

ANiC: OUR POSITION AND OUR PROSPECTS

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Just about a year ago I stood here to deliver, in the hearing of some present today, a position paper entitled: “Global Realignment: Where We Stand – a Theological Perspective”. Now I am asked to give another such address; a second helping, you might say, of the Packer pudding. The talk might have been titled “ANiC: Our Character and our Calling”, for that, rather than people’s reaction to us, is what I am going to talk about. (as perhaps you see already when my mind gets into high gear it pumps out alliterations constantly; and I can promise you plenty of those before I am through; for my mind currently is in high gear, because the cause I hope this address will serve is so close to my heart.)

Let me begin now by reflecting on “ANiC: our Character” – who we are and what we are about.

I ended last year’s talk by stating four points about Network identity, under the section heading Anglicans Anchored. (That heading, be it said, was in deliberate contrast with the heading of the previous section, Anglicans Adrift, where I had reviewed the sad story of events in the ACC from the New Westminster Synod of 2002 to the ACC General Synod of 2007.) I begin today’s presentation by reaffirming the same four points, in the belief that they are just as true now as they were then, and that they are fundamental to all what we are about. They are as follows.

(1) We are a community of conscience, committed to Anglican convictions – to the consensus, that is, that historic Anglicanism as held, or shall I say that has held historic Anglicanism, from at least the Reformation up to at least Lambeth 1998. Two convictions in particular stand out here.

The first and fundamental conviction is of the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, concerning which Article 20 of the 39 lays it down that

it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.

The second and consequent conviction is that the repentance that the gospel of Jesus Christ requires, the real repentance that real faith in Christ begets, includes renouncing same-sex physical relationships, as contrary to the revealed will of God for human living. So, when we are asked to reconceive gay relationships as a form of Christian holiness, we can only say “no”. And we each take to ourselves Luther’s words at Worms in 1521: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against

conscience is nether right nor safe [i.e., it endangers the soul]”. So – “here I stand; I cannot do anything else; God help me; amen”. We thank God that the greater part of global Anglicanism is with us in this.

(2) We are a community of churchpeople, committed to the Anglican Communion. Why this commitment? Not, I trust, from indifference or inertia, or delusions about social status, but because we recognize in the historic Anglican blend of biblically-based, creedally-shaped, liturgically ordered, pastorally and evangelistically oriented Christianity, with its heritage of human breadth, spiritual depth, theological wisdom, personal piety, and irrepressible vitality, the richest version of Christianity that is on offer anywhere. So we stay with global Anglicanism, despite its current disorders, and even though we have been forced to leave our own geographical province, and we contend for a re-reformation that will restore Anglicanism where it is ailing to full purity and health. We are not evangelical, Anglo-Catholic or charismatic in party or sectarian terms, but under the guidance of Scripture we seek to enter into the strengths of all three, and thus to model what we hope and pray will be the Anglicanism of the future. Meantime, we do not abandon the Communion, but realign within it.

(3) We are a community of consecration, committed to the Anglican calling. I shall say more about that calling later, so I shall only say of it now that it covers worship and work, doxology and discipling, evangelism and education, holiness and mission. But consecration must be highlighted now. This is a word that expresses the thought of full-scale self-giving to God, and therefore of thoroughgoing, sustained repentance, or full surrender, and of flat-out service. When Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, “Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13), he was summoning them to practise consecration in this deep and comprehensive sense. And we need to be very clear in our own minds that without such consecration we cannot expect that ANiC will enjoy the help, guidance, and blessing from God for which we hope and pray. Let us never forget that.

(4) We are a community of courage, committed to the Anglican confidence in the faithfulness of God: that confidence which, in due humility yet with great boldness, finds expression in so many of the Prayer book prayers. Christian courage comes from knowing that God never fails those who trust in him; it is faith heeding the constantly-repeated biblical admonition from God and God’s messengers “Fear not;” and it is well expressed by Luther in the following familiar words:

And though this world , with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill; God has willed his truth to triumph through us.

