

**Trinity Season, 2006**  
***True Unity by the Cross of Christ***  
***For the Spread of the Gospel***

*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).*

*For the love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not thenceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. . . And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14-18).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings in the matchless Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We write as your Pastors in the Kingdom of God, out of love for the Living Lord, reverence for His holy Word, and a longing for all men and women to come to a saving knowledge of the Savior of the world. Out of our overwhelming desire for the spread of the Gospel, we write to you about the particular need for greater unity with our fellow Christians among orthodox Anglicans, especially the Anglican Province in America. Our Lord's words above have convinced us that unity among the brethren is critical for effective proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus prayed, "That they may be one . . . that the world may believe." It is therefore our conviction, compelled by Christ's prayer, that the time is at hand for Anglicans committed to the Faith once delivered, including the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Anglican Province of America, to form unions to the greatest extent possible for the sake of the Gospel. To this end we have entitled our letter, *True Unity by the Cross of Christ for the Spread of the Gospel*.

We come to the aforementioned call on our lives with unanimous consensus among the Bishops. It was the late Rt. Rev. William H. S. Jerdan who began many years ago gathering the Bishops of the Reformed Episcopal Church to meet, to pray and seek God's will. At one of the initial meetings, he shared the burden on his heart that no final action would be taken without unanimity. He was also a man of God strongly committed to true unity among faithful Anglicans. He was the first Reformed Episcopal Bishop ever to extend the hand of evangelical fellowship to an Episcopal Bishop and Diocese, namely the Rt. Rev. Fitzsimons Allison of the Diocese of South Carolina. The Rt. Rev. James C. West, who participated in the writing of this letter before his untimely departure to be with the Lord, continued the *koinonia* in Christ that Bishop Jerdan had begun. Only a few months before our beloved brother's passing, he concelebrated with the Rt. Rev. Ed Salmon, the Ordinary of the Diocese of the Southeast. With God's help, we have followed the holy example of the Diocese of the Southeast with our complete, concurrent resolve to work together with fellow, faithful Anglican believers to the greatest extent

possible. What Bishop Jerdan started, and Bishop West continued, has spread to all of the Bishops of the Reformed Episcopal Church. Furthermore, as the Lord has led together the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Anglican Province of America, the APA Bishops have expressed the same practice of unanimous agreement in all decisions.

Therefore, what we offer to you by way of godly admonition emerges from unity among ourselves. We dare not call for union among faithful Anglicans if we are not united. For so long we have watched tragic fragmentation develop among the Anglican family in this part of the world. The cause has been largely due to the erosion of the Gospel and faithfulness to God's Word in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada. Unfortunately most of the splintering has been needless. Group after group has formed around personalities, instead of the Gospel. The result has been the proliferation of around fifty (at last count) different Anglican jurisdictions mostly too small to number. Instead of joining already established churches such as the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Anglican Province of America, others have been created.

For the first time, however, we see the Lord opening a door for godly, Biblical Anglicans to reverse further fracturing. To quote the Rev. Dr. James I. Packer, "It's about time for Christians who recite the creed and mean it to come together for fellowship and witness regardless of the denominational identity."<sup>1</sup> In the past, divisions caused by false teaching have allowed true believers to unite around the Truth of God's Word, starting with the great Ecumenical Councils. Those Councils that crafted the foundational creedal statements of the Church united Christianity. Heresy divides. Orthodoxy unites.

We bear witness to you that something similar appears to be developing among orthodox Anglican Christians. As you may recall, in 2003 we sadly had to bring to a conclusion our ecumenical dialogue with the Episcopal Church after it approved and consecrated a practicing homosexual to the Episcopate. Undoubtedly, the Word of God states that homosexual practices are wrong for any minister (Deacon, Presbyter or Bishop) as well as a lay person. Yet, the violation of Scripture by the Episcopal Church became objectively known to us when a specific clergyman living in sin with a male partner was elected, confirmed and consecrated to the Episcopate. This unethical behavior in direct violation of Holy Scripture provoked massive divisions among Anglicans and other Christians, as they one by one severed their ecumenical discussions with the ECUSA. At the same time, this unorthodox division has also become the occasion for new, orthodox alignments among and with the faithful followers of Christ and His Word in the Anglican Communion.

The Reformed Episcopal Church and the Anglican Province of America are part of the new alignment. It has taken initial shape for us by means of the Church of Nigeria of the Anglican Communion. Their Primate, the Most Rev. Peter Akinola, has entered for the first time into a covenant union on behalf of his province with the REC/APA. This agreement, approved by our own General Committee, brings us into communion with the Church of Nigeria, the largest province in the Anglican Communion.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Shepherds after God's Own Heart." *Faith and Renewal* 15/3 (1990): 12-17.

