

How much is the Global South worth? A Response to the Anglican Communion Institute on ECUSA GC2006

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Who are these Anglicans outside Britain and America? Why do they matter? My aim here is to help British and American Anglican friends to come to a better understanding of the “Global South”.

Graham Kings’ view of the Anglican world offers a good starting point in this discussion. In Fulcrum’s June Newsletter, Kings referred to Andrew Goddard’s analysis of the Communion and divided Anglicans into four groups: the federal conservatives, communion conservatives, communion liberals, and federal liberals. (See “[Shechem, Corinth and Columbus: ECUSA’s Choices](#),” Fulcrum, also Andrew Goddard, “[A Commentary on the Address of the Bishop of Exeter to the American House of Bishops](#),” Anglican Communion Institute. He placed the “Global South” among the first two categories in the quadrant.

The Anglican Communion Institute, of which Andrew Goddard is a Fellow, exercises enormous influence on Canterbury’s thinking on the Communion (or the other way around, with due respect to the current chair). Goddard based his model on that of Michael Langrish, which I am sure was the result of much discussion, and received official sanction at the highest levels in Lambeth and the Church of England. After all, Bishop Michael Langrish – as Canterbury’s representative – proposed it in his 29 March 2006 address to the House of Bishops of ECUSA.

The quadrant model interprets the Communion only along the theological and ecclesiastical dimensional lines that are familiar to Western forms of Anglicanism. It then extrapolates it to the rest of the world without considering the socio-political realities in the Communion and in the wider world. So it does not offer a solid interpretation; and may mislead us in the same time in these crucial times of the Communion history.

Let me explain. Throughout the discussions on the present Communion crisis – except for Grant Lemarquand’s fine article “African responses to New Hampshire and New Westminster” – I find little attempt among British and American clerics in making explicit reference to the “Global South” in their reflections. (See *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 75 (2006): 13-36.) For sure, some refer to the primitive outlook and the sins in the Global South. Some may even criticize former colonial practices. Yet, the Global South is often depicted in general terms. The Communion could have simply consisted of America and Britain – in their theological and ecclesiastical diversities. The rest of the world surfaces only as issues that ECUSA and Canterbury need to deal with: whether it is a difficult Nigerian archbishop or HIV/AIDS problem.

I do not notice any serious attempt among my Western colleagues in reflecting the mission histories and the impact of nation building and globalization on our common life. I suspect that British and American friends in general do not know what I am talking about. They cannot fit the complexities of the non-Western Communion into their familiar categories because they simply do not understand the rest of the world. If they do, their experience does not caution them of their sometimes optimistic assessment of ecclesiastical apparatus.

Professor Oliver O'Donovan helpfully depicted the present crisis in the world as "the loss of a sense of place". (See his article "The Loss of a Sense of Place" in *Bonds of Imperfection. Christian Politics, Past and Present*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 296-320). Graham Kings' quadrant does not account for geographical places and thus misplaces the central issues.

The Communion – as the wider world – is divided into those who are materially rich and those who have little. It is difficult for us who live in stable and sophisticate urban centres to understand the plight of the dispossessed. I did not, until I come to Singapore, where my students from across rural areas in Asia bless me with their lives and testimonies.

A serious fault-line is growing in the Communion. On one side we find the minority elite who control the decision-making processes; and on the other is the vast majority who are left in the dark. This is why repeatedly I raised my concern on how Canterbury makes his recent appointments on Communion matters. I do not doubt his good intent. Yet I am sorry for his paternalistic attitude. Read his well-meaning 7 July 2006 address to the Church of England's General Synod. There he painted the threats facing the breakup of the Communion. I applauded his courage to take responsibility for the Communion. I thought similar sentiments were expressed in British parliamentary debate on the merit of British rule in India.

In the same vein, Ephraim Radner can say "the Windsor Report...as well as the *Archbishop of Canterbury* are, it seems to us, *better attuned* to the realities of our churches and Church's diversity – including in the Global South – than many [my emphasis]". He went on to reassure his critics that "ACI is well engaged" in counseling "a way of dealing with the failures and errors of the Episcopal Church". And remarkably, he generalized these failures and errors – that specifically dealt with the Windsor request – to include those in the "Global South" (See his [How does the ACI see the present challenges in the Communion?](#) 4, 5). Why such a build up to the GC2006 if all the Communion asks of ECUSA were simply to recite the General Confession? Radner needs to help me understand his grounds of confidence in top-down institutional approach. Must the Holy Spirit confine his work through the hierarchy?

We are in a polarized Communion. The elite live in stable societies with huge financial reserves and mature infrastructures. They can afford long-term planning. Most Anglicans however live tenuously at the edge of life and die young. The divide is not simply between the west and the rest of the world. Such fault line appears within the Global South. Even in East Asia, we have churches and societies with huge economic

differential living alongside one another. Many Anglicans live in unstable societies. The present Communion instruments are biased against the have-nots since they are completely dependent on Western life-style. Imagine how much it costs (in terms of years of salary for the average African) for African bishops to attend Lambeth. Do they have to prostrate themselves and beg? Well, those who have money dictate the listening processes by organizing meetings and shaping opinions at their own whim. America and Britain are still acting like huge vacuum pumps that suck up the brains and treasures from the rest of the world, and impoverish it further by their financial machineries. The Global South cannot match the west on intellectual resources. This is why listening processes can become politicized and be turned into one huge vote-buying exercise, just as American politics are at the mercy of oil companies.

How can we enable one another to discern? I think America and Britain need to be more critical of the empire building attitude that is endemic to the present structures. They need to rediscover their places within a catholic Communion. The future of the Communion cannot be but multipolar: a Church with Provinces in different places in the world. This is why the Primates' Meeting – rather than Canterbury – is more suitable in assuming the role to be the focus of unity of the Communion.

As Christ's disciples, we must take up this pilgrimage if we are to walk with the dispossessed. Morally we must lay the subtle ideology shaping devices openly on the table and subject them to the scrutiny of the Gospel, if we are serious in saying that we are a Christian and catholic Communion. Spiritually speaking, we need to discover a new sense of mission; from aid-relief to restoration of homelands. We need to pray to God to stir in each of us the compassion to strengthen the worldwide churches: "to draw the gifted and the able back from the great world capitals and universities to the regional and local communities from which they sprang, to put the gifts and skills which they possess at the service of their neighbours". (See Oliver O'Donovan, "The Loss of a Sense of Place", 319.)

As I wrote elsewhere, I appreciate Rowan Williams. His approach to the Communion is sharply different from that of Schori. He is able to put aside personal theological opinions to take up his responsibilities as guardian of faith. Schori announced her presence as a theological innovator. Despite Canterbury's good intent, I wonder whether the Communion machineries take on their runaway course. How can the worldwide churches share meaningfully in any reception and listening processes, when they are economically and politically so disadvantaged and remote from the power centres?

I end with a final word. To rephrase a famous saying: "So far, academics and church leaders have tried to interpret the Communion; the point however, is to change it." My hunch is that this initiative will come from the Global South rather than top-down from Canterbury. Church history tells me so.

15 July 2006