

In the Time We are Given:
an extended pastoral letter to the Diocese of Dallas

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Introduction: The native Elder

I once heard my friend, Bishop Mark MacDonald, now of indigenous Canada, formerly of Alaska, tell this story. In a sense this whole booklet is a reflection on it. The debate over marriage and sexuality had come to a gathering of native Church leaders. An old man stood up and said the following: “There are three things I would like to say. In our village we have always found a place for those who are different. Where I come from, to leave is to freeze to death. And the male and the female are the tent-poles holding up the cosmos.” Then he sat down. It was as if he were implying, “there you have it my children- you work it out!” The trick is of course finding a way to hold all three of the elder’s points together and to make sense of the whole. You might compare it to the challenge of patting your head and rubbing your stomach, while tapping your toes. These three: hospitality, a commitment to the oneness of the Church, and faithfulness in teaching, are also what I promised when I came to be your bishop, as I will note in my conclusion.

The key to understanding where we are as a Church, and I hope understanding this booklet too, is holding these three in concert. For it would be easier, but problematic, to grasp one, however good the rationale might seem, and let the other two go. I suspect

that holding thoughts together, in the hope that sparks of light might appear as from flint on flint, is needed in many of the conundra we face in life.

In the history of our Anglican tradition, theological reflection has often been ‘occasional,’ prompted by pastoral, practical or political considerations of the moment. The occasion for this reflection is the ongoing debate over marriage in our Church national and global, now in its fourth decade. We shall see how this one issue opens onto a wider array of issues. However I am not aiming to offer a theological treatise, much less a polemical tract or strategy. Rather I want to address these thoughts to the Christians in my diocese as your bishop, your chief pastor. I do so keenly aware how strongly and how long people have held their respective views on this contentious issue. My goal is simple, namely that you should understand why I think what I think. I hope that this reflection will be an act of sympathy and honesty, and will evoke the same in my readers, however you understand this issue. Therefore, I aim to speak directly and plainly, which is not always easy for me! Each chapter will have one main point. My larger purpose is encouragement. I believe that our one diocese, in our downsized denomination, in this moment in American history, has, by God’s grace, something important to offer, so that we ought to press forward toward this calling (Philippians 3). As I will argue, we stand in witness to something more ‘deep and wide’ in time and space than ourselves and our own struggles.

As a classics student in college I took a seminar in the Latin historian Tacitus, under the guidance of Herbert Bloch, a Jewish scholar who had lived his early life in Nazi Germany. There was something silently powerful about reading the history of that

dire and violent era of the Roman empire with such a guide. At the outset of his history, Tacitus said that he meant to recall that era 'sine ira et studio,' 'without anger or fanaticism.' It must have been difficult for him, since he had suffered its effects; at times his acerbic side does show through. Now I have not lived through anything like the rigors of that time, and so would do well to avoid self-dramatization. But that goal of an asceticism, a letting go of our anger and partisanship, on all of our parts, is a worthy aim, especially in the poisonous political atmosphere in which we live.

It has sometimes been argued that the question of whether two people of the same gender can be married is, in the grand scheme of things, a secondary question, and that we would do better to invest our time in more primary (and less divisive) matters. In the ordinary, week to week, life of our parishes, this is indeed how we conduct ourselves, and there is a good deal of wisdom to it. One way to understand theology is, precisely, this attention to keeping first things first. Furthermore, many feel a great weariness about engaging this question after so many years of contention, a weariness I share. Just the same, an issue that has torn the fabric of our Communion, and one that is of such urgent importance to many of our members, deserves attention.

The things we believe are a net or web, connected to one another, secondary matters tied into the central ones.¹ What we believe about marriage is tied to what we believe about the human person; how we understand conflict is related to how we understand the Church; what we make of our cultural climate impinges on how we see our mission, and

¹ George Lindbeck once cited Newman, who said that from a snip to something as small as a vein a body could bleed out.

so on. The question of marriage is the occasion for wider questions, like the expanding ripples in a pond. Though we Americans are a pragmatic lot, considering seriously what we believe, and why, and where it leads, does matter.

In the same spirit, urgent and very practical questions about our liturgical life should engender theological debates. Any assumption that theology is some airy, ‘academic’ matter which is isolated from, and optional for pragmatic Church issues, misunderstands what theology is. Real theology gives our best account of what is really real. Let me offer an example. Years ago, the (now retired) bishop of South Carolina and former professor, Fitz Allison, used to talk about the ‘leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees’ with respect to the debate on sexuality. As someone insistent on our reclaiming the doctrine of grace in the Church, he was always attuned to cases of its opposite, justification by works, the notion that our own efforts could set us right with God. Allison, though a controversial conservative voice in this debate, had in this instance a word of theological critique for both sides. Conservatives slipped into a unjustifiable sense of moral superiority, and liberals, in their own way, in pursuit of justice, claim merit in their own works. His conclusion was that the starting point for disagreement needed to be a shared sense of our own brokenness, all of us, as well as of ourselves as recipients of the divine grace.² I’m not OK, nor are you, but we are

² This is an important part of the point in the locus classicus on the subject, Romans 1:26-27. Again, the background is Genesis 1-2, but now joined by the account of the fall in chapter 3. The example of same sex relations is a case in point of Paul’s argument that all human beings are ‘closed under sin,’ so that all might be the recipients of grace in Jesus Christ.

something better; forgiven sinners from which perspective we can truly see ourselves as creatures in God's image and pilgrims on the way to God's heavenly city. I know that the term 'sin' here may be hard for some to hear, since experiences in their lives have made them sensitive to messages of denigration. I suspect that we all have some of this hidden in our souls. But the term is, strangely, the cause for a certain kind of 'democracy' of brokenness³, and the premise for the good news of God's gracious welcome in Jesus Christ.

Let me be clear about several things at the outset. My topic is highly contested, and many will disagree. I am not laying down the law, but rather offering an account of how I see matters. Mine is the minority view among leaders in the Episcopal Church these days, and my argument has the aim of imagining an ongoing place for traditional Episcopalians in our Church.⁴ In short, in our denomination as a whole, I represent 'difference'. In Dallas more progressive voices feel they represent just that too. I am bound by my calling as chief pastor and teacher to speak here, but I have a vocation to listen as well. Most importantly, our churches must continue to have wide open doors to all. Speaking the truth in love is one way we are together, but not the only one- we also pray together and serve together, we who are diverse in many ways. Arguments, resolutions, cultural trends, provinces do not sit in our pews - but you all do, as individuals. That is the first theme from the story of the native elder - that place is found in the village for everyone, including those who differ in one way or another. Survival

³ The idea is in Alan Jacobs' Original Sin: a Cultural History, (2009).

⁴ Of course ours is also the inheritance of the Church catholic and the official teaching of the Communion.

requires huddling together. But of course, strong families are able to meet around the dinner table and work things out, to be direct and honest with each other, even in disagreement. That is what I intend for this extended letter, and I hope it is heard in that spirit.

Let me offer a roadmap for the chapters to come. The first chapter offer a succinct account of the traditional teaching on marriage and its importance. The second tells how we as a minority should now understand our role in our own Church. The third shows how this teaching and this role remind us what our tradition, Anglicanism, is called to be. The fourth places the whole matter against a wider and darker horizon, contemporary culture and its emerging challenges, which we must face all together. The conclusion returns to the threefold truth of the elder, and in its light looks ‘in a glass darkly’ at what lies ahead for us Episcopalians. (A reflection on Ephesians with an eye to all of the above is offered for individual or parish consideration, in an interlude).

Theology is not an end in itself, nor is ‘getting it right’ intellectually some kind of merit. Again, what is primary is what you do, say, and feel as you listen to the Word of God, repent and hear ourselves to be forgiven, and worship Him who is Father, Son, and Spirit every Sunday, together, in your parish. I am glad that this is so, nor do I wish that contention should invade or distract from that. But we are also a family, a communion, a Body. Finding a way truthfully and charitably to order its life, seeing how one issue impinges on others we have barely yet imagined does, in the long run, help local and congregational life to flourish in this beloved diocese.

Chapter One: The Inconvenient Truth

The case for same-sex marriage in the Church has yet to be made.

If we are to talk about whether same sex unions can be marriages, we had better begin with what marriage is. To do this we need to start with something yet more fundamental: the same God is both our Creator and our Redeemer. These are two aspects or dimensions of His one work. To put it another way, the same God creates and recreates us, and both serve the same loving purpose that we should dwell with him unto eternity in the new heaven and earth, the kingdom of God. To separate the two lies at the heart of the oldest heresy of all.⁵ In keeping with this, the one institution of marriage is rooted in creation, but also has a place in the order of redemption or salvation as well. This deep truth about the one God of creation and redemption lends to teaching about marriage a deeper pertinence as well.

We humans are creatures, mammals to be exact. While the world of fauna and flora is varied, we are, like our fellow mammals, created male and female. Now the doctrine of creation is not the same thing as the scientific study of the physical world, but it is consistent with an interest in the contingent, empirical, and verifiable. The male and

⁵ Called ‘Gnosticism.’ They mistakenly belittled the work of creation, since it was material and so supposed to be less spiritual, and they identified this lesser creator with the god of the Old Testament.

female are not, as is claimed in the contemporary and ideological parlance, merely a ‘construction.’⁶ As the opening chapter of Genesis attests, and science confirms, we, in our complementarity, share with our fellow mammals the ‘fruitfulness’ of reproduction, which Scripture tells us is a gift of blessedness.

In that same chapter, we learn that we were made to be ‘in the image of God.’ There has been much debate about what this richly multivalent expression means. It includes the gift of language and communication, the related gift of reason, and the calling to be stewards of the creation, or, as the Orthodox would put it, microcosms of that creation able to voice its praise. It can be seen to include the conscious mutuality of male and female as well. As a result, fruitfulness is related to these other gifts, and convey a special blessedness for us as well. This becomes clear as we read in chapter 2 about the creation of Adam and Eve, who is ‘bone of his bone and flesh of [his] flesh,’ his companion. Their complementary union is the source of human society, even as their rebellion proves to be the origin of its fracture. It is significant that New Testament accounts of marriage do not leave Genesis 1-2 behind, but each look back to it and build on its foundation. So, when Jesus himself wades into the rabbinic debate about divorce, he drives the conversation back to what marriage is meant to be, back that is to Genesis 2: ‘but from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ Therefore a man

⁶ If, at any university, one were to walk from the post-modern confines of the English department, and travel cross-campus to Biology, and specifically Genetics, they would confirm this fact.

