

Open Minds

The Newsletter of Albany Via Media

May, 2009

A Word from the Editors

As Albany's convention (5 to 7 June) and General Convention (8 to 17 July) approach, much is going on in what blogger Fr. Mark Harris calls "Anglican Land." The just concluded meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council disappointed proponents of an Anglican covenant, one of whom is our Bishop Love. Asked to endorse the third ("Ridley-Cambridge") draft thereof and pass it along to the provinces for approval, the ACC decided to hold for now. As our Presiding Bishop explained in an article on Episcopal Life Online, "The covenant garnered broad support for its first three sections, but some feel the fourth section is inappropriately focused on discipline, while others see that as essential."

Supporters of a covenant are briefly down, but by no means out. Dr. Ephraim Radner, a member of the Covenant Design Group, and ++Mouneer Anis, Presiding Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East, have urged provinces and *individual dioceses* to embrace the covenant "in principle." We wonder whether Albany will act on this suggestion at its convention.

Lost in the headline-grabbing struggle over what an Anglican covenant should include is a more basic question: Do we need what would be, in effect, a contract? Fr. E. Walton Zelley has written a thoughtful discussion of this issue, which we're happy to publish here.

Full inclusion of LGBT persons is, as you know, a central concern of Albany Via Media. We are happy to note that four states – Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and Iowa – have made same sex marriage legal, and New York is just one Senate vote away from joining them. As Rich Angelo reports below, more than 2000 supporters of LGBT rights turned out for Albany's Equality and Justice Day (28 April). Among them was the Rt. Rev. Prince Singh, Bishop of Rochester. His very moving remarks can be found on John White's blog, *Openly Episcopal in Albany*.

Legalization of same sex marriage is close at hand in several other states. New Jersey gives partners in civil unions almost all the legal rights of married couples. New Hampshire's legislature has voted to legalize same sex marriage and is now negotiating language to gain the Governor's signature.

Few people were surprised when, on 26 May, California's Supreme Court upheld the

state's Proposition 8, which bans same sex marriages. This bitter pill for LGBT's and their supporters was accompanied by better news: The 18,000 couples who married before Prop. 8 went into effect remain married. Moreover, same sex couples in California continue to enjoy most of the legal rights enjoyed by heterosexual couples.

For those of you who will journey to Anaheim, California, for General Convention, we wish you Godspeed. In your number will be Dennis Wisnom of St. Stephen's, Schenectady, a member of the AVM Board and a volunteer at GC 2009.

Bob and Marya Dodd, Editors

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For Your Consideration...

Two non-courtesy resolutions have been submitted to this summer's Diocesan Convention. The first, put forward by Fr. Mark Diebel, and titled "A Right to Human Identity", solicits diocesan support for new state and federal laws to open birth records to adoptees:

A RIGHT TO HUMAN IDENTITY

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of Albany adopt the following statement: Personal history is a fundamental human right and knowledge of one's entire parentage should be assumed as part of a person's natural property. Be it further

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of Albany adopt the following statement: That the New York State legislature be urged to establish procedures that would enable adoptees [upon reaching legal age] to secure current information regarding their historical heritage, medical history, and genetic derivation without the necessity of court action. Be it further

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of Albany propose the two above resolutions to the next General Convention, with the second resolution written to cover all states.

The second resolution, submitted by Paula Sipple and Mary White+ and endorsed by the AVM Board, asks the Diocese of Albany to go on record as fully supporting The Episcopal Church:

A RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of Albany shall hereby re-affirm its allegiance to and loyal membership in Province II and the Episcopal Church, and

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of Albany recognizes the legislative authority of the 76th General Convention, and supports the governance of The Episcopal Church, and

*RESOLVED, that the Diocese shall take no actions that may jeopardize remaining fully in support of The Episcopal Church, including, but not limited to declining to support the so-called **Bishop's Statement on the Polity of the Episcopal Church** promulgated by the Anglican Communion Institute.*

In most dioceses this resolution would be unnecessary, even absurd: Isn't full support of the national Church a given? Alas, in Albany, South Carolina and several other dioceses it is not. Nor is acceptance of such a resolution a guarantee that it will be presented. As John White observes on his blog "Openly Episcopal in Albany":

"It will be interesting to see if this resolution is presented to Convention as written or referred to the Standing Committee at the last moment, there to be tabled. Such a tactic has been used previously at diocesan convention to insure that controversial issues are avoided. But the substance of this resolution cannot be considered controversial: it is a simple re-affirmation of adherence to The Episcopal Church. Nevertheless, if this resolution does see the light at convention the debate promises to be revealing."

