
What Is Anglicanism?

Archbishop Henry Luke Orombi

Few would deny that the Anglican Communion is in crisis. The nature of that crisis, however, remains a question. Is it about sexuality? Is it a crisis of authority—who has it and who doesn't? Have Anglicans lost their commitment to the *via media*, epitomized by the Elizabethan Settlement, which somehow declared a truce between Puritan and Catholic sentiments in the Church of England? Is it a crisis of globalization? A crisis of identity?

I have the privilege of serving as archbishop of the Church of Uganda, providing spiritual leadership and oversight to more than nine million Anglicans. Uganda is second only to Nigeria as the largest Anglican province in the world, and most of our members are fiercely loyal to their global communion. But however we come to understand the current crisis in Anglicanism, this much is apparent: The younger churches of Anglican Christianity will shape what it means to be Anglican. The long season of British hegemony is over.

The preface to the *Book of Common Prayer* states, "It is a most invaluable part of that blessed 'liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,' that in his worship different forms and usages may without offense be allowed, provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire; and that, in every Church, what cannot be clearly determined to belong to Doctrine must be referred to Discipline."

And yet, despite this clear distinction, contemporary Anglicans are in danger of confusing doctrine and discipline. For four hundred years Anglicanism represented both the theological convictions of the English Reformation and the culture of the Christian Church in Britain. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anglican divines gave voice to both: English Reformation theology (doctrine) and British culture (discipline). The Anglican churches around the world, however, have ended the assumption that Anglican belief and practice must be clothed in historic British culture.

HENRY LUKE OROMBI is the Anglican archbishop of Uganda.

Take, for instance, the traditional Anglican characteristics of restraint and moderation. Are they part of doctrine, as Anglican theology, or discipline, as British culture? At the recent consecration of the fourth bishop of the Karamoja diocese, the preacher was the bishop of a neighboring diocese whose people have historically been at odds with the Karimajong (principally because of cattle rustling). At the end of his sermon, the preacher appealed for peace between the two tribes and began singing a song of peace. One by one, members of the congregation began singing. By the end of the song, the attending bishops, members of Parliament, and Karimajong warriors were all in the aisles dancing.

The vision of Christ breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between these historic rivals was so compelling that joy literally broke out in our midst. At that point in the service, I dare say, we were hardly restrained or moderate in our enthusiasm for the hope of peace given to us in Jesus Christ. Did we fail, then, in being Anglican in that moment? Was the spontaneity that overcame us a part of doctrine or of discipline? Surely, African joy in song and dance is an expression of discipline. Yet our confidence that the Word of God remains true, and our confidence that it transforms individuals and communities—all this is part of doctrine: the substance of the Faith that shall not change but shall be "kept entire."

In the Church of Uganda, Anglicanism has been built on three pillars: martyrs, revival, and the historic episcopate. Yet each of these refers back to the Word of God, the ground on which all is built: The faith of the martyrs was maintained by the Word of God, the East African revival brought to the people the Word of God, and the historic ordering of ministry was designed to advance the Word of God.

So let us think about how the Word of God works in the worldwide Anglican Communion. We in the Church of Uganda are convinced that Scripture must be reasserted as the central authority in our communion. The basis of our commitment to Anglicanism is that it

provides a wider forum for holding each other accountable to Scripture, which is the seed of faith and the foundation of the Church in Uganda.

The Bible cannot appear to us a cadaver, merely to be dissected, analyzed, and critiqued, as has been the practice of much modern higher biblical criticism. Certainly we engage in biblical scholarship and criticism, but what is important to us is the power of the Word of God precisely as the *Word* of God—written to bring transformation in our lives, our families, our communities, and our culture. For us, the Bible is “living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, it penetrates to dividing soul and spirits, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The transforming effect of the Bible on Ugandans has generated so much conviction and confidence that believers were martyred in the defense of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ that it brought.

For the Ugandan church to compromise God’s call of obedience to the Scriptures would be the undoing of more than 125 years of Christianity through which African life and society have been transformed. Traditional African society was solely an oral culture, which limited its ability to share ideas beyond the family level. We couldn’t write our language, and there was nothing to read in our language. The first converts in Uganda were called “readers” because they could read the Bible, the first book available in our own languages. Because of the Bible, our languages have been enriched and recorded. For the first time, we heard God in our own languages. To this day, our people bring their Bibles to church and follow along with the readings.