The REC and the APA are also members of the Common Cause Partners commissioned by the Primates of the Anglican Communion to gather the fragments. The Moderator is the Rt. Rev. Robert Duncan of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. If you will recall, he spoke to our General Council in Houston 2002; our hearts were warmed as he brought greetings from the faithful remnant still in the ECUSA. Since that time, he has emerged as the leader of the Common Cause Partners. The REC and the APA are two jurisdictions of nine from Canada and the USA.

In addition, last year (2005) an Anglican Primate, the Most Rev. Gregory Venables, spoke at our General Council at St. Alban's Cathedral (APA) in Orlando, Florida. Our Bishops had first met him at a Missions Conference in Nassau at the invitation of the Most Rev. Drexel Gomez, the Anglican Primate of the West Indies. The Most Rev. Leonard W. Riches and the Rt. Rev. Messrs Royal U. Grote and Ray R. Sutton were the Bible Teachers for the week along with Archbishop Venables. We found true fellowship in Christ and His Word as the Archbishop preached in Nassau. The same occurred last summer as he once again broke forth the Bread of Life through his preached Word. It was an historic moment when we devoted an entire day of business to learning about evangelism. We speak for all the REC and the APA when we declare that a relationship in Christ was begun, and continues to grow, with Archbishop Venables. We will have more to say about his future involvement with the REC/APA later in this communication.

These positive strides toward a united orthodox Anglican Christendom indicate that the Holy Spirit is indeed drawing godly Anglicans closer together. We are encouraged by what has happened. We even wait in great expectation to see how the Holy Spirit will continue to unite His people. Yet, as motivating as these historic, ecumenical moments in Anglicanism are, our call to true unity by the Cross of Christ is not based on expediency. Others before us, including Bishop William H. S. Jerdan, stepped in faith according to his commitment to Holy Scripture long before the most recent developments. Our conviction follows by standing on the Word of God Written.

We therefore base our call to true unity on Biblical principles. Then we offer some practical suggestions as to how we in the REC/APA and others might be able to move forward . . . together according to a Scriptural model.

### **The Biblical Principles of True Unity**

The most cogent summary of Biblical principles for true unity in the New Testament is the profound prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17). He prays for the unity of which we have been convicted and to which we call ourselves. What Jesus asked of the Father is a mandate for the Church. His mandate in turn becomes the paradigm for unity with other Christians.

The prayer of Christ in John's Gospel does not appear in a vacuum. It is part of the apostle's presentation of Jesus Christ as *Lord of the new creation*. The Evangelist begins his proclamation like the Book of Genesis, "In the beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). This Word became flesh (1:14). Then similar to the creation week of Genesis 1, St. John records how just as Jesus Christ created the World with the Father and the Spirit (Genesis 1:2), He came to bring into existence a new creation in obedience to the Father through the Spirit (John 16:13). He initially created the world out of water (Genesis 1:2), the source of food (vegetation, Genesis 1:11), light (Genesis 1:3, 14) and life (Genesis 1:20, 26). So too the Incarnate Lord of heaven and earth recreates the world by means of new water and the Spirit (John 3), new food (John 6), new light (John 8), and new, resurrected life (John 11).

Immediately after Christ’s resurrection of Lazarus and the triumphal entry, we arrive at an extended section having to do with teachings and events around the Last Supper. The themes turn us from Christ the Lord of the New Creation to specific instructions for this New Creation, His Church. Just as Adam and Eve were given a cultural mandate to be fruitful, have dominion, and to guard and cultivate the garden (Genesis 1:26; 2:15), the new creation of the Church receives similar instruction in terms of the first Holy Communion. Christ gives the disciples a new mandate, the Latin *mandatum*, from which we derive the name for that first Maundy Thursday. This love for God, and for one another, is what will raise up the new humanity by uniting it. Clearly division had already begun among them. One had just betrayed Him and them. Our Lord made His way to Gethsemane with grief in His heart over Judas. The disciples had even started to bicker with each other over who would have privileged status at Christ’s right hand. No sooner had He told them to live out and into the New Creation by loving one another, than they had conflict in their midst.

Finally, the disciples arrive at Gethsemane with the message of how the Church, through loving one another, is to live like and model the new creation. Christ goes off to pray. He prays for what He had just taught His disciples, unity. As we examine this prayer in full, there are five principles.

First, the prayer connects the unity of the disciples to the moment of the Cross. Christ’s “hour has come” (17:1). It is the eve of the crucifixion. Jesus speaks to the Father with a sense of urgency. He knows that “He has finished the work which thou gavest Me to do” (17:4). The Greek word, “finished,” is the same one He would declare on the Cross, “It is finished.” He can now pray for the unity of the disciples.