You recognize these words as coming from what has been called the Battle Hymn of the Reformation quoted from the Frederick Hedge translation (Ps. 46). So we move ahead, undaunted by the short-term problems and losses that mark out our path.

It seems to me, then, that there are two things that should be said about us, and that we should clear-headedly say about ourselves.

The first thing is that within world Anglicanism we are travellers. To be sure, this age has become a transitional era in Anglican history, in which quite a lot of travelling goes on, and familiar patterns of Anglican togetherness are taking on a new shape. But ANiC belongs to that category of travellers whom nowadays we label refugees. We are people who for reasons of conscience have had to walk away from, or have actually been displaced from, the home we once had in ACC. For most of us that has involved some personal loss, and all of us now face uncertainty as to where in the long term we shall end up. This is what it means to be refugees. In the short-term, by God's good providence, we have been given jurisdictional sanctuary and a welcome by the Archbishop of the Southern Cone, as also have some single congregations and the entire diocese of Recife, San Joachim, Pittsburgh, Quincy, and Forth Worth. I suppose we should call ourselves a paradiocese within that province, a body that is moving forward towards full diocesan status, as indeed the present Synod clearly shows.

Now I want, before going further, to express the warmest possible appreciation for the hospitality that Archbishop Venables has extended to us, and to state explicitly the long-term significance that I think his generous action has. It seems to me that although the Windsor Continuation Committee formed at Lambeth is repeating the original Windsor plea for an end to all jurisdictional extensions – the Committee would call them, intrusions – by primates into territory already assigned to other dioceses in other provinces, and although we can expect Archbishop Rowan Williams to go on calling for precisely this for as long as he is in office at Canterbury, it can safely be affirmed that the grand scale of Archbishop Venables' action has effectively demolished the historic Anglican rule of only one bishop with jurisdiction for each geographical area. Jurisdiction, as we know, means power to ordain, license, appoint and discipline clergy, to conduct confirmations, and to adjudicate contentions within congregations in a disciplinary way. The practice of exclusive jurisdiction in each place was established in the world church in the fourth century; its purpose then was to protect dioceses against the intrusion of heretical, freelance, church-gathering, sheep-stealing bishops, and thus to strengthen the hand of each diocesan for his fulfilling of the apostolic mandate which our 1962 Prayer Book Ordinal, following 1662, words thus: "to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's Word' and both privately and openly to call upon and encourage others to do the same". But times change and, in a day like ours, when in the old West (Britain, America, Australasia) individual diocesan bishops are found actively promoting, or at least sanctioning and smiling on, doctrine that by historic Anglican standards is erroneous, it is evident that sometimes the prohibition of geographically overlapping jurisdictions needs to be waived, and alternative Episcopal oversight be allowed. Archbishop Venables, in company with African and Asian primates, has seen this, and acted accordingly. And the present range of his jurisdiction, extending

as it does from South America to California, Pennsylvania, Texas, the mid-West, Brazil and Canada, surely takes world Anglicanism over a watershed, ensuring that, however much a single jurisdiction in each area remains the ideal, the necessity of jurisdictional intrusions in emergency situations created by heretical and lawless diocesan bishops can no longer be denied. The bar on alternative Episcopal oversight has come down, and cannot be put up again in its old form. In days like these, in which bishops are being elected who will no uphold the fullness of historic Anglican faith, this is a development for which to thank God.

