

The trivial round, the common task: Sober Notes to Dr Radner

Michael Nai-Chiu Poon

The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God. (Keble)

I am grateful for Dr Radner's swift response to my comments on his exposition of the Proposed Covenant.ⁱ Yes, I agree with what he affirms. However, my concerns may have been misread.

Some are anxious to hold the American Episcopal Church from breaking up, or even worse, from sinking to a fratricidal war fought right down at street-levels. The Communion structure – with Canterbury as its focus – provides the only viable lifeline. I do understand the basis for some of his concerns. This may explain his enthusiastic evaluation of the Communion hierarchies.

In my earlier response I tried to draw attention we need to reconnect our Communion life to the fundamental reality we share.ⁱⁱ Yes, conciliar life is important. My criticism was on the present-day power structures that underpin conciliar processes. To be realistic, not many are able to join in the international gatherings. I suppose only those who are English-speaking and can afford to travel, have the right kinds of travel documents or those who live in internet-ready locations can qualify. I cannot imagine the ACO and Lambeth – both based in London – can engage and now try to manage the realities in the Communion. This is not to blemish the officeholders in ACO. However, the machineries the Communion devised over the past thirty years are structurally limited and do not connect enough with socio-political and cultural complexities in today's world.

True, as Dr Radner notes, “for all the failures and continuing failures”, the Communion is beginning to learn from the Global South. Well, not if the hierarchy still sanctions the “quadrant-model”. We need to break away from labeling people and find the ability to listen without prejudice to the contributions they make. And even if things are moving slowly, how does change happen? I do not suppose the status quo achieves this. It is happening because of the initiatives that some Global South churches are taking. For some, such initiatives may be too audacious and inconvenient, but they are part of the learning processes that challenges our suppositions and wider our horizons. I also agree with Dr Radner that we need to relate the new with the old. But we equally need to come to a theological understanding of what is new and perhaps of our historical roots as well.

This leads to my second comment. How are the conciliar processes related to the ordinary clergy and laity? As Keble put it, “The trivial round, the common task will furnish all we ought to ask”. The concrete routines in ordinary life day after day provide the context for discipleship and Christian growth. This was why I connect the Covenant to the Book of Common Prayer. I am not suggesting a return to 1662.

However, the Book of Common Prayer embodies a fundamental order within which parish life is shaped. I think of ordinary Christians, catechists and priests who live in years of isolation; and of ordinary Christians who make sure the elderly are cared for and young children properly fed day after day. To them, covenanting means more a formal assent to statements. The troth “to have and to hold, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part” is worked out in practical details in life. What do the communiqués, statements and commission reports mean to them? To those *deeper levels of Communion* – that even TEC itself recognizes – we must affirm.

Singapore, March 2007

ⁱ “Unocering the Light”, Global South Anglicans,,
http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/uncovering_the_light_the_proposed_covenant_our_anglican_heritage_a_response/.

ⁱⁱ “A very Godly Order”, *Global South Anglicans*,
http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/index.php/comments/a_very_godly_order_response_to_ephraim_raders_making_promises_the_propose/.