

## How to think about Cross-Jurisdictional Episcopal Intervention in the ECUSA. A Proposal

I admire the admonition to faithfulness and holiness coming from many voices in our list-serve discussions that, like the prophets, we might speak the truth in love, and from a place of suffering not wasted because our Lord's provisions and promises are sure. I agree this is God's way.

*Our earnest desire is that the Savior's prayer, "That we all may be one," may, in its deepest and truest sense, be speedily fulfilled. BCP p. 876*

### The Virtue of Staying

Augustine called "schism" is a "damnable heresy", and so it is. The Church makes extraordinary claims which, if true, suggests there is never a good reason to abandon what God WILL NOT abandon. I chose to stay in the ECUSA rather than follow my friends and colleagues into the AmiA for several reasons. Principle among them was my desire to protect parishioners who, for many reasons, were not prepared in heart and mind to abandon hope, and my deep Catholic sensibilities. I was concerned that many who were leaving fundamentally did not understand the nature of the Bride of Christ, the "new Israel," for which Jesus died and rose. Many did not understand that the Lord of the entire universe was quite capable if giving us all the tools and spiritual weaponry to sustain this most beautiful and holy Bride of Christ. Most did not seem to understand that error in the church has always been used by the Lord as a challenge to the ecclesia to engage in self-criticism, repentance, reform and renewal.

In fact, we know all too well that heresy has always been with the Church, whatever its ecclesial manifestations, and always will be. There's no escaping it. Even St. Paul understood that heresies were born with the Church, and the whole life and teaching of the Church has historically been influenced by the question of how to deal with them.

In Galatians Paul finds it necessary to include among the works of the flesh, alongside enmity, strife, and dissension, "factions" ("heresies" in A.V.) (5:20), and there appears to be a tone of resignation in his words when he writes "*I hear that when you all come together as a community, there are separate factions among you, and I half believe it – since there must no doubt be separate groups among you, to distinguish those who are to be trusted*" (1 Cor. 11:19).

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, at the end of the New Testament period, there is another vigorous warning:

*As there were false prophets in the past history of our people, so you too will have your false teachers, who will insinuate their own disruptive views and disown the Master who purchased their freedom. They will destroy themselves very quickly; but there will be many who copy their shameful behavior and the Way of Truth will be brought into disrepute on their account. (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:1 f.)*

The Church in Thyatira watched some form of sexual immorality occurring in their own worshipping community. In that dreadful situation, the Son of God did not direct them to separate. *“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to their teaching...I will not impose any other burden on you: Only hold on to what you have until I come.”* **Revelation 2: 24-25**

In attacking Nicaea, there were “liberals”, besides Eusebius of Caesarea and the Arians, whose chief ambition for the Church was a kind of worldly glory and the appearance of unity and peace. They didn’t believe theological differences were important enough to justify anyone separating from the church, and advocated formulations so vague that they were capable of pluriform and even contradictory interpretations. Sound familiar? They were vanquished, thankfully, in a remarkable victory of our Lord, whose anointing was alive in the saints.

I think we know that what burdens the ECUSA is not some unique historical phenomena but a continuation of sin that has always been bound with the nature of the visible Church itself. As well, experience teaches us that the powerful temptation to separate ourselves from those who are in error sets us on a slippery, wearying, and never ending journey [as can be testified by the some thirty-thousand Protestant sects, and roughly thirty-six Continuing Anglican groups who have been born of this pursuit] Sojourners all, constantly attentive to that still small voice which at any moment might whisper, “I’m moving on now, this was a church, but is no more. The gates of hell have overcome. Go and pack your bags.”

## **The Vanity of Staying?**

Before we can question whether or not this Province of Anglicanism should be severed from the wider communion and Eucharistic friendship, perhaps satisfactory answers should be given regarding what remains of the four marks of the “Church” in the ECUSA. This provides (I think) a fascinating scorecard, if not an essential exercise for our discernment.

**I. The Church is first One.** Unity is its prime characteristic. Whatever else the Church may be, it is one -- visibly one, unmistakably one, incontrovertibly one, in communion. In what sense does our Province demonstrate this understanding?

**II. The Church is Holy.** Holiness is of the essence of the Church. The Church, therefore, cannot cease to be holy without ceasing to exist. As the unity of the Church implies its indivisibility, so the sanctity of the Church implies its incorruptibility. In what sense does the ECUSA retain marks of Holiness?