To be clear, history and culture certainly do influence the roles that the sexes have played in society, and relations between them.

shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ (Mark 10:6-8)⁷

If you were now to open your prayer book to the marriage service and read, from its preamble, its purposes, you would find the following threefold answer: ‘for their [the husband and wife’s] mutual joy, for help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity, and when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children...’ We can see joy and procreation already in the creation accounts, and of course adversity is soon on the way. These purposes are not separate and unrelated. Children, opening a future, as the fruit of the two become one, are themselves a source of mutual joy. For most cultures of the world this is easy to see. Joy for the couple, help in the ordering of subsequent society, and procreation, with the complementarity it requires, are knit together in those chapters, and so in our understanding of the divine purpose for the human being.

When we turn to the New Testament, its new contribution to our understanding of marriage is not an extraneous or arbitrary addition, but grows out of what I have already noted. The loving purpose of God the Creator, a dimension of which is His gift of marriage, is displayed further in the role marriage takes on in the Church. Christian marriage communicates something that includes, but also surpasses, what all human marriages say.

⁷ One sometimes hears that Jesus has nothing to say on the question at hand, which this passage shows not to be so (and this is a red herring, since the words of Paul are equally Scripture). Jesus prefaces this quotation with the rejection of a contemporary custom of easy divorce which surely worked to the disadvantage of women.

The classic expression of this purpose for marriage, specific to the Christian, is articulated by St. Paul in Ephesians 5:32. Here too the foundational passage in Genesis 2:24, reinforces the connection between the purposes of creation and new creation. Listen to Paul's words: 'This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church.' In other words, the mutual sacrifice, intimacy, and covenantal union across genders that marriage is to symbolize shows us something deep about our life with God. They lead to fruitfulness spiritual as well as physical.⁸ We need to be careful here. Paul is not saying that marriage and hence sexuality have on their own some kind of sacral power- that way of thinking was associated with paganism in the ancient world (and maybe ours as well). Rather, it serves as a 'mystery' (translated into Latin as 'sacramentum'), signifying something true first and foremost of Jesus Christ and His union with His people. The power here lies in His hands, not ours. But we can say that, in addition to its own inherent goods, marriage serves symbolically to 'say' something to the Church and hence to the world, about who the risen Christ is and how He is found in our midst.⁹ And what it has to say is, for Paul, connected directly in Ephesians 5 to the complementarity of male and female in marriage. To summarize, taking these New Testament passages together, against the background of the Old, we find a consistent Biblical account of marriage, its nature as the union of man and woman, and its close connection to fruitfulness spiritual and physical.

⁸ For a more adequate account see 'Marriage, Creation, and Covenant' by Bauerschmidt, Hylden, Guiliano, and Hill in First Things, (June 2, 2015).

⁹ For an explanation of the sacraments in this 'iconic' or communicative sense, see my booklet Being Salt, (Eugene: 2007).

At this point I need to return to the main thesis at the outset of this chapter. Surely the Church should not proceed with this seismic change without making a convincing theological case in favor of the innovation.¹⁰ Actually, I believe that such a case is still wanting. In short, I believe that adequate rejoinders or answers to the points I have made (which are hardly original with me), have not been made. Such a change should await exactly such a compelling account.

I am not impugning the motives of those who advocate the revision, nor am I denying that much has been written by able minds on the progressive side. But what I am saying is that often theologians commence from different assumptions, so that they seem to be in dialogue, but actually talk past one another. For example, the presumed analogy between the cause of LGBT people and the civil rights movement has meant that for many, not least those of the Boomer generation, the justice of the cause has been self-evident, and arguments in its aid have followed along in its wake. Unfortunately this has meant that key passages like that in Ephesians 5 have been read accordingly, so as to leave behind the theme of complementarity of male and female. Appeal in its stead is made to a more general idea of mutuality of persons, whose vagueness obscures the actual logic of the passages in question. As a result, the argument of one side does not answer the other, but rather they slip past each other, like the proverbial ships at night.

As an aside, I know something of this personally, since I was a member of the traditional side of the House of Bishops' theological sub-committee on marriage back in

¹⁰ As to its 'seismic' effect, see the recent comments from around the Communion about this 'matter of grave consequence' of such a change to the Prayer Book (The Living Church, April, 20, 2018).

2009-2011. It was the last time that both sides of the debate were adequately represented on a relevant theological body of the Episcopal Church. We managed to lay out the two ways of seeing the matters, and we engaged in a dialogue between our respective positions.¹¹ But our conclusion was a kind of stalemate, a perplexity, with two teachings over against each other, hardly a situation from which one could happily conclude that the light is green to speed ahead.

The main claim is simply that, Biblically speaking, marriage is not neutral, but that the joining of male and female is its unique form theologically. Remember as our starting point the word from that native elder and his reference to the ‘tent-poles of the cosmos’- he was making a claim consistent with the Bible. And accompanying this fact is the awkward conclusion that a compelling counter-argument, contending with the traditional claims as they actually are, has not been made, however much the Church might want to hurry on to implementation.

We could of course deal with each of the points I have made at much greater length; I have merely listed them. Likewise I need to cite the frequent rejoinders to the position I have offered, though these too should rightly provoke much longer treatments. First, one might cite the vast cultural diversity of heterosexual marriage. In the Old Testament this includes polygamy; some of its forms in later Christian history we find today less than edifying, especially in how they have treated women. That we often do not live up to the vision in Ephesians 5, for example, is patently true. But what it mostly

¹¹ See Anglican Theological Review, (Winter, 2011). Later committees mostly reflected on how what liturgies should follow from the assumed progressive starting-point.

proves is that original sin is a doctrine with lots of empirical verification.¹² While we are on the subject, the struggle of the African church with polygamy is sometimes offered as a counter-example. It may be in fact pertinent, though the normative status of marriage of one man and one woman was in the African discussion never in question.¹³

Secondly, we can note the criticism I sometimes hear from Christians of the younger generation- perhaps you can recognize here the voice of your own children or grandchildren. They ask whether we wouldn't do better to invest this energy into something more profitable, for example feeding the hungry and advocating for the disadvantaged. On this I frankly agree, and bemoan the lost time we as a Church could have spent tending to other matters. Still, we are obliged to witness to the truth as we see it, as questions come to us. That we must also get on with the Church's calling to service and mission I agree wholeheartedly.

Thirdly, people ask about cases that seem to contradict the emphasis on the gift of children. Sometimes they cite older couples or barren ones, for whom the procreation of children is not possible, but who are married nonetheless. Here one may respond that what is normative is the form of the relationship, its male-and-female-complementariness, which is, by God's creative design, intrinsically fruitful, whether a particular couple experiences it. Likewise the fact that we can make babies in test-tubes

¹² In Chesterton's Orthodoxy.

¹³ See my article "'Patience Leads to Character": The Polygamy-Homosexuality Analogy in Contemporary Debate', in Catherine Sider Hamilton (ed.), *The Homosexuality Debate: Faith Seeking Understanding* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2003), pp.

only shows that we are clever, not that we have succeeded in making the human something different from what it has been.

Fourthly, one often hears the charge of hypocrisy: why so much attention on gay marriages in a culture in which heterosexual co-habitation before marriage is common, not to mention casual sex, pornography, abusive relationships, divorce, and, though often unnoted, the gradual decline of the institution overall. With this critique too I agree, though it might be taken as an impetus to reflect anew on Christian marriage as a practice more counter-cultural than we had previously supposed.

Fifth, one often hears that the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, and we ought to be law-abiding and patriotic Americans who acknowledge what has been decided. So we should be! In fact, even before the ruling¹⁴ I was in favor of affording gay couples the same civil rights and protections which married couples received. This is a secular and political question, though Christians have an interest in fairness in our society. However we as Americans have also inherited a tradition of the separation of Church and state. The Church has the obligation to make its witness regardless of what the State does, and that separation has helped to safeguard the Church's ability to do so. One can readily think of other issues where you would not want the Church obliged to follow the leading of the State, no matter which side of the political fence you are on.

Sixth, the analogy I mentioned above of movement of civil rights, is offered in rebuttal. But as I have already made clear, one can support rights in the secular arena, but

¹⁴ Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015.

see the life of the Church as guided by its own distinctive polestar.¹⁵ Furthermore these cases need to be consider one by one, as they differ greatly.

The seventh and final rejoinder I would mention has to do with the criteria by which we make theological judgments. In short, isn't my argument more 'Baptist' than 'Episcopal'? Aren't we taking the Bible in a fundamentalist way, and don't our citations amount to proof-texting? What about the balance provided by the Anglican 'stool' of Scripture, reason, and tradition? This rejoinder deserves a book instead of a paragraph, doesn't it? The real question is whether something is true or not. Calling it 'Baptist' as if that were a fair critique is something I hear too much of. As the Articles of Religion make clear, and our Catechism confirms,¹⁶ the Holy Scriptures are the norm for our thinking and acting; this is, quite simply, 'mere Christianity.' They are the trustworthy measuring stick by which we evaluate other claims and ideas. 'Fundamentalism' had to do with a claim about the use of certain passages for historical or scientific information, not to a more general desire to take what the Bible actually says seriously. Proof-texting is pulling a few verses out of their place in the whole sweep of the Scriptural witness; in our case we have shown how the relevant New Testament passages connect back to a key Old Testament one. Their claim is interwoven into the whole narrative sweep of Scripture.

¹⁵ For what it's worth, our judgments about progressive social causes occasionally look different in hindsight. In the 19th century, in addition to suffrage and abolition, my Quaker ancestors advocated the assimilation of native people into the dominant culture.

