

April 29, 1991 Anglican Primates Issue Statement at Close of Meeting

Episcopal News Service

The primates of the Anglican Communion, ending a week-long meeting here, issued a communique on April 13, 1991, addressing issues and concerns discussed during their deliberations.

Attending with the primates of the 28 autonomous provinces, representing 164 countries, were the moderators of the churches of North and South India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, churches in full communion with the Anglican Communion.

The statement addressed the subjects of evangelism, Ireland, the Middle East, Southern Africa, international debt, and human sexuality -- topics placed on the agenda by the primates themselves.

The meeting, held every two or three years, also allowed the primates to maintain and strengthen bonds of fellowship and to take counsel together on ways by which they can more effectively fulfill the church's mission.

The primates met in Northern Ireland at the invitation of the Most Rev. Robert Eames, archbishop of Armagh and primate of all Ireland. It was the first meeting to include the new archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. The primates will next meet in the Province of Southern Africa in 1993.

Attached is the statement approved by the primates at the conclusion of their meeting.

Introduction

We have met in Newcastle, Northern Ireland, as the primates of the 28 churches of the Anglican Communion, together with the moderators of the churches of North and South India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

We met during Eastertide. In worship, Bible study, and discussion our meeting was permeated with the joy and hope of the Resurrection. In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we affirm the triumph of life over death, of good over evil. As we reflected on some of the troubled situations in the various parts of the world from which we come, we learned for ourselves -- and we want to say to the people of our churches -- that we who are people of the Resurrection are called to be bearers of hope in a broken and divided world.

The purpose of the Primates' Meeting is to maintain and strengthen the bonds of fellowship and affection among the churches of the Anglican Communion. We are also able to take counsel together on ways by which we can more effectively fulfill the mission that our Lord has committed to his church.

We were forcibly reminded of disastrous circumstances in various parts of the world that directly impinge upon members of our Communion. Archbishop George Browne, primate of West Africa, was unable to attend because of the painful civil war that has ravaged his country. Sudan also has experienced civil war since 1983, and many bishops have been forced to leave their dioceses. Famine, compounded by internal conflict, is causing terrible starvation in other parts of Africa. Sri

Lanka is suffering from civil war and terrorism. We were not able to give detailed attention to these and many other troubled areas, but we commend them all to the prayers of our people.

Some of our number bear the responsibility of leadership in areas of political instability and violence; some in places of dehumanizing poverty and oppression; some in areas where tension is related to differences of faith; some in countries where secularist and materialistic philosophies pose strong challenges to Christian faith and practice. The circumstances in which the church finds itself differ considerably from place to place, but we have been struck by common elements that enable us to understand better the problems that confront us. We strive to assist one another in the exercise of our pastoral leadership in our respective churches.

The primates warmly welcomed the newly appointed archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. George Carey, as their president and appreciated his strong leadership at our meeting. We recognized the archbishop of Canterbury's clear personal commitment to Christ and his Gospel, to evangelism, and to the application of the values of the Kingdom of God to the life of the world. We have experienced the warm personal qualities of our brother in Christ whose leadership will be valued throughout the Anglican Communion. The presence of the primates at the archbishop's enthronement in the week following our meeting will be a tangible expression of our wholehearted personal support to the archbishop and of the unity of the Anglican Communion.

It was significant that the primates met in Northern Ireland. Ireland's troubles have been publicized throughout the world. We were impressed, however, not by the deplorable acts of terrorism that are highlighted by the world's media but by the positive spirit of determination among a great number of people to come through the present troubles. We have found a genuine will to build a stronger, more harmonious, and more prosperous community. We were warmed by the genuineness of the welcome and the hospitality that we received. We became aware of the profound spiritual tradition of the Church of Ireland and its clear Christian witness under the leadership of Archbishop Robert Eames. We pray that our meeting in Northern Ireland might be taken as an affirmation of confidence in Ireland's future.

Evangelism

We rejoiced to learn of the commitment of the churches of the communion in taking up the call to the Decade of Evangelism that was issued at the Lambeth Conference 1988. We reaffirmed our own determination to give priority to evangelism in the leadership of our churches.

At our meeting we have been encouraged by firsthand accounts of effective evangelism and witness from throughout the communion. From Africa we have heard about the growth of evangelism, with emphasis on teaching the faith, leadership training, and the linking of evangelism with social justice.

From Asia and the Pacific we have noted the need for methods of evangelism to be related to the widely divergent cultures and societies and for the priority of spiritual renewal in a church wanting to evangelize others.

The experience of churches in the Islamic world has highlighted the need to understand Islam from within through serious study and dialogue. The current expansion of Islam gives such study special urgency.

From the Americas and Europe, primates commented on the need to strengthen family and community life in the face of rampant individualism. They pledged themselves to hold up evangelism as the work of the whole church. This would involve better training of the bishops and clergy as teachers and models of evangelism, the encouragement and training of the laity for evangelism, and working at the quality of congregational life so that each congregation might become an effective evangelistic agent.

