

Introductory Essay

The Most Rev'd Fred Hiltz
Primate of The Anglican Church of Canada

“A Communion in the making”

That's the way Canadian and African Bishops in Dialogue speak of our beloved Anglican Communion worldwide. It is, they say, “still being shaped and formed in the hands of God who desires of us and for us the fullness of partnership that comes out of attentiveness, prayer, and love”. (The Third Gathering)

This publication is a compilation of what they have described as “testimonies” coming out of each of their gatherings since an informal reception hosted by Archbishop Colin Johnson (Toronto) at the Lambeth Conference in 2008. From very diverse political, social, and cultural contexts in which they are endeavouring to faithfully serve God's mission they have gathered to pray, to speak and learn from one another, to honour their diversity in theological perspectives and to celebrate their unity in Christ. In the testimony arising from their first meeting, they wrote “We gather assuming friendship and collegiality, extending good will and humility to one another, knowing that we are one in shared faith and values”. I find the tone of their language very encouraging compared to that of so much other rhetoric about deep division and splintering of relationships across the Communion. While some speak of “impaired” communion, they write “We choose to turn face to face with each other. We are engaged in a quest for language that will bring us to common understanding and to better dialogue...we seek to understand each other, not to justify or defend, but to enter into a deep and holy conversation broadening our understanding of each other, of the Church, of God's mission, and of Christ's call to each of us.” (The First Gathering)

In each of their testimonies the bishops speak appreciatively of the opportunity to worship with the church local and to witness its ministry in the community. Many are the stories of a Church committed to the fullness of the gospel as embodied in the Marks of Mission held by Anglicans worldwide. One of the testimonies speaks of the challenge of the gospel call to “bear one another's burdens”, to accompany one another in prayer, pastoral statements of care and concern in the name of Christ, and acts of solidarity in the cause of what is good and right and just for all in the sight of God.

Reconciliation has been a major theme in this dialogue. The participants have learned much about the nature and work of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in which the Churches have been involved in a number of countries around the world, and we are blessed by their sharing of the insights they have gained for this ministry entrusted to us by Christ.

There is about this ongoing dialogue, the seventh gathering to take place in Ghana in May 2016, a deep joy and humility. These bishops speak of themselves as “a work in progress”. They

name a continuing need to be aware of and sensitive to the political, cultural and pastoral contexts in which they serve. In moving forward “they commit themselves to consider deeply the impact of their decisions and actions informed by their own context and perspectives on the life and ministry of the Church in other contexts”. (Third Consultation) Here is testimony to the long held principle of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ adopted by the Anglican Congress held in Toronto in 1963.

Out of their own experience these bishops have encouraged similar dialogues around the Communion. I heartily endorse their counsel. After all the heart of Anglicanism is relationship. “Within our communion there are structures which express unity; marks which identify our mission; and relationships which create our fellowship. We are a Communion in Mission in so far as our identifiable mission is relational and our structures serve those mission relationships”. (Chapter 2. The Report of the Inter Anglican Communion on Mission and Evangelism, ACC-XIII Nottingham, England)

These testimonies illuminate those “bonds of affection” with which we are called to regard one another in Christ. I commend this publication as both gift and invitation to the Communion.

The ‘Testimonies’ Reviewed

http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/Bishops_Dialogue_2014_Statement.pdf

<http://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/6th-Testimony-of-Bishops-in-Dialogue.pdf>

The Reflections

Prof Emmanuel D Mbennah Ph.D, PhD.
Vice Chancellor St. John University
Dodoma Tanzania

Making sense of bearing one another’s burden: A commentary to “The Testimony of Love: Bearing One Another’s Burdens”.

I am honored to have the opportunity to comment, albeit briefly, on both the Anglican Bishops in Dialogue process and the Testimony emanating from the 6th Consultation. I feel especially honored in light of the significance of the Dialogue process and the testimonies emanating from them. I will first make some general comments on the Anglican Bishops in Dialogue and then specifically comment on the “Testimony of Love: Bearing One Another’s Burdens”.

