



Papers from the 2008 Modern Churchpeople's Conference

*Saving the Soul of Anglicanism: the nature and future of the Anglican Communion*

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## A Holy Mess and the Grace of Ambiguity

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**N**BC sports commentator Bob Costas was on hand during the Parade of Nations at the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney, Australia, introducing the different countries as they paraded down the stadium. "Next up is the Central African Republic," Fortunately, for geographically challenged viewers, he helpfully remarked "located in Central Africa!"

Well I am from The Church of the Province of Central Africa.

There is a modern parable I wish to share with you tucked away in Martin Laird's inspiring book *Into the Silent Land*. In the epilogue you find: "*Who am I?*" *A Tale of Monastic Failure*. It is about a young man who did not know what to do with his life. One day he decided that he would enter a monastery, but not just any monastery a 'real' monastery. So he went in search of a 'real' monastery. At the first monastery he came across he told the porter who opened the door that he would like to enter a monastery but it had to be a 'real' monastery and asks if that monastery is a 'real' monastery?

The porter said to him that he would be more than welcome at the monastery but unfortunately they were not a real monastery at all. They were a fake monastery. They were only pretending, and if the young man's heart was set on a 'real' monastery he had to go further down the road and he would come across it soon.

The young man was delighted and set off to find the real monastery. Soon he came across a large sign pointing down a small road that led into the woods. The sign read, "Real Monastery 100 Yards". The young man was happy. He knocked on



the monastery door and his jaw dropped in amazement when the porter opened because he was certain it was the very same monk who was the porter at the fake monastery. The porter asked how he could help and the young man told him he wanted to enter a real monastery.

The porter told him that he had come to the right place and he would take him to the novitiate. On the way the porter explained to the young man how fortunate he was not to have fallen for the fake monastery up the road.

The young man settled into the novitiate easily. He liked all his fellow novices and all the monks and decided to make his profession. An appointment with the abbot was made and the young man was asked why he felt ready to make his profession. He responded that he liked the place very much and everyone was nice to him.

The abbot said it was very encouraging to hear that but felt he should go back to the novitiate for a while longer as it

would do him no harm. The young man returned to his life as a novice greatly distressed. This experience told him about his 'faults and failings and presumption'. He started to grow in self-knowledge and studied diligently and mastered all the monastery's history, traditions, and various customs.

After more than a year the young man felt ready for another shot. The abbot asked why he felt ready to make his profession. The young man said he was convinced that this is what God was asking him to do. He had studied the traditions and charism of the monastery with which he thoroughly identified and confirmed his sense of interior call.

The abbot advised the young man to go back to the novitiate until he was really ready. The young man was totally devastated. He knew he belonged more in the monastery than half of those other wretched monks. But to the novitiate he returned and took to helping in the garden, pruning vines and thinning carrots and also serving in the infirmary.

He did these tasks for what seemed like ages. One day the abbot enquired from the novice master if the young man was still interested in making his profession. The novice master simply said he went about doing his tasks in the garden, consoling old monks in the infirmary, and encouraging the new ones in the novitiate. Now the abbot wanted to see the young man.

The abbot asked the young man if he was still interested in making his profession as he seemed not as keen as when he was making such a thorough study of the tradition of the monastery.

The young man, his face with the freshness and peace of one whose poverty have taught them they have nothing to defend, said to the abbot, "Jesus Christ is my monastery".

The abbot gazed into the man as though looking for something, looked into him as though gazing into the heart of mys-

tery. His gaze fixed on the man, sifting him, assessing every turn taken, every decision made in order to know if this man really knew what he had said. The abbot stood up slowly ... and said, "You have learned our tradition well. May I have your blessing?"

Here ends the parable. But there is more, the transformation of the young man's mind-set started after his second request for profession was rejected. He was in utter despair and needed help. The help came from a wise priest named Fr. Alypius who posed only one question to the young man, "Who are you?"

In all that had happened in his life, his search for a real monastery, his refusal for profession, the clothes he wore, his name, where he came from, what he had done, the things he had studied and so on. In all these things, the problem was that the young man did not know who he was.

Who are you?