The association of the Cross with unity indicates that unity is based on the Passion of Christ. Unity is not “solved through easy humanistic ideas of fellowship and brotherhood, but by the hard road of the Cross.”<sup>2</sup> St. Paul explains in specific, theological details how the unity for which Jesus prayed is centered in His own death: “if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not thenceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). The Pauline interpretation of the death of Christ is that all those in Christ die with Him on the Cross. One who dies with Christ so dies to his own self that he is united with all those who do the same. This is the way of the Cross that leads to the path of true unity.

---

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, [1936] 1990), p. 7.

St. John utters the same association between the Gospel and fellowship in his first letter. He writes, “that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Archbishop Michael Ramsey states, “No book in the New Testament is more emphatic in its teaching about the fellowship of the love of the brotherhood than the first Epistle of John; and no book is more insistent that the fellowship springs from and bears witness to the events of Jesus in the flesh,” namely His propitiation for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). “It is indeed a paradox that the death of Jesus, an event of utter isolation from men, should be the means of fellowship between men and God, and between men and one another.”<sup>3</sup>

Herein is true unity. It is not union based on simplistic ecclesiastical schemes. It is oneness the only way God and humanity, and humanity with humanity, can find real, lasting cohesion. The Death of deaths, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the foundation of union.

Second, through the “hour that is come,” the Cross, Jesus prays for the oneness of the people of God to reflect the oneness of the Godhead. Our Lord asks the Father, “That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21). The “us” is a reference to the Holy Trinity. As such, this request fits precisely with the new creation message of the Gospel as a whole. In the beginning of the world, the Triune God was first referred to in terms of “us.” God says, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). Humanity uniquely was made to be a mirror reflecting God. In its oneness it would image the One, True God. Yet, the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, marred the image of God in mankind. One immediate effect of sin was the disruption of true unity. The first murder occurred when brother turned against brother; Cain killed Abel. Later in Genesis, murder is defined as destroying the image of God (Genesis 9:6). To hurt a human is to attack God because a person is in His image. Sin cracked the image of God in mankind. It was not done away with; it was darkened. Evil to one another, including strife, resulted in the divisive, hateful, sin. It blurred humanity’s ability to see God’s oneness. A blinded fragmented humanity consequently began to perceive God as multiple, many gods, not as one. Is it any wonder, polytheism, the worship of many gods, develops soon after in the history of religion? Mankind rejected the One God, smudged the created image, lost unity, murdered, and turned to many gods.

In John 17, Christ prays for the reversal of the divisive, hateful, image of God damaging, impact of sin. By requesting unity to offset division, He fulfills one of the primary objectives of the new creation theme, the restored image of God in humanity. He recreates the pristine image of God through the Cross. Once the image of the Oneness of God is returned, mankind can again mirror this oneness through true unity. Humans through Christ can treat one another with respect and dignity. Yet, they can be truly united only by honoring each other as the image of God. If to do harm to any person is tacitly to attack the image of God, how much more is it wrong for Christians to speak and

---

<sup>3</sup> Ramsey, pp. 48, 21.

act evil toward one another, the redeemed image of Christ? It is worse because in Christ's mind, "the unity which comes to men through the Cross is the eternal unity of God Himself."<sup>4</sup>

Third, Christ prays for a unity sanctified by the Truth, which is the Word of God. Jesus requests of the Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Then He further explains, "And for their sakes I sanctified myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:19). Christ's logic in His prayer is the following: the unity of the Godhead for which Christ prays is through sanctification (To be set apart) by the Truth. Truth therefore plays a primary role in accomplishing the unity for which Jesus prayed. Truth draws the faithful together; falsehood separates them. True Truth and True Unity are not mutually exclusive. The former promotes the latter according to Christ.

What is the Truth in the above statement of Jesus? Significantly, the Truth referred to is in the third person; it is an objective Truth. Christ asks of the Father, "Sanctify them through *thy* truth." It is the Truth of the Father, the one to whom Jesus prays. Further, Jesus qualifies exactly the Truth of the Father. It is His Word. He adds, "Thy word is truth." This Truth, of which Jesus speaks, is that which proceeds from the mouth of God the Father. It is propositional, verbally communicated reality. No doubt Truth is Christ's Person as well; it is Incarnational. Jesus declares earlier in the Gospel of John, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6). It is this personal aspect of Truth that is probably implied in the rest of Jesus' statement about being sanctified through Truth. He adds, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they might be sanctified through the truth" (17:19). There is a parallel between the setting apart of Christ's Person and being sanctified through the Truth. Knowing Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior is vital to understanding God's verbal Word, the Holy Scriptures (v. 17).

