The Invisible Mitre: Holy Orders, Contextualization, and the Muslim Frontier

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Abstract

This article seeks to examine whether Anglican orders function as a contextualized ecclesial practice or whether they are implicitly treated as context-transcendent structures. By placing Anglican theology of orders in dialogue with missiological theories of contextualization, the article argues that current Anglican practice reveals an unresolved contradiction: the church affirms contextualization in principle while exempting one of its most visible structures from contextual analysis. First, it clarifies contextualization as a theological method within Anglican and ecumenical missiology. Second, it examines Anglican holy orders as historically contingent yet theologically constrained practices. Finally, it considers how frontier mission to Muslims exposes the limits of current Anglican approaches and raises the possibility that the ordering of ministry itself may require renewed theological reflection. The aim is not resolution but clarity: to articulate the missiological stakes of Anglican orders in contexts where the church exists not as a public institution, but as a vulnerable and often hidden community.

Introduction

Anglican engagement in Muslim-majority contexts has long revealed tensions between inherited ecclesial structures and the demands of frontier mission (Cragg 2000). While Anglican missiology has shown considerable flexibility in matters of liturgy, language, and pastoral practice, the ordering of ministry—particularly episcopal oversight and holy orders—has remained comparatively resistant to contextual adaptation. This resistance is not merely practical or canonical but theological, rooted in Anglican understandings of apostolicity, catholicity, and ecclesial continuity. Yet it is precisely in Muslim contexts, where Christian presence is fragile, legally constrained, and often socially invisible, that the question of how Anglican orders are embodied becomes most acute.

In recent decades, Anglican theologians and missiologists have increasingly embraced contextualization as a central category for mission, and I draw especially on the work of Shoki Coe and the ecumenical movement of the mid-twentieth century (Miller 2016). Contextualization, as Coe articulated it, refers not to superficial cultural adaptation but to the discernment of faithful Christian witness within particular historical, social, and religious realities (Coe 2012). This approach assumes that theology is not merely repeated across contexts but is continually formed in dialogue with lived experience. Anglicanism has largely accepted this logic in areas such as liturgy, hymnody, and catechesis, where local adaptation is now widely regarded as both legitimate and necessary.

What has received less sustained theological attention, however, is whether contextualization properly applies to ecclesial structures themselves, and specifically to the ordering of ministry. Holy orders are often treated as a fixed inheritance, safeguarded from contextual pressure by canon law and episcopal succession. This assumption is understandable, given Anglican commitments to visible continuity and episcopal oversight. Yet it also risks insulating orders from the same missiological scrutiny applied elsewhere in Anglican life. If contextualization is a theological method rather than a stylistic preference, then it must raise questions not only about how the church worships, but about how it authorizes, recognizes, and sustains ministry in particular contexts.

This tension becomes especially visible in Muslim-majority societies, where Christian clergy may lack legal recognition, where public ecclesial structures can provoke state scrutiny, and where conversion to Christianity carries social and sometimes juridical consequences. In such settings, the territorial assumptions of Anglican episcopacy—diocesan boundaries, public ordinations, formal clerical status—often collide with the realities of minority Christian existence. The result is not merely administrative difficulty but a deeper missiological problem: Anglican holy orders, as currently configured, may presuppose social and political conditions that do not exist in Muslim frontier contexts.

Previous Anglican scholarship has demonstrated that contextualization can be pursued responsibly without dissolving ecclesial identity. In earlier work on Anglican liturgy in Jordan, for example, it has been argued that local adaptation of worship practices allowed Anglican communities to remain recognizably catholic while becoming intelligible and sustainable within a Muslim cultural environment (Miller 2019, 205-222). That case showed that Anglican liturgy could be shaped by local constraints and sensibilities without abandoning theological coherence. The present

article asks whether a similar logic can be applied—carefully and critically—to the ordering of ministry itself.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to propose the abandonment of Anglican holy orders, nor to advocate for ad hoc or irregular forms of ministry. Rather, it seeks to examine whether Anglican orders function as a contextualized ecclesial practice, or whether they are implicitly treated as context-transcendent structures. By placing Anglican theology of orders in dialogue with missiological theories of contextualization, the article argues that current Anglican practice reveals an unresolved contradiction: the church affirms contextualization in principle while exempting one of its most visible structures from contextual analysis.

