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A Response to the Interim Report of the Working Group



I'm not certain whether this 'accommodation' is

'beautiful' or not. It is certainly an accommodation. That is to say, it is an organizational, and therefore political, solution to a perceived human problem. And as such, it might indeed have much to commend it (e.g. Orders of Consecrated Life; Respectful Climate). Whether it is also an appropriate and due Church solution - that is something else again, entirely.

A. I shall address to start with the matter of *koinônia*, the first key finding of the WG. This is hardly surprising, given two key things. Firstly, the Gospel is surely all about *koinônia*, either of the sort 1 Jn 1:1-4 depicts or Phil 1:5 specifies, to say nothing of Eph 4:3ff. And so secondly therefore, the perceived desire for 'unity' across the ACANZ&P, which is a profound Gospel calling, is laudable; indeed, the entire mandate of the WG, and its solution, is geared towards this second thing - in one form anyway.

And yet, and yet ... There is *koinônia*, and there is *koinônia*, just as there is unity, and there is unity. For what does it mean for one to 'participate *in the Gospel*' (Phil 1:5)? What does it mean to so receive the Holy Spirit (Gal 3) that this hallmark of the Gospel engenders that **form** of unity and *koinônia* created by the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah of God, as per 1 Jn 1? For are there *alternative* 'gospels' out there? Clearly St Paul thought so, viz. Gal 1:6-12, 2 Cor 11:4. Many parts of Paul's correspondence with his churches we have in the canon of

the New Testament witness to the occurrence of such 'perversions' of the Gospel, the Gospel Paul dared to call 'my Gospel' (Rom 16:25), and of which he was 'not ashamed' (Rom 1:16). Nor should any of this surprise us. After all, the Christian Church of the time took over a word already in common currency. There was uppermost that 'gospel', that 'victory' of Roman 'peace' and 'salvation' sanctioned by Augustus, who was precisely so-called by the senate when Octavian brought stability to 'the world', the *oecumene* of the day. And it is most helpful to set these Recommendations of the WG, and their rationale, alongside just such a political alternative to the Gospel of Jesus.

In short, is this Report something of which the Church should actually be ashamed? I am forcibly reminded of the likes of Matt 10:33, set within the apostles' missionary charge, and Mk 8:38, the aftermath to Peter's Confession and Jesus' first Passion prediction. These are no light matters. They are rather issues of life and death.

And yet, and yet ... The Church has always been caught between two kingdoms, two ways of organizing itself as the Community of God's People. It comes with the form of eschatology God himself has seen fit to establish. There is the Way of the Kingdom of God, and there is the way of the world. And whether we are aware of either Augustine's or Luther's analysis or not^[1] (it surely helps to be guided by them), the true nature of that 'world' is only revealed when the Church acts *as the Church*. Should it then succumb to the wisdom of the world, approving of its diagnoses and solutions, rather than those of the Gospel and its resources, then it will hardly be surprising that the murkiness of the world's ways will not appear in their muddled and muddled form. After all, even Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14, in context, 2 Cor 10-13)! And so, what exactly are we the Christian Community up against here?

B. The answer leads me to the second part of my response.

'Dear Wormwood; I have devised under the inspiration of our Master a new strategy, a new way of steering the Enemy's People off course. It reeks of their own ideas and yet mixes into them just enough of our own poison that they will be able to swallow this new medicine like obedient patients who realise a little bit of nastiness heals in the long term. And it's the long term we have had in mind all along; indeed, we've been planning this game for many decades, even centuries. It has to do with their very Image, their very nature as creatures of His. Of course, He is all about Love and Life - supposed to be, that is. And He is certainly all about Holy Integrity (Deut 6:4), His Uniqueness of Justice and Righteousness - which frankly we are well aware of, and which makes us 'shudder' [Jas 2:19]. But if we might skew this just enough that their own righteous indignation fires up their sense of loving their neighbours 'better', then we can even disrupt their form of life-giving procreation, their naturally sexed identities. After all, what's wrong with a bit of pleasure, of enjoyment for the sake of coupling, of strengthening two, or more, humans together, that their relationships better reflect seemingly their Maker! So; we are taking their very God-given nature and using it against them. We are taking what is designed for love and life, and using it to eventually bring out hatred and death - and especially the death of the Church, as it learns to hate even its own members, separating one from another. Oh what a muddled recipe we have concocted ...! It looks so 'compassionate', so 'loving' and generous and kind. And yet all along, it is leading them down the paths of despair and destruction. Our father has really got something clever worked out this time. So; sit back and watch, dear Wormwood! Enjoy the show!