The disciples of Christ are to be unified around a shared commitment to Christ and the authority of God's Holy Word. In the ancient, ecumenical Church councils this was graphically portrayed. It was the custom of the early Church bishops and teachers, meeting to address the heresies of their day, to sit around the manuscript(s) of the Holy Scriptures resting on the emperor's throne. They were not worshipping the Bible. They were underscoring their notion of authority, the Holy Scriptures. This was the Word of the King of kings above all other words, indeed over prince as well as prelate. The great Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century necessarily sought to restore this belief in the supreme authority of Scripture to the Church. What the Reformation at the end of the Middle Ages attempted, was nothing less than an effort to regain what had always been, until corruptions entered the late Medieval Church.

The Church of England was part of the important move of the Holy Spirit in the 1500s. For this reason, the authority of the Holy Scriptures is emphasized in the liturgy and doctrinal statements of the period. Thomas Cranmer, the architect of reforming worship into the Book of Common Prayer, centered the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer on the reading, recitation, singing and even praying of the Holy Scriptures, especially the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ramsey, p. 49.

Psalms. The service of Holy Communion was joined to and preceded by the ancient catechetical service known as ante communion. The ante communion, like the Daily Office, was essentially the reading, praying, confessing (Creed), and preaching of Holy Scripture prior to participation in the Eucharist. Large amounts of Scripture were also restored to the lectionary, the reading of Scripture in the Service. The sense of the ancient church as the people of God gathered around the Word of the Lord was therefore reinstated in the liturgy and life of the English Church at the time of the Reformation. It is this heritage of Biblical fidelity which we have upheld, by which we are bound and through which we have true unity.

All too often nowadays, there is confusion about adherence to the authority of Scripture in North American Anglicanism, though this is not so in the REC/APA, nor in the largest part of the wider Anglican Communion that is called the Global South. Much of the challenge to the priority of Holy Writ in the northern part of the Anglican world has been created by the unfortunate misunderstanding of Richard Hooker's alleged maxim, "Scripture, tradition and reason." The great, 16<sup>th</sup> century Anglican theologian actually never taught that tradition and reason are parallel authorities with the Word of God written. Instead, tradition and reason are to be subordinate to the Scriptures. The Word of God written was understood by Hooker as the final, unchangeable authority of faith and life. He asserted, "the word of God is his heavenly truth touching matters of eternal life revealed and uttered to men: Unto prophets and apostles by immediate divine inspiration; from them to us by their books and writings . . . we therefore have no word of God but the Scripture," and that "in this present question we are, when we name the *word of God*, always to mean the *Scripture only*."<sup>5</sup> As someone has noted, if Richard Hooker believed in a three-legged stool of Scripture, tradition and reason, then one of the legs should be much, much longer than the others, namely the canonical Scriptures. Perhaps better stated, Hooker believed in Scripture and *its tradition* and *its reason*.

Jesus prays that His Church would be sanctified by the Truth. The Truth referenced in His prayer is first verbal (17:17), then Incarnational (17:19). The dynamic between the Word spoken and the Word Incarnate is the means of sanctification to the end of unity. Without a commitment to the Christ and His Word there simply cannot be the unity for which Christ prayed. With it, we are obligated to work for that which Christ the Living Word petitioned the Father, unity around adherence to His unerring Truth of Holy Writ with all those who love our Divine Lord and Savior.

Fourth, the unity for which the Lord prays comes only through the Church. Christ prays accordingly for the future formation of a unified Church because the world will only know of His type of unity through the kingdom of God. He formulates His petition as, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). The Church is the context, indeed the new world order, in which the unity of the Godhead is known. The Greek word for Church is *ecclesia*. It literally means, "called out ones." Biblically and theologically, the word means so much more. Scriptures only speak of three categories of races in redemptive history. There is Jew, Gentile and the Church. The Church as *ecclesia* is a "third race," "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, V, xxi, 2; (Vol. II, p. 85- Hooker's emphasis).

holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). The irony is that it is only in the Church, the redemptive historical third race, where there is neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:27-29). Race is not to be a factor because all racial boundaries are transcended by Christ. Among the people of God, there are "neither Jews nor Gentiles, but . . . a third race, whose unity lies not in their opinions but in the redemptive act whereby they were begotten and born anew."<sup>6</sup> The Church is the place of ultimate, eschatological oneness. Richard Neuhaus writes, "God is one, and all who are God's are one. The church is the communal articulation of that truth."<sup>7</sup>

Our Lord's great prayer implies that "the fact of Christ includes the fact of the Church." The one who was called Saul met this reality on the way to Damascus. He was knocked to the ground by the appearance of the Living, Resurrected Christ. Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul was killing Christians, yet Jesus spoke of His oneness with them (the Church) as though He considered this persecution an assault on His Person. Saul received Christ and entered the Church. He was a new person known as Paul. Later the same Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "As the body is one and hath many members . . . so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). John Calvin in his commentary on this passage even referred to Christ as the Church, since the apostle simultaneously embraced the Cross and the realm of the Cross, the Church.

