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THE CUTTING EDGE (PART II)

It is a remarkable thing that St. John's appears now on the cutting edge. So what does it mean for us? It means simply that we will continue as we have been in hope that a more profound unity lies ahead for the Anglican Communion.

We also continue in common cause with many, and not just the Prayer Book Society. They should be commended for being a voice in the wilderness all these years. We should also commend those parishes that have continued to use the 1928 Prayer Book, or have used it partially while accepting the 1979 revision or the 1979 Eucharistic lectionary. Any significant tie with historic Anglicanism bodes well for the future.

Moreover we should remember that many faithful parishes in the so-called continuing churches have been faithful to the Prayer Book tradition. Some of these remain in the "high" church tradition and some in the "low." I believe that given the valid consecration of their Bishops, and the spiritual life they lead in the orthodox tradition of Anglicanism, we are in true Communion with them, even though they are not attached to the Archbishop of Canterbury or the various structures of Lambeth. Some of these continuing churches have a charismatic influence and quality. Still, their adherence to the Prayer Book grants them a steadiness of mind on which they rely. The theological substance abides.

And so what of the American Anglican Council, the Network, and Forward in Faith, North America? We continue to have common cause with these organizations, but we recognize our differences, as well as our contribution.

The American Anglican Council is, for the most part, an evangelical group that has stood courageously against the sexual revisionism of the Episcopal Church. They are, for the most part, adherents of the new liturgical rites, and many for the ordination of women to the priesthood. Their great virtue is their allegiance to the Scripture as the Word of God, their proclamation of that Word, and Christian missions. From our point of view, they are mistaken in their acceptance of the ordination of women.

But what is most necessary for them is a discovery of, and return to, the spiritual substance of the authentic Prayer Book. They will find in it a better articulation of their biblical understanding, derived through

the teaching of the greatest saints of Christendom. One hopes that time, and the inevitable theological disputes that will arise, shall make a way for us all to return to the theological clarity that only the Prayer Book, the Ordinal, and the Thirty-nine Articles can provide to the Anglican Communion.

Forward in Faith, North America has also had our allegiance for many years now. Most of those who belong to this organization are of a "high" church liturgical tradition. They have been courageously steadfast in their opposition to the ordination of women in the priesthood. Catholic order has been of supreme importance to them, as it should be. And they also have entered bravely into common cause with the American Anglican Council, and the Network, for the sake of the orthodox cause in the Anglican Communion. But, for the most part, they have been slow to recognize that the substance of their religion does not abide solely in catholic order, but also and more fundamentally, in the substance of faith and practice so clearly and beautifully articulated in the Prayer Book tradition.

When I sat down to write this article, someone asked what I was going to write about and I told him I was going to say plainly how we are right and everyone else is wrong! That of course was said completely in jest and with the awareness of how presumptuous this all sounds. But I write it nonetheless, for the following reason.

If the Anglican Communion is ever to regain a modicum of true unity, it will have to be not just through common liturgical preferences, or praise music, or meeting all the requirements for sacramental validity. It will come through a common theological mind that knows what, and why, we believe in God the blessed Trinity, what and who Jesus is, what he has done, and what and who the Holy Ghost is. Our teaching of the nature of the Church will derive from this, and not only the structure of the church, but the character and definition of moral life within the Church. In other words, there must be an intelligent account of Theology so that we can have a common mind in and of and by and with Christ Jesus.

The only theological mind that has been truly shared in Anglicanism has been that of the traditional formularies – the Prayer Book, the Ordinal, and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. When the new liturgies were forced down the throat of her membership, the Episcopal Church gave up the substance of our theological inheritance, and the way in which it was inculcated in the lives of faithful Episcopalians. We did not memorize a confession of faith, but we lived by and through a way of praying that had the substance of our religion woven into liturgy. It was not antique language or aesthetic sensibility, it was the form and substance of what was said. How it was said conformed to the depth and wonder and mystery and gravity and joy of what was said. By dispensing with the integrity, the wholeness of our way of praying with the Prayer Book, we poured out the baby with the bath. The theology was diluted to teach a contemporary notion of Christianity, and not the wealth and richness of the Catholic and Reformed traditions made one. The subsequent fragmentation of spirituality and morality was sure to follow.

What should be our perspective, now, at St. Johns? Are we right and everyone else wrong? That is not the question. We are as all are in the Body of Christ. We are beggars in Spirit, looking to Christ Jesus for

grace and giving thanks to God for it. Each churchmanship that I have mentioned has a place in the Body of Christ. Each has a contribution. Our Lord looks with favor on all those who strive to love him with heart and soul and mind, both those who use the contemporary liturgies and those like St. John's who hold to the Prayer Book. It cannot be doubted that it will take some time for Anglicans to recognize the need for theological unity. When and how the church shall regain her mind is a difficult question.

But the beginning for the present Anglican Communion has been made, in truth, with the rewriting of the constitution of the Anglican Church of Nigeria. The traditional formularies are necessary and of incalculable benefit to guide the mind of Anglican Christians.

And in this, we at St. John's, beset with "our manifold sins and wickedness," are able to rejoice at the inheritance of the Prayer Book. We pray that our mother Church of England will breathe life into what still abides legally for her as the official standard of doctrine and discipline - the Prayer Book. And then, perhaps, the Holy Ghost will fill us anew, and we will once again return to being a church, a participant in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, with the beauty and wisdom, the solemnity and joy, of the Anglican way.

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