

Daybreak at Kigali – Horizons before the Anglican Global South Primates in September 2006

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“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. . . . The man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip (Genesis 32: 24-31).”

I begin with a disclaimer. This essay is “without authority”: there is no official sanction, as all my other essays are. It is a personal reflection offered to the Communion I love and therefore grieve.

The coming Global South Primates’ Meeting in Kigali this September comes in a crucial time in the present Communion crisis. Near the same time, a critical meeting also takes place across the Atlantic in New York to “discuss some of the difficult issues facing the Church and to explore possible resolutions”, as the Anglican Communion News Service put it. The Archbishop of Canterbury was the main impetus to bring about this meeting between contending parties in ECUSA.

The outcomes of these two meetings have enormous implication for the Communion. Many ask: will the Anglican primates and bishops do their utmost to keep the unity that the Holy Spirit gives. After all, they are Anglican under-shepherds. Such are the grounds of their deliberations and decisions. To harm the Communion as *Anglican* bishops; or to abandon their custodian responsibility as *under-shepherds* would undermine their own authority.

The road to Kigali

Some fear the Kigali Meeting would turn out to be a meeting of the so-called anti-revisionist and anti-conciliar bishops; a meeting that would lead to an irrevocable schism in the Communion.

I think otherwise. It is important to remind ourselves the road Global South churches have traveled to this point. The 1986 Brisbane meeting of mission agencies encouraged an Encounter of “Anglican provinces in the South”, to give them “the opportunity to listen to God and one another, to share their joys and pains, and to express their hopes and aspirations”.¹ This gave “Global South Anglicans” an organizational form. Successive struggles with Communion issues became a catalyst for closer cooperation between churches in the southern continents. Now twenty years onwards, the Global South churches have become a major force within the Communion. Some may even say, the future of the Communion hinges on the views of the Global South leaders at Kigali.

The Bible also spoke of the story of a battle-hardened street-smart fighter. I refer of course to Jacob. That night at the ford of Jabbok, as he reflected on his twenty years of struggle with Laban, God drew near and struggled with him until daybreak. Jacob prevailed. But it wasn't just another win. He received the new name 'Israel', and with that, the divine calling to live and work for God. From then on, his striving took on a new meaning.

Global South churches have a similar spiritual journey to share. Less than a year ago, one hundred and three delegates of twenty provinces in the Global South met by the Red Sea. They came from Africa, Asia, West Indies and South America, representing about two-thirds of the Anglican Communion. They were far from being anti-revisionist and anti-conciliar. They issued a Communiqué, the "Third Trumpet" was by far theologically the most rigorous statement that South-South Encounters have issued. The churches rediscovered their roots in 'the one, holy catholic and apostolic church'.² This insight anchors their theological reflections and concrete decisions.

Global South Anglicans are not anti-revisionist (which has taken to mean anti-homosexual) and anti-conciliar (which has evolved to mean anti-Williams). Global South Anglicans are churches in the non-Western world that makes the Anglican Communion a universal reality. They insist on two matters: the historic faith and on fundamental structural reform to reflect the fact that the Communion has come of age.

The coming of age: a blessing to the whole Communion

It is important to realize that not only Global South churches have come of age. Their maturing ushers a new era in the Communion's history. The Anglican Communion itself has come of age: it has become a worldwide church. The Global South churches, to borrow Archbishop Rowan Williams' words, gives hope – and with this of course – challenge to the Communion. *The Challenge and Hope of being an Anglican Today* is important,³ because it does not only deal with issues surrounding GC2006; it engages Global South churches to work out what it means to be a worldwide church.

For the Anglican Communion, especially for churches in Britain and North America, to live as a worldwide church is a new experience. It is encouraging to read that the Archbishop of Canterbury recognizes this new condition in *The Challenge and Hope of being an Anglican Today*. If there is something good that comes of the present mess the Communion is in, it is surely this: For the past thirty years, church-building and diocese-creating exercises have absorbed the energy of the Provinces in the Communion. The present crisis makes it painfully clear that we need to reexamine the theological underpinnings of our Communion structures: what it means for us all to live as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" church? This is the secure platform upon which the Global South Primates should discern and wrestle with pressing issues and long-term concerns in Kigali.

There are of course other platforms on offer. The question on homosexuality could serve the rallying point as well. Global South churches are anti-homosexual, is this all that is to it? I have insisted all along we are not. That issue does not define Global South concerns.

In recent statements Rowan Williams and Oliver O'Donovan warned of the split and recrimination imminent in North America and the Church of England.⁴ O'Donovan pleaded against schism: "Schisms may come, but woe to that church through whom they come! There is no right, or duty, of schism." Were these words directed to Global South churches? I suspect that we can trace the spring of such schismatic undercurrents back in the Church of England, the historic heartland of the Communion. After all, it was a senior Church of England bishop who declared immediately after GC2006 that "Anglicans must split".⁵

True, some Global South church leaders react strongly to William's personal views on human sexuality. True too, the North American liberal positions are untenable. However, who promotes the so-called anti-revisionist and anti-conciliar positions among Global South churches? After all, Williams' "offending" article, *The Body's Grace*, was not widely available in the Global South. (Christians in the non-western world cannot afford to buy it; most people do not have the IT infrastructure to read it on the web.) It is an academic and subtle paper (meant to be shared during sherry time in a don's study), and is (with due respect) too technical for the faithful around the Communion.

It is not my purpose to enter into a blame game. My point is that Global South churches are not engineering schism in the Communion. However, ecclesiastical stakeholders in the Church of England and ECUSA may be at work and are using the Global South churches to advance their own political agenda. American churches may well use similar vote-buying tactics as their political counterparts do to further their own national interests. Global South churches need to be alert to these undercurrents, and work out priorities that are worthy of being the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church".

Worthy of the high call

There are three priorities:

1. Life and Witness

The geopolitical configurations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America open new forms of partnership in the life and witness of the churches. The Primate may wish to make concrete plans "to pursue networking with one another to add strength to our mission and ministry. . . . [and] to explore appropriate structures to facilitate and support this."⁶ I suggested such areas of fruitful engagement in my recent article "Till they have homes".⁷

There are other practical ways of cooperation. The Economic Empowerment Consultation that takes place alongside the Primate's Meeting in Kigali is important. Christians in financially richer areas in the non-Western world need to take up responsibilities to share in practical ways with their counterparts in other regions.

2. Equipping the Faithful to understand and teach the Historic Faith

The present Communion crisis starkly reveals that the so-called Anglican Way leads nowhere. The Communion has not yet found the Way!

The local churches are centres of worship, teaching and practical sharing (Acts 2:44-47). Formation of theological colleges and faculty development may not be the first priorities in many parts of the non-Western world, where people do not even have the daily bread. I wrote elsewhere that we need something more fundamental. I suggest Global South theologians need to compile a new catechism that helps local pastors (many in remote places with struggling congregations) to reflect and teach more effectively. I hope the Theological Formation and Education Task Force that meets also in Kigali will explore such and similar long-term concrete projects.

3. Working with the Archbishop of Canterbury on the promotion of unity within the Communion

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Global South Primates need one another to guard the unity of the Community in the aftermaths of GC2006. Global South Primates need to cooperate in the fullest manner with Canterbury; and Canterbury needs to call upon Global South churches as a whole to guard the unity of the Communion.

Global South Primates did not unilaterally dictate the terms of “compliance” to ECUSA. Those terms was unanimously adopted in the Windsor Report and the Dromantine Communiqué. It was Bishop Tom Wright who impressed the serious consequences on ECUSA shortly before the General Convention in June 2006. He ended with these words: “But if the resolutions are not amended, then, with great sadness and with complete uncertainty about what way ahead might then be found, the rest of the Communion will have to conclude that, despite every opportunity, ECUSA has declined to comply with Windsor; has decided, in other words, to ‘walk apart’ (Windsor 157).”⁸ In the event ECUSA did “think the unthinkable” – using O’Donovan’s words – and clearly walked apart, despite such was not a “choiceworthy alternative”. How Schori referred to Mother Jesus in her first sermon as the newly elected Presiding Bishop was insensitive and unnecessarily provocative. The contrast with Rowan Williams cannot be starker. Primates are by definition not champions of causes. They are guardians of the historic faith. I wonder whether Schori has decided to walk away from the Primates’ Meeting as well.

The Primates’ Meeting emerges to be the only forum at this stage where the thinking and listening processes can take place. After all, the Provinces are autonomous; therefore only the Primates have the jurisdictional authority over their respective churches. There are three urgent issues that Global South Primates can work with Canterbury to promote unity in the Communion:

- i. to provide a coherent arrangement of alternative episcopal oversight for the dissenting minorities in North America;
- ii. to draft the Anglican Covenant in order to “make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of Communion”;⁹
- iii. to redesign the agenda of Lambeth 2008 that the bishops may be able to discuss the fundamental issues facing the Communion.

Longer term, Canterbury recognizes that fundamental structural changes are necessary. I wrote elsewhere that Canterbury is called to be “Servant of Unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”. Global South churches should help him in such tasks. The issues before the Communion are theological. They demand the bet

theological wrestling from us all. God has given the Communion at this time one of the most sensitive theologian modern time England has ever produced to occupy the chair of Augustine. No matter what our personal theological positions are, we can at least work with him. He holds the historic office, and was at pains to put aside his personal views to serve the wider church. Be critical of him; admonish him in Christian spirit if we should; but work with him to uphold truth and promote unity we must. After all, he did not provoke the present Communion crisis. The seed was sown in earlier years when a theological safe Archbishop was caught off guard by an enterprising Secretary General!

Rowan Williams may well find his fellow Primates in the non-Western world to be his staunchest friends and confidants in the coming days.

Arise, morning has broken. “Make the most of the *kairos*, for the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).”

The Feast of John Bunyan, August 2006
Singapore

¹ *Trumpet I*, First Anglican Encounter in the South, 1994, Section 1.

² *Communiqué*, 10.

³³ Rowan Williams, “*The Challenge and Hope of being an Anglican Today: A Reflection for the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Anglican Communion*,” Anglican Communion News Service. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/50/acns4161.cfm>.

⁴ Wim Houtman, “The Church is not Inclusive: An Interview with the Archbishop of Canterbury,” *Nederlands Dagblad*. <http://www.nd.nl/het/dossier/seksualiteit/artikelen/060819eb.htm>; Oliver O’Donovan, “The Care of the Churches: Sermons on the Subject of the Day (2),” *Fulcrum*. <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/20060803odonovan2.cfm?doc=128>.

⁵ “Anglicans must split, says bishop.” BBC. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5093544.stm. Graham Kings’ account of the founding of Fulcrum is fascinating. It told the story of the split among British evangelicals over the appointment of Rowan Williams as the Archbishop of Canterbury. See Graham Kings, “The Founding of Fulcrum: Fulcrum Newsletter August 2006,” *Fulcrum*. <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/newsletter09.cfm?doc=137>.

⁶ *Communiqué*, 24.

⁷ “Till they have homes: Christian Responsibilities in the Twenty-First Century,” *Global South Anglicans*. http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/till_they_have_homes/.

⁸ N T Wright, “The Choice before ECUSA,” 17. *Fulcrum*. <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=117>.

⁹ *Windsor Report*, 118.