

Article reprinted from Cross†Way Issue Spring 2004 No.92

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

TURMOIL IN THE COMMUNION

David Phillips

It is difficult to keep up with the rapidly unfolding events in the Anglican Communion. As is well known the trigger to all the upheaval was the schismatic behaviour of Dioceses in the US and Canada but the problems run far deeper. Much of the American and Canadian Episcopal churches long ago abandoned Christianity in favour of liberalism and it is a blessing that we are no longer pretending that this doesn't matter. The divisions in the Communion can be healed once action is taken to expel those in error. However, this is unlikely to happen because there are too many from Great Britain, Ireland and some other provinces who either share the same error or who are so weak that they will not respond to error in the way demanded by God in His Word.

Lambeth Commission

The Lambeth Commission chaired by Robin Eames has begun its work. It is important to remember that the Commission has not been set up to look at the theological issues surrounding sexual practice. As far as the Primates Meeting of last October and the 1998 Lambeth Conference is concerned this is not an open issue. The question before the Commission is what to do with segments of the Communion that depart from authentic Christianity. If this nettle is not grasped now then there is no future for the Communion at all.

But what hope should we have that the Commission will recommend decisive action? The Chairman, Robin Eames, has shown in the statements from himself and the Irish Bishops that his sympathies lie with the liberals. Apparently the only thing he saw wrong with the consecration of an immoral Bishop is that it threatens the unity of the Communion. There are some good people on the Commission but they are likely to be out-manoeuvred by the politically minded liberals. Moreover there appear to be a disproportionate number of liberals or the spineless as compared to the Communion as a whole.

New Network in the US.

In North America the response to the errors of the Episcopal Church has been varied. The Anglican Mission in America, which was established a few years ago in response to the liberalism of ECUSA, continues to grow. But the most significant development is the establishment on the 20th January of the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes. This initially involves about thirteen of the Dioceses of ECUSA and many other parishes (of course there are also parishes within the said Dioceses who have objected to the creation of the Network). They have not separated themselves from ECUSA as a whole but, by defining themselves as those who are in communion with Canterbury and upholding what ECUSA is supposed to uphold they are pitching themselves as the authentic article. This is a piece of godly wisdom. Why should those who uphold the teaching of the Church be forced out by those who have abandoned it?

A recent meeting of the Council of Church Society welcomed the setting up of the Network. However, there were concerns expressed. First, whilst we recognise that it is important constitutionally for them to put themselves in Communion with the See of Canterbury this rather ignores the fact that the present incumbent of the See does not himself believe the doctrines which they are fighting for. Second, they have ducked the issue of the presbyteral ministry of women that cannot be ducked indefinitely since it involves a matter of obedience to God's Word. This was also the course taken by AMiA at first and they have now affirmed women's ministry but not as

presbyters. We must also say that whilst this is a strategy for survival which excludes liberalism it definitely includes sacramentalism.

Anglican Church of Canada falling apart.

The focus of the conflict between Christianity and liberalism in Canada has been the Diocese of New Westminster. Michael Ingham, who holds the office of Bishop, has not worked alone but with the approval of the Diocesan Synod. However, it appears that Ingham is quite prepared to persecute Christians in order to pursue the liberal agenda.

The chief opposition to liberalism within the Diocese comes from the eleven parishes which are now called the Anglican Communion in New Westminster who represent around one quarter of Sunday attendance in Anglican churches in the Diocese. The Diocese has already acted to close one mission church which sided with ACiNW.

At the request of the meeting of Anglican Primates in October the Canadian House of Bishops established a Task Force under the chairmanship of Bishop Victoria Matthews to examine and report upon Adequate Episcopal Oversight. The Task Force reported at the beginning of March and appears to be making recommendation to the General Synod which is due to meet in June this year. They have proposed a form of Alternative Episcopal Oversight for those parishes that are not prepared to comply with the Diocesan policy of allowing the blessing of same-sex unions.

Whilst this was going on four Primates from the Communion responded to a request from four of the ACiNW parishes and established 'emergency oversight'. The remaining seven parishes were waiting for the result of the report above.

