

Towards rapprochement: A note of appreciation to Dr Ephraim Radner's "Communion's Martyred Depth"

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I am grateful to Dr Radner's swift and positive response to my invitation "Into Deeper levels of Communion and Interdependence across the Anglican Communion".¹ Thank you for following up the martyrdom theme, and the moving poem at the end of your reflection.

Dr Radner is perhaps the first person from the West – other than Canterbury of course in his address to the gathering at the Red Sea – who seriously engages the central theological tenets in the Third South to South Encounter Communiqué. I was worried earlier – forgive me if I misread you, Dr Radner – with his seemingly unreserved defence of the Communion apparatus. His response opens a fruitful way forward out of the present impasse in the Communion.

So I dare not tarry to offer this note to continue this discussion, and invite at the same time colleagues around the Communion to join in this "holy" conversation.

The quadrant model used in interpreting the present-day Communion is problematic. It worsens the crisis. It tries to judge every group or member in the Communion according to how she stands along two fault lines – Resolution 1.10 and the Windsor-Dromantine processes. Of course, the Lambeth resolution on human sexuality and the Windsor recommendations are binding on the Communion. Yet they themselves do not embody the deeper reality of the Communion.

Let me explain. Many in the West only glean from the Red Sea Communiqué and the follow-up Kigali Communiqué those sections that speak to the American situation. Surely, the Primates at Kigali have much to say about the American scene. But they do that as a response to appeal *from* churches in America. What is creative and is of long-term importance in the Red Sea Communiqué was the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" proposal. This the Primates follow up in concrete ways in Kigali. As cases in point, they set up a theological formation and education task force, the economic empowerment initiative and various other forms of mission ventures. Churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia are helping one another in concrete ways within their present geopolitical realities. In other words, they are beginning to underpin their life and witness with the catholic faith. *That* ecclesiology is surely far from being anti-revisionist and anti-Communion.

The Kigali Communiqué requires sensitive reading. Many gloss over the Global South Primates' central message in the animated discussion on the break-up of ECUSA after its release. No, the Global South churches are not calling for the breakup of the Communion. No, they are not yielding to any politicking initiative. No, they have not adopted any ultraconservative theological position. No, they are not boycotting Lambeth 2008. No, they have not called for the exclusion of the incoming

¹ Ephraim Radner, "Communion's Martyred Depth," Global South Anglicans, http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/weblog/comments/communions_martyred_depth_dr_ephraim_radner/.

ECUSA Presiding Bishop from the coming Primates' Meeting. But yes, they will work *with* Canterbury to provide a coherent solution to the appeal from some American dioceses and churches. Yes, they will contribute positively to the Anglican Covenant. Individual primates or provinces may have different opinions on particular matters; but as one body, they affirm this central position. The confession in the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" guides the churches across the spectrum to come to a common mind over many complex issues. It prevents them from taking any radical position.

Allow me to labour over this point because this is a key towards rapprochement. Bear with me as I take an example from the history of mathematics. Early in the 20th century, mathematicians introduced set theory to define members (or elements) of sets, to use it as a reasoning tool in understanding abstract concepts. Bertrand Russell immediately saw a weakness in the early attempts. He proposed what has become known as the Russell's Paradox: "Consider the set S whose elements x are sets that are not elements of themselves. Is S then an element of S?"² It is a paradox because if S is not an element of S, then S belongs to S; if S is not, then it is! Russell explained this paradox in plain language in his Barber Paradox: "I shave all those men in town, and only those men, who do not shave themselves." Is there no barber? Of course not; but one needs to be more careful in making definitions. Russell drew attention to "the danger of unrestricted use of abstraction when forming sets". This caution led mathematicians to develop "axiomatic set theory" that gives closer attention to the characteristics of what is being defined, and to the purposes for which the definitions are used.

To apply this to our discussion, we need to pay closer attention on what we are seeking to defend. We cannot simply go on defending the status quo when it may contribute to the root problems. The definitions may perhaps be problematic. I suppose this explains why the tasks of the Panel of Reference are so difficult and impossible. To defend the welfare of the Communion and particular definitions of it are two different matters. In the same way, to criticize the Communion instruments does not necessarily amount to an attack on the Communion itself.

We need to be careful in how we put people into sets. That may in the end create more identity crisis and provoke knee-jerk reactions. More pointedly, it places Canterbury into a most difficult situation. We are asking him to hold together an ill-defined Communion (set S) whose very definition is problematic itself (is S an element of S). What should one conclude? Some of course can draw the conclusion that the Anglican Communion should be disbanded, or Canterbury be got rid of. This is wrong, in the same way that to conclude from the Barber Paradox that barbers do not exist. The problem lies in how we define the situation and classify people. We need to go back and redefine the Communion in different ways. Otherwise it may lead to further polarization and at the end may even final dissolution.

I do not think the present-day conservatives and liberals can offer the Communion any guidance. Their partisan spirits are manifestations of the end-game in the Enlightenment project. How then can we move out of this impasse? We do this only by paying closer attention to the reality. The "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic

² Jan Gullberg, *Mathematics: From the Birth of Numbers* (London: Norton, 1997), 235.

Church”, so the Global South churches propose in Red Sea, gives us the reference point to launch our exploration. It asks the Communion to get back in touch with its ecclesial reality rather than to be mired in ideological and abstract constructs.

This is why I welcome the questions Dr Radner poses in *Communion’s Martyred Depth*. I have no ready answer to his questions because they cannot be answered in abstract. I look forward to approaching them with him and fellow theologians in the Communion. To continue with my mathematical analogy, mathematical modeling requires constant data input from real situations. Mathematicians have to devise new models (and formulas) to give closer fit to real data. The “boundary values” are critical to understanding the shape of reality. In the same way, in the Communion we need to begin describing and explaining our realities. The frontier experience –here we come back to the martyrdom experience – is thus of vast importance. The participation of churches from socio-economically and geopolitically different regions is vital. I may even suggest the Anglican Communion would be enriched if the Church in China is able to rejoin the Communion as a united church. Therefore I have suggested in another article Canterbury’s coming China visit is symbolic and significant.

Would you take modest, concrete and steady steps with us? “Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom, lead Thou me on! . . . Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.”

Thank you for your understanding. I am sure it comes out of your act of discipleship.

Feast of Saint Michael and all Angels, 2006
Singapore