We could stretch this profound question and ask if we know who other people are. Here let's let our minds wander for a moment to an African tale which explores this. Once upon a time in an African forest a blind rabbit and blind snake met. And since they could not make out who the other was they decided to feel each other and say who they were. So the snake went first and begun to touch the rabbit and said, "You are furry. You have long ears. You have a short stumpy tail. Ah! You are a rabbit. The rabbit responded enthusiastically, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Then the rabbit proceeded to explore the snake and said, "You have a forked tongue. You are long and rather cold blooded. You have beady eyes. You are slithery and you have no means of self locomotion. Ah! You must be, you must be a Consultant"!

Who are you?

Fr. Alypius' answer to the young man is eternal, universal and helpful to us and the Communion to know ourselves. He says, "Let me tell you who you are. You are a ray of God's own light. ... You say you seek God, but a ray of light doesn't seek the sun; it's coming from the sun. You are a branch on the vine of God. A branch doesn't seek the vine; it's already part of the vine. A wave doesn't look for the ocean; it's already full of ocean."

The young man's problem is clear in the light of Fr. Alypius diagnosis. "Because you don't know that you are one with God, you believe all these labels about yourself: I'm a sinner, I'm a saint, I'm a wretch, I'm a worm and no man, I'm a monk, I'm a nurse. These are all labels, clothing. They serve a purpose, but they are not who you are. To the extent that you believe these labels, you believe a lie, and you add anguish upon anguish. It's what most of us do for most of our lives. We believe labels.

It is what we are doing in the Communion adding 'anguish upon anguish'. This is the essence of the Communion's crisis. "Before you can know in your own experience what the Psalmist meant when he said, 'Be still and know that I am God', you must first learn to be still and know who you are. The rest will follow."

We are not the labels we tag ourselves with: straight, gay, liberal, conservative, moderate, Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, traditionalist, and to the extent that we believe these labels we believe a lie and add 'anguish upon anguish'. We must first learn to be still and know who we are.

This is what I seek to explore with you in the context of the theme *Saving the Soul of Anglicanism, Blessing or Curse, the African Experience*.

In thinking about the African Experience my mind wanders to Mma Ramotswe a cheerful woman of 'traditional build'. Precious Ramotswe is the founder of the

No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency in Botswana and a devout Anglican! She is cross between Kinsey Millhone and Miss Marple. Once Mma Ramotswe was thinking: "God put us on this earth. We were all Africans then, in the beginning, because man started in Kenya, as Dr Leakey and his Daddy have proved. So, if one thinks carefully about it, we are all brothers and sisters, and yet everywhere you look, what do you see? Fighting, fighting, fighting.

"The problem, of course, was that people did not seem to understand the difference between right and wrong. They needed to be reminded about this, because if you left it to them to work it out for themselves, they would never bother. They would just find out what was best for them, and then they would call that the right thing. That's how most people thought."

"God put us on this earth. We were all Africans then ...". The African Experience can help us in our understanding of right and wrong and indeed in saving the soul of Anglicanism.

First, a word of caution when we talk about the African Experience. What do we mean by this? Africa is both deceptively simple and complex. Simple because many people think that it is one country. All Africans are, for example, Nigerians! Or when violent conflicts break out in some place, people assume it engulfs the whole continent. This way of thinking presumes Africa is a monochrome body. To think thus is simplistic and a distortion of the truth.

Africa is much more complex. In his moving book, *The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life*, Ryszard Kapuscinski, rightly observes, "The continent is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say "Africa". In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist." You see, there are many Africas.

With many Africas we are faced with an identity crisis. Sounds like the Anglican Communion! What is the real Africa? In my view the real Africa is complex, it's an 'immensely rich cosmos'.

As Pliny summed it up, "There is always something new out of Africa". New, yes, but also old and it is from the old we must draw some wisdom to help us in the present.

I draw your attention to the historical root of Christianity in Africa.

Sir Winston Churchill once advised a young Union Scholar from America, "Study history, study history – in history lie all the secrets of statecraft". The same principle applies in comprehending Christianity in Africa. Study history, study history for you will discover that the Church in Africa was planted in the first century of the Christian era, during the apostolic period. If the story of the Ethiopian eunuch is anything to go by, then it can be argued that he was the first African Christian. The missionary activities of St. Mark in the streets of Alexandria and that of St. Barnabas as well ensured not only the Christian presence in Africa but its permanence in historical records. Both the Egyptian and Ethiopian Churches kept the light of Christ burning on the African continent to the missionary era in the 19th Century.

