

Report for the Fellowship of St John the Evangelist

The Fellowship of St John the Evangelist kindly supported me financially both for a significant proportion my fees for the MSt in Ecclesiastical History which I read for at the University of Oxford during my second and final year of training for ordination at St Stephen's House (2019-20), and to travel to South Africa and Zimbabwe to carry out research for this programme.

My main research was on *The Church of England and the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1985-90*, with shorter supporting research on *Anglican-State Relations in UDI Rhodesia and the Transition to Zimbabwe, 1965-ca. 1982*, and *Church and State Under Thatcher*. This allowed me to develop expertise on a period of church history which is only now coming under the purview of serious study. The struggle against apartheid was a period where, as my research has demonstrated, the Church of England played an overwhelmingly positive, if not entirely unambiguous role; in particular, I discovered that the support Robert Runcie gave to Desmond Tutu and many other South African clergy, nearly always at Tutu's direct request, was far more extensive than was visible at the time and arguably represents Runcie's finest achievement as Archbishop of Canterbury. The role in the struggle against apartheid of South African Anglicans in general and Tutu in particular risks declining in public consciousness as a younger generation emerges with no memory of the period. Given the importance of issues of racial justice to the rising generation, it is important for the Church's evangelistic credibility that this story is retrieved and showcased. My research on Rhodesia and Zimbabwe uncovered a high degree of Black Anglican assertiveness and agency in the struggle against Ian Smith's UDI régime that seems to have hitherto escaped historians. My research on church and state under Thatcher uncovered a Church of England that was far less easily pigeonholed as "the effective opposition" to the Conservative Party than is often supposed, with some supporters of Thatcher prominent among the Church's leadership, especially but not only its lay leadership; at the same time government ministers included many devoutly Anglican "wets" who actively welcomed episcopal interventions as assisting them in debates inside the government. Had these relationships been pursued in a more systematically sophisticated way by bishops, more might have been preserved of a post-War settlement that many saw as an embodiment of Christian values. This should give pause for thought to those in the current House of Bishops who want to pursue a simplistically oppositional line with the Johnson government.

Having not studied history since third form, this research also allowed me to develop skills necessary for a professional historian in terms of handling archival material and carrying out oral history – I carried out a significant programme of interviews in South Africa and Zimbabwe, primarily with churchpeople, but also with the Minister of Police under PW Botha and FW de Klerk. I have transcribed these ten interviews verbatim for the historical record. I carried out extensive research in archives at Lambeth Palace, Johannesburg,

Pietermaritzburg, and Bulawayo; several other planned pieces of research were diverted whether by the coronavirus (further visits to Lambeth as well as research in the Church of England Records Centre and the USPG archives), government restrictions (Harare), or staff on strike (Pretoria). Of particular note, I now have a good working knowledge of the archives of Archbishops Ramsay, Coggan, and Runcie as well as the enormous Anglican Church in Southern Africa archives at the William Cullen Library in Johannesburg.

I also benefitted from a taught historiography course that covered Christian history over a 2,000 year compass, allowing me to learn more about why historians write the histories that they do, and intensifying my already passionate commitment to church history. These skills will be invaluable as I expect to begin doctoral studies part-time, again at the University of Oxford, in October, specialising in Global Anglicanism in the last two decades of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the Lambeth Conferences of 1988 and 1998.

I expect the Church as a whole will be most likely benefit from these skills in four ways. Firstly, the Church must be more committed to the public debate with an aggressive “New Atheism” as well as more widely held but rather lazy secular assumptions. Given that I still write as a freelance journalist, and have a background in both political and ecclesiastical communications, I am well placed to take part in that debate, showcasing the positive role of the Church in the late 20th Century as well as what has been lost by its precipitous decline in the West in the most recent decades. Secondly, through teaching church history both to lay people, including in the parishes where I shall work, as well as potentially to ordinands and readers in training on courses or at theological colleges. Finally, as the foundation for doctoral research which will examine the question of Anglican ecclesiastical polity in the light of the Communion’s globalisation of the last fifty years, in the hope that it might make a significant contribution to that field, one in urgent need of revisiting. Fourthly, in a Communion where inter-continental links can be fraught, the expertise I have already developed on South African and Zimbabwean Church history opens doors and shows respect for the enormous contribution of Africans to Anglican life.

I am enormously grateful to FSJE for the financial support it provided, without which it would not have been possible for me to pursue this course of study or to bring it to fruition to such a high standard.

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