Message and method

We were helped by a presentation by Bishop Leslie Newbigin on the theme "Proclaiming the Gospel in a Pluralist Society." We recognized that secularism has become in effect an alternative faith to Christianity in many developed countries and that the influence of secularism is rapidly spreading throughout the world. The church must be prepared to question and challenge the assumptions that underlie the secularist attitude to life.

Meeting immediately after Easter, we were reminded that Christianity is essentially an Easter faith and that the death and resurrection of Jesus lies at the core of the good news we are called to proclaim. We want to emphasize these points in particular:

1. The basis of evangelism is not our activity but what God has done and is doing in human history.
2. The Bible contains the unique account of what God has done, culminating in the overcoming of the forces of darkness, sin, and death in the cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. Evangelism is the telling of the biblical story, not just as historical events, but as a present reality for every individual and community today.
4. Evangelism is not so much a duty to be imposed as a natural and joyful outcome of the lives of people who find their own lives renewed by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.
5. In a secularized and pluralistic society the telling of the Christian story will not be credible unless its truth is demonstrated in the worship and quality of life of local Christian communities.
6. As Jesus showed the power of the Gospel in bringing healing, forgiveness and transformation of life to the poor, the wretched, the outcasts (including the wealthy) so the church must proclaim and live out the good news in such a way that the lives of individuals and of society are transformed.

In the light of this understanding of the Gospel and of the evangelistic task, we turned our attention to certain of the pressing issues being faced in parts of the world in which our churches have special involvement.

Ireland

As Anglican Church leaders we represent a tradition that is both Catholic and Reformed. In the context of Northern Ireland we feel it is important to underline the historic and contemporary significance of both the Catholic and Reformed traditions within the Christian family. In a community where the Roman Catholic Church exists with those of the Reformed tradition and where, wrongly, a conflict situation is described in religious terms alone, we wish to acknowledge the role all traditions have to play in responding to the will and purpose of God.

We were privileged to meet representative political and religious leaders and to receive from them different perspectives on the present situation in Ireland. We were made aware of the long and complex history that forbids the possibility of any glib or easy answers. We do, however, find parallels to situations in other parts of the world in which some of us are involved, and this encourages us to make a few observations that we hope may encourage those who long for, and are praying and working for, peace.

1. We feel deep compassion for those on both sides who have suffered terribly from acts of violence. We are disciples of the Lord who himself suffered innocently and who in taking all suffering into himself made it a means of redemption for others. Our Lord knows the pain of suffering to the full, and his compassion -- and ours -- reaches out equally to all who suffer.

2. We plead with those who perpetuate violence to recognize that violence breeds violence and that peace and justice will not be achieved by terror. We reject any attempt to associate terrorist methods with the name of Christ and his church.

3. We have been encouraged to hear of determined and courageous, and often effective, efforts by people on both sides of the religious divide towards the promotion of community harmony. Church leaders have played a positive and notable part in these efforts. We thank God for this and encourage all members of the Christian community and all people of good will to support these efforts.

4. We recognize that on both sides there are political leaders of integrity and courage who have a sincere commitment to peace. We want to encourage them to work together with renewed determination until they have agreed on a way forward. It is our hope and prayer that all the people of this land can live happily together in mutual appreciation and well-being.

5. Our experience in other parts of the world suggests that aggression is often fostered by a deep-rooted sense of insecurity. Peace can only come when each side is prepared to guarantee the security and identity of the other. Can each side recognize that the other side has the same need for security and identity as they themselves have?

6. We must never underestimate the power of faithful prayer. We call upon Christians in Ireland and around the world to continue to pray earnestly for reconciliation and peace among those who are at enmity in Ireland.

The Middle East

As primates of the Anglican Communion we

- express gratitude to Almighty God for the ceasefire in the Gulf War and for the restoration of Kuwait
- voice our sadness at the enormous loss of human life in the recent and continuing conflicts and extend our pastoral support to the families of those who have died on all sides of the conflict
- condemn the massive assault upon the environment and the pollution of water, soil, and air that will have incalculable consequences for future generations of people and for the natural ecology

- call upon the international community to recognize and respond to the tragic suffering of displaced peoples, including Kurdish refugees, and to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories suffering inhumane containment, curfews, and the continued denial of human rights
- plead for consistency by the United Nations in the implementation of all resolutions with respect to the region as a whole and particularly Palestine/Israel
- affirm the position expressed in 1988 by the bishops of the Anglican Communion in Lambeth Resolution 24 on Palestine/Israel.

This conference, saddened by the present suffering in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

- Affirms the importance of the church in the exercise of its prophetic role by standing on the side of the oppressed in their struggle for justice, and by promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation for all peoples in the region
- Affirms the existence of the State of Israel and its right to recognized and secure borders, as well as the civic and human rights of all those who live within its borders
- Affirms the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, including the choice of their own representatives and the establishment of their own state
- Supports the convening of an international conference over Palestine/Israel under the auspices of the UN and based on all the UN resolutions in relation to this conflict, to which all parties of the conflict be invited
- Commits itself to continued prayer for Israelis and Palestinians, for Muslim, Jew, and Christian, for the achievement of justice, peace, and reconciliation for all.

