

ECCLESIOLOGY AT THE CROSSROADS: Discerning the future course for the Catholic Anglicans amidst the changing landscape of Anglicanism  
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In the important work **The Hermeneutics of Doctrine**, Anthony Thistleton makes the assertion that we cannot leave philosophical concepts out of account when attempting to formulate the task of biblical hermeneutics. If this is true of biblical hermeneutics, would it not also be true of a ecclesiological hermeneutics. His point that doctrine involves the *disposition* of belief, which includes *formation* and leads us on to *transformation* is certainly applicable to the critical questions of Anglican ecclesiology such as identity, missiology and conciliarism, which in terms of ecclesiology needs to be investigated and clarified for an Anglican Transformation in the long term future of the church.

When one consider the state of Global Anglicanism in general (and North America in particular) and how it expresses itself is part of the church catholic, the question that is ever present is there a hermeneutic that frames how the ***Anglicanae Ecclesiae***, as a complex global reality, can function as a communion of catholicity, renewal and evangelism beyond locally determined ecclesiologies?

Numerous voices from the various wings of the realignment movement from the Anglican Communion have stressed that the call to the church is to be about mission. Few would quibble with the primacy of this vocation but it assumes that there is agreement on the nature of the church ( ecclesiology) to effect this mission as missiology and ecclesiology tend to go hand in hand. While few would disagree that mission is derived from the Scriptures, the evangelism, catechesis and pastoral instruction to apply that sacred message within the Anglican Realignment movement lacks a cohesive vision. While the mission

clearly is to bring men and women into communion with the sole mediation of Christ, the orthodox expression of the Body of Christ as Anglicans that we bring them into is deeply fractured and the time has come for leadership to undertake a serious conversation about missiology and ecclesiology for those who claim that Anglicanism is an expression of the faith that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The ecclesial deficit can no longer be avoided as something to be addressed!

In addressing this ecclesial deficit, one must inquire are there resources available to close the deficit/gap? Anglicans must authentically ask: *Can there be an authentic catholic evangelical Communion Ecclesiology for Anglicans given what is known as the ecclesial deficit in its present state?* This question cannot be ignored as the historic Bonds of Affection are frayed and the alliances made between sympathetic Anglicans of various levels of churchmanship are wearing thin. Anglicanism has prided itself on diversity and yet we now know with clarity that the ecclesiology of being Communion is held together by a larger expression of unity. This has been the difficult point for Anglicans whether revisionist or orthodox because like the post-modern world we minister in, we in fact often prefer our expression of diversity and autonomy over unity. Anglicanism must address that if it does not embrace a conciliar and canonical model to reconstruct its ecclesiology; it will mirror the post-modernism contentment with pluralism--the acceptance of diverse views alongside each other, irrespective of the ability to integrate or reconcile them.

Catholicity as an instrument of ecclesiology is the special vocation of the church to call forth that integration and reconciliation for the church and to the world. Anglicanism claims that heritage; but all too often finds the easier course is to leave the idea of *communio anglicanae* to the local/particular churches. This has resulted in a false model of "spiritual unity" that has no real provision for mutual accountability or common decision-making--much less serious ecclesial

structural implications. Institutions do matter, and church institutions have a significant level of accountability for continuity and authenticity. The time has come for Anglicanism to do the challenging work of identifying the systematic ecclesiology it lays claim to because systematic ecclesiologies investigate the church methodically, critically, and constructively, in contrast to catechetical and pastoral exercises in theological communication and to academic religious studies approaches to religious phenomena"<sup>1</sup>

Anglicanism's diversity allows various hermeneutics of ecclesiology to be considered such as:

