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Renewal in the Spirit

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Pentecost Letter

to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Anglican Communion

1.

‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak’ (Acts 2.4). At Pentecost, we celebrate the gift God gives us of being able to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ in the various languages of the whole human world. The Gospel is not the property of any one group, any one culture or history, but is what God intends for the salvation of all who will listen and respond.

St Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit is also what God gives us so that we can call God ‘Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8.15, Gal. 4.6). The Spirit is given not only so that we can speak to the world about God but so that we can speak *to* God in the words of his own beloved Son. The Good News we share is not just a story about Jesus but the possibility of living in and through the life of Jesus and praying his prayer to the Father.

And so the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of ‘communion’ or fellowship (II Cor. 13.13). The Spirit allows us to recognise each other as part of the Body of Christ because we can hear in each other the voice of Jesus praying to the Father. We know, in the Spirit, that we who are baptised into Jesus Christ share one life; so that all the diversity of gifting and service in the Church can be seen as the work of one Spirit (I Cor. 12.4). In the Holy Eucharist, this unity in and through the self-offering of Jesus is reaffirmed and renewed as we pray for the Spirit to transform both the bread and wine and ‘ourselves, our souls and bodies’.

When the Church is living by the Spirit, what the world will see is a community of people who joyfully and gratefully hear the prayer of Jesus being offered in each other's words and lives, and are able to recognise the one Christ working through human diversity. And if the world sees this, the Church is a true sign of hope in a world of bitter conflict and rivalry.

2.

From the very first, as the New Testament makes plain, the Church has experienced division and internal hostilities. From the very first, the Church has had to repent of its failure to live fully in the light and truth of the Spirit. Jesus tells us in St John's gospel that the Spirit of truth will 'prove the world wrong' in respect of sin and righteousness and judgement (Jn 16.8). But if the Spirit is leading us all further into the truth, the Spirit will convict the Church too of its wrongness and lead it into repentance. And if the Church is a community where we serve each other in the name of Christ, it is a community where we can and should call each other to repentance in the name of Christ and his Spirit – not to make the other feel inferior (because we all need to be called to repentance) but to remind them of the glory of Christ's gift and the promise that we lose sight of when we fail in our common life as a Church.

Our Anglican fellowship continues to experience painful division, and the events of recent months have not brought us nearer to full reconciliation. There are still things being done that the representative bodies of the Communion have repeatedly pleaded should not be done; and this leads to recrimination, confusion and bitterness all round. It is clear that the official bodies of The Episcopal Church have felt in conscience that they cannot go along with what has been asked of them by others, and the consecration of Canon Mary Glasspool on May 15 has been a clear sign of this. And despite attempts to clarify the situation, activity across provincial boundaries still continues – equally dictated by what people have felt they must in conscience do. Some provinces have within them dioceses that are committed to policies that neither the province as a whole nor the Communion has sanctioned. In several places, not only in North America, Anglicans have not hesitated to involve the law courts in settling disputes, often at great expense and at the cost of the Church's good name.

All are agreed that the disputes arising around these matters threaten to distract us from our main calling as Christ's Church. The recent Global South encounter in Singapore articulated a strong and welcome plea for the priority of mission in the Communion; and in my own message to that meeting I prayed for a 'new Pentecost' for all of us. This is a good season of the year to pray earnestly for renewal in the Spirit, so that we may indeed do what God asks of us and let all people know that new and forgiven life in Christ is possible and that created men and women may by the Spirit's power be given the amazing liberty to call God 'Abba, Father!'

It is my own passionate hope that our discussion of the Anglican Covenant in its entirety will help us focus on that priority; the Covenant is nothing if not a tool for mission. I want to stress yet again that the Covenant is not envisaged as an instrument of control. And this is perhaps a good place to clarify that the place given in the final text to the Standing Committee of the Communion introduces no novelty: the Committee is identical to the former Joint Standing Committee, fully

answerable in all matters to the ACC and the Primates; nor is there any intention to prevent the Primates in the group from meeting separately. The reference to the Standing Committee reflected widespread unease about leaving certain processes *only* to the ACC or *only* to the Primates.