In our historical study you will also discover that North Africa, gave theological leadership to the Western church. The church fathers Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine were pillars of the local North African church and the church of the West. A recent book, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, by Thomas C. Oden, presents the thesis of how Africa played a decisive role in the formation of Christian culture.

We must remember this because the tendency is to think that Christianity is foreign to Africa brought by white missionaries in the 19th Century when in fact it

has been part of Africa's heritage for centuries. From this rich legacy we urgently need to be reminded in the Anglican Communion, of Cyprian's brilliant teaching on the unity of the church, the privilege and autonomy of each church, embodied in each local bishop, and rededicate ourselves to it.

During the baptismal controversy the North African church in three councils refused to recognize Novatian baptisms. All those baptized in Novatian assemblies were re-baptized in North Africa. The crisis posed the danger of a real schism between Rome and North Africa. North Africa was, however, shocked that Rome threatened to break communion over such an issue. During the Seventh Council of Carthage (the third council held to deliberate the issue, with Cyprian presiding, September 1 256). Cyprian prefaced the meeting by reminding his brother bishops of the sovereign independence of each bishop in his church. And he also insisted that, in the matter under discussion, liberty should be respected. One should refrain from passing judgment on those who think in a different manner; and the differences should not lead to the breaking of communion.

Cyprian stated clearly, "It but remains that each of us should, in regard to this same matter, bring forward his opinion, judging no one, nor depriving anyone of the right of communion if he should think differently. For neither does anyone of us set himself up as a bishop, nor by tyranny and terror does anyone compel his colleagues to the necessity of obedience, since every bishop has his own free will to the unrestrained exercise of his liberty and power, so that neither can he be judged by another, nor is he himself able to judge another. Rather, let us all await the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only one who has both the power of setting us over the governing of His Church, and of judging our conduct in that capacity."

For Cyprian, the *Concordia*, or moral unity (communion), of the bishops is vital for the manifestation of the one church. Pastors must always bear in mind that there is one flock which they have been chosen to feed.

The crucial emphasis is on the notion of the church, which is one but multiple. Each local church springs from the Lord and is bestowed with all the necessary means of bearing witness to the risen Lord in its context. It will always strive to maintain communion with other churches in order to manifest the oneness of this church.

This was the teaching of an African bishop which we need to be reminded of now in order to keep the Anglican Communion on course. We are offered a lesson and way of seeing the nature and future of the Anglican Communion.

The next view I raise points to the African Experience in Anglicanism.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Church Missionary Society and the Universities Mission to Central Africa laid strong foundations in planting churches in many parts of Africa. From its inception in the 19th Century to now, the Anglican Church in Africa has grown rapidly and constitutes today one of the fastest growing parts of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican provinces in Africa reflect the colours of the Anglican traditions – Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal and Charismatic. If we have to use labels politely, Southern Africa is more liberal, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, more conservative Evangelical, Central Africa, following its UMCA and USPG heritage, traditional Catholic. I am from Central Africa in case you are wondering!

Now, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams once described ECUSA as not being a monochrome body, but containing ‘a full range of conviction’. I agree and also draw a parallel with Angli-

can provinces in Africa. The African provinces are not a monochrome body as popular belief would suggest. There are ‘a full range of conviction’ in the various African provinces. To think that there is one conviction is simplistic and a distortion of the truth. We need therefore to give space and credit to the *diversity* embraced by the African provinces.

However, today, I can assure you that Anglican Christians in Africa speak with one voice in professing that Jesus Christ is their Lord and personal Saviour and that they have been called by God into his Kingdom.

The impact of the Anglican Communion in the life of ordinary Christians and the society has been tremendous in areas of education, provision of health services, democratic values, a deep spirituality based on the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and above all the unity of God’s people across ethnic, tribal, national and regional boundaries. But beyond this, through their membership in the Anglican Communion, Anglican Christians in Africa are united with their brothers and sisters across the globe as they strive to work together to proclaim the Kingdom of God with its message of love, forgiveness, compassion and care.

Some of our provinces cut across national boundaries and they create and foster a truly united spirit of all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God. This is the unwavering spirit of our people and here they speak with one voice. We derive our spiritual strength in our unity as Anglicans in the Communion.

This unity will not be cast away by African Anglicans.

