

St Boniface Trust Essay Competition

Why I am an Anglican and believe I shall remain so

Jesse Zink

[This essay was one of the few sent in from outside the UK. The Reverend Jesse Zink is a deacon in the Diocese of Western Massachusetts and a student at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale in New Haven, Connecticut. Apart from some additional footnotes by way of explanation, little editing has been necessary in preparation for publication; but the spellchecker has Anglicized the spelling, for which we apologise to those who prefer the American forms.]

While visiting a small Anglican church in a rural archdeaconry in eastern Nigeria this past year, I found myself caught off guard by the first question a young priest asked me. “This globalization,” he said, “what effect will it have on the church?” Used to fielding questions about gay bishops in the American church or same-sex marriage, I struggled for an answer and turned the question back on him. He was only too eager to answer. “It is making it harder to be together as Anglicans,” he said. “We keep hearing about what you Americans are doing.”

That young priest’s insight goes straight to the centre of the problems roiling the Anglican Communion—and illustrates why I am an Anglican. In the twenty-first century, an era marked indelibly by “globalization”—however defined—Anglicans are struggling to hold together. The worldwide Communion is said to be fracturing, hopelessly split over matters of sexuality, Biblical interpretation, and authority. Christ’s prayer for his followers “that all may be one” is a joke, an ideal never to be reached, or even, it occasionally seems, worked towards. Surveying the situation, one is tempted to throw up one’s hands and walk away entirely—towards Rome and more centralization, perhaps, where the Vatican would never tolerate such public travails; or towards churches with freer polities, less connected to fellow Christians around the world.

This would be a mistake. In an era of globalization, the unity of the worldwide body of Christ is at the heart of the Church’s counter-cultural witness to the patterns of living in this

world. I am an Anglican and shall remain so because I believe the Anglican tradition, with its worldwide Communion and our emphasis on Incarnational relationality, remains the best instrument for the promotion of precisely this Christian unity.

I

If there is a hallmark of our twenty-first century world, it is globalization. To me, globalization is defined by a basic dynamic: the clash between a local particularity and a universalizing norm, an interaction that is the result of the technological advances that bring all of us around the world into closer contact with one another. Thus, for instance, an indigenous group in Latin America can protest against a free-trade agreement—a universalizing norm—which they argue destroys their traditional culture—a local particularity. The European Union is beset by a contest between a universalizing norm of fiscal discipline and local desires for more freedom in budgetary decision-making.

The difficulties of the Anglican Communion fit this pattern as well. Seen from one perspective, the decision to ordain Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 was a local, contextual response to the needs of a particular church community. The response from some provinces of the Communion can be interpreted as a desire to impose universal standards for the selection of Anglican bishops and forbid this particular action in New Hampshire. Seen from another angle, Anglicans in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and elsewhere are seeking the freedom to pursue ministry in their own context, unencumbered by the burden of being labelled the “gay church” by other Christians and Muslims and free from the “taint” of their association with American Episcopalians. Whatever the perspective, the dynamic, that of globalization, remains the same.

Although technological advances are bringing human beings around the world into much closer contact with one another, it is not clear that we have the means to manage this closer interaction. Indeed, the examples just cited are examples of increased conflict that is the result of globalization; rare is the instance of increased understanding and cooperation. Globalization, rather than promoting unity among humans, serves as a force of fracture. For all that we are said to be living in a “global village,” it seems discord is the most common outcome of our interconnected life. Ryszard Kapuscinski, the late Polish journalist, once wrote that rather than being like a village, “society on our planet...is more like the anonymous crowd at a major airport, a crowd of people rushing along in haste, mutually indifferent and ignorant.”¹ For many Anglicans, this is too true. Liberal Americans condemn Nigerians as anti-gay bigots. Nigerians read about same-sex marriage in New York and take it as a sign of the end times. But few have ever ventured to encounter the Other themselves and examples of true dialogue across inter-cultural and international lines of difference are rare. If globalization is the hallmark of our twenty-first century world, division is its shadow.

¹ Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Other* (New York: Verso, 2008), 75.

II

Jesus explicitly linked unity with the missional witness of his followers. *“That they may all be one,”* he prayed, *“so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* (John 17.21)² The unity of the believing community thus is a testimony to the truth that Christ is God’s Son, a truth that is at the very heart of the Good News the Church has to proclaim. In order to understand why Jesus would so explicitly link unity with the missional witness of his followers, we might look more thoroughly at the history of God’s dealing with God’s people.

