

The Affirmation of St. Louis (1977)

Origin

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The Making of the Affirmation of St. Louis

From an article by (the late) Perry Laukhuff which appeared in the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen (FCC) journal, "The North American Review"

The Affirmation of St. Louis is the Magna Carta of Continuing Anglicans. Its lifetime has been too short for accurate and objective judgement of its importance - and I am too prejudiced an observer to make such a judgement. In my own mind, I tend to think of it almost as in a class with the Creeds and the articles of Religion. Almost all the Continuing Church bodies have claimed it as one of their cornerstones. More competent voices than mine have praised it in the highest forms. For example, the Eastern orthodox quarterly review, *Doxa* has called the Affirmation "an amazing document" and one that is 'very close to an Orthodox Confession of Faith.' To read it quickens the spirit. What, then, are the origins of this moving proclamation, this great charter of our continuing faith?

On September 14-16, 1977 there took place at the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri, a gathering known as the St. Louis Church Congress. This meeting had been called and announced almost a year earlier by the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen (FCC). This Fellowship was a coalition of fifteen Episcopal publications and organisations and one publication and one organisation from the Anglican Church of Canada. The idea had originated with the Reverend Canon Albert J. duBois in 1973 in preparation for the Louisville General Convention of the Episcopal Church. He rightly saw such a coalition as the best means of rallying the loyal orthodox elements of the Church in opposition to the controversial proposals which were expected to generate much heat. Foremost among these

were revision of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer and ordination of women to the sacred ministry,

...From its beginnings, the fellowship debated with growing concern and intensity the course it should follow if heretical and apostate forces won the upper hand in the Episcopal Church. FCC members sought to coordinate their actions and publicity with one another and from time to time the fellowship issued to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church or to the Church at large, statements intended to boost morale, intensify and unify opposition to the growing threats of heresy, clarify its own position and keep alive the hope of preserving traditional Anglicanism.

After the defeat of the traditionalists at Minneapolis, attention was focused strongly on what the practical response should be. It was determined that a Church Congress should be convened in September 1977. The FCC also came to a unified view that nothing but an organizational separation from the Episcopal Church would answer the need caused by that Church's theological separation from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

It would appear that the seed of the "Affirmation" idea was sown at the Nashville meeting of the FCC on November 4th and 5th, 1976. There was a long, informal and at times almost anguished discussion of possible future courses of action. Bishop Clarence Haden, of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, who was present as a visitor, threw out the idea that the FCC must profess specific and unswerving basis for its stand if it were to lead a movement to set up a Continuing Episcopal Church. Dr. Harold Weatherby, of the Society for the Preservation of the Book of Common Prayer, took up this theme by saying that we must set forth the principles on which a Continuing Church would be based and do it soon. The public statement released by the FCC following this meeting indicated that the FCC had commissioned the drafting of a statement of moral and devotional principles upon which a Continuing Church would be based.

It was from these tentative and somewhat unspecific beginnings in Nashville in November 1976, then, that the Affirmation grew. The drafting committee met several times during the spring and summer of 1977. It was against a confusing and exhausting background of months of struggle that the Drafting Committee successfully completed its labours. At the final pre-Congress meeting of the FCC, less than twenty-four hours before the Congress opened, there was presented for definite consideration a complete draft of the Affirmation of St. Louis. After several hours of deliberation, the draft was approved unanimously with some amendments. It was read out to the 1,800 attendees at the Congress, heard with rapt attention and received a standing ovation. There was no debate or discussion. The Affirmation was simply promulgated. Nothing quite like it, to the best of my knowledge, had ever evolved in 450 years of Anglican history.

Introduction

The Continuation of Anglicism

We affirm that the Church of our fathers, sustained by the most Holy Trinity, lives yet, and that we, being moved by the Holy Spirit to walk only in that way, are determined to continue in the Catholic Faith, Apostolic Order, Orthodox Worship and Evangelical Witness of the traditional Anglican Church, doing all things necessary for the continuance of the same. We are upheld and strengthened in this determination by the knowledge that many provinces and dioceses of the Anglican Communion have continued steadfast in the same Faith, Order, Worship and Witness, and that they continue to confine ordination to the priesthood and the episcopate to males. We rejoice in these facts and we affirm our solidarity with these provinces and dioceses.

The Dissolution of Anglican and Episcopal Church Structure

We affirm that the Anglican Church of Canada and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, by their unlawful attempts to alter Faith, Order and Morality (especially in their General Synod of 1975 and General Convention of 1976), have departed from Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The Need to Continue Order in the Church

We affirm that all former ecclesiastical governments, being fundamentally impaired by the schismatic acts of lawless Councils, are of no effect among us, and that we must now reorder such godly discipline as may strengthen us in the continuation of our common life and witness.