This contradiction matters not only for mission strategy but for Anglican self-understanding. If Anglicanism claims to be both catholic and reformed, historically rooted yet responsive to context, then it must account for how its sacramental and ministerial life is embodied in settings far removed from the social conditions in which its structures developed. Muslim-majority contexts, precisely because they expose the fragility of Christian institutional presence, serve as a testing ground for Anglican missiology. They force the question of whether Anglican holy orders are primarily instruments of mission or guardians of ecclesial continuity—and whether these roles can be held together under conditions of legal and social marginality.

The argument that follows proceeds in three stages. First, it clarifies contextualization as a theological method within Anglican and ecumenical missiology. Second, it examines Anglican holy orders as historically contingent yet theologically constrained practices. Finally, it considers how frontier mission to Muslims exposes the limits of current Anglican approaches and raises the possibility that the ordering of ministry itself may require renewed theological reflection. The aim is not resolution but clarity: to articulate the missiological stakes of Anglican orders in contexts where the church exists not as a public institution, but as a vulnerable and often hidden community.

Contextualization as Theological Method

Contextualization emerged within twentieth-century missiology as a response to the growing recognition that theology is never produced in abstraction from historical and cultural conditions. Although Christian theology has always been shaped by context, the explicit articulation of contextualization as a theological method arose in the aftermath of decolonization, when inherited Western ecclesial forms were increasingly

experienced as alien or oppressive in non-Western settings. Within this milieu, Shoki Coe played a decisive role in reframing mission not as the transmission of a finished theological product, but as a dynamic process of discernment shaped by lived Christian witness in particular places (Coe 1973b, 12-25).

For Coe, contextualization was not a strategy for cultural accommodation, nor a concession to relativism. Rather, it was an expression of theological fidelity grounded in the incarnation. Because the Word became flesh within a specific historical and cultural context, Christian faith must continually take form within the concrete realities of local communities. Theology, on this account, is not merely applied after the fact but is generated through engagement with social, political, and religious conditions (Coe 2012, 23-41). Contextualization, therefore, assumes that Christian doctrine is stable in its referent but variable in its expression, requiring ongoing discernment rather than mechanical repetition.

Anglican missiology has largely received this insight, particularly in relation to worship and pastoral practice. The development of locally adapted liturgies, vernacular prayer, and indigenous leadership has been widely justified on contextual grounds. These adaptations are typically defended not as departures from Anglican identity, but as expressions of catholicity understood as the capacity of the church to be fully itself in diverse settings. Contextualization, in this sense, is treated as a means of safeguarding rather than undermining ecclesial coherence.

Yet contextualization, as Coe and (some) subsequent practioners understood it, extends beyond matters of language and ritual. It concerns the whole life of the church, including its patterns of authority, leadership, and institutional presence. Coe himself insisted that theological education, ecclesial formation, and ministerial practice must all be shaped by the social realities in which the church lives. To restrict contextualization to aesthetics or surface forms is therefore to truncate the method and to neutralize its critical force.

This broader understanding of contextualization introduces a tension that Anglican theology has not fully resolved. On the one hand, Anglicanism affirms that theology is formed within history and culture; on the other hand, it treats certain ecclesial structures—most notably holy orders—as effectively context-transcendent. Orders are often discussed as bearers of apostolic continuity whose validity is independent of social location. While this claim serves an important theological purpose, it also risks placing the ordering of ministry beyond missiological examination, even though ministry is exercised within concrete social and political conditions.

Recent Anglican scholarship has shown that contextualization can be pursued with theological discipline rather than ecclesial improvisation. In the case of Anglican liturgy in Jordan, for example, contextual adaptation was shaped by legal constraints, Muslim cultural sensibilities, and minority Christian experience, yet remained accountable to Anglican sacramental theology and communal recognition (Miller 2019, 205-222). This work demonstrated that contextualization need not dissolve continuity, provided that its criteria are articulated and its limits acknowledged. Liturgy was neither replicated wholesale from Western models nor detached from Anglican norms; instead, it was rearticulated within a particular context through careful theological judgment.