Although it is easy for this recognition to be occluded in a Euro-Atlantic society that so values the individual, a major part of the Biblical witness is devoted to the importance of the believing community. God elects Israel to be a witness to and participant in God’s work in the world. The community of believers serves God by making God’s name known throughout the earth and so restoring all people to unity with God and one another. In the New Testament, the claims that were made about Israel in the Old Testament are expanded to include all those who join the new Israel through baptism (e.g. 1 Peter 1.9-10). The Church, the community of the baptized, the inheritors of the promises to Israel, has a mission—make God’s name known and serve God’s purposes in the world. That mission is best served as a community. Indeed, the reconciled community is a mark of the success of the mission (2 Corinthians 5.18-20).

The Biblical witness is equally consistent that a central way the believing community serves God’s call to mission is by living a particular kind of life: a holy life. This is the genesis of the codes in Leviticus. The people of Israel are, as God repeatedly commands them, to *“be holy, for I am holy”* (Leviticus 11.44-45; 19.2; 20.7). God’s holiness is to be reflected in the lives of God’s community of people. The result is that the mission of Israel is not necessarily to *do* something but to *be* something: a *“priestly kingdom and a holy nation”* (Exodus 19:6). Holiness is not so much about the arcane minutiae of the commandments as it is about living a certain kind of life in the midst of many other—watching—nations. Israel lives among the nations to reflect the glory of God and God’s purposes for the world to those around it. The life of the community and its mission are thus integrally related.

The effect of living in a holy and distinctive way is that it sets the believing community apart from the other communities around it. This was part of God’s plan from the beginning: *“You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.”* (Leviticus 20.26). In order to fulfil God’s mission of reconciliation,

² All Scripture quotations are from the [non-Anglicized] New Revised Standard Version, copyright 1989, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Israel had to be different from the nations around it. God's people look different from other nations. This is a theme that extends into the New Testament community, where not only is the commandment to be holy repeated (1 Peter 1.16) but Paul tells the Romans to *"not be conformed to this world"* (Romans 12.2). In this, Christian communities are only following the example of their founder when it came to the assumptions of first century Jewish culture and society. In his pattern of living and in his ministry, Christ represented a major challenge to the mores of his time. There is a certain counter-cultural element that is at the heart of a community's missional witness.

The Church shows its distinctiveness most in the quality of relationship between and among its members: how its members interact with one another, engage in discourse, and welcome others to the community, for instance. The apostolic and early Church was noted for distinctive relationships. The life of the early Christians described in the Acts of the Apostles—*"all who believed were together and had all things in common"* (Acts 2.44)—was counter-cultural in the context of a Roman society stratified by divisions of wealth. Paul lambasts the Corinthians for reifying social divisions in what was supposed to be a communal meal: *"When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you... Do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"* (1 Corinthians 11. 18,22). In the early Christian community, social divisions were, if not erased, at least lessened. When Jesus tells his followers that *"by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another"* (John 13.35), he is connecting the kind of relationships within the early Christian community to that community's witness to the world. The community that God calls into mission shapes its life differently from the dominant culture and is counter-cultural because God's values are 'out of step' with those that are widely prevalent in society.

Seen in light of this understanding of Christian community, the unity of the Church takes on a particular importance in the twenty-first century. If the hallmarks of this era are fracture, division, and discord, unity among Christians would be a powerful counter-cultural witness. Anglicans, in falling prey to divisions between and within the provinces of their Communion, are living a lifestyle marked by conformity to the pattern of this world. In doing so, we are singularly failing to grasp an opportunity to live a counter-cultural lifestyle—one of unity—that would be a foundational element of our witness to the world.

III

In order to think about how we might work towards this unity, we might turn to two aspects of Anglican history, one from the mid-twentieth century and the other the late nineteenth century, and think about how they can still be relevant to the Anglican Communion of the twenty-first century. The first is "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ," a manifesto that emerged from the 1963 Anglican Congress in Toronto, Canada. The second is to think of Anglicanism as a "religion of the Incarnation."

"Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ" (MRI) was a radical new vision for the Anglican Communion of the post-colonial, post-war period. Coming at a time when churches in the former colonies were often seen as little more than extensions of their 'mother churches', MRI asserted that *"the keynotes of our time are equality,*

interdependence, [and] mutual responsibility” and declared *“our unity in Christ...is the most profound bond among us, in all our political and racial and cultural diversity.”*³ News reports at the time called it a “dramatic manifesto,” and said it showed delegates were “electrified” by MRI and that Anglicans were *“admitting [their] problems and yearning for new life.”*⁴

The principal author of MRI was Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., sometime bishop of Olympia and, from 1960 to 1964, first executive officer of the Anglican Communion. In his time in that position, Bayne emphasized communication among Anglicans, starting inter-Anglican publications and launching the Anglican Cycle of Prayer. He also visited dioceses and provinces around the world, averaging 150,000 miles a year. This work towards communication flowed from a belief that what were truly important were relationships among Anglicans around the world.

Those relationships couldn’t be formed if people stayed at home all the time. The way forward for Anglicans, Bayne wrote, was not *“through theological documents or elaborate agreements ... [but] through the common, shared life of Christians with different experiences and different backgrounds, who pray and work and think together, who do in fact share a common life and, supremely, share a common Sacrament.”*⁵ Bayne sensed that some of the tension and anguish caused by the shifting power in the Anglican Communion could be eased if people more truly knew one another.

The emphasis on relationships at the heart of the Anglican Communion entailed a shift in emphasis from an historical one on *doing* things to an emphasis on *being*:

*“Basically mission is not about things that we do as much as it is about what we are. The mission of the Church is not, first of all, to do something but to be something. In our world, broken and divided by the barriers between the nations, it is very hard sometimes for us to do very much... Therefore, we are being forced back on being something, and the essence of being something is in the little cluster of ideas which is the only precious and irreplaceable treasure at the heart of the Christian body.”*⁶

Indeed, when MRI was published, Bayne noted that the document had confused some people: “[they] were perplexed because it did not tell anybody what to do.”⁷ Instead, MRI was calling Anglicans into a new pattern of being and relationship that was difficult to reduce to a series of deeds and actions but was significantly more important for the life of the Communion.

³ *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ with Related Background Documents*, ed. Stephen F. Bayne, Jr. (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 18.

⁴ “Anglicans: A Test of our Discipleship,” *Time*, Aug. 30, 1963; “Anglicans Urged to Give Church New World Basis,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 18, 1963, 1,33; “Second Chance for Anglicanism,” *Christian Century*, Aug. 28, 1963,1045.

⁵ Bayne, “The Anglican Communion and the World Mission of the Church,” *The Episcopal Overseas Mission Review* III. 3 (1958), 7

⁶ Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., “Four Notes of Mission,” Address at annual meeting of Overseas Mission Society, 1961, in *An Anglican Turning Point* (Austin, TX: Church Historical Society, 1964),205.

⁷ *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ*, 12-13.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey⁸ echoed these themes in Toronto. What was most required of the churches in the Communion was not so much new procedures and institutions as “new attitudes”.⁹ These new attitudes would lead to patterns of relationship more attuned to the reality of, as MRI’s title makes clear, mutuality among Anglicans. This was especially true, said Bayne, for the American and English churches that had so often operated from a position of strength when they sent people and resources overseas: “We shall never send anything or anybody without realizing that we have needs equally, and must therefore ask in the same breath what we need to receive in return. What has Africa to bring to us?”¹⁰ Archbishop Ramsey agreed: “The word ‘missionary’ will mean not colonialism of any kind, but going to one another to help one another. Let African and Asian missionaries come to England to help convert the post-Christian heathenism in our country and to convert our English Church to a closer following of Christ.”¹¹ If all Anglicans were both givers and receivers, this would deepen relationships and strengthen the Anglican Communion.

Although MRI did not have the impact its framers had intended—in contrast to the wishes of its drafters, it became seen simply as one more way of asking for money—I believe its legacy is important for us to recall. The emphasis on relationships of equality, mutuality, and interdependence, where the focus is on God’s work and the quality of relationship among Anglicans is worth preserving. Moreover, Anglicanism is uniquely suited to such an emphasis. Our structures of authority have always prized collegiality in decision-making and establishing relationships before making decisions. The first Lambeth Conference, for instance, came about because some bishops wanted a decision to be made about Bishop Colenso.¹² Wisely, however, Archbishop Longley¹³ opted not to intervene so decisively in the situation. Although Lambeth Conferences have, in the past, been known for the resolutions bishops pass, it is commonly noted that these resolutions have little authority and, except in exceptional circumstances are not long remembered. Rather, the significance of the Conference is the way it allows bishops to come to know one another better around the Communion, something the 2008 Conference’s indaba¹⁴ groups were designed to highlight. There was a similar purpose to the three Anglican Congresses held in the twentieth century, though involving both clergy and lay people. Similarly, the Primates’ Meeting was first called by Archbishop Donald Coggan¹⁵ so its members could

⁸ Arthur Michael Ramsey, *Archbishop of Canterbury 1961-74 (the hundredth Archbishop of Canterbury)*.]