But we are constantly reminded that the priorities of mission are experienced differently in different places, and that trying to communicate the Gospel in the diverse tongues of human beings can itself lead to misunderstandings and failures of communication between Christians. The sobering truth is that often our attempts to share the Gospel effectively in our own setting can create problems for those in other settings.

3.

We are at a point in our common life where broken communications and fragile relationships have created a very mistrustful climate. This is not news. But many have a sense that the current risks are greater than ever. Although attitudes to human sexuality have been the presenting cause, I want to underline the fact that what has precipitated the current problem is not simply this issue but the widespread bewilderment and often hurt in different quarters that we have no way of making decisions together so that we are not compromised or undermined by what others are doing. We have not, in other words, found a way of shaping our consciences and convictions as a worldwide body. We have not fully received the Pentecostal gift of mutual understanding for common mission.

It may be said – quite understandably, in one way – that our societies and their assumptions are so diverse that we shall never be able to do this. Yet we are called to seek for mutual harmony and common purpose, and not to lose heart. If the truth of Christ is indeed ultimately one as we all believe, there should be a path of mutual respect and thankfulness that will hold us in union and help us grow in that truth.

Yet at the moment we face a dilemma. To maintain outward unity at a formal level while we are convinced that the divisions are not only deep but damaging to our local mission is not a good thing. Neither is it a good thing to break away from each other so dramatically that we no longer see Christ in each other and risk trying to create a church of the ‘perfect’ – people like us. It is significant that there are still very many in The Episcopal Church, bishops, clergy and faithful, who want to be aligned with the Communion’s general commitments and directions, such as those who identify as ‘Communion Partners’, who disagree strongly with recent decisions, yet want to remain in visible fellowship within TEC so far as they can. And, as has often been pointed out, there are things that Anglicans across the world need and want to do together for the care of God’s poor and vulnerable that can and do go on even when division over doctrine or discipline is sharp.

4.

More and more, Anglicans are aware of living through a time of substantial transition, a time when the structures that have served us need reviewing and refreshing, perhaps radical changing, when the voice and witness in the Communion of Christians from the developing world is more

articulate and creative than ever, and when the rapidity of social change in ‘developed’ nations leaves even some of the most faithful and traditional Christian communities uncertain where to draw the boundaries in controversial matters – not only sexuality but issues of bioethics, for example, or the complexities of morality in the financial world.

A time of transition, by definition, does not allow quick solutions to such questions, and it is a time when, ideally, we need more than ever to stay in conversation. As I have said many times before, whatever happens to our structures, we still need to preserve both working relationships and places for exchange and discussion. New vehicles for conversations across these boundaries are being developed with much energy.

But some decisions cannot be avoided. We began by thinking about Pentecost and the diverse peoples of the earth finding a common voice, recognising that each was speaking a truth recognised by all. However, when some part of that fellowship speaks in ways that others find hard to recognise, and that point in a significantly different direction from what others are saying, we cannot pretend there is no problem.

And when a province through its formal decision-making bodies or its House of Bishops as a body declines to accept requests or advice from the consultative organs of the Communion, it is very hard (as noted in my letter to the Communion last year after the General Convention of TEC) to see how members of that province can be placed in positions where they are required to represent the Communion as a whole. This affects both our ecumenical dialogues, where our partners (as they often say to us) need to know who it is they are talking to, and our internal faith-and-order related groups.

