

Launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans in British Isles

England swings! I spent my sabbatical of 1998 at Oak Hill Theological College on London's northern edge, and it was satisfying to return to its hospitality. On Monday morning I walked with the Principal, Michael Ovey and his Deputy, Chris Green to Southgate Station and took the tube to Victoria. A stranger in the crowded carriage overheard our conversation and asked if we were going to "the conference". Indeed we were and it was good to learn that the UK and Ireland launch of the FCA was not about to happen "in a corner".

A year ago I was a participant in GAFCON: the Global Anglican Futures Conference – the movement it crystallized, formally referred to loosely as the Global South, took the name "the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans" (FCA). July 6 was its inauguration in the British Isles at the magnificent Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, a bowshot from Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.

GAFCON was an act of desperation. The Episcopal Church of the USA (TEC) – it recently dropped "Protestant" from its official name – consecrated a sodomite as bishop of New Hampshire despite pleas from churches around the world and warnings that such action would seriously endanger the "Communion". The eruption included many American Episcopal churches, no longer able to accept the spiritual authority of their heretical bishops, who were seeking spiritual oversight and counsel from bishops in other parts of the world (Rwanda, Nigeria, Singapore, Uganda, Southern Cone). When the Archbishop of Canterbury failed to act impartially in his invitations to the Lambeth Conference (2008), and American bishops implied that the African attitude was primitive and a consequence of flawed missionary method orthodox bishops around the world called their own conference in Jerusalem. There were close to 200 bishops in a

company of 1200 Anglicans leaders. The GAFCON Declaration evoked tremendous enthusiasm: along with the solidly evangelical African provinces, the excluded or marginalized – Americans, Canadians, South Africans, English, European and many more -saw that they belonged to a world wide body of Anglicans, confessing the faith of Scripture, creeds, articles and prayer book. The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans was born.

It was somewhat unnerving for a colonial pushing his way into a crowded palace in a foreign land, but by the time I had been greeted by Quinlan Terry, the O'Donoghue twins, Megan Nield, Vijay Menon, Lisa Nolland, David Gibb and had found a place next to Brenda Becket and Carrie Sandom it really did feel like a fellowship. And right at the beginning there was a greeting from the Queen. Wow!

The Queen's letter was controversial. Was it a mere acknowledgement that the meeting was happening? I did not think so. The Archbishop of Canterbury's greeting sounded that way: I know you are meeting and you are in my prayers. But the Queen spoke of *understanding our concerns*. The slogan of the rally was "Be Faithful." She is the titular head of the Church of England and "Defender of the Faith." She needed to say something and it was positive. Many were encouraged. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, also wrote, making it clear he both approved and identified with what was happening.

British bishops were welcomed and apologies read. It was clear that something had happened since GAFCON, where they were conspicuous by their absence. The Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir Ali, has maintained a courageous witness to orthodoxy in faith and morals and has been much criticized in the English media, but other bishops now are coming forward to be counted. I was excited to see them taking a stand. Much of the Anglican world is under a kind of

“Babylonian Captivity”, its leadership dominated by people who no longer believe in the historic Christian Faith. In ancient times it was the bishop who was the leader in confessing the church’s faith. These days bishops are out in front denying Jesus’ Godhood, doubting the incarnation, dismissing any real atonement, explaining away the resurrection, ridiculing the second coming, discounting the Bible, and now campaigning against the Christian understanding of sexuality and marriage.

For 150 years evangelicals in the Anglican Communion have told each other to exercise restraint, to be loyal, to go out of their way not to offend, but now it has reached a point where to remain Christian hundreds of congregations in the USA have had to walk from the churches they or their believing ancestors built and dedicated to the glory of God, where the leading Anglican theologian of the past generation has had to surrender his diocese’s licence and seek the care of another bishop, where a man seeking ordination (a neurosurgeon with four years’ theological training) is asked by his Selection Committee, “You don’t believe Jesus is the only way to salvation, do you?” One speaker (Rev Paul Perkin) likened the modern church to the Gadarene demoniac, “crying out and cutting himself with stones.” The lost faith, nay sometimes hostility to the faith, which now controls large parts of the communion including the mother church itself, had to call forth a protest. We can only applaud the English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish saints who have drawn a line in the sand and said, “No further!” “Be faithful,” was what it was all about.