But what is the long-term future for us, and for the rest of North and South America's constituency of refugee travellers? Archbishop Venables' hospitality must surely be thought of as an interim arrangement rather than a final destination; what, then, may lie beyond it? Here I wish to highlight the Common Cause project. Common Cause aims to reunite North America's separated Anglican communities in a single new province, whose field of jurisdiction will spread over all the US and Canada; a province maintaining orthodoxy (that is, soundness of faith) and orthopraxy (that is, soundness of morals), showing respect for all conscientious convictions on such matters as divorce and women's ministry, and with a workable disciplinary system to maintain internal order. 2009 was set as the target date for producing an acceptable blueprint for this; achieving the blueprint may in fact take a bit longer; but there is no doubt about the seriousness with which this project is being undertaken, and ANiC, I can tell you, is seriously involved. Half a dozen of us, I know, have already been recruited, beside myself, to work on the infrastructure, and there may well be others). If a credible constitution can be produced, we may expect that the Primates' Council within the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans formed at GAFCON will recognize it as a component of the inner circle of authentically Anglican provinces that the GAFCON strategists evidently hope to see formed, as a first step to re-establishing Anglican soundness worldwide. Common Cause involvement, then, gives hope for our long-term future, and the project claims care and prayer from us all. We cannot however guarantee that it will come to fruition, so while we pray for its success we must continue the work that this Synod is beginning, namely to construct an infrastructure for ANiC that will stand even if the planned third province for North America never becomes reality.

As we contemplate where we are at present, two questions keep surfacing: one more down-to-earth and practical, one more open-textured and speculative. The down-to-earth question is: what hope do we see for Archbishop Williams' attempts to hold the Anglican Communion together by means of a covenant, leading to a state of affairs in which refugees like ourselves feel able to return to the places from which they came? Little hope, I think, is the answer to that question. The archbishop's public gestures remind me, at least, of the Canadian hero Red Green of Possum Lodge, who reckons to hold things together with lashings of duct tape, while the equivocal nature of his own position, privately valuing the gay lifestyle while publicly following Lambeth 1998 in ruling it out, robs his leadership of moral authority. And in any case the process of drafting the covenant seems to have got bogged down as Liberals labour to broaden its terms and soften its edges. So this entire enterprise of patching the cracks seems forlorn. The cracks are quite simply too wide for that to work.

The second, more speculative question is, what might be God's purpose in the current Anglican meltdown, through which, among other things, ANiC has some to birth? There was a meltdown of churchly prerogatives in the 16th century, which proved to be God's way of establishing the Reformation; could anything similar be on the horizon for us today? Of course, we cannot know in advance, we can only guess and wonder as we go through the upheaval. But I, for one, keep returning to the thought that this might be God's heroic surgery, whereby he is using the upheaval to squeeze Liberalism out of Anglican leadership in the old West, where it has dominated for too long. In any case, that is an outcome to be devoutly desired, and I would like to think that you will join me in praying that this is what will finally happen.

Now I turn to the second thing that should be said about us, and that we should be saying about ourselves, and that is, that we are trustees, God's trustees, on the one hand for truth and on the other hand for training. Both are matters of vital importance, on which it seems to me that in the past Anglicanism has fallen short, and I have a specific point to make about each.

Concerning truth: ANiC is an association of Bible Christians who believe that what Scripture says, God says, and that discipleship to Christ is based on taking God's written Word to heart. That being so, it is important, I believe, that ANiC should develop a strong inner theological life, in which, under the authority of the Scripture, we mine together the full wealth of the expository traditions that we label evangelical, catholic and charismatic, or Pentecostal. Too often in the past interaction between these three versions of the Christian heritage of truth have been critical in the negative sense of seeking primarily to point out each other's weakness. But criticism is a positive word that properly means discriminating appreciation, not just censorious depreciation, and the true path in theological exchange is always to look for the strengths of your conversation partner's position, and build your own case on them. Without strong, unified theology we shall drift, and without the rule of conscientious mutual appreciation we shall grow prickly and narrow, and will never achieve the unified theology that we need. And that would spell failure in ANiC's trusteeship of truth.

And concerning training: it is vital, in my view, that we work from the start for a renewal of catechetical life, and of adult catechesis in particular, in all our congregations. The present era, as we all know, is making by self-perpetuating ignorance about the Bible and Christianity. With Christian instruction out of our schools and, with few exceptions, out of our homes too, each Canadian generation from now on is bound to grow up through spiritually pagan childhood to spiritually pagan adulthood. Henceforth, paganism – let us call it by its proper name – will be all around us all the time as we seek to reach out for God in Canada. And that fact takes us right back to how things were in the first three Christian centuries, when Christianity, though a religio non licite, that is, a religion not authorized by the Roman authorities and often exposed to persecution as a result, none the less virtually won the world. It was an amazing achievement, and one that raises questions for us.