**III. The Church is Catholic.** No one can rightly apprehend the universality of the Anglican Communion who does not first understand the nature of the Church's unity. *Unitas Catholica, quae toto orbe diffusa est* (The Catholic unity which is spread

throughout the whole world), is the canon to which St. Augustine holds the Donatists. How does the ECUSA continue to participate in that unity?

**IV. The Church is Apostolic.** There can be no “faith once delivered to the saints” without constant instruments of unity by which important aspects of faith and order may be determined. There can be no true universality without agreement, and no agreement without some standard of uniformity. There can be no apostolic order without an apostolic instrument serving “as a head over the members.” Does the simple fact that the ECUSA has orders make it *ipso facto* a portion of the Church Apostolic?

To what degree do these marks reside in our Province? To what degree does it matter to this conversation? Would God want to invest in an irregular form of religion, operating (practically) as an independent sectarian denomination, clouding the marks of a “Church” and lacking structure that would allow it to, not only overcome the wiles of the devil, but also negotiate and resolve complex theological disagreements? For the sake of a case we may make for episcopal intervention, let’s assume these marks are irretrievably clouded.

### **Christian Unity**

*“The Catholic Church, which as St. Cyprian says, ‘stretches her branches in the richness of exuberance over the whole earth,’ endures everywhere the scandals of those who, through the fault of their grievous pride, are cut off from her, some in one place and some in another....For where they fall there they remain, and in the place where they are severed there they wither away; whence the Church herself from which they are cut off is spread even through those lands where those broken branches lie each in its own region.” St. Augustine*

Unity with those preaching “another gospel” is not, and never has been, a “good” in and of itself. If that were the case, the only recourse for Christian unity is to become something akin to civility, love, tolerance, respect, etc. This is laudable...but we know finally that this kind of unity, though necessary for civil society, will never provide the “rock” upon which the Church was built.

Christian unity in the history of the Church (as far as I can tell) was seen fundamentally as a way of sustaining the integrity of the Christian proclamation. The proclamation, of course, had a great deal of fine print and it was deemed necessary that everyone exercise ministry from a common understanding (concerning the nature and person of Christ for example). This need for a “substantial deposit of the Christian Faith,” as we know, is what gave rise to the great councils of the Church. This is expressed in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral:

*But furthermore, we do hereby affirm that the Christian unity...can be restored only by the return of all Christian communions to the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence; which principles we believe to be the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and his Apostles*

*to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender by those who have been ordained to be its stewards and trustees for the common and equal benefit of all men.*

### **Compounding problems**

The AmiA pioneers were quick to contest any notion that if we were simply patient, God himself will intervene and straighten the whole thing out. We who stayed enjoined an heroic act of desperate love trying to successfully adapt some Anglican variation of Roman ecclesiology, imputing some notion of “incorruptibility” to our distinctly Protestant sectarian problem in the ECUSA. I have been tagged as an innovator and dreamy utopian with such sentiments – reflecting (they say) an unhealthy divination of the church. In assurances given, there was hope that if we were willing to speak as our Lord speaks, believing a parish to be the very Bride of Christ, the Lord of the entire universe would give us freely and ungrudgingly all the tools and spiritual weaponry we need to sustain her. The idealism is compelling, at least to me, and these convictions remain utterly genuine. Who of us would want to plant deep roots in an ECUSA parish if that were not taught and believed?

In a real sense, however, we sacrificed this hope as a living reality by the failed marriage from which from we were born. The willing participation of Henry VIII, Cromwell, Cranmer and their pals, helped ignite the detonation charge and misery of the Protestant revolt. It was on this altar that we finally sacrificed the possibility of ever again daring to believe, in any coherent way, that our Lord is sacrificially given to reforming existing visible structures of the Church as they have been handed to us through time. The pastoral ramifications are unmistakable. As clergy, we shepherd a particular mindset in the pews, given to the “spiritual quest” but not to the structures of religion. I say all this to underscore the difficulties all of us are having keeping our parishioners simultaneously informed about the difficult road ahead, and active and committed.