The Bishop of Chichester, John Hind, likened the shift in belief to a cook whose favourite recipe for tripe and onion soup is modified over the years by the addition of this and that spice and the omission of one or another ingredient until there is no longer any tripe or onion, but actually beans and bacon. The result of

two hundred year of addition and subtraction is no longer Christianity, but something else. But since there are still Christians in the church (the majority according to Archbishop Venables) conflict is inevitable.

Greg Venables is the Archbishop of the Southern Cone, comprising the dioceses of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Peru and recently four dioceses in the USA. He drew attention to Hebrews 1 & 2 emphasizing the authority of the Word of God and the danger of drifting from its teachings. Drifting is easy; you don't have to do much. He recalled a flight over the Argentine Chako. The pilot asked him if he thought that was the runway down there. The Archbishop had been that way before and assured him it was. The gospel is our God-given runway: the one safe place to land and to take off. "We haven't moved it and it hasn't moved. It's not relative, subjective, a matter of interpretation; a runway is a runway!" Concluding, the Archbishop called for a "robust resistance" lest the gospel be silenced. The god - the Ccrist - who is not the God (Christ) revealed in Scripture is a counterfeit. There is no other way - no other name by which we may be saved. "We must stand together; we can do no other."

The Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, defended GAFCON and the Jerusalem declaration and called on British Anglicans not to stay on the sidelines, not to let the culture "swallow you alive": "The FCA exists to keep orthodox, biblical Anglicans inside the fold at the highest level possible. It exists to gather up the fragments, to unite them. It exists so that evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics and mere Anglicans can continue to be Anglicans without compromising biblical truth. The question for you is: will you join us, will you help us keep our Communion one, holy, catholic and apostolic. (For the text of Peter Jensen's address and others at the conference see the GAFCON website www.gafcon.org)

There was an array of speakers and issues. Messages of support were also conveyed from the Archbishops of Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. The Church of England in South Africa was also mentioned. I was present because none of the bishops of CESA had been able to attend. I found it all thrilling and absorbing. The DVD will be well worth watching. Challenging was Baroness Caroline Cox's call for Anglican solidarity with the embattled church in Southern Sudan. Heartening were many reports of gospel growth and church planting in Britain. But a question hung over everything: What next? Where is it going? The organizers gave no clear answer. People were asked to signify general agreement and support for what was happening, and this is important. It is a huge encouragement to Anglicans in places where they are a minority or marginalized in some way to know that they are part of a world-wide movement; this is what fellowship is all about. I signed my name and will be asking George Whitefield College and CESA to do the same. But what should we expect to see now? No one is splitting or leaving: quite the opposite. FCA is about staying and standing up for authentic Anglican Christianity. Christians are not into *jihad*, so there will be no violence - not even rudeness, I hope. Continued faithfulness is the best counsel, including preaching and defending the faith once delivered to the saints, and "speaking the truth in love" which will occasionally mean saying, "I respect your opinion, but that is just not the Christian Faith." And of course it means owning those who hold the Christian Faith as brothers and sisters and standing with those who are in the Anglican tradition, regardless of the "excommunications" of revisionist bishops and archbishops. What will ultimately cause us to "win" or "lose" will be our zeal in living and preaching the faith, making disciples, planting churches, developing strong congregational life, and training a new generation of Christian workers. We also need to be prayerful that God grants FCA's leaders extraordinary wisdom and courage.

The day's events concluded with the Lord's Supper. Bishop Michael Nazir Ali was celebrant and preacher. In his sermon he presented an analysis of the present crisis, particularly as it relates to the abandonment of Christian teachings on marriage and sexuality. He also encouraged the orthodox (evangelicals, charismatics, anglo-catholics) to exercise discipline and restraint so they can continue to make common cause in these matters.

Church politics has always worried me. It is unavoidable, if we are to hand on to our children's children a church which is still "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" and a community of salvation and fellowship with the living God. But controversy brings out the worst in us. I came away inwardly lamenting my own failures and the shortcomings of the movement with which I identify. Our stand would be so much more effective, if we were not so deeply flawed. It was good, then, at the end to be reminded of the heart of it all: the powerful atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ: The body of Christ given for us to give us eternal life." We stand forgiven only at the cross. "To God be the glory," was just the right hymn to send us off.

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