

**Into deeper levels of communion and interdependence across the Anglican Communion: An Invitation to Ephraim Radner and the ACI to reflect and discuss together**

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*Shake us, O God  
Shake us with the storm of the Pentecost,  
For over a century we have remained silent  
Unable to speak a word.*

*Give us speech, O God,  
Command the tongues of fire to descend on us,  
Why do we remain dumb  
before our compatriots?*

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*I beg you, Siloam,  
remove the mud from my eyes  
with the gentle ridges in your pool.  
Enable me to see mother earth  
and the smiling faces of children  
lit up by sun-rays in early Spring.*

*(Wang Weifan, 1956, translation mine)*

I am very grateful to Dr Ephraim Radner of the Anglican Communion Institute for responding to my earlier invitation to conversation.<sup>1</sup> I appreciate his generous and friendly comments. In what follows I hope to map out areas for further engagement. In doing so, I hope also to take up ECUSA's challenge at GC2006 to explore "the deeper levels of communion and interdependence across the Anglican Communion".

Wang Weifan's two poems written in 1956 when he was still at the young age of twenty-nine provides a convenient starting point. Wang is one of the leading Christian scholar and poet in China, little known in the West because he writes exclusively in Chinese. After all his theological formation took place in the post-denominational era in China. Wang penned these two poems at the height of radical theological reconstruction in the late 1950s.

Why does Wang see the church remained silent and unable to offer a word to the Chinese people despite over a century of intensive Protestant mission? What prevents Chinese Christians from sharing the plight of their compatriots? When will children's faces in the war-ravaged nation light up with smiles again?

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<sup>1</sup> Global South Anglicans,  
[http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/er\\_mp\\_works\\_of\\_love/](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/er_mp_works_of_love/).

Wang stands in line with some of the most reflective Chinese Christians – the Rev. Zhao Zichen included – in the last century who tried to wrestle with the legacy of Protestant mission in China. Christianity has become alienating and alienated from the wider society. The Christian message is implicated with imperialist aggression. Do Chinese Christians have anything to say to the wider society? Do they have the strength to proclaim the message in the new nation?

It is not obvious that one can enter “deeper levels of communion and interdependence” with our hurting compatriots. It would be easier if all that involves is for us to launch rescue missions to the isolated crisis here and atomised individuals there in a globalized world. But that would be far from “the communion of saints” Jesus envisaged. Jesus asked his eager disciples: “You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? (Mark 10: 38).” Only God can bring this about. Wang asked God to shake him with “the storm of the Pentecost”. In God’s gracious providence, Wang and his fellow Christians did drink the cup of suffering to the full during the Cultural Revolution. It was a time of cleansing and rebirth for the Chinese church. Through experiences of suffering and alienation, the church began to gain the credibility to speak to the wider communities

This China detour is relevant to our present discussion in the Anglican Communion. A central issue is what churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America stand for? I find that Dr Radner and many Christians in North America and Britain continue to misunderstand the Global South. Is the Global South simply power hungry? Are they reducing the Communion into a fellowship between like-minded Christians? I take this to be the heart of Dr Radner’s challenge. Behind such questions is an attitude to interpret Global South actions in terms of their impact on churches in the West. This may explain why the issue of “Alternative Primatial Oversight” became an overriding concern to Global South critics. Will they intrude into the internal affairs of North American churches?

I shall touch on the issue of “Alternative Primatial Oversight” briefly later in this response. My immediate task is to invite Dr Radner to explore the present-day Anglican world together. We can only understand churches in Latin America, Africa and Asia in their own terms. No interest group in Britain and America can claim to represent Global South interests. Nor Global South churches are interested in giving blanket endorsement to the particular political agenda of any Western ecclesiastical grouping. To know the world, we need to walk its full breath. I look forward to his discerning observations as we embark this journey, that we may together see the world whole.