An Anglican Covenant?

E. Walton Zellely+

One of the recommendations of the framers of the Windsor Report was the formulation of an "Anglican Covenant" which would set forth the "bedrock" doctrinal affirmations that members of the "Anglican Communion" might be expected to subscribe to if they were legitimately to describe themselves as Anglican Christians in Communion with other Anglican Christians throughout the world. The draft "Covenant" is expected to come before the upcoming General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Anaheim, California, this summer. However, it is reported that the Presiding Bishop and the leadership of the Episcopal Church favor putting off voting on whether this Covenant should be subscribed to until the next General Convention when this province of the

Anglican Communion will have had time to study it, disseminate it among the clergy and communicants of this church for their discussion and input, and formulate a response. A group of Bishops, including our own Diocesan, Bishop Love, have stated their intention to sign on to the Covenant immediately whether or not the general Convention chooses to put it up for a vote this year.

Some members of our Diocesan Family might be tempted to ask, "Why would anyone object to subscribing to a statement of basic beliefs which might serve to unify the Churches of the Anglican Communion? The first objection is that by setting forth a standard of "orthodoxy" to which the various provinces which comprise the Anglican Communion would have to subscribe in order to be considered authentically "Anglican" would put us in the very un-Anglican position of being a "confessional church."

The Roman Catholic Church has always been a “confessional church” holding the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (i.e. Thomistic Theology) as the standard of orthodoxy and thus the litmus test against which all the formulations of Catholic theologians must be measured along with the “infallible teachings” of the Papacy. This, of course, gets them into the kind of pickle they find themselves in, for example, when Aristotle’s theory of “Natural Law” which Aquinas espoused, forces Popes and Catholic theologians to continue in the 21st century to condemn the use of birth control devices and lobby against the distribution of condoms in countries where AIDS is rampant.

Other Reformation Churches are identified as “Confessional Churches” because they have statements of orthodox belief, e.g. the Lutheran “Augsburg Confession” and the Calvinist Reformed Church’s “Westminster Confession.” In the English Reformation there was no such instrument involved. The closest to it were the “Thirty Nine Articles” which spelled out where we differed from the Roman Catholic Church from which we had separated.

It is significant, I believe, that the Thirty Nine Articles” have been relegated to the “Historical Section” at the back of our Prayer book, and probably the vast majority of Anglican Christians don’t even know that they exist. Anglicans over the years have been wary of setting up “written in concrete theological statements of orthodoxy, believing that truth is most likely to arise from the free interchange of ideas, and thus, until recently, we have been content to allow a very wide roof under which theological diversity is welcome and honored. What has principally united Anglicans over the centuries has been the way we worship. (“Lex orate, Lex credente” - the rule of

worship is the rule of faith) What has united us more than anything is the Book of Common Prayer.

To say that we are not a confessional church with a set in concrete standard of orthodoxy does not mean that we have no statements of agreement to which most Anglicans over the years since they were formulated have generally subscribed. The major one is **The Lambeth Quadrilateral**, an instrument which was formulated to describe what would be the “bottom line” for Anglicans in any ecumenical discussions. They were:

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary to salvation.
2. The Apostles and Nicene Creeds as the summary statements of the Christian Faith.
3. The “Two Gospel Sacraments”: Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.
4. The three-fold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

This is all we would ask of other Christian bodies who would enter into Communion with us, so why can’t we be content to allow these to be the “Bottom line” for us Anglicans to be in communion with each other?

