

# Report and Sermon of the Essentials 2004 Ottawa Conference

As many of you know, I was in Ottawa last week with Gary Taylor, Sue Hart and Pete Lillington. We joined some seven hundred other Anglicans for an Essentials conference entitled “The Way Forward”. Essentials is a movement within the Anglican Church of Canada that has been working for the past decade to influence the Anglican Church of Canada to return to a biblically sound theology and moral practice as laid out in *The Montreal Declaration of Anglican Essentials*. The conference at which this document was drafted took place in June 1994. There were some eight hundred people present at that time.

The conference last week was the largest Essentials gathering since the June 1994 meeting in Montreal. The conference was given the name “The Way Forward” because it was our intention to chart “The Way Forward” for orthodox Anglicans in Canada. We deemed this necessary because of the current crisis in the Anglican Church of Canada and the larger Anglican Communion.

In August 2003 the Episcopal Church decided to give local dioceses the option to create and use rites for the blessing of same sex relationships. The Episcopal Church then exacerbated the crisis when in November they consecrated Gene Robinson as a Bishop in New Hampshire. Mr. Robinson is a practicing homosexual. His consecration was conducted by Archbishop Frank Griswold, the senior bishop of the Episcopal Church.

When the Diocese of New Westminster, under the leadership of Bishop Michael Ingham, permitted the use of a rite for same sex blessings in February 2004, and when the Anglican Church of Canada decided to affirm the “integrity and sanctity of adult committed same sex relationships” at its tri-annual synod in June, the Canadian Church chose to mirror the theological position of our neighbours to the south.

Those who gathered in Ottawa last week affirmed by the contents of what was said and the decisions made concerning The Way Forward that we take our stand with the Anglican Mainstream. The Church in the Global South, where the majority of Anglican Christians live, see those who are part of the Essentials movement as representing authentic Anglicanism in Canada. One the Primates from the Global

South, Gregory Venables, who has oversight for the Anglican Church in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay was in Ottawa last week. He was asked in a interview which I read on-line: “Do you see the emerging Anglican Communion Network in the Episcopal Church and the new Network and Federation in Canada as the authentic voice of Anglicanism on this continent? Would you give it your full support?”

To this he answered “We already see it as the authentic voice of Anglicanism. It is precisely for that reason so many provinces have recognized the Network and why many are in broken or impaired communion with Frank Griswold and The Episcopal Church. There are so many concrete expressions of solidarity with this meeting in Canada that the Western World needs to understand that Global South Primates see the decisions of ECUSA and Canada being utterly out of bounds, hence we see ourselves in cooperation with the Network.”

The question asked Archbishop Venables mentioned the new Network and Federation in Canada. I would like to take a minute to explain what these are.

The Federation will act as an umbrella for all orthodox Canadian Anglicans, bishops, clergy and laity in the Anglican Church of Canada who see themselves as being in impaired communion with their diocese and the national church. (The name Federation may be changed because it has connotations of the Federation Council in Star Wars.)

A second organization, The Network, modeled along the lines of the Anglican Communion Network in the U.S. was also launched to provide an alternative structure with a national task force for parishes and their clergy. Bishop Don Harvey of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador will act as Episcopal Moderator for the new Network.

The Federation is for those who want to stand firm in the gospel and remain in the Anglican Church of Canada, at least until a report comes out of the Lambeth/Eames Commission. This report is expected to be released in early October. The Federation is a first step. We want to be prepared in the eventuality that the Primates act against the Anglican Church of Canada over its voting to affirm the integrity and sanctity of same sex relationships in June.

The Anglican Communion Network in Canada (ACNC) was the name chosen to

identify with Anglican Communion worldwide. We also want to identify with The Network in the Episcopal Church USA who have similarly been abandoned by the church over matters of catholic faith and order.

The Network will hopefully embrace such organizations as the Anglican Communion in New Westminster (ACiNW) consisting of six parishes and the Anglican Communion in Canada (ACIC) of four parishes who recently broke away from Bishop Michael Ingham and the Diocese of New Westminster as well as other orthodox affiliates who may want to distance themselves from the decision of the ACC and from their present episcopal oversight. It is not necessarily for those who want to jump ship tomorrow. We need to move in concert with the international Anglican Communion.