The Church as the realm of the Cross is the new world where a sinner learns the way of the Cross and self denial. The self sacrifice of Christ is to translate into a community of self denial. The Lord told His followers, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). How does this happen? Through union and communion with Him who denied Himself, the Holy Spirit "brings the self-giving of God into the convert's life [and] the self-centered nexus of appetites and impulses is broken, and the life is brought into a new centre and a new environment, Christ and His body."<sup>8</sup> The Church is not to be about I, me, mine, or my agenda, my wants, my preferences, my churchmanship. It is the one place where Christ's self-sacrifice takes over ego. Separate selfhoods are swallowed up by Christ's passion and giving to one another. Self denial gives way to others' preferences, indeed even expressions of churchmanship in the Church. Death to self by the way of the Cross can only be found in the Church.

"From the Church therefore the Christian never escapes; it is part of his own existence since it is a part of Christ Himself. And without the Church, the Christian does not grow, since Christ is fulfilled in the totality of all its members."<sup>9</sup> The temptation constantly before a Christian is to exclude certain parts of the Body of Christ. How much easier it is to escape to a world or a church where everyone seems to be the same. No real self denial is required. **Yet, to do so is to flee the Church, the only Bride of Christ.** It is to

---

<sup>6</sup> Ramsey, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Ramsey, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsey, p. 38. Archbishop Ramsey places a definite article in front of Christ, literally reading, "the Christ," which makes for an awkward flow. I have paraphrased the quote by removing the definite article for a smoother reading. Nevertheless, there is still only one, true Christ, the Christ. The definite sense, or meaning, of Jesus Christ is therefore not intended to be altered.

abandon her as the kingdom of the third race that encompasses all other races, styles, gifts, personalities, even differences in churchmanship. To run from the hard road of the Cross, however, is never to know the oneness of which Christ spoke, and for which He prayed. In the end, the spread of the Gospel itself is undermined.

Fifth, the true unity for which Christ prays is essential for the spread of the Gospel. Christ speaks the following words to the Father, “That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). Unity among Christians is the precursor to and necessary for witness. Charles Colson writes, “Unity is the attitude from which the church’s actions flow. It is the prerequisite for effective witness.”<sup>10</sup> All too often churches assume that simply evangelizing will help their parishes grow. Newcomers are brought. If they arrive only to discover infighting, backbiting, criticism and bitterness, they will not return. The spread of the Gospel will be impeded. Growth will probably not occur. To quote Colson again, “The message is clear [in John 17:21]. The world isn’t looking at our tracts and rallies and telecasts and study manuals. It is looking at us and how we behave. When it fails to see the unity of Jesus’ followers – the church – it fails to see the validation that Christ is indeed the Son of the living God.”<sup>11</sup>

For Jesus Christ, the above five principles begin with unity based on the Cross and take us to the spread of the Gospel. All of us who truly do call on the Name of the Lord believe in these realities. They are mandated by Jesus Christ. For this reason we bid our brothers and sisters in Christ to embrace what has been expounded in John 17. The question now is a practical one.

We have begun an historic process of union between the REC and the APA. We have done so with the conviction that we are one as Anglican Christians. We love the same Lord Jesus Christ. We embrace the same classical Anglican standards of Holy Scripture, the historic Book of Common Prayer, and the Articles of Religion. We share a common desire to see the Gospel of our Lord spread.

Even in our pasts, ecumenical concerns have appeared all through our histories. The REC was begun primarily because its founder, the Rt. Rev. George David Cummins, believed the Protestant Episcopal Church was going to exclude the Evangelical, Low Churchman. He stepped away from PECUSA to form a separate jurisdiction where these views could be freely allowed and encouraged, where fellowship with other Protestant evangelicals would be welcome, where the office of Morning Prayer could continue as a main service on Sundays, and where the ideals of the Reformation would be maintained.

The APA, going all the way back to the American Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of America, also wanted to continue in classical Anglicanism as the Church of the Middle Way. Initially the issue was the challenge to catholic order presented by the unprecedented ordination of women to holy orders in the 1970s. They also understood that the Faith once delivered was rapidly eroding, which led to the redefinition of the historic ministry of the Church. They concluded that classical Anglicans were being

---

<sup>10</sup> Charles Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Colson, p. 96.

marginalized and even systematically excluded from the Episcopal Church. They too found themselves in a separate jurisdiction to preserve evangelical faith and catholic order. At the same time, they still engaged dialogue with the Episcopal Church and other continuing Anglicans. Their Presiding Bishop even became friends with the Rt. Rev. William H. S. Jerdan of the Reformed Episcopal Church. Again we see Bishop Jerdan's vision for new alignments among faithful Anglicans. He was the first Reformed Episcopal Bishop to encourage communication and communion with continuing Anglicans like the APA. He and others sought fellowship as well with other Evangelical Christians. Yet it is certain that his and our deepest commitments of unity were and should start with those in our own branch of the kingdom of God, those among the Anglican family with commitment to Christ, the absolute authority of the Word of God written, and the classic Anglican formularies of faith, worship and polity.

