

**Gathering as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church around Jesus Christ: A response to ECUSA's decisions at the General Convention 2006**

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“A new day is dawning”, so Bishop Bob Duncan, moderator of the Anglican Communion Network, introduced his 23 June 2006 pastoral letter soon after the end of ECUSA's General Convention. ECUSA has indeed made clear that it “embraced the course of ‘walking apart’” from the rest of the Communion. This is the starting point from which Provinces and the Communion as a whole need to consider their courses of actions. More importantly, we need to understand that ECUSA's actions brought about the confusing ad hoc episcopal cross-border interventions.

ECUSA's Special Commission on the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion proposed several key resolutions in their report *One Baptism, One Hope in God's Call*. In response to this document, Tom Wright pleaded in “The Choice before ECUSA” before the Convention that these resolutions did not comply with Windsor. What followed in GC2006 was tragic. The General Convention fell short of even what the Special Commission recommended. Pointedly, the Convention added a section to the original A167 Resolution “Full and Equal Claim” for All the Baptized”:

“That, in evidence of that apology, The Episcopal Church pledge to include openly gay and lesbian persons on every committee, commission or task force developed for the specific purpose of discussing issues about sexuality and *request the same of our sister churches in the Anglican Communion and Anglican Communion bodies* [my emphasis]”.

See the obvious imbalance. ECUSA House of Bishops Camp Allen 15 March 2006 Statement, the Special Commission Report, and the General Convention Resolutions use the same tactics. They broadened “the reference to persons in same-gender unions into a general statement about persons whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church” (Wright, 16). The desperate measure B033 only resolved “exercise of restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion”. At the same time, ECUSA showed no hesitancy in championing the cause of the homosexuals in A167, and even urged such courses of action on the rest of Communion.

B033 did not specifically deal with the consecration of practicing gay persons as bishops. The debate transcript of the B033 discussion makes for sad reading. Indeed it never received full support within ECUSA, as the following public dissent among the liberal bishops revealed. So, I do not share Archbishop's Rowan Williams assessment on this particular point in his address to the Church of England's General Synod (7 July 2006). B033 is irrelevant with regard to the Windsor request. The manner of life of corporate executives and pop idols could also present a challenge to the wider church. Indeed, in

Tom Wright's words, with sadness the rest of the Communion can conclude that, "despite every opportunity, ECUSA has declined to comply with Windsor; has decided, in other words, to 'walk apart'" (Wright, 19).

This is why Canterbury's remark in his General Synod puzzling. He said: "As has become plain, the resolutions of Convention overall leave a number of unanswered questions, and there needs to be some careful disentangling of what they say and what they don't say". Equally, I cannot understand why he can write in his *'Challenge and Hope' for the Anglican Communion* that "the resolutions have not produced a complete response". This is astonishing. Are Canterbury and ECUSA playing a game of brinkmanship? ECUSA is calling Windsor bluff, and they won?! Canterbury can invite ECUSA bishops to cucumber sandwich tea parties in Lambeth 2008 after all?

What the resolutions conveyed is clear. What remains unclear and needs clarification is ECUSA's plans in light of *their* decisions to walk apart – a matter I now elaborate. Later in this article, I shall consider how the Communion should move on from here. To rephrase Williams' words, there needs to be some careful disentangling of what ECUSA *do in the Convention* (which is alarming) and what they don't say *in the resolutions* (which are already clear).

Is ECUSA intending to start an ideological Cold War in this post-GC2006 era? This is what ECUSA needs to explain to the Communion. Why the emphasis on its new identity as the Episcopal Church (TEC) (Refer to Ruth Gledhill's Report "Ecusa is no more: Long Live The Episcopal Church!" June 14, 2006)?

Historically, ECUSA's map coincided with their missionary advances, in the same way that British missionary societies drew the map of Canterbury's episcopal jurisdiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these mission fields began to evolve into national churches. The new Provinces relate to one another and their former 'mother churches' as full member in the Communion.

To suggest ECUSA is "The Episcopal Church" that consists of sixteen countries from across the world (Europe to Taiwan) is new and worrying. No province has ever made this claim. Is ECUSA creating a split within the Communion? The Special Commission on the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion referred to the problems of colonialism and the "unbridled arrogance of Western imperialism" (*One Baptism, One Hope in God's Call*, 10, 39, 40). Why then, for example, hang on to Taiwan, a far-flung territory an ocean apart from America that some would see as part of the People's Republic of China? This is disconcerting especially since ECUSA's "occupation" of Taiwan – to borrow the title of the 1922 missionary compilation *Christian Occupation of China* – was due solely to the presence of American military personnel after the Communists took over China in 1949. Taiwan was in fact under Japan's episcopal jurisdiction during the Pacific War. Hawaii then assumed pastoral care of US military personnel in Taiwan, and exercised de facto episcopal oversight of Chinese Anglicans who fled to Taiwan from mainland China. In 1963 the Diocese of Taiwan officially took its name as "Taiwan Sheng Kung Hui [Taiwan Holy Catholic Church]". It expected it

would one day be part of the Holy Catholic Church in China (See *Taiwan Sheng Gong Hui Ershi Nian* [=Taiwan Holy Catholic Church. The First Twenty Years], edited by Chen Datong, 1974).

ECUSA needs to clarify whether it intends to hang on territories outside the United States of America, and to create a new worldwide alliance. Has it a schedule to help churches outside of the United States of America homeland to become autonomous provinces? What is frightening that it has the financial and technological machineries to engineer such *American* counter-body in opposition to the *Anglican* Communion. Imagine what the Communion thinks if Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Hong Kong Anglican Church) were to set up a worldwide Chinese Anglican Province that covers all continents that Chinese Anglicans reside.

So far, all sides have the welfare of the one Communion in mind, however intensely the issues were debated. The church has not yet come to a common mind in many matters. In this sense, we are “with two minds” in moral deliberation, to use the phrase quoted by ECUSA’s Presiding-Bishop elect Schori. For Schori to infer from this the Communion is like “conjoined twins” – thus with two separate identities – is to make similar mistakes as Apollinarianism did in the late fourth century in the discussion on Christ’s identity.

The General Convention indeed leaves many unanswered questions for the Communion. In Canterbury’s words in “‘Challenge and hope’ for the Anglican Communion”, “there is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment”. The Communion has to accept psychologically ECUSA has chosen to walk apart. It has to discover fresh ways of partnership and discipleship without the financial support (and perhaps pension funds) of ECUSA. It also has to muster the moral courage to consider that Williams own words “there is a global organization which can declare such a separatist body illegitimate” may perhaps also apply to ECUSA. We are now in these unfamiliar circumstances.

On longer term, the Primates need to think through the future of the Communion. So far, the trans-Atlantic alliance underpinned the structure of the Communion, in the same way that comprehensiveness was the unchallenged Anglican ethos. The recent controversies exposed how both are antiquated and inadequate to meet the new challenges. (I refer here Professor Oliver O’Donovan’s critique of the liberal paradigm in the Fulcrum website.) The doctrinal and moral crises became the catalyst for churches outside Britain and America to think through the ground of their identities. They rediscovered to their calling to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

Canterbury’s *Challenge and Hope* outlines key theological and structural questions for the Communion. More than GC2006 resolutions, it deserves close study by the remaining faithful in America and the rest of the Communion. The Primates Meeting in 2007 and Lambeth 2008 would be wise to study and discuss the issues that Williams highlighted in the document.

There are two issues the Communion needs to consider.

First, the Communion need to rethink the instruments or (to use Williams words) *servants* of unity, that they are able to serve the Communion worldwide. Who can truly share in the various Anglican processes? Let's face it. Most of them are professionals who can afford leave of absence from their employment; they have the necessary travel documents; they are highly educated; they write and speak in English. How can the instruments and commissions be effective if the executives are mostly based in Lambeth and Saint Andrew's House? How can the Communion website – the massive 'fifth' instrument and shaper of public opinions – be representative if the webmasters are in London and perhaps New York?

The instruments arose out of historical accidents. I suggest in future the Primates' Meeting to take a more central role in giving theological leadership in the Communion.

Second, the Communion needs to recover the expository and parish focus in theological education. How can churches in the Communion become theologically mature? I suggest that we must think of more imaginative ways than to set up regional theological education offices and provide 'key books' to seminaries, as TEAC tries to do. Missionaries tried that in the last century. It did not work, and for obvious reasons. Many people in the world cannot read. Many churches cannot afford to release their best people to seminaries in urban centres. Many who have experienced the glitz of urban centres will not return to their homeland. Many churches cannot financially pay for "proper theological education" anyway.

We need something more basic and direct. Elsewhere I suggested parish priests and evangelists would benefit from having a new Catechism for today. It provides the basic syllabus for teaching Christianity (yes, in all its richness) to the faithful who gather week after week for worship and fellowship. In this way, while the Anglican Covenant provides the authoritative basis of communal life; the Catechism expounds the ramifications for Christian life.

There remains an important area that those in "Global South" need to think through. Archbishop Peter Jensen ended his article *Crisis in the Communion: the Way Forward for Evangelicals: Have we a plan?* with an observation on the Global South. I am not aware of any response from the Global South to his keen observations. We need to work more actively with orthodox Anglicans in Britain and America to discern our tasks and coordinate our actions.

There too are vast economic differentials and political diversities among societies in the Global South. New patterns of mission are also surfacing within our own situations. I do not think, on long-term, the term "Global South" is helpful in expressing the concerns of the churches outside Britain and America. After all, we are simply taking up our calling in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic community of Jesus Christ. The Global South Primates may wish to consider these concerns in their meeting in Kigali this September.

A new day indeed is dawning for those who have received the one baptism and the one hope in Jesus Christ. With sadness, in GC2006 ECUSA has decided to walk apart. It is the Primates' task to reform a new Anglican church in America.

More immediately Canterbury and the Primates of the Communion need to work with the Anglican Communion Network in offering a coherent and effective episcopal oversight to the faithful in the United States of America. This responsibility Canterbury and the Primates can ill afford to ignore.

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