

# Unity Among Orthodox Anglicans: How Do We Get There From Here?

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**MENDING DIVISIONS** between U.S. orthodox Anglicans is in the initial sense a spiritual and organic process, rather than an organizational, institutional one, and should always be guided by the cause of wider Christian unity.

Those were just a few of the assertions made by speakers at a conference at All Saints' Episcopal Church, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania September 30-October 1. It was certainly not the first serious consideration of how to reunite Anglican traditionalists displaced by liberalism in the U.S. Episcopal Church (ECUSA) and fragmented by conflicts among themselves. But it had to be one of the most thoughtful and sobering sessions yet held on the topic.

Some 50 faithful Anglicans came together for the conference titled *The Affirmation of St. Louis: Seeking a Path to Reconciliation and Unity*, co-sponsored by the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen and the Anglican Fellowship of the Delaware Valley (AFDV).

As indicated by the reference to the 1977 *Affirmation*, a key aim of the conference was to consider ways to resolve divisions among extramural Anglican bodies, chiefly those of the U.S. Continuing Church, though traditionalists remaining within ECUSA were included in that focus. Likewise, the FCC—now over 30 years old--has a pan-Anglican membership.

Faithful Anglicans still linked to ECUSA, of course, are themselves represented by several internal organizations, and now often find themselves in anomalous situations created by the theological clash with ECUSA, and between it and the wider Communion. The FCC meeting's venue was a case in point. Though All Saints', a traditional parish affiliated with Forward in Faith, North America (FIF-NA), is still within ECUSA, its rector, the Rev. Eddie Rix, is currently serving there without license from ultra-liberal Pennsylvania Bishop Charles Bennison. Rix is canonically resident in the Anglican Diocese of Lusaka, Zambia, in the province of Central Africa.

**IT WAS** another cleric who defies "normal" Anglican order who kicked off the

FCC conference with a talk on “The Affirmation of St. Louis in Historical Perspective.” The Rt. Rev. David Moyer, former FIF-NA president, is rector of Good Shepherd, Rosemont (PA), a parish still in ECUSA, while also serving as a bishop within the Anglican Church in America (ACA), a part of the global Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC); as episcopal visitor to TAC parishes in England; and an assistant bishop in the “official” Australian province’s Diocese of The Murray (led by Bishop Ross Davies, one of Moyer’s consecrators).

“The lines are blurred, because it’s a new day,” Moyer declared.

He termed the *Affirmation* an “incredibly good” and still-relevant document that recognized that “you can’t have the Church without catholic order.”

“At St. Louis, Anglicans said we will continue to be the Church,” and responded to God’s call for orthodox Anglicans to be united, Moyer stated.

But he noted that that vision started to fade into “absolute scandal” after the 1977 St. Louis Church Congress that produced the *Affirmation* and particularly at and after the Continuum’s 1978 Constitutional Assembly. He said the fragmentation of the movement under the weight of Catholic-Protestant tensions--long felt within “official” Anglicanism—dueling egos, and other strains would likely have been avoided if Continuum had had what it conspicuously lacked: a seasoned bishop or bishops willing to lead this largely lay and clerical movement. As no Episcopal or other Anglican prelates stepped up to the plate, the Continuers were compelled to consecrate new bishops for a new situation (though retired Episcopal Bishop of Springfield, Albert Chambers acted as chief consecrator in that cause).

Not that things have gone well in the Anglican Communion since then, either. Moyer observed that the Continuers said in 1977 what ECUSA orthodox/conservatives are saying today, that they remain in communion with Canterbury and all faithful parts of the Anglican Communion. But--while expressing appreciation for the support the present and former Archbishops of Canterbury gave him after Bishop Bennison moved to depose him—Moyer noted that Canterbury and the Communion are not as they used to be. Unlike one billion Roman Catholics and 400 million Orthodox, “official” Anglicans “have decided that they can disagree on ordained ministry and get along.”

“Unfortunately, the global South primates are not clear on this,” he added. “They’re saying that the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate is not Communion-dividing but that human sexuality is a salvation issue...Jesus says that unless you partake of His Body `you have no life in you.’ That is a salvation issue...When you break catholic order, the order of the Church, that is an act of schism. Which is worse for the Body of Christ, schism or sin?”