We should bear in mind that one of Africa’s important contributions to Anglicanism is that it was the architect of the Anglican Communion. The first Lambeth Conference in 1867 called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Thomas Longley, came into being because of an internal problem within the young

South African church. In 1863, Robert Gray, Bishop of Cape Town, unseated John William Colenso as Bishop of Natal on the grounds that his writings contravened and subverted the Catholic Faith. Consequently Gray declared Colenso a heretic and removed him from office. Colenso appealed to the English courts and on a legal technicality was reinstated. This resulted in an untenable situation in which two bishops, Colenso and the cleric who Gray appointed to succeed him, claimed jurisdiction in the same diocese. Although this was an internal issue, Bishops elsewhere in the Anglican Church convinced Archbishop Longley that it had grave implications for the entire Communion, and the first Lambeth Conference was convened to sort things out. That process was significant. It laid the groundwork for the structure of the Anglican Communion, which with some modifications has endured until today. Second, it became clear that in the eyes of many, Colenso's crime was not heresy so much as it was a radical approach to mission. That approach set the stage for missionary endeavour which also has had a lasting effect on the life and witness of the Church.

That was 141 years ago. Next week the Lambeth Conference takes place and its meeting will be conducted on an African style called Indaba. Indaba is a Zulu word for a gathering for purposeful discussion. It is both a process and method of engagement as people listen to one another concerning challenges that face the community. In our case the Anglican Communion.

This is indeed the right approach: listening to one another. It is very African. In Botswana it is known as the *kgotla* system. Kgotla simply means a meeting place. Everybody is allowed to speak till a consensus is reached. In Somali it is called *shir* all decisions are made during this meeting, and as at the *kgotla* meeting everyone can speak.

Elochukwu E. Uzukwu in his insightful book, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, talks about developing a Ministry "with Large Ears" or Leadership of Communities in the Service of Listening.

He gives an example of the Manja of the Central Africa Republic whose totem for the chief is the rabbit because it has "large ears". The Manja stress listening as the most important characteristic of the chief. His "large ears" bring him close to God ... and close to the conversations taking place in the community. He has the last word – in Botswana they say the chief speaks last – because he speaks after having assimilated and digested the Word in the community. He is the guardian of the dynamic, life-giving Word which creates and re-creates the community. "Word" means truthfulness, fairness, honesty, communication.

For the chief to be fair, he must be a patient listener and listening takes plenty of time.

The problem in the Anglican Communion is that the bishops have "short ears" which means we are hard of hearing, all deafened by the noise of our respective agendas. The great tragedy, speaking as an African bishop, is that having 'short ears' make some of our Primates in Africa act like ecclesiastical Mugabes.

For example, the Kigali Communiqué issued by the Primates of the Global South in September 2006 in Rwanda caused a theological earthquake measuring 8.6 on the Richter scale. The communiqué evoked mixed feelings across the Anglican Communion reflecting both the extreme right and extreme left of Anglicanism.

The communiqué claimed to be a unanimous statement presumably speaking for a majority of Anglicans who live in the southern hemisphere!

In the communiqué, among other things, the Primates noted that they had asked the Global South Steering Committee to

develop a proposal identifying the ways by which an Alternative Primatial Oversight can be set up within the Anglican Communion in order to oversee the work of some of the dioceses in the USA which were not happy with the existing Primate and other bishops.

But the reality of the situation was that not all Primates associated themselves with the Statement. The Archbishop of Cape Town, for example, did not endorse it and was of the view that there was a deliberate intention to undermine the due processes of the Anglican Communion and the integrity of the instruments of Unity. He called for patience in resolving the present crisis and appealed to his brother Primates to step back from the brink at which the Kigali Communiqué had placed the Anglican Communion, calling for a spirit of tolerance and grace in the face of pains of divisions among the Primates.

The communiqué revealed the Primates delusion of grandeur and disregard for a consultative process that fully engaged the laity, clergy and bishops in the debate within the Global South. This goes contrary to the spirit of “large ears”. Surely Primates do not have sole monopoly on wisdom and knowledge. Although some would like to think so!

