

THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS

ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield



When I was growing up, elephant jokes were the rage. They were geared to be funny by how ridiculous the situation or the solution was. (Why did the elephant paint his toenails red? So he could hide in a cherry tree.) But like all jokes, sometimes they border on the profound: What did the Dallas chief of police say to the elephant that walked into the police station? Nothing. He didn't notice.

Now, many of you are too young to understand this joke, but it came out soon after Lee Harvey Oswald, who assassinated President Kennedy, was in turn assassinated by Jack Ruby. Mr. Ruby did so by walking into a Dallas police station, carrying a gun.

What do these elephant jokes have to do with the Convocation of the West? Well, there is an elephant in the room that I feel obligated to address. It is the recent decision by three of the Anglican Provinces within GAFCON to consecrate women as bishops even after they promised not to do so – not until after all in GAFCON had decided this issue. Many of us are shocked and quite honestly hurt that an ally would act in this way. This is NOT a question regarding women's ordination. Rather, it is a question of integrity and personal

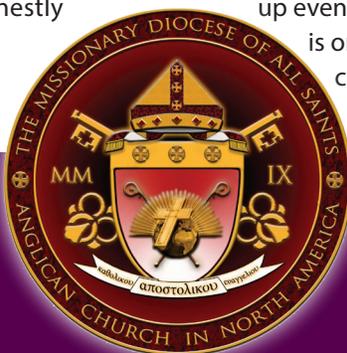
responsibility. And it raises the questions whether there is an expiration date on promises and whether this action is the proper act of one Christian to another.

Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount tells us:

"Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." [Matthew 5:33-37]

What Jesus is calling for is personal integrity, and I am afraid to say that, in our present society, this is in short supply.

Personally, I have always been impressed with the person who holds an opinion, which is not stereotypical. It may be something that a "typical" African American or liberal or conservative does not hold. And, I think, if they are able to stand up even in the face of group pressure and say something is or is not right, they must have personal integrity. I can think of a few, even in politics, who are willing to say that maybe "their side" is not correct.



Our Core Value is:

"The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us."

The Vision of the Convocation is:

*"To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders."*

In the autobiography of President Calvin Coolidge that I am currently reading, it has become clear to me that he stood out as Governor of Massachusetts, not because he always supported the Republican position, but rather because he tried to do what he thought was right for his people. As a result, he sometimes had to take positions contrary to the Republican position, even though he was a Republican. And this enabled him to achieve many things through the legislature because he was well respected by Democrats and Republicans, alike.

When someone has personal integrity, we know that their 'yes' is 'yes' and their 'no' is 'no.' And there is no question. But when a 'yes' can mean 'no' or a 'no' can sometimes turn into a 'yes,' then there is nothing to support their word. This is a lesson that every teacher and every parent learns quite quickly. Giving in to tantrums and demands for expediency's sake or out of embarrassment only serves to eliminate authority. And this is also true for any organization, including the Church.

Many years ago while searching for a church to attend I visited several other denominations. Although I question the theology behind it, I never was offended when I was not allowed to take communion at a Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church. And, I must admit that I was impressed when a Roman Catholic Rector permitted me to take communion at his church – a right recently granted by the Roman Church to its rectors. When we are aware of the position of a person or an organization, even if we do not agree with it, we can respect those acting consistently with that position.

But this brings me to two of the most difficult concepts of integrity – and they are mercy and self-examination. Sometimes integrity means admitting when we are wrong. Sometimes being a good Christian means being merciful – as God has been merciful to us, especially in the atoning execution of His Own Beloved Son. Let us start with how admitting we are wrong when we are, is an act of integrity.

In the original Articles of Faith drafter by Cranmer (which were only 4 to 8 Articles originally), Archbishop Cranmer lists three, not two, sacraments instituted by Jesus, Himself. They are Baptism, Holy Communion, and, interestingly enough, Confession. It gives one pause. To confess one's sins to God and/or a priest is important. But true contrition comes about when we confess our wrongs to others, especially those who are aggrieved, and then CORRECT them.

When I was twelve and my sister was fifteen, we fought a lot. My sister would explode, say some terrible things, and then, a few minutes later apologize. After a while I told her that apologies were not enough; she needed to try to change. Unfortunately, at that time, that aspect of contrition was lost on her. Such are the ways of youth and learning.