Your affectionate Uncle Screwtape.'

C. What then, thirdly, have been the consequences and/or manifestations of this piece of

spiritual warfare (NB Eph 6:10ff, and Revelation generally), a specific strategy which has been going on glacially over many decades, even centuries - although it has speeded up considerably these past 50 years? Perhaps a way into an answer is to ask another set of questions, of the Church now, as we presently find her. There are three in all.

C1. How did western Christianity finish up here? How did we reach the point we have? This may be framed in the form we are being presented with today: we have a complete stand-off between those who deem homoeroticism *per se* a sin, and those who desire to see it set within what they suggest is a 'reasonable and holy'^[2] relationship. [NB I say homoeroticism, NOT homosexuality *per se*, which though related clearly is something else.] Nor should we fail to note well: neither 'side' sees the matter to be *adiaphora*; positions are therefore held strongly and with seeming strong justification. While the Canadian St Michael Report (2005) saw the issue to be 'non-creedal', it also saw it as more than a mere 'pastoral matter' since it implied a change in the doctrine of marriage (and therefore as a specifically political matter according to ACC's Constitution).

Such an historical exercise will employ both theology and sociology, cultural analysis of the kind often called 'the sociology of knowledge', which itself is a form of hermeneutics and epistemology, via cultural traits both material and immaterial. Essentially, I see the watershed beginning to occur around 1700, finishing up as a debate between starting premises mostly: revelation versus human experience.

That is how I expressed it in my summary memo to Justice Judith Potter, 9th December, 2012, and the Ma Whea Commission.

[See for example John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, NT Wright's and Alister McGrath's oeuvre, Michael Polanyi and TF Torrance, to name but a few: I'd also nail my own colours to the mast, by avowing an *a priori* perspective of 'critical realism' - contrary to a good deal of what passes for so-called 'Critical Theory' in the world of literature and/or contemporary philosophy^[3] - even though *some* of their insights might be helpful. The date of 1700, by the way, is derived from Paul Hazard's book, originally in French and published in 1935, *La Crise de la conscience européenne*, ET *The European Mind: 1680-1715* (Penguin, 1973).]

C2. To be quite specific, noting the Christian Faith as an Incarnational Reality, we here in ACANZ&P are presented with this core to the GS Motion 30, 2014, and which determined subsequently the premise for the WFG's Report, and subsequently the WG of 2016:

1. This General Synod/Te Hînota Whânui resolves to appoint a working group to bring and recommend to the 62nd General Synod/Te Hînota Whânui:

- a. A process and structure by which those who believe the blessing of same-genderrelationships is **contrary to** scripture, doctrine, tikanga or civil law, will not be required to perform any liturgy for the blessing of same-gender relationships, will continue to have *integrity* within the Church, and will remain compliant with the parliamentary legislation within any relevant jurisdiction;
- b. A process and structure by which those who believe the blessing of same-genderrelationships is **consonant with** scripture, doctrine, tikanga and civil

law may perform a yet to be developed liturgy for blessing same-gender relationships in a manner which maintains their *integrity* within the Church, is compliant with the parliamentary legislation within any relevant jurisdiction, and can remain in communion under scripture, doctrine and law; including

- (i) A proposal for a new liturgy to bless right ordered same-gender relationships;
- (ii) A process and legislation (whether church or parliamentary) by which a new liturgy to bless right ordered same-gender relationships may be adopted;

Now; much could, and no doubt should, be said re such things as what on earth is meant by 'right ordered same-gender relationships'? Huge things are presupposed right here, as other commentators have pointed out, especially when trying to consider what on earth was meant by the final 'Therefore?' resolution re 'recognition?' of same-sex relationships: what form(s) of recognition are being contemplated, and what not, and on what basis? This piece of (interim) history is now resolved - but only to a point, for the moment, probably! - as the 2017 WG has **recommended?** there be 'no alteration to the formularies of this Church?' re 'marriage?', while also **recommending** 'bishops [be able] to authorise individual clergy within their ministry units to conduct services blessing same gender relationships.?'

