From the Editor

Orthodox Anglicans and Catholicity

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When Basil George Mitchell died on 23 June 2011 English academic life and Christians generally lost one of the most important voices of the twentieth century in public philosophy. Just a few years after he became Nolloth Professor of Christian Religion at the University of Oxford in 1968 he came to Durham in the north of England to give a lecture in the university. His predecessor at Oxford, Ian Ramsey, was then the bishop of Durham. These were heady times for the public profession of christian faith. Ramsey had contributed extensively to the debates on science and religion and the nature of religious language. Mitchell wrote on politics and law and the place of christian faith in a secular society. In the wider community secularization was popularly thought to be coming to its fulfilment[1] and for Anglicans in England their pattern of faith seemed to be particularly old hat. Student unrest had arrived from France and Germany in 1969 and in a form that engaged even the generally conservative theological students. The debate often polarized and older academics were dismissed as simply 'not getting it'. Institution was challenged in the name of community and rationality in the name of experience.

Mitchell's lecture was entitled 'How to Play Theological Ping Pong'.[2] The lecture was packed out and I attended not only as a keen ping pong player (in the more literal sense of using a ball and bat

1. See the recent analyses of Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2009) and Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

2. It was later published as Basil Mitchell, William J. Abraham and Robert Prevost, *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong : And Other Essays on Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991). John Heywood Thomas, who taught philosophy in the Department of Theology, was present at the lecture and gave the subsequent published form a favourable review in *Religious Studies*, 28.3 (1992), pp. 431–432.

at a table) but also as a recently appointed Tutor and Lecturer in New Testament. Mitchell took to task the manner of public debate on theological matters. You could win an argument by showing that your opponent's position was fatally flawed on the assumption that therefore by default your own position was established. Mitchell's point was that such a binary picture of argument about theological issues was not just naive generally but that it seriously misrepresented the complex nature of the subject. There needed to be a more serious presentation. Underlying his sometimes satirical, but consistently entertaining lecture, was another point, namely, that there was a serious conversation going on in academic and church circles and that conversation should be given more attention than was contained in the popular public debate.

This rather simple point could easily be applied to a number of phases in public life. Complex issues are difficult to represent in a popular mass media environment. Mitchell was addressing a vital issue in the understanding and practice of christian faith in a social environment where plausibility assumptions were changing. In such a context where christian identity was at stake the christian community has a particular responsibility to foster serious conversation. In the forty years since Mitchell's Durham lecture Anglicans and also other christian traditions such as the Copts and various Orthodox families have been facing the challenge of defining their christian identity. Dramatic political changes, mass migration and globalization have forced these Christians to work out the terms of their identity in new and different contexts. It is a particularly difficult issue for them because their ecclesial traditions have been so enmeshed with their 'home' environment, just as indeed is the case for Anglicans.[3]

The current Anglican debate about identity, to some extent focused around the proposal of an Anglican covenant, has produced some interesting rhetorical moves. Some participants refer to themselves as 'Orthodox Anglicans' which presumably means they hold to some particular understanding of Anglican beliefs and practices which they see as normative for all Anglicans. Others see the issue before Anglicans worldwide as a question of catholicity over against local independency.

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3. Anglicans were confronted with this in missiological terms by the first Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission established by the Anglican Consultative Council, but alas the report has not been given the attention it deserves. Anglican Consultative Council and Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *For the Sake of the Kingdom: God's Church and the New Creation* (London: Church House, 1986).

There are other elements in the rhetoric of the current confusions that are both interesting and warrant investigation, but these two seem to me to stand together in interesting ways and also appear to proceed without much attention to the serious theological conversation that is being neglected. They also raise some of the questions Basil Mitchell highlighted in the early 1970s.

