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CONFIDENT AND EQUIPPED: The 3rd Junior Anglican Evangelical Conference

By James Taylor

In July 2011 I joined 24 other junior Anglican evangelicals at a short conference organised by John Richardson. Observing the younger evangelical scene in the Church of England and in discussion with colleagues John became concerned that, whilst clear about our evangelical identity, many of us were less clear about what it means to be Anglican. In practice, this meant that our attitude towards the established structures of the Church was indifferent at best. Perhaps more seriously, as John wrote in *Cross†way* in 2011, if we continue as semi-detached Anglicans, “then not only will Evangelicalism remain on the institutional margins but many millions in this country will never get the chance to hear the gospel — not, at least, from a conventional Anglican.”¹

That conference - and the resultant book written by John, “A strategy that changes the denomination” - clearly touched a nerve and met a need. Two years on we now have a national network, a lively and useful Facebook discussion group and have just held the 3rd Junior Anglican Evangelical Conference (JAEC) with 34 delegates and 8 senior leaders and speakers. ‘Junior’ refers primarily to stage and experience of ministry: the 34 delegates included some exploring the idea of ordained Anglican ministry; students from Wycliffe Hall, Ridley Hall, Oak Hill College, and St John’s College, Nottingham; curates from across the country; and some recently installed incumbents.

The theme of the conference was ‘Confident and Equipped’ - the very things we need to be as we seek a renewed Church and as we face our task of proclaiming the gospel to our nation. Lee Gatiss opened the conference with a challenging exposition of 2 Timothy 1. Just as Paul reminded his young protégé Timothy of his spiritual heritage, thereby urging him to remain faithful to it, so Lee challenged us as to our faithfulness to our spiritual heritage. Heritage requires loyalty and it was good for us ‘junior’ Anglicans to be reminded of our Confessional church; our Articles and Prayer Book and the example of Cranmer himself. Such a reminder also serves to give us confidence in our Anglicanism: whilst we might feel like a sidelined minority, our reformed evangelical faith is authentically Anglican. Our confession is one of which we must be unashamed and to which we can unashamedly call the whole Church of England.

Simon Austen, addressing the question of “why stay in the Church of England?” also urged us to loyalty. In the midst of struggles the grass may look greener on the other side. Yet we were helpfully reminded that on this side of glory the church is always mixed and we are not the first to face such struggles or to be tempted to leave. John Wesley, faced with the question of separation from the Church of England and looking at the experience of those who had left, concluded that “their influence was more and more confined; they grew less and less useful to others; and generally lost the spirit of religion themselves in the spirit of controversy.”² J. C. Ryle, looking back over the previous 100 years of the Church concluded that “they were all asleep”³ and yet by persevering in faithful ministry, many woke up to the gospel. Simon left us with the challenging question of if we leave, who will minister to the flocks we leave behind?

The conference also had the aim of equipping us to face the challenges in our church; those of the present and those we see on the horizon. Sam Allberry led a superb session on ‘reclaiming the good news of the gospel in human sexuality’ and Ben Cooper brought us some exceptionally careful and clear teaching on complementarianism. A variety of seminars were offered to help us get equipped

for various areas of ministry including rural, urban, in non-evangelical parishes and in the Diocese and Deanery.

Delegates also benefitted from JAEC hosting the 2013 St Antholin Lecture. Lee Gatiss spoke on 'Edmund Grindal - The Preacher's Archbishop.' Facing pressure from Queen Elizabeth I to discourage preaching and even reduce the number of preachers, Archbishop Grindal remained steadfastly committed to the appointment of godly preachers, the task of preaching and the benefit of 'prophesyings' - the preaching groups of his day. As Lee concludes, "When many acquire the habit and reputation for jettisoning their principles for the sake of preferment and advance, let us hope to be inspired by bishops like Grindal, who are prepared to suffer professionally when a clear stand becomes necessary." Lee gave us a fantastic study of this less well known Archbishop, but one who faced a similar challenge to the priority of preaching to that which we face today. Look out for The Latimer Trust's publication of the lecture.

In John Richardson's 'state of the nation' address - which has almost become an institution in itself - we were woken up to reality: a Church of over 19,000 ministers (one for every 2,500 people) and with over 16,000 buildings. Yet a shrinking Church. Not only must we be confident and equipped ourselves, the task of equipping others is urgent. As John concluded, "we have failed to equip and empower the people of God. We have ministered to them, we have provided them with food even, but we have not brought them into ministry and therefore we exhaust ourselves to little effect."

No other conference or course addresses this urgent need. As Simon Austen commented, "this conference is unique and I'd love to see hundreds and hundreds of people here." So, plan to join us for the 4th JAEC, 8th-10th September 2014, or consider who you might send. But before then, join us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/JAECgroup) and read John Richardson's book to join with us in "A strategy that changes the denomination."

James Taylor is Curate at St Luke's Hampstead, on the organising team for JAEC and a Church Society Council member.

Endnotes:

- 1) John Richardson, Anglican Evangelical Junior Clergy Conference Report, *Cross+Way* Issue Autumn 2011 No. 122.
- 2) John Wesley, *Reasons against a separation from the Church of England*, 1758.
- 3) J. C. Ryle, *Christian leaders of the eighteenth century*, 1885: 14.