The success of such liturgical contextualization raises a further question: whether the same methodological logic can be applied to other aspects of ecclesial life. If contextualization is a theological method rather than a stylistic preference, then it must be capable of interrogating not only how the church worships, but how it authorizes and sustains ministry. The question is not whether Anglican holy orders can be contextualized without remainder, but whether they have already been contextualized historically and whether their present forms implicitly presume social conditions that do not exist everywhere.

This recognition does not entail the abandonment of Anglican commitments to episcopacy, apostolic succession, or sacramental integrity. It does, however, suggest that these commitments must be interpreted within the realities of mission. Contextualization, properly understood, does not ask whether theology should adapt to context, but how theological norms are embodied under particular conditions. When those conditions include legal marginalization, social invisibility, and the risks associated with conversion, the embodiment of holy orders becomes a missiological question rather than a purely canonical one.

Accordingly, contextualization functions in this article as a critical lens rather than a prescriptive program. It provides a way of asking how Anglican holy orders operate in practice, what assumptions they carry, and where they encounter resistance or distortion in Muslim-majority contexts.

Coe described contextualization as a double-wrestle: wrestling with the Word of God and with the world of God. A proposed praxis would emerge from this dialectic. By treating contextualization as a theological method that applies to ecclesial structures as well as to worship, the article prepares the ground for a more focused examination of Anglican orders themselves, understood as historically contingent yet theologically constrained practices.

Anglican Holy Orders as Contextual Practice

Anglican theology has long held together a tension between continuity and adaptability. On the one hand, Anglicanism presents itself as a church ordered by bishops in historic succession, with a sacramental and ministerial life that participates in the catholic tradition. On the other hand, Anglican identity has never been defined by rigid uniformity. Its liturgies, canonical arrangements, and patterns of governance have shifted in response to political, cultural, and missional pressures. Holy orders, however, have often been treated as an exception to this pattern: as a stable core that must be protected from contextual influence lest ecclesial coherence be lost.

This instinct is understandable, particularly in a communion that lacks a centralized magisterium. Episcopal oversight and the recognition of orders serve as key mechanisms of unity within Anglicanism, providing a visible sign of continuity across time and space. Yet the assumption that holy orders are in some meaningful sense *context-transcendent* deserves closer scrutiny. Anglican orders did not emerge in abstraction from history but were shaped within particular political and ecclesial settlements, most notably the post-Reformation English context. The territorial diocese, the public office of the bishop, and the legal recognition of clergy were not incidental features but constitutive assumptions of Anglican ministerial life.

In contexts where those assumptions no longer hold, Anglican orders do not simply function less efficiently; they function differently. This is particularly evident in Muslim-majority societies, where Christian clergy may lack legal standing, public visibility may invite scrutiny, and episcopal presence can become a liability rather than a stabilizing force. In such settings, the territorial logic of Anglican episcopacy—so often taken for granted—encounters social and political realities that were not envisioned when those structures were formed. The question is not whether Anglican orders remain theologically valid in these contexts, but whether their current configuration adequately serves the missional life of the church.

Anglicanism already acknowledges, at least implicitly, that holy orders are exercised within context. Bishops operate differently in established churches than in missionary dioceses, clergy formation varies widely across provinces, and extraordinary episcopal arrangements have periodically emerged in response to pastoral necessity (see Miller 2017c; Hartman 2025). These variations are usually described as exceptions or temporary measures, yet they reveal that Anglican orders are already contextualized in practice, even if this is rarely acknowledged theologically. What is lacking is not adaptation, but a sustained theological account of why and how such adaptation occurs.