As Brett Cane, one of the national leaders of Essentials said “The Federation is an umbrella. The network is to be a thoroughly Anglican expression of First Century Christianity. The way forward is a church that thinks with an apostolic mind, a church in submission to the Holy Scriptures and to the ancient formularies. The way forward pulsates with an apostolic heart; it is a church that reaches beyond its own walls. The way forward is a church that has apostolic focus whose first love must be Jesus. He alone is seen as our outward focus. Whether Anglicans choose the pathway of the Federation or the Network, it all flows out from the Federation. We are one great company of believers.”

I want to move now from the conference to looking briefly at the text we heard read from Galatians. This morning I only have time to comment on verses 6 and 7. As a way into these verses I want to use a quote from a book called *the Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Pastor Bonhoeffer was a German Christian leader who spoke out vocally against German National Socialism (Nazism) and was martyred for his faith in April 1945. He believed that modern liberal theology and secular totalitarianism hold pretty much in common that the message of the Bible has to be adapted more or less, to the requirements of the secular world. He spoke of liberal theology as adhering to a message of cheap grace. Listen to how he defined cheap grace:

“Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. Let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world’s

standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin”.

When the Anglican Church of Canada affirmed the “integrity and sanctity of adult committed same sex relationships” in June 2004 it officially adopted this theology of cheap grace. It chose to justify sinful behaviour, committed homosexual acts, by calling them sacred. It publicly declared that we will model ourselves according to the world’s standards and adapt the bible accordingly. This is dangerous ground because it is a position that runs counter to Scripture.

One of the speakers in Ottawa, Douglas Farrow, who teaches theology at McGill University in Montreal helped to clarify this when he said:

Resolution A-134, amendment six, (integrity and sanctity of same sex relationships) exemplifies the principle that what we are in ourselves is already pleasing to God, requiring no redemption in Christ. That is, it does something more than change Christian moral teaching by asserting, in contradiction of Holy Scripture, that homosexual relations fall within the divine plan and purpose for human sexuality, It concedes what cannot be conceded without denying the gospel itself and the church with it; namely, that the persons involved in such relationships carry within them, in their very capacity for such relationships, their own holiness and their own sanctification. It speaks, in other words, as if there are areas of our life in which we do not belong to Jesus Christ, but to ourselves or to other lords, “areas in which we do not need justification and sanctification through Christ.”

We needed to gather in Ottawa because we are aware that there is a crisis in the Anglican Church of Canada because like the Galatians we have officially turned away from Jesus Christ just as the Galatians were doing. Listen again to the verse 6 and 7 from Galatians in light of what I have just said.

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,<sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The Greek word Paul uses for “marvel” has about it the sense of being astounded and bewildered. His astonishment was not at the false teachers, those who “pervert the gospel” but at the church. He was not surprised that there were false teachers. He was

surprised that the church was FOLLOWING them. He had expected false teachers. In Acts, he warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would come.

The Galatians had been taught by the greatest teacher the church has ever known apart from the Lord Himself; yet they readily rejected what they had learned from him. So do you see why it is we have to say no to the false teaching that is being put forward today? At a time when many are quickly turning away from the Gospel of costly grace we need to hear what Paul is writing here.

Paul was surprised that the defection had come so quickly. The Greek word for “so soon” is *tacheos* - quickly - also means easily and readily. The church apparently offered little resistance to the false teachers. They were fickle in their allegiance to Paul and his teaching. They quickly and easily came under the influence of heretical doctrines.

In deserting the truth they were also turning away from the one who had called them. The "one who called" them "by the grace of Christ" is God. They were not only deserting the truth, they were deserting God. The word used here for “turning away” in the Greek is a verb indicating that the act was voluntary. The believers were not passively being removed, but were actively removing themselves from the sphere of grace.

Paul is clear that there is only one true Gospel. He is also clear that it takes diligence not to be lead astray by those who teach false doctrines.

As a congregation it is my prayer that we will be attentive to the challenges we face as false teachers would have us pervert the gospel of grace. To remain true to Christ and grow in our commitment to him will require a deepening awareness of how we will need to rely on God’s leading more fully than we have had to in the past. It will also be a time when we are invited to become more involved with others in the Church who want to chart the Way Forward that will allow us to reflect an authentic Anglican Voice and Practice so that we can be true to our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ.