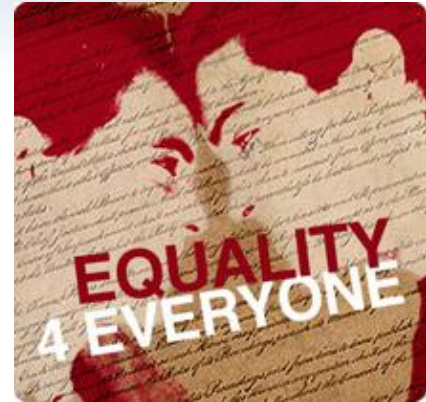


Globalism isn't necessarily leading to cosmopolitanism within the worldwide Anglican Communion



Some social theorists have hoped that the intensified connections between people and places across the globe which we refer to as 'globalization' would lead to a more interconnected global citizenship living in mutual respect and harmony. Taking as its subject the worldwide Anglican communion's stance on homosexuality, this large research project led by Professor Gill Valentine and a team of theologians and geographers between 2008 and 2010, funded by [Religion and Society](#), found the opposite. More extensive and intensive global connections can strengthen division and conflict, rather than generating cosmopolitanism or unity.

Division has its roots in the structure of the worldwide Anglican Communion, which came into being through the missionary of expansion of the Church of England alongside British colonialism. Today it has approximately 80 million members spread across more than 165 countries. Bishops from its thirty-four provinces are invited to attend the decennial Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, UK (first held in 1867), but its rulings are not binding on the autonomous provinces. This is why, despite the fact that Lambeth 1998 passed Resolution 1.10 declaring homosexuality 'incompatible with scripture', in 2002, the bishop of the Canadian diocese of New Westminster was able to approve a liturgy blessing same-sex unions, and why one year later the Episcopal Church in the USA consecrated an actively gay priest, Gene Robinson, as bishop.

It was these events which became the focus of division within the communion, a division greatly strengthened by the way in which opponents of homosexuality have been able to 'cross borders'. As the project documents, for example, some conservative evangelical Anglican bishops in North America have placed themselves under the authority of African provinces including Nigeria and Uganda who also strongly oppose these north American initiatives. These 'break away' bishops were not invited to Lambeth 2008. Partly in response, the groups 'Anglican Mainstream', 'Primates of the Global South' and the Diocese of Sydney co-ordinated a rival 2008 Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem. Sixty-one percent of Africa's bishops then boycotted Lambeth, from which Bishop Robinson was also excluded.

Whilst these developments have been framed in terms of a culture clash between a liberal, progressive, and secular Global North and a conservative, traditional, religious Global South where the Communion's demographic strength now lies,ⁱ Valentine's research uncovers a more complex reality. The research involved in depth study of one liberal and one conservative congregation in dioceses in South Africa, the UK and the USA, plus observation and interview at GAFCON, Lambeth 2008, and the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, along with comparative work in Lesotho and Uganda. They found that for many parishioners the Communion exists only as a remote, abstract concept, and that their primary concern was their local church. There are black African Anglicans

who are openly gay and gay-rights supporters. The Church of Southern Africa's stance is relatively liberal, as is South Africa's constitution. (Nevertheless, many had heard of Gene Robinson, and one South African clergyman commented that the actions of members of the Communion on the other side of the world had made the position of his church more difficult in a township where other churches expressly admonish homosexuality, in keeping with the prevailing social norm.) Provinces in Oceania and Asia seem even less invested in the dispute. What fuels the dispute then are actively-mobilised connections between interest groups in North America, the UK and Africa opposed to the 'liberalisation' of the Church. Division is intensified by the way that both sides try to use the media, which often simplifies the issues and emphasises conflict. Voices on each side accuse the other of neo-colonialism through use of funding and attempted imposition of beliefs.

Thus shifting issue-based alliances within the worldwide Anglican Communion, made possible by improved global linkages, seem to be deepening rather than dissolving division. People on both sides of the debate are forging international networks based upon shared values. At the moment both sides wish to uphold the global Communion, but chiefly in order to educate the other side in the error of their ways. Each side has a rhetoric which mixes universalism and cultural relativism: the Bible is unerring and human rights are a form of Western cultural imperialism; Biblical interpretation is contextual but homosexuality is natural and homophobia is absolutely wrong. For the unity of the worldwide Anglican Communion, globalisation is proving a very mixed blessing.

Find out more...

- Listen to interviews with project Principal Investigator Gill Valentine and Co-Investigator Kevin Ward: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/gill_valentine_short_version_oct_2009
- Visit the project's website: <http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/research/groups/faithnetwork>
- Access articles published from the research: Sadgrove, J., Vanderbeck, R.M., Ward, K., Valentine, G. and Andersson, J. (2010) 'Constructing the boundaries of Anglican orthodoxy: an analysis of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON).', *Religion*, 40: 193-206.
- Vanderbeck, R.M., Valentine, G., Ward, K., Sadgrove, J. and Andersson, J. (2010) 'The meanings of communion: Anglican identities, the sexuality debates, and Christian relationality.', *Sociological Research Online*. 15(2). [<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/15/2/3.html>]
- Ward, Kevin (2009) 'The Empire Fights Back: the invention of African Anglicanism.' In Adogame, A., Gerloff, R. and Hock, K. (eds.) *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: the Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*. Continuum, pp.86-96.
- Valentine, G., Vanderbeck, R.M., Ward, K., Sadgrove, J., and Andersson, J. (2010) 'Emplacements: the event as a prism for exploring intersectionality, a case study of Lambeth Conference (2008). Conference.' *Sociology*, 44(5): 925-943.
- Vanderbeck, R.M., Andersson, J., Valentine, G., Sadgrove, J., and Ward, K. (2011) 'Sexuality, activism, and witness in the Anglican Communion: the 2008 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops.', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101(3): 670-689. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00045608.2011.561105>.

You might also be interested in...

- The 'Continuing Indaba' mutual listening project within the Anglican Communion which project researcher Joanna Sadgrove has been invited to be part of the evaluation team for:
http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba/about.cfm#_ftnref4
- Reading findings from the Religion and Society Programme-funded project about British young people's religion and sexuality:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/young_people_find_ways_to_be_religious_and_sexual_despite_the_silence_of_their_elders
- Another Programme project which combined Geography and Theology:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/young_people_find_ways_to_be_religious_and_sexual_despite_the_silence_of_their_elders
- Reading about the innovative methods conference at which Gill Valentine presented the project's methodology:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/innovative_methods_in_the_study_of_religion

Award Title

Sexuality and Global Faith Networks: A Social Topography

Team

Principal Investigator: Professor Gill Valentine (University of Leeds)

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Researcher: Dr Johan Andersson (University of Leeds)

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Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Research Partner(s)

School of Religion and Theology at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Uganda Christian University, the University of Botswana, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, Yale Divinity School, Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry, City University of New York

Award Type

Phase I Large Grant

Key terms

homosexuality, Gill Valentine, Kevin Ward, Church of England, GAFCON, Lambeth, globalization

ⁱ The Church of England still has the most baptized members but the Church of Nigeria has the largest active Anglican community at 17.5 million.