¹⁶ Article VI and Catechism, 'The Holy Scriptures'

As for the ‘stool,’¹⁷ the point is not to imagine theology as if the three were disconnected, so that ‘two out of three ain’t bad’. Rather the Scripture needs to be heard with the aid of the tradition, even as we strain with the help of exegesis to hear its original voice too; we are not the first who have heard them. Consideration of this conversation with tradition as we hear Scripture requires the use of reason in the service of faith. The ‘stool’ of Scripture, reason, and tradition is shorthand for this complex (and often contested) activity. In other words, invoking the ‘stool’ does not get us out of the specific task of considering the arguments made, and responding to them, nor does it provide a route around what the Bible has to say.¹⁸

There is little appetite for repeating the quarrels about same sex blessings and marriage which have marred the last decade, nor am I sanguine about the likelihood that rehearsing these arguments will change many minds. I have offered the preceding account of the traditional view, first, to give some encouragement to believers who hold traditional views on this question, who may by now feel beleaguered, and, second, to defend my claim that the revisionist case has yet to be made. The latter in turn has to do, as you shall see, with my account of the special calling we have within our Church, ‘out of season’ though it may seem.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Chris Seitz’ ‘Repugnance and the three-legged Stool,’ in Radner and Sumner, Reclaiming Faith, (Grand Rapids, 1993)

¹⁸ From a letter on this point by Oliver O’Donovan: “...in speaking of Scripture, tradition, and reason...we speak of how we work on our disagreements as responsible Christians under the authority of Scripture in worship. A second-order methodological reflection of this kind is only of help if we are prepared to work with it. It is there to make discussion of the undiscussable possible.”

¹⁹ II Timothy 4:2.

The preceding litany of arguments may seem overly negative, as if excessive energy were being expended in what we are against. Such an impression would be contrary to what I intend, since actually I mean to lead with what traditional Episcopalians on this question are for: the unique place of the marriage of man and woman in the spiritual ‘economy’ of the Church, and the accompanying reasons for it. What is at stake here? Given all the heartache the issue has caused, why continue to bother? At the very least, it is a matter of honesty, of bearing witness. Truths, especially when they are inconvenient, ought not to be left aside, especially given the especially amnesiac nature of our age of Church life. In addition, remembering this teaching ought to put a renewed claim on the lives of the married, who live in a culture confused about many related matters. At perhaps the most sweeping level, the traditional teaching reminds us of the nexus of creation and redemption with which I began this chapter.²⁰ But how that recollection matters for life in our time and place will be for a subsequent chapter to flesh out.

My worry about the chapter I have just written is that it seems, after so many years of discussing this topic, too settled, too cut-and-dried. We need to be open to critique. We need to be open to hearing, truly, what fellow Episcopalians of a different view have to say. I was greatly influenced, in my own young adulthood, by reading Martin Buber’s I and Thou, where he was perhaps the first to find in the voice of the Other the voice of the Spirit. Arguments matter, but so does that living dialogue, even

²⁰ The case for same-sex marriage is not the only challenge to the vocation of marriage; the incidence of divorce and of pre-marital co-habitation also call us to a deeper sense of the vocation of marriage with these theological underpinnings in mind.

among opponents who have ‘fierce conversations.’²¹ Some months ago I told a young priest, after he had made a passionate case for marriage equality to me over scrambled eggs, to return with his best re-readings of the Scriptural passages I have cited in this letter, and I, old though I be, was ready to listen. I am not saying that we cannot see in same-sex unions evidence of the virtues, nor that many opposite- sex couples couldn’t show a good deal more!²² Doubtless we have more to learn about pastoral outreach to gay and lesbian people, further to go in welcome. Doubtless we need to be sensitive to the failings of the Church toward them in the past. Doubtless society needs that witness that we all are equally made in God’s image. And doubtless being one who raises the inconvenient truth makes it harder to be believed on these scores. At least let this chapter of theological witness be coupled with these pastoral imperatives.

²¹ See [A House Divided? Ways Forward for North American Anglicans](#), ed. Arten and Glass, (Eugene, 2015)

²² My friend Kathryn Greene-McCreight is good on this topic: ‘the self-giving of to individuals in a committed relationship can, after all, reflect the sacrificial love of Christ. The contribution to the wider community which may come of homosexual relationships can also be acknowledged as a ‘good’...to recognize these goods, however, is not to sanction the sexual activity which may (or may not) accompany such relationships...to insist on this would be to insist on consequentialist ethics, that the ‘ends justify the means,’ so to speak.

Chapter 2: Solving for X- A Time of Testing and a Vocation of Witness

Same-sex marriage is, at best, a doctrinal experiment in one corner of the Church catholic which would require an extended period of testing.

A major part of mental health is a willingness to deal with reality, a capacity for ‘adaptation to life.’²³ We have to come to terms with what is. The last chapter offered a succinct case for maintaining the traditional teaching, but the Episcopal horse is already out of the barn.²⁴ What are we to do now? We are emerging from a period of intense conflict in the Episcopal Church, in which many traditional members felt conscience-

²³ See George Valliant’s Adaptation to Life. (Cambridge, 1998)

²⁴ Or perhaps half-way out! So far the catechism and the marriage rite express the traditional teaching, though these are, for now, inconsistent with the canonical change. Here we might also mention the exhortation of the ordination rite and the catechism.

bound to leave and to constitute an alternative Anglicanism in North American (or more accurately, several). Are we simply left with the extreme alternatives of departure, as they did, or acquiescence? That is the question we are addressing in this chapter: given the present state of play, how are we to understand where we are, and, as a result, what are we to do?

We need, in our reflection, to return and touch home periodically, to recall what amounts to an ecclesial ‘koan’ from our native elder: space for differences, solidarity, and the inherited teaching, all at once. His wisdom disbars us from those two extremes, but what then opens up as an alternative?

At the heart of the traditionalist theological vision is the idea that we need to listen again, that we, who are forgetful, need to be called back to the depth of what we have inherited. In this regard, let me offer a parable. When I was a curate years ago in a church in Worcester, Massachusetts, I heard how the once grand downtown church had decided to clean out the accumulated junk from its cellar, the remains of old yard-sales, pageant costumes, moldy books, parts to past lawn-movers. They came across some dingy old paintings and offered one to the curate, if he would like it...until they had the one he selected cleaned and appraised and realized it was by a minor Renaissance master and worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, whereupon, embarrassed, they rescinded the offer! Well, I am not saying that most of church history amounts to yard-sale rejects, but

I am saying that there are things, now covered with dust, which are treasures, and able to aid us in our present perplexities.²⁵

One treasure which we need to haul out of the forgotten basement is the idea of reception. At the most basic level, this concept maintains that any doctrinal innovation takes time. The Church has to determine that the new idea is consistent with the ‘faith once received,’ that we are saying something new in order to say the same thing the apostles did, only in new circumstances. Only over time can we determine that the change in question is not a peculiarity of the circumstance of that one church and its situation.²⁶ But why should we keep looking back so as to be faithful? Ultimately it comes from the assurance that Jesus is the ‘same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.’²⁷ Reception claims that this can only happen by a kind of widespread and cumulative verdict of the people of God over time.

But wait a minute- wasn’t there a validly constituted General Convention (and won’t there be another soon)? Wasn’t this change approved there? Am I impugning the right of those delegates to decide what seems best to them? That is not what I am saying

²⁵ This way of seeing things was called an ‘hermeneutic of gratitude’ in Reclaiming Faith, Radner and Sumner, 1992. An extreme example of the opposite was Bishop Pike’s infamous rejection of the Trinity as ‘excess luggage in 1964, just ahead of the remarkable revival of Trinitarian theology, a churchly example of ‘just in time to be too late.’

The classic Biblical text of rediscovery which lights up the present perplexity is Josiah’s rediscovery of the Torah in the Temple’s store-room in II Kings 21:11-13.

²⁶ The classic study of the kind of criteria over time that would be applied to see if something new were faithful is John Henry Newman’s On the Development of Doctrine.

²⁷ Hebrews 13:8.

here.²⁸ These changes were passed, and now have canonical force- the General Convention is competent to do this. But the General Convention is not an ecumenical council of the worldwide Church, to say the least. It cannot by itself, on a hot summer afternoon in Salt Lake City in 2015, up and change the teaching on what marriage has been across centuries and continents for the global Church. Nor as a branch of the Anglican Communion can we disregard the consensus view about the doctrine of marriage, as expressed by Resolution 1.10 of the Lambeth Conference 1998.

Let's put it another way. Consider the word 'Church.' By it we can mean the parish whose gathering you attend every Sunday. Or it can mean 'The Episcopal Church.' Or it can mean that wider family of Churches of which ours is a member. Or it can mean that great reality across centuries and continents in which we confess faith when we say the creed: 'we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.' But when something changes at one level of the Church, the relations between, as well as the gaps between the levels, become more evident. How does a decision at one level relate to the faith commonly held at another? The kind of testing required is to make sure that teachings do not become idiosyncratic, peculiar, and exclusive to one place and time.

It would be simpler, of course, if we just understood the Episcopal Church as a free-standing and utterly independent entity, similar to, for example, the Shriners or the Kiwanis in the USA. They make up their own mind about their policies. From a

²⁸ There is a question about the consistency of the decisions reached with the Constitution of our Church, where consistency with the doctrine of the Church of England is required. There has also been a debate about the role of dioceses in approving rites not in the BCP. But my present argument prescinds from, i.e. leaves aside, this question.

canonical, political, legal point of view, one might indeed say that. And there is an attraction in this view for Americans, who would ‘live free or die!’ But that cannot be the sum of what we believe, nor is reality limited to legal and political judgments. For if it were, then the reality to which we point as Church would be truncated beyond recognition. We could no longer stand on Sunday morning and say ‘I believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.’

Let me go back to the main question: what status does the innovation called ‘same-sex marriage’ have? Now if one were to study the concept of reception, one would learn that new doctrines, however they be generated, much pass a number of ‘tests’. It needs to be demonstrated that their decisions were not contradictory of the witness of Scripture.²⁹ In other words, it is problematic to claim that the doctrine of reception is, strictly speaking, directly applicable in this case.

So for argument’s sake, let us consider the present case as a kind of extended analogue to reception. It is similar to reception in that time and attention to the reactions and responses of other Churches are required. The passage of the new rites in convention can cause them to be canonically licit in our national Church, and it thus places this new teaching next to the old one. But it cannot thereby create a new doctrine for the Communion, much less the Church catholic. What it has done is initiate what we might call a doctrinal ‘experiment’. It has commenced something doctrinally local and hence, with respect to the Church catholic, at best provisional. It is a proposal before the

²⁹ See Thomas Rausch in *Theological Studies* 47 1986 on the ARCIC Final Report, also Seitz, op.cit

Anglican family, and ultimately the Church catholic, but it is an anomaly as well. To be sure, the ‘instruments of communion’ are not a formal process for testing an innovation, but they were certainly intended to be an informal and consultative process for just this.³⁰ So, it must be noted, even if we think of ourselves in a time of testing of the new teaching on marriage, by analogy with reception, insofar as we are also members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, confused and divided though it also be, the teaching on marriage remains the traditional one which we have received. For us as Episcopalians the two now sit together, though, as I have argued, their theological status is not the same.