At the time of Mitchell's lecture New Testament studies were at something of a turning point with the waning of the influence of Rudolf Bultmann and a move from the rather precise form critical analysis of texts in the New Testament to a consideration of the documents as a whole and the communities to which they were addressed. The diversity of approach reflected in the different gospels was just the most obvious starting point for an examination of the diversity to be uncovered in the New Testament generally. This was the time of redaction criticism in the gospels and of the rhetoric to be found in the letters of Paul. The issue became not so much whether particular documents were written by Paul as to the different ways in which he expressed himself in writing to different communities. The great conflict between Judaism and Christianity, made so prominent in the nineteenth century by F.C. Baur, was now widened to see other conflicts and diversity within the NT. Writing on Romans presents a classic example of the different ways of reading a particular text which might or might not have been written out of a knowledge of the state of Christianity in Rome.[4]

As a young NT lecturer these issues claimed my attention and Mitchell's lecture crystallized a set of questions that were both disturbing and challenging. The challenge was focused sharply by the publication of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* in 1971 in the US and in 1972 in the UK.[5] Bauer had published this work first in Germany in 1934, but it gained little notice in the politically preoccupied Germany of the time. It was reissued in German in 1964, but it caught the flow of the times in 1972 in the

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4.   See Karl P. Donfried, *The Romans Debate* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, rev. edn, 1991). Bruce Kaye, ' ''To the Romans and Others'' Revisited', *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976), pp. 37–77. The classic text in this movement had been Albert Schweitzer and W. Montgomery, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Macmillan, 1956). Originally published in German in 1930 Schweitzer tried to overcome the problems with a radically Lutheran interpretation of Paul generally and of Romans in particular.

5.   W. Bauer, *Rechtglaubigkeit Und Ketzerei Im Altesten Christentum* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1934; ET *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, London, 1972).

Anglo-Saxon world not least because it challenged a traditional view of the authority on which Christianity was based.

During the nineteenth century the reliability of the text of the Bible had been questioned where the assumption had been that Christianity was founded on reliable historical events reported in historically reliable texts. Bauer addressed a different question. He challenged the idea, long held in Christianity, that authentic Christianity was that taught by Jesus to the apostles and then passed on by the apostles and embedded in the NT. Divergence from this original norm came later and was construed in varying degrees as heresy over against the originating orthodoxy. This was how to construe orthodoxy and heresy. Bauer claimed that this picture was a later construction and served the purposes of the emerging institutional church.[6] He proposed looking at both sides of the argument without prejudice to which side 'won' the argument within the church. Bauer did not deal with the NT material but rather later documents and those areas of the ancient world not covered by the NT material.

It was inevitable that these questions of orthodoxy and heresy should be taken up by NT scholars, though the issue was discussed in more open-ended terms of diversity and unity. While the NT guild of scholars could reasonably see this task in descriptive and analytical terms the task itself and the results created a significant set of theological issues. If the text of the NT did not speak univocally, and if the differences were not simply different ways of putting something, but rather ways of putting something different, then the role of the NT as a classic text of authority in christian faith became a serious theological question. A collection of texts seen as coherent and displaying a high level of detailed agreement could more easily be thought to provide a more or less univocal authority. In the context of demonstrable and significant diversity within the New Testament collection of texts such a univocal authority was less available.

The establishment of a canon of Scripture turns out not to provide an authoritative coherent notion of authority but rather the identification of the character of earliest Christianity marked by diversity and conflict. On a broader theological perspective any serious reflection on the extraordinary notion of incarnation and the promise of divine presence through the Holy Spirit might well have suggested a more nuanced

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6.   This has clear echoes of D.F. Strauss, see B.N. Kaye, 'D F Strauss and the European Theological Tradition: ''Der Ischariotismus Unsere Tag''?', *Journal of Religious History* 17 (1992), pp. 172–93.

and complex sense of authority in christian faith and practice. The diversity embedded in the New Testament turns out to point to a richer and more theologically integrated notion of orthodoxy and its companion heresy.

The year before he was elected as Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams contributed a paper on 'Defining Heresy' to a collection of essays on *The Origins of Christendom in the West*.[7] He notes the early use of the term *haeresis* to mean simply a faction or a party and then, referring to the work of Walter Bauer, goes on to refute, as Bauer had done, the older picture of 'Christian history as the record of a single coherent belief community from which dissident groups broke away because they believed different things'.[8] On the contrary, he claims that 'the history of the early Christian period suggests less a pattern of primitive ideological protest against a clearly defined orthodoxy than a story of the gradual fragmentation of communities originally rather loosely defined as far as commonly accepted belief goes'.[9]