How did they do it? We ask. What was their secret? Of the many things that need to be said in answer to this question, I want to speak of just one: namely, the adult catechetical courses for enquirers that the churches regularly provided. These courses, we know, were systematic, in the sense that they embraced and linked together all the biblical truths by which Christians are to live; they were practical, in that they taught would-be disciples how to live by those truths, with prayer and in obedience; they were clinical, in that deviations from and diminishings of the full faith were carefully diagnosed and dismissed as the course went along; they were thorough, planned for two or three years of teaching that covered what was called the rule of faith, corresponding to our Apostles' Creed; they were purposeful, in that they led up to the baptism of faithful catechumens on Easter eve, followed by their first communion on Easter morning; and they were doxological and devotional throughout, in a way that they issued in appreciation and adoration of those qualities in God that the economy of grace most clearly displays – holy love, greatness, goodness, wisdom, faithfulness, justice, power and patience, for starters. By God's grace, these catechetical schools and schoolings produced generation after generation of virile, alert, mature believers, who knew their stuff as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses today know their stuff, have been drilled in it; believers, then, whose witness to Christ and new life in him made a difference – a big difference – among their peers. I contend, now, that a renewal and indeed an extension of adult catechizing of this kind is today long overdue, especially among us Anglicans, and it is my hope and prayer that ANiC will become a pioneer in its renewal.

Catechizing today, where it has not vanished entirely, has shrunk, as we know, to a crash course for adolescents, based on the children's catechism in the Prayer Book and leading to confirmation; after which it is assumed that no further doctrinal instruction is needed at any point in life. This assumption came in at the Restoration in 1660, so it is now three and a half centuries old, and over the years has gained a fair amount of traction. My dream, however, is that as the need for lifelong Bible study is unquestioned among us, so the need for continuous doctrinal study in face of constantly mutating paganism should today be recognized, as a means both to personal maturing and to effective witness, and should henceforth be pegged into the regular round of weekday congregational activities. Back in England, in my youth, Anglo-Catholic Clergy used to do a certain amount of this in lecture series on the theology of the prayer book; more than that I am sure is needed today, though perhaps not less – as a vice-chair of the prayer book society of Canada I urge that this procedure is something worth exploring. But anyways, doctrinal study is, to my mind a necessary educational component in Christian nurture, as if there is a gap here in our current practice it should be filled as soon as possible. John Paul II, aware of ignorance and consequent ineffectiveness among Catholic laypeople, called for "a new catechesis" and had the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church prepared to help priests tackle adult catechetical instruction. Perhaps we need to take a leaf out of John Paul's book; perhaps also we need to reappraise what in God's providence we already have. For the Alpha course, which clergy so often view simply as a parish pick-me-up, along with the similar courses for beginners that now exist, such as Christianity Explored, ought to be acclaimed as the first stage of an adult catechism sequence, needing now to be followed by a full series of similar units, making up a complete catechetical syllabus for our time.

Were you thinking that these units of instruction do not yet exist? I agree with you'; they don't. So...?

The clock forbids me to go further; I must wind down. What I have tried to do in this talk is to position us, as refugee travellers and trustees for truth under God, amid present pressures, in such a way as to sharpen our focus on the future, on our calling and our tasks. I invite you to agree with me that here and now our calling is fourfold: to adore our Saviour God, to adorn the doctrine of the gospel with lives of righteousness and holiness, to accept and work through the current pressures, as part of our preordained pilgrimage (nothing new so far), and, along with all that, to address the tasks of pastoral care, evangelism, congregational education, church-planting and mission, with all the resources of energy and enterprise that God has given us. And I close by repeating for our encouragement some of Luther's words that we heard before, only it is time in the more pungent translation of Thomas Carlyle:

And though they take our life, goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small; these things shall finish all;
The city of God remaineth.

Amen.