My suspicion that it is too late in our shared history to recover and apply some kind of catholic imagination for our Episcopal parishes (a way of seeing and hearing we willingly and gladly torched during the Reformation, the Enlightenment and beyond). And if, as expressed in the beautiful and inimitable writing of Ephraim Radner, God wants to bring to an end a willfully divided Church, and what he has termed “contradictions of ecclesial love” and “empty precincts” of our Godforsaken churches, in what sense would “staying put” be a virtue or help to the Anglican Communion? In what sense would this be a hope our Lord would offer us in the ECUSA as an expression of a more perfect desire? In what sense would God want to truly impart the gift of faith to believe that if we stick around in the ECUSA neighborhood long enough, he is going to perform some kind of wonderful reforming miracle? We have no mechanism in Anglicanism in which to force compliance on this Province, and mere attempts at moral persuasion are already proving utterly ineffective.

Roman Catholic or Orthodox reception is not an option for most of us, for many reasons, and the free market of “Continuing Anglicans,” aloof and unconstrained by “communion” is somewhat distasteful as well, running counter to Anglo-Catholic sensibility, if not common sense. That being the case, what are we going to do with this particularly nasty form of Gnostic liberalism that has been insinuating itself in the ECUSA for most of our lives, and which now threatens our very livelihood, if not our souls? It’s a conundrum - we feel we can’t stay, but leaving is bad form!...and an especially pissy reminder of the unseemly and untimely behavior of our AmiA brothers and sisters.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that she is the one true Church of Jesus Christ most fully and rightly ordered through time and that, using the language of Vatican II, the Church of Jesus Christ uniquely “subsists” in the Catholic Church. That implies that, not only is the Church in constant need of renewal and reform, but also that the Church of Jesus Christ, in a real sense, subsists in Anglicanism as well. Naturally, Anglicans would agree, but in reverse - contending that WE are most fully and rightly ordered.

The point is what both uniquely have in common and what uniquely qualifies each to teach in Christ’s name is the value we both place on our Eucharistic friendship, our ecclesiology of communion, and our vast unbroken witness. All distinguishing marks of a “Church.” rightly ordered. If Anglicanism loses any of this by vain attempts to prop up and reform the ECUSA and by shielding this province from episcopal intervention, then I fear that, because of protracted conflict, we could subject the Communion to stresses leading only to greater uncertainty and a precarious future. Certainly any evangelical witness in the ECUSA that can survive in this environment will eventually become hopelessly enervated and irrelevant.

## **Staying – Rescuing Bishops**

To their credit, I think the AmiA does rightly understand that we really have only one option and one hope that is a catholic option - that wonderful apostolic instrument of unity and reform still found in the episcopacy of the wider Communion, and that still clings to the Catholic tree of the “faith once delivered to the saints.” The AmiA may have been untimely and arrogant, but this part of the equation was, I think, spot on.

As well, we know there is considerable precedent for rescuing bishops who cross jurisdictions - not thereby creating ecclesial chaos, but precisely preventing it. Thomas Arthur Middleton sheds some light from the annals of history in the following (Courtesy of William Tighe):

“Between 1708–22, Joseph Bingham (1668-1723), an Anglican priest and notable patristic scholar, produced his ten-volume work, *Antiquities of the Christian Church*. It is not a mere catalogue of information but a compendium of critically- evaluated evidence for the living tradition of patristic church life. In the two volume edition, Book II, ch. V, *Antiquities of the Christian Church* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1875), he discusses “Of the Office of Bishops in relation to the whole Catholic Church.”

... there is yet a more eminent branch of their pastoral office and care behind, which is, their superintendency over the whole catholic church; in which every bishop was supposed to have an equal share, not as to what concerned external polity and government, but the prime, essential part of religion, the preservation of the Christian faith. Whenever the faith was in danger of being subverted by heresy, or destroyed by persecution, then every bishop thought it part of his duty and office to put to his helping hand, and labour as much for any other diocese as his own. Dioceses were but limits of convenience, for the preservation of order in times of peace; but the faith was a more universal thing, and when war was made upon that, then the whole world was but one diocese, and the whole church but one flock, and every pastor thought himself obliged to feed his great Master's sheep according to his power, whatever part of the world they were scattered in. In this sense, every bishop was a universal pastor and bishop of the whole world, as having a common care and concern for the whole church of Christ. This is what St. Austin told Boniface, Bishop of Rome, that the pastoral care was common to all those who had the office of bishop; and though he was a little higher advanced toward the top of Christ's watch-tower, yet all others had an equal concern in it.

