



Anglican Parish of St Julian of Norwich
Vicars: Pa Wiremu and Mother Ambrose

A letter from the Church Wardens of the Parish of St Julian of Norwich to all parishioners

Dearly beloved in Christ

Using our Anglican Theological Method to reflect on Housing and Creation

Thank you all for your submissions in response to our first Parish Consultation regarding our land behind our church which we affectionately know as God's Acre.¹ Inspired by a story in year's Lenten Study "Housing Ruins", about what a parish had achieved to alleviate a housing crisis in Naenae,² our discussion turned to whether we could do similar with our own land. Our Vestry subcommittee noticed that exactly half of the submissions favoured turning this into housing, the remainder favoured maintaining God's Acres as a green space. Our Vicars Fr Wiremu and Mater Ambrose discerned that whilst all presented arguments were valid, there was very little evidence of theological reflection taking place, especially within our unique Anglican method. Since we are a Church, we need to examine this method which will explain our ecclesiology and our mission.

A legacy of theologian Richard Hooker, our Anglican theological method is a synthesis or binding together of Scripture - from which we receive the authority of the Gospel;³ Tradition (*paradosis*) - the apostolic faith based on Scripture; and Reason;⁴

¹ A fictitious term applied to a real piece of church land. There are no graves!

² Wayne Kirkland, *Rebuilding the Ruins* (N.p: Anglican Movement Diocese of Wellington/Theology House, 2021), 27-31.

³ Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church: An introduction* (London: SPCK, 2000), 45, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴ Andrew Walker, "Deep Church as *Paradosis*: On Relating Scripture and Tradition". In *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* edited by Andrew Walker & Luke Bretherton. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 61.

- thought based on argument and evidence,⁵ along with sound learning by which we can interpret Scripture.⁶

Reformers agreed the Scripture had a God-given purpose to provide salvation but was insufficient to provide answers to *adiaphora* or in Hookers own words “things accessory” to the Gospel, under which some of our beloved “traditional” Anglo-Catholic practices undoubtedly fall.⁷ Instead, these could be provided through “human rational discernment”.⁸ Maintaining the episcopacy ensured continuity of apostolic tradition.⁹ Hence our Church is reformed yet retaining her Catholic tradition, the *via media*.¹⁰ But it is reason and openness to interaction with the changing world which allows Anglicanism to adapt tradition and liturgical practices in accordance with changing times.¹¹

It is this synthesis or “binding together” of Scripture, Tradition and Reason which is the vital component. Reason ensures that our *paradosis* remains a living tradition,¹² and does not become “blinkered traditionalism infused with uncritical nostalgia”¹³ and that there is not a slide towards Fundamentalism in interpreting Scripture.¹⁴ And Tradition and Scripture ensure that Reason does not replace God altogether with Rationalism.¹⁵ Therefore it is within this model, as Christians we are to discern and carry out God’s will as revealed in Scripture, within the boundaries of the catholic and apostolic Tradition and interpreted in the light of Reason.

“Binding together” not only refers to that of Scripture, Tradition and Reason but also to our binding together as a Church.¹⁶ We practice this within our sacramental tradition, starting with Baptism: “by one Spirit we are baptised into one body”¹⁷. Our

⁵ Alister McGrath and Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010), 144, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶ Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰ Thomas McKenzie, *The Anglican Way* (Nashville: Colony Catherine, Inc., 2014), 4.

¹¹ Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, 43.

¹² *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ McGrath and McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 145.

¹⁶ Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, 46.

¹⁷ Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa* (Auckland: Collins, 1989), 419.

community is strengthened in the Eucharist where we are “united with one another through our union with Christ” (Romans 15:7),¹⁸ and given the power to be sent out to carry out our mission as a Church in response to God’s plan: “Go now to love and serve the Lord. Go in peace”.¹⁹ So what are we sent out to do?

From Genesis 1 to the end of Revelation 22, we have the entire story of God’s actions and plan: His Creation story; The Fall, His consequent sending His Son Jesus Christ for our Salvation and Restoration through His crucifixion and resurrection, and His promise of a new and restored Creation.²⁰ Paul summarises this as “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ”. (Ephesians 1:10) The Church’s and hence our mission is to proclaim and live the Gospel. The Anglican Communion’s mission statement is the *Five Marks of Mission*;²¹ summed up here in five words: Evangelism, Teaching, Compassion, Justice, and Care of Creation respectively.²² These were formulated in 1984 by the Anglican Consultative Council and ratified at the Lambeth Bishop’s conference in 1988,²³ therefore becoming part of our living tradition. Whilst all are equally important, the two which will be the most relevant in this case are:

- “(iii) To respond to human needs by loving service;
- (v) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”²⁴

We proclaim that: “Jesus Christ is good news for the poor...”²⁵ so it is primarily Jesus’ example and teachings we need to be following. Jesus advised selling possessions to give money to the poor, (Matthew 19:16-30)²⁶ and that what was done to the least of these was done to Him, to extend hospitality to the poor including shelter. Since our Tradition is apostolic, we can refer to the book of Acts to learn that “believers sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:45, 4:34-35)

¹⁸ Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, 46.