⁹ Quoted in R. David Cox, “A Vision to Fulfil: ‘Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence’ in the Anglican Communion”, (S.T.M., Yale Divinity School, 1987), 127.

¹⁰ Stephen F. Bayne, Jr. “Chosen for Mission,” address at Missionary Festival Service, 1962, in *An Anglican Turning Point*, 221.

¹¹ *Anglican Congress 1963: Report of Proceedings*, ed. E.R. Fairweather (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 16.

¹² John William Colenso, a Cornishman, became first Bishop of Natal in 1853. His liberal views on biblical interpretation, strengthened by his pastoral concern for the needs of his Zulu people, brought upon him a conviction on the charge of heresy. The Privy Council overturned that verdict, and the first Lambeth Conference was called in 1867 in response to the consternation this created among Anglican churches around the world.]

¹³ Charles Thomas Longley, *Archbishop of Canterbury 1862-68*.]

¹⁴ Indaba – an African word meaning ‘gathering’ or ‘meeting’; used at the Lambeth Conference 2008 for smaller groups meeting to discuss large issues, where all are heard and differing views respected.]

¹⁵ Frederick Donald Coggan, *Archbishop of Canterbury 1974-80*.]

engage in “leisurely thought, prayer, and deep contemplation.” Recent moves to vest more authority in this body appear to contravene its original intent, namely that it be a place for leaders of the Communion to share and reflect with one another. The structures in the Anglican Communion have long been designed to facilitate the deepening of true relationship among its members.

Anglicanism, at least since the time of *Lux Mundi*¹⁶, has been seen as a tradition that emphasizes the Incarnation. This emphasis has been criticized by those within and without the tradition for the way in which it can simply ratify things as they are, without accounting for sin and the Fall. While these criticisms are valid, we might step back for a moment and look again at the Incarnation, particularly in the method of action it represents and its approach to power.

In the history of God’s dealings with God’s people, the Incarnation represents a novelty. Hitherto, God spoke to God’s people through prophets, rulers (whether of Israel or other nations), and cataclysmic events, like exile. God gave the law as a guideline for the community’s counter-cultural life, gave the prophets to call the community back to that law, and brought about events in the community’s life that made God’s displeasure clear. To little avail. God’s people continued in their ways, missing the point of the law. The norms of God’s way of life clashed with the particularities of what it means to be a community in the Ancient Near East, struggling with the constant threat of foreign invasion and beset by internal strife and intrigue.

Rather than continuing with old strategies, God took a new tack. Instead of remaining, as God had to this point, on one side of the barrier between human and divine, God intentionally broke down this long-standing barrier. This is the miracle of the Incarnation: an omniscient, omnipotent, and all-mighty God voluntarily took human form in Jesus Christ to love, teach, heal, and save humankind in his ministry, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ, as fully human and fully God, represents, in his being, the reconciliation of the universalizing norms of God’s law and the local particularities of each human life.

The border-crossing Incarnation represents a new use of power or, rather, weakness. The Holy One of Israel is all-mighty and far more powerful than humans can ever imagine. This is clear from repeated references in the Old Testament, as when Moses celebrates the triumph over the Egyptians: “*The Lord is my strength and my might... The Lord is a warrior... Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power*” (Exod. 15:2,3,6). In the context of this view of God, it is notable that the Incarnation took place in a back-alley stable with a manger for a crib, surrounded by shepherds and animals. This is the first of many indications in Christ’s ministry that God has chosen to shed the power and majesty that is God’s alone for a different sort of existence. Christ’s life and ministry were marked by a striking degree of vulnerability, uniquely encapsulated in the cross, in which Christ willingly chose a degrading death so that humankind might live eternally. It is expressed most fully in the Christ hymn in Philippians: Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being

¹⁶ “*Lux Mundi: A series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*” (1889) edited by Charles Gore.]

born in human likeness... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death" (2:7-8). In willingly giving up power, God was able to bring about the reconciliation that is at the core of God's purposes for the world.