The contrast with liturgical contextualization is instructive. In Anglican liturgy, contextual adaptation is widely accepted, provided that core sacramental forms are retained and communal recognition is maintained. In my own work on Anglican worship in Jordan, I argued that liturgical practices could be shaped by local cultural and legal constraints without compromising Anglican identity, precisely because those practices were grounded in shared theological commitments rather than cultural replication (Miller 2019, 205-222). That argument was not offered as a license for improvisation, but as a disciplined exercise in ecclesial discernment. The same methodological question now arises with respect to holy orders: whether Anglicanism can articulate criteria for contextual adaptation that preserve continuity while allowing ministry to be embodied credibly in constrained environments.

One reason this question provokes discomfort is that holy orders occupy a different symbolic register than liturgy. Orders are public claims about authority, legitimacy, and succession. In Muslim contexts, where religious authority is closely monitored and conversion is often stigmatized, these claims carry risks that liturgical practices do not. A bishop's presence may attract attention in ways that imperil local believers; public ordinations may expose converts; and formal clerical status may be impossible to maintain. In such cases, Anglican orders are not merely ecclesial realities but legal and social signals, interpreted within a framework not of Christian sacramental theology but of state and religious regulation.

It is at this point that contextualization becomes unavoidable as a theological method. If contextualization asks how Christian faith is embodied under particular conditions, then it must ask how ministry itself is embodied when visibility is dangerous and institutional presence is constrained. To insist that Anglican orders must be exercised in the same manner everywhere risks confusing theological continuity with structural replication. Conversely, to abandon ordered ministry altogether would undermine Anglican claims to catholicity and apostolic continuity. The challenge, therefore, is not to choose between order and mission, but to examine whether existing forms of order adequately serve the church's missionary vocation in frontier contexts.

This article does not propose a definitive solution to this tension. Rather, it argues that Anglican theology has not yet fully confronted the missiological implications of its theology of orders. By treating holy orders as a contextual practice—historically formed, theologically constrained, and socially embodied—it becomes possible to ask more precise questions about how Anglican ministry functions at the edges of the communion. Such questions do not weaken Anglican identity; they clarify the cost of maintaining it under conditions of marginality.

Frontier Mission in Muslim Contexts

Frontier mission to Muslims unfolds within social and legal environments that place significant constraints on Christian visibility, authority, and institutional presence. In much of the Muslim world, Christianity exists as a tolerated minority tradition whose public expression is carefully regulated and whose growth through conversion is viewed with suspicion. These constraints arise not only from Islamic jurisprudence but also from modern state interests in religious stability and social cohesion. As a result, Christian communities often operate within a narrow margin of legality, balancing pastoral care with the need to avoid undue attention from authorities (Tadros et al 2018, 1-18).

Within these contexts, the ordinary markers of ecclesial life—church buildings, ordained clergy, episcopal oversight—cannot be assumed to function as they do in historically Christian societies. Studies of Christianity in North Africa and West Asia repeatedly note that Christian leadership in Muslim-majority settings is shaped by discretion, informality, and relational authority rather than by public office (Ross 2018, 19-36). This does not indicate ecclesial weakness, but adaptation to conditions in which overt institutional presence can provoke restriction or retaliation. The church's life is therefore often sustained through personal networks, family relationships, and small gatherings rather than through visible structures.

Anglican ministry, however, has traditionally been organized around assumptions of territoriality and public recognition. Bishops exercise authority within defined diocesan boundaries; clergy are publicly identifiable; and ordination marks a clear transition into a legally and socially recognized role. These assumptions are deeply embedded in Anglican ecclesiology and are rarely questioned where Christianity enjoys social legitimacy. In Muslim frontier contexts, by contrast, they frequently become liabilities. Episcopal visits may attract state scrutiny; formal ordinations may expose converts; and clerical visibility may endanger both ministers and congregants. The tension that results is not merely administrative but theological, touching on the nature of ministry itself.

