

The place of the Reformation in Anglicanism

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I am an Anglican priest who has lived and worked in Africa, Haiti, the United States, and now Canada. And I have spent many years concerned especially with this reality we call “the Anglican Communion”. It is a reality that has drawn Anglican churches from around the world together in structures and acts of common counsel and mission, churches begun as missions from England or later America, but most also now fueled by local mission. The notion of a “communion” has a kind of “catholic” feel to it. Anglicans sat around meeting with Russian and Greek Orthodox theologians a lot in the 1920’s; today they write books about icons; we have bishops, and they all gather at special meetings, dressed in elaborate clothes; and we have Archbishops too, and they are dressed even more colorfully when they meet. And, of course, Anglicans have always had a lot to say about the early Fathers of the Church, and the “primitive” consensus of the early Christians that we represent and so on. So, where is the Reformation in all of this?

The Anglican Communion, as most of you probably know, is tearing apart at the seams these days; there are arguments; schisms; alternative churches and alignments; and fatigued meetings where fewer and fewer people show up. We’re actually not that catholic after all; we are quite *Protestant*. Even though many Anglicans in the West don’t like that designation, it is in fact true. If you travel about the world, Anglicans are all part of the *Protestant* Councils of this or that African or Asian country, or even American city. And in Africa and Asia, where Anglican churches are growing rapidly and engaging in mission widely, it is as “protestants” that they do so. Finally, it is simply the case that Protestants divide. Not necessarily because we are “heretics”, as Tertullian first said, and then Catholics repeated in the 16th and 17th century (and today!); but because of certain commitments that make it hard to keep people together. Not “together” in every sense; but “together” as a single *church*. Indeed, one of the things Anglicanism has struggled with is how to be Protestant and keep the peace of civil society at the same time; and that problem is part of our particular Reformation inheritance.

But this inheritance is only one part of Anglicanism’s resources; and perhaps a limited or deformed part at that. There is great debate among historians as to the relative importance of Luther’s or of Calvin’s influence on the early and developing Church of England. Clearly, both had key roles to play, along with their followers. And so too did various important Protestant revival movements especially in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, some of which hearkened back to Reformation realities. But for all that, contemporary Anglicanism, however much shaped by these elements, does not really track with them. The “revivals” were just that: movements *within* something much larger and perhaps even different. And when one looks at the burgeoning African and Asian churches, they show little interest in the Reformation, or in Luther or Calvin or their followers. They are “Protestant”, as I said; but their Protestantism has a special character that has its own historical genealogy. What is that character? I will look at it under two headings: first, the commitment to Scriptural moral renewal; and second the reactive commitment to cohesive political (and ecclesial) pluralism.

I. Scriptural moral renewal

Let me begin with the larger cultural-religious movement that the English Reformation emerged *within*: Scriptural moral renewal. It is a movement that encompasses, in a very concrete way, English Christian purposes from the late 14th-century, with John Wycliffe, through to the 19th-century missionary expansion of Anglicanism into Africa and the South Pacific (not to mention earlier in North America); and it has continued to influence the larger character of Anglican mission in what I would call the 20th-century “re-Protestantization” of Anglicanism through the Evangelical revival associated with e.g. John Stott and more recent movements.

The movement itself – Scriptural moral renewal – was a medieval one. We can see aspects of it at work especially in the so-called revival of the *vita apostolica* ideal – the form of life of the first apostles -- among the new groups of the “canons regular”, and then the Friars, including of course Francis and his followers.¹ The central interest here was to re-embrace the life of the primitive Church, as it was conceived based upon very literal readings of the Gospels and the Book of Acts: poverty, itinerancy, shared material goods, and evangelical preaching were all central aspects of this diffuse movement. At issue was the *form of life* the Christian was called to assume in conformity with the Scriptural witness – hence my phrase “Scriptural moral renewal”.

In England, this larger European ferment took its own forms, especially by the end of the 14th-century, in the theological and political turmoil associated, in the wake of the Plague and the divided papacy, with John Wycliffe and his followers, eventually known as Lollards. Wycliffe was engaged in a long battle against the Franciscans, whom he saw as a corrupted and materially-self-aggrandizing set of Christian frauds. Much as Francis himself had done, Wycliffe took hold of the literal descriptions of Jesus’ and the Apostles’ lives, and used them as standards for judging the Church’s moral calling. He developed a radical argument against the Church’s ownership of property and in favor of secular “dominion” – a vision that, if not itself responsible for Henry VIII’s later abolition of the monasteries, certainly fitted well with it. Most importantly, Wycliffe articulated a theology of Scripture that logically demanded its literal application to the Christian’s moral life; and as such, the Scripture’s dissemination in terms that were graspable by the people, that is, in the vernacular.²