Vulnerability is not a value that is highly prized in a western culture that rewards dominance. Yet vulnerability is exactly what Christ chose to expose himself to and what Anglicans are called to as well, with all its attendant nerve-jangling, mind-warping, and uncomfortable effects. This is not the forced vulnerability of the abused spouse or exploited worker but the chosen vulnerability of one who is confident in God's purposes and sure of God's love. The lesson of the Incarnation is that we must generally seek not the security of the inn but the vulnerability of the manger as we encounter one another around the world.

The combination of MRI and the Incarnation gives us some clues as to how Anglicans—and others—might work towards reconciling the conflictual dynamics of globalization that mark and mar our twenty-first century existence. Show up, in a posture of humility, and work towards relationship: not tasks Anglicans—nor anyone else—have been noted for in recent years. Yet if we do this, we might learn that paths of reconciling unity among Anglicans are easier to discern than we once thought.

This is a lesson I have learned from first-hand experience. Perhaps no province of the Anglican Communion has been more opposed to decisions by the American church than Nigeria. The Church of Nigeria's previous primate, Peter Akinola, was vociferous in his opposition to the decision to ordain Gene Robinson and was instrumental in leading the opposition to the American church. I spent a month—the length of a tourist visa—in Nigeria in 2011, visiting three dioceses as a guest of each one's bishop. As an American, I didn't know what to expect or how I would be received. What I found was surprising. Rather than a bunch of rabidly anti-American Anglicans intent on founding a new Communion independent of outside influence, I found lay people, priests, and bishops committed to the idea of Anglican unity.

The scores of people I spoke with were opposed to homosexuality, finding it unfamiliar to their culture and incompatible with Scripture (in that order). But the vast majority of Anglicans I encountered did not see the issue as one to split over. Instead, they expressed a deep yearning for continued relationship with Anglicans around the world—including in the United States. Amara, a young man raised in his local Anglican church and recently graduated from college, and I had a long conversation about Biblical interpretation. He disagreed with my belief that one can be both gay and a faithful Christian. I disagreed with his assertion that women should not be ordained. Sitting outside a diocesan conference centre during the lunch break of a diocesan meeting, we discussed the issues from numerous angles for nearly an hour. Just as we were being called back in, he said, "I can disagree with you. But that doesn't mean I should cut myself off from you. Even the early Church had lots of disagreements. But they still came together to propagate the Gospel. We can do the same." I agreed.

People I met questioned the decision to boycott the 2008 Lambeth Conference, wishing their bishops had attended so they could engage other bishops around the world. Chike, a senior priest, told me that when you have a dispute with someone, "The solution is not to withdraw yourself, the solution is to stay in there and keep on discussing." He quoted an

Igbo proverb: “When your house is on fire, you don’t run away.” One bishop lamented his absence at Lambeth, telling me that the Biblical message was one of unity and reconciliation and that by missing Lambeth, bishops had missed an opportunity to work towards that goal.

As I travelled, I found myself thinking often of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in St John’s Gospel Chapter 4. John takes pains to point out that Jews and Samaritans did not associate with one another. But there was Jesus and there was the woman chatting with one another. What would happen, I kept asking myself, if Anglicans—and people more generally—could do what Jesus did: show up in places where no one expects us and start talking with people who are different to us? Perhaps we would learn what I was learning, that the story from the pews and local pulpits of the Communion’s churches is different from that told at its highest levels.

The lesson was brought home to me by one priest nearing retirement. He is a man who began his career as a school principal before being ordained, a man who has no role in the Church hierarchy and never will have, but who faithfully pastors his congregation week in and week out. “Flexing of muscles left and right doesn’t solve anything,” he told me when our conversation turned to divisions in the Communion. “Arrogance is a poor solution for ignorance. These problems have hurt our association with one another.”

“But,” he said, “we are still all Anglicans.”

IV

It is easy enough for me to make this argument. Unattached and funded by generous grants, I have had experiences few Anglicans are able to have. Nothing will lessen the intensifying dynamics of globalization nor are sweeping generalizations a substitute for serious research. The young priest in the rural archdeaconry is right. The challenge of holding together a global communion in the face of differing contexts will not go away. Partisans around the Communion have been particularly skilful at exploiting the Internet to deepen divisions and harden positions. Whatever I learned in a mere month in Nigeria will be quickly overwhelmed by the voices of disunity that dominate the debate.