¹⁹ Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa*, 429.

²⁰ Chris Wright, “Five Marks of Mission,” *Anglican Taonga*, October 7, 2015, <https://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/features/extra/marks>.

²¹ “Mission Statement,” Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.anglican.org.nz/About/Mission-Statement>.

²² Wright, “Five Marks of Mission.”

²³ Wright, “Five Marks of Mission.”

²⁴ Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, “Mission Statement.”

²⁵ Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa* (Auckland: Collins, 1989), 457.

²⁶ Also Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:30.

and gave the proceeds to the apostles to distribute. (Acts 4:35,37). Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas included providing supplies and relief to believers in Judea who were experiencing famine (Acts 11:27-30).²⁷ This tradition predated the early Church as there are a number of Old Testament references about generosity to the poor (Deuteronomy 15:10-11); giving shelter (Isaiah 58:7). Jesus reiterates that what was done to the least of your brothers and sisters you did for Him (Matthew 25:40). Based on this evidence, since we are followers of Jesus, then surely our mission is ensuring those without a home should be given shelter!

Our responsibility to "care for creation" was argued by parishioners wanting to retain "God's Acre" as a green space, citing that that given the current intensification of the area, retaining this and adding trees would benefit not only the parish but the wider community to whom we should be ministering to. *A New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa* reflects the importance of Creation within our Tradition with the Thanksgiving for Creation and Redemption (the "Page-four-five-six"), and within this, our beloved *Benedicte Aotearoa* canticle.²⁸ Since Creation became an important societal issue during the years our Prayer Book was being written (1964-1989);²⁹ this is one example of how Reason interacted with Tradition and added to it. *A Catechism* also names our being "responsible stewards of God's creation" as one of the values which "characterise the followers of Christ."³⁰

We have been commissioned to care for the world right from the beginning, as in the first two chapters of Genesis (Genesis 1:26:28, 2:15). God's mission is restoration of creation and this points us back to Jesus, to whom all authority in earth and heaven has been given (Matthew 28:18) and "in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Colossians 1:15-16). So how we treat the earth is also important to Jesus, making the argument to keep the land as is an equally legitimate argument.

So at this stage we are faced with two theological arguments, both valid. If Anglican theology was based on the *sola scriptura* model, then our issue would become

²⁷ Wright, "Five Marks of Mission."

²⁸ Max Anthony Gerritsen. "Spiritual Journeying with 'A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa': Perspectives from Three Tikanga." (MTheol Thesis, University of Otago, 2017), 22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Church of the Province of New Zealand, *A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa*, 937.

largely an exercise of who can come up with the most and best proof texts, a point scoring exercise which would go against God's plan to restore our relationship to Him, each other and creation. Those looking through the Anglican lens will argue that because of the very real life housing and climate crises that both arguments are equally important in the light of Scripture and Tradition and will use Reason find a unified way forward.

Given our apparent stalemate we do need to consider two new developments: firstly a large portion of the land is backfilled with the remains of our old parish hall hence cannot be built over; secondly Council has determined that our driveway cannot service another property.³¹ If we were to build housing on the usable portion, we would have to purchase another house! Reason would tell us that given there is a housing crisis this would be difficult and costly, although we could then argue that our carefully funds for earthquake strengthening our church should perhaps be redirected towards purchasing a property for homeless. That would then involve another theological reflection whether Church is about the Building or the People, based on Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

The main strength of the Anglican Theological model, mirroring Queen Elizabeth I's original ideal of a Church which was uniform yet giving latitude for varying opinions³², a *via media*, is the tension maintained between Scripture, Tradition and Reason and the ensuing tolerance for diversity of theologies and practices. Just like one should be at the extremes on the Anglican Compass Rose points;³³ likewise we must not exclude one or more of the three parts to our Anglican method, or favour one aspect excessively lest our three-legged stool becomes a pin!³⁴ This would mean no room for Reasoning. So how to find a *via media* pertaining to the land to achieve our marks of mission discussed above?

One possible exercise could be to reflect on, say, Psalm 24:1 which states "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;" We are all created in God's image so care of creation means caring for His people, including the poor and homeless, and vice versa and we know that this is within our Marks of

³¹ This scenario is partly based on fact.

³² Justo L Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity Volume II* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 97.

³³ McKenzie, *The Anglican Way*, 18,22.

³⁴ Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church*, 47.

Mission (part of our Tradition). Reason tells us that our community garden provides food which can be distributed to those in need; money from church fairs held on God's Acre can be donated to other housing projects; whilst striving for justice leading to the fence at the top of the cliff regarding housing. In the meantime the trees provide fruit, oxygen and shelter; the green space a safe place to play, fellowship and worship by walking the Labyrinth (a tradition of our own). This then feeds into the overall mission of restoration leading to new creation, beginning and ending with Jesus Christ to whom all this belongs to as we learned through Scripture.



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