

An Unfulfilled Promise

I had posted what follows below shortly after having arrived at Trinity School for Ministry. I was just adjusting to the new life of faculty and was disappointed at how little time this left for blogging. I have since discovered that there is no letup to the responsibilities of teaching at a seminary. Some of us have suggested that this has something to do with the Calvinist heritage of the place. We're all trying to prove we're elect by putting in as many hours as we can.

Seriously, in some ways teaching in a seminary is more time consuming than teaching at a university or college, or doing full-time IT support. There are a lot more responsibilities besides teaching classes. All the faculty preach in chapel. All the faculty are advisors to students. All the faculty participate in the day to day governing of the seminary—from discussing curriculum, to student evaluations, to discussing finances. We all promote the school in various ways. We go to conferences. We contribute to the Theological Journal, and other publications. We have responsibilities connected with the current Episcopal Church/Anglican Communion crisis. We teach not only on campus, but online as well. It is a lot to do. But I think we all love it. And we love the students. Or we wouldn't do it. But it makes blogging difficult.

I decided to add a blog to my website last January after having received complaints that people would like to be able to comment on what I had written. I had hoped that blogging might become a regular discipline. Shortly after my first few posts, however, my life was interrupted first by the unexpected death of my father, and then, by the more happy request to interview for a teaching position at Trinity School for Ministry. Since that interview, the last several months have been consumed with preparing to teach two courses I had never taught before, packing up and saying goodbye to old friends, moving to Ambridge, unpacking, saying hello to

new friends, and now, the first few weeks of teaching.

So far TESM has exceeded my wildest expectations. Despite the general craziness that comes with moving to a new place—one of the movers commented while unloading one of my dozens and dozens of boxes of books, “You sure must like to read”—being here has brought me almost unmitigated joy. There are new surprises every day. This morning we heard Bishop Mouneer Anis preach in chapel, and then speak afterwards to the faculty and student body. He is the Primate of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East. His diocese includes not only Jerusalem, but also Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Tunisia, and Algiers. He brought greetings from the Global South Primates and assured us of their support for the “remnant” of faithful Anglicans/Episcopalians in the United States. When I was a child I used to dread the Sundays when the missionaries brought in their slideshows, but Bishop Mouneer visibly moved a packed auditorium as he talked about the work of Anglican Christians in an overwhelmingly Muslim part of the world. I was moved. My jaded cynicism is having to fight hard to stay alive here.

Now that I am a little more settled I’ll try to do more to keep in touch with my readers.

Grace and Peace,

Bill

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Why Not Leave? A Followup

“Why Not Leave?” was one of the first blog posts I did, and the most popular. It received over 14,000 views. A lot of the people who viewed it at the time misread it as an apology to stay in the Episcopal Church, but that was a misreading. If you read to the end I make clear that I believed there would be a separation of the ways between orthodox Anglicans and TEC, and I believed at the time it would happen sooner rather than later.

There were a couple of things that I did not anticipate when I wrote this. First was that the Archbishop of Canterbury would subvert the process of disciplining the Episcopal Church by (1) disregarding the deadline set by the Primates at Dar Es Salaam; (2) guaranteeing that the Lambeth Conference would exercise no discipline by inviting all the TEC bishops who had participated in Robinson’s ordination, and (3) by turning the Conference into a series of Indaba groups where no substantive conversation could take place, and no decisions made.

I really did believe that discipline would take place, and that it would be exercised by the Communion as a whole. with Rowan Williams leading the way.

The second thing I did not anticipate was that there would be two very different responses by the orthodox to the failure of Communion discipline—the distinction that has now come to be made between so-called Federal Conservatives and Communion Conservatives, also known as the “Outside Approach” and the “Inside Approach.”

I had presumed that if Plan A failed (failure of Communion discipline) that the orthodox would naturally go with some kind of Plan B—which to me meant turning to the Global South rather than Canterbury. So I was quite surprised to discover that not only were there many who would simply refuse Plan B,

but who would insist that there had never been a real Plan A, or, at least that there was not now. I was also quite surprised at the virulent reaction of Communion Conservatives against the so-called Federal Conservatives when they began pursuing Plan B after Plan A failed.

While I admire a willingness to suffer and be a witness, that was never my original understanding in writing this post. I certainly anticipated that orthodox Anglicanism might fade away. I wrote in "Why Not Leave?" that a disappearance of Anglicanism would be a tragedy—like the disappearance of the Celtic Church or the churches in North Africa that were obliterated by the Muslim conquerors.

But I was not embracing such a future. The hope that I expressed in the post was for a "renewed orthodoxy" that might well consist of Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and free church Evangelicals. I anticipated that we might well be meeting in storefronts, and sharing each other's buildings, and that there might be a rapprochement between these "remnant Reformation Churches" with Rome and Orthodoxy. And that is largely what has been happening, both in dioceses like my former Diocese of CT—the orthodox remnant of my old CT6 church meets in a gymnasium—and here in Pittsburgh, where we are not yet in the storefronts, but we are certainly being sued by the stayers, including those who claim to be "orthodox"—and we might well end up in the storefronts.

So the bottom line was, when I originally wrote "Why Not Leave?" that I was anticipating something like GAFCON should Communion discipline fail. And I am happy that my bishop will be the Archbishop for the new Anglican Province of North America.

I am sad, of course, that the orthodox have not made a united choice together. I was wrong about that.