

Quo Vadis? – Questions along the Road from Lambeth A Response to CAPA's Invitation

Michael Nai-Chiu Poon

“We received ‘The Road to Lambeth’, a draft report commissioned by the Primates of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) which they have commended to their churches for study and response. It highlights the crisis that now confronts us as we consider the future of the Lambeth Conference. We commend this report for wider reflection. (Kigali Communiqué, 14)”

The Road to Lambeth is an appeal for faithfulness to God. It also recommends the way by which we keep this faith. These are two related but distinct summons. It is important to bear this in mind as we read the Report. My purpose here is to heed the Global South Primates' advice to reflect on this draft report.

I begin with an observation on the status of the Report. The Report states in its Preamble that it was commissioned by CAPA Primates in February 2006. CAPA Primates received it “with gratitude” on 19 September 2006. They did not say they approved it; rather they “commended [it] for study and response to the churches of the provinces in Africa”.

The Kigali Communiqué takes a more reserved view on the Report. In sharp contrast with the enthusiastic language used on the Anglican Covenant processes earlier in Section 7 of the Communiqué, the Global South Primates stated that they “receive” the Report. They noted that “it highlights the crisis that now confronts us” and “commend this report for wider reflection”. In other words, they recognized the depth of the crisis that called for faithfulness. However, they shied away from endorsing the particular solutions the Report offered.

What then is the status of the Road to Lambeth? A CAPA commission drafted it and presented it to their Primates in September. CAPA Primates now officially recommends it for wider study. They have not mentioned how they will follow it up. The Global South Primates takes note of it as a document from CAPA, and commends it for wider reflection within the Communion.

The Primates are wise in their decisions. We need to read *The Road to Lambeth* against the official document *Kigali Communiqué*, and indeed not the other way around. They are not two parallel statements from Kigali that bear the same authority.

The Report identifies two crises in the Communion: “a crisis of doctrine and a crisis of leadership”. Specifically, it calls in question Canterbury's ability in handling the doctrinal crisis. In particular, “the central issue of an Anglican Communion Covenant is not front-and-centre on the agenda of the [Lambeth] Conference. If any group should be expected to consult on these most important issues, it should be the assembled bishops of the Communion”. The supposed dismissal of the Covenant from the Lambeth agenda

underpins the Report's radical appeal for non-attendance in Lambeth 2008 and for convening a "Covenant Assembly" among Global South churches.

This is puzzling. Shortly before the Kigali Meeting, Canterbury issued a statement announcing that he has invited Archbishop Drexel Gomez to head a Covenant Design Group to draft an Anglican Covenant. He confirmed that this will be "a major and serious focus for the Lambeth Conference".¹ The Primates at Kigali greeted this in the most enthusiastic language. They believed that "an Anglican Covenant [that is now a major and serious focus for Lambeth 2008!] will demonstrate to the world that it is possible to be a truly global communion where differences are not affirmed at the expense of faith and truth but within the framework of a common confession of faith and mutual accountability" (*Communiqué*, 7). In other words, the Global South Primates affirmed in clearest possible terms their intent to contribute in the Covenant processes. The Covenant constitutes the test of faithfulness (and membership). Lambeth 2008 will be the defining moment for the Communion.

Indeed, are not the recommendations in the Report superseded by recent events? Is not the Spirit of God at work, giving us more than we have ever imagined possible? Does not this explain why the CAPA Primates themselves did not explicitly endorse it at Kigali? In affirming the Covenant processes, the Global South Primates – CAPA Primates included – implicitly confirmed their intent to be present at Lambeth 2008 to stand up and defend the apostolic faith. CAPA Primates did not even bother to revise the now-outdated reference on the Covenant processes in the Report.

The Report however alerts us to one important concern. It notes that our churches (in the Global South) need to "reflect" and "repent". We need, so the Report says, "to 'listen' and learn to understand better the phenomenon of homosexual attraction". I take that to mean that we need to attend to provide the faithful with better Christian instruction. Illness prevented me from taking part in the Theological Formation and Education Task Force Meeting in Kigali. I deeply appreciate the recommendations that my colleagues presented to the Global South Primates. My African colleagues affirmed "the significance of the catechism and the catechetical method of discipleship".² The theological task in preparing a framework for liturgies and catechisms will be a focal point in our future labour. Catechetical instruction does not only cover doctrinal matters; it also teaches Christian morals, opening the minds and hearts of the faithful to understand the shape of moral life. This is to say, Christian discipleship may call for bold actions. At the same time, we need to direct our passion with an illumined mind and a discerning heart.

The legend has it that as when Peter fled from Rome, he met Jesus at the city gate. He asked "Quo vadis (where are you going)?" Peter eventually returned to Rome to face martyrdom.

¹ Rowan Williams, "Prayers for the 'ordinary people of God' as covenant plans progress". ACNS 4190. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/75/acns4190.cfm>.

² "Global South Anglican Theological Formation and Education Task Force Statement," Global South Anglicans, http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/global_south_anglican_theological_formation_and_education_task_force_kigali/.

At the beginning of this note, I distinguish between the call to faithfulness and the manner by which we keep faith to God. Quo vadis? I humbly offer this note to reflect further the way by which we should keep faith with Jesus now. Is there a way that we can be with Jesus when he is lifted up on the Cross at Lambeth?

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