While theological uniformity was slow to develop the tendency to reject varieties of Gnostic teaching was clear very early. Moreover deviant behaviour was more likely to concern these networked christian communities. This issue becomes more important when 'traditional markers of identity have been challenged or destroyed'.[10] He instances the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple as just such an example of this challenge. The great achievement of Tannaiitic Judaism was to give a future and an enduring identity beyond this great tragedy and thereby to sustain a future for Judaism. The disappearance of the use to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer by Anglicans is another occasion of boundary uncertainty and identity disorientation. 'This is how *haeresis* turns into heresy: when a sectional interest or emphasis offends against hardening criteria of belonging, particularly in a period of general disorientation'.[11]

Williams envisages a process whereby at the end of the first century a number of groups associating themselves with the name of Jesus felt the need to develop closer and tighter criteria for belonging. They have circulated texts and traditions and they seem to be marked by practices of baptism and Eucharist. Anxiety about boundaries arises

7.   Rowan Williams, 'Defining Heresy', in A. Kreider (ed.), *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), pp. 313–36.
8.   Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 316.
9.   Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 316.
10.   Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 319.
11.   Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 320.

because of pressure from the state and the need to identify the terms of communication between the groups. So a cluster of practices emerges; sharing martyrdom stories, criteria to discern legitimacy of travelling teachers, testing prophets. In all of this 'increasing significance is given to the role of tangible links with the history of Jesus and to the idea of a *universal* interpretation of the traditions about Jesus that can be applied from community to community across (and beyond) the Roam world'.[12] There are some, notably Gnostics, who fall outside this growing 'catholic' network and they become increasingly regraded as aliens.

At this point Williams pauses to make a crucial point for his argument. Embedded in the christian foundations is a dynamic of disruption. Jesus comes to announce the kingdom of God, not to re-pristinate the faith of ancient Israel. Fulfilling the law involves both continuity and also what turns out to be revolutionary discontinuity as well. 'Christianity is self-consciously both innovative and universalistic; that is to say, it is aware of beginning in a rupture from existing systems of meaning, and it moves consistently and rapidly away from any localised, ethnic or political criteria for belonging.'[13] 'In short, Christianity is fundamentally disruptive of pre-existing forms of religious meaning and social belonging. … The generative moment of Christian language and practice is one of dissonance and difficulty.'[14] Making this point enables him to point out that the same question about discontinuity and continuity applies to those who became heretics and those who did not. The emerging 'catholic' network of recognition did not escape this foundational element in christian faith, indeed this very fact became a serious challenge in the process of institutionalization already beginning in the so-called 'catholic' network.

That process in the course of the third and fourth centuries turned out to involve the creation of a sense of recomposing the world in an ordered and christian way. So continuity between old and new covenant, creator and redeemer, become key themes in the re-running of the arguments of the second century in a new phase in which Christianity was coming to terms with the world as it was. In this context the emerging institutions of Christianity, particularly the *regula fidei* and the sacramental system, were strong enough to cope with divisions that appeared not to be based on fundamental difference

12. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 321.
13. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 322.
14. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 323.

of belief. One could live with schism, but not heresy. Heresy was 'whatever pushes Christian speech over from its precarious balance into a rhetoric of cosmic fragmentation'.[15]

On the basis of this analysis Williams sees the ongoing task as tied necessarily to the disruptive character in Christianity. It has to do with power and 'securing the authority of Christian leadership' and this is important because of the anxieties that inevitably lie within a community 'that is self consciously challenging the prevailing norms of meaning and coherence in the social and cosmic environment'.[16]

> The actual Christian 'norm' is not so much in the steady overcoming of all this in a fully reconciled metaphysic, as in the continuing labour of engagement between the disruptive narrative and the conventions making for historical intelligibility – the institutionally positive aspects that make it possible to see the act of God in Jesus as fulfilling as well as overthrowing, aspects such as ministerial validation and succession, iconography, sacramental theologies and so on.[17]

Added to this Williams claims that the peculiar form of the intellectual life of western Christendom has been of intensifying disunity and scepticism.

This is a powerful analysis that provides the basis for an approach to christian mission which takes seriously the eschatology embedded in the foundation of Christianity and recognizes the inevitable processes of institutionalization at work in any community that exists over time and has to come to terms with generational transmission.