My point however is the same – after a while, apologies are worthless, like counterfeit money. They must be backed

by something – usually actions. Change is necessary if one really wants to show integrity. One note of caution: changing usually takes a couple of tries. We can all be good for a while, relax, and then do the same wrong thing again, which always disappoints and makes us angry with ourselves. So, let us be merciful to others who are truly trying to change.

And this brings us to mercy. As Christians, our integrity is tied to how closely we exhibit those attributes that Christ has. Many remember the mercy Christ imparted on sinners, though few remember His words afterward, "Go, and sin no more." And no one recalls how zealously Jesus defended the faith, making a whip and chasing the moneychangers out of the Temple. Yet, without mercy, we are no better than the Pharisees, condemning those under the Law, but winking at our own offenses. Mercy when done right is a powerful part of our faith, and shows our integrity by practicing what we preach.

So, let us return to the elephant in the room. Now that we acknowledge that the elephant does, in fact, exist, what should GAFCON do about this situation, and what should we do? Well, my suggestion to GAFCON would be to remove the three offending Provinces from GAFCON. Our relationship with them should be severed. Don't get me wrong; they are still part of the Anglican Communion and should remain so; that will not change. But if we all agree to abide by a set of principles, those principles are not worth the paper they are written on if they can be dismissed whenever and wherever they are considered inconvenient. But I doubt this will happen. And thus the integrity and worth of GAFCON will be severely hampered.

As for us, we can be reassured that both FIFNA and our own Bishops in MDAS have stated their displeasure. But the one thing we CANNOT do is compromise our own integrity. This is a grade school defense that I am hearing way too often by our own leaders outside the Church. "Well, since they did it, we can do it too!" Hopefully that will NOT happen in ACNA. Hopefully, that will NOT happen in MDAS. Hopefully, that will NOT happen in our own parishes. Hopefully we will all honor the word we have given one to another.

But, if all else fails, all we can do is preserve our own integrity and pray that the others will preserve theirs. We must trust the Lord. All things are destined to happen to further His kingdom. And we must trust in the Holy Spirit. After all, if Saint Athanasius did not despair when the Church was gripped by heresy, we should not despair either.

Amen and God bless,
The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West

Advent Absorption

By Bishop Winfield Mott

Christmas season is the time to be..... excruciatingly lonely. Year after year, the psychologist-gurus who monitor such things point this out. Depression, thoughts of suicide and just plain morose staring out the window at the murky cold, all peak at Christmas. Partly this is because no other annual event has such a large gap between the image of the ideal and the actual reality.

Christmas is suppose to be a time of silver bells, togetherness, brightness, family reunion, a trip to Granma's house (a white frame farmhouse in the hills, radiating welcoming warmth out its windows), comforting nostalgia, generosity and giving, kindness and caring, outings to shop for others among festive crowds, workplace celebrations strengthening employee morale, Midnight Mass, and Father Sean come by to bless the house afterwards....the long list could go on, but you get the drift. The reality rarely comes close. The result is a stark epiphany into the loneliness, rifts, tensions, failures and lack of fulfillment in life, experienced by so many, perhaps by you.

The blame is often placed on the way we do Christmas. It is routine in church to hear Christmas denounced for having become nothing but a resurgence of its old pagan solstice self, with a consumer component on steroids added. And for an increasingly large percentage of the populace, the reason for the season is to have a festival for the sake of having a festival. The tinsel cheer in that thought will hardly improve your mood, and then the emptiness of

it hits. "Bah, humbug" may not be such a bad comment after all, as the event has evolved over the years.

It is easy to forget in the middle of all the uproar and condemnations of the uproar, that we are not at Christmas at all. Instead, Advent has begun, a new (church) year starting, appropriately, with a penitential season, not a celebration. A natural side effect of repentance and penitence is depression, so not to worry. Contemplation of your failings, mistakes and ugly moments hardly leads to euphoria. You may be depressed like those around you but your experience of Advent will end better, taking you on an adventure far away from the maddening Christmas crowd. On the day after Christmas, they will be exhausted, relieved that grey everyday has returned and the dieting can begin.

You, on the other hand, will have arrived, with effort and determination, at a mountain peak of celebration just

beginning, the result of a climb through your inner self. Your Advent journey is going somewhere, literally.