Within the Anglican family, the REC has been primarily low-church and the APA has had a higher church emphasis. Together in Christ we have been led to consider how we might unite to recreate the old, historic Episcopal Church of low and high churchmanship by Scripture, the historic prayer book and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. This was the vision that Bishop Cummins called the "old paths," which he wanted to maintain. Although a low churchman, he asked a high churchman (Augustus Muhlenberg) to be one of the first bishops of the REC. By this action, he indicated that he truly desired the old, re-formed, historic classically Anglican Church: low and high churchmen gathered together in one Church under the Word and Sacrament of Christ. This was also the passion of many of the concerned churchmen who began the continuing Anglican churches. More importantly, this is the will of our Lord as expressed in His high priestly prayer. The REC and the APA therefore have an opportunity to fulfill the original vision of their founders going all the way back to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The challenge is a practical one. Our churches have had predominantly two different styles of churchmanship. To unite we face many challenges regarding convictions and practice. In the remainder of our letter, we offer some pastoral suggestions for living into Christ's high priestly petition for unity.

### **In Essentials . . . In Non Essentials . . . and in All Things Charity**

"In essentials unity; in non essentials liberty; in all things charity." This statement has been attributed to St. Augustine as well as a number of early and Medieval theologians. Regardless of its origin, it rings true to the teaching of the Holy Scripture. It captures the distinction of the New Testament between things necessary to be believed and things indifferent (the word *adiaphora* is often used for the expression, things indifferent). It has been therefore a defining guide for ecumenical considerations in the history of the Church, and for one-hundred-twenty years has been on the masthead of the *Episcopal Recorder*, an historic magazine of the REC. It is offered as an excellent application of the principles of unity as presented in Christ's prayer of John 17.

First, “in essentials unity,” establishes that there are certain realities in Holy Scripture that all Christians must hold in common. Christ’s prayer calls for “sanctification through Truth” (17:19). The prayer of Jesus is not for unity for unity’s sake but unity for and in the truth. Furthermore, the truth is not determined by individual judgment. It has been believed by Christ’s One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Church has agreed on certain, irreducible essentials of the Holy Scriptures. For Anglicanism, they are enumerated in the Creeds, the historic prayer book and the Articles of Religion. C. S. Lewis called this common ground of truth “mere Christianity,” comparing it to “the great level viaduct which stands solidly over the dips and valleys of heresy and apostasy through the years.”<sup>12</sup> Classical Anglicanism is not inclusive of every wind of doctrine. It should instead be comprehensive, circumscribed by the parameters of our historic formularies.

In these essentials we in the REC and the APA have unity. In a day when the Faith has been all but given over among many North American Churches, we believe it is a powerful witness that we hold so much in common with one another. We encourage our churches to teach unrelentingly the Holy Scriptures as understood by the catholic creeds, the prayer book and the Articles of Religion. These standards define for us as Anglican Christians the fundamental teachings on which we are to major.

Second, “in non essentials liberty.” Even though we share so much in common, our different pasts in terms of churchmanship present a challenge. Some among us take a more evangelical or catholic approach to our standards, particularly the Articles of Religion. These approaches provide the contours of Anglican liturgical, spiritual and devotional practices. Some wear more or less elaborate vestments. Many among us have found food for their soul in a range of strong, historic Christians: St. Benedict, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and even in Roman Catholic devotional writers such as John of the Cross, Brother Lawrence, Francis de Sales, Blaise Pascal and Francois Fenelon, to name only a few. We also represent a variety of devotional practices concerning reading the Bible, daily prayer, sacramental observance, spiritual gifts and devotion to the saints and the Mother of Jesus.

As important and wonderful as these beliefs and practices may be, they are not essential. They are non essential. They are things indifferent according to the language of the New Testament. They are minor issues compared to the major teachings we all hold in common. The great temptation and potential tragedy is to allow things non essential to become points of division. We believe Jesus would not approve. Neither would St. Paul. He declares that liberty should be granted in matters indifferent: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Questions have been raised about matters touching the Articles of Religion. In Anglicanism there have been evangelical and catholic ways of interpreting the Articles. According to the historic preface to the articles in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, it seems that a normal, grammatical and historical interpretation of the Articles of Religion

---

<sup>12</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), p. 148.

was the intended hermeneutical method. This approach would re-enforce the essential/non essential distinction. It would not commend an exclusively evangelical or catholic interpretation. At times, a literal/grammatical interpretation would allow for both, but always stopping short of Roman Catholic and more extreme Protestant dogma. Some articles describe teachings as not found in “Holy Writ,” meaning anywhere in Scripture (Article 28). In other articles it is stated that a teaching is not commanded by Christ, which means it could be allowed but not required because it is based on some other part of the Scriptures (Article 25). Certain teachings are condemned as “repugnant to the plain words of Scripture” (Article 28).