Global South churches face an acute missiological hurdle: Are Christians an antisocial and destabilising element in the emerging nation-states in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How can Christians live in deeper levels of communion and interdependence with their suffering compatriots and the wider world? These are my key concerns. I tried to reflect on these issues in a recent article “Till they have Homes”.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere I also noted nation building

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<sup>2</sup> “Till they have Homes: Christian responsibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Global South Anglicans, [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/till\\_they\\_have\\_homes/](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/till_they_have_homes/).

processes in the sixty years make young churches literalist in understanding their faith.<sup>3</sup> I ask: Is the present Communion ethos able to help Global South churches to become mature and face their particular mission challenges? Do the present Communion instruments provide an effective structure for churches to enter deeper Communion with one another and the wider world? My response is “No”. This explains the reasons behind my struggle.

What is the point in the present debate in the Communion? I am not defending Anglicanism and the status quo. Anglicans around the world cannot afford to live simply as “Anglicans”, if we take that to mean a denominational manifestation in the narrow sense of the word. There is something more basic: We live as Christians. How should Christians live responsibly in today’s world? Is historic Christianity able to survive our generation? Are churches able to remain as strong and viable communities around the world? These are not simply Anglican issues. Our Anglican upbringing provides the context of our decisions. Indeed, our historic ties offer us particular sets of opportunities to work for God’s Kingdom. But we see, deliberate and act as Christians. We need to connect our discussion on Communion matters with this underlying Christian foundation.

Let me outline three convictions to invite further discussion.

First, the Suffering Servant provides a better model for interpreting Christian oversight in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. . . . For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53: 3, 12).” Saint Paul drew out its implication for his apostolic ministry in 2 Corinthians and Colossians. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. . . . Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Colossians 1:24).” Bishops today are called to drink the cup of suffering with Jesus. The martyr’s blood remains to be the seed of the church and the soul of the world. We labour for the day when children yet to be born are able to smile in the good earth God gives us.

Primates’ Meetings provide opportunities for mutual consolation in the midst of deep suffering. The purple cloth is stained with the blood of martyrdom. That should be the norm. They gain the credibility to speak and govern their churches only when they are

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<sup>3</sup> “Theological Education and Nation Building: seminary teachers and librarians as partners in mission in Southeast Asia” in *Trinity Theological Journal* 14 (2006): 124-139.

<sup>4</sup> See also my discussion with Bishop Mark MacDonald in his “The Gospel comes to North America” and my “The Gift Outright: A Conversation with Bishop Mark MacDonald on our common future”, Global South Anglicans, [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/the\\_gospel\\_comes\\_to\\_north\\_america\\_bishop\\_mark\\_macdonald/](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/the_gospel_comes_to_north_america_bishop_mark_macdonald/) and [http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/the\\_gift\\_outright\\_a\\_conversation\\_with\\_bishop\\_mark\\_macdonald\\_on\\_our\\_common\\_f/](http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/the_gift_outright_a_conversation_with_bishop_mark_macdonald_on_our_common_f/).

able to enter the deeper levels of communion with their suffering Christians. Canterbury leads by entering into the suffering of his fellow Primates. This is why I believe the Primates' Meeting should take up a central role in the Anglican Communion. This does not mean we give up the Roman understanding of episcopate from the fifth century. It only means the jurisdictional and administrative understandings we inherit from the Latin churches are not the only models the Scripture and historic Christianity authorize. The call to suffering, martyrdom and closer union with our neighbours demands a different way of guarding the faith together in the universal church.

Second, churches in the Global South need to develop their own suitable ways of being Christian communities in their own geopolitical conditions. Christianity might have provided the evangelical inspiration for the emergence of democracy in the world.<sup>5</sup> The liberal ideals that Western churches and societies today adopt however do not necessarily represent the full spectrum of the Christian faith.<sup>6</sup>

This is why I am critical of the informal and formal Communion instruments the Anglican Communion fabricated in the past two decades. They make the Communion completely in the mercy of those who can bankroll the sprawling Anglican Communion Office. Imagine if the Communion's "Platinum club" Compass Rose Society were to withdraw funding the Communion Office because ECUSA is in impaired relation with the rest of the Communion. I imagine the Secretary General would face immediate personnel crisis; his staff would make sure the media instruments that are at their disposal would carry ECUSA's views. Read the Trinitytide 2006 issue of the *Anglican World* and note the coverage on GC2006 and ECUSA. Responsible journalism would give a more balanced coverage.