Now accepting that we are in, at best, an extended period of testing, broadly understood, requires of us virtues which will challenge us. In the idea of reception-like testing is comprised patience, of which there is precious little evidence in our time. We advocate our political causes fervently, and we win or lose- that we readily understand. We careen from one issue to the next, at a rate which reckons two weeks of news to be a long time. But in the case about which we are speaking, we must reckon on generations. (I must add that, however hard this may be for us to imagine at present, challenging the impatience of our age is itself a calling).

We will also need humility, on all sides. For the ‘victors’³¹, the notion that the power to decide is not fully in their hands, and not immediate, will be difficult. For the minority, living ‘out of favor’ and to some extent by the leave of others, with whom we

³⁰ See especially Paul Avis’ work, including Beyond the Reformation?, Anglican Conciliarity and the Lambeth Conference, and most recently The Lambeth Conference, (edited with Ben Guyer).

³¹ A point made well by Dean Paul Zahl at an ECF conference at Advent, Birmingham in 2004.

disagree, but with whom we are in communion, may prove equally challenging. Third and finally, we in that minority will need to pray for the gift of hope. By this I do not mean simply the desire, eventually, to prevail. Rather I mean avoiding that despair which comes to think that the transactions of politics, in both victory and defeat finally own the day. The teaching of the Church catholic remains the traditional one. To continue to live in witness to the truth, and to do so in charity and solidarity, to believe this to be 'sufficient unto the day,' is itself a surrender of the unseen future into the hands of God, and so an act of hope.

At this point we would do well to answer a potential objection. The advocate of same-sex marriage will say that those deprived of marriage have waited too long already, and that patience before injustice is not a virtue. This assumes a political stage in which groups vie for rights. It also assumes the self-evident rightness of the cause, which is of course what is up for discernment. But a fuller account of the nature of the Church includes the assumption that we forbear each other as the family of God, that we actually need each other as global Churches to discern which innovations are indeed of the Spirit. It assumes that we are a Body which waits on the Lord. All of this is consistent with a deep respect for one another, and speaking the truth, even a hard one, to each other in love. It takes to heart Paul's words about weak and strong, especially when we believe ourselves to be right. It assumes a vision of the Church in which we are more than a collection of individuals contending politically. Finally it assumes that the Church is the recipient of a treasure, an inheritance, an heirloom, we ought to be slow to jettison. For

traditional cultures this is entailed in honoring our elders.³² The notion of reception shares with such cultures this sense of honoring the past, along with a more deliberate pace of change, and we have something to learn here.

All of this brings me to the second theme of this chapter. Testing is the category in relation to which we have thought through the present situation. But how are we to understand ourselves as a result? The title of this chapter is ‘solving for x.’ I have in mind a problem in algebra, in which you must figure out what value to put for the variable x so that the equation comes out right. The x- which we are trying to figure out is our place in our Church, with which we are in dissent on this issue, and with respect to which we maintain the on-going teaching (for them as well as us, recognized or not). Beyond departure or acquiescence, what kind of relationship can we have which will, for our part, solve for x-? If the concept of reception helps us understand where the teaching stands, what would similarly help us determine where we stand?

The answer is simply that the present circumstance, with its anomaly in teaching in our Church, summons us to a special calling, a vocation. It is, by its nature, exercised for the whole, but it can only be accomplished insofar as we maintain our distinctiveness. ‘But if the salt loses its taste, it is no longer good for anything but to be thrown down and trampled under people’s feet...’³³ To have a vocation is to have something distinctive, and to discern that God has called you to deploy it, and to do so for the benefit of the

³² This was, in my experience as a TEC missionary in east Africa, key to learning from that setting, namely the appreciation for the honoring of the mababu, our ancestors in the faith.

³³ Matthew 5:13

whole Body and the world. Vocations are not always welcomed by those for whom they are exercised- just ask the prophets. At the same time we need to make sure that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we ought.³⁴ There are doubtless many such vocations in our Church: others may challenge us to take heed to the plight of immigrants, or of the addicted, or to pay better attention to the young and their catechesis, or to the ministry of healing or intercessory prayer, and so forth. These too are callings that remind us of who we are as the Church, and display some feature of the one great calling of all Christians to be conformed to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. Ours is not the only vocation, nor need we concern ourselves with its relative importance.

Vocations may be thrust on us, though to be sure the Scriptures do give account of Isaiah's 'here I am. Lord, send me' as well as Peter and Andrew dropping their nets and following. Nor are we given to know what will come of a vocation: faithful missionaries labored where no harvest came, or a harvest after they died, or one in a form utterly unexpected and seemingly problematic.³⁵ All that is required, and ultimately matters, is the presence of a gift, a discernment of the call from God, and the shouldering of the call on behalf of the whole. In all three ways we have a vocation of witness, preservation, and the undergoing of whatever may ensue in patience, humility, and hope.

Where would we look in the Bible for a warrant for such a sense of vocation? We might look to the Old Testament idea of the remnant which embodies the whole in nuce,

³⁴ Romans 12:3

³⁵ As examples, think of Charles de Foucauld in North Africa, or of the Methodists in India and the mass movements of untouchables that ensued.

for whom the prophet may bind up the scroll for a season.³⁶ Or we might look to the exhortation to the apostle's apprentice to guard the deposit of the faith he has received. There is a measure of this in the ministry of the apostle himself, who holds on to the teaching even when his congregations seem confused.³⁷ Each is at best a partial analogy, each to be heard in a manner purged of self-importance.

Perhaps the yet closer New Testament analogy is Paul's collection for the saints in Jerusalem. There his vocation is to remind all of the obligation they must have for each other, and the need to be of 'one mind' in Christ Jesus.³⁸ In an analogous way, traditional Episcopalians have a role of being a spiritual bridge to the rest of our Communion which has preserved the teaching on marriage, to help to maintain those 'bonds of affection' for another day.

When I first came to be the bishop in Dallas, I wrote an article in which I offered a number of possible metaphors for the kind of relationship I am describing.³⁹ They included a bit of bio-diverse DNA, the shletl or ghetto where traditional Jewish Hasids might live, or yeast for a yoghurt culture. One might add that of a seed-bed or perhaps some kind of mnemonic for an amnesiac. I have learned that these strike people who are by nature sympathetic differently, and not always positively! Sometimes they seem defeatist or passive, as if we were in retreat. Other metaphors may be better, perhaps a

³⁶ Cite Isaiah 8:16

³⁷ e.g. I Corinthians passim and II Timothy 1:14.

³⁸ Philippians 2:5

³⁹ See my 'We too are the Other', The Living Church, Oct. 2, 2015

band of overland pioneer trekkers! These metaphors do not imagine being hermetically sealed off, or merely reactionary. On the contrary they all in some way look to the future, to a fresh batch of yoghurt, or to a life with restored memory, or a new-grown bunch of spring flowers. Which metaphor may not matter much, since most of all we want to point out the complex relation between vitality and patience, between looking back and stepping into the future, between cultural difference and imagination.

I know there are energetic and faithful Episcopalians who may in theory agree with much that I have said, but who would prefer simply to get on with the essential things the local Church ought to be up to: serving, praying, witnessing. Maybe they have grown weary. Maybe they have come to focus on ‘tending their own garden.’ I want to stress that, day to day, and week by week, that is precisely what we ought to be doing. I am not suggesting that the Church ought to devote much of its energy to rehashing old debates, or tracking the latest controversy. Our main vocation is discipleship lived out in the Body, and we ought first of all to get on with that. In so doing we ought to maintain a strong sense of companionship with our fellow Episcopalians (indeed our fellow Christians), with whom on particular issues we will disagree. But while these debates should not dominate the landscape, they are part of that scene and cannot be totally disregarded or dismissed, as if with blinkers on. Clarity and charity on issues, especially as they lead to insight about our central commitments, can help us ‘get on with it.’

In this regard we cannot help but note that the debate over marriage is not the only one to be found on that landscape. While we would err to suppose that all the Church’s

novelties can be understood as a ‘package deal,’ as if everyone who buys one buys them all, at the same time we would err to suppose that they are entirely separate, piecemeal, and sui generis. A certain way of thinking about doctrine, experience, change, salvation, and authority may contribute to being positively disposed to various other changes. Fast on the heels of change in marriage is a proposal to alter the name of God; they are different issues, but the underlying method is for many not unrelated.⁴⁰ Sometimes the Church has wished to make a change and then cordon the rest of doctrine off, but this has proved difficult.⁴¹ Cases must be judged one by one, but the vocation of a loyal witness and preservation has not seen its last such occasion. And eventually these come to impinge on local parish life.

Before I conclude this chapter about ‘our vocation,’ I should add a note about the sense in which I use the pronoun ‘we.’ What about members of our diocese who do not share my views, and do not imagine themselves to have such a vocation on behalf of the rest of the Episcopal Church- they may simply think they are part of the rest! Or is this the ‘royal we,’ or perhaps wishful thinking? Remember that I am describing how things look to me, who has been called as bishop with clearly articulated expectations which form the starting point for this letter. In so doing I am bearing in mind that I as bishop have the obligation to articulate teaching on behalf of the diocese (as well as an obligation to listen to those who dissent!) It is not inaccurate to say that Dallas has a particular perch in our Church as a whole. I seek to give that particularity a fuller

⁴⁰ Reported on Episcopal Café, Feb. 2, 2018

⁴¹ A good example is the generation of bishops who for a decade advocated blessings but not marriage for same-sex couples, only to change suddenly in 2015.

theological articulation. Finally we are in this boat together; we have differing roles in a single drama. The vocation to witness is as a largely theologically conservative diocese that makes room and won't leave. We witness, and we have space for some to dissent in the midst of the Body. But that does not negate the discernment of the calling and its articulation. We are a fugue with a line of melody but dissonant chords too. With complexity borne in mind, as bishop I need intrepidly to continue to use 'we' throughout.

In these two chapters I have dissented from the theological view of most of the leadership of the Episcopal Church, and described how much dissent leads to a particular calling in and for that Church. Perhaps the first point is like the one that our native elder made about the tent-poles holding up the cosmos, and the second like his point about leaving equaling freezing. So it is fitting here, at the conclusion of the portion of this letter that may seem to some to be polemical, to reiterate the native elder's first point, that Church should provide for a diversity of people whom God wills to mold into one. Debate and calling are for the sake of the common life of the Church, and not the other way around! The one thing needful is the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ, of which we are all equally recipients. By virtue of it we are all made sons and daughters of our heavenly Father- that is our first identity, however our views and vocations may diverge. This is primary for me, who as bishop am called to a sign of the welcome of the Gospel, and of the oneness Christ bestows on us as He feeds us from the one bread. That includes brothers and sisters who disagree with what I have written. That includes people who may be feel that they have been sufficiently heard. It includes Christians whose call to celibacy, or to spiritual friendship, enrich the life of the Body. It includes people,

veterans, immigrants, the unemployed, the traumatized, the lonely, who may feel that they may have been lost sight of in midst of the Church's debates. The native elder's first point is really that Church is the family of God, and, while families argue, they recognize one another as kin and make room. A sign of this is the great hospitality I receive as I visit our parishes, varying as they do widely in a number of ways; for this, and for all the members of my diocese I give thanks to God.

The truth is that the vocation of witness on behalf of our Church's heritage and future also requires a love for Anglicanism itself. One needs to believe that, in the providence of God, it needs to be preserved and renewed. One needs to believe something precious and vital would be lost if it lost its saltiness. And this leads on to our next question; how do we understand that tradition within which we are to exercise this vocation? To that we must now turn.

A Biblical interlude: a reflection on Ephesians, appropriate for personal or parish study

Consider how the apostle unfolds his meditation on the nature of the Church, In chapter 1 we see the Church with the widest angle lens. The Church is called from before creation in the eternal counsels of God. We hear first of all that the Church is part of the divine plan in its full breadth, to unite 'all in all' in creation (v.10). We hear of His

predestining will for us, the source of our assurance of our inheritance (vv.11-14). And we are enlightened to realize these things because of the victory over death and hell already won by Christ, who now has dominion over the whole cosmos. (vv.18-22).

Chapter one sets the stage with a message of victory in Christ whose dimensions exceed what we could ever imagine. This is the stage on which the questions and struggles of the Church must be considered.

Chapter 2 considers the Church, not from this eternal height, but with the spotlight now on the sacrificial death of Jesus (vv.13-14). He is the new Temple. In His flesh human estrangement is overcome, and there emerges a new people in a new covenant, themselves dwelling as a new temple. The Shalom hoped for in the sojourn of God's people is now realized in Him. (vv.17-22) If we are to talk about reconciliation, we can only do so in relation to this accomplishment. As a result we are to witness to this costly overcoming of human alienation. This pertains directly to our seeking reconciliation amidst disagreements within and without the Church.

Chapter 3 considers the Church as evangelist and so places its life squarely in the midst of the travail of human history. This assumes what has preceded, the eternal purpose and the reconciling death of Jesus. This will bring about the restoration of the nations of the earth to God. This is the 'mystery', the key to unlock the riddle of human history, which is otherwise 'sound and fury signifying nothing.' We cannot make this gathering happen, but are only the 'stewards' of the news (v.6), the key, as its announcers. But this calling itself is breath-taking. Paul has no choice but to end the chapter in adoration and doxology (v.20). So evangelism is the watchword, which is itself a

‘liberative practice’ insofar as the Gentiles are called out of their futility into the light of the Church. That summoning can make sense once the setting in divine will and reconciling death are laid out.

Chapter 4 turns now to the problems of doctrinal confusion in the Church, even as the Church is tested in persecution. Questions of power have been raised, as have questions about the ordering of the Church’s life. Paul issues a call to unity in faith, practice, suffering, personal obedience to Christ as Lord vv.1-6). He reminds them that high is low, reign is submission in the dawning kingdom, starting with Jesus himself. (v. 9) Only then does he deal with office and charism, relating all to the building up of the Body, and the one ‘work’ which is itself diaconal, since Servant Jesus has already gone on high. (vv.11-12) Now they must grow into the One who already is perfect and so be made the ones they by grace are. This means not being thrown off by the confusing ‘winds of doctrine’ (v.14) in contrast they are to be built up into maturity by the ‘speaking of the truth in love.’(v.21). Likewise they are to avoid all bitterness, anger, and malice. Here we find both an authentic theology and an ethics of what is now called ‘good disagreement’ within the Body.

Chapter 5 sees Paul bring his ecclesiology into direct contact with his understanding of Christian marriage. In particular, self-giving and surrender, Eucharistic intimacy with God, and unity-in-difference are found to be embodied sacramentally in the marriage of man and woman in a way that is deeper than we can comprehend (v. 32).

Chapter 6 too must be understood in light of what has preceded, especially the victory of God in Christ. For here at the conclusion, we are called to take our station in a

conflict far exceeding our understanding or power, one which involves the whole cosmos, visible and invisible. More is afoot and at stake here than we grasp; we are dealing with the ‘spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.’ The struggle here reaches back to the primal fall and ahead to the ‘last battle.’ It is also a battle waged within our hearts. We have no hope of victory on our own, but must put on the spiritual armor we are given. We realize that we are dealing as humans with the human issues that present themselves, but also and always with deeper things, and that none of these issues can really be addressed out of our own resources.

Chapter 3: The Episcopal Church We Hope For

This moment of perplexity can be the occasion to reclaim aspects of our Anglican identity: its diversity, global nature, missional heart, and its unique kind of authority.

The trouble with history is that we know how the story ends, so it is hard to understand how it must have felt for the actors. Consider for example the period of the Commonwealth, the ascendancy of the Puritans in the 17th Century in England. No king,

no bishops, no Prayer Book: in the interregnum it must have seemed that what came to be called 'Anglicanism' was finished: 'the signs are gone.'⁴² In such a time leaders like Bishop Jeremy Taylor had to carry on as best they could, reckoning what practice would be most consistent with what they had known, only now in unfamiliar circumstances.⁴³ We look back and see how that chapter came to an end, and another began. We may feel at times as if we live in a similar moment today, and we too worry.

In fact one can look back on the whole of the history of the Church of England and its offspring Churches as a series of such moments of perplexity: the Elizabethan Settlement, Puritanism, the rise of the age of science and deism, the end of government-supported conformity in England in the 19th Century, the trauma of World War, the rise of truly global communion, the cultural revolution of the 1960's. Through all this, Anglicanism at its best has maintained a steady, minimalist account of itself, as 'mere Christianity'.⁴⁴ Yet it has been changed by the press of history, and has had to work out how it was to react to these forces. In the midst of all this, its ballast has been provided by the shared inheritance of the Book of Common Prayer. This remains a source of strength for us, as well as a great gift to world Christianity. Just the same, we can see how this pastoral, liturgical glue holding us together has led to some of our weaknesses. Unity in a common book becomes a problem in an era of constant liturgical change. We of the book have claimed, at once modestly and haughtily, that 'systematic' theology was for other,

⁴² Psalm 74:9

⁴³ from a sermon in Wycliffe Chapel by Bishop Tony Burton

⁴⁴ from C.S. Lewis' book by that name.

‘confessional’ traditions, which has left us vulnerable, if by ‘systematic’ we mean simply ‘articulate, thought out.’⁴⁵

Any tradition has to have some kind of authority, a way of determining how to hang together and how to proceed faithfully, what must be insisted on and what can be left to local choice. All traditions struggle in some way with this, but obviously, in one way, a Pope makes it easier! Anglicanism depended for a long time, not only on the BCP, but also on an assumed balance of reformed and catholic inheritances, a dependence on the Creeds as sufficient, a (British?) sense of restraint, the cohesive effect of culture, and a willingness to let more adventurous ‘outliers’ of thought be tolerated so long as the rest could be leaned upon. Authority was to be found in the tissue made up of all these things, both tangible and intangible. Some deserved to survive more than others. Clearly such a notion of authority requires healthy doses of patience and forbearance. But you can see how, under the pressure of modernism, by which I mean science, literary criticism, secularity, industrial change, new media, cultural diversity, relativism, skepticism, etc., this more subtle kind of authority proved problematic. Modernism has been a challenge to all Churches with respect to authority, not least for Anglicanism.

Think for example of some of the clichés our own Church has come to adopt in the last generation. While in each case one can understand the grain of truth that would lead one to say it, it is also not hard to see how each in itself would lead us into a thicket. ‘Our Church is more about questions than answers.’ ‘The point is not orthodoxy (believing in common) but rather orthopraxy (doing in common).’ ‘The Episcopal

⁴⁵ On this see Stephen Sykes’ Integrity of Anglicanism, (New York, 1978)

Church doesn't tell you what to believe.' Now put all that in relation to that other, older account of our Church, that we are 'mere Christians,' believing and doing the basic things all Churches share. You can see the challenge we have, to determine those basics, and yet leave the kind of room which the more recent, indeterminate sentences imply. Who has a right to answer these questions, and how will we arrive at enough of an answer to hold us together?

All of this may sound too abstruse, so let me make one more run at the issue, this time from the experience of members of parishes in the diocese today. Many are new to our tradition. All of us live in a culture in which things are understood most readily as a market, including churches. The newcomer picks one which seems compatible, as when matters become difficult, might pick another. What people really know is their own congregation, gathered around Word and sacrament on Sunday and going out to serve in some way or other during the week. That is well and good, but it is not particularly Anglican, nor need it be. We are baptized as Christians, not as Episcopalians, after all.

Working from this assumption, we can identify four features of that typical congregation which are important to us as Anglicans (though not necessarily unique.) They are all related to professing faith in the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.' First of all, we are part of something continuous, ancient, going back to the beginning. Parishes come and go, but we haven't made this thing up. Whether expressed or not, this is one reason people may indeed choose our Church. Second, we use the Book of Common Prayer. What does that prove? It has beautiful language, and historically it has been accessible to lay people, especially in Morning and Evening Prayer (as opposed to

being meant for monks). But most of all, it is saturated in Scripture, and is in fact a way to hear the full breadth of Scripture, day by day and week by week, in the great moments of life and death. The prayers too allude to the Bible, and express its main themes. This Bible-oriented nature of the BCP is fully in keeping with the legacy of the Reformation, which is also part of our history.