Part of the genius of Anglicanism, therefore, has been its clearly defined standards on first order doctrines, while at the same time it has allowed for a breadth of belief regarding second order doctrines. For example, the debates about Calvinism and Arminianism occur over fifty years after the prayer book and the Articles of Religion. The Church of England never adopted the Canons of Dort in 1620 that resulted from this debate, indicating that Anglicans would not be pulled one direction or the other.

The approach of freedom within defined doctrinal parameters has resulted in greater unity and less fracture. It requires resisting the temptation to permit “isms” and movements from pulling the theology of the Church to one extreme or the other. To some, this is not pure enough. They have sought a kind of absolute doctrinal purity that can only exist in heaven. This was the error of the Anabaptists. John Calvin addressed this problem when he wrote, “Among Christians there ought to be so great a dislike of schism, as that they may always avoid it so far as lies in their power. That there ought to prevail among them such a reverence for the ministry of the word and the sacraments that wherever they perceive these things to be, there they must consider the church to exist . . . nor need it be of any hindrance that some points of doctrine are not quite so pure, seeing that there is scarcely a church which has not retained some remnants of former ignorance.”<sup>13</sup>

The same tendency for purity beyond the standards of the Faith has also appeared among those who are more catholic in orientation. Liturgical vestment and procedures, Eucharistic devotion such as the Benediction, and veneration of the saints, have all too often become tests for who is “truly catholic.” Such over emphasis on secondary, adiaphora matters in the Anglican context has led to a kind of quest for catholic purity. Such concerns have often developed into their own kind of unwarranted exclusivity, becoming equally divisive among fellow Anglican Christians who love the Lord God, His Word, and adhere to the primary standards of the Faith (BCP, Articles and so forth). In classic Anglicanism there is room for divergence of belief and practice at the secondary level of doctrine and practice. The Creed and the Articles set the doctrinal parameters. The Book of Common Prayer, which actually says very little about ritual and ceremonial, establishes liturgical boundaries that have permitted high and low churchmen to worship together. This approach has fostered more than tolerance; it has called for charity in things non essential.

---

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin to William Farrell, from Strasbourg, 24 October 1538, in H. Beveridge and J. Bonnet, eds. *Selected Book of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 4, trans. D. Constable (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), 101-102.

The Anglican Way of being a Christian offers great liberty within parameters. There has been historically the freedom of thought and expression. This freedom has resulted in the heights of Christian culture: music, art, science and so forth. The temptation is always to erect false fences to limit freedom for fear that liberty might result in sin. This has happened on both the evangelical and catholic ends of the spectrum of Anglican comprehensiveness. Legalism can appear in the externals of Puritan simplicity or elaborate vestment. Both the Bible and Church Fathers have been used to forge a kind of false fundamentalism contrary to the spirit of the Scriptures and the Patristics. To prevent this ungodly rigidity, the Church ought to be careful to place the limits neither beyond nor short of God's eternal standard. When it does, the extent of Christian liberty becomes apparent. No doubt certain insecurities are awakened. The proper response is faithfulness, trusting that God will honor commitment to His Word even when it means allowing something in the name of true Christian liberty.

Third, "in all things charity." The call for charity in "all things" covers everything. Holy Scripture speaks of love as the primary motive for all Christian belief and behavior in all matters all the time. The classic text is 1 Corinthians 13. This passage commands patience, believing the best, not being easily provoked, not thinking evil of fellow believers and so forth. St. Paul's point is that love should reach into the total life of a believer in Christ. He even concludes that it is greater than faith and hope.

The Christian virtue of love should not be thought of as only applicable to the category of "all things" beyond things essential and things non essential. A charitable spirit is even to pervade strongly held, non negotiable beliefs. St. Paul exhorts the Ephesian Church to, "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 5). Just because something is absolute does not mean a believer is allowed to behave in an ungodly way in his assertion of Biblical reality.

Furthermore, love is called for regarding non essentials. The New Testament also has much to say about the way in which things indifferent, adiaphora, are to be addressed. There were people in the early Church who had deep convictions about all kinds of issues that were non essential, what one could eat and not eat, when one worshipped (Sabbaths), and so forth. The writers of Scripture time and again called for love of the brethren, forgiveness, and showing deference to those who disagree on secondary issues. St. Paul even commands Christians to forego, even give up, certain non essentials for the sake of the peace and the unity of the Body of Christ.