Traditionalists, he said, “must say there is no compromise on Christ’s established order of ministry” and govern their communion relationships accordingly. Further, they should accept that the Anglican Communion “does not exist,” because it lacks a common liturgy, an interchangeable ministry, any method of discipline, or a magisterium. He noted that this is increasingly being confirmed by events, such as Nigeria’s recent decision (though based mainly on the sexuality dispute) to stress faith rather than communion with Canterbury in its constitution.

At the same time, Moyer insisted that Anglicans who hold common doctrine and discipline must be united, and seek wider Christian reunion.

“We can’t keep going on week after week without the intention to bring things together,” he said.

“I’m determined to give the rest of my life for the greater unity of the Church,” he declared.

Asked what can be done that has not been done before to unite orthodox Anglicans, Moyer said leaders of the various bodies should “seclude themselves in fasting and prayer until it is accomplished.”

In comments following Moyer’s talk, the Rev. Canon John Hollister, chancellor of the Anglican Catholic Church, noted that, in the 1990s, ACC bishops declared that, as the Church of England had accepted the concept of women’s ordination, communion with Canterbury was no longer “expedient.”

The Rev. Warren Tanghe, a vice president of FIF-NA, respectfully challenged the claim that the Anglican Communion does not exist, rather asserting FIF’s view that there remains a faithful community, a “vestige of an Anglican Communion,” with whom to “interface.” FIF, he said, had aligned with that community as well as parts of the Continuum.

Bishop Moyer agreed, saying his remarks referred to the institutional Communion. But he disagreed with the idea that Anglicanism could be rebuilt “based on different notions of holy order.”

### *The Jurisdictional Jigsaw*

In his address on “Reconciling the Jurisdictional Chaos: The Geographical Challenge,” though, Fr. Tanghe not only joined but surpassed Moyer in decrying the multiple separations among U.S. orthodox Anglicans, saying they have the same effect on the Body of Christ as terrorist bombs that rip apart physical bodies.

“Ecumenism is not some interesting...aberration, but rather a work of repentance and restoration, placing ourselves at the disposition of the grace of God for His reintegration of His Church,” said Tanghe, who is also chaplain at All

Saints' Convent, Catonsville, Maryland.

However, he acknowledged that the work of reintegration would be slowed by the varied dynamics and “distinctives” of the salient orthodox Anglican bodies. Contrary to what some believe, their differences “are not just superficial matters or personality and pique, but involve serious issues of principle - whether they should be ‘broad,’ as historic Anglicanism has been, for instance, or strictly and explicitly Catholic in an Anglican way--and over time they have developed their own...unique familial characteristics.”

He therefore suggested that “the model to which God is inviting us at this stage” is one of “jurisdictional partnership, rather than jurisdictional unity.” Such a partnership could be implemented between jurisdictions or parishes within a region, he said.

“One congregation is working to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus in this town. Another congregation is [doing the same] in the next town.” Both “are in the Anglican Way,” though they are in different jurisdictions, and have varied “distinctives,” histories and emphases. “But because [they] serve one and the same Lord in one and the same Spirit, each can respect the other...and cooperate in... common witness, so far as its own particular polity and rules allow.”

He conceded that, for more than one reason, the fact that each of the main extramural jurisdictions seem to predominate in a particular part of the country may deter partnerships between them.

Nonetheless, he saw such alliances as needed in light of changed circumstances. When orthodox Anglican jurisdictions looked primarily to the limited number of alienated Episcopalians to fill their pews, they were competitors, Tanghe said.

“But now that those who were likely to leave [ECUSA] for any of the existing orthodox Anglican bodies have done so, those bodies and their congregations must, of necessity, look to those who do not know and love and follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior, or do so only in a very partial and defective way, to fill their pews. And there are millions of them in every part of the country, more than enough to fill every congregation in every jurisdiction, and plant many more.”

This means that God is offering the different jurisdictions “a new opportunity to consult..and cooperate together, fully respecting each other’s traditions, fully obedient to their own, in the mission they have in common,” he said. In the process, they will get to know one another as they really are, perhaps begin to grow together, and to find in others “distinctives” treasures for themselves, or answers to problems they have not yet had to face.

He noted that a similar model is already found at the national level in the Common Cause Partnership. Urged by conservative Anglican primates, it links half a dozen church bodies and “ecclesial entities” inside and outside of the “official” Communion. Not all members of the Partnership are or can be in communion with all the others, but they have agreed to work together as much as possible for the sake of the historic faith, he said.

Tanghe reminded, however, that “we must always set what we are doing in...terms of the larger (ecumenical) mandate.”

In his response, Suffragan Bishop Paul Hewett of the Diocese of the Holy Cross (DHC), organizer of the AFDW, pronounced Tanghe’s address “excellent,” while also calling for orthodox Anglicans to open themselves to “break-through” thinking and action to move toward a seemingly impossible goal, the creation of a new orthodox province.

A single new U.S. province, Hewett maintained, could include at least eight jurisdictions and groups: The Anglican Catholic Church (ACC), Anglican Church in America (ACA), Anglican Province of Christ the King (APCK), Anglican Province of America (APA, which is working toward a merger with the Reformed Episcopal Church (REC)), Anglican Mission in America, DHC, and FIF-NA. All the groups cited are orthodox in faith and uphold the all-male priesthood and episcopate; all but AMiA and FIF-NA do not support female deacons (as part of holy order, *i.e.*, as opposed to deaconesses).

Hewett laid out nine steps toward this new province, step one being for U.S. orthodox Anglicans and parishes to daily pray and give thanks for each other. That “leads to all kinds of new communication, cooperation, pulpit exchanges and clergy covering for one another,” he said.

He also recommended (*inter alia*) that U.S. traditionalists continue to support FIF-United Kingdom as it pursues its goal of a free province in the anticipation of the C of E’s likely approval of women bishops, as well as para-church organizations that transcend jurisdictional lines (such as the FCC, the Prayer Book Society and SSC). As well, he highlighted the need for geographic planning “while existing jurisdictional lines are slowly erased.” This process could be advanced by the formation of more regional fellowships, while a state “with a large number of traditional parishes can become a diocese in the emerging one province.”

Finally, Hewett called for U.S. orthodox Anglicans to think, speak and act as though the new province already exists. “Refuse ingrown, narrow or denominational thinking...The Holy Spirit wants us to learn ‘Kingdom Thinking,’ which is to see geographic regions as the places where we work together to present

the claims of Christ to every person living in them, people who are starving for the Gospel.”

“This is the *kairotic* moment for us to relinquish the existing pattern of guerrilla units and become one army of the Lord in the terrible battle which is upon us, the battle for Truth,” he said.

### *Canonical Differences*

In his talk on “Reconciling the Canonical Differences,” the ACC’s Canon John Hollister spoke not so much on the stated topic as on the reasons he thought that “canonical arrangements and legal structures are largely irrelevant, either to causing or to curing the present divisions” among extramural Anglicans.

The Ohio-based cleric observed that many Continuing Anglican bodies had experienced tensions-- carried over from ECUSA--between an “entrenched congregationalism at the parish and diocesan levels” and “the apostolic and practical mandates for substantial hierarchical authority,” and asserted that Continuers had adopted two different forms of juridical structure. Most bodies operate under “old American forms”--a modification of ECUSA’s canons, and sometimes of its constitution, as they stood at some time before ECUSA’s 1976 break with apostolic order, while regulations based on “old Anglican forms” (guided by international Anglican reports in 1867 and 1948) were adopted *de novo* for the “post-St. Louis situation.” These, Hollister said, are principally seen in the ACC’s governing documents (with ACC’s much-criticized canons now being pared down and recast in simpler language, he noted).

However, he doubted that disagreements over constitutional or other regulatory theory were at the heart of most divisions in the Continuum—even in that between the ACC and APCK, often blamed on constitutional differences—but rather stemmed from issues of *control* and *obedience*, which he argued underlie most schisms. These factors are in play when one or more persons decide he/they are enlightened beyond the grace granted to the rest of a church body and must therefore direct its decisions and destiny, often by ignoring restraints placed upon them by their group’s formal structures. In other words, he maintained, schisms have more often been caused by an unwillingness to submit to the authority of the legal structures in place rather than by disagreements over the forms those structures would take.

Hollister further asserted that, even if the ACC, APCK and United Episcopal Church of North America (UECNA) “*had* separated from each other over constitutional or canonical theories or form,” pre- and post-St. Louis extramural Anglican bodies which have since subscribed to the *Affirmation* are not responsible

for or parties to the ruptures in the church jurisdiction formed at St. Louis.

He argued, in fact, that there are different families of separations among the extramural groups, and that current quests to recover unity among all of them actually seek something desirable that, however, has not heretofore existed. While conceding that many members of these groups were once part of a united ECUSA, he said a number of the bodies in which they now subsist have no past institutional relationship.

He contended, for example, that one could not understand the causes of and seek to remedy the separations between the ACC, APCK, and UECNA by looking at the “unrelated histories” of other extramural Anglican bodies, such as that of another “family” of divisions that he saw as including the ACA, (formed in 1991 by the entire American Episcopal Church, which dated from 1968, joined, however, by a significant group of ACC members), and the APA, a spin-off from the ACA rooted in the old AEC. He identified the 19<sup>th</sup> century separations of the REC from ECUSA as part of another set of divisions with their own causes.

“To know why any ‘Continuing’ or ‘extramural’ Church is separate from the others,” a task vital to achieving unity, he said, “we must study its unique institutional history and, especially, we must compare it to the other churches that share the same ‘family tree.’ We cannot compare apples to oranges to discover why they are both not grapefruit.”

“Only once has a body larger than a parish formed itself into a group for the purpose of leaving a Lambeth province in order to continue the historic Anglican Faith, and that was at the Congress of St. Louis,” Hollister declared. “All other ‘Continuing Churches’ exist today either because a number of individuals left [ECUSA] and subsequently gathered themselves together or because some members of an existing ‘Continuing’ group went into schism from their parent group.”

**HOLLISTER** said there are only two strategies available to remedy Continuing Anglicanism’s fragmentation.

“One is to pray for the conviction and conversion of the hearts of the proud, the arrogant, and the self-willed who have caused this problem.” The other, he said, is for each group to be much more diligent in investigating and assessing the backgrounds and fitness of those proposed for ordination or consecration. He also called for each church group to “restrict its creation of new bishops to cases of true and pressing...pastoral necessities.”

While thus improving the climate for inter-group discussion, he said (again, contrary to common wisdom) that there are “real theological issues“ that hinder

unity among some Continuing and other extramural Anglican bodies--and in some cases between them and traditionalists still in “official” Anglicanism--that should be considered “honestly and dispassionately.” These include varying perspectives on: the 39 Articles of Religion; the validity of rites such as those in the 1979 prayer book; whether Holy Order is really one sacrament or three; the validity of sacraments and orders conferred in an “official” Anglican province since it began ordaining women; the propriety and logic of seeking or maintaining ties with Canterbury; and marital discipline. (*Canon Hollister included a more complete inventory of such discussion points in an appendix to his paper, which will be viewable following his address when the Conference texts are posted sometime during the week of October 23 at <http://www.challengeonline.org>. – Ed.*)

“Until we explore these issues, calmly and rationally, we have no hope of meaningful progress toward the *de novo* unification” of Continuing and other extramural Anglicans, Hollister concluded.

In his response, the Rev. Canon R.H. Tregenza, Ph.D., of the Anglican Province of America, agreed with that assertion. But he wondered why Hollister continued to stress the “St. Louis churches”—the ACC and its “sister provinces” (APCK and UECNA)--as holding “some special place in North America... We are all by the grace of God heading as Apostolic Christians to the Wedding Feast, and like Southwest Air there are no pre-assigned seats,” he said.

The Maryland-based Tregenza said he also agreed that schism “for the most part” stems from non-canonical issues of control and obedience. But he said the “pressing issue for me is how Anglican constitutions and canons can be redefined in such a manner as to provide a better mechanism to deter heresy.” He thought it might be better to return to all 85 original Apostolic Canons.

### *The Cross As Antidote*

“The Role of Bishops, Clergy and Laity in the Quest for Unity” must begin with penitence and humility, contended the Rev. David Ousley, rector for 22 years of St. James the Less, Philadelphia, an Episcopal-turned-independent congregation (which now awaits an appellate court decision on whether or not it will lose its property to Bishop Bennison).

Fr. Ousley drew a parallel with how St. Paul dealt with the Corinthians, who suffered from some substantive (Gospel-rooted) and therefore necessary divisions, but mostly from “carnal” envying and sectarian strife.

“Paul’s direct antidote to the problem, as articulated in the first chapter of I Corinthians, is the Cross, which is weakness to this world’s strength...Recalling them to the Cross is Paul’s way to humble their pride. The Cross is the source of

unity: no Cross, no unity," he said.

Christian history, Ousley continued, is full of splits—"some necessary, some benign, some sinful." Likewise, while most of the splits undertaken by groups of orthodox Anglicans since 1976 have been regarded by those who effected them as necessary to the integrity of the Gospel, he said, some of them were rooted instead in "some form of human selfishness," *e.g.*, personality conflicts or objections to leadership style, "and are rightly termed `schism.'" Complicating matters, Ousley noted, is that orthodox Anglicans might in a few cases disagree as to which are substantive or non-substantive issues, for instance the ordination of women deacons, or whether seeking reunion with Rome is a high priority.

The post-1976 Continuing Church has "split various times," Ousley noted. Additionally, others who left ECUSA since 1976 have formed separate bodies. "While that is not exactly `splitting' it still contributes to the current state of disunity," he said.

Ousley made six suggestions for approaching sectarian and substantive divisions that are aimed at shifting the balance toward godly unity. The first, a prerequisite for the rest, is penitence.

"We should be sorry for our disunity...We should regard [it] with...shame," he stated. "We should acknowledge that even if [our] actions did not precipitate the division, [we] have since acquiesced in it" and perhaps even contributed to it," or "disrupted the unity God would give," for instance by bad-mouthing other jurisdictions or their leaders. We should acknowledge that those in and outside of the Church have been hurt. The *status quo* represents "a Christian moral failure--no less than marital infidelity" and is "offensive to our Lord," he said.

"Second, we need to remember that *unity is received and not achieved*. In the New Testament, unity is something that is *given* (by the Spirit) rather than something *achieved* by man (see *e.g. Ephesians 4:3*)...We are apt...to try to negotiate the matters [that] divide: the pragmatic approach. (There is a place for such.) Paul, however, begins with the Cross. We should do likewise.

"This means (third) that humility is essential. Along with penitence, humility undergirds the necessary change of heart" and cultivates charity, he maintained, while pride engenders thoughts, words, and deeds that militate against unity. Most seriously, pride leads us to depend on ourselves instead of God, he added.

"Fourth, we must...never indulge the idea that the *status quo* is acceptable," Ousley said. "From a Gospel perspective, unity is not a desirable extra-cost option like a leather interior in your SUV. It is rather an essential element, like the steering wheel; that we may be one, as Jesus and the Father are one. We must ask God to rid

our hearts of the sense that ‘We’re doing just fine the way we are, thank you very much.’

”Fifth, the change of heart which I am suggesting here should lead us (and especially our leaders) to an openness to creative ways of receiving the unity which God would give us. I have in mind the offer made at last year’s conference in Wilmington by the Bishop of Fulham (John Broadhurst, Chairman of FIF-UK) to privately mediate the American divisions in any way that might be helpful.”

Sixth, honesty, truthfulness and clarity will be essential to resolving substantive disagreements, or those perceived to be such, Ousley said. And those conditions are “much more likely to arise from changed hearts. Moreover, the non-substantive issues will dissolve before the power of humble, penitent Christian faith and practice,” he averred.

“The bottom line is that we need to give up the carnal approach altogether, and embrace a more distinctly Christian one,” he concluded. “So, ‘the role of bishops clergy and laity in the quest for unity’ is in the first place conversion of life.”

In part of his response, the Rev. William Kenney Jr., an assistant rector at St. John the Evangelist, Churchville, Pennsylvania, an Episcopal-turned-AMiA congregation, called attention to the fact that no mention had been made thus far of the “devious and pervasive activity of Satan in leading [orthodox Anglicans] into their painful divisions.” At the same time, Satan’s activity against traditionalists clearly showed “that we must be doing something right in living these difficulties out,” he observed.

Still, he echoed Fr. Ousley and other speakers in saying that “our painful and shameful difficulties should lead us to become humble before God Almighty, as our Lord’s own cross led Him to humble submission before the Father.”

END

