

# The Edge: The Episcopal Church, September 2007

## Fulcrum Newsletter, September 2007

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'Edge' has several meanings, literal and figurative. These include, 'sharpened side of blade', 'brink of a precipice', 'critical position or moment' and 'boundary line'. When people are 'on edge' they are 'excitable or irritable'. The verb, 'to edge', means 'to furnish with a border' and finally there is (the very Anglican verb?) 'to edge forward'.

Many of these meanings seem to coalesce in the meeting of the Archbishop of Canterbury with the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church in New Orleans, 20-22 September 2007. Afterwards, the Bishops' meeting will continue until the 25 September. This is just before the 30 September deadline, which was given by the Primates of the Anglican Communion for a response to their communiqué from Dar es Salaam in February this year. Perhaps it is worth drawing on three theologians of the Anglican tradition to seek a wider context for these events?

400 years ago, in 1607, Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626), the Bishop of Winchester, preached before King James I at Greenwich. He was a polymath, multi-linguist, translator, spiritual scholar and bishop, a subtle and sometimes difficult-to-follow preacher, who was thrown into controversies. Does that sound somewhat familiar?

His text was, 'And be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves' and he used the image of the edge. Concerning the second part of that verse, he commented: 'Then secondly, he giveth it an edge, by saying if we follow not his caution, we fall into a flat *paralogisme*, we make a false conclusion, or fallacy. Yea, a double edge: First, that we are deceived: The second, that we deceive ourselves.'<sup>1</sup>

Andrewes surely is echoing here the double-edged sword in Hebrews 4: 12, 'the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...'<sup>2</sup>

He strikes while the irony is hot:

And the Apostle could not possibly devise to speak more fitly, or to give his Caution a better edge. For these great hearers, nothing so much nettles them, as to be counted men deceived, unwise or overseen. Men are deceived for want of knowledge. They reckon themselves the only people, as if knowledge should die with them. And being men of knowledge, consequently freed from error, of any men alive. They pity much the blindness of the former times: but as for them, they see light clearly, and are not deceived you may be sure...<sup>3</sup>

Those who have ears to hear, and actions to perform, in The Episcopal Church, let them hear and perform.

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<sup>1</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, *XCVI Sermons by The Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God, Lancelot Andrewes, Late Lord Bishop of Winchester* (London: 1661), p.757.

<sup>2</sup> Always seriously playful with words, I think Andrewes would have enjoyed the strangely iconic initials of the Revised English Bible translation of Hebrews 5: 12, 'By this time you ought to be teachers, but instead you need someone to teach you the ABC of God's oracles over again.'

<sup>3</sup> Andrewes, *XCVI Sermons* p. 761.

Andrewes was a contemporary, friend and admirer of Richard Hooker (1554-1600). Both defended the Church of England on two edges: against Roman Catholicism and the Puritans – or Rome and Geneva, as Hooker often put it. As an Anglican, he was 'Reformed' in theology but drew on 'natural law'. Rather than respond with an instant tract to the Puritan opposition to him in his church, The Temple, he retired to a quieter parish and wrote his magisterial, multi-volume *Of The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*.<sup>4</sup><http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=32 - edn16# edn16>

What are the two extreme 'edges' that the Anglican Communion needs defending against today? It seems to me that they are the 'autonomous rootless liberalism' that too often has undergirded the actions of The Episcopal Church and the 'independent relentless puritanism' that ignores the pivotal, gathering role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Both positions, in effect, have tried to trump the 'interdependence' of the Communion with their pre-emptive actions and reactions.

Immensely learned and biblically founded, Hooker drew on a hinterland of classical literature, patristics and 'natural law'. His works were read by Roman Catholic and Puritan theologians. Sounds familiar? Oliver O'Donovan is Professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh. Formerly he was Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology in the University of Oxford, and a member of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. It was he who coined the phrase concerning the Windsor Report, '[the only game in town](#)', and this was echoed by Rowan Williams in his [speech](#) to General Synod in February 2005.

Like Hooker, instead of reacting with an instant tract on the current crisis in the Anglican Communion, O'Donovan responded with a series of [seven monthly articles](#) for Fulcrum. They provide crucial, challenging and nourishing background reading for this week.

