

ANiC Synod 2008

Theological Commission Report

The Theological Commission is an ad hoc committee of Jim Packer and myself, and those we co-opt from time to time. Over the next year we want to develop six statements of what we believe supplementing and articulating what we believe as Anglicans for today. We hope to develop six *memoranda of understanding* to be affirmed by the next synod as positive statements of how we wish to order our lives, in agreement with Anglican doctrine, in submission to the Scriptures to be most effective and faithful for the future of the gospel in Canada.

WHY DO THIS?

Our deep desire is that our practice will truly reflect our theology. We recognize that God is doing something remarkable in the global communion, and that the realignment of Anglicanism, which is much larger than us is taking place around the gospel. Therefore we want to restate and reaffirm our fundamental commitments and to do so with as much clarity and grace as we can for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

We are refugees from the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) which has departed from the historic faith and lost its bearings, ignoring the compass God has given us and going its own way. All signs point to the fact that it is unwilling to repent. We do not want to replicate what is wrong in the North American church but we want the Anglican Network in Canada (ANiC) to be a vital vibrant vehicle through which Christ may effectively reach Canada with salvation.

At the same time we are deeply aware that our trust is in God and that the most perfect, pristine and thoroughly orthodox statements, and the best structures in the world will not save anyone, nor will they ensure our faithfulness. We look to God and trust him for our future.

WHERE ARE WE?

There are two key contexts to consider.

The first context is 'the great tradition', by which I mean God's purposes revealed in Scriptures, from creation to new creation, particularly fulfilled in life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, delivered to the Apostles through the Holy Spirit. Since the time of the Apostles the church has received this tradition unimpaired and sought to understand it and apply it and to form its life around it. In the creeds we have the mature expression of the early church fathers that crystallizes and focuses our lives and faith. Until the last 75 years in the West, the great tradition was received giving coherence to the witness of the church.

This means we are not trying to reinvent the wheel. As Anglicans we stand in the rich doctrinal heritage of biblical Christianity in its genuine comprehensiveness and gracious theological engagement. The best way for us to move forward is to understand our past.

The second context is the current shape of the Anglican communion. The communion will never be the same again. The false teaching which has metastasized in the West has torn the fabric of the communion. The Canadian house of bishops and the international instruments of unity have demonstrated themselves unwilling and incapable of resolving the crisis—with the exception of the global primates. At

the same time there has been explosive gospel growth in the global south, and our brothers and sisters in the global south have stood with us and have graciously extended their jurisdiction to us.

Within this second context there are two very hopeful signs. One is the Common Cause partnership in North America. Instead of an 'everyone for themselves' attitude there is a concerted and deliberate effort at humble submission and united expression, an intentional structural coalescing for the sake of the gospel. This means that all we do is in some way provisional and that our theological affirmations and practices as a Network in Canada have to harmonize with those of the Common Cause. We want to serve the purposes of being genuinely biblical, united and missionary. As we look forward to a new North American Province, we need humility.

The second sign of hope is GAFCON. The 14 articles of the Jerusalem declaration are important for us as a gracious yet definite articulation of authentic Anglican Christianity in the twenty first century. They were never intended as a comprehensive compendium of all things Anglican or theological, but they describe historical classical Christ focused Anglicanism in such a way to include all who want to honour the gospel. So our affirmations and practices need to harmonize with the Jerusalem declaration.

WHAT ARE THE SIX AREAS FOR MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING?

1. The Doctrine of the Church

God is the Shepherd of his people and he gathers his flock into congregations, places undershepherds to pastor the flock, by leading them into the pasture and guarding them from wolves. God gives massive dignity to the church. In 1 Tim 3:15 the church is called the household of God, the pillar and buttress of the truth. Elsewhere the Apostle Paul calls the church is the body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all things in all ways.

All of us who have become members of ANiC have signed declarations committing ourselves to the Anglican formularies—the Scripture, the three creeds of the undivided church, the 39 articles, the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) with the ordinal. The reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wrestled deeply with the doctrine of the church. Article 19 of the 39 articles is one of the loveliest and most helpful flowers of this struggle.

XIX. Of the Church.

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.

Notice this is not a definition but a description. The two marks by which we recognize the true church is the preaching of the pure word of God and the ministering of the sacraments according to Christ's ordinance. It says nothing about buildings or denomination but describes the church congregationally. The second half of the article assumes discipline and distinguishes between matters of "living and manner of ceremonies" and "matters of faith". This means that it is possible to fall into error and disobey God in life or doctrine.

There are huge implications for us.

- It means that our structures have value but their value is secondary to the gospel. More accurately, they have value only as they serve the gospel, and if they do not serve the gospel they should be challenged.
- It means that a diocese or any larger units exist for the sake of congregations. Congregations do not exist for the sake of the diocese.
- It means that we hold certain things with an open hand. One of the remarkable things about the current reality in North America is that some networks are geographically based, some affiliation based, yet the key identity of many congregations is not their current jurisdictional alignment but of belonging to the global Anglican communion.

