



CNI

Comment - An unhelpful and unnecessary forthcoming event

I am concerned about the future of my church
- The Church of Ireland.

As I stated in an earlier “Comment” there are places where the basic qualities and worship of Irish Anglicanism no longer seem to be practiced and these situations cannot but be known by some who hold high positions of responsibility in this church.

Also, I understood that the Church of Ireland was implementing a self-imposed exercise in encouraging its members to listen to others and especially over the issue of same-sex relationships, in an attempt to enable the church to formulate as far as possible an agreed response to the same. An inter-diocesan process

has been underway to facilitate this.

Furthermore, a fairly representative committee under the chairmanship of Dean John Mann had been appointed to report back to General Synod on a related area.

One does not need to be prophet or the son of a prophet to know that we are at a time in the history of this church that great care is needed in how we act and communicate - including the messages intended or otherwise which we emit. Looked at personally, it is most definitely a time when I need to consider how you will hear what I am saying, and be concerned about how you feel in regard to what I am doing. And hopefully vice-versa.

I could not readily describe how disappointed I felt when I saw that the Church of Ireland in Down Diocese was to host a meeting later this year of Gafcon and AMiE. The event is titled: "GAFCON: a moment and a movement – a discussion on the future of global Anglicanism". The meeting is to be held in C of I premises in a

parish, the rector of which is the Archdeacon of that see.

Anyone who knows anything about the Anglican Communion, knows that these are organisations whose stance is, by their own documentation, judgmental, and who themselves at times have sat lightly to the previous norms of inter-Anglican behaviour.

At the heart of Gafcon is the retired Bishop of Sydney, Rt Rev Dr Peter Jensen. There is a continuing, growing bibliography about the divisive nature of his episcopal contribution.

Alongside him are bishops who wish to disassociate with other members churches of the Anglican Communion and in particular the Episcopal Church of the USA and the Anglican Church in Canada. Most of these people would describe themselves as “Evangelical.”

They have articulated their origin and cause thus - “They were compelled to meet because of decades of drift from the apostolic gospel

apparent across the Communion, expressed, not least, in the widespread acceptance of same-sex relationships.”

Their apologia and implicit judgment continues - “Their meeting resulted in a plan to organise a gathering of Anglican Christians in Jerusalem, later that year (the geographical roots of the faith). Over 1,000, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, clergy and laity from around the world gathered to renew their commitment to the faith ‘once delivered’ and the mission of proclaiming this faith to the ends of the earth, until the end of time at the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). More than 1,300 gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, five years later, to consolidate and focus this new work of God. These conferences, moments in the history of Christ’s church, have initiated a global movement of faithful, Anglican Christians, steadfast and determined in the cause of Christ and his gospel. “

The current Archbishop of Canterbury would also describe himself as an “evangelical”. Shortly after his enthronement he visited a

number of dioceses in Africa and included a visit to Nairobi whilst Gafcon was meeting. The impression I recall was that he didn't cut much ice with that constituency. I may be misguided.

Whilst arguments may flow to and fro on bishop Jensen and Gafcon, I cannot do other but protest in the strongest possible terms, that the Anglican Mission in England and the Rev Canon Andy Lines, General Secretary, of AMiE, is a principal participant. He is speaking on "Fresh shoots: the Anglican Mission in England".

AMiE claims - "The Anglican Mission in England (AMiE) is a mission society that seeks to promote gospel growth in areas covered by the Church of England (principally in England, but also in other parts of Europe) by supporting Anglican churches and individuals both within and outside present Church of England structures".

It also states - "There are four basic categories of those that AMiE seeks to serve:

1. Anglicans within the structures of the Church of England whose mission is constrained by their bishop or diocese.
2. Anglicans within the structures of the Church of England but who are in impaired communion with their bishop or diocese.
3. Anglicans outside the structures of the Church of England.
4. Anglicans within the structures of the Church of England who are currently experiencing few constraints but who wish to express solidarity with those under 1-3 above.”

I find it difficult not to agree with those in the Church of England who feel that AMiE is promoting schism.

In January of this year the Bishop of Salisbury protested about the behaviour of AMiE in his diocese.

As the Church Times reported : “The Bishop of Salisbury, the Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, is seeking clarification about the involvement of the Rt Revd John Ellison at a service of

commissioning for a new church in the diocese that is affiliated to the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE) .

“Christ Church, Salisbury, has been meeting since the summer. Bishop Ellison, chairman of the Panel of Bishops of AMiE, presided at a formal service of thanksgiving and commission on 6 December.

“A statement from the diocese on Monday said that "No one involved in planting the church has contacted the Bishop, nor is the Diocese aware of any consultation with Churches Together in Salisbury about the need for a church plant.

"Ideally we might want to welcome Christ Church as fellow workers in Christ, but we also wonder why another church explicitly for Anglicans is needed in Salisbury when the broad spectrum of Anglican identities is already catered for.

"The Bishop of Salisbury is seeking clarification about the involvement of Bishop John Ellison in the December service. Bishop Ellison has had to postpone two meetings arranged to discuss this matter due to illness.

"We hope and pray that the Gamaliel principle of Acts 5.38-39 will guide us."

