and promoted values that shape their central value systems, but the Bible and Anglican traditions appear to have been relegated to the margins of local cultures. Without defining first what the unifying culture of the Communion should be, any council formed by leaders of the Church will achieve little. Academic debates among theologians in the Communion might be the starting point in narrowing the gap of disagreement. In our academic debates, we should revisit the history of the Church to learn different ways in which church problems were solved within and outside Anglican Communion.

³⁶ GAFCON, "Conference Statement."

³⁷ De Vries, "Living in Truth," 139.

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If the Church is a different community from normal geographical communities, then we should define our identity in ways that are free from influences of schools of thought and traditions that appear to threaten biblical teachings. The Bible should not be the one to fit into our cultures. It should be the other way around. If this academic debate is impossible, then it is unlikely that Provinces will form alliances following central values that inform their understanding of the Scriptures. And this will make it difficult for the Communion to operate as one body. Only intentional focus on the will of God may help in discerning what the right teaching should look like since Provinces are bound by cultures, but the Bible is not bound by local cultures.

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