Thirdly, by a series of historical accidents, the Church of England came to be transplanted into most all the nations of the world, and in many places it has flourished. The Gospel has been shared there, thanks to evangelists and catechists from those nations themselves. The spread of Anglicanism has resulted from, but has also occasioned, a great upsurge of missionary activity. So, we are part of a family of Churches throughout the world with whom we are in communion. The demographically typical fellow Anglican is, as one sometimes hears, young, female, African, and evangelical.

Fourth and finally, there has been a tradition in Anglicanism of cultural engagement, of musicians and poets. There has been a tradition of allowing a certain latitude of thought, questioning, exploring, precisely because of the things we have shared, which have offered both a center and a boundary.⁴⁶

What does all this amount to for a person who walks into a parish this Sunday? They are part of something ‘deep and wide’: it goes back to the beginning and is shared

⁴⁶ This is an helpful quotation from the general introduction to Love’s Redeeming Work, es. Rowell, Stevenson, and Williams: ‘There is a natural skepticism that has to do with self-protection against being made a fool of...But there is also a reflexive and theological skepticism: I am always ready to deceive *myself*, because my passions distort clear judgment...the latter is conservative...I need the presence of history and community to check my self-obsessions...this second kind of skepticism is very characteristic of much of the Anglican style over the centuries.’ (pg. xxi)

to the ends of the earth. We didn't make it up, and we alone don't own it. (This 'deep and wide' quality does lay a certain obligation on us, to take the preserving of its continuity, across time and continent, very seriously.) Its' Prayer Book worship has immersed us in the Biblical witness. In addition it has a tradition of evangelism (which we have not always held up.) It does encourage questions, but because it assumed it could provide answers. (And obviously it has bishops, ostensibly to guarantee these things). These are all features which one's local church can identify, and which are representative of Anglicanism.

My point is not simply to offer a history lesson. Rather I hope this time of uncertainty might also be a time to rediscover some of the key facets of our identity as American Anglicans, which is to say Episcopalians, with the blessings and obligations which it brings with it.

We as a minority serve as a reminder that we are to be a comprehensive Church.

Much of the source of energy for worship, service, and evangelism in the 19th and into the 20th century came from what are called the 'Church parties,' the evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics. To be sure, there was a negative side to that chapter as well: a distant relative of mine, John Bird Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury, spent a good deal of effort suing Anglo-Catholics in the mid-19th century! But each group imagined that they were reclaiming the key part of their history, and in so doing opened up a key part of their future. The Anglo-Catholics were recalling that the Church in England was the same Church that stretched back to 2nd century British isle, a part of the one Church catholic. The evangelicals were children, in a pietist mode, of the Reformation. Both were in their

early days energetic evangelists. They are a kind of ‘distant mirror’ for us today. You can see the fruit of this history in the varied liturgical practices when you travel from parish to parish in our diocese. I can recall vividly from years as a young priest experiencing these different shoots from the vine, Anglo-Catholic, evangelical, with social activists and charismatics mixed in with various kinds of overlap. All this seems at present to have thinned, for a variety of reasons, not least that people are less willing to join groups, and that some have departed or have retreated from the fray. Our Church is poorer as a result.

I have already described the distinct vocation that parishes, seminaries, dioceses, and individuals might have as a more traditional part of our Church. This is not a new phenomenon, nor need it be divisive. We can recall a more variegated past with distinctive groups, alternately vying and collaborating, but as part of one Church. To be sure, where varied parties are found will be different in our time; the young voices heard in places like the Covenant blog of the Living Church, or the student body of Nashotah House, or Wycliffe College, are a complex blend of evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, many from the ‘Canterbury trail.’⁴⁷

In those earlier eras the Church did not yet speak of ‘diversity,’ but that is in fact what we are talking about. In some cases we are talking about a very literal diversity of ethnicity and place of origin in our midst; Dallas has congregations of Nepalis, Sudanese, Khmers, Nigerians, not to mention Episcopalians from Latin America. Some of these members have a sense of Churchmanship derived directly from the history I have cited. Many hold a more traditional view on marriage.

⁴⁷ The expression is from Robert Webber’s [Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail](#).

We as Episcopalians have a diversity of class, race, background, and orientation. We are urban, suburban, and rural. But we also need to preserve our theological diversity, and the willingness to see traditionalists as an example of that diversity will be a crucial act of generosity and imagination on the part of the majority of our national leadership.

The Church needs to see the importance of ‘evangelical catholics’ for the sake of its own goal of evangelism.

Such recognition is not only the gracious thing to do; it will also conduce to the well-being of our Church as a whole. I have specifically in mind the admirable determination of our Presiding Bishop to turn our attention to evangelism, not merely for growth in numbers for the sake of survival, but rather because it lies at the heart of the Church’s life. To be sure, there is a debate within the Church about how adequately to define evangelism. But for our present purposes, it suffices to note how the goal of renewed energy for evangelism is shared by all.

There is more than an etymological connection between the activity of evangelism and those who are the heirs of the evangelicals.⁴⁸ The themes I recently heard a research group correlate with successful Episcopal Churches sounded like a profile of evangelicalism: belief in a personal God, salvation by grace, small groups (our Methodist ancestry), immersion in the Bible, and invitation to others.⁴⁹ The young clergy who walk the ‘Canterbury Road’ into our denomination often bring these parts of their inheritance

⁴⁸ I am surprised by how many people in our Church have no knowledge or memory of evangelicals making up one of our historic groups, and indeed constituting the majority of our Communion. This myopia distorts our own sense of ourselves.

⁴⁹ The results of the research group called ‘Reveal’ were presented to the spring House of Bishops, 2018.

with them. Retaining and encouraging evangelicals in our midst is one factor which will key to our own evangelistic efforts.

Membership in a global Communion, answerable one to another, is an integral part of our identity.

One of the unfortunate results of the conflict of the past decade, not only within the Episcopal Church but also in the councils of Anglicanism worldwide, has been an increased sense of being a Church unto ourselves (even to the point of talking of ourselves as our own international fellowship, by virtue of Province 9). To be sure, the Communion is made up of ‘autocephalous’ or self-governing Churches, and as a result we do have the power to go our own way. But as I have said before, what we can do canonically or politically, and how we ought to understand ourselves spiritually and theologically, are often not the same.

What then does it mean in this fuller sense to be part of a Communion? It is a gift of the history of the missionary movement, a dramatic embodiment of diversity and a global awareness in a cultural sense, a particularly Anglican expression of the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic’ nature of the Church. It was given its most eloquent expression at the last worldwide Anglican Congress⁵⁰, which spoke of the Communion being held together by ‘mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ.’ We are, in other words, in mutual need of one another, like the organs of the Body in Paul’s

⁵⁰ Held in 1963 in Toronto.

metaphor for the Church.⁵¹ This does not force any kind of response from us, but it calls constantly to act as members who rely on one another.⁵²

This includes gathered deliberation over theology and practice, what is called the ‘conciliar’ dimension of life between Churches. In such moment we need each other to say whether or not we can recognize innovations, for example, as legitimate expressions of the Gospel (and we likewise get to fulfill this same function for our sibling). You can readily see how this relates directly to our discussion of testing in the preceding chapter. This conciliar role is crucial, but not the only one- we also share with our fellow Anglicans around the globe in mission, service, suffering, especially when Churches are persecuted or harmed by natural disaster, and mutual appreciation as we enjoy one another’s styles of devotion. It must be added again here that, in a time when our relations with some other Churches are strained over teaching, not to mention the fracturing within North American Anglicanism itself, the more traditional, ‘Communion Partner’ dioceses and parishes, realizing as they do that ‘to leave is to freeze...,’ can act as a bridge on behalf of our Church as a whole.

When contention arises, within and between Churches, it must entail charitable debate about how to hear the Word of God.

⁵¹ I Corinthians 12.

⁵² This voluntary and non-coercive aspect of our common life as Anglican Churches came to be obscured in the recent debates, especially about the Windsor Report and the Anglican Covenant proposal. The latter has always been understood as an opportunity Churches are free to accept or reject. In the same sense adult members of a family make their own decisions, which then have consequences for how close they feel to their relatives. I hope still that, with respect to the Covenant, ‘the vision awaits the time.’ (Hosea)

Anglicanism's catholic side has to do with its breadth and continuity in time and space, while its reformed side focuses our attention on the Word of God, whose center of gravity is the graciously saving death and resurrection of Jesus. We have noted how the Book of Common Prayer was pre-eminently a way to have all of one's life, one's times, one's congregation, immersed in that Word.

At the same time, there will inevitably be contention, disagreement, and critique within the Body as it moves through history. For example the 39 Articles of the 16th century note that councils can err.⁵³ It also finds expression in the tradition of discussion and debate, of testing and exploration, which has been characteristic of the 'Broad Church' tradition. Conflict is inevitable.⁵⁴ But we do well to expect that it be, in significant measure, a struggle over how to hear the Scriptures. It should never lose this 'rabbinic' dimension. It should not be a debate about whether to hear the Scriptures, nor one that supposes our listening to culture could be a comparable substitute to listening to Scripture. For the Bible is uniquely the measuring stick by which Christians adjudicate questions that arise. The Church gathered in council resembles the Church gathered around the Word to worship. I worry at times that our disagreements over time have become less Biblical and more outright political. Contention there will be; charitable we hope, and necessarily located around the Word.

Having described a vocation for a diocese like ours, I have gone on to describe some dimensions of our Episcopal Church, a branch of Anglicanism, rediscovered, within

⁵³ Article 21.

⁵⁴ This theme is important in the works of Stephen Sykes, e.g. in The Identity of Christianity.

which it would make sense, and it might flourish. But all of this does not take place in a vacuum. What has all this got to do with the world around us? How is it a result of that world, and what would a faithful response to that world look like? To those questions we now must turn.

Chapter 4: Okefenokee

We all, together, are shaped by the same cultural forces, and will all face the same unprecedented future challenges.