The Church Times report continues - "AMiE describes itself as "a mission society that seeks to promote gospel growth in England by supporting Anglican churches and individuals, both within and outside present Church of England structures". It is a product of the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GFCA), which was established in 2008.

"Last year, it was one of the organisers of the the ReNew conference at which there was a commitment to investigate "the opportunities to revitalise an existing Church of England church and/or plant with or without diocesan approval" ([News, 3 October](#)).

"The Rector of Christ Church, the Revd Matthew Mason, was appointed after a "significant AMiE selection process", which included "consultation carried out with ministers in the area", the AMiE website states. He has previously served in churches in Tunbridge Wells and Washington, DC. Services are held at Chafyn Grove school.

"Christ Church Salisbury started last July with the aim of reaching unchurched people with the good news of Jesus," Mr Mason said on Tuesday. "Sadly, the vast majority of Salisbury's

population don't attend church and don't know Christ. We're therefore delighted that there are other churches who share our gospel ambition, and we want to work with them. We're also praying that other people will plant more new churches here. There's lots of room for Christ's Kingdom to grow." (Ref: Church Times - 25th February 2015).

Not only are there those who would encourage the sort of behaviour which AMiE indulged in Salisbury Diocese, there are those who would wish Gafcon bishops to take further action on its behalf.

“Anglican Mainstream” is a web site which is a platform for a fairly conservative brand of Anglicanism. One of its contributors, Julian Mann, referring to the situation in Salisbury stated that it, “ shows clearly that the GAFCON-supported movement now needs to consecrate its own bishops.

“The local diocesan bishop has been able publicly to raise the spectre of a conflict of interest for the AMiE bishop, John Ellison, over his involvement in Christ Church Salisbury. That is because Bishop Ellison, retired Bishop of Paraguay and chairman of the AMiE Panel of

Bishops, is a licensed honorary assistant bishop in the neighbouring diocese of Winchester.

“If the GAFCON Primates were to consecrate two or three English Anglican ministers not currently licensed in any Church of England diocese (or in a position to hand in their licences if they have them), the question of a conflict of interest in confessing Anglican church planting would no longer arise.” (Ref: Anglican Mainstream, March 8, 2015).

So, as I see it, the Church of Ireland is effectively hosting a body (AMiE), which is determined to supplant or split the Church of England if it does not conform to iAMiE’s interpretation of Anglican doctrine. That is a clear message which can be taken (i) from its policy statement above, (ii) its implementation of the same in Salisbury, and (iii) the like of Julian Mann who advocate the ordination of bishops by the Gafcon leadership. It leaves one in no doubt about the strength of intent and ambition of its supporters and sympathisers.

Salisbury is a diocese with which I have had some acquaintance over the years. For twenty years I enjoyed the fellow professionalism and friendship of its education team both in school and college based education as well as

children's ministry. Salisbury was certainly not lacking in its commitment, vision, resources and support of clergy, teachers and leaders. The scale it operates on is about the size of the five northern dioceses of the Church of Ireland. In the Close was a theological college in which people of the calibre of the present Dean of Durham taught, and where the Bishop of Tuam was a student. The Dean of Salisbury, June Osborne, is amongst the most capable of church leaders. The chapter has provided the most recent C of E female bishop Dame Sarah Mullaly whom I recall preaching in Belfast Cathedral at a service for the nursing profession when she was Chief Nursing Officer for England.

I find it difficult to see my Church of Ireland aligning itself with a body which has attempted to usurp the role of a bishop and diocese from which we could really learn a lot and be inspired, if we were so inclined. But that is a reality I have been forced by this planned event to consider.

The Church of Ireland needs to examine how it exercises its gift of hospitality and not only just for the important messages articulated, or the hidden curriculum it communicates. There are matters here of public trust as a registered charity as well as our internal ecclesial judicatory issues.

If this event is a rallying of the troops of a particular standpoint; if it is designed to send a message to the wider Church of Ireland; it cannot escape from being interpreted as a power play and a stratagem to either force or scare the rest of the church into conformity with the views of Gafcon and AMiE and their assorted runners in Reform.

I object to my church being abused in this manner. Most definitely it is a “Not in my name” event and process. I would adopt the same stance if the body concerned was comprised of bunch of activists seeking to introduce and impose upon us “the Rule of the Order of the Holy Anglican Rosary”!

And above all, and quite literally, please, for heaven’s sake, stop abusing the description, that wonderful word, “evangelical”.

For what it is worth throughout my life and ministry I have attempted with the grace of God to be in Gafcon-speak, “a faithful, Anglican Christian, steadfast and determined in the cause of Christ and his gospel.” I do not need either its presence or approval. I was commissioned in my baptism and in my ordination. There are many like me in this Church of Ireland and we don’t

need the approval of schismatic inclined Anglicans - either native or exotic.

That said, I recall my ordination vow that as far as it lay within me I was to set forth peace and reconciliation among all people. Having ministered in what was a church plant of its time throughout the Ulster Workers Council Strike, as well as a few other heady, heavily demanding situations, I have been round the track more than a few laps. My accountability was to my Saviour - and my bishop - and not to any sectional mutual support group whether indigenous or otherwise.

Houston McKelvey