Our doctrine of the church will have implications for property ownership.

- Who should own the parish property?
- What does licensing mean?
- How do we most effectively create new congregations?

2. The Life of the Church: Ministry

In the BCP ordination services and in Article 23 ordination is appointment and admission to ministry in a congregation with pastoral responsibilities, after examination as to call and fitness and the laying on of hands with prayer, together with authorization for ministry. The ministry of word and sacrament is for those lawfully called and sent “known to have such qualities as are requisite to the same” and “tried, called, examined.” It is the bishop who approves and admits by laying on hands and giving lawful authority.

There are a number of gnarly issues for us to deal with in this area.

First, how do we choose and appoint new bishops?

- How do we bring the role of bishop more in line with prayer book and the articles? Within CC partners there is an increasing sense that the role of the bishop is to defend the truth and be a sign of service. I want to publicly give thanks to God for the manner of life, the godly humility and the gospel ministry of our bishops Don and Malcolm.
- How do we configure ourselves so that oversight promotes the health and life of congregations?
- What is the role of a missionary bishop?

Second, what about the ordination of women to the priesthood?

- How do we genuinely protect the conscience of those who believe there are biblical impediments to women in the priesthood alongside the practice of ordaining women in ANiC? This does seem to be one of the remarkable achievements of CC, and the GAFCON statement recognizes genuine differences here
- How do we honour true diversity and maintain unity in this area?

Third, how do we raise up the next generation of clergy under God?

- What are the New Testament requirements for presbyteral and diaconal leadership in the congregation?
- How do we best identify, recruit, train, deploy, and support new clergy and new congregations?

Fourth, what should be our policy on divorce and remarriage in the ministry?

3. The Life of the Church: Discipline

We are disciples of Christ and part of discipleship is discipline. There is a positive and negative side to discipline.

Positively:

- how do we fulfill Jesus mandate to make disciples of all nations teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded?
- how can we foster lay involvement and leadership in the church?
- how do we so nurture our lay people equipping them to love Christ serve Christ in their families and in the marketplace?
- how do we make our congregational life attractive, adorning the gospel?
- how do we develop a strong inner theological life in ANiC mining the wealth of the three streams that make up authentic Anglicanism?

There is a group working to renew of our catechetical life by developing three courses which will be offered to Network parishes covering doctrine, Christian life and what it means to be an Anglican. Each course is 12 weeks and is aimed for teens, new Christians as well as older Christians. The draft outline of the three courses is as follows:

Course 1—What does it mean to be a Christian?

- 1) Who is Jesus?
- 2) How do we know the bible is authentic?
- 3) The trinity and God's plan of salvation
- 4) Kingship and the Kingdom of God
- 5) The sinfulness of humanity
- 6) Jesus as Savior and Lord
- 7) Life in the Spirit - Sanctification
- 8) The Church
- 9) The Cross and Justification
- 10) Faith and Repentance
- 11) Obedience and Patience
- 12) The Lord's Supper

Course 2—What does it mean to live as a Christian?

- 1) Renewing your mind
- 2) Walking in the Spirit
- 3) More than conquerors - trials and temptations
- 4) Understanding victory - spiritual warfare
- 5) Fellowship
- 6) The life of prayer and praise
- 7) Good and bad habits
- 8) Relationship in Christ
- 9) Mission and outreach
- 10) Challenging the culture
- 11) Good and bad health (body and spirit)
- 12) Praise God anyway

Course 3—What does it mean to live as an Anglican?

- 1) Heritage
- 2) The 39 articles - the Anglican creed
- 3) The book of common prayer
- 4) The sacraments of the church
- 5) Nurture and discipline
- 6) Money
- 7) The bishop and the diocese
- 8) The services
- 9) The confirmation service
- 10) The burial service and Christian hope
- 11) Anglican history
- 12) Anglican prospects

Negatively there needs to be corrective discipline.

what accountabilities need to be in place for clergy and lay leaders?

how do we hold bishops, priests and deacons accountable to their vows in life and doctrine

what processes should be in place to protect congregations and to promote godliness

how do we best develop a code of conduct for the Network leaders including Sunday school teachers, and small group leaders.

4. The Life of the Church: Liturgy

One of the valuable principles of our Anglican heritage is that our liturgical life is guided by the normative principle rather than the regulative principle. The regulative principle, which is practiced by Presbyterian and Reformed churches, affirms that in our Sunday gatherings we must do only what is commanded in Scripture. What is not commanded in Scripture is forbidden. The normative principle affirms that we may do anything in our gatherings which is not forbidden by Scripture, we should do nothing contrary to the word of God. There is great freedom in this.