In some traditional African societies, women were denied benefits because of various superstitions. For example, some societies believed that if women ate chicken they would grow beards. In that culture, women, then, never ate chicken. When the Bible came alive during the East African Revival of the 1930s, the Holy Spirit convicted men of such sins of oppression and began the progressive empowerment of women that is continuing today. So, for another example, the African tradition of polygamy and divorce at will left many women neglected and often destitute. The biblical teaching of marriage between one man and one woman in a loving, lifelong relationship liberated not only women but also the institution of marriage and family.

For many of our tribes, revenge was esteemed as a virtue. If a family had been violated, the first instinct was to gather the clan, arm them, and seek revenge on the family and clan of the offender. In such realms, the Bible has had a profoundly transforming effect, given the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness. Traditional Ugandan society was driven by family loyalties, with little basis

for loving those beyond your blood ties. The Bible brought the teaching of Jesus to love our neighbors and even our enemies. And, while there remain remnants of the old culture, the Bible has given us a moral and spiritual basis for transforming culture.

Traditional African objects of worship were limited to families and clans. This created a context in which no central beliefs could be held or shared beyond the ethnic setting. Yet ancestral spirits and such natural phenomena as earthquakes, lakes, and mountains could not satisfy the Africans’ quest for the living God. The Bible’s revelation of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brought hope for deliverance from the fatalism that resulted from worshiping created things rather than the Creator and Redeemer.

The gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to us through the Word of God enables warring tribes to begin to coexist and to embrace neighborliness. Indeed, the Word of God opened the way for the nation of Uganda to be forged. When evangelists from Buganda (in central Uganda) traveled to tribes in the east, west, and north, a new day dawned in our country. Instead of being armed with spears, they came armed only with the Word of God. Instead of a message of war and destruction, they delivered a message of Good News from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As the Bible came with the authority of Christ, it revealed a God that is greater than the evil spirits and the kingdom of darkness that controlled so many people’s lives. In Uganda, the Bible has grown into a cherished source of authority that is central to Christian faith, practice, and mission. For all God’s people, obedience to this Bible is the source of confidence, abundant life, and joy. It is an absolute treasure that no one can take away. Isaiah, later quoted by Peter, wrote, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:24–25). The grass on which our cattle feed, the grass from which our roofs are thatched—all this withers. But the Word of God has withstood the test of time. The Bible is at the heart of our Anglican identity, and we Ugandan Anglicans joyfully submit to its life-giving and transforming authority.

With this knowledge of the centrality of the authority of Scripture in Anglicanism, therefore, we understand ourselves to be in the mainstream of Anglicanism—from Thomas Cranmer to John Stott. The evangelical tradition in the Church of England produced William Wilberforce, whose lifelong mission to eradicate slavery and the slave trade liberated our people. It produced Charles Simeon, who inspired the beginning of mission societies that shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with us and many others. It produced

Bishop Tucker and other missionaries, who risked their lives to come to Uganda. These and many more Anglican evangelicals brought us the legacy of the Protestant Reformation in England. Their commitment to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture has continued among us to this day.

Such a commitment—to the authority of Scripture as a defining mark of Anglican identity—was why the vast majority of bishops from the Global South and I insisted that Lambeth Resolution 1.10, the 1998 decision on human sexuality, include the words “incompatible with Holy Scripture” when describing homosexual practice. This standard of Holy Scripture is why we continue to uphold Lambeth 1.10 each time we meet.

In the current Anglican crisis, we are at risk of losing our biblical foundation. As bishops, we are constrained, in the words of the 1662 Ordinal, “to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God’s Word,” and we are determined “out of the same Holy Scriptures to instruct the people committed to [our] charge and to teach or maintain nothing, as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which [we] shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the same.”

From Thomas Cranmer to Richard Hooker, from the Thirty-Nine Articles and the 1662 Ordinal to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, the authority of Holy Scripture has always held a central and foundational role in Anglican identity. This is true for the Anglican church in Uganda; and, if it is not true for the entire Anglican Communion, then that communion will cease to be an authentic expression of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Tertullian’s oft-quoted statement “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” is the story of the faith in Uganda. On his first visit to Uganda in 1885, the Englishman and missionary bishop James Hannington was martyred as he tried to cross the river Nile into central Uganda. Bishop Hannington was coming to Uganda from Kenya and decided to approach the Buganda kingdom from the east. Unfortunately, unknown to him, there was a Baganda belief that its enemies would approach the kingdom from the eastern route. So the king, the *Kabaka*, sent warriors to meet this encroaching enemy. Before they killed Hannington, on October 29, 1885, he is reported to have said, “Tell the Kabaka that I die for Uganda.”