First, with regard to the Anglican Bishops in Dialogue, I note that the consultations of the Anglican Bishops in Dialogue are annual and informal gatherings. The dialogues are centering on issues pertinent to the unity and state of the church and, ultimately, the mission and witness of the Anglican Church in the world. As such, the dialogues constitute a notable contribution of the bishops, collectively, towards the continuity of the Church's mission. This is, of course, encouraging. Matters that seem to make it to the agenda of the consultations are of considerable weight. The informal nature of the dialogues could be the most viable setting for the bishops to engage on such matters. In such a setting there would be the freedom, social ecology, and the invitation within which the bishops would engage. Here I see the potential in the dialogues leading to a critical oneness for the collective responsibility of the bishops to preserve and advance the mission of the Church. However, I cannot help but ask a key question: Are the bishops open to the possibility of a general environment that is a comfortable home for everyone regardless of any disturbing individual convictions that could emerge from these dialogues? Needless to say, such a general environment could practically mean condoning or giving credence to any and every doctrinal position and any and every style of ministry administration.

And second, with regard to the Testimony of Love: Bearing One Another's Burden. This is a pertinent theme. The bishops provide an enlightening definition of "burden" – that which threatens to crush the joy of our faith – with the potential for us to doubt, even question, God's goodness to us, or to sin. Indeed, even spiritual leaders are not above the realities of burdens. I find it assuring that the bishops reflect an important admission that they too have, or could have, burdens. It is further assuring that the bishops realize they cannot carry these burdens themselves alone. Here they reflect, truthfully, their humanity and their vulnerability, contrary to the notion that bishops are beyond and closed to correction. I would agree too that the bishops are an important reference point for reconciliation. However, whereas many may look to the bishops – and rightly so – for hope and they see bishops as agents of reconciliation, many others lose hope further when they look up to their bishops. Outside the bishops' band, many who struggle through the sharp pains of disagreement and conflict, see their respective bishops as key contributing factors to the unfortunate circumstances with which they have to contend. I would hope that someday and in some way the bishops embark on dialogues at another level - between the bishops and others. That is to say, the bishops would want to consider ways of "bearing one another's burdens" with various ones outside of their own circle.

Much pain which we have come to witness in the Church pertain to the matrix of the bishops and doctrine, power, money, and lifestyle. There is a need for a lifestyle audit of our bishops. I suspect divergent positions with regard to these matters. I often wonder: Where did that traditional Anglican spirit of repentance go? Could we come to the point where bishops step down as they admit that they should not have been elected in the first place, or return money used or taken wrongly, or abandon lifestyle that is patterned after the world? How could these dialogues lead to the introduction of a culture whereby people relinquish positions they no longer deserve or to the dismantling of the craving for power? Could the bishops assume sufficient courage to review the spectrum of doctrinal diversity and determine what is outside of the boundaries of sound doctrine? Or, would it be a valid goal to cultivate an environment in which everyone is accommodated as they are?

The 8 points to which the bishops testify are worthy of particular attention. I will comment briefly on #1, #2 and #8:

1. The commitment to not exacerbate conflict is noteworthy. But what can be done with regard to the part of the Anglican Communion that has sought to return to greater

commitment to historical Christianity? It is important to realize that those who do not share the view that same-sex unions are also marriages will always hurt because this is deemed to be a departure from acknowledged Biblical foundations, whereas those who hold that view might have a sense of gratification that often accompanies the feeling of accomplishment and even victory.

2. Yes, servant leadership is needed. It will be important to find a way, or ways, to support the cultivation of servant leadership. Perhaps the bishops could further reflect on what strategy could be used to cultivate a servant leadership culture.
 3. Prof Mbiti's statement is a good expression of the African communalistic orientation. But it should be noted that this is a description and not a prescription, and that it is anthropological, not theological. What is the basis of the Christian identity? In Mbiti's view, and the bishops imply agreement, it is the community context that defines one's identity. Although that would be in consonance with Christian living it is in fact something other than Christian identity. This requires reflection. I think a Scriptural basis is needed for the foundation of unity rather than Mbiti's anthropological view. The bishops could be more explicit about their commitment to an authentic Biblical worldview.
-

Robert S. Heaney Ph.D, D.Phil
Director of the Center for Anglican Communion Studies
Virginia Theological Seminary, USA

It was my great pleasure to be present at the Sixth meeting of the Anglicans Bishop in Consultation in Richmond, Virginia. The spirit of the gathering and the spirit that the bishops went about their work bodes well for Anglican understandings of God's mission and catholicity.