The Anglican Communion Office from Carey's time has all along been making appointments with little regard for the rest of the Communion. For years, British mission societies and the Communion Office have been sharing the same building and resources in Partnership House, London. I suspect this promoted an illusion that they have the whole world in their hands. They act with their best intent. However, the Secretary General and some Anglican leaders – both left and right wing – should let go of their patronising attitude. They are not racist. Far from it, they are clever in putting ethnic Christians under their employ to propagate their agenda worldwide. The West does not know best. They should stop using Africa, Latin America and Asia as a battle field to further their own interests. This is why I am puzzled with Dr Radner's criticism that I pay little regard for "mutual subjection of individual communities". This is how ECUSA and the Communion Office have been behaving. After all, who has not been Windsor-compliant?

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<sup>5</sup> See Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945).

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Professor Oliver O'Donovan for his continuing tutelage. *His Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) was a constant companion in years of intellectual isolation while serving in an outpost. His book helps me to reflect on my mission tasks in a time of drastic political, social and ecclesiastical transition in my part of the world. Of special relevance is the Chapter "The Redemption of Society" where Oliver O'Donovan in typical Augustinian fashion contrasts two complimentary narratives of western civilization. See *Desire*, 243-284. This book deserves the closest study by those in the Global South.

Third, Global South churches need to underpin their life and witness with a more coherent theological foundation. The world-order is undergoing radical restructuring. We live in an explosive and violent age. Conventional wisdom from the evangelical and liberal wings can no longer serve our present purposes. We need to understand and engage historic Christianity in its full breath and depth, in order to illumine our present situation and connect it with our Christian experience. Professor Oliver O'Donovan observes in a web sermon on Fulcrum that churches in the Global South adopt a patristic-Calvinist outlook.<sup>7</sup> I take that as a compliment. The pre-Nicene period and Calvin's reform in Geneva were formative periods in the church. Global South churches would not go horribly wrong if they take that as starting points for building their church life. Would Dr Radner and the Anglican Communion Institute join us in this common task? We need one another. Professor Oliver O'Donovan's recent series of web sermons on Fulcrum is an exemplary model for such endeavour.

Just in passing, I return to the question of "Alternative Primatial Oversight". The Kigali Communiqué reflects an ecclesiology that is far from being congregational and pietist. It is moderate and yet decisive. The Primates renew their commitment to work with Canterbury. They have not derailed Lambeth 2008; nor are they rejecting the incoming ECUSA Presiding Bishop to attend the coming Primates' Meeting in February 2007! They further take the important steps to resource one another in economic development and theological formation. They are working for the long-term welfare of the Communion.

Dr Radner is right to point out we need to pay closer attention to our ecclesiological suppositions. Are we able to broaden our catholic horizons beyond the administrative-committee-consensual strictures with a more sacramental approach? "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10: 16)" Let us venture to deeper levels of communion and interdependence as we share in Christ's suffering. Let the Global South churches take equal place in the Communion. They too bear the stigma of Christ (Galatians 6:17).

I end by thanking Dr Radner again for his charitable comments. I offer him as a token of friendship the following poem by Xie Fuya (N Z Zia), another contemporary Chinese Christian. I hope Xie's vision would be our common goal as we continue to learn and grow together across the continents, to edify the universal church and to bring glory to God. Let us do all we can to support Canterbury and his fellow Primates as they care for the churches. They are men of sorrow and acquainted with grief; and we laid on them the sins of us all.

*In quest of truth unwavering  
Through days and months we've sought,  
Intense in thought, discerning well,  
To strengthen life and thought.  
With wisdom and with reason taught,*

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<sup>7</sup> "The Care of the Churches," Fulcrum, <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=128>.

*With Christian faith instilled,  
We aim to take our place in life  
With Christlike purpose filled.*

*Mankind, like trees, take years to grow,  
As vessels, slow to mould,  
Bright days will dawn, serve then with zeal,  
And be Christ's soldiers bold,  
God calls us all to fragrant deeds  
O'er bitter seas to gleam:  
The world awaits a helping hand  
To show a guiding beam.*

(Translated by Ivy Balchin, slightly modified.)

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