I am therefore proposing that, while these tensions remain unresolved, members of such provinces – provinces that have *formally*, through their Synod or House of Bishops, adopted policies that breach any of the moratoria requested by the Instruments of Communion and recently reaffirmed by the Standing Committee and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFUO) – should not be participants in the ecumenical dialogues in which the Communion is formally engaged. I am further proposing that members of such provinces serving on IASCUFUO should for the time being have the status only of consultants rather than full members. This is simply to confirm what the Communion as a whole has come to regard as the acceptable limits of diversity in its practice. It does not alter what has been said earlier by the Primates’ Meeting about the nature of the moratoria: the request for restraint does not necessarily imply that the issues involved are of equal weight but recognises that they are ‘central factors placing strains on our common life’, in the words of the Primates in 2007. Particular provinces will be contacted about the outworking of this in the near future.

I am aware that other bodies have responsibilities in questions concerned with faith and order, notably the Primates’ Meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Standing Committee. The latter two are governed by constitutional provisions which cannot be overturned by any one person’s decision alone, and there will have to be further consultation as to how they are affected. I shall be inviting the views of all members of the Primates’ Meeting on the handling of these matters with a view to the agenda of the next scheduled meeting in January 2011.

5.

In our dealings with other Christian communions, we do not seek to deny our diversity; but there is an obvious problem in putting forward representatives of the Communion who are consciously at odds with what the Communion has formally requested or stipulated. This does not seem fair to them or to our partners. In our dealings with each other, we need to be clear that conscientious decisions may be taken in good faith, even for what are held to be good theological or missional reasons, and yet have a cost when they move away from what is recognisable and acceptable within the Communion. Thus – to take a very different kind of example – there have been and there are Anglicans who have a strong conscientious objection to infant baptism. Their views deserve attention, respect and careful study, they should be engaged in serious dialogue – but it would be eccentric to place such people in a position where their view was implicitly acknowledged as one of a range of equally acceptable convictions, all of which could be taken as representatively Anglican.

Yet no-one should be celebrating such public recognition of divisions and everyone should be reflecting on how to rebuild relations and to move towards a more coherent Anglican identity (which does not mean an Anglican identity with no diversity, a point once again well made by the statement from the Singapore meeting). Some complain that we are condemned to endless meetings that achieve nothing. I believe that in fact we have too *few* meetings that allow proper mutual exploration. It may well be that such encounters need to take place in a completely different atmosphere from the official meetings of the Communion's representative bodies, and this needs some imaginative thought and planning. Much work is already going into making this more possible.

But if we do conclude that some public marks of 'distance', as the Windsor Continuation Group put it, are unavoidable if our Communion bodies are not to be stripped of credibility and effectiveness, the *least* Christian thing we can do is to think that this absolves us from prayer and care for each other, or continuing efforts to make sense of each other.

We are praying for a new Pentecost for our Communion. That means above all a vast deepening of our capacity to receive the gift of being adopted sons and daughters of the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It means a deepened capacity to speak of Jesus Christ in the language of our context so that we are heard and the Gospel is made compelling and credible. And it also means a deepened capacity to love and nourish each other within Christ's Body – especially to love and nourish, as well as to challenge, those whom Christ has given us as neighbours with whom we are in deep and painful dispute.

One remarkable symbol of promise for our Communion is the generous gift received by the Diocese of Jerusalem from His Majesty the King of Jordan, who has provided a site on the banks of the Jordan River, at the traditional site of Our Lord's Baptism, for the construction of an Anglican church. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of blessing the foundation stone of this church and viewing the plans for its design. It will be a worthy witness at this historic site to the Anglican tradition, a sign of real hope for the long-suffering Christians of the region, and

something around which the Communion should gather as a focus of common commitment in Christ and his Spirit. I hope that many in the Communion will give generous support to the project.

‘We have the mind of Christ’ says St Paul (I Cor. 2.16); and, as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has recently written, this means that we must have a ‘kenotic’, a self-emptying approach to each other in the Church. May the Spirit create this in us daily and lead us into that wholeness of truth which is only to be found in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

I wish you all God’s richest blessing at this season.

+Rowan Cantuar:

*Lambeth Palace
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