In a presidential address delivered by the former Archbishop of Sydney and Primate The Most Revd Sir Marcus Loane, said,

“The trouble is that the Bishops are not the Church. The Church is made up of people: it is governed by an elected General Synod; when the synod is not in session, its Standing Committee acts on its behalf. That is as democratic a system of church government as can easily be devised, but it makes it impossible for the Church to speak with a single authoritative voice.

“Therefore what the Primate should choose to say, or what the Bishops decide to say may be no more than a personal utterance and may command no

more support than those whose views it happens to reflect.”

From this position the Global South’s pronouncement are no more than “Primates utterances” provoking deep thought. For the fundamental and indispensable element of our Anglican identity is that we are both episcopally led and synodically governed.

We therefore expect the bishops at Lambeth to grow “Large Ears” and indeed even those who have kept away!

I seek now to focus on the nature of Anglicanism and how I perceive its future.

One of Brazil’s most respected authors, Lya Luft, in her book, *Losses and Gains* talks about looking for the ‘right tone’. The tone of our language, of our art, and – this is true of anybody – the tone of our life. In what tone do we wish to live?” she asks. It depends partly on us.

What is the tone of Anglicanism? Scripture, Reason, and Tradition. Yes, but all these point to the mystery of being. It seems to me that the tone of Anglicanism is the recognition that every human being is holy mess and in need of the grace of ambiguity.

How are we a mess? The best way to explain this is to quote Mother Mary Clare of the Sisters of the Love of God, in Judy Hirst’s book, *Struggling to be Holy*.

Mother Mary Clare says, “When you go before God in prayer you cannot leave anything behind. You carry in your heart every person, every incident, every thought, every feeling you have ever had and as you lay yourself before God so you bring all the mess as well.” “My prayer”, she said, “is really one sentence: Here I am, what a mess”.

What a mess we all are and what a mess the Communion is in. But this mess points to our humanity and Anglicanism’s gift is to recognise the untidiness of life and give space to the totality of our being. It provides space for all. It

recognises that there is always a reality of some sort to what a person thinks or says. So we must hear it even if we don't understand it. With time, if not in this time, then in the world to come all things will become clear.

The grace of ambiguity is what St. Paul meant when he said, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known". We see in part, we know in part, this is the nature of Faith in God, in this life.

Like the young man who sought the 'real' monastery only to discover it does not exist, only Jesus is the monastery. So the 'real' Anglican Communion is non-existent Jesus is the Anglican Communion and we must find ourselves in God. This is the right tone.

You see, when we speak of what a human being is, or what the Anglican Communion is, we have not said enough until we speak of God. For we discover that in most self that is known before it is formed, ever hidden with Christ in God.

We see in part and know in part. But I fear that our problem in the Communion is deeper than we realize because we don't see and know that we have lost God in our hearts. We seek not the Mystery within and beyond us and focus on things that do not affirm and bring life. More than anything we need to experience God afresh by having our hearts transformed in His Grace of God.

The core mission of the Church is the enlargement of God's kingdom on earth. A Kingdom where everybody has a place at the table of God. Where everybody is welcomed and accepted. Where everybody is affirmed. So the mission of the Church is to draw our attention to the dimensions of the Kingdom of God which are immense and draw people into this Kingdom

The Epistle to the Ephesians prays that "rooted and grounded in love we may be

able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length, the height and depth" of the love of God in Christ. The kingdom is larger than any of us can imagine. We are always trying to cut it back, set limits and boundaries. And God is forever saying NO! NO! NO!

We see that in the Old Testament many wanted to cut down the kingdom to a reasonable size. Yahweh is concerned with this tribe, this culture, our rules and ceremonies - never mind the outsider. While some voices said that, other voices said no: He is not just a God of Israel. Such a God is too small.

In the New Testament the Pharisees also thought small - with a limited understanding of the Kingdom as the keeping of rules God had given them. Jesus rejected that narrow view. The kingdom is infinitely larger. It includes Samaritans, Gentiles, Romans, the lost, publicans and sinners, lepers and prostitutes - the outsider. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold ... I pray that all may be one, as the Father and I are one, that the world may believe".

In breadth and length it embraces every tribe, every nation, every colour, every language on the face of the earth. As Saint Paul put it, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus."

So why do we keep thinking separation - us and them, the ins and the outs, the faithful and the unfaithful?