Missiological literature on mission under conditions of marginality has long recognized that Christian leadership in constrained contexts tends to be exercised differently. Andrew Walls' work on the serial expansion of Christianity emphasizes that ecclesial forms which appear essential in one cultural moment may be provisional in another, shaped by historical circumstance rather than theological necessity

(Walls 1996, 7-28). Similarly, Lamin Sanneh's analysis of Christianity as a translatable faith underscores the way Christian authority has repeatedly been re-embedded within local social systems, often in ways that depart from inherited Western models (Sanneh 1989, 29-52). These insights suggest that the forms through which ministry is exercised are neither timeless nor culturally neutral.

Conversion from Islam further intensifies these dynamics. For converts, participation in visible Christian leadership can carry consequences that extend far beyond those faced by members of historic Christian communities (Miller 2017a). Apostasy laws, social ostracism, and familial pressure render public religious affiliation costly, and formal ordination may mark a convert as a particular target of scrutiny. Pastoral literature consistently emphasizes the need for discretion, gradual formation, and relational accountability in such contexts (Miller 2021, 31-56). The exercise of ministry thus often takes place without formal titles or public recognition, even when sacramental and pastoral functions are being performed in practice.

Despite these constraints, frontier mission does not result in the disappearance of ecclesial order. On the contrary, Christian communities in Muslim contexts frequently express a strong desire for recognized leadership, sacramental assurance, and connection to the wider church. The challenge lies in the form that such order can take without undermining the safety and sustainability of local believers. Anglican practice on the ground often reflects this tension through informal or provisional arrangements that sit uneasily with inherited ecclesiological language. These practices are usually described as temporary or exceptional, yet they persist across regions and decades, suggesting that they respond to structural rather than incidental realities.

Muslim frontier contexts, therefore, function as a revealing lens for Anglican theology. They expose the extent to which Anglican holy orders presuppose conditions of legal recognition, cultural familiarity, and institutional stability. When those conditions are absent, Anglicanism does not cease to exist, but it operates through adaptations that lack clear theological articulation. Frontier mission thus brings into focus a gap between Anglican ecclesiology as formally described and Anglican ministry as actually practiced. Addressing this gap requires neither romanticizing marginality nor abandoning order, but developing a theological account of ministry that takes seriously the realities of concealment, risk, and constraint that characterize Christian life at the margins.

A Missiological Proposal: The Clandestine Missionary Bishop

If Anglican holy orders are to be examined through the lens of contextualization, the task is not merely to describe existing informalities but to propose a structural solution. The analysis above suggests that the primary obstacle to Anglican mission in Muslim frontier contexts is not the *fact* of episcopacy, but its *visibility*. The solution, therefore, lies in disentangling the apostolic office from its public, prelatic accoutrements.

I propose the revival and adaptation of a historic Anglican instrument: the missionary bishop, but reconfigured for the realities of the surveillance state. Specifically, this requires the consecration of bishops who operate under professional cover, without public installation, territorial claims, or open recognition.

In the nineteenth century, Anglican mission operated through bishops whose jurisdiction was personal rather than territorial (Allen 1953). To meet the demands of the modern frontier, this model must be taken to its logical conclusion.

1. Non-Public Consecration. The selection and consecration of such a bishop would not be a public event. It would be carried out by a small number of sponsor bishops and missionary societies acting with the quiet assent of ecclesiastical authority. There would be no public announcement, no press release, and no entry in public directories.

2. Secular Identity (Tentmaking). The bishop would not be a salaried employee of the church. To reside legally in a closed country, he must possess legitimate professional credentials—whether in business, education, or development—that justify his presence to state authorities. This secular identity is not a cover in the deceptive sense, but a genuine vocational integration, mirroring the tentmaking ministry of St. Paul.

3. Kenotic Visibility. There would be no purple shirts, copes, or mitres. The bishop would be visually indistinguishable from the laity in day-to-day life. His episcopal identity would be known only to the clergy he ordains and the specific communities he serves. To the state and the broader public, he is a private Christian individual; to the church, he is a successor of the apostles.

This proposal may strike some as irregular or subversive, yet it is deeply rooted in the early church's *disciplina arcani* (discipline of the secret) and the Ignatian understanding of the episcopate.