- 1. *Biblical Ecclesiology*** - This approach seeks to ground ecclesiology in the person and work of Christ, establishing a model of the church that is both biblically centered. Paul Minear highlighted at least ninety images of the Church in the New Testament that serve this purpose.<sup>2</sup>
- 2. *Baptismal Ecclesiology*** - This describes the early Church's self understanding before the emergence of a hierarchical ecclesiology following the Constantinian settlement. Thus, Baptismal Ecclesiology can be seen as a recovery of the understanding that ordained ministry is set within the ministry of the whole people of God; the entire baptized are called to actively participate in the ministry of the Church and thus any sense that ordination elevates the clergy above the laity is eliminated.<sup>3</sup>
- 3. *Incarnational Ecclesiology***. This approach assumes that everything we need to know about the Church and its ministry can be identified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It draws on the Pauline language of the body of Christ, for just as Jesus was God incarnate, so the Church, in all its ministries, is called to be Christ's body in the world.
- 4. *Philosophical Ecclesiology***: Perhaps the systemic epistemological and metaphysical foundations as to how we approach being the church are worth considering with the Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, Nominalist, Idealist, and phenomenological-historical categories being examined.<sup>4</sup>

5. **Trinitarian Ecclesiology** – Here church order is embraced through the paradigm of a hierarchy of relationship which offers a complete communion of persons and yet distinctions of person and roles as embodied by the Trinity.<sup>5</sup>
6. **Paradigmatic Ecclesiology** - In this approach there are a series of paradigms that function at best interactively for the church to accomplish its mission which occurs through the expression of the church as: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples.<sup>6</sup>
7. **Atonement Ecclesiology** – Here the Church continues what Christ has done, and its work is Christ's work of atonement, which leads to a doctrine of the atonement that parallels ecclesiological norms.<sup>7</sup>

Avery Dulles who championed this paradigmatic model promotes a synthesis of the models for the church to function in its fullest catholic and evangelical giftedness. However, he also speaks from a church grounded in the authority of the magisterium of the church which is distinct from the celebrated Anglican notion of "dispersed authority".

### ***Canonical and Conciliar Ecclesiology***

There are various models that hold precedence in the realignment movement of Anglicanism as well as the wider Communion. For example, it seems that in *African ecclesiology*, the Church as Family (*Mystical Communion*) and Living Word (Herald) seems to be dominant expressions of African ecclesiology. While in other parts of the Communion such as in the West, *Institution and Community of Disciples* tends to pre-dominate as prime focus. At face value, this vision of ecclesial diversity held within unity, of mutual accountability within one body, remains attractive and compelling but how will Anglicans sustain an organic theology and structure to insure those models are normative to the church catholic and not aberrant? An

ecclesiology that is canonical and conciliar may hold the necessary hermeneutic.

It seems the time has come for orthodox Anglican leaders to re-appropriate the theological heritage of the church in a conciliar way, now more than every given the present landscape which is not resolving the questions of splintering at all. Specifically this approach centers on the re-envisioning the very idea of conciliarism and integrating it with the vast segments of the church's traditions, practices, councils, disciplines, rules and norms. By using this as one hermeneutic to frame Anglican ecclesiology, Forward In Faith for example as well as other orthodox groups that do not fit into diocesan or provincial structures may affirm a vocational heritage for ministry recognizing that in this matter, the Church has had more than one approach.

Certainly, Sacred Scripture is the starting point as it gave rise to the worshipping communities of faith. From that firm foundation a diversity of materials developed (from Scriptures to Creeds to Canons) that were framed in the life of the worshipping communities. While it is true that the the canonical tradition is not static and is open to changes. Those changes occur naturally and appropriately within the established norms of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, that same criteria should be the basis for the realignment movement assessing how to create systems of creative ministry within a united ecclesiological vision.

*"Given that the Church is subject to the actions of human agents, change is surely possible. Moreover, change is also clearly welcome. The canonical heritage of the Church has developed over time. New insights can be derived from its existing canonical heritage, and fresh readings of its materials and practices can and will be creatively advanced and refined. Further, new canonical materials and practices can be developed to enrich the life of faith*

*so long as they fit naturally and appropriately with the canonical tradition already in place”.<sup>8</sup>*

This may be a type via media adaptation that will appeal to some within classical Anglicanism, especially among orthodoxy's evangelical and catholic wings as the model of ecclesiology of jurisdiction vs. vocation seems to be at a point of heightened sensitivity. Both of these positions within Anglicanism can engage in such conversations as these categories complement what Dr. J. I. Packer has proposed to build a “convergent conservative testimony to ‘mere Christianity,’ unified and transformative.”

