

Shorelines From the Helm

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Maintaining Anglican Unity

When A Church Crosses Cultures

As I write this article, the Windsor Report, commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, has just been released. The report considers the strain on the Anglican Communion as autonomous provinces in the Western World and the Global South interpret differently both Christian authority and the human condition.

Reasonable people understand that there are cultural differences that influence Christian believing and that all theology is interpreted theology.

Until recently, the Anglican Communion was largely a western church priding itself as a "thinking and seeking" church, not a church of dogmatic absolutes. We recognized that the Christian voyage is a voyage of the discovery of God, and that the Holy Spirit fills our lives with surprises. Anglicans realized that we do not have all the answers and certainly not absolute answers to the things of God. Therefore, the Anglican Church has openly sought growth in the Holy Spirit. Historically Anglicans value inclusiveness and take pride in being able to "live in ambiguity," accepting that while we can differ on such things as the interpretation of Scripture, our shared discipleship is greater than our differences. The globalization of the Anglican Communion strains this unity because many of the third world people do not share western values especially the value that we place on human inclusiveness. Today, the homosexuality issue is just the tip of the iceberg. We also have significant differences between the West and the Global South regarding women and their value and equality in both society and in the church.

We also face division within the Episcopal Church, USA. Again, the place of homosexual Christians in Christian community is only the tip of the iceberg. Historically, some Episcopalians think of themselves as "Catholic Episcopalians" with a love of ritual and reverence of the sacraments. Others cling to a protestant and evangelical tradition with great emphasis on the authority of Scripture to a level that gives authority to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Most of us fit very comfortably somewhere near the middle of this continuum and pride ourselves on being part of a "thinking man's church." Whether we continue to be a unified church strengthened by a sense of common mission that welcomes and seeks to include all who would follow Jesus, without defining a mandated path to Jesus, depends on how strongly those who are dissatisfied need to believe that they are right. When someone insists that only his or her view is the "right" view, then those who think differently by definition are "wrong." Polarization leads to broken communion and schism.

Clearly, the days ahead will test the strength of the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church. The primates of the Anglican Church must study the Windsor Report and explore how the suggestions can be implemented. The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church working with the Presiding Bishop and the House of Bishops will formulate the American response. The Episcopal Church is committed to receiving and reviewing the document with openness and humility and will respond in love while not betraying our openness to going where the Holy Spirit leads.

Bishop Frade and I are personally committed to maintaining the parish and the diocese as a church where anyone can find the love of Christ. I urge you to commit to prayer daily for the Episcopal Church and its leadership, as we seek God's will in the days ahead.

Fr. Ron+

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