



“Mind the Gap” – Reflections on the Anglican Consultative Council Meeting in Nottingham

“Mind The Gap” is the logo on the t-shirt I purchased as a last minute impulse at a Heathrow souvenir kiosk as I was returning from my whirlwind trip “across the pond” to the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Nottingham. The phrase is, of course, the British Rail system’s ubiquitous reminder to watch out for the sometimes-daunting space between the train one is preparing to board or exit and the platform at the rail or underground station. But my “impulse buy” had nothing to do with either trains or platforms – rather it was inspired by two other “gaps” that I experienced as part of my ACC adventure.

The first is the significant gap between the truth of what happened in Nottingham and many of the stories that purport to describe the actions of the ACC. In fact, the meeting had not even ended before the “spin” began, led by the radical, schismatic voices of the conservative fringe persisting in their Orwellian efforts to double-speak into reality this rupture of the Anglican Communion they have committed to bring into being. But lest I be accused of putting words into their mouths, here are some directly from American Anglican Council President David Anderson in his mid-Nottingham missive sent to rally the AAC troops: *“... the Normandy Beach has been taken and the heights above taken. There is still a great deal of suffering before the heresy of ECUSA has been separated from the Anglican body. Press forward with us.”* The Rev’d Canon David C. Anderson, AAC President and CEO

Wow. You’d think by now I would be immune to being surprised by AAC rhetoric. I’ve been reading David’s press releases for a decade or more now – back before he added “Canon” to his title (anecdotally the result of being named a Canon of the Cathedral Center of the Diocese of Los Angeles, that hotbed of apostate heresy. One does wonder at the rationale behind retaining the honorific bestowed upon one by a diocese one is seeking to expunge from the Anglican Communion, but there you go!)

Yet even with that long history I was shocked by this release from Nottingham. I was stunned by the “ethnic cleansing” tone of the rhetoric and struck by the Herculean efforts to twist the truth of recent events into the outcome they are so desperate to achieve. “Press forward with us” is, of course, shorthand for “keep sending us money so we can keep throwing kerosene on the embers of disagreement in our concerted effort to inflame them into a blaze of division.”

One of the questions I was asked by BBC radio was, essentially: aren’t you lot responsible for creating this schism that seems to be consuming the church and keeping it from getting on with its larger mission? Absolutely not, was and is my reply. There have always been differences in the Anglican Communion and I am convinced that our historic ability to embrace difference rather than default to division has been one of our greatest strengths as a particular people of God. Whatever division we currently face is the direct result of the AAC and other members of the radical, conservative fringe exploiting “the gap” on human sexuality to serve their own political agenda: to achieve their stated goal of “returning the Episcopal Church to Biblical Orthodoxy” – that “orthodoxy” being a narrow literalism that is frankly neither orthodox nor Anglican.

So toward the goal of “minding the gap” I want to briefly note some significant “gaps” between the spin being spun by the Religious Right and truth of what happened in Nottingham, particularly around the resolutions passed by the ACC

1. On June 22nd the ACC passed two resolutions. In the first, they voted to accept the voluntary withdrawal of the US and Canadian delegates from official representation. As both of these provinces had already voted to do just that and the ACC doesn't even meet again until after Lambeth 2008, **the truth is: it was a meaningless and repetitive vote.**

2. "Listening" was the focus of a second resolution that included the call for the Anglican Communion to listen to the experience of homosexual persons. This affirmation re-engages a commitment to listen made at the Lambeth Conference 1998 -- a commitment that up until now has been sadly ignored. **The truth is: the overwhelming endorsement of this radical new commitment by voting representatives from every Province in the Communion is an extraordinarily hopeful sign for ECUSA, the Communion and the Gospel.**
3. The vote on the first resolution was extremely close (30-28 with 4 abstentions) and if the US and Canada had been allowed to vote it would not, in fact, have passed. The second resolution passed unanimously. This totally debunks the fiction that the US reactionaries are promoting that it is "North America against the world." **The truth is: half of the world supported us and the other half has committed to listen to us.**

We can work with that. In fact, I believe this is the second "gap" we can not only "mind" but bridge – and that is the work I believe we must commit to do. We must commit to tell the truth about the very real gaps that exist between the experiences, worldviews and theologies of many members of the Anglican Communion. We must find ways to speak the truth that the Gospel we share is stronger than the differences we acknowledge. AND we must likewise commit to tell the truth when those gaps are magnified rather than minded; must refuse to allow our heritage of Anglican comprehensiveness to be jettisoned by the strident voices of an American Religious Right determined to reinvent Anglicanism in its own image.

Their dire predictions to the contrary the tribe has not "spoken" – ECUSA has not been "voted off the Anglican Island." Rather, in a resolution at the meeting's close, the council recognized "with appreciation" the responses offered by the Episcopal Church and the Church of Canada. I believe we will look back on Nottingham 2005 as a genuine turning point in this process of "minding the gap" between members of the Anglican family of God; that "setting our hope on Christ" we can indeed move forward toward a unity that transcends uniformity and get on with the work of the Gospel we have been given to do.