'To carry one another's burdens' seems a particularly helpful way to frame current conversations. For to love God cannot be separated from love of neighbor and that cannot be separated from the practical work of bearing each other's burdens. Different parts of the Communion are burdened by different concerns. Different parts of the Communion seek to express the Gospel of Christ in relation both to these concerns and in relation to the particular charisms that the Spirit gives. All seek to carry the message of Jesus to a world that through violence, discrimination, and misuses of power knows the deep reality of sin.

The report recognizes "...it is not easy to fully face the pain of division whether its roots or social, ideological, or racial". Yet, taking heed of the mission of God and forming communities and communion shaped by the Gospel of reconciliation is a fundamental part of Christian vocation and is the apostolic vocation of bishops in the church of Christ. These meetings and this sixth report is, therefore, important to reflect on as together we seek to further discern what it means to follow Jesus across distinct cultures, communities, and convictions.

As I read the report at least three points strike me as important.

First, informality is generative. This is a meeting and a conversation that continues in a spirit of generosity. Meeting each other face to face and meeting each other as, first and foremost, children of God and followers of Jesus creates space for telling stories, sharing concerns, and seeking encouragement. Testifying to how the Gospel is at work in our lives should be the first priority of our meetings.

Second, context feeds theological vision. The consultation not only addresses the concerns from which each participant comes from but also explicitly names the context within which this dialogue took place. Naming the particularities of our contexts and the way in which we can learn from contexts beyond our own is a vital task for Episcopalians and Anglicans. Indeed, it is part of what it means to practice catholicity.

Third, Anglican mission theology is the framework for the future. “We need not walk apart in discerning the mission of Christ in the world.” God is the agent of mission and the church is the fruit of God’s mission. We are in God’s hands. A proper and humbled sense of our own agency in God’s world and God’s mission will be central to a renewal of Anglicanism.

Our world is in need of leaders grounding practices of reconciliation and peace. It is my prayer that the Consultations of Bishops in Dialogue will continue to do that work and set that example.

The Most Revd. Francisco de Assis da Silva
Primate of Brazil and Diocesan in Santa Maria

An effort at reconciliation in a divided Communion

I am very grateful for the opportunity to offer my impressions about the Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue.

Initially, the most striking aspect of the Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue is that this group is not structured by an institution but rather is initiative driven. These Bishops felt the call for reconciliation among the Anglican Communion and created this group in response to this need. It seems heartfelt linked with the central truth from the baptismal covenant that is to announce the Good News to the world.

This group acknowledges the pain felt by many all over the Anglican Communion due to many different causes and know that the road to reconciliation is not easy. The first step on the way of reconciliation is to be ready to hear who is not agreeing with us. Rather, they accept that it is a long, arduous process, but they feel that it is possible through the love and teachings of Jesus Christ. They are the first to admit their many differences, but rather than letting those force them apart, they use the differences to better educate each other in culture and community. They let these aspects further show the love of Christ to each other, and they then share these experiences with the people of their churches.

Within the Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue, the desire is to heal and reconcile the pain and tension among the children of God. There is not calling to show that one is better, more deserving or more faithful than another. No one has the right to claim infallibility. The calling is as the Good Shepherd is called to watch his sheep. The need to help guide and take care of the people is the common pull for all involved in this group.

All people are the children of God, and as children of God, we are called to love and respect the dignity of every person. At any given moment, this can be a difficult task, whether to show the love of God to a friend, to a stranger from another country, or to a homeless person on the street. The focus of this group is to counteract the idea of individualism and instead, encourage unity in our relationships with each other and with God. The Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue not only desires to show this love of Christ to each member within this group, but also to the people of the world.

I'm very pleased with the witness of this group. Friendship, Study and Prayers are the source of energy and commitment of this group. It will be also be so interesting if we can add other bishops from other regions and have other theological and cultural perspectives in terms of understanding reconciliation process. For example, it would be valuable to hear the experiences of reconciliation in East Asia from the initiatives in Korea and between Korean and Japan.