Our third central theologian on 'edge' is Samuel T Coleridge (1772-1834). In his *Aids to Reflection*, he referred to 'the venerable Hooker' and quoted him 'on the nature of pride'.<sup>5</sup> On 26 October 1831, near the end of his life, the poet, philosopher and theologian of genius, had dinner with his friends. His son, Hartley Coleridge, recorded some of his conversation, which included discussion of the 'point' and the 'edge' as the difference between 'Keeness and Subtlety':

Few men of genius are keen; but almost every man of genius is subtle. If you ask me the difference between keeness and subtlety, I answer that it is the difference between a point and an edge. To split a hair is no proof of subtlety; for subtlety acts in distinguishing between differences – in showing that two things apparently one are in fact two; whereas, to split a hair is to cause division, and not to ascertain difference.<sup>6</sup>

In our present double-edged context of response after 30 September 2007, it may be that Anglicans in the USA are more called towards the 'distinguishing between differences' – staying and arguing from within The Episcopal Church<sup>7</sup> - rather than the 'common cause of division' – splitting and forming another church.<sup>8</sup> As we saw Andrewes echoing Hebrews 4:12, perhaps we can see Coleridge echoing Hebrews 5:14 - which in turn reinforces the text preached before Kings James I in 1607, 'But solid food is for the mature, for those who faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.'

So, we have considered three prolific central Anglican theologians, Lancelot Andrewes, Richard Hooker, and Samuel T Coleridge – who may be, perhaps, representative of our authentic catholic, evangelical and liberal traditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (London: Will Stansby, 1617), books 1-4 and 5 originally published respectively in 1594 and 1597.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London: 1825).

<sup>6</sup> *Specimens of the Table Talk of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, NewYork: George Routledge & Sons, 1835), p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> See the new website, '[Covenant](#)' and the [Anglican Communion Institute, Inc](#) site.

<sup>8</sup> See the '[Common Cause](#)' section of the [Anglican Communion Network](#) site. In the light of some comments on both conservative and liberal Anglican web sites in the USA over the summer, it may be worth noting that on 7 June 1830, Coleridge said over dinner, 'Party men always hate a slightly differing friend more than a downright enemy.' (Coleridge, *Table Talk*, p. 98)

We conclude with the verbs 'to edge' meaning 'to furnish with a border' and 'to edge forward'. These may be referred to the significance of the Anglican Covenant<sup>9</sup> which is at the heart of the [invitation letter](#) to the Lambeth Conference 2008 from the Archbishop of Canterbury: 'My hope is that as we gather we can trust that your acceptance of the invitation carries a willingness to work with these tools [The Windsor Report and the Covenant proposals] to shape our future.'

Rowan Williams flies to New Orleans on 19 September, the day the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican Communion celebrate the life and wisdom of Theodore of Tarsus, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 668 to 690, who came from St Paul's own town. On 24 September 673, he summoned the Synod of Hertford. Amongst other things, that Synod issued canons dealing with the rights and obligations of clergy and restricted bishops to working in their own dioceses and not intruding on the ministry of neighbouring bishops. The canons were based on those of the Council of Chalcedon, in 451.

Lancelot Andrewes died on 25 September 1626. In his book of private devotions, *Preces Privatae*, published 22 years after his death, was discovered a 'Caution before Preaching after the example of St Fulgentius'. Its beautiful coherence of truth surrounded by loving kindness provides a prayer for clarity and charity in the meetings in New Orleans:

I beseech this truth, that loving kindness preventing and following me, he would teach me the wholesome things that I know not; keep me in the true things I know; correct me wherein I am (which is human) in error, confirm me wherein I waver; preserve me from false and noxious things, and make that to proceed from my mouth which, as it shall be chiefly pleasing to the truth itself, so it may be accepted by all the faithful, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>10</sup>

Yours in Christ,

Graham

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<sup>9</sup> See '[Fulcrum Response to the Covenant for the Anglican Communion](#)', Fulcrum, 19 February 2007, and Graham Kings and Jonathan Clark, '[Stretching and the Spirit: The Anglican Covenant](#)', Fulcrum, 1 July 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, *Preces Privatae*, originally composed in Greek and Latin and published in London in 1648. This translation by Robert Atwell, *Celebrating the Saints: Daily Spiritual Readings to accompany the Calendar of the Church of England* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1998), p. 332-333.