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THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS: A MIND DARKLY BEMUSED (PART II)

What can be done about this darkly bemused mind of the House of Bishops? One thing only - a complete and utter transformation! How this shall come about, if it does at all, is within the providence of Almighty God.

It seems more likely that the future of historic Anglicanism in the United States will require new structures within the Anglican Communion. These structures will be conceived with respect to what they have been historically, but also with a view to what they must be at present by necessity. We should expect this to develop over time, but it must begin with some sense of urgency, if we would be faithful to God for the sake of his sheep. It seems that only by means of a new structure, a realignment, will faithful Episcopalians be able to proclaim and practice the "faith once delivered to the saints."

Why does this realignment seem more likely than the transformation of the mind of the House of Bishops? Because the Episcopal Church, as an institution, refuses to acknowledge the gravity of what they have done to the Anglican Communion as a whole. Not only have the Bishops devised this "Mind of the House Resolution," exiling priests to geographical obscurity, but also the Bishops are posturing themselves for the conflict to come.

At their last meeting, the Bishops put out a communiqué which declared that they are sorry for the pain that other Provinces in the Anglican Communion have suffered because of ECUSA's decisions. But the Bishops of ECUSA take no responsibility for inflicting that pain. On the one hand, the Bishops stated that their house is committed to a gracious reception (whatever that means) of the Lambeth Commission Report. On the other hand, they stated that they "value Anglican comprehensiveness and its capacity to make room for difference" In other words, the Bishops are making it clear that their adherence to the notion of difference will keep them in their intransigent position of heresy and schism. They will not budge from their position because they believe in "multiple realities." Thus their communiqué is part and parcel of their private will to construe their own actions as somehow led by the Spirit, and to ignore the rest of the Anglican Communion and the Church Catholic.

Well, this is all the same pattern of mind that we have encountered now for years in the Episcopal Church. It does not commend itself with

persuasion; it simply produces the latest ideological agenda of an ever more secularized culture. And so the time and necessity have arrived that we should build new structures in a realignment of the Anglican Communion. We shall need new wine for new skins.

I would suggest that such realignment will require the following. These ideas are garnered from over a long period of time, with many diverse influences. They are not mine alone, and yet I take responsibility for sharing them.

1. In place of the theological narcissism of the contemporary church there must be a return to theological clarity. The first principle of the Christian Church has always been the treasure of her saving knowledge. "And this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Such clarity must begin, as our Fathers in the faith began, with a clear submission to the authority of Holy Scripture. And right beneath the authority of Scripture must come the teaching of the Church, what the early church called the *regula fidei*, the rule of faith. In its incipient form, the Church knew this rule as essentially what was given in the Apostles' Creed, and later in the development of the Nicene Creed.

Within the development of Christendom, centuries later, the *regula fidei* became for Anglicans the integrity of the Prayer Book tradition. The Prayer Book offers the rule of faith as it has developed in the church's doctrine and the administration of her sacraments. It is greater in depth of understanding and in beauty of form than were the primitive forms of the *regula fidei*, but the essence of what was and is taught is the same, the "faith once delivered to the saints."

The theological confession of the Anglican Communion Network puts it this way, "Within the Anglican Church of which we are a part ...Scripture's meaning is rightly discerned in addition through the theological ordering of the common historic formularies, including the sixteenth and seventeenth century authorized Books of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles which ground the belief and practices of our Communion's life."

The point is that the Scripture's meaning is "rightly discerned" in the theological ordering of the Prayer Book tradition, which in the life of prayer, includes the understanding of the Thirty Nine Articles and the Ordinal (the services for the Ordinations of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons).

If we are to have and keep our identity as Anglicans, it lies precisely here. The Bible is the Word of God written, and the Prayer Book is the Word's harvest. Its theological poetry sanctifies time with Christian feasts and fasts, woven out of the great theological truths of the Bible, and in witness with the Saints, Martyrs, and Reformers of Christian History. This is our means to grow a people in the Christian faith. This must be the theological foundation of the new structures of an Anglican realignment.

2. The final intention of the realignment must be union with the Church Catholic. In his great High Priestly Prayer of John 17, our Lord prayed for the unity of his church, "that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us"

(17:21). What follows upon the understanding of the regula fidei is the love of God in Christ and of one another in him. This is not something that can be achieved when the church lacks the common mind of truth. There must be essential things which define the tenets of faith. These are the axioms of truth and moral life, derived from our Lord, taught and practiced in the doctrines and sacramental life of the church. The church cannot subsist in unity when her first principles are those of worldly institutions. She cannot survive when changing presuppositions dictate the nature of theological and moral authority. Those who see the time and necessity for new structures must understand these within the life of the present Anglican Communion and the context of the historic church. This will mean not only seeking greater union with the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, but also with the so-called continuing churches within the United States whose ties to the historic church are valid, and who hold to the essentials of Anglicanism.

3. The legal structures of the realignment must safeguard the priority of spiritual authority. The great plague that now afflicts the Episcopal Church is the reverse of this. Canonical rigorism, achieved through the political apparatus of the General Convention, has usurped the clear priority of spiritual authority. Geographical jurisdiction has replaced spiritual jurisdiction. Bishops relate to their priests and congregations not on the basis of godly counsel and persuasion, but on the basis of canonical power. The result has been the tyranny of the majority in the Episcopal Church. The new realignment must do its very best to insure that this cannot happen in the administration of the church's mission which is the Gospel. "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (II. Corinthians 3:17). What must inform the new structures is a godly freedom, wholly submitted to the authority of Holy Scripture and the received historic formularies of the Anglican Way, with every encouragement and intention to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

I am well aware that this new beginning will be somewhat disorderly and will take time and patience and wisdom. The Christian Church has never been without difficulty and crisis (a word which I remind you literally means judgment) but in each case God has worked for the sake of his Kingdom to renew, to forgive, to have mercy, and to fill his church with his own blessed life. That time is upon us, and our task is to be faithful and to persevere with joy.

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