We have a special vocation within our one Church: that implies a distinction for the sake of a larger solidarity. We are different for the sake of those with whom we are one. But that is not the only way in which I hope this essay can overcome the usual ‘us/them’ thinking, in spite of our articulating a definite position on a contentious issue. To this end I have alluded to the Okefenokee Swamp, the home of the characters in the cartoon ‘Pogo.’ (It is also near the hospitable camp of the Diocese of Florida where we the Communion Partner bishops meet annually). It was Pogo, inhabitant of Okefenokee, who uttered that most quotable line, ‘we have met the enemy, and he is us.’ That, in short, is the point of this chapter. When it comes to the pervasive forces of contemporary culture, all of us are equally shaped, in some ways deformed, by them, and all of us face together the challenges ahead of us. While I certainly believe the question of marriage is important (see the chapters above), it is not the only issue facing us, nor the last one. Institutions can be divided over one protracted debate, only to find themselves weakened for facing the next.

I once heard that ‘culture’ is best defined as all the things you assume such that no one even notices them- they are the water in which we swim. Being neither an anthropologist nor a philosopher, I must limit myself to the most basic observations. We in modernity (whether you prefer ‘late’ or ‘post’ makes no difference here) are supposed

to create or invent ourselves. We are the authors of our own life drama.⁵⁵ Well, of course we are, who else would be? Exactly. Not only is the question ‘who am I?’ up for grabs, so are the parameters of my self-creation. Our own era, by means of our scientific prowess, has seen the expansion of the areas in which the human may choose: technologies of conception and genetic alteration, a myriad of treatments and new choices involving our health physical and mental, the definition of marriage and gender, choices around death (and the prospect of alternatives post-mortem).⁵⁶ Whether each is to be praised or blamed is not the point here, for we are trying to see what it all implies about how we see ourselves.

There is a relationship between this self-creative feature of our culture, and the dominant paradigm running throughout it, the market-place. Choosing, investing ourselves, looking for a fulfilling return: this is how we see ourselves and the world, without thinking about it. (It is also, incidentally, how many prospective Church members assess their visit to a local church.) The Gospel is for all peoples, which means it can inhabit all cultures, including ours, but when it takes root it not only embraces, but also challenges and transforms, what it finds. It is to transactional individuals with a

⁵⁵ This is a central contention in the work of Charles Taylor, for example in his A Secular Age.

⁵⁶ For example Homo Deus by Harari (2017) describes among other things the pursuit of the technological preservation of consciousness and the prospects for the ‘trans-human.’ Is this a sci-fi dream?

generally thinner sense of social cohesion⁵⁷ that the Gospel comes in 21st century North America (though obviously factors like immigration call my claim into question). These sweeping cultural generalizations pertain to all of us, in varied domains of life. I am a human being of this culture, and so it is not alien to me.⁵⁸

We are, in this chapter, broadening our purview to include not just the Church, but the world. We have seen how its most salient feature is this expectation of the power to choose, the burden of self-creation. At the very same time, we experience ourselves as passive recipients, even victims, of sweeping, alien forces.⁵⁹ The most obvious is technology, which we have already allowed to shape our lives in a ways that are ever more invasive. Machines weigh in on our grocery choices and suggest other dishes we might like; machines listen in on our phone conversations unbidden; machines assess our health risks based on our genetic data, and in aggregate adjust health care costs, benefits, etc. No less a source than the recently late Stephen Hawking worried over the projected date when the techno-matrix would become weary of our ineptitude: sci-fi fantasy?⁶⁰ Many other things that once were the stuff of a ‘brave new world’ have now come to pass,⁶¹so we dismiss such dystopian imaginings uneasily. The very nature and

⁵⁷ Theologians do well to bring the insights of sociologists to bear on the conditions under which ideas are (or aren’t heard). I recommend Mary Douglas highly. An important and recent example of this greatly affecting Church life is the trend against joining groups and clubs, and for ‘bowling alone’ (from Robert Putnam’s book by the same name).

⁵⁸ I am paraphrasing the Latin author Terence.

⁵⁹ The theological prophet of the coming era is surely Jacques Ellul, with his warning about the coming technological regimen, which he called ‘le technique.’

⁶⁰ Elon Musk recently called technology our ‘immortal dictator.’

⁶¹ Fukuyama, Our Post-Human Future, (New York, 2002).

‘exceptionalism’ of the human may well be in question in the generations to come. Already we have the sense of being beholden to vast and alien forces.⁶² There is a reason why a number of younger theologians find the notion of ‘powers and principalities’ so freshly apropos.⁶³

Futurology is a dubious business, the ground strewn with its failures like so many Atari or Gateway computers. I want to offer some descriptive features of the culture into which we must preach in a generation.⁶⁴ They will be a challenge for all of us. About any one of them I could be (indeed hope to be) wrong. Each has a direct impact on how we conduct the Church’s affairs.

First of all, ours is an era which experiences **time** differently than in the past. An expectation of rapidity and transience define us in ways we only partially grasp. The factors I have already mentioned, technology and markets, have affected this. The close connection between patience and wisdom becomes itself a kind of counter-cultural commitment.

⁶² One of the first dystopian novels was [A Canticle For Liebowitz](#), by Walter Miller in which the hub of post-disaster cultural restoration was Texarkana, Tx. Get ready St. James!

⁶³ For the past generation the debate over a practice has divided the Church. Is it possible that a practice in the world into which we move might come to unite us, for example how we deal with the most vulnerable? To figure out what kind of issue that might be, most any episode of [Dark Mirrors](#) can help. Of course yet unknown moral challenges may prove as divisive as past ones.

⁶⁴ An eloquent account of what we are headed into and how unprecedented it is may be found in Ephraim Radner’s description of the ‘anthropocene.’ ([The Living Church](#), July 28, 2016).

Secondly, this era has witnessed major shifts in the nature of **families** quite aside from the question of same-sex marriage. Divorce, aging, absent fathers, lowered marriage and birth rates in parts of our society, the premature sexualizing of the lives of young men and women: these constitute the quieter crisis which the Church struggles to address, though its effects will be far-reaching.

Thirdly, our culture is defined by **movement**. Jobs shift, and so workers move. On the larger scene, we live in a time of global migration, immigration, and dislocation, our own spasms of xenophobia notwithstanding. The connection between these two factors is the strain it places on extended familial ties. (Both these also offer clear evangelistic possibilities for the Church which is the new family). Immigration offers great benefits to the Church; the whole Communion can now be found here in our own major cities.⁶⁵ But at the same time, under the rubric of ‘movement’ would also be the on-going process of declining population in our rural areas. Our churches feel the brunt of this process.

I profess no expertise in ecology, but it is not hard to discern the ‘signs of the times’: grievous pollution in China with its juggernaut economy, the growing water issues in many places in the world, erratic weather which touches us directly, a mass of trash in the Atlantic the size of France, and on and on. So fourth, environmental **degradation** will require that greater awareness which we hope the rising generation has.

Fifth, we cannot help but observe a **harshness** which characterizes our era, divisiveness, caricature, slander, and a waning of the common good, evidenced between classes, parties, races, etc. Perhaps this will be remembered as an episode out of time, but

⁶⁵ Philip Jenkins, The Next Christendom, (Oxford, 2002)

it is an odd tenor for a strong economy which might well have inspired more generosity. It may be connected to a wider global rise of xenophobia and authoritarianism. (This makes finding ways to live together across strong disagreements all the more important as not just a matter of church politics or survival, but of the Gospel).

My last two guesses bear more directly on the Church. Sixthly, the Church will undergo extensive, albeit uneven, **changes in the next decade** or two. Indeed the configuration of Christianity in America, dating back to the last century and focused on towns big and small, will become impossible to maintain. This is already taking place in more rural, western dioceses, though it will be slowed and altered by the economic growth in our part of the country. Add to this the demographic tilt of our Church, and clearly the map will be redrawn. In our own diocese, we have been affected by, and been adapting to, these trends for some time. More yoking of congregations in rural areas, as well as a growing need for new lay roles, especially catechists and evangelists, are at the very minimum easy to see.

Here, as with some of the issues mentioned above, one can imagine a more localized, diffuse church scene in an American culture already tending toward such a devolution. Our seventh and final point, then, is that **counter-movements** will doubtless appear in the Church. There is always something of this in renewal- over against a culturally compromised C of E in the 19th Century, Anglo-Catholicism, over against post-war exhaustion in Europe, Taize and Cursillo, over against a complacent 60's Christianity, the charismatic movement. I do not know what this will look like. We see at most hints at present. Over against technology, the Church emphasizes face-to-face

common life. Various kinds of eco-evangelicalisms sprout up, as do intentional or neo-monastic communities. The Church is infused with new influences in worship and devotion from the globally diverse congregations of our suburbs. My list feels altogether inadequate- let it be an invitation for you to fill in the blanks I can't. The best I can do is note how the contemporary Church gestures toward what we cannot yet see: 'the new monasticism' / 'the Benedict option' / 'the house church movement'.

Meanwhile, we will increasingly depend on a few great churches and seminaries for stability and longevity.⁶⁶ It is to be hoped, in such a post-modern landscape, that traditional claims and practices find their important niche, as in the early Church, in a more pluralistic scene.⁶⁷ For many the allure of the 'modern' per se will have waned. So much we can say. But in many more ways we cannot predict what is to come, and how we as teachers and evangelists will have to respond. But we will face these things together, and we will be compelled to make common cause in ways that are beyond or across alignments and alliances we now see.

This chapter may have seemed both somber and murky. I actually intend it to be an encouragement and an exhortation. We do not know the form that our witness, our 'martyria,' will take in the coming generation- that is why we have to pray for our needs today, and pray to be delivered from evil, and protected from the 'great trial.' But to be called to be a Christian, in the face of such uncertainty, in need of one another, in

⁶⁶ Consider how King Alfred in the 9th century helped the Saxon Church to survive, against the odds, by maintaining the cathedrals and the schools.

⁶⁷ This is one of the assumptions behind the 'post-liberal' project in theology, of which I was a student at Yale.

opposition to forces within as well as without us, with such openings and opportunities before us, is a great blessing. In such a moment in the Church's life our own strategizing is stilled, and we are thrown on our utter need for the grace of God, is the occasion for thanks. What I have described should only be contemplated in the light of the resurrection of Jesus, to which we learn to cleave more and more, and for which we say "Alleluia."

Conclusion: A Threefold Cord

While the decisions of General Convention do affect the state of the Church in general and our diocese in particular, who we are, what we teach, and what our vocation is, will carry on regardless.