All this is well-known, and indeed a part of the Protestant mythology of the English Reformation – Wycliffe, the “Morningstar” of reform in the proto-Puritan John Bale’s phrase.³ The point, however, was that Wycliffe’s orientation proved remarkably stable as an influential undercurrent in English reform thinking. In the early 16th-century, to be sure, Luther would play a key role as an inspiring catalyst. But the real work in refashioning and carrying through this already-given set of concerns was taken up by native Englishmen in their own way, most notably William Tyndale, the first printed translator of the New Testament and Pentateuch into English. Wycliffe’s witness and perhaps direct organization had spawned an ongoing movement of

¹ E. W. McDonnell, ‘The *Vita Apostolica*: Diversity or Dissent?’, *Church History*, xxiv (1955), 15-31; Andrew Garrett Traver, *The Identification of the ‘Vita Apostolica’ with a Life of Itinerant Preaching and Mendicancy: Its Origins, Adherents, and Critics ca. 1055–1266*. Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1966.

² Ian C. Levy (ed), *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden, Brill, 2011)

³ G. R. Evans, *John Wycliffe: Myth and Reality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), p. 244-245.

Christian Bible-translation and production, as well as often secretive but sometimes open protest verging on heresy in many elements, known as Lollardy.⁴ (The origin of this word remains mysterious.) Scholars continue to debate the extent to which Lollardy was disseminated in England still by the 1520's. But few doubt its survival, and indeed, its flourishing in many areas. The so-called Wycliffite Bible – the translated Bible that followed Wycliffe's call for vernacular preaching and reading – is the most common surviving manuscript book in Middle English (over 250 copies). This is so despite its complex length and the sturdy attempts made to destroy it. Lollard interest, thus, were clearly popular and deep-rooted.⁵ Tyndale may himself, as some have argued,⁶ been directly connected with Lollard adherents. But whatever the case, Tyndale's interests and attitudes coincided with key elements of Lollardy. Furthermore, the pre-Luther focus of Erasmian Scriptural moralism and reform had also been implanted in the universities where Tyndale was formed, and played to deep-seated concerns. While I am arguing for an older interpretation that, albeit one that continues to have strong support, there are also revisionist evaluations of English Protestantism that see Erasmian tradition as a key thread.⁷ Certainly it is one that is consistent with my overall perspective.

In any case, I want to stress the claim that Reformation ideas did NOT initially spread in England through printing. There were but one or two printing presses in all of England until the mid-16th-century, unlike Germany, where there were dozens. What writings of Luther there were, were imported in Latin (the language in which Luther's early works were written, and thus only his earliest works had currency in England), and few small translations later. Tyndale's Bible translations were all printed in Antwerp, and later English reforming books were printed in Holland. Finally, the official English Bibles, permitted by the King in 1537 and after, were printed in Paris. Only in the 1540's did printing in England take off, and with it *English religious* texts.⁸ And this they did through the work of Dutch immigrants and refugees from the wars in the Lowlands.⁹ The point is: even if Tyndale and other early English reformers did not

⁴ John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards 1414-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); See also Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵ Su Fang Ng, "Translation, Interpretation, and Heresy: The Wycliffite Bible, Tyndale's Bible, and the Contested Origin", in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (Summer, 2001), pp. 315-338

⁶ See Donald Dean Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988); Patrick Collinson, "William Tyndale and the Course of the English Reformation", in *Reformation*, 1 (1996), pp. 72-97.

⁷ Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 83-120; Tyndale was no friend of Erasmus' theology or anti-Lutheran polemic. But the humanistic context that Erasmus was seen as embodying was one that Tyndale arguably inhabited. Certainly, Erasmus was later made the patron saint of English reform from one point of view. See Gregory D. Dodds, *Exploiting Erasmus: The Erasmian Legacy and Religious Change in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

⁸ Alex Ryrie, *The gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 113-158.

⁹ Andrew Pettegree, "Printing and the Reformation: the English Exception", in Peter Marshall and Alex Ryrie (eds), *The Beginnings of the English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 157-179; Carl S. Meyer, "Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books, 12 May 1521", in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 9:2 (Oct. 1958), pp. 173-187; Basil Hall gives some helpful detail, however, on how Lutheran ideas spread through less formal publications – devotional tracts and even the revised liturgies that incorporated Lutheran commitments, and sometimes Luther directly, in ways that were never made explicit. See his early rise and gradual decline of

work alone, and certainly found their interests kindled and directed by their limited encounter with Luther's writings, nonetheless they grew their ideas and had them spread in their own way, and on a basis very different than in Germany. And ultimately, a different theological focus emerged.

The central element of this British orientation lies in its theological reifying of the Scriptures. Wycliffe himself had a robust Neoplatonic understanding of the "words" of Scripture embodying the very "ideas" of God the Son.¹⁰ Some later Puritans held to analogous notions (e.g. Edwards), although the metaphysics ultimately proved less important. What *was* important was a practical claim regarding the literal authority of the Bible that, with whatever Christocentric hermeneutics were brought to bear, nonetheless insisted on maintaining the breadth of Old and New Testaments in their detail and divine constraints on the historical lives of Christian and Church.

