

Presidential Address

The Thirty-Seventh Session of the General Synod

Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, May 28, 2004

I greet you in the name of the Risen and Ascended Lord, and welcome you to this 37th Session of our General Synod. We gather during the time when the Church remembers that strange period between the Resurrection of our Lord and the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Those few days when the disciples waited for the promised empowering by the Holy Spirit must have been a time of great impatience for them, but as is always the case, their time of impatience was God's time of patience.

The Realm of God had been proclaimed and made real, but then as now acceptance of it is voluntary; as God waited patiently then, so God still waits patiently for the Realm to be brought into full being for those whom God has called to the task. As Christians we are not called to preserve ourselves, but to expend ourselves; we are not called to save our lives but to lose them; our call is not to seek personal salvation but rather to bring into the fullness of being the Realm of God. God is still waiting patiently for us to do that.

We are gathered here as the church to make decisions for and about the life of the church, but the basis of our decisions cannot be, "Is it what I want?" or "Is it good for the Church?" The criterion for our decisions must be, "Will this enhance or inhibit the spread of the Realm of God?" or to put it another way, "Is what we are doing true to the nature of the Kingdom of God?" In a book of essays published in the '50s, called "Soundings", a relatively unknown New Testament scholar named John A.T. Robinson wrote, "You can have as high a view of the church as you like, provided your view of the Kingdom is higher."

A good portion of the Gospel is taken up with Jesus' teaching about the nature of the Realm of God. There is a strange neurological disease that affects the eyes so that one sees everything upside down. In a sense in the Realm of God, everything is similarly inverted.

In the world, the way is power; in the Realm of God, the way is love. In the world, the focus is self; in the Realm of God, the focus is others. In the world, the rule is law; in the Realm of God, the rule is trust. In the world, the practice is get; in the Realm of God, it is give.

And yet, and yet, we are all citizens of both the Realm and this world.

Richard Holloway, former Primus of Scotland, tells a story about Charles Ives, the American composer. As a young man, Ives was listening to a record on the phonograph in the family parlour when he heard a brass band marching down the street and realized that he was listening to two tunes at once.

As Christians, we constantly find ourselves listening to two tunes. One is the teachings, traditions and practices of the church. Like the record Ives was playing, this tune is basically self-selected. We choose a church, or more often choose to stay in a church because its

teachings, traditions and practices generally suit us, although within that generality most of us find particular elements that we do not much like.

The second tune that we hear constantly is the culture and thought of our day. This tune, like the one played by the passing band is not chosen by us. It is imposed on us by external forces. No matter how distantly we hear it, if we are alive and cognitively aware of the world around us, we cannot escape it.

It is not easy to listen to two often-discordant tunes at the same time. Some people, finding it too difficult, close the windows and pull the drapes to shut out or at least muffle the intrusive song of the world. Others choose to shut off the gramophone and rush out into the street to follow the marching band.

This struggle to maintain the tradition but live in the world is not new. The Scriptures, both Hebrew and Christian, are replete with examples of it: the Hebrews entering Palestine and finding there a religion seemingly more suited to a settled life than that of Yahweh the God of the journey, the God of the wilderness or the first Christians encountering the Gentile world and having to decide which aspects of their Jewish heritage were only cultural.

Christians cannot simply abandon their traditions and be blown to and fro by the changing winds of their culture. Dean Inge, known as the Gloomy dean, once wrote, "A man who marries the spirit of this age will be a widower in the next." But Christians who repudiate entirely the culture in which they live either retreat into a social, spiritual and intellectual ghetto or attempt entirely to control society. Neither response is faithful to the Gospel. The trick of course is to maintain a balance, to "be in the world but not of the world."

One of the ways to maintain that balance, as I have said already, is to test every decision by asking whether it reflects the values of the Realm of God.

Now to some of the issues we will have to face: First, the relationship within our church between indigenous and non-indigenous members. Some of you will remember that at the last General Synod, one of the major debates was about the litigation arising from abuse in the Residential Schools and the issue was whether we should withdraw from the ecumenical negotiations with the government and simply fight it out in courts.

During the last three years much has changed. We moved into bilateral negotiations and completed an agreement that saw our liability for abuse limited to a \$25,000,000 Settlement Fund. I am proud to say that every diocese in our church agreed to accept their proportional share and to date has kept that commitment. I want to pause here to thank all those at the national and diocesan levels who worked so hard to get the agreement and to meet our obligations.

But the agreement was not seen in a favourable light by some of our indigenous members. The core of their disappointment was the nature of the complete release required by the Government from those who entered the proposed Alternate Dispute Resolution process, a release which we, in the agreement, accepted. Since the signing of the agreement, the Government has changed its

tune and is willing to accept a partial release exempting claims for the loss of language and culture from it. During the past months, a resurrected remnant of the negotiating team, including an indigenous person, met with the deputy minister and some of his staff to work at how we might be able also to accept a partial release. We need to continue those conversations.

As painful and difficult as these last ten years have been for all of us in the church, from them as arisen a determination to forge a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Anglicans.

I cannot predict what shape this new relationship will take but it must be one in which the structures of our church allow for a greater recognition of the fact that over a huge geographic area of our country, indigenous peoples are in a majority in many parishes. The new model must not only provide greater recognition but allow a greater degree of autonomy, for that is the only means by which we can break the insidious pattern of paternalism and its corollary, dependency. During this Synod we will hear about the Covenant and the work being done to implement it. I bid you listen carefully. Our church's life, particularly in the north and west will be profoundly affected by this changing relationship for it will mean a major realignment of our present jurisdictions. These jurisdictional changes will reinforce the need for us to rethink the manner of the provision of ordained ministry in small communities. If we are not going simply to abandon the villages and smaller towns (and that is not the Anglican way), we must look to new forms of recruiting, training and supporting non-professional clergy. There will be a motion brought forward about theological education. It may need to be expanded.

Secondly, we will be hearing from one of our most distinguished Canadians, Stephen Lewis, about the HIV/AIDS pandemic which is sweeping much of the global south. I quote from a speech given by Mrs. Veronica Maziya of Swaziland, a semi-autonomous kingdom in the Church of Southern Africa.

“The situation is a disaster for Swaziland,” said Mrs. Maziya. “HIV has destroyed our youth and the future. We have been left with an orphaned country. We face a tragedy beyond comprehension.”

Of the country's one million population, five hundred thousand are under fifteen years of age. Of the remaining half million, 200,000 are infected. The chance of a 15 year old reaching the age of 35 is only 10 per cent. More than 5,500 homes are now headed by orphans (with an average age of 11). “The situation is amplified by the fact that there are only 2,000 hospital beds in the country,” she continued. “And as there is no social welfare system, very few can afford treatment.” More than 50 percent of Swaziland lives below the poverty line, currently set at \$8.50 per month.

“In order to relieve the HIV/AIDS situation, we must get people out of poverty, and that means giving them back hope.” says Mrs. Maziya, adding that the diocese needed the prayers of everyone in the Anglican Communion. “I call for everyone worldwide through the Communion to pray for Swaziland, for its people, and the work of its church.”

As Canadians we can be proud that our country recently promised 100 million dollars to fight this scourge in Africa and that we are the first country to pass legislation allowing the production of cheaper generic drugs to combat HIV/AIDS in impoverished countries. But as a church, we must respond with prayer and more. The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund has established this as a major priority and provides the means for us to contribute.

Thirdly, we face a difficult and demanding discussion and debate on the place of gay men and lesbians in our church, focused particularly on the issue of the blessing of the union of same-sex couples. It would be inappropriate for me to speak of my own position on the matter in this address, but I do want to make some comments about the manner in which the debate has proceeded so far.

On the part of some on both sides, it has been harsh and vituperative to an unacceptable degree. We all feel deeply about this issue, but that is no excuse to descend into the depths. The judgmentalism and the profoundly personal nature of some comments, both private and public, could never reflect the nature of the Realm of God no matter what you understand it to be. A letter that says, "I hope I never have to stand next to you because when God strikes you dead, I do not want to be covered with bits of burnt, cowardly episcopal guts." Or our twelve-year-old daughter being called a lesbian and told she is the wrong kind of Christian, seem a bit beyond the pale.

Equally unacceptable is the direct interference in the affairs of the Anglican Church of Canada by Primates of other Provinces of the Communion. That is not the way our Communion operates.

Within this Synod, it is imperative that we maintain a high degree of civility. I suggest that during the actual debate on the evening of Wednesday, June 2nd we pay careful attention to the rules of order, especially to our practice that there be no applause after speeches. Further, I wonder if we might not be wise to observe ten seconds of silence between speakers. If memory serves, we did that in Quebec in 1975 during the debate on the ordination of women to the priesthood and it helped give the debate a measured dignity.

At the Lambeth Conference, one of the bishops in my bible study group, an English Suffragan, said to me, "But David, you must understand that for me this is a Kingdom question. How I vote on it will determine whether I go to heaven." Afterwards, thinking about it, I decided that it is indeed a 'kingdom' or 'Realm of God' question, not in the sense that it is determinative of our salvation but rather that it must be decided according to the nature of the Realm. I know that among us, there are held different views of the nature of the Realm of God – that is part of being human. What I ask is that each of our votes on this issue reflects honestly our understanding of the Realm of God.

It is my belief that we most accurately and fully manifest the nature of the Realm when we are gathered at the altar. There we define ourselves as Church. The words, "the Body of Christ" not only describe what we receive, but also what we are. There is a radical equality at the altar rail. There everyone comes as equal, as a forgiven sinner. There everyone receives the same, there is

no measuring of grace – that radical equality is to me the quintessential nature of the Christian community and the truest manifestation of the Realm.

But that radical equality does not mean homogeneity – in fact it means exactly the opposite. For true community can only be built on diversity. Diversity strengthens; homogeneity weakens. That is why we have laws in this country to prevent close relatives marrying. It is thus everywhere in nature. Avian flu spread like wildfire in B.C.'s Frazer Valley in part because all the chicken farmers get their chicks from the same sources and the diminished gene pool has lowered natural resistance. Even in what we do, homogeneity creates weaknesses. One of the reasons computer viruses are such a plague is because one company dominates the software market. Diversity or as the Book of Common Prayer says, "All sorts and conditions" is the nature of the Realm of God.

I hope you will forgive me if I throw in a couple of personal notes. I live in Kelowna in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia and I am the Archbishop of the Diocese of Kootenay and for the last few years have also had responsibility for the Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior (The old diocese of Cariboo). All of last summer's B.C. forest fires that ran wild and destroyed homes and businesses were within the bounds of Kootenay or the Central Interior. A number of dioceses and many individuals contributed more than \$40,000 directly or through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund to our Fire Relief Fund. We are immensely grateful to all who contributed so generously. Thank you.

I have enjoyed my brief time as Acting Primate, even if it did interfere with my skiing. I thank the House of Bishops who were supportive of me in the unaccustomed role and the staff at Church House who were kind to me when I kept dropping in from the sky to intrude in their lives. My wife Joan and our daughter Rachael were generous and uncomplaining about my frequent lengthy absences. Finally, I count it a great honour to have been able to address you as Acting Primate.

Our church faces momentous decisions, difficult times, and hard work. Let us, with true faith, good courage, and confidence in the Holy Spirit turn to the business at hand remembering that although we, from time to time forget God – God never forgets nor forsakes us.

Thank you.

Address by the Most Reverend David Crawley, Archbishop and Acting Primate