St. Ignatius of Antioch famously wrote to the Church at Smyrna (8.2), "Where the bishop is, there is the Catholic Church." He did not say, "Where the *diocese* is," nor "Where the *cathedral* is." In the pre-Constantinian era, the bishop was the center of unity for a persecuted minority, functioning without legal standing or public property.

By stripping the episcopate of its Constantinian trappings—palaces, titles, and political recognition—we do not diminish the office; we return it to its apostolic simplicity. This is a kenotic episcopacy, one that empties itself of status to ensure the sacramental life of the church survives. Furthermore, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886) explicitly allows for the historic episcopate to be "locally adapted in the methods of its administration," providing a conciliar basis for this flexibility.

The primary role of this bishop is not administration but sacramental assurance. In a closed country, local believers cannot travel freely to external dioceses for confirmation or ordination without alerting security services. By embedding a bishop within the context, the church ensures that:

- Ordinations can occur locally and privately, preventing the exposure of new clergy;
- Confirmations can solidify the commitment of converts in their own language and setting;
- Discipline can be maintained relationally rather than juridically.

This proposal involves high risk. It requires the global Anglican structures to trust a bishop whose work cannot be audited by public reports. It requires a willingness to bypass the bureaucratic machinery that typically governs episcopal elections. But as Andrew Walls has reminded us, the expansion of the church has often required it to live in liminal forms, sustained by relational authority rather than institutional dominance (Walls 1996). If Anglicanism is to be true to its claim of being a Church Apostolic—sent into all the world—it must be willing to send its bishops where the law forbids them to go, even if it means they must go in secret.

The Limits of Contextualization

Any proposal to examine Anglican holy orders through the lens of contextualization must also reckon with the limits of that method. Contextualization, as articulated within Anglican and ecumenical missiology, has never implied that all ecclesial forms are equally negotiable. Rather, it presupposes that discernment takes place within theological constraints that safeguard continuity, communion, and sacramental

integrity. To ignore these limits would be to collapse contextualization into pragmatism and to undermine the very ecclesial coherence that Anglican orders are intended to preserve.

One such limit concerns the sacramental character of holy orders. Anglican theology has consistently resisted purely functional accounts of ministry, insisting that ordination effects a real ecclesial change rather than merely recognizing existing leadership. This sacramental understanding places boundaries on adaptation, particularly where proposals risk reducing orders to informal authorization or communal recognition alone. While ministry may be exercised discreetly or relationally in constrained contexts, Anglican theology cannot dispense with the claim that ordination is an ecclesial act grounded in apostolic continuity. Contextualization may shape how this act is embodied, but it cannot negate its theological significance (Avis 2007, 101-123).

A second limit arises from the communal and relational nature of Anglican orders. Ordination is not a private or purely local act; it presupposes communion with the wider church and recognition beyond the immediate context. This poses particular challenges in frontier mission settings, where discretion and concealment may restrict visibility and documentation. Yet Anglicanism has historically maintained that ministry is accountable not only to local communities but also to the broader ecclesial body. Any contextual adaptation of orders must therefore preserve mechanisms of recognition and accountability, even if those mechanisms operate quietly or indirectly. Without such connections, the risk of fragmentation becomes acute.

There are also practical limits imposed by formation and sustainability. Ordained ministry requires theological education, spiritual formation, and ongoing support. In Muslim-majority contexts, where access to formal training may be limited and mobility constrained, these requirements can be difficult to meet. While Anglicanism has shown flexibility in modes of formation, particularly in missionary settings, it has not abandoned the expectation that clergy be adequately prepared for sacramental and pastoral responsibility. Contextualization may modify the pathways to formation, but it cannot eliminate the need for formation itself without compromising the church's pastoral and theological integrity (Coe 1974, 3-15).

Moreover, contextualization must contend with the risk of normalizing exceptional arrangements. Practices developed in response to constraints—such as informal oversight or delayed ordination—may be pastorally necessary, but they can also become

entrenched in ways that obscure their provisional character. Anglican theology has tended to describe such arrangements as temporary or extraordinary, yet in some regions they persist across generations. This persistence raises difficult questions about whether exceptional practices remain exceptions or gradually constitute a parallel ecclesiology. Contextualization must therefore include a capacity for self-critique, distinguishing between adaptations that serve mission and those that unintentionally erode coherence.