Less than a year later, on June 3, 1886, the king of Buganda ordered the killing of twenty-six of his court pages because they refused his homosexual advances and would not recant their belief in King Jesus. They cut and carried the reeds that were then wrapped around them and set on fire in an execution pit. As the flames engulfed them, these young martyrs sang songs

of praise. Far from eliminating Christianity, the martyrdoms had the opposite effect: If the faith of these martyrs was worth dying for, then it must also be something worth living for. Christianity began to spread like wildfire.

Martyrdom, however, is not a thing of the past. As recently as 1977, the archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Janani Luwum, was martyred at the hands of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Archbishop Luwum spoke out boldly against the injustices and atrocities of Amin. This, however, ushered in a swift and merciless reaction from Amin. The archbishop’s home was plundered during a 1:30 a.m. raid on February 5, 1977. This brought a piercing censure of Amin from the Ugandan House of Bishops. Church leaders were summoned to Kampala and then ordered to leave, one by one. Luwum turned to Bishop Festo Kivengere and said: “They are going to kill me. I am not afraid.”

On February 16, 1977, Amin had Archbishop Luwum arrested on trumped-up charges of treason. Thrown into a cell with several other political prisoners, the archbishop said, “Let us pray.” Then they were taken to Amin himself, brutally beaten, and shot to death. “While the opportunity is there, I preach the Gospel with all my might, and my conscience is clear before God that I have not sided with the present government which is utterly self-seeking,” Janani Luwum wrote. “I have been threatened many times. Whenever I have the opportunity I have told the president the things the churches disapprove of. God is my witness.”

The influence of these martyrs on the faith of Anglican Christians in Uganda cannot be underestimated. The Church of Uganda has been built not only on the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, but also on its martyrs. The faith and moral vision for which our martyrs died can never be denied by the Church of Uganda. Their courage and complete confidence in the God of the Bible and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has left an indelible mark on Christianity in Uganda.

The experience of martyrdom is not, however, unique to Uganda. The faith of the Ugandan martyrs is the same faith that took Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley to the stake. Latimer’s dying words to Ridley were, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.” Yet, as the light of the gospel continues to dim in the Western world, are we not betraying our founding fathers and the Reformation Faith for which they died?

Do we not need a revival of the martyrs’ confidence in the Word of God? A revival in the conviction that this Faith that was worth dying for is the same Faith

worth living for today? The heroes of Anglicanism throughout the world are our martyrs.

In 1935, fifty-eight years after the first missionaries arrived in Uganda, a revival broke out in northeastern Rwanda and rapidly spread throughout Uganda, beginning in the western part of the country. At that time, much of Anglicanism in Uganda was nominal. The missionaries had emphasized liturgical and formal expressions of faith, grounded in the catechism. When the East African Revival broke out, the nominal African Christians realized that what they had learned from the missionaries through the catechism and liturgy actually made a difference in their lives.

The influence of the revival cannot be overemphasized. The Ugandan Anglican identity was forged through God's gift to us of the East African Revival. Genuine repentance, for instance—in which people turned from their old ways of believing and behaving and turned to embrace the God of the Bible and his moral vision—was a fruit of the revival in people's lives. The missionaries had challenged us to dispense with the fatalism of our traditional African religions. The result, though, was eliminating only the outward and superficial symbols, without touching the roots of those deep beliefs. Gone from our worship were our traditional drums, yet in our hearts people still invoked our ancestors and other spirits. When the East African Revival swept through our villages, it swept away the old roots; our people turned from its lies and replaced them with the truth of Jesus Christ in the gospel. There was true repentance and conversion, and the fruit of repentance was evident in people's lives. The revival established a new zeal for enthusiastic holiness in African Christianity.

In Uganda, a Christian is one who has a testimony—a story of what their life was like before a living relationship with Jesus Christ; how they heard the message of Jesus Christ and how their life has changed since surrendering their lives to him. The First Letter of John states: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:5–9).