What drives this outcome was the desire - by all - to try to remain together (for as long as possible, in good conscience ...? See too H2). Yet my question is this. Granted (for the moment) each 'side?'s respective 'integrity?', how do we move from this mere *phenomenon* of (a) and (b) *within* a single organization to an **evaluation** of that organization? By what criteria or frame of reference might we truly conduct such an *evaluation*? This is a truly **basic** dilemma! For related to it is the other question: supposing any 'successful?' outcome, and a 'new?' organizational body, with these two parts (and multiple forms in-between), comes into existence - as now specifically recommended by the WG - what of the 'integrity?' of the *eventual* structure that seeks to house BOTH of these stances, **together?** *How on earth might we read? the integrity of this new whole?!* For the Christian Faith is in the end an essentially moral entity. The one holy catholic and apostolic Church, of which the AC, and its constituent members like ACANZ&P, claim to be a part (cf. the opening pages of our Constitution), necessarily embodies and reflects the character of the Living Triune God. Christians do NOT subscribe to a monist ethos and world-view, which seemingly allows such contradictions to sit side by side. E.g. Hinduism's *neti neti* ... More of this below.

C3. These two sections 1 & 2 lead to an interim conclusion; I say interim as I am trying (still!) to sit also with this 'process?', which is now taking shape, without preempting its outcome, notably re our GS 2018 (let alone further down the track).

If there is indeed an essential link between history, and the ontological and the logical, in the final analysis another set of questions arises: **how do people become sincerely mistaken?** NB: I do not say 'are?' mistaken; I am being resolutely historical here. For all humanity is comprised of both personal, little histories (all our multiple little histories, as well), and our respective cultural histories'all set within that Grand Story that is the Triune God's Economy of Salvation. Add to which now our 21st C as a polyglot confluence of many cultural strands, which we fondly term the postmodern.

This last series of questions, under 3, seeks to probe the very possibility that either one or the other 'side?' in this stand-off is indeed mistaken. In fact, it might be that BOTH are mistaken,

to *varying* degrees. It is this third section's questions which have prompted my own frail attempts these past 25+ years to get to the bottom of our present 'dilemmas' and their supposed 'accommodation' (viz. a version of answering C1). To be sure; I tend strongly to a particular conclusion at the present time; more of this below. For all that, this is not (yet) the Eschaton; there is even about my own judgments a certain eschatological reserve - imposed by the very Economy in Whom we all live. And yet again; Jesus has clearly said, he will 'not leave us as orphans': we are not adrift in an alien cosmos! [This last quote from John 14 presupposes indeed an entire hermeneutic about how the Upper Room Discourses give rise to both the canon of Holy Scripture and our 'reading' of it by means of the Holy Spirit's corporate guidance - for another day!]

D. What this set of three questions really prompts is the theme of an article I wrote for *Taonga* late in 2009, after the release of the Ridley Cambridge Draft of the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant: 'Why the Anglican Communion Covenant is a Good and Necessary Thing.' The key to the article is encapsulated in the two words 'recognition' (taken from the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams) and 'authority'. What we have today in both the AC world-wide, and more locally in ACANZ&P, is a Crisis of Authority.^[4] Not just authority itself, yet surely that, but also how to concretely recognize that authority, and so to practise legitimate forms of common life and faith. The WG's Report attempts to be just such an answer this crisis. Yet its very mandate and brief ensures it fails from the start - ***as a due approach for the Christian Church***. Let's be clear here. I quote from the Report:

Its mandate as set out in Motion 29 [of GS 2016] was tightly focused and its task was to consider possible structural arrangements within our Three Tikanga Church to safeguard both theological convictions concerning the blessing of same gender relationships. ... Our mandate was not to consider the differing theological positions or to interpret scripture on this point. Instead we had a very specific task of considering what arrangements and safeguards could be put in place to hold us together within the same ecclesial family so that no one was forced to compromise sincerely held beliefs. We were asked to find structural solutions which would hold our Church together in that unity which Christ expressed, and which He has gifted to us.