Because we have lost sight of the height and depth of the kingdom which is just as great - the kingdom within, the infinity of God in us, the wonders of union with God in prayer and sacrament and the realm of silence. We think too small in our inner world just as we think too small in the world around us. We are baptised into something larger, all of us. God inhabits us and we must live into that. God help the leaders of the church to see the full dimensions of the kingdom, the large picture, and deliberately

set out to include, to heal, to reconcile a broken church in a broken world.

We need the grace of God to reveal afresh in us our oneness that we possess by virtue of being baptised in Christ. We need the grace of God to help us live in this oneness.

It is in grace that the right tone of Anglicanism lies. This we must never lose.

The final point I leave with you is the future of the Communion.

Over a year ago I was invited to deliver a paper at the Ecclesiastical Law Society Conference in Liverpool. The theme of that conference was *The Anglican Communion: Crisis and Opportunity*. My paper focused on an appraisal of the current position of the African Church concerning homosexuality and same sex unions in the Anglican Communion and its future.

Looking at the future of the Anglican Communion from an African context, my contention then and now is that it will continue renewed in faith and mission inspired by appropriate structures and instruments of unity. I dismiss the doomsday predictions of those who glimpse the break-up of the Anglican Communion at a drop of a hat. Of course the sensational media reports on the matter do not help except to increase sales of the newspapers.

The simple reality is that the majority of African Anglicans, about 37 million of them, are frankly not bothered with the debate on sexuality. A bishop from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, told me that the people in his diocese were not in the least interested in the issue. This is just the tip of the iceberg because in my own Province of Central Africa contrary to what the renegade ex-bishop of Harare, Dr. Nolbert Kunonga, and David Virtue have said the debate on sexuality is also not an issue. We can multiply these examples across Africa.

The Windsor Commission were right in recognizing the existence within the Anglican Communion of a large constituency of faithful members who are bemused and bewildered by the intensity of the opposing views on issues of sexuality. This group embraces worshippers who yearn for expressions of communion which will provide stability and encouragement for their pilgrimage. Their voices have been eclipsed by the intensity of sounds on opposing sides of the debate.

I wish to confirm this statement with two experiences. The first is from England. Last year, after many years, I received an email from an old friend, Fr Tony Coslett, saying:

“It is such a long time since we celebrated life and theology in Oxford and ministry in Notting Hill – me at St. Clements and you ... at All Saints. ... but you have often been in our thoughts and our prayers. Never more so than now, we wanted, simply, to assure you of our prayers at this difficult time for our Communion and for you personally.

“We have a small community of Anglican Christians here all of whom are totally confused by the trials and tribulations besetting the church and Communion of which they see themselves part. It is almost as if our Bishops, Archbishops and Prelates have forgotten the ordinary sinners who make up the Anglican Communion and whose spiritual lives are so intertwined with their daily cares that the theological arguments of the Ordained, Consecrated and proud make no connection with reality. If I thought it would make any difference at all I would wash the feet of the whole Lambeth Conference – should they be able to step outside of their political wrangling and be humble enough to meet together – and beg them to listen to one another and, though in total disagreement currently – together seek the will of the Holy Spirit for God's Holy Anglican Communion for the sort of division that is coming upon

us cannot be of the Holy Spirit who only brings together in unity and should it be the will of God that the Anglican Communion die it will be because it will become part of a greater unity. But, I am convinced, this is not the way for the current debate, and tension is of man not of the spirit. Enough; Father in God I communicate simply because I want to thank you for all your effort to keep our Communion together and to assure you of two things: that you are and will remain in our prayers ... and that there are so many throughout the Communion who are in your debt for the stand you have taken.

"I doubt that any would describe my theological stand as 'liberal' but I am Anglican and so desire to remain in communion with my fellow Anglicans throughout the globe."

That is the first experience confirming the Windsor Commission's assertion.

The second experience is from the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA) conference which I attended in October last year in Mauritius. At this conference something of a miracle happened touching Archbishop Peter Akinola during a Press Conference. Let me put this in context for you. A month earlier (September 2007) Archbishop Peter Akinola, blasted bishops from the U.S.A. Episcopal Church for "ignoring" pleas to take a clear stand against consecrating gay clergy or blessing gay unions. Now a month later the Archbishop was at pains to avoid the topic when a Reuters journalist, Ed Harris, posed a question to him on homosexuality. The Archbishop responded:

"I'm trying to avoid dragging us into unnecessary controversy when there are more profitable things to talk about. This is Africa, and we would rather focus on those important things that affect us Africans." For a moment I thought that the Archbishop was not feeling well then realized he was serious as he resisted being drawn into airing his critical views on homosexuality. The Archbishop was very

serious in stating that "we would rather focus on those important things that affect us Africans." Here we speak of the continent's problems which the CAPA Conference resolved that going forward it would focus on: such as drought and floods, Zimbabwe's political oppression, the Darfur conflict, and HIV/AIDS.