Finally, there are limits shaped by Anglican self-understanding as both catholic and reformed. Anglicanism has historically sought to balance fidelity to inherited forms with openness to reform under the guidance of Scripture and reason. Contextualization operates within this balance, neither absolutizing tradition nor dismissing it. Applied to holy orders, this means that Anglicanism must resist two equal and opposite errors: treating existing structures as untouchable, and treating them as infinitely malleable. The task is not to resolve this tension but to inhabit it faithfully, recognizing that some ecclesial forms may strain under missionary pressure without immediately yielding a clear alternative.

Acknowledging these limits does not weaken the case for examining holy orders contextually; it strengthens it. By naming what cannot be adapted, Anglican theology clarifies the stakes of adaptation where it does occur. In frontier mission contexts, where Christian existence is marked by marginality and risk, the question is not whether Anglican orders will be exercised differently, but whether the church will develop a theological account of those differences. Contextualization, constrained by sacramental theology and ecclesial communion, offers a way of engaging this reality without surrendering Anglican identity to either rigidity or expediency.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Anglican holy orders cannot be exempted from missiological scrutiny without undermining Anglican commitments to contextual theology. While Anglicanism has readily embraced contextualization in matters of liturgy, language, and pastoral practice, it has been more hesitant to apply the same theological method to the ordering of ministry itself. Frontier mission among Muslims exposes this hesitation with particular clarity, revealing the extent to which Anglican orders presuppose social, legal, and political conditions that are not universally available.

By retrieving contextualization as a theological method rather than a pragmatic strategy, the article has sought to place Anglican holy orders within the same analytical framework already applied elsewhere in Anglican life. Drawing on Shoki Coe's account of contextual theology, Anglican liturgical practice in Muslim contexts, and historical precedents for missionary episcopacy, it has shown that Anglican orders are neither context-transcendent abstractions nor infinitely adaptable instruments. They are historically formed, theologically constrained practices that are embodied under particular conditions and therefore subject to missiological evaluation.

Muslim-majority contexts serve as a revealing lens for this evaluation. In settings where Christian communities exist under legal constraint and social vulnerability, the public, territorial, and juridical assumptions embedded in Anglican episcopacy and ordination often become sources of tension rather than stability. The adaptations that emerge in response—discreet oversight, informal leadership, delayed or modified ordination—are not evidence of ecclesial failure but of theological improvisation under pressure. What has been lacking is not practice, but theological articulation.

At the same time, the article has resisted the temptation to treat contextualization as a warrant for unlimited flexibility. Anglican sacramental theology, communal recognition of ministry, and the requirements of formation and accountability impose real limits on adaptation. Naming these limits is essential if contextualization is to remain a theological discipline rather than a rationale for expediency. The challenge Anglicanism faces is not whether to preserve holy orders or to abandon them, but how to exercise them faithfully where visibility is dangerous and institutional presence is fragile.

The contribution of this article is therefore modest but necessary. It does not propose a new ecclesial structure, nor does it offer a comprehensive solution to the tensions it identifies. Instead, it seeks to clarify the theological stakes of Anglican ministry in frontier mission contexts and to invite further reflection on how Anglican holy orders function at the margins of the communion. If Anglicanism is to sustain its witness among Muslims—and, by extension, in other contexts of marginality—it must develop a theological account of ministry that takes contextualization seriously without surrendering continuity.

Such reflection will inevitably be uncomfortable, particularly for a communion whose unity is already strained. Yet discomfort is not foreign to Anglican theology, which has long sought to hold together reform and tradition, catholicity and contingency. Frontier mission does not introduce a new problem so much as it brings

an old one into sharper focus: how a church ordered for stability can remain faithful in motion. The question of Anglican holy orders in Muslim contexts thus becomes not a peripheral concern, but a test case for whether Anglican missiology is willing to examine its own structures with the same theological seriousness it brings to its worship and witness.

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