Anglican Essentials in Canada is a coalition of three organisations opposed to the revisionist agenda in Canada and under the leadership of Bishop Tony Burton (once the youngest Bishop in the Communion) they have been slowly seeking to firm up their position and held an apparently successful video-conference with a range of speakers. As with the new Network in the United States the Anglican Essentials has reiterated their support for doctrinal essentials but have not addressed some of those other changes in the Church, such as the presbyteral ministry of women, which flow from the failure to submit fully to the Word of God.

The Canadian House of Bishops meets in April and the General Synod for its triennial meeting in June. The Standing Committee of the Synod has agreed to a motion going before the Synod that would initiate work to bring proposals for homosexual marriage to the next meeting of the Synod in 2007.

The recent meeting of the Standing Committee of the Synod also reported that they were expecting a deficit of £325,000 part of which was due to the drop in income because of the liberalism of the Church.

Akinola provides the lead

Praise God for the courageous lead being given in the Anglican Communion by the Primate of Nigeria, Peter Akinola. The Archbishop is one of the members of the Standing Committee of the Primates that recently met with the Anglican Consultative Council in Canterbury. The problem was that Frank Griswold, the Presiding Bishop of ECUSA, was also due to attend. Griswold is clearly a false teacher in biblical terms, he has shown a flagrant disregard for the Anglican Communion and also demonstrated after the Primates Meeting in October that he is a man who has a loose attachment to concepts such as truth and honesty. It is to the great credit of Peter Akinola that he has been prepared to live out the Word of God and separate himself from false teachers by refusing to attend the Standing Committee. No doubt many others would argue that Akinola has lost an

opportunity to bring his influence to bear at an important meeting but this is a worldly way of thinking. But remaining faithful to the Lord and upholding the authority of His Word is far more important and of much greater benefit to the Church of God.

There have been accusations by liberals in the past that Archbishop Akinola is engineering himself into being the next leader of the Anglican Communion. Such mud-slinging is only to be expected. Our hope would be to see more Bishops like Peter Akinola who are prepared to put the Lord first and obey His Word not the wisdom of men.

Central Africa speaks out

One of the blights on the Church of England is the foolish view that somehow it is wrong to refute error. An illustration of this is the way in which the role of Bishops and Presbyters in refuting error has been virtually written out of the new draft Ordination services. However, the 1662 Ordinal is still The Ordinal and it is still the authoritative statement of what Anglican orders mean. It is the duty of ministers to drive away all strange and erroneous doctrine. This is not some invention of reformation controversy, anyone reading the Bible with any degree of honesty can see that Paul, John, Peter and, of course, the Lord Jesus, stood out against error in the most forceful terms. To fail to refute error is therefore un-Christian.

In view of the sterility of the Church of England it is refreshing to see the robust statements issued by the Churches of Africa and Asia in response to the errors in the Anglican Communion. One such recent statement came from the Standing Committee of the Province of Central Africa. The statement concerns those Bishops who voted for or took part in the consecration of an actively homosexual man as Bishop. They focus very clearly on the fact that this is a salvation issue.

By choosing to ignore the clear voice of God revealed in Holy scripture, the bishops and other leaders who have done this put in peril the souls of those who follow them into this grievous error.

These bishops have disregarded the anguished cries of the Primates of the Anglican Communion, the clear voice of the Anglican Consultative Council, the overwhelming voice of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, and countless pleas from other Christians. If their actions were benign, their arrogance has irreparably shattered trust and fellowship. But the action was not morally neutral. It is so desperately sinful, it has fractured sacramental communion. Only their sincere repentance can rescue the crisis they have created. This is wrong and it is sin. By their action, they have rejected us, our counsel, and the faith we share with history and with countless millions. The Presiding Bishop of ECUSA and the other bishops who have acted with him could not have been more clear.

Despite our pleas, they have declared independence from the agreed historical faith. By willfully ignoring the unanimous voice of the Primates, ECUSA has declared independence from the Anglican Communion. They have created a separation that cannot be ignored. Though they continue to speak of unity, they have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. The unity they propose no longer exists. Sadly, it appears that defiant eyes see neither truth nor pain.

The statement then speaks of the need to find a way forward:

But the way forward simply cannot welcome sin into the church. It cannot ignore the authority of the Bible. It cannot overlook the injury ECUSA has caused. It is simply not acceptable to rob wounded people of our only true hope.

... separation from ECUSA is inevitable. If there is no repentance, it will become permanent.

David Phillips is General Secretary of Church Society