

by JONATHAN AITKEN

## The CEO of Canterbury

**W**HILE ALL EYES have been on Rome in recent weeks for the election of a new pope, the world's third-largest Christian denomination has enthroned a new archbishop of Canterbury. He is Justin Welby, the global leader of 90 million Anglicans. An original and unexpected choice for the most recognizable top job in the Protestant churches, Welby is expected to have an impact far beyond the faithful in his own flock.

Both the throne of St. Peter in Rome and the throne of Augustine in Canterbury are uncomfortable seats these days. Their occupants must be concerned by falling numbers, particularly in their home continent of Europe, although the pews are emptying almost as fast in North and even South America. Traditional religion seems to hold declining appeal for the rising generation. This isn't to say the young are indifferent to the worship of God. In many parts of the world they are flocking to His churches in increasing numbers. But those growing churches are rarely Anglican or Catholic. They are predominantly Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Evangelical. This presents the new pope and the new archbishop with a challenge, but also with an opportunity.

Old churches are naturally resistant to

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change. The sobriquet for Episcopalians (the American name for Anglicans) is "the Frozen Chosen," which says it all. Some traditionalists want to travel even further into the deep freeze. Before his retirement, Pope Benedict appeared to be hinting that the future of his church might lie in becoming more conservative and more faithful to its traditional liturgies, rules, and doctrines. This would be a hard sell given the contentious Catholic teaching on issues such as contraception and celibacy.

The optimists point out that reform has worked before, for instance in the 16th century, when great leaders like Ignatius of Loyola purified and energized the Catholic Church. The pessimists are, well, pessimistic, and say that there must be a better way to halt the decline—in a word, evangelization.

This is why Archbishop Welby looks so interesting: He is an authentic Anglican evangelical, homegrown from the 21st century's most successful outreach movement, known as HTB-Alpha. It began 30 years ago at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) in West London, the mega-church that welcomed Welby at a dark time in his life, when he and his wife were devastated by the loss of their first born child, 7-month-old Johanna, killed in a Paris car accident.

"It is in our pain and in our brokenness that we come the closest to Christ," said Martin Luther. His words have a resonance with Archbishop Welby's spiritual journey. At the time of his daughter's death, he was a rising star in the oil industry, finance director and treasurer of the FTSE 100 company Enterprise Oil. He loved the buzz of acquisitions and mergers. But as he nursed his wounds in bereavement, Welby heard God's call. A talk at HTB by one of the leaders of the U.S. Vineyard Churches, John Mc-

Clure, inspired him to seek training for ordination. This was not an easy path, for his local bishop rejected Welby as a candidate, saying he had “no future in the Church of England.” But the influential vicar of HTB, the Rev. Sandy Millar, persuaded his parishioner to keep knocking on the door of the ordained ministry, and eventually Welby was accepted for training at St. John’s College, Durham.

The ministry of HTB, and consequently of Welby, is spirit-filled and spirit-led. Its outreach arm of evangelism is the Alpha course, an introduction to Christianity in 10 sessions that has been phenomenally successful, bringing millions of participants into a relationship with Christ. It crosses all denominational boundaries. In this unchurched century, religious leaders from Catholics to Calvinists enthuse over Alpha because it has proved its effectiveness. To give one example, attendance in the Diocese of London has risen by 3 percent every year since 2000. Credit for reversing the long pattern of decline is largely attributed to the energetic evangelism and church planting of HTB-Alpha.

ARCHBISHOP Welby is proud of his HTB roots, but he should not be simplistically pigeonholed. He has a Catholic spiritual director. He spent some years working in Nigeria, which has given him an understanding of the African provinces in the Anglican Communion. They are ultra-conservative in comparison to many liberal American and English churches, and Welby will need to work hard to prevent quarrels and schisms within his international flock. Fortunately he seems well-equipped for this and for the even greater challenges that lie ahead of him.

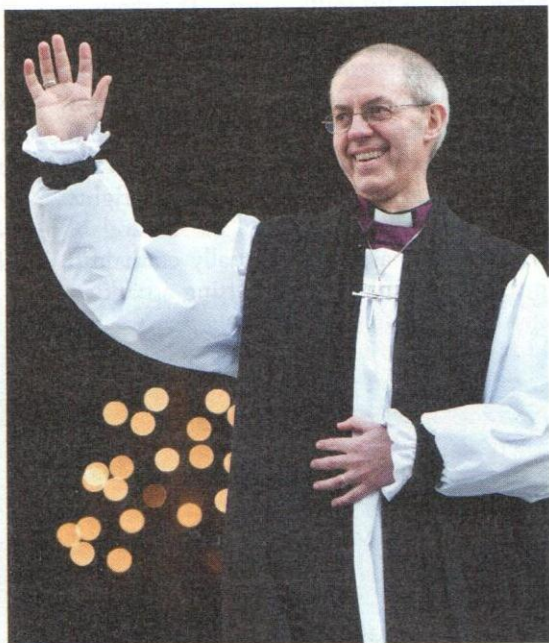
Although inexperienced as a prelate—his elevation to Canterbury came after only nine months as the bishop of Durham—he is politically skillful and media-savvy.

His novelty helped him to get off to a good presentational start. The worldwide reporting of his appointment was amazingly—almost miraculously—favorable. Perhaps this was because surprised journalists quickly recognized in Welby an exceptionally clever and knowledgeable leader whose understanding of worldly issues like business and politics is likely to lend strength to his spiritual calling.

Never before in ecclesiastical history has an established denomination chosen as its leader a man who had a serious career in

business before entering the ministry. This boardroom experience gives Archbishop Welby a unique platform from which to address the issues facing religion in the public square, such as ethical capitalism and responsible wealth creation. He is seizing his opportunities. His publications include *Can Companies Sin?* and *Explorations in Financial Ethics*. By virtue of his seat in the House of Lords he has been a member of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, where his sharp questioning has wrong-footed one or two bank CEOs.

But Welby is no enemy of business. One of his oldest and most influential friends is the well-known City of London investment banker Ken Costa. When not at his day job, Costa chairs Alpha International and Holy Trinity Brompton. The world is likely to hear more of the Welby-Costa partnership, because from it could spring the seeds of a



new drive for evangelism intended to inspire the rebuilding of the Anglican Communion. Rome will be watching with interest, perhaps one day with admiration and emulation.

One way or another, Justin Welby will be an innovative spiritual leader. He is likely to be a healer of church divisions, a conservative in biblically based doctrine, a liberal supporter of women bishops, and above all an energetic leader in efforts to bring new Christians into old churches. He is far too wise to allow himself to be labeled a happy-clappy fundamentalist, or to become the prisoner of any church faction—high, low, or middle. But he will not forget his HTB-Alpha roots, from which are already springing the strongest plants and shoots of the 21st-century church. ❁