God gathers us to meet with him in the presence of Christ. Liturgy gives shape to our gatherings so that we might hear the word of God, pray and love one another. One of the reasons that liberalism has been so apparently successful is the use of modern liturgies which put me at the center and God at periphery, which demote the creeds as optional, and which replace substitutionary atonement in the holy communion with an universalism based on the incarnation. There are parts of the Book of Alternative Services which are helpful and useful, but we cannot theologically affirm all of it.

On the other hand, for many people the Elizabethan English of the BCP is an impediment to entering into the liturgy and to inviting outsiders. Cranmer himself recognized the need to update liturgies in Article 34.

XXXIV. Of the Traditions of the Church.

It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly alike; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word. . . . so that all things be done to edifying.

Within the communion there is a rich diversity of modern English liturgies and within our own churches there is a great variety of styles and practices. How do we maintain our unity with diversity of expression? Indeed, how do we encourage new and different styles so that all things are done to edifying? We need freedom without everyone doing what is right in their own eyes, unity without uniformity. We need authorized rites and the time has come to undertake a modern English revision of the 1662 BCP.

5. The Life of the Church: Marriage and Family

One of the presenting issues in the demise and compromise of church in West is the revisionist devaluing of marriage. Our Canadian culture is increasingly anti-marriage, anti-family and anti-children. There is deep confusion leading to terrible cruelty regarding sexual conduct. Marriage is seen as a human societal contract with little structural content, which is possible to revise and update.

However, we believe that marriage is a creation ordinance, made by God for all humanity, and not the device of any government. The bible's view of sexuality is profoundly positive, locating marriage within a context much bigger than just a happy couple. Marriage is for the service of the Kingdom of God to the glory of God, and an analogy of Christ's relation to his church.

Marriage is the voluntary sexual public social union of one man and one woman from different families patterned on the union of God with his people involving lifelong exclusive sexual faithfulness.¹

What about when marriages break down—are there legitimate and biblical grounds for remarriage after divorce? We need to develop a marriage commission to study this and to discern the best marriage preparation materials for congregations to prepare those entering marriage. We need to develop ways to strengthen marriages in our congregations and to bring together the best pastoral resources for those in difficulty.

What about questions of life and the dignity of human persons? What are the implications for us that we are made to be the image of God?

6. The Mission of the Church

There is a danger for us that we should be more focused on Anglicanism than on Christ. One symptom of this will be if we merely replicate what the ACC has been doing but put the 'orthodox' badge on the front. We can be completely orthodox and utterly ineffective as Christians and churches.

We need to be clear about the gospel: what the gospel is and what the gospel is not. We need to be clear about the priority of mission: to so present Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men and women will turn to Christ in repentance and faith and be gathered into the fellowship of the church.

There is much talk amongst our CC partners regarding shifting our 'DNA' so that our life, priorities and decisions reflect the priority of Jesus Christ in saving the lost. This has implications for us from the way from Sunday school to the shape of theological education to the role of bishop as leader in mission. Our churches cannot just pretend to continue with business as usual because the one size fits all approach no longer works as mission strategy. We need to welcome the emergence of 'fresh expressions'—new networks, plants, fellowships, café groups and cell churches as effective means for reaching out with the gospel

What of our responsibility for global mission? What is our responsibility to the global south? The ACC was established by missionaries who were sent from England by the Church Missionary Society. CMS has long since ceased to exist. Do we need to start CMS again in Canada?

What should be our commitment to holistic mission—to relief and development? Our hope is to set up a Canadian arm of the Anglican Relief and Development Fund (ARDF) which is part of the CC. The approach to funding is entirely new. The projects supported are chosen by the global south primates on the board, and the giving is objective not relational, to the poorest of the poor in the global south, creating long term sustainable good rather than dependency. The ARDF aims to partner with global Anglicans for holistic development to help tomorrows church stand tall in Christ.

¹ Christopher Ash, Marriage: Sex in The Service of God.

HOW SHOULD WE PROCEED?

Here are six significant agendas for us theologically. This is a work in progress and it is not in any way complete. We need to find truly competent and qualified people who can help draft statements in these areas which can act as the basis for policies and our life together in the future. I have approached a number of people both inside and outside Canada to help.

We are calling for nominations for people who have the ability and will to help us with these agendas, and if there are areas that are not covered and you feel are significant omissions we welcome your input. Please contact Rev. Archie Pell or Jude Carriere.

Over the next year Dr. Packer has agreed to act as consultant on these statements. After drafting they will go to the ANiC board for approval. They will then be sent to each parish for comment. We aim to present them to the next ANiC synod for affirmation. Then we will offer them to the new North American Province and seek to live under the mercy of God.

David Short
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