From Tyndale's viewpoint, as his theology was gradually worked out through the experience of his translating of first the New Testament, and then the Pentateuch, two central doctrinal commitments emerge. First, the "Law" is never superseded. Rather, it is enabled. To take up the key Lutheran doctrine of Justification: Tyndale will originally embrace Luther's claims about this energetically, and he will do so to the end of his life: we are justified, not through the works of law-keeping – for in this, the Law continually condemns us through our unavoidable disobedience. But Tyndale even from the start, and quite firmly by the 1530's, will insist that Justification's pneumatic reach – the empowering work of the indwelling Spirit – must issue finally in *law-keeping*, quite literally, although now a lawkeeping that is marked by divine love as its interior power and purpose. Tyndale's discussion of Justification in his fullest theological treatise, *Obedience of a Christian Man* comes in his chapter against the Pope. The issue at stake there is true "love"; which comes by faith. This is the *instigating* problematic, in a way that moves in a direction very different from Luther.¹¹ How does one "love freely", he asks?¹² Not when coerced by usurped authorities or offices like the papacy. Not on the basis of any human "office" at all in fact. But only where the Spirit of God moves a person to love the law of God. (This is the New Covenant written in the heart, spoken of by Jeremiah). A human being can "love" freely, as a sovereign agent, where the Spirit takes hold of him or her out of a vision of God's "free" mercy and love in Christ for us. Justification at root, yes, but described in terms of a kind of motive, as it were, to pneumatic love.

William Clebsch's classic argument about Tyndale inventing a kind of proto-Covenant theology may not be right. Nor may Clebsch be right that this was spurred by Tyndale's study of the Old Testament as he moved on to translate it.¹³ Still, the articulations are striking: in his revised 1534 Preface¹⁴ to his New Testament translation he writes clearly, and in a very unLutheran manner: "The general covenant wherein all other are comprehended and included, is this. If we

Lutheranism in England (1520-1600)", in Derek Baker (ed.), *Reform and Reformation: England and the Continent: c1500-v1750* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), pp. 102-131.

¹⁰ Ian Christopher Levy, "John Wyclif's Neoplatonic View of Scripture in its Christological Context", in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 11 (2003), pp. 227-240; Ghosh.

¹¹ *Obedience*, ed, David Daniell (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 52-3.

¹² pp. 42-44.

¹³ William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964).

¹⁴ In Daniell's edition (Yale). Vs. the earlier 1525-26 Prologues.

meek ourselves to God, to keep all his laws, after the example of Christ: then god hath bound himself unto us to keep and make good all the mercies promised in Christ, throughout all the scripture”.¹⁵

Justification leads to law-keeping, and so the Scriptures are, in effect, all about this integrated reality, hence their literal force, albeit a complex one. This leads to the second doctrinal commitment we see in Tyndale and as something that informs the wider British Protestant tradition: that is, that a core doctrine like Justification is almost always deeply bound to an interest in the particularly *social*, not individual, soil of faith’s deployment.¹⁶ The critical debate over Tyndale’s particular theological stance on this matter rather proves the point, despite differences in final evaluation. Was he a Lollard? Or was he an unexceptional Lutheran with a little ethical humanism thrown in?¹⁷ I tend to agree with Daniell, when he writes that Tyndale didn’t “need” Luther.¹⁸ Tyndale’s theological commitments were given primarily through his Bible reading itself, and the NT as a whole, which he imbibed in his own British context. Notions of purgatory or aural confession were not to be found in the Bible, and with their rejection “two supports of the Church’s wealth and power collapse”. But that’s the point: the issue was “dominion” in this case – who held the “office” of salvation? Not the Church, but God. For Tyndale, abuses of the church – oppressive demands, demeaning, dehumanizing and ultimately contrary to Scripture’s express calling, needed to be rejected; they were false. And the alternative was the fact that salvation was offered in a manner “free” from such demands, demands whose social form was given in a corrupted ecclesial structure and clerisy.

But if free from such corruption, then embodied finally in the *uncorrupted* form of well-ordered office, or social life. And this law-keeping – love itself – is now described directly in terms of the right social relations that from the beginning seemed to underscore Tyndale’s interest: “if we love our neighbors in God and Christ...*then* may we be bold to trust in God through Christ and his deserving, for all mercy.” “For all the promises of the mercy and grace that Christ hath purchased for us, are made upon the condition that we keep the law”. Hearing the word of God, we are made every day better and better, till we “be grown into a perfect man in the knowledge of Christ and love of the law of God”¹⁹. Justification, in Bishop Hugh Latimer’s later words, transforms the soil of our “unperfect” works into the seed bed of a new “goodness” – we are “made good” – but specifically so in order that we can now do our “duty”.²⁰

¹⁵ p. 4

¹⁶ Cf. to Augsburg Confession: the emphasis on very short discussion of works is always to subordinate their meaning to justification. Not so in Homilies. The explication is serial, and the final interest is indeed in the works and in their specificity of duty: following the commands of neighborly good treatment and obedience, these two.

¹⁷ Smeeton. Trueman. collinson. See also Cf. also essays in John A. R. Dick and Anne Richardson, *Tyndale and the Law* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers), 1994.

¹⁸ David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 58-59.

¹⁹ p. 5

²⁰ p. 142, sermon at Grimsthorpe 1553. Latimer’s outlook is well-known, and consistent. Cf. Sermon on Romans 13 (8,9), 1552: love as fulfilling of the law. Obviously, this is the same kind of focus as Tyndale, via the lectionary in this case (Advent 1). But nonetheless, the focus is similar: and Latimer is able to speak of “losing one’s justification” in terms of willfully disobeying God (p. 7). The goal is “repentance”, in 3 parts: sorry plus faith; fighting against sin, and finally “penance” itself. Yes, only Christ’s death can merit us forgiveness; still, there are necessary things to be done: restitution; and then the “hedges” upon our actions that we take up: gods’ commandments, our neighbor’s good, our conscience, the laws and ordinances of the state. We are to conform ourselves to what is just in our common life.

The issue of “duty” is key here. Sin in this context is “law-breaking” and it leads to damnation. Justification is salvation, because it leads to law-keeping. And law-keeping is love, given in the proper order of society – among family members and the offices rightly distributed throughout the commonwealth as a whole. If damnation was something to worry about, it’s adjudication lay here, in the way a person lived his or her brief life within this order. Children, wives, husbands, farmers, scholars, clergy. This is Tyndale’s main interest in *Obedience*. While Tyndale certainly didn’t read Wycliffe, there is a fit between the two that is astonishing, and that makes the later swing of Protestant Anglicanism towards Calvin and his ideas seem less novel than one might otherwise think.

Read the Scriptures, and obey them literally, and do so on the basis of and for the sake of your larger community. That was the English “way”, and it remained so in English Protestantism with a special emphasis. Indeed we can leave aside all the intricate struggles within the Church of England for several centuries, and see this as the great energizing motor of British Christianity through the 20th century: for the missionary movement of Anglicanism has been based on these two elements – Bible translation and dissemination and moral reform, that is, obedience. My own theological college in Toronto, Wycliffe College, was founded in 1877, during a time of evangelical renewal within Anglicanism as a whole. The Chapel windows are an exact reflection of this reality I have been describing. In the back, above the entrance, is a single and small window with Wycliffe in the center, surrounded by Luther and Calvin. Fine – the Reformation pillars. But the intricate and large windows up and down the sides of the chapel – the ones a worshiper actually looks at, tell a different story: on one side 5 windows that elaborately trace the translation of the Bible into English, from Wycliffe to the King James Authorized Version of 1611, with a final window showing this movement reaching out to the Canadian indigenous peoples, with the Mohawk translation of the early 19th century. On the other side of the building, are five windows filled with the story of Evangelical Anglicans taking the Bible into the wilds of the Canadian north, and then throughout the world. There are no European heroes in this story besides the English and the indigenous peoples of the New World and Asia.

II. Political resilience in the face of pluralization (including religious).

A common paradox, perhaps. But the key is how the paradox is described. For Latimer, extended discussions of justification by faith in terms of our “unperfect” works, and Christ’s only upon which our salvation depends, go hand in hand with admonitions to “labour thou, and God will bless thee” (sermon on epiphany 1, 1552 p. 154), with long descriptions of the OT theology of blessing bound to righteousness. The Magi are saved by their faith; but they bring gifts. The sermon’s culmination is Jesus’ submission to his parents in obedience and “labour”, showing us the same.

epiphany 5 (1552): slothful bishops and clergy are the “devil” sowing the bad seed, or at least not preventing it. Seed that is given in law-breaking and final damnation. Justification by Christ’s merits alone can save us (p. 193). But the good works show us this faith in Christ, as it is clothed in repentance and new obedience. This is described in terms of just dealings and love and charity, vs. monks and friars and heretics and the rest. Justification by Christ “makes us good”, so that we can then do our “duty” (p. 142, sermon at Grimsthorpe 1553)

I have talked about Scriptural obedientialism as a key element in English Christianity which the Reformation rekindled and indeed focused in important ways, but that was, in a sense “native” to Britain and finally resisted aspects of central Reformation doctrine. Let me know pick up on the second element that I have already mentioned, but whose importance moves English Christianity *out* of a certain realm of Reformation commitment within 150 years of Luther. This is the social and political concern of English Christian existence, and in this case, the Reformation plays a negative, although highly creative, role.

I like to tell my students that there are three key moments in the history of English Anglicanism: the Reformation, especially in the 1540’s when the essential liturgical documents of Anglicanism were written and imposed on the nation; then 1688/89, the so-called “Glorious Revolution”, when the Catholic monarch James II was kicked out, and Parliament brought in the Protestant William of Orange to succeed him. This marked a renewed Protestantism in England, but also a new kind of Protestantism. Finally, I like to underline World War I as the last turning point in English Christianity – a dark and degrading one. Among these three moments, however, 1688 is perhaps the most important in long run, because it affected far more than England, as its purposes and implications moved over, especially to America and then elsewhere in various mutations and parallels.

The issue in 1688, to put it simplistically, was how to deal with religious disagreement and violence, and the response was to politically enshrine religious pluralism (Christian) and toleration. The vision and civil war. Reformation and post-Reformation – both Catholic and Protestant – were “persecuting societies” in varying respects, and this is quite true in England, all the way through the 17th century at least.²¹ (The last individual arrested and imprisoned for blasphemy in England was George Holyoake in 1842 Holyoake is credited with inventing the term “secularism”, to describe a moral system based on non-religious foundations). In England, the divisive consequences of the 16th-century Christian struggles came to a head in the 1640’s and 1650’s, in the form of a series of civil wars, tens of thousands of deaths – indeed hundreds of thousands if one counts Ireland, as one ought – the execution of an archbishop and a monarch, along with many others. The struggle to deal with Christian diversity finally came to political resolution in the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 and the first parliamentary acts of toleration in 1689. This proved the beginning of a long and steady opening up of protected social space for varying and vying religious commitments, that came to fruition in 1829 with the Catholic Relief Act, and finally in 1858 with the first Jewish member of Parliament.

One can track this English political movement, again, according to significant presentation of the key Reformation doctrine of Justification. I will mention only two instances, the first being John Locke, and the second, but in passing, second William Colenso.

Scriptural obedience was an English passion, and for the sake of a communal integrity. What happens in the course of the 17th century is that the Church as the instrumental expression of an integrated commonwealth of righteousness – again, both for Establishment and separatist Christians alike – seems to fail in its efficacy. That is, even the “reformed” Church cannot

²¹John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and ‘Early Enlightenment’ Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 94, quoting Mark Goldie, and taking up a theme of medieval history.

uphold the larger community of the nation. Despite the obvious maintenance of what we can still see as classic formulations of the 16th-century doctrine of justification, most historians are agreed at least that the 17th century saw the rise of alternative models, if not the actual subordination of the classic doctrine to them. Lutheran *and* Calvinist notions drift into the shadows.²² This is true even more so in the 18th-century, despite Whitfield and Wesley's controverted renewal of the theme.

The issue was the loss of ecclesial community itself, and parallel to it, the marginalization of the family as the prime political location of order. This is the era of the rise of the magistracy and of national law. Certainly, the church had, as it were, been both the object of Justification – the receiver of righteous life – but also the orderer of that life's maintained space, the place where the Scriptures could be heard, where grace could be received, and love of the Law could be nurtured; while the family was the place where it's fruit was to be enjoyed. The post-civil wars period – i.e. that of the later Stuarts – was, however, one of expectation and disillusionment both: searching for another means by which what was “necessary for salvation” could be granted unimpeded access without accumulating the bankrupted hopes for Established church and dissenting sect together. Life expectancy actually dropped in England during the 17th-century. The Civil Wars themselves were a time of hunger and starvation, along with brutality and murder, as well as the steady erosion of stability, both economic and personal.²³ Whom could you trust at all? Almost 200,000 persons died in the wars, about 5% of the population, half from violent acts, another from war-related disease.²⁴ (And let us not speak of Ireland, where Cromwell's army and its wars were responsible for 600,000 deaths.) The ravages of disease, furthermore, continued after the Restoration, including, as we know, the Great Plague of London in the early 1660's, which killed 20% of the city. The search for a new center for social order was, for many, a desperate one. What some have pointed to as the successful dissemination of English Arminianism, Latitudinarianism, and Socinianism is in part tied to this disillusioned quest.

John Locke exemplifies this shift to a new context of social expectation: a shift from the Church herself to the *natural community* and the demands of the natural community's mediating truth. We all know something of the Lockean “tolerant society”. And it is this society that is clearly at the center of Locke's own largest intellectual endeavor: how articulate the basis and form of a social sphere in which human individuals can live securely given the moral impossibility of religious coercion – an impossibility visible for all to see, in his mind.

But this tolerant society is actually a working out of (or at least symbiotically related to) Locke's reformulated religious vision of justification, understood in terms of the question of “what is

²²See, variously: J. Wayne Baker, “*Sola Fide, Sola Gratia*: The Battle for Luther in Seventeenth-Century England”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16:1 (Spring, 1985), pp. 115-133. ; Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., “Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and the Sources of John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45:1 (Jan-March 1984), pp. 49-66. On these developments into the 18th Century, see Gregory F. Scholtz, “Anglicanism in the Age of Johnson: The Doctrine of Conditional Salvation”, in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22:2 (Winter, 1988-89), pp. 182-207; John Spurr, “‘Rational Religion’ in Restoration England”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49:4 (Oct.-Dec., 1988), pp. 563-585.

²³Diane Purkiss, *The English Civil War: A People's History* (London: HarperCollins, 2006).

²⁴Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 201-229.

necessary for salvation”. That Locke was a Christian, few have any doubt. That his Christian faith was lodged firmly within the Established Church of England, furthermore, is now accepted. And that he, at least and along with many others, considered his faith to be completely coherent with the Church of England’s official formularies, seems clear. Finally, that he was a carefully, if not quite as synthetic, a reader of Scripture as, say, Hobbes, is also clear. Although Locke was accused of Socinianism, and there are those who still see this as possible, it seems unreasonable to press these kinds of theological identifications at a time precisely when their very meaning was malleable in the minds of Christian protagonists. What is relatively new in the scholarly literature – beginning in the 1970’s only, with the work of people like John Dunn²⁵ -- is the willingness to acknowledge the *centrality* of Locke’s Christian faith to his larger project.

Locke’s 1695 *Reasonableness of Christianity* can be seen as his Christian argument for a religious basis for his tolerant pluralist society.²⁶ And the issue here is “equality”: equality of access, as it were, to God’s justice. Only by asserting this religiously could one uphold equality’s *political* shape. More importantly, the political shape reflected the religious reality.

Locke’s religious or theological entry into this argument is indicated in his *Treatises on Government*²⁷: the equality of all human beings is based on the claim that we are all the “workmanship” of God (II.5-6); we are equally, therefore, God’s “property”, and stand before God on the same basis as one another. Of course, this is true of all creatures. Locke goes further and asserts the Biblical notion of the human being as created in the *imago Dei* (I.30), which is given specifically in human intellectual capacities – in “reasoning”, that is, that distinguishes human beings from other animals. This will be the basis for Locke’s “natural” religion – we can all reason to God through the use of our abstractive intellect, and indeed gain certain fundamental notions about God’s character and our duty, assuming our reasoning is unimpeded. Rights, duties, and the rest, all flow from this.

The point, though, is that this core reality of human nature demands common respect of human life: “rights” and also duties. Together, these mark the contours of appropriate – because God-given and demanded – “freedom”, a freedom, that is, to pursue one’s divine vocation or purpose in life for the sake of the common good. That is the purpose for which toleration is geared. (Dunn’s original argument was that Locke’s argument actually is a political defense of Calvinistic vocation: a society where each individual can fulfill his or her vocation is a society of protected equal rights and duties). Locke opens the *Second Treatise*, significantly, on just this note with a long quote from Hooker himself (Bk. I) on equality and the nature of community and common concern.²⁸

In the *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, then, Locke seeks to provide a specifically theological framework for his views on equality. How ought we to frame the Christian religion,

²⁵ John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the ‘Two Treatises of Government’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). On vocation, Chapter 18, pp. 245-261.

²⁶ More recently, Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke and Equality: Christian foundations in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002). Papers on Waldron’s book, by among other John Dunn and Paul Sigmund, are usefully gathered in *The Review of Politics* 67:3 (Summer 2005), with his own response.

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²⁸ *The works of John Locke*, 12th Edition (London, 1834), Vol. IV (II.2.5), pp. 340-41.

according to its traditional categories, so as to demonstrate its coherence with, even its foundation for such a tolerant society of equals? Locke turns to the doctrine of justification in particular, to help him do this. For this doctrine, which he sees as being at the center of religious dispute and division in his time²⁹, is a key explicator of God's justice and human equality both.

Thus we see how Locke famously – if hardly in a novel way – unfolds his argument. The Fall of Adam must be seen in terms of some obviously *universal* or “common” effect – in his reading, mortality, not a guilt that then only *some* are saved from. The point here is both to secure an equal effect and an equal standing before God's equal justice. Hence, Locke rejects the doctrines of differentiated divine punishments and predestination: these are affronts to equality itself. Locke does this on the basis both of his reading of the Scriptures, but also of his understanding of natural justice that, he claims, derives both from the Scriptures and our reasoning. The two criteria – plain reading and rational reading -- come together: all reasoning human persons must be able to read the Scriptures with the same reason and come to the same fundamental conclusions, or the whole system of equality falls apart, and society is left to the coercive stratagems of vying theological elites; in England, the fuel for “Protestant popes” as he puts it.³⁰ Indeed, as he states in his *Vindication* of his argument to the Anglican Calvinist John Edwards, “orthodox” arguments about justification, in all their “intricacy” are nothing but the tools of theological elites to coerce the less educated and rob them of their religious freedom in a way no better than the papists.

The debated, and ultimately probably incoherent, attempt by Locke to hold a Scriptural revelation and a universal natural religion together, derives from this. But it is important to see why. The “natural community” has now taken over from the ecclesial community as the place where the Christian God does His saving work. That saving work, however, must be distributed equally to all. Locke was not a universalist, and in fact believed in Hell (if not one of infinitely long torment, but rather of final annihilation). But the only basis upon which he could locate distinctions in outcome, given his commitments, was in the quality of personal agency, that is, obedience. God justifies those who believe in Jesus as Messiah and keep the natural law; but God is just, and therefore accepts the keeping of the natural law as sufficient for those who know nothing of Christ. The moralistic effect is the same. But Locke is a disillusioned sectarian – a Puritan who saw it all fall apart in the 1650's; and a Conforming Anglican who saw the same thing in the 1670's and 80's, fleeing for his own life and living in exile for 5 years. When he first visits Brandenburg in the 1665 he is amazed to see a place where Christians of different views *did* live together.³¹ What is necessary to Salvation? A uniform, clear, and accessible law and the means to keep it. And thus, a society that is shaped to maintain *this*, and the now diversified and small churches within it that can assist the larger public good variously.

²⁹ John Locke, *the Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), par. 252 (p. 76). He provides an account of the book's origin in the Preface to his *Second Vindication* of the work, against John Edwards: “The beginning of the year in which it was published the controversy that made so much noise and heat amongst some of the dissenters, coming one day accidentally into my mind, drew me, by degrees, into a stricter and more thorough inquiry into the question about justification.” See *The Works of John Locke*, 12th Edition (London, 1824), Vol. VI, pp. 186-187.

³⁰ *Second Vindication*, XXIV, in *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 289-292.

³¹ Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957/1985), p. 82.

Here is what is important to note: Locke's doctrine of Justification has little to do with Luther and Calvin; but it has *something* to do with Tyndale and Latimer, if only in terms of its social interest and moralism. It has put virtually *all* its weight into this direction, however; but it has done so in the shadow of the churches' own failure to offer a coherent context for the Christian's communal security and thus evangelical embodiment. The integrity of "life", in its communal substance, demanded a movement out from the churches into the now theorized "natural" community.

III.

What we see in English and then wider Anglican theology, in all the permutations of the 18th and then 19th centuries, is the gradual adjustment to the needs of ever-expanding – and always newly threatened! – notions of "community". As the missionary expansion of Anglicanism came to include more and more people, and more *different* people, and more distinct nations and cultures, the need to find ways to maintain cohesion on a theological basis also grew. On the one hand, the late 18th-century American Anglican church, known as the Episcopal Church after the Revolution, picked up Locke's ideas almost by second-nature. Elsewhere, as in the missionary fields of Africa, something more radical emerged. The most famous case involved John William Colenso, a devoted missionary bishop in Natal, what is now South Africa.³² Colenso is remembered today for instigating a major intellectual furor over biblical interpretation, having imbibed German "higher criticism" and written at length about the multiple "sources" of the early books of the Old Testament. He was tried for heresy, deposed, and then reinstated by the government.

But Colenso was first and foremost, in his own mind and truly so, a "missionary". He adopted aspects of romantic theology (Coleridge and Maurice) early on, but creatively applied them to his missionary commitments: European colonial powers and missionaries, he argued, had shackled the Africans with *new* fears, anxieties, and guilt – rendering them politically docile in the process – through their preaching of reprobation, eternal punishment, and the strict penal substitution understanding of the Cross. Colenso wrote a commentary on Romans to lay all this out. Focusing especially on the 5th chapter, Colenso argued that the message Paul is the *universal* salvation of humanity as a whole "in Christ", and the Church's message of salvation as the disclosure of an *already* accomplished reality, whose apprehension was to be a subjective

³² On the literature, primary and secondary, associated with this brief note, see: John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London: Longmans, Green, 1862). The work, continued to 1879, stretched to 7 volumes. John William Colenso, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated, and Explained from a Missionary Point of View* (1861; New York: D. Appleton, 1863). John William Colenso, *On Missions to the Zulus in Natal and Zululand: A Lecture* (London: Social Science Review/ Benjamin W. Richardson, 1864); *Natal Sermons* (Second Series; London: N. Trübner, 1868). On Colenso, see Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814-1883* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1883); Jonathan A. Draper; "Hermeneutical Drama On the Colonial Stage: Liminal Space and Creativity in Colenso's *Commentary on Romans*", in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 103 (March, 1999), pp. 13-32; Jonathan A. Draper (ed.), *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Inspiration* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003); Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), pp. 59-77.; Timothy Larsen, "John William Colenso", in Jeffrey P. Grennman and Timothy Larsen (eds.) *Reading Romans Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 187-204.

appropriation of the objective fact. Colenso explained the value of this approach – justification as subjective perception an already-accomplished universal salvation – in terms of the universal character-similarity of human beings across cultures and times. Salvation is now read in terms of apprehending a “transcendent” reality of spirit that is available to all, equally and without cultural or really experiential limitation.

These are the first stirrings of a vision of general humanity, whose “community”, if you will, is now “globalized”. It is a key change here, but one so familiar to us in so many ways that it is hard to see how radical it was in the 1860’s (however gradual its development). To be sure, this expansion of community to a global scope, as well as the almost naïve assurance of its capacity to engage an optimistic faith or assurance, is precisely what hits a wall by the end of World War I. But it still hovers about as a goal, now more desperately.³³ The League of Nations, peace and reconciliation movements, and of course, ecumenism become standard bearers for a deeply worried search for cohesion in the 1920’s. And Anglicanism takes a lead here, precisely in her new-found self-identity as a “communion”, which she thinks she can offer the world as an example. We all know the rest of the story, which is of course ongoing and unfinished – with more and worse wars, and more and more challenging expansions of the human community, in all its fragility and now global threat.

As we follow along, however, we see that the “Protestant” character of much Anglican evangelicalism is Bible-oriented, not justification- or dogma oriented. But it is also community-oriented, upheld by a search for a cohesion among the kinds of lives that are part of such social expansions. In Britain and America, this has meant in particular a search for ways to maintain a space for the plural reading of Scripture. And this became its own “moral” endeavor – the liberal state.³⁴ In Africa today, we see something parallel in the African Anglican churches’ deep concerns for national political engagement. The Bible remains the center and base of devotional life, but its purchase lies in how Christians use it for communal cohesion. The conflicts over sexuality and so on are less ones based on doctrinal concerns in the first instance than they are on moral demands situated in the sense of communal integrity: what does the Bible tell us to do in order to maintain our common life in the midst of rapidly fragmenting societies?

What to say about the Reformation in this Anglican light? Early in Thomas Mann’s novel *Dr. Faustus*, the narrator Serenus Zietblom, in one of his many fussy intellectual digressions, describes the Reformation as a “bridge” between medieval culture and modern “free thought”. It is a bridge that moves forward into “free-thinking” modernity, and one that moves backwards towards medieval synthesis. And one can travel in either direction, he says. The Reformation is how communal Christian life is linked to multiple Christian and non-Christian lives. Linked, not caused or ruined or misled. The Reformation is *how* Christianity became world-wide without yet destroying the world in the process. Or so one hopes, and despite horrendous failures.

³³ The only thorough treatment of this remains Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent of Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945* (London: SCM Ltd., 1986).

³⁴ Aspects of this development have in fact included almost all churches, at least after a fashion and imperfectly. The theological and ecclesiological implications of this historical reality are analyzed in Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Church* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

For Anglicans, the Reformation upheld an already-expanding grasp after the Bible and its moral instructions; it also opened the door to disintegrating societies. But it is inaccurate to blame the multiplication of Christian churches simply on the Reformation: for the recognition of human “diversity”, including Christian diversity, was probably inevitable within the widening spheres of human contact beginning in the late 15th and 16th-centuries, bringing together Africa, China, and the Americas with Europe, often in brutal encounter; and confronting intrinsic human diversity was probably inevitable given the complexification of human society in Europe alone already taking place by the late 15th-century. What the Reformation *did* provide – at least in the British context of Anglicanism’s evolution and extension around the world – was a means by which the Scriptural renewal movements of medieval Christianity were carried forward – maintaining their energies in recast forms – for the inevitable social transformations that finally gave rise to the liberal state of pluralistic religious commitment.

Can the two continue to coexist or inform each other? Great bridges are rightly celebrated, while they are still standing. Brooklyn Bridge, that majestic link across the East River of NY between two cities, was a marvel of technical ingenuity and change when it opened in 1883. Over the years, it played a key role in racial and ethnic mixture, as well as facilitating certain forms of social and economic segregation. In September 2001, it provided a conduit for thousands of individuals fleeing the attack on lower Manhattan, reversing the unconscious direction of security for many. It soon was insufficient, and other bridges were built. But today, with its traffic jams, and noise, and for all of its late 19th-century utilitarian lines, it is now considered perhaps the most beautiful structure New York City. Bridges are celebrated while they still stand, and mourned when they fall. I suppose we should ask if the Reformation bridge, like London’s, “falling down”, so that we are stuck on the far side of fragmentation and vying moral universes of action? That is Anglicanism’s current life and death struggle. But the struggle is not over; and the goal of a human community, where the Scripture is heard, and where their divine power can shape its hearers into servants and members of Christ, whose lives can further human flourishing before God, is a goal to whose ongoing achievement the Reformation bridge is a continuing source of thanksgiving.