1. Display the rational coherence of historic mainstream Christian beliefs . . .
2. Spell out Trinitarian Theo centrality as the foundational frame for Christian thought.
3. Stress that the incarnation, atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension, present heavenly reign, and future public return of Jesus Christ are central to the Christian story, and . . . establish the fact that the Christian gospel is first and foremost news of redemption for lost sinners.
4. Celebrate the life-changing impact of the gospel of Jesus Christ as an integral part of our testimony. <sup>9</sup>

I refer back to the talk with Bishop Ackerman on the New Oxford Movement and my proposition on **The 20 Principles for a Canonical Conciliarism within Anglicanism** ( for the entire talk go to <http://www.anglican.tv/content/fifna-2010-teaching-two> ) which offered a foundation for a renewed Anglican ecclesiology. The time has come to be reminded that the church uses canonicity and catholicity to shape the judgment of the church in contextualizing the Gospel for the people of God.<sup>10</sup>

What is called for in this new day where models of ministry such as the a catholic missional conciliar model is in contrast to an exclusive jurisdictional/parochial model is that a renewed missiological and conciliar consciousness in ecclesiology can be nurtured; where the theology of the church (our ontology) precedes our knowledge and experience (our epistemology). The Anglican Realignment movement increasingly mitigates the form of being the church catholic by using tools for interpretation of their own design regardless of historical precedent beyond the 16th Century.

It would seem that this movement and no longer has the luxury of assuming that everything which reflects the form of catholicity prior to the 16th Century is considered non-canonical and deviates from the traditions and norms of “ classical Anglicanism” ( whether they be biblical and ecclesial). These 20 Principles remind us that the Church structures (ecclesiology) cannot but rest upon historical and canonical norms that are part of the entire story of the church, not simply the part that we are most familiar with and subsequently be informed and governed by them. The vocational/missional approach as we have seen from the Celtic Missionary movement is a legitimate expression of communion and local ecclesiology. “Uncertainty about how these models apply in a new realignment along with a undeveloped canonical consciousness is one reason for the many difficulties in the current discussion. These difficulties can be overcome with careful study of the tradition in its canonical and conciliar context. It seems to me that in whatever way we can assist towards a beneficial process of time, we can prepare for the overcoming of these difficulties by establishing a correct basis of conciliar consciousness and a correct relationship to canons based on that consciousness.”<sup>11</sup>

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Perhaps the leaders the catholic movement in Anglicanism should consider setting as a priority the renewal of an authentic Anglican

ecclesiology that has both the vocational and jurisdictional models as normative. Perhaps an association of those on the bubble map could attend the summit can pioneer another model, namely the ecumenical-vocational-missional model that has been lost in recent days. As a catholic witness, this movement has been eloquent in its discourse on the mission of God through Church and now seeks to affirm that in a model of being Church that once lost is in need of reclaiming. It now has a unique opportunity to re-establish a catholic missional ecclesiology that would be authentic and historic.

The ecclesiology of an catholic -ecumenical-vocational-missional model is that it would offer a renewed missional and conciliar consciousness which would demand an engagement of some essential concepts such as:

1. The collegiality of the bishops as a reappraisal of the bishops' ministry in relation to being a catholic college.
2. The reappraisal of the local Churches in relation to the wider call to catholic Communion
3. Clear teaching on the nature and idea of the catholic Missional/ Vocational Model to work with the Jurisdictional Model
4. The concept of an ecumenical and catholic Anglicanism expressed in the formula which holds that the Church, defined in the Creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, *subsistit in Ecclesia catholica*.

A Conciliar consciousness requires of its leadership to discern what is needed in the life of the church and how to gather when the church is in most need. This is a critical time not just for the Anglican Mission but for Anglican realignment movement in general.