This extended letter to my diocese began with the native elder's quotation, setting out at once the conundrum and the vision of the Church in the meantime. At the end, as at the beginning, a right assessment of the life we are called to as Church requires grasping the cord at once, with all three of the threads found in the elder's words. At a more personal level, the quotation is evocative for me of the promises I made when I was a candidate for bishop in the 'walk-about' events in the spring of 2015. It was a time of hope for an improved relationship, foreboding about what lay ahead in the national agenda, and worry about our long-term relationship to the Episcopal Church. Within that process, I promised three things: we will continue to uphold the traditional teaching, we will deal with one another charitably, and we will not leave the Episcopal Church. The threefold promise at the walkabout, and the threefold native insight, are aligned, not accidentally. Both his vision and my promise are born of a commitment to witnessing to

the truth for and from the Church. I am no less committed to living out those promises today.

However, that doesn't mean I know exactly how things will work out, or what walking along that path will look like. That is the nature of promises, isn't it? A man promises to be faithful to his wife 'until we are parted by death,' and so the woman to the man, and neither knows how illness or tragedy will shape their common life in yet unimaginable ways. Promises involve certainty and uncertainty, and that is their point. An international student once refused to return home after promising at his arrival to do so; he said to me, 'but it was unfair, since I didn't understand what the promise would really involve.' Exactly, but that doesn't mean he was any less bound. This is no small matter, since in baptism, marriage, confirmation, ordination, and rites of new ministry, we traffic in promises before God, in earnestness (and also 'under the mercy,' since we are fallible creatures). I believe the threefold promise I made as a candidate belongs to all of us as a diocese, and we need to see what living it out will look like, we who gaze into the future as one looking 'into a glass darkly.'⁶⁸

Let me consider our situation from another, admittedly less theological, point of view. Over the past generation, our Church has benefitted from the secular wisdom of family systems theory, especially as articulated by Edwin Friedman;⁶⁹ I have been at meetings where I wondered if he might be canonized as our fifth evangelist! In addition to the quality of 'non-anxious presence,' he stressed that leadership required what he

⁶⁸ I Corinthians, 13:12

⁶⁹ A Failure of Nerve, (New York, 1997).

called ‘self-differentiation,’ not for the sake of separating from the body, but rather for effective service within in. I am offering in this letter an account of just such a self-differentiation. Being clear about who we are and what we believe is not a matter of intransigence. In fact it entails recognizing that we have power over some things, and over some things we may be powerless, and we pray for ‘the wisdom to know the difference.’ But as Christians we do not think of power in the same way that the world does. Witnessing to the truth, and understanding ourselves bound to the Body, and seeking charity whether done by well or ill, these are themselves forms of power of the Spirit.

I want to take a moment to address directly one portion of my audience, namely young aspirants, seminarians, and priests, who wonder about giving their lives to a Church in such conflict and uncertainty. I do feel a burden to do all I can to see that there is space in our Church for traditional Episcopalians in general, and for these in particular. Let me paraphrase what one of the best recently said to me in response to the sort of case I have laid out in this letter: ‘I don’t disagree with what you are saying, but is giving your life to a community so knotted up really the good, true, and beautiful?’ I am actually hopeful for our Church’s future in the midst of what I have been describing, not least because of the way that renewal in Anglicanism has often come from such ‘minority reports.’ Still, this question, from someone like that young priest, is one that worries me. Here then is my reply.

First, and at the most basic level, amidst all these uncertainties, Gospel ministry of Word and sacrament in the apostolic tradition takes place, and can continue to take place,

in the Episcopal Church. And this tending of one's corner of the vineyard, with the saving message of Jesus Christ, is the most important thing, and remains so. Second, the great mission theologian Hendrik Kraemer⁷⁰ rightly said that we should give thanks for moments of deep perplexity, since they lay bare the Church's utter dependence on the grace of God. I am not saying that we should pray for confusion, only that, when it comes, it does lay bare something profound about what it is to be a priest in and for the Church. Third, I believe that Anglicanism is something beautiful, vital, and precious for world Christianity (even as it is flawed, frustrating, and insular). The preservation of its traditional expressions is important and worth spending our life on, in ways we cannot now fully perceive. And frankly, what more should a young priest want than a chance to labor, through difficulty, on behalf of some portion of the apostolic inheritance which is precious and uncertain of outcome- it stirs the blood! Fourth, I have tried to show how we are one small case in point of a much more vast challenge to witness to the Gospel in the midst of cultural changes affecting all of us- to quote my friend Ephraim Radner, there is 'no safe place but hope.'⁷¹ To be sure, there are many other ways to serve our Lord which are also true, good, and beautiful: feeding the poor, witnessing to the young and lost, etc. The question about which a person is called to requires prayer and personal discernment. But being a priest, precisely here and now, in this time we are given, is indeed 'something beautiful for God' (Mother Teresa).

⁷⁰ I believe it is in his The Communication of the Christian Faith, (1956).

⁷¹ See his 'Anthropocene...', op.cit.

None of us knows what specific decisions will be reached at the General Convention meeting soon in Austin. For now, I will limit myself to more general imperatives I believe will be before us, one way or another. First of all, the time has come for peace, for the ‘truce of God’, the closing of the ecclesiastical doors of Janus.⁷² A generation of conflict on this issue is enough. Generosity is incumbent on the present leadership first, but then on the part of the theological minority as well. We must continue to remind the Church as a whole of the flexibility and room which are consonant with the time not of plucking up but of planting.

Second, we must be open to some creative thinking that allows those in conflict to remain together in one Body, each keeping their conscience intact. This may require new thoughts. Think for example of the analogy of the religious orders operating within the interstices of the Church, or of specifically ethnic, and geographically overlapping jurisdictions, as with the Maori in New Zealand. We need to think in terms of structural complexity, the kind of thing we find in theorists of negotiation in the EU.⁷³ More recently younger scholars speak of ‘liquid modernity,’ with its more porous borders. I understand such thinking, and such dialogue, consistent with my theological principles, to be part of my own calling.

This may involve, thirdly, partnerships and collaboration perhaps between neighboring but differing dioceses, which in itself would be a witness to inter-dependence

⁷² These doors in ancient Rome were only closed in the very few years when the Empire was not at war.

⁷³ The idea is borrowed from an article by Ephraim Radner.

and peace. Likewise there may be ways to deepen communion within the structures of jurisdiction we already have.⁷⁴

My fourth item has to do with something we traditional Episcopalians must do for ourselves, something we cannot look to others to do for us. For a generation we have sought by informal or local structures, conferences, fellowships, and publications, to make our case and to build up our fellowship and witness. To build these has been a struggle which we have managed only partially. This is why the support of existing institutions is critical: sympathetic seminaries, Communion Partner dioceses, sodalities of younger theologians in the blogosphere, connections to the Global South. Neither then nor now can we go it alone.

My remaining two suggestions have to do, blessedly, with the future. I am, sadly, part of a generation whose ministry has been marked by this conflict from start to finish. We need, fifthly, to hand leadership over to a new generation, and to accomplish this in a spirit of ‘generativity’⁷⁵. ‘Tradition’ means ‘handing on.’ Sixth and finally, this debate must not consume all our energies. On the contrary, I hope that clarity and resolve will enable us deliberately to get on with the multifarious mission God has given us to do. As I have already argued, in the next generation that mission will pose challenges we have not yet countenanced, in a Church changed and, in some ways diminished, with which we have not really reckoned. Therefore commitment both to our distinctive vocation and

⁷⁴ See ‘The Communion Way,’ (forthcoming).

⁷⁵ in the Eriksonian sense of finding our fruitfulness in the emerging generation; see his Childhood and Society, (New York: 1950).

to the Body, at one and the same time, in the spirit of the native elder, will be crucial and tested, in ways none of us can at present imagine.

Roughly two months after the publication of this letter, the General Convention will meet in Austin, in the proud state of Texas! After months of attention to prognostications from many quarters I can honestly say that I have no idea what will happen! There are various possible outcomes I consider benign, and long-term worrisome, and downright harmful. I don't know which it will be, or even several at once. So, in a spirit of transparency, tell you some things I do know.

- As your chief theologian and liturgist, I will continue to expound the received teaching, which is held by the Communion as whole and the Church ecumenical, and exhort and instruct my clergy to do likewise. This will not change. (I will do so because it is still found in the Prayer Book, is still found in the canons of our Diocese, is the teaching of the Communion and our the ecumenical consensus, and most importantly, is the teaching in Holy Scripture I am bound to uphold).
- We will continue as the Diocese of Dallas to live in charity with members of our Church who disagree with us, as a witness to 'communion-across-difference'⁷⁶, and likewise we will together continue to live out our vocation of witness on behalf of the whole Episcopal Church of which we will continue to be a part. We will seek common cause, wherever possible, in mission.

⁷⁶ This is the name of the group of traditional and progressive bishops in the House of Bishops seeking a way forward together.

- We will do all that we can to make our vocation within the Episcopal Church known so as to maintain the ‘bonds of affection’ we enjoy in the wider Communion. This includes maintaining our solidarity with indigenous and Latino members who often share our theological commitments.
- We will maintain the right of conscience of traditional clergy in the matter of the performance of same-sex marriages, without exception or ‘sunset.’
- Parishes for their part will continue to have access to forms of the Book of Common Prayer in familiar language, rites, and theology.

A wiser and more wizened Church-hand than I completed his meditation in this way: ‘the end of the matter is this, all has been heard. Fear God and obey his commandments...’⁷⁷ What is ‘the end of the matter’ in my communication with you, brothers and sisters? Be of good cheer, no matter what happens at the General Convention, our teaching and our vocation continue. This is true, but putting it this way might sound as if the matter were static, and it might sound as if the most important thing were our effort on its behalf. So let me choose a different text with which to close, one that counters such possible misapprehensions: ‘not that I have already obtained this...but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own...but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...’⁷⁸ Every

⁷⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:13

⁷⁸ Philippians 3:12-14

question or challenge in the life of each of us, and in the life of the Church, is an occasion, ultimately, to recall the Christ has made us His own by grace. And as a result we, each of us and as the Church, look ahead to the mission we are given today, and press on to a future we cannot see, since we know that it belongs already to our Lord, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless each of you who read it, today and forever. Amen.

+GRS