Whatever else is not covered by essential or non essential categories should be lived in charity. This category of "all things" concerns such matters as how we conduct meetings, the day to day work of the ministry, the color of the carpet in the church and other trivial, albeit important, church-splitting details. These matters are not essential or non essential to belief or practice. Yet they touch so much of what goes on at the heart of the Christian life and ministry. Love should circumscribe even these so called insignificant issues.

It should not go without notice that many of the worst disagreements in ministry often have to do neither with essentials, nor even with non essential matters of faith and life.

Rather, Christians tend to disagree and become disagreeable over the least significant concerns. This pattern can be found among the earliest conflicts recorded in the New Testament, throughout church history, and into the present Church. The corrective in every case is and can only be charity, simply extending the love of God, and all that this powerful fruit of the Spirit entails, to our fellow Christians, yes, even to non-Christians.

Thus, we believe that our Lord's high priestly prayer in John 17, lived out in unity regarding essentials, liberty with reference to non essentials, and charity pertaining to all matters, offers a way for us to move forward with unification between the REC and the APA. We do not want to move too slowly nor too quickly in order that the balance between essential and non essential might be maintained. To move toward our desired goal of merger, yet not to step forward without careful prayer, discussion and growth, a Federation of Anglican Churches in the Americas (FACA) has been created to allow separate organizational structures. At the same time, through FACA we want to forge a deeper union between us. It will facilitates growing into the unity that we possess. Articles of federation have been adopted by federated partners. Archbishop Greg Venables has agreed to be an Archepiscopal patron (adviser) to the Federation, offering his godly wisdom to guide us while at the same time linking us with the thinking of the Global South Primates. As the Scriptures say, "There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors."

This past April in Dallas, our committees gathered for their spring meeting at Church of the Holy Communion, REC. The first assembly of FACA was also held just prior to the other meetings. Representatives from a number of Anglican jurisdictions attended, expressing their interest to take part. Their constituencies totaled over four hundred parishes, the largest group of faithful Anglicans in North America. FACA therefore also helps form a subordinate structure to the Common Cause Partners promoting greater bi-lateral union among the fragments of continuing Anglicanism.

We ask for your prayers and support of FACA. It offers a way forward between the REC and the APA as well as among many other Anglican jurisdictions. By the grace of God, it will play a role in the larger realignment of Anglicanism. Our prayer is not only for unity, but for a unity by the Cross of Christ for the spread of the Gospel. Perhaps Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has stated it best, "In recent years the major Christian churches have taken steps towards reconciliation, but these measures are far too slow; the world is perishing a hundred times more quickly."<sup>14</sup> The famous Oxford scholar, Edward Pusey, wrote similarly in his classic work, *Eirenicon*.

The strife with unbelief stretches and strains the powers of the Church everywhere; Satan's armies are united, at least in the warfare against "the truth as it is in Jesus." Are those who would maintain the faith in Him alone to be at variance? . . . we long to see the Church united; to all who . . . desire to see intercommunion restored among those who hold the faith of the undivided Church, we say, "This is not our longing only; this is impressed on our Liturgy by

---

<sup>14</sup> Templeton address, given at Guildhall, London, England, 11 May 1983; excerpts printed in "Return to God; Solzhenitsyn Speaks Out," *Time* 23 May 1983, 57.

those who were before us; for this, whenever we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, we are bound to pray, that God ‘would inspire continually the Universal Church with the Spirit of truth, unity and concord.’” For this I pray daily. For this I would gladly die. “O Lord, tarry not.” (p. 150)

For this we too need to pray! The world is indeed lost without the Gospel; North America requires re-evangelizing. It will not happen without the union of Christendom, beginning with that branch of the Church that was so instrumental in the founding of this great part of the world. Orthodox Anglicanism has in its spiritual DNA the capacity to lead the way. We in the REC and the APA must set an example of the way forward to reach the world for Christ. Many are watching, waiting and praying for us. Let us not disappoint our Lord who prayed so long ago for us. To this end we call our fellow Christians in the REC, the APA and all who love our Divine Lord and Savior to a true unity by the Cross of Christ for the spread of the Gospel. Amen.

Sincerely, in Christ,  
The Most Rev. Leonard W. Riches  
The Most Rev. Walter H. Grundorf  
The Rt. Rev. Richard J. Boyce  
The Rt. Rev. Charles Dorrington  
The Rt. Rev. Michael Fedechko  
The Rt. Rev. George B. Fincke  
The Rt. Rev. Royal U. Grote, Jr.  
The Rt. Rev. David L. Hicks  
The Rt. Rev. Daniel R. Morse  
The Rt. Rev. Ray R. Sutton  
The Rt. Rev. James C. West