The significance of this CAPA conference was that it clearly registered that the homosexuality issue in the context of the continent's problems was minor in the light of the more life and death issues our people have to grapple with.

I am not surprised that CAPA refocused its energy on the life and death issues that concentrate the majority of the minds of Africans. CAPA also sounded a loud tone of reconciliation as reflected in the Statement that the new Chairman of CAPA, The Most Rev Ian Ernest, Archbishop of the Indian Ocean & Bishop of Mauritius, issued. He stated briefly, "I take the work of reconciliation very seriously and believe that reconciling people to God and to one another is our apostolic call ...".

What I have just said is a summary of where the Anglican Church in Africa stands at present devoid of all the spin and razzamatazz that some prophets of doom bombard us with.

Africa has over the centuries suffered much and has been manipulated to serve foreign interests. There was the scramble for Africa which parcelled out nice chunks of African territories to European powers. The social anthropologist, Valentine Mudimbe described it as the 'invention of Africa'. There was the cold war where Africa became the battle field of super power rivalry. As in politics so in religion with American Episcopalian dissidents caught in an internal power struggle, they seek with all they have at their means to influence some African bishops in reshaping Anglicanism. GACON and its new creation Fellowship

of Confessing Anglicans (FOCA) can have its space and place in the Communion but the spirit of African Anglicans is not inclined to schism but reconciliation.

The former Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, clearly stated that, "homosexuality is not the issue at stake. It is emblematic of, or even a smokescreen for, a far more important principle which the political struggles of today's globalizing world are echoing. That is whether one world view, one political perspective, one theological stance, overrules, is right, can assert dominance, and render all other standpoints inferior and illegitimate? The alternative is the very nature of Anglicanism. What is Anglican is that none of us has the monopoly on knowledge and understanding; our lives are enriched and our horizons expanded when we encounter other, authentic expressions of human life, culture and spirituality."

This is the African Experience and we will learn much from it and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa has much to teach us. It has held together despite huge diversities, not just of race, but of ecclesiology and theology, culture, language – and all under the most intensely divisive political system. Whether the issue was economic sanctions, army chaplains in Namibia, or the ordination of women, they stuck together, not unwillingly but joyfully sharing in the family of the Church, the kingdom of God, to which they knew they all belonged.

It is about time we focused our energies in doing God's mission in the world and strengthening the many things we have in common rather than on those on which we differ.

The African perspective also has much to teach us in recognising that the individual finds his/her identity within

the community; and the community is more important than the individual. This insight is helpful at a time of exaggerated emphasis on individualism in the west. Globalisation means that no region or province can act unilaterally – neither the US nor regions of Africa. The whole Body of Christ is affected by the actions of one part. In a symphony, the various instruments and sections of the orchestra are designed to play together, such that the full melody is heard. This is unity in diversity. The mind of God.

In his quest for the real monastery the young man discovers that only Jesus is the real monastery. All else are dead labels. In our Anglican Communion, the Soul, the Nature, the Future, the Curse, the Blessing are in God and we need only place ourselves at the feet of Christ – the holy mess that we are to discover and the grace of ambiguity that transforms life.

Christ is our life who leads us into other worlds. Christ is our *passport to understanding*, we need not fear or be dismayed nor despair in the challenges that the Church faces today or tomorrow; for Christ is greater than all our conceptions. Christ is all in all.

Let us then straight, gay, liberal, conservative, moderate, Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, traditionalist, Africans and Americans, Asians, Europeans get into each other's worlds and be enriched in the discovery of our oneness in Christ and together enlarge God's kingdom of love where everybody has a seat at the table.

Lets beware of excommunicating each other here on earth. For we shall find in heaven we are still bound together at the table of Christ's love. Archbishop Akinola sitting next to Bishop Gene Robinson for such is the kingdom of God.