It seems to me that we are living a pastoral environment-friendly, since one of the guidelines of the ABC is exactly expand reconciliation efforts within the Communion. We must optimize together this pedagogical process as even the ABC itself expresses: "Reconciliation doesn't mean we are all agree. It means we find ways of disagreeing-perhaps very passionately-but loving each other deeply at the same time, and being deeply committed to each other. That's the challenge for the church if we are actually going to speak to our society, which is increasingly divided in many different ways."

The Revd. Canon Dr. Makhosi Nzimande
Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Pressing on Towards Reconciliation: Reflections on the Fifth Consultation of Anglican Bishops in Dialogue

It is encouraging to observe the use of dialogue by the Anglican Bishops as a means of fostering reconciliation and love among God's people in the Anglican Communion. This is a highly commendable effort indeed. The attainment of political liberation in South Africa twenty one years ago would not have been realized had it not been for, among others, the utilization of dialogue as a means of changing the socio-political landscape and the role that the Church, especially Archbishop Tutu, played in the process.

No doubt, I find the theme of reconciliation that is the focus of the fifth Consultation of the Anglican Bishops in Dialogue quite engaging. I am particularly intrigued by the Bishops' acknowledgement that identity, experience, patience, kindness, understanding and love are necessary ingredients in charting the journey towards reconciliation. Without intending to place any items on the agenda of the Consultations, I believe a few comments would be in order:

Whereas due acknowledgement is given to cultural contexts as informing efforts towards reconciliation, I think it would be useful for the bishops' dialogue to probe the various ways in which socio-political contexts and related ideologies of power are responsible for the dissensions in the *oikumene* per se. In essence, cultural contexts, cultural influences and socio-political contexts are inextricable. Increasingly, terrorism and neo-liberalism remain major global threats to meaningful dialogue and so are the unequal power relations between the global North and South. And unless the root causes of disunity are redressed, the efforts towards meaningful reconciliation would be like pouring water into a cracked clay pot.

By and large, the Gospels reflect how inequality was Jesus' major source of criticism against the Pharisees and other privileged groups in first century Israel. Therefore, achieving the goal of reconciliation in the Anglican Communion and ecumenically would require much more than "learning about each other's contexts." Still, it would aid the bishops' dialogues, I believe, not to be oblivious to the varied postcolonial contexts of some parts of the Anglican Communion as well as to the socio-political, socio-economic and ecclesiastical challenges therein and how these impact on meaningful reconciliation. There would probably be no better expression of "bearing one another's burdens in love" and solidarity than seeking to immerse oneself in the life settings of others, no matter how dire these may seem. This, I believe, would constitute genuine "walking together as ambassadors of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). In due course, a paradigm shift from dialogue to *praxis* would be worth exploring in subsequent dialogues.

Furthermore, whereas I applaud the commitment to "being a Eucharistic community...strengthened by prayer, word and sacrament" in the journey towards reconciliation, I yearn for a clear pronouncement on the use of Scripture as a source of authority and the effects thereof on reconciliation. As one of the three pillars of Anglicanism, I maintain that Scripture should be given a more prominent role in the bishops' dialogues than it is hitherto apparent. In historical efforts at disunity, Scripture was used as a tool to colonize, conquer, oppress and subdue. In current efforts towards reconciliation, hermeneutical models of using scripture as a tool for decolonization and liberation could enhance the bishops' dialogues.

As much as the bishops in dialogue "are not required to produce action plans, recommendations and decisions," they could play an important role in the moral conscientization of the Anglican Communion by perhaps being audible on issues of gender, race, class, sexuality. Of course, taking a radical stance even within the ambits of the Gospels, Anglican doctrine and Theology would have its effects. But if we are to be true to being Christ-like in our mission and purpose, the risks are sometimes worth taking. Listening to the voices from the margins as part of the ongoing bishops' dialogues is crucial if a complete turnaround of worldviews, stereotypes and perceptions is to be achieved on the journey toward reconciliation.