The East African Revival taught us about living transparently with one another and before God about our sin. To "walk in the light" is to be eager to confess our sin publicly, to receive forgiveness, and to be

restored into the fellowship of the community. The revival spawned thousands of local lay-led fellowships in which Christians gathered weekly to pray and praise, to share testimonies, and to walk in the light with one another.

Initially, the revival was met by resistance from the missionaries and other church leaders because it challenged the status quo of nominal Anglicanism. Over time, however, the revival became part of mainstream Anglicanism in Uganda; today most of our bishops and other church leaders are products of the East African Revival.

Another notable effect of the East African Revival on Anglican identity in Uganda is a renewed passion for mission and evangelism. The goodness of the gospel cannot be hid under a bushel; it cannot be whispered but must be shouted from the rooftops. Even as archbishop, when I make a pastoral visit to a diocese, I go as an evangelist. When I am invited to speak, I preach the gospel and invite people to come forward and give their lives to Christ. Every diocese in our church organizes regular evangelistic outreaches within the villages and markets in their communities. Ugandan Anglicans are not ashamed of the gospel, "because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16).

Ugandan Anglicans are not unique in their experience of revival. The Great Awakenings in America, the revivals catalyzed by John Wesley in England, the Welsh revival, and countless others around the world have been a part of Anglican experience. Even the charismatic renewals in the late twentieth century are part of this revival stream within Anglicanism.

Theologically, Ugandan Anglicans share much in common with our evangelical brothers and sisters, yet we have retained the historic threefold order of ministry: bishops, priests, and deacons. This, of course, is reminiscent of the English Reformation, which theologically had much in common with the continental Reformers while retaining the historic episcopate.

And yet our commitment to the episcopate is not just about the good order of the Church. As bishops are successors to the apostles, so our focus through the historic episcopate is on apostolic faith and ministry. A bishop is ordained in apostolic succession to be the apostolic presence in the community. A bishop, therefore, is the ongoing presence and voice of the apostles. He is our link to the early Church, and this link between bishop and apostolicity gives Anglicans our transcultural identity. The implication, therefore, is that the essence of Anglican identity is to be apostolic. More than a simple unbroken line of consecrations, we are to be apostolic in nature: faithful to the apostolic message,

submitted to apostolic authority in Scripture, committed to apostolic mission and ministry, and devoted to apostolic worship.

In short, an apostolic church is a missionary church. A bishop is the focus for the mission of the Church, following in the footsteps of Jesus, who commissioned his apostles to preach, to teach, and to heal. The bishop's apostolic ministry starts with evangelism, because transformation begins with the individual. The bishop himself must have a testimony and set a direction in his diocese for evangelism and church planting. When the early missionaries came in the late 1800s, their understanding of mission was not only preaching but also education and health ministry. So, combined with our churches, there are schools and health clinics, all under the apostolic oversight of the bishop, whose charge is to preach (evangelism), to teach (schools), and to heal (health clinics).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ has been described as the "scandal of particularity." The One who came, as Savior of all, was born as a particular man—Jesus of Nazareth—at a particular place, with a particular ethnicity, and at a particular time. Our particular experience of Anglicanism in Uganda, too, has some universal applicability. The pillars of Anglican identity in Uganda—the martyrs, revival, and the historic episcopate, all resting on the Word of God—suggest themes with historic precedent from the formative years of Anglicanism in Britain.

Consider, first, the centrality of the Word of God in faith and life. No honest reading of historic Anglican formularies and the English Reformers can deny the central place of Scripture in Anglicanism. Our worldwide communion is in danger today of confusing doctrine and discipline. The various disciplines of the autonomous provincial churches can be contextualized, but doctrine, based on Scripture, transcends all such cultural distinctions.

We would not be facing the crisis in the Anglican Communion if we had upheld the basic Reformation convictions about Holy Scripture: its primacy, clarity, sufficiency, and unity. Part of the genius of the Reformation was its insistence that the Word of God and the liturgy be in the language of the people—that the Bible could be read and understood by the simplest plowboy. The insistence from some Anglican circles (mostly in the Western world) on esoteric interpretations of Scripture borders on incipient Gnosticism that has no place in historic or global Anglicanism.

At the Anglican Communion's Global Conference on Dynamic Evangelism in Kanuga in 1995, delegates from most of the communion's provinces gathered to evaluate the "Decade of Evangelism" at its halfway point. The pattern that emerged from reports was that

the growing churches, mostly in the Global South, possessed a confidence in God's presence and his ability to act and intervene in human affairs; the declining churches seemed to lack such confidence.

