

Contrapuntal Notes to Rowan Cantuar's Music: A Response to the Consultation Paper on the Covenant Proposal of the Windsor Report (March 2006)

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Strange are the ways of Rowan Williams. To borrow his phrase, "It would be strange", if for all his godly discipline and intellectual rigour, that "all were pursued in the absence of any acquisition of a skill – any capacity to do something in a particular way. Just as we might say it would be very strange to learn a language without learning how to speak it (*CEFACS Lecture*, 3 November 2004)". How Canterbury deals with the present Communion crisis in practice is puzzling.

The latest Consultation Paper on the Covenant Proposal of the Windsor Report is a case in point. It is another instance of his failure to first consult his fellow primates in major decisions that involve the whole Communion.

The Primates at Dromantine asked Canterbury to follow up on the Windsor Report's Covenant Proposal as a project with a clear time line "between now and the Lambeth Conference 2008 (*Dromantine*, 9)". Canterbury followed up by setting up "a small working party" convened by the Deputy Secretary General. It is intriguing that under the short section "Provenance of this Document" of the Consultation Paper, the most important verbs were all in passive voice. Minds that are familiar with drafting insurance policies and legal documents are at work to evade the question "who makes the decisions". Who chose the team? Who decided that only those who could come easily to London for two day meeting? Why London? We wonder!

More importantly, what is their brief? The Working Party asked fundamental questions about the Covenant. It is beside the point whether those issues are intellectually valid. The Group asked "Is the concept of an Anglican Covenant still viable?" as the first question (para. 3). Why use the word "still"? Has there been a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit since Dromantine that the Communion now lives under a new dispensation? The Group then capped their questions by revisiting the time-frame: "What sort of timetable is desirable for the covenant project?" Has not the Primates agreed to Lambeth 2008 as the target date?

The Group then weaved an elaborate and long drawn decision making procedure. They preferred setting up a drafting group rather than taking the obvious way of asking the thirty-eight primates to work through their provincial structures. This drafting group in its turn would produce texts for consultation among "interested parties especially [and hence not exclusively, my comment here] other Communion bodies (e.g. IATDC, IASCOME, ACLAN, ecumenical commissions, the Global South) (para. 23)". What defines an "interested party"? What makes an opinion from such parties valid? All commissions of the Communion are set up with clear terms of reference. It would be odd and expensive if they now take up a new brief that is not their business at all. Surely Canterbury and the Secretary Generals were aware of that when they tried to cut down expenses in setting up meetings in London.

If there is an Anglican way, as Rowan Cantuar reminds us, it surely would be our insistence on truth – truth at all cost. This is why we insist on the need for

discernment. In Bishop Stephen Neill's words, we are willing "to tolerate for the time being what appears to be error (*Anglicanism*, 422)". Since Dromantine, we see however a growing disregard of discernment. We read of ACC's Chair playing the democratic-ACC card and apologizing without mandate to the Anglican Church of Canada. We see the Anglican Communion Office changed the structure of the Communion by promoting Canterbury to be the focus of unity. Williams announced that Lambeth 2008 would be a resolution-light "training and development" gathering. Are these measures orchestration of the "Anglican Way"?

The Anglican Way, if it existed at all, does not consist of one mega-narrative that draws its strength from the technological and financial clout of Wall Street. Those outside the western world perhaps at this stage can do little to counter the public media exercises the Anglican Communion Office and Lambeth Palace use to stifle voices from the Global South. Somehow Lambeth and the Communion Office based in the United Kingdom can find funding from financially rich Provinces to reshape the Communion without going through due processes of consultation with the Primates. But Williams will leave a legacy of bitter recrimination that will set back the good work of some of his saintly predecessors. Perhaps with good intent Williams wants to wait it out for some 'difficult' primates to retire in the coming years. Let time bury issues, so he may think. Church history tells us that bitterness festers even after the original contenders die. Discerning truth requires the moral courage and intellectual integrity to confront issues head on, and continue to hold conversations with colleagues even if such is difficult. I fear that Williams has lost the courage to consult his fellow primates after Dromantine.

The Communion is in a changed age, as the world also is. The thirty-eight provinces of the Communion are fully autonomous; each church lives and witnesses in different political and cultural conditions. We need God's grace to see this to be a gift and not a liability. The problem with the west is that it continues to cling to a Christendom mind-set, thinking that it is the centre, and organise the Communion along traditional categories. Somehow, given the proper evangelical-liberal mix, spiced in with an ethnic balance, then it would work – is not Britain the centre of the world? This may work for the demographically changed societies in America and Britain. It would not do for the Communion. For British and American friends need to understand Africa, Asia and Latin America on their own terms and on their own turf. They need to move out of their parochial attitude to learn and embrace the histories and geographies of the wider world.

Williams compares theological education to playing a music instrument (*CEFACS Lecture*, 2004). I assume he sees the present problems with the Communion arise from a lack in theological skills that good education offers. 'Let's reeducate the Communion' is the new clarion call. The Anglican Way that TEAC proposes is a musical score that makes for good background music: it offers soothing notes that drifts from nowhere to nowhere. Everything is reshaped and ideological purified; all is encompassing, provisional, incomplete and contextual. TEAC uses jargons that confuse rather illumine: What do "contemplative pragmatism", "inhabiting doctrine", "doing theology by preaching, liturgy, hymnody, and artistic creativity" mean in practice (See the Questions and Issues to be explored by the Target Group "the Anglican Way" in <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/teac>)? Williams would learn well the lessons of the complete failure of similar projects that missionaries undertook

in China in the early twentieth century. TEAC would do better if instead it explores what theological education is proper for British and American churches. They are the first who need reeducation. History of the worldwide church would be important in their curriculum. Learning languages other than English that they may converse with Christians of other dialects is another (Acts 2: 8-11).

Charles Maier speaks of writing history to be a way of discerning truth in this way: “The historian must create a narrative that allows for contending voices, that reveals the aspirations of all actors, the hitherto repressed and the hitherto privileged. . . . This does not mean banally insisting that both have a point. . . .It means listening to, testing, and ultimately making public their respective subnarratives or partial stories. To resort to a musical analogy: written history must be contrapuntal and not harmonic. . . . that the careful listener can follow them distinctly but simultaneously, hearing the whole together with the parts. (Charles Maier, “Doing History, Doing Justice” in *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, ed. R Rotberg and D Thompson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 274-275).”

Williams and TEAC need to think through how we can encourage contrapuntal notes in the Communion. Lambeth Palace and the Communion Office should begin putting the use of public media and financial budget under the discipline of truth. I remember vividly a General Assembly of (Anglican) Council of the Church of East Asia in the late 1980s. Missionary agencies for the first time ceded to the request to reveal to regional Anglican churches their funding policies and financial budget. This step helped churches and mission agencies to build trust among one another. So far, Williams has not made a public stance on the ideological reshaping of the Communion that his colleagues in Lambeth and St Andrew’s House use to undercut discerning processes in the Communion.

Canterbury needs to discern the Communion agenda with the Primates. This is his duty and task in this changed time.

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