Cyprian of Carthage (Epistle 67, 68), testifies that the bishops in his own time were so united that if anyone of the body preached heresy or persecuted the flock of Christ, all the bishops came to its rescue. Gregory of Nazianzen regarded Cyprian as a universal bishop in Carthage and Africa and he speaks similarly of Athanasius. From this came the notion of one bishopric in the Church in which every bishop had a share in the sense that he had an equal concern for the whole. However, in things that did not appertain to the faith they were not to meddle with other men's dioceses, but only be concerned with the business of their own. When the faith or welfare of the Church was at stake, then by this rule of there being one-episcopacy, every other bishopric was as much their diocese as their own. '... and no human laws or canons could tie up their hands from performing such acts of their Episcopal office in any part of the world, as they thought necessary for the preservation of religion.'

The rule in the primitive Church was that no bishop should ordain in another's diocese without his permission and for order's sake this was generally observed. There were exceptions to this rule when a situation demanded that it was necessary to do otherwise. Such situations would be when a bishop became a heretic and would only ordain heretical clergy while persecuting the orthodox. Any catholic bishop, being a bishop of the universal Church would then be authorised to ordain orthodox men in such a diocese. This was contrary to the common rule, which was waived in such exceptional circumstances for the preservation of the faith. The preservation of the faith is seen to be the supreme rule of all and so the lesser rule had to give way to this superior obligation.

Examples of such exceptions arose when the Church was in danger of being overrun by Arianism. In Socrates History, Bk. II ch. 24 (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol. II, pp. 520) we read of Athanasius having no scruples about ordaining men in cities outside his own diocese. Eusebius of Samosata (Theodoret's History, Bk. IV. Ch. 13), followed suit. Dressed as a soldier he travelled in Syria, Cilicia, and other places, ordaining men

deacons, priests and bishops and putting right whatever he found wanting in the churches. Theodoret (Bk. V, ch. 4), names them.

While this was contrary to the common rule it was necessary for the life of the Church and this is what gave them authority to act as bishops of the whole catholic Church and exert their power. It is recorded of Epiphanius that he ordained Paulinianus, St. Jerome's brother, in a monastery outside his own diocese in Palestine. When challenged that he was acting contrary to canon he vindicated himself on this principle, ' that in cases of necessity such as this was, where the interest of God was to be served, any bishop had power to act in any part of the Church ... Yet the love of Christ was a rule above all: and therefore men were not barely to consider the thing that was done, but the circumstances of the action, the time, the manner, the persons for whose sake, and the end for which it was done.'" *Thomas Arthur Middleton*

Is this the criteria in which a case is made for alternative episcopal oversight? In the last analysis the alternative may just be practically impossible. I find it all a maddening puzzle in many ways, and plead for whatever insight you can again bring to this unhappy and costly conversation. I am certainly not advocating a continued trickling away of isolated parishes and clergy here and there. My guess is that the most desirable outcome lies with something on the larger scale, something that shocks the system, appealing to public sympathy, and thereby rendering a particular diocese, such as ours, incapable of any timely and coordinated response by Chancellors with their Dennis cannons, and the like. When there's a serious fire, those kinds of things may just become, in Kierkegaard's word's, "pitchers and squirts."

I'm searching for some other way for an Anglican witness to thrive, esp. in Colorado. I can't find one.

Phil +

### Statement from Primates gathered at the African Anglican Bishops' Conference in Lagos, Nigeria (Partial)

- We call on the Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada to take seriously the need for "repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation enjoined on us by Christ" (Windsor Report [134]) and move beyond informal expressions of regret for the effect of their actions to a genuine change of heart and mind. Failure to do so would indicate that they have chosen to "walk alone" and follow another religion.
- We note with approval that the Windsor Report calls for a moratorium on the election and consecration of any candidate to the episcopate who is living in same gender union and the use of rites for the blessing of same-sex unions. We urge the Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada to take this call to heart mindful of Lambeth Resolution 1.10 "We cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex

unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.” Failure to do so would indicate that they have chosen to “walk alone.”

- We note with approval the recognition that extraordinary episcopal care is needed for congregations alienated from their diocesan bishops. We remain convinced that the adequacy of that care should be determined by those who receive it, ....”