But the lesson of the martyrs is exactly this—that we must have confidence in God—and their universal appeal derives from their heroic example. The gospel exists to challenge the worldview of all—even Anglicans—who do not see the joy and beauty of a life lived with confidence in a great and dynamic God who can and does intervene in the affairs of human beings.

The legacy of the East African Revival is its strong emphasis on the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This emphasis is not unique to Uganda; it is a part of historic Anglicanism, especially in its Reformation heritage and the evangelical tradition. I long for the day when the global reputation of Anglicans is our insistence on a relationship with Jesus Christ that is characterized by personal experience and repentance, and shared through testimonies. "Oh, those Anglicans! How they always talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!"

Finally, a passion for evangelism and mission is at the heart of an apostolic and missionary church. The reason there is a global Anglicanism today is that Anglicans were compelled by the Word of God to share the gospel throughout the expanding British Empire and beyond. In the absence today of such a convenient infrastructure, the future of the Anglican Communion is found in embracing the key Reformation and evangelical principles that have had such an impact in Uganda.

Without a commitment to the authority of the Word of God, a confidence in a God who acts in the world, and a conviction of the necessity of repentance and of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we will be hard-pressed as a communion to revive and advance our apostolic and missionary calling as a church.

If, as I have suggested, the future of Anglicanism lies in a revival of the key Reformation and evangelical principles that shaped the Church of Uganda and our mother Church of England, then our instruments of communion need to find a way to serve that vision. I fear, however, that our conciliar instruments are in danger of losing their credibility and being rendered irrelevant. The resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of Bishops have always had a moral authority among the communion's autonomous but interdependent provinces, yet some of those resolutions are now flagrantly defied and even mocked.

We primates have worked hard in recent years to find consensus even in our present situation of broken or impaired communion. Through the grace of God, our communiqués have been consensus statements,

unanimously agreed upon, and they are evidence of our commitment as primates to “*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*” (Eph. 4:3). Yet some provinces have not taken our communiqués seriously, and the primates, as an instrument of communion, have been scorned.

The current crisis presents us with an opportunity to mature into a global communion that represents not just historic bonds of affection but also an advancing mission force for the Kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated. For this to happen, our instruments of communion may also have to become instruments of discipline. As a member of the primates’ standing committee, I was invited to come to the United States in September 2007 to attend the meeting of the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops. But I recently wrote the archbishop of Canterbury and informed him that I could not participate.

Among my reasons is this: In February 2007, the primates of the Anglican Communion met in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and made certain requests of the Episcopal church. It is my conviction that our Dar es Salaam communiqué did not envision interference in the American House of Bishops while they are considering our requests. For me to violate our hard-won agreement in Dar es Salaam would be another case of undermining our instruments of communion. My decision to uphold our Dar es Salaam communiqué is intended to strengthen our instruments of communion so we will be able to mature into an even more effective global communion of the Church of Jesus Christ than in the past.

In December 2006, the House of Bishops of the Church of Uganda unanimously adopted “The Road to Lambeth,” a statement drafted for a council of African provinces. Among other things, it stated, “We will definitely not attend any Lambeth Conference to which the violators of the Lambeth Resolution [1.10] are also invited as participants or observers.” Accordingly, if the present invitations to the Lambeth Conference stand, I do not expect the Ugandan bishops to attend.

It is important that this decision not be misunderstood as withdrawing from the instruments of communion. On the contrary, our decision reflects the critical importance of the Lambeth Conference: Its value as an instrument of communion is greatly diminished when the persistent violators of its resolutions are invited. If our resolutions as a council of bishops do not have moral authority among ourselves, how can we expect our statements on world affairs to carry weight in the world’s forums? An instrument of communion must also be an instrument of discipline in order to effectively facilitate meaningful communion among its autonomous provinces.

The Church of Uganda takes its Anglican identity and the future prospects of the global Anglican Communion very seriously. Our thoughtfulness in how we participate in the instruments of communion reflects our fundamental loyalty to our Anglican heritage. Likewise, our devotion to the Word of God—expressed through our martyrs, revival, and the historic episcopate—reflects our commitment to the ongoing place of the Church of Uganda as a province of the Anglican Communion. FT



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