In preparation for that, some review of the basics is important. Our society embraces a heresy, that our Faith is about spiritual things apart from material ones. The heresy manifests itself in a myriad of ways, all of them wrong. The truth is, God made creation, all of creation, to be good, the material equally with the spiritual. Christmas is about how God did not despair when humans set about wrecking creation, both the spiritual and material parts of it. He sent his Son to be incarnate and fix the problem. Given the pervasive character of the dualistic heresy, it is no wonder that this action was "an offense to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks," as St. Paul notes.

But Christianity is a carnal Faith, a celebration of the God who created this wondrous planet, including us, and is now restoring

it, and us, to the goodness it was meant to be, spiritually and materially. Curious that the famous star chose the name "Madonna" and the term "material woman," because that is exactly what the original Madonna was able to achieve by her cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born "material man," incarnate. Jesus enters this earth with a body and he leaves it, in Resurrection, with that body. Our Creed expresses both quite clearly, "and was made man," and "[I believe] in the resurrection of the body." Together with the motive ("for God so loved the world..."), that



is the Christmas message.

The Advent journey begins where the world around us is, in despair. Rumbings of doom, portends of end times which will end badly in destruction and horror, appear in the Advent lessons. It sounds more than a bit like the evening news, as if we are hearing the news anchors recite the Litany every night, with details included, "lightning and tempest, earthquake, fire and flood, plague, pestilence and famine, battle and murder, sudden death, sedition, privy conspiracy and rebellion....," etc. The only sensible reaction to the scenario is metanoia, for society and self to make a U-turn, repent and find a better way. Fortunately (back to basics), that has been provided via the Incarnation, as noted above.

Thus, in repentance and amendment of life, the real journey home for Christmas can begin for us. As the world rumbles down the tracks towards its predictable (and predicted)

conclusion like the boxcars of the Holocaust, our journey slowly, painfully, draws away in the other direction. Repentance is not easy work, but Absolution is absolute, once pronounced it is fixed in eternity, “your sin is forgiven.” As the journey goes, new sin arises, new repentance joins the struggle, but always when that happens, new absolution sacramentally flows, and the journey tumbles forward once more.

The goal is not simply spiritual, salvation of our souls. It is the resurrection of the body (all bodies come with the soul already installed). Christ has come, now incarnate, to carry us home, incorporated in him (incorporated=to be included in the corpus, or Body). Advent means to arrive. It is the arriving of God Incarnate among us, and equally our arrival to him.

Advent is thus the ultimate adventure (the word “adventure” is directly related), an exciting trip into the unknown. The trip begins at baptism, and progress is made every Eucharist. In the Eucharistic canon (prayer), we ask that, in receiving Communion, we may “be made one Body with him, so that he may dwell in us, and we in him” (quoted from BCP 2019, and similar in other BCP editions).

This theological term for this incorporation is “theosis,”

being absorbed into God. It is difficult to think of a more spectacular adventure. It certainly beats shopping at the mall or the office Christmas bash. It might even be better than arguing politics with your relatives at Granma’s.

As I write this, all the highways west of our town are closed due to landslides triggered by torrential rains, in turn attributed to a heightened number of drastic climate events. The highway to the south is almost entirely closed due to a Catch-22 thicket of border COVID restrictions. But the road to theosis always remains open and welcoming. “Come unto me, all ye who are heavy laden,” we hear, the invitation to adventure, to really come home for Christmas.

There is always a choice of alternative routes in life. This Advent, as always, you can choose the frenetic (pre) Christmas distraction around you or the open Eucharistic road of Advent absorption into theosis. The road has been made straight, our sin alone detours us. The season of Advent ends at the twelve days of Christmas, but the adventure into absorption is forever.



SAVE THE DATE

Upcoming Synod & Clericus 2022

Please note that this year’s Regional Synod will be conducted in conjunction with our Annual Clericus. The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding both in Mesilla, New Mexico, **April 18, 19, 20 and 21 (Bright Week).**

The plan at this stage is to have both our Regional Synod and our Clericus in person, but given the ins and outs of COVID, regulations and restrictions, we will be prepared to conduct both using our hybrid model that we used last year, if necessary.

Please let our Vicar General know if you are going to attend these meetings and whether it will be in person or via Zoom as soon as possible.

If any one cannot attend because of financial reasons, the Convocation may be able to help. Please contact your Vicar General, the Very Rev. Canon Michael A. Penfield, at VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org or at (408) 960-4915 so we may discuss what financial help we can offer.

This promises to be an excellent Clericus. We hope to see you all there!