The third problem with providing a “Covenant Statement” of Anglican Orthodoxy has to do with the source of authority in the Church and Anglican polity. What, for example, is the nature of the Anglican Communion? It is this author’s understanding that the Anglican Communion is a confederation of autonomous national churches or “provinces”. For a long time in our Church’s history there has been no such thing as the concept of an “Anglican Communion”. Each national church was, as

it still remains, a “law unto itself”.

The highest authority in the Episcopal Church, for example, is the General Convention, and the chief prelate is the Presiding Bishop. We are democratically governed in the formulation of canons, the revisions of our Prayer books and Hymnals, etc. Other provinces of the Anglican Communion may not be governed in the same way, but they share with us in being a “Law unto themselves.” In short, Anglicanism is not an hierarchical church. No other ecclesiastical body, be it the Lambeth Council, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the meetings of the primates, or the Anglican Consultative Council has any authority over any of the constituent provinces. And this includes drawing up a standard of orthodoxy called an “Anglican Covenant” to which an autonomous national church would be forced to subscribe in order to be in communion with other churches in the “Anglican Communion.”

I, like most priests of the Episcopal Church, was a convert to this Church. I was drawn to this church by two things - the richness and reverence of its worship, and the open-mindedness and toleration of differences while maintaining the sense that we are in communion with each other because in our Baptisms we have become one with Christ and thus with each other. I still believe that these are our greatest strengths and I would hate to see them compromised.

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Rites and Rights: Equality and Justice Day 2009

- Richard Angelo

On Tuesday, April 28th, more than 2000 people gathered in the Convention Center at the Empire State Plaza in Albany for the annual Equality and Justice Day, sponsored by the Empire State Pride Agenda. Advocates for equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered New Yorkers gather each year to hear a host of speakers and then fan out to lobby individual members of the New York State Legislature in support of bills that advance equality for GLBT New Yorkers. Among those bills for consideration this year are the Dignity for All Students Act and Same Sex Marriage.

Speakers that morning included Governor David Patterson and the Rt. Rev. Prince Singh, Episcopal Bishop of Rochester. Speaking at an outdoor rally at West Capital Park (within sight of the Diocese of Albany offices), Bishop Singh thanked the organizers for inviting him, saying, “I am humbled to stand in a continuum of lay and Church leaders including bishops – like Bob Spears, Bill Burrell, and Jack McKelvey – in the Diocese of Rochester, all of whom have helped uphold the human dignity and full inclusion of LGBT saints for the past three decades.”

Continuing his remarks, Bishop Singh reminded the large crowd -- both gay and straight – that in the creation narrative in Genesis we are told that everything God makes is good, and later, in the Gospels, we are told that we are all God’s beloved children. “Sacraments,” he said, “are visible signs of invisible grace ... but it is important that we administer those sacramental rites (and rights) with fairness.” He went on to emphasize the need for both the State and the Episcopal Church to ensure that

marriage be available to all New Yorkers.

The gathering also included many people, clergy and laity, from a variety of faith communities around the State,

including Integrity, the ministry of the Episcopal Church to and for GLBT Episcopalians, and a small contingent from the local Albany Integrity Network.

Words&Music

On Sunday, 1 March, Albany Via Media collaborated with St. Paul's Church, Albany, to present a most unusual musical event: A performance of Ned Rorem's 36 part song cycle, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* by the Washington-based group, Words&Music. Almost two hours long and set to poems by 22 writers, Auden, Whitman, Crane, and Millay among them, the cycle is divided into three sections that are devoted to the beginning, middle, and end of life.

In his review of the concert for the Albany Times-Union, Joseph Dalton praised the singers (Melissa Coombs, soprano; Bailey Whiteman, alto; Terrance Johns, tenor; and William Heim, baritone) warmly for "being fully committed to and passionate about the material," but he gave particular credit to pianist Virginia Sircy. He observed that although "Evidence" was written for two pianos, Ms. Sircy "ably tackled the whole darned thing, showing flair during the brief but plentiful preludes and interludes but also a sensitivity to letting the singers shine."

If you missed this exciting concert, don't despair. Clair Touby hopes to have Words&Music perform it again next summer, in Saranac Lake. Stay tuned!