We call upon the United Nations to assume the administration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip from the State of Israel, and to facilitate humane policies for the people of the Occupied Territories until there is a settlement of the Palestinian/Israeli issue.

Southern Africa

We give thanks to God for the extraordinary changes that have come about in Southern Africa since we last met:

- the independence of Namibia
- the potential that has been created for movement towards multiparty democracy in Mozambique, and
- in particular, the breakthrough in South Africa that occurred when its state president, Mr. F.W. de Klerk, courageously lifted restrictions on black political parties and released Mr. Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners.

We thank God also for the Rustenburg Conference of Churches, which brought together an unprecedented range of South African churches and produced a joint confession of guilt for their role in the sin of apartheid.

We commend warmly the personal commitment to a negotiated settlement that Mr. Mandela and Mr. de Klerk continue to display. However, we are deeply distressed at the carnage the country is experiencing during its transition to democracy and at the government's failure to protect the lives of people living in South Africa's black townships. We urge all parties to spare no effort in bringing an end to the conflict. We support the efforts of church leaders to bring together the leaders of communities that are suffering from the violence. We are concerned at the potential that the violence has for wrecking the prospect of negotiations. We call on all South Africans to refrain from violence, which is ultimately self-defeating, and we call on the South African government to take appropriate action to demonstrate beyond question its resolve to stop the fighting.

We are glad to note the success that the strategy of sanctions has had in bringing about change in Southern Africa. We believe any signal for the lifting of sanctions must come from consultation with the leaders of the black community. We urge Western governments -- whose countries have benefited extensively from cheap black labor in South Africa -- to provide massive development aid to the country, controlled by representatives of those who have been oppressed, for the urgent provision of housing, education, health services, and land.

International debt

The Christian Gospel is concerned with human dignity and must confront anything that degrades human life. The primates therefore express their continuing concern in relation to the international debt crisis. We have heard again from some of our churches in nations whose international debt is paid by poverty, hunger, and death.

We recognize the power of the debt crisis over the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

- Whole economies are in bondage.
- The crisis is being used for foreign domination and exploitation.
- The plight of women, children, and marginalized groups in developing countries is worsening.
- The roots of poverty in so many countries and cultures of the south lie largely in the wealth of the countries of the north.
- The fruits of the injustice of trade imbalances and lack of accountability in the economic system are, inevitably, corruption, war, hunger, poverty, disease, and environmental destruction.

At the same time we note with appreciation that certain countries and banking institutions have canceled or renegotiated the debts of several countries.

As primates, we call on all churches to

- recognize and examine their need to be liberated from any complicity with unjust economic systems

- exercise stewardship of their own resources under the guidance of a Gospel that underlines a preferential option for the poor
- support alternative monetary and economic systems that serve the ends of justice and peace.

We call on churches, in the light of Gospel values, to examine

- principles governing trade relationships.
- the transfer of technology and resources
- loan and debt servicing policies in order to improve the economic viability and local autonomy of developing countries.

We further call on churches to engage economists from north and south, aware of the complexity of issues and in the light of the Gospel, to offer their expertise. In this way the church may bring informed pressure to bear on the decision makers.

Human sexuality

We devoted some time to considering questions related to human sexuality. While sexuality is a matter of universal significance, there are wide differences from one culture to another in the issues that surface and the degree of explicitness with which they are discussed. Homosexuality, and the related question of whether it is right for homosexuals to be ordained, are live issues in some of our churches but not in others. The presiding bishop of ECUSA shared with us the report on the subject that is to be presented to the General Convention of his church in July 1991.

These are sensitive questions. We agreed that in considering them the church needs to give full weight to the testimony of Holy Scripture. We need also to take account of such understanding of homosexuality as scientific research is able to provide. It is important, too, to try to understand the experience of homosexuals themselves as they face the implications of their sexuality.

It is clear that at present there are wide differences of understanding on this matter within the churches of the Anglican Communion. We noted with appreciation this recent statement of the American House of Bishops:

"We recognize that it would not be faithful to the Gospel to ignore the anguished cries of homosexual men and women who feel hurt, rejected, and angry by what they see about them. At the same time, we recognize that it would not be faithful to the Gospel to ignore or simply label as homophobic the anguished cries of men and women who feel hurt, rejected, and angry that what they see as sin is not being reaffirmed as such."

As the church continues to wrestle with this difficult question, we want to encourage our people to pursue the discussion with honesty, compassion, and a genuine desire to seek the will of God.

Conclusion

During our time in Newcastle, we have studied and discussed many issues of interest and concern to the individual regions of the communion; we also took time to consider our Anglican identity in relation to our ecumenical journey with other churches.

We have had a rich experience of the reality of the Easter faith: we leave Northern Ireland strengthened in faith and fellowship by one another and by joy in the risen Lord.

Newcastle

April 13, 1991

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