Otherwise, as Richard Rohr (1996) would put it, the bishops' dialogues could be no different to "the old self on a new path" whereby the new language, behaviour and practices are sincere with the underlying goals, worldviews and motivation remaining unchanged. Rather, the outcomes would be different if they entail an overall transformation of worldview, consciousness and motivation as a representation of "the new self on a new path."

I laud the work that has gone into the Anglican Bishop's Dialogues thus far. I am highly optimistic that these will make giant strides in the journey towards reconciliation in the Anglican Communion.

Aluta Continua!

**The Rt. Rev. Nicholas Baines
Bishop of the Diocese of Leeds**

It is encouraging that informal initiatives such as this are invested in across the Communion. Relationships and face-to-face encounter are essential to any notion of reconciliation. Therefore, it is commendable that these ‘Testimonies’ lead to prayer, mutual commitment and continuing conversation.

However, they read as if reconciliation can be achieved without attention being paid to the content of disagreement. The appeal to the reconciling ministry of Christ, now committed to us in both church and world, is essential, but it cannot be established in isolation from the issues that cause division in the first place. If ‘liberals’ are accused of not taking Scripture or ethics seriously, then ‘conservatives’ must address some of the deeply unethical (and unbiblical) behaviour manifested in (for example) misrepresentation and subterfuge. There is no attention paid to the use of power – conscious or unconscious - in the divisions. The brutal fact is that there are factions within the Anglican Communion who do not want reconciliation – so, the question remains how to seek reconciliation in the face of this reality.

The recent decision by the Archbishop of Canterbury to invite all Primates to Canterbury in January 2016 might change the game for all. This will be the reality check on intention. Primates (who might or might not actually represent the stance of their fellow bishops) will set the agenda, agree their conclusions, and set a future course. They will take responsibility for this and not be able to blame others for any fracture that might ensue.

This makes informal conversations and initiatives all the more important in keeping the relationships alive while the consequences of January’s meeting settle down – whichever way they go.

Prof. Ephraim Radner
Wycliffe College, Toronto School of Theology
Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg

I am encouraged and discouraged at the same time by the “Testimony” of our “Anglican Bishops in Dialogue”. I am encouraged that they are meeting at all! And that they are doing so as an explicit act of faith in Christ and in his life and purpose. But I am discouraged that, after several consultations, their common statement remains articulate only at the level of numbingly broad generality. It is as if “reconciliation” in Christ were an abstract theme, and not one mired in the particulars of specific acts and responses, about which the statement is silent.

It is encouraging that, in the midst of ongoing anger and recrimination among Communion bishops and leaders, ones that continue to include litigation and explicit excommunication, these bishops are willing to gather together to pray and maintain their witness as brothers and sisters in Christ, even in the midst profound disagreement. As the “Testimony” makes clear, such gathering is vital and demanded in a world of continued and embedded

violence and division. If Christians cannot do this, then their own faith is vain. So, I commend them for doing so, in some cases in the face of personal ridicule and rebuke.

But why cannot we hear about the actualities at issue in this particular Christian press for reconciliation? Coventry Cathedral, site of their meeting, became a symbol for this goal because of very specific realities: the terrors of National Socialism in Germany, aggression and resistance in the Second World War, the genocide of Jews, and the need to bring together peoples and Christians of Britain and Europe out of the ruins of this conflict and its specific meanings. Anglicans around the world, analogously, are estranged due to specific actions and commitments, and their reconciliation cannot bypass these matters by appeal to something mistily beyond them. It is discouraging to hear about “eschatology” and ecclesial “family” in the face of our divisions, when what is demanded is the toughness and sacrifice of concrete negotiation in Christ one Church over matters of articulated belief, biblical interpretation, and moral witness. The theology of the “Testimony”, in this case, smacks of dilution and avoidance.

So: I hope the Consultation will continue; and I will be praying for its participants, and that their number will grow. There is no understanding, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation without meeting face to face, often with exhausting patience. But I will also be praying that they do far more than report on the vague traces of a meandering journey, but will finally engage the very specific “sword” that pierces each other’s heart in the light following Jesus together at this time and in the midst of our very peculiar challenges as Anglicans.