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PRIMATES - A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

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*Anything can happen in the next half-hour!*¹

There was a real sense of uncertainty immediately prior to the recent meeting of the Anglican Primates. There was talk of clear, decisive action; others feared it would be a damp-squib. Post meeting comments imply that the Canadian Primate expected to be kicked out of the Communion. With 3 of the 38 primates absent there were concerns this would tip the meeting in a liberal direction. Furthermore all the key players were liberals - Eames (Ireland) chaired Lambeth & hosted the meeting, Cameron (Scotland) chaired the follow-up group and Carnley (Australia) chaired the drafting committee for the statement issued.

In the end the statement issued by the Primates was a relief, it most definitely took a step in the right direction but it was also frustrating in that once again it appears to have been but a small step and at a painfully slow speed.

There are now real signs that orthodox primates, who represent the vast bulk of the Communion, are breaking free of the liberal stranglehold. For the first time they refused to participate in a service of Holy Communion with the two North American primates. They insisted in dealing first with the issue now dividing the Communion, but refused to be deflected from discussing some of the great problems their own provinces are dealing with.

The Primates had to wrestle with how to tackle the problems without taking to themselves an authority they do not have and without making the Communion into something it should not be. They seem to have managed to walk this tightrope reasonably well.

In the end the main thing they did was ask the North Americans to voluntarily absent themselves from the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council. This does not look like a momentous change, but it sends a very clear signal of how things are moving, and it may help to break the liberal stranglehold on ACC and its funding.

It is said that the Africans came intending to give the North Americans three months to repent of their actions. In the end they opted for three years apparently to allow time for the synodical bodies to respond themselves. It is hard to imagine that they do not have a mechanism for emergency meetings but at least action is being taken.

The other significant thing is that contrary to the Windsor Report they did not put a stop to the provision of oversight to the marginalised orthodox in North America. The existing provision will continue for the time being whilst a panel of reference is established to ensure that there is proper pastoral care being given to these groups and individuals. This may also prove useful to many in the Church of England who have revisionist Bishops.

It was frustrating that something more dramatic was not done. It is particularly strange that the North American primates were not asked to absent themselves from future primates meetings. There could have been a clear statement that the actions of ECUSA and the Anglican Church in Canada put them outside of orthodox Christianity. There could have been more direct intervention in fostering links with Anglicans in North America who have distanced themselves from error. And there could have been a call to all the provinces to refuse to recognise the ministry of the North American provinces until they repent. These things would all have helped greatly in defending the

truth against error, in hopefully bringing people to repentance and in stating clearly to the world what Christians believe about sexual morality.

The Primates, remarkably, produced a unanimous statement. Presumably this was why it was not sharper, how could the two North American's have voted for much more than they did? How many other liberals would have refused to endorse a stronger statement? I believe that a stronger statement would have better served the Communion, but I can understand why they opted to tread more carefully.

Sidelines

It is reported that Robin Eames (Ireland) permitted Frank Griswold (arch liberal & ECUSA) to celebrate communion in the Cathedral but refused Greg Venables (conservative, South America) permission to preach in an evangelical Church in Belfast.

Many commented on the emergence of Henry Orombi (Uganda) as a winsome yet firm leader. It appears that the balance in the Primates meetings has also been helped by the fact that the new Primate of the liberal dominated New Zealand is a strongly morally conservative Maori – Whakahuihui Vercoe.

Most intriguing of all has been the attitude to Rowan Williams. Revisionists and elements of the liberal press have been incensed by his attitude. It appears that he is determined to uphold the mind of the Church rather than his own personal views. It would be far better he subjected his views to the Word of God, but at least at present he is working for the majority orthodox view in the Communion.

¹In case you were wondering, the full quotation is: "Stand by for action! We are about to launch Stingray ! Marineville - I am calling 'Battle Stations'! Anything can happen in the next half-hour!" Commander Shore, opening theme to the 1960's cartoon series Stingray.