So the aim is deemed to be to offer the means to 'hold us together' - as the Church. YET the Church, like any organization, has an ideology (in the neutral sense of that term). That Christian ideology we call 'theology'. But the Report, and the long, meandering process that has led up to it, with its proposals for sundry resolutions at GS 2018, is predicated not just upon a diversity of theologies, but upon blatantly *contradictory* theologies, together with their opposing *premises*. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand' (Mk 3:24-25, and NB the context in relation to section B above), says our Lord, the Head of the Body, the Church. It's all very well to propose a political, worldly solution to what is deemed an organizational problem. However, that approach is doomed to failure, certainly long term if not imminently, *when that Body is actually the Church of the triune God*, as revealed in the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.

When the Background states, 'We were asked to find structural solutions which would hold our Church together *in that unity which Christ expressed, and which He has gifted to us*' (emphasis added), despite the initial seemingly neutral theological stance of the WG, they in fact presuppose an ecclesiology, a form of Church, which they seek to manifest. And so the

question becomes: Do the recommendations of the WG truly and really reveal 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church' as per our Constitution which marks of the Church Christ truly expressed, and with which he has gifted her, and to which he calls her?^[5] Frankly, given the inchoate and muddled and muddled set of premises which stand behind the various 'sides' in the debate, given the forms of legitimation each and everyone seeks to bring to bear, how may any objective observer offer a positive answer. For crucially, as was asked earlier in C2: 'By what criteria or frame of reference might we truly conduct such an *evaluation*? - any evaluation of the nature of the integrity of the new organizational body, as now proposed? 'This is a truly **basic** dilemma!' For we may *not* employ either C2a or C2b, each of which stands on their own as being most partial, from any objective stance. Nor is there any other form of legitimation being cogently offered. The WG Report deliberately eschews any - supposedly! Not least also, as the GS of ACANZ&P has explicitly rejected any form of Anglican Communion Covenant - which might have come to our aid. The conclusion then is this: By what due **Christian authority** might we recognize the WG's recommendations? We may not, even organizationally, 'drift' (Heb 2:1) with a supposed neutral ideology? **for no such thing in fact exists!**

E. So at this stage of the process, I have to conclude we are being driven, as a church organization, first and foremost by our pragmatic Kiwi culture. Some have tried to couch it all as seeking to sustain friendly relationships across imponderable boundaries. A laudable goal perhaps. Yet what sort of friendships are we to properly contemplate - *in the Church*?^[6] When Jesus calls us **his friends** in Jn 15:14-15, such a form of friendship is based on obedience and revelation, that form of grace and truth in the Spirit of the Gospel to which the entire Johannine body of literature witnesses (Jn 15:26-27). Do the recommendations of the WG reflect this canonical testimony? I remain rather unconvinced ... And I'm far from convinced, at this stage of the process, what might truly sway me otherwise? given what has actually transpired to date, both short term and especially longer term, over the decades and even centuries, among the Anglican churches of western societies, of which I happen to be a member by desire and conviction.

Rev Dr Bryden Black, Christchurch, July 2017

[1] . I am thinking of course of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and Luther's notion of the 'Left Hand of God'. See e.g. 'Temporal Authority: To what extent it should be obeyed' (1523). While eschatology sees human society, and even the Church, to be necessarily 'mixed' (Augustine) until the End, love of neighbour, and especially one's non-Christian neighbour, means Christians should serve the State and even its 'sword' as justly as possible, although without ultimate compromise.

[2] . This references of course Tobias Haller's book, *Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality* (Seabury, 2009)

[3] . See Michael Walsh, *The Devil's Pleasure Palace: The Cult of Critical Theory and the Subversion of the West* (New York: Encounter Books, 2015).

[4] . See Robert Runcie, *Authority in Crisis? An Anglican Response* (London: SCM, 1988).

However, in hindsight, his particular approach seems woefully inadequate, even while it begins to ask the right questions. In which light too, we might be better warned of our ?accommodations? and compromises.

[5] . While *The Windsor Report* (2004) does refer to these four marks or notes of the Church, more fulsomely see Aidan Nichols, *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks, and Her Masters* (Ignatius Press, 2013), albeit from a Roman Catholic perspective at key points.

[6] . I am aware of the likes of Aelred of Rievaulx's *Spiritual Friendship* (Liturgical Press, Cistercian Publications, 2010).

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