The word *communio* has a distinctive element when considered in light of the concept to belonging to the church catholic. *Communio* in its fullest theological sense is based on the biblical context which renders a theological, Christological, salvation historical, sacramental and



ecclesiological character(I Cor 10,16 ). The ecclesiology of communion shares a rich heritage in the expressions of catholicity in the East and the West, that was both missional and jurisdictional. Then as now there is a need for an ecclesiology that is both concrete and at the same time spiritual, transcendent and eschatological.

In considering the vocation of being a catholic missional conciliar movement with a canonical consciousness, Forward In Faith recognizes an ontological character of being church. As the gathered faithful they seek to bear the the light of Christ to the nations by being gathered together in the Holy Spirit. Within this premise they reaffirm historic ecclesiology of the church that has borne fruit in the East and West. In this affirmation, it is clear that ecclesiology is intimately involved with Christology and Soteriology and thus creates visions of the Church that is truly Trinitarian. The catholic missional vocational model incarnates the experience of Trinitarian synergy in the history of the church between God and humans, in which humans participate with God through the Holy Spirit in a manner different from the jurisdictional model.

By participating in a catholic ecumenical missional conciliar approach, — unity in diversity through mutual-indwelling — catholic Anglicans and others listed in our original list could celebrate the life of the church with the Jurisdictional model while advancing this new model. Thus, conciliarity is found “in every act of communion among all members of the Church’s body.<sup>12</sup> In coming together as a *Church in Mission with a conciliar focus, a proposed summit* would seek to be *theologically* understood considering the different images/models of the Church which all describe the unique local expressions of the Church, while seeking to answer question: what is this, this one concept of being a catholic ecumenical missional Anglican which ontologically shares in the common life of the local Church?

As Anthony Thistleton states, "Once truth is 'made' rather than discovered, what cannot be done in the name of socially constructed truth? 13 While not the only way forward, the catholic ecumenical missional conciliar models is a historic response that simply needs to be understood. What is important in this next season for the catholic Anglicans, is a realignment movement confronting the crisis exists today! By embracing a catholic, missional, conciliar character *as a framework to share in the restoration of an orthodox Anglican Ecclesiology, the steps would be profound in establishing in this realignment movement* the essence of the Church and a legitimate witness.

[1] B. P. Flanagan, "The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology", **Horizons** 35/1, 2008, pp. 42-43.

[2] Cf. Paul . Minear, **Images of the Church in the New Testament**, (Cambridge, Clark, 2006)

[3] Louis Weil., *Baptismal Ecclesiology: Uncovering a Paradigm,*" in **Equipping the Saints. Ordination in Anglicanism Today** (Eds. Ronald L. Dowling & David R. Holeton) Blackrock, Co. Ireland: Columba Press, 2006.

[4] Thomas F O'Meara, "Philosophical Models in Ecclesiology." **Theological Studies** 39 (1978) 3-21.)

[5] Jurgen Moltmann., **The Trinity and the Kingdom**, (San Francisco: Harper,1991) p.202

[6] Avery R Dulles., **Models of the Church** . New York: Image Books, 1991

[7] John Milbank., 'The Name of Jesus: Incarnation, Atonement, Ecclesiology', **Modern Theology** 7.4 (July 1991)

[8]William J. Abraham, **Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: *from the Fathers to Feminism*** (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998 p. 55)

[9] James Cutsinger (ed) **Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue.**, ( Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997, Chapter IV

[10] Kevin J. Vanhoozer., **The Drama of Doctrine:A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology.** (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2005.) p.322

[11] Nicholas Afanasiev., *Canons and Canonical Consciousness.* (San Francisco: *The Orthodox Church in America - The Diocese of the West*, 2000) <http://www.holy-trinity.org/ecclesiology/afanasiev-canons.html>

[12] Lewis J. Patsavos "The synodal structure of the Orthodox Church," **St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly** 39 no 1, 1995, p. 73

[13] Anthony C. Thistleton (ed). **Postmodernity- postmodernism"**, **A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion.** (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), p. 235

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