However, it seems to me that there are some things missing in the story. Institutional development in earliest Christianity can be seen within the New Testament documents themselves not only through the pattern of handing on traditions received from others but also in the patterns of church life reflected in Paul's letters and in such things as the passing on of his 'ways'. The association of the narrative of Jesus' last supper with his disciples with the disorderly fellowship meals in Corinth has the effect not only of providing a rationale for more seemly order, but also of establishing a link between the meals and an aspect of Jesus' story. The general emergence of the institutions of ordered ministry and the practices of baptism and commensality in remembrance of Jesus' death, each seen as sacramental activities, took place over a significantly longer period of time and in different ways

15. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 334.
16. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 334.
17. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 335.

in different places. The idea of a select list of christian documents is first referred to in a second-century document, but the final form of the process in anything like a canon of agreed texts takes several centuries to appear and gain general acceptance. These institutions of sacrament and associated offices of ministry and a canon only develop in the context of increasing inter-local connection. The situation seems to me to be more complex and multi-faceted than Williams' suggestion that the development of notions of identity and heresy and associated doctrines that 'mirrored the mechanisms of episcopal authority'.[18]

Missing also from this analysis is the influence of the social structures of contemporary society in the formation and apprehension of emerging institutionalities in Christianity. Not the least important in this process was the adoption of Christianity as the religion of the empire and the reflex effect which this had on christian institutional perceptions.[19] Anglicans are not without experience in this phenomenon. We can see it in the changing patterns of ecclesiastical relations with political powers from Wilfrid through Alfred, Lanfranc and others to the Tudor Royal Supremacy and the emergence in the twentieth century of stages of quasi democratic models in the Church of England. Outside England the process is more clearly visible in the post-independence Episcopal Church in the USA with a constitution that is virtually a mirror image of new Federal Constitution of the USA, or the Westminster Parliamentary style of synods in former British colonies such as South Africa, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. Making these comparisons does not denigrate the point in relation to the early church, but it does point to the contingent character of the modelling that emerged from this interaction.

In this context it seems to me that Latin Christendom left a heritage in the modern world that characteristically sees the holy in the church in primarily institutional terms. One can see this most acutely in the papal claims to exclusive representation of Christ from Gregory VII up to the present via Vatican I. It is also visible in the debates about the validity of ministerial orders that marked a good deal of Anglican Roman Catholic relations in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century.

Rowan Williams helpfully refers to iconography and the Greek christological debates of the seventh and eighth centuries which seem

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18. Williams, 'Defining Heresy', p. 313.

19. There is a wide literature on this. For a recent account see Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

to me to present an alternative to Western institutionality that is more vernacular in its conception of the divine presence and resonates with aspects of lay authority in Anglicanism.

Williams' article, emphasized by these comments, shows clearly that notions of orthodoxy are not simply about bodies of doctrine that can be regarded as normative in all places at all times. Heresy has ecclesial connotations which require engagement with some sense of catholicity. Such a catholicity would provide for a dynamic interaction between the various locals that go to make up that network of churches that has emerged in history from Christianity in England and that go by the name of Anglican.[20]

Claiming the title 'orthodox' or 'catholic' in the present uncertain times of Anglicanism seems to point to something like the kind of theological ping pong to which Basil Mitchell objected so long ago and in a different context. In Mitchell's terms the game probably begs too many questions to be helpful in the formation of any future ecclesial shape for Anglican churches around the world. Whatever the public rhetoric might be it would be a great service to the future of this christian tradition for these questions to be further examined in depth by the many scholars working within that tradition. The *Journal of Anglican Studies* stands ready to facilitate such a conversation.

A Note from Dr Timothy Yates

Since I wrote the review of Noel Cox's book on church and state I have discovered that subsequent to my retirement from the General Synod of the Church of England in 2000, the Blair government introduced parliamentary legislation removing ordination as a bar to election to the House of Commons. This change came into effect in an Act of Parliament in 2001. I am advised by the Secretary General of the Church of England that this is now how the law operates for clergy of the Church of England. This is contrary to what I wrote in my review in JAS 8.2 (November 2010) p.249. I apologise for any false impression given to readers of the JAS.

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20. See the use of this idea in Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2008).