

## Revisiting the Global South Communiqué—Focusing on Fundamentals

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The Third Global South to South Encounter Communiqué and Canterbury's response on 'One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' were the two defining statements of the Encounter. The Communiqué received the widest possible endorsement from those in the Global South as the basis of further engagement; Canterbury's response—which was acknowledged and 'appreciated' in the Communiqué—also opened the way for further conversation on matters of faith and order. The whole Communion, true to the Anglican spirit, needs to reflect upon both documents, and make considered response to them. It is important for the Communion, especially amidst the burst of statements and reports after the Ain El-Sukhna Encounter, to stay focused on this simple fact.

The Communiqué reminds the Communion of the Scriptural foundation of ecclesial life: it takes precedence over contextual concerns. The Anglican Communion, over the past fifty years, has increasingly become institutionalised, as if it is an ecclesiastical accreditation agency and a foreign office. Simply go through ACC records and reflect on the time that ACC-related bodies devoted themselves in setting criteria for the formation of dioceses and provinces, and on issuing high-sounding statements on the plight of the world that they had not the faintest idea on how to carry them through. The British Empire was built on business and trade; so also the Communion has become a massive corporation, with the vain hope that the sun would not set on the Compass Rose.

That would be furthest from the mind of missionaries who ventured to the 'Global South' in the days before the first Lambeth, bringing with them nothing other than the 'primitive' Bible. Global South reminds the Communion that the present crisis has nothing to do with cultural difference and differing strategies of mission. Something more fundamental is at stake: what is the basis of our authority that makes us able to see, hear, interpret and act? God has given us the Holy Word that we may 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest'. The fundamental relation in Jesus Christ is a relationship in 'Christ of Scripture' (Communiqué, 11). Hence the church is always open to reformation under the authority of the Holy Scripture. Fundamentally, Global South is not simply cloistered behind a doctrinal position, far from it being labelled any 'conservative' stance. Rather it insists that Christian life must *radically* stand under the Word of God. Stephen Neill puts it this way in his exposition on 'Anglicanism': 'Show us that there is anything *clearly* set forth in Holy Scripture that we do not teach and we will teach it. Show us that anything in our teaching or practice is *clearly* contrary to Holy Scripture, and we will abandon it. [emphasis added]' (*Anglicanism*, 419) Hence the confidence we place in the public, plain and systematic reading of the Bible on the Lord's Day. That takes precedence over any expository and contextual tasks. For all the eloquence and sincerity in Canterbury's exposition, this insistence is sadly missing.

Canterbury at the same time in his exposition opens up the field for the Global South to contribute to the wider welfare of the Communion. By recognising that the relationship in Jesus Christ is the basis of unity in the Communion, he invites the Global South to help the wider Communion to explore new and perhaps even radical ways the Communion should adopt in order to be effective for God's service in the contemporary world. Leaders in the Global South would be wise in taking up this invitation to re-examine the 'servants of unity', that the whole Communion would come of age to become truly 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. The churches in the Reformation period certainly took up this challenge at a time when the Holy

Roman empire outlived its political usefulness, and churches (and nations) began to organise themselves in different ways.

The Communiqué actually identifies areas that lend themselves to long-term theological engagement and conversation across the Communion:

The first task is to produce a Catechism for the Communion. Catechetical instruction has always been a central task of the church. But alas, the Communion as a whole has not paid enough attention to this. The Thirty-Nine Articles was silent on the shape of moral life. The concerns identified in the Communiqué on Poverty, HIV and AIDS, Corruption, and Violent Conflict (37-41) touch on Christian teaching in sex, money and politics, where the church often offers its opinions to the wider world but seldom teaching to the laity. The Communion is good in alerting areas of social concerns, and may offer institutional responses to them; at the same time, it often offers little practical guidance how individuals can think through these moral concerns and arrive at personal decisions. For believers in West and South, the ‘plain teaching of Scripture’ (Communiqué, 29) requires elucidation and personal reflection. A clearer articulation of the shape of moral life would help the Communion in the drafting of the Anglican Covenant, which after all, binds us to certain fundamentals in Christian faith, order, *and conduct*.

Secondly, the Communiqué identifies theological education as an area of concern. The proposal ‘to hasten the full establishment of adequate theological education *institutions* [emphasis added] across the Global South’ (28) actually narrows the scope and does not address the core problem. Theological education takes place first in the church, and then in seminaries. What is required is the recovering of the patristic and Reformed practice of expository preaching in the weekly gathering on the Lord’s Day. The desert fathers taught us about theological education as they perhaps also did on unity (which I must confess, I never understood ‘unity’ for them would refer to institutional unity, except for Basil the Great). Read as a case in point John Chrysostom’s lament over the priestly vocation. The ecclesiastical office with its attending endless administrative duties was a frightening prospect to many ascetics. Busy Anglican clerics in the Global South are as much engrossed in administrative matters and social responsibilities today and are in danger of neglecting their teaching office. Our Anglican fathers saw the Book of Common Prayer and the Lectionary as providing the framework for education of the laity. The regular reading of the lectionary and the commitment to the daily office has often fallen by the wayside today. We need urgently to recover the vision of the parish church as the base for theological learning. Would leaders in the Global South apply their minds and hearts to this? Only thus could godly leaders of the next generation emerge. Spiritual leaders cannot be recruited or identified. They are God’s good favour to an obedient church (Communiqué, 34).

My church tradition ‘Sheng Kung Hui (Holy Catholic Church)’ has always taught me to be self-reliant. I guess what Chinese Christians went through in the tumultuous periods in China’s recent history taught us that there is no other way to live but to stand on one’s own feet. I guess Global South churches too, situated in many emerging nations, need to take responsibility of their own lives. We would still be living in a dream if we expect the west, Church of England and as a matter of fact, even Canterbury, to wage the battle or uphold the standards for us. Perhaps it is by not placing false expectations on others—who are also human, just as we are, with all our failings, standing in need of grace—that we can start working with them all, sometimes rebuking, sometimes challenging, and yet always complementing and learning from each other, in the fundamental tasks that God has given us all to do in our days. This is our confidence: however difficult the situation, the Word of God is free, and frees us to act in Christ-like ways! Thus also both Canterbury and the Global South leaders were able to meet and speak—however trying the

times were—according to the measure of their faith, by the Red Sea. To them we must harden not our hearts, but continue to listen.

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