But there are broader lessons here. Our relationships with one another have missional significance. In our race to proclaim an allegedly pure and unadulterated truth, we lose sight of the relationships within our global community and become more like the global airport than the global village. We become more like the rest of the world and less counter-cultural. Anglicans around the world and on all sides of the issues have been as guilty of this as any other. One does not have to travel from the United States to Nigeria to encounter people with different beliefs. In the Church of England, low-church evangelical congregations are down the street from high-church Anglo-Catholic ones. One would never guess, from the relationships between the two, that they are members of the same Church. Encountering difference in a humble way and building relationships with the Other are a key part of what the Gospel calls us to do.

As Anglicans, we are uniquely suited for this task. As we have seen, we are a Communion that understands the missiological importance of relationships. In our governance

structures, we have emphasized collegiality, striking a balance between centralization and federalism. Neither the Lambeth Conference nor any of the other Instruments of Communion are designed to be supreme authorities in the way the Vatican is for the Roman church. Nor, however, is the Anglican Communion a loose federation of like-minded churches in the manner of the Lutheran World Federation or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. These groups, as helpful as they are, do not posit the same interdependence and mutuality—true ‘communion’—among their members as Anglicans do. Anglicans understand that the body of Christ does truly span the globe and that our church organization must reflect that reality.

The fruits of this approach are seen not in high-profile decisions, like the one to boycott Lambeth, but in the relationships and gatherings that are made possible only because of our recognition that the body of Christ is global. There are companion diocese relationships, joint mission trips, and much more. In a statement issued after one meeting in Tanzania in February 2011, nineteen bishops representing eleven countries and a variety of theological perspectives, concluded, “Across the globe, across the Communion, we actually really need one another. We are stronger in relationship than when we are apart. This, we believe, is a work of engaging in Communion building rather than Communion breaking.”¹⁷ Ideas like these, I’m convinced, might just be the most accurate representation of where Anglicans are nearly ten years after Gene Robinson’s consecration.

This background—the emphasis on relationships that leads to a balance between increased centralization and looser federation as well as a particular understanding of the Incarnation—gives the Anglican Communion a powerful opportunity to be a witness to the truth of the Gospel in a divided and fracturing world. “Yes, we disagree,” Anglicans could say, “but we affirm that we are still one, equally needing one another. And we believe that our historic reliance on the Incarnation, the importance of showing up and honestly and vulnerably encountering the different Other, is a Gospel-centric task that is at the heart of our witness to the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ.” That, at least, is the reason I am an Anglican and will remain one.

Of course, Anglican unity is not the ultimate end. As powerful a witness as worldwide Anglican unity could be to a globalized world, the truly powerful witness would be the ecumenical unity of all of God’s children. This is an eschatological goal—the “great multitude ... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” of the Book of Revelation (7.9)—but Anglicans can point the way towards it in their unique balance of authority and emphasis on Incarnational relationships.

The significance of the Anglican Communion and the incarnational reality of Christian unity were brought home to me in a small church in Nigeria, in the same vast rural archdeaconry where the young priest asked me about globalization. It’s an area where Anglicans have historically been weak, due to agreements among missionaries that parcelled this area out

¹⁷ *Consultation of Bishops in Dialogue, “A Testimony of Grace,” 1 March 2011* <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm12011/3/3/ACNS4806>> accessed 29 December 2011.

to other denominations. Four elderly parishioners—two-thirds of the Sunday attendance—had come on a weekday afternoon to meet the American visitor in their church—a rented room with three pews and a small altar. We visited a while, sharing stories about our churches and praying together. As I thanked them for their hospitality and went to leave, one of the old men stood up. He had something to say. “Sometimes, we are ashamed to be Anglicans in this village. Other churches are much bigger and we are ashamed of our little room.” He paused. “But today you have come here. It is evangelism for you to come here. People in our village will be talking, ‘The white man came all the way to go to that little Anglican church!’ It will be the talk of the town.”

I struggled for what to say. All I could think was to tell him that we were both members of the Anglican Communion, a part of the worldwide body of Christ. There are millions of us around the world, I said, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in being Anglican.

More than anything, I am Anglican and will remain Anglican because of that community of Anglicans in that village. They and I and millions of others are part of the same portion of the body of Christ spread around the world, a portion of the body of Christ that has incredible potential to be a witness of unity to a divided and fractured world. Perhaps when we begin to show up, to see the Other not as an enemy but as part of us, to see difference not as a barrier but a blessing, then we will live out the reality of Christ’s prayer for unity and the world will know the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ.