

Dialectical Anglicanism

The term 'dialectical materialism' was a term first used by the nineteenth century Prussian socialist (and interestingly a tanner by trade) Joseph Dietzen. His theory of 'movers', which facilitate the development of the economy, found its way, in various manifestations, into the thinking of Hegel and Marx. Much influenced by the disturbing lynchings that characterised the slave states of the South during his early visits to America; Dietzen tried unsuccessfully to re-establish the unity between various branches of the political left.

As a prototypical advancer of revolutionary new social forms of society Dietzen can scarcely have given the then Anglican Communion (developing as it was throughout the period) a thought, except to lump it perhaps with the worst aspects of bourgeois hegemony. Yet the dialectical approach to the Christian Gospel that has emerged in recent years, not least in the seemingly interminable struggles regarding sexuality is something he would recognise as a destructive negative trait.

Current Anglican thinking is characterised by reactive argument as opposed to proactive affirmation. The most vocal and unyielding side of Anglicanism seems to be that which proclaims a loud 'no' to perceived change and development. An attempted revolution in a Marxian style of overthrow consequently seems as much an option as a retreat into a self-affirming club of like-minded and strongly held viewpoints.

Enter into this scenario the Bishops of the Church of England, the new archiepiscopal regime in Uganda and the GAFCON movement.

On 4th January 2013 the Church of England House of Bishops issued a statement resulting in headlines 'Church of England drops gay bishop opposition'¹. The statement, which broadly proposes that clergy in civil, but celibate, partnerships may now be considered as candidates for the episcopate has met with derision. This appears as a paradoxical attempt to open bishoprics to gay men (still men only at this point following the November failure of the General Synod to agree to women bishops) on completely unequal terms to their heterosexual counterparts. Already the proposal has succeeded in appeasing neither conservative nor liberal factions, merely reinforcing a general view that the bishops are out of touch, even disingenuous.

Meanwhile, in a part of the Anglican Communion far removed from middle England, Uganda has a new Archbishop in the person of the Most Rev'd Stanley Ntagali. Hopes will be high for his period in office, not least on the part of breakaway bishops from the American Episcopal Church, whose prominence at the enthronement eclipsed that of the official visitor John

¹ See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20914799> (accessed January 2013)

Sentamu, Archbishop of York, giving them the appearance of 'minders' keeping the Ugandans toeing the right line.

With such schismatic American support it is difficult also to see anything other than a dialectic GAFCON movement for the foreseeable future. Certainly, it will trouble the next Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby as much as it inconvenienced his predecessor. The fragmentation of the Communion has begun to harden into two loosely linked camps that in turn reflect the ongoing cultural wars in the United States of America and divisions in North American Anglicanism.

The question now will be whether the historic 'movers' of Anglicanism will ever reassert themselves by living with differences? This has in the past been characterised as the Anglican genius for compromise. It is a way that bears little resemblance to the kind of power struggles that the Marxian model envisaged, except that a division in Anglicanism has ensued, is continuing and seems currently without any potential for resolution.

Sadly, the revolutionary new world of love that the poor carpenter of Nazareth envisaged and which long preceded the ideas of the tanner of Prussia is as far off as it ever was.

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