The Invalidity of Schismatic Authority

We affirm that the claim of any such schismatic person or body to act against any Church member, clerical or lay, for his witness to the whole Faith is with no authority of Christ's true Church, and any such inhibition, deposition or discipline is without effect and is absolutely null and void.

The Need for Principles and a Constitution

We affirm that fundamental principles (doctrinal, moral, and constitutional) are necessary for the present, and that a Constitution (redressing the defects and abuses of our former governments) should be adopted, whereby the Church may be soundly continued.

The Continuation of Communion with Canterbury

We affirm our continued relations of communion with the See of Canterbury and all faithful parts of the Anglican Communion.

WHEREFORE, with a firm trust in Divine Providence, and before Almighty God and all the company of heaven, we solemnly affirm, covenant and declare that we, lawful and faithful members of the Anglican and Episcopal Churches, shall now and hereafter continue and be the unified continuing Anglican Church in North America, in true and valid succession thereto.

Fundamental Principles

In order to carry out these declarations, we set forth these fundamental Principles for our continued life and witness.

PREFACE

In the firm conviction that "we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," and that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," and acknowledging our duty to proclaim Christ's saving Truth to all peoples, nations and tongues, we declare our intention to hold fast the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith of God.

We acknowledge that rule of faith laid down by St. Vincent of Lerins: "Let us hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all, for that is truly and properly Catholic."

I. Principles of Doctrine

The Nature of the Church

We gather as people called by God to be faithful and obedient to Him. As the Royal Priestly People of God, the Church is called to be, in fact, the manifestation of Christ in and to the world. True religion is revealed to man by God. We cannot decide what is truth, but rather (in obedience) ought to receive, accept, cherish, defend and teach what God has given us. The Church is created by God, and is beyond the ultimate control of man.

The Church is the Body of Christ at work in the world. She is the society of the baptized called out from the world: In it, but not of it. As Christ's faithful Bride, she is different from the world and must not be influenced by it.

The Essentials of Truth and Order

We repudiate all deviation of departure from the Faith, in whole or in part, and bear witness to these essential principles of evangelical Truth and apostolic Order:

Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the authentic record of God's revelation of Himself, His saving activity, and moral demands - a revelation valid for all men and all time.

The Creeds

The Nicene Creed as the authoritative summary of the chief articles of the Christian Faith, together with the "Apostles' Creed, and that known as the Creed of St. Athanasius to be "thoroughly received and believed" in the sense they have had always in the Catholic Church.

Tradition

The received Tradition of the Church and its teachings as set forth by "the ancient catholic bishops and doctors," and especially as defined by the Seven Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church, to the exclusion of all errors, ancient and modern.

Sacraments

The Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders, Penance and Unction of the Sick, as objective and effective signs of the continued presence and saving activity of Christ our Lord among His people and as His covenanted means for conveying His grace. In particular, we affirm the necessity of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist (where they may be had) -- Baptism as incorporating us into Christ (with its completion in Confirmation as the "seal of the Holy Spirit"), and the Eucharist as the sacrifice which unites us to the all-sufficient Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and the Sacrament in which He feeds us with His Body and Blood.

Holy Orders

The Holy Orders of bishops, priests and deacons as the perpetuation of Christ's gift of apostolic ministry to His Church, asserting the necessity of a bishop of apostolic succession (or priest ordained by such) as the celebrant of the Eucharist - these Orders consisting exclusively of men in accordance with Christ's Will and institution (as evidenced by the Scriptures), and the universal practice of the Catholic Church.

Deaconesses

The ancient office and ministry of Deaconesses as a lay vocation for women, affirming the need for proper encouragement of that office.

Duty of Bishops

Bishops as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers, as well as their duty (together with other clergy and the laity) to guard and defend the purity and integrity of the Church's Faith and Moral Teaching.

The Use of Other Formulae

In affirming these principles, we recognize that all Anglican statements of faith and liturgical formulae must be interpreted in accordance with them.

Incompetence of Church Bodies to Alter Truth

We disclaim any right or competence to suppress, alter or amend any of the ancient Ecumenical Creeds and definitions of Faith, to set aside or depart from Holy Scripture, or to alter or deviate from the essential pre-requisites of any Sacrament.

Unity with Other Believers

We declare our firm intention to seek and achieve full sacramental communion and visible unity with other Christians who "worship the Trinity in Unity, and Unity in Trinity," and who hold the Catholic and Apostolic Faith in accordance with the foregoing principles.

II. PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY

The conscience, as the inherent knowledge of right and wrong, cannot stand alone as a sovereign arbiter of morals. Every Christian is obligated to form his conscience by the Divine Moral Law and the Mind of Christ as revealed in Holy Scriptures, and by the teaching and Tradition of the Church. We hold that when the Christian conscience is thus properly informed and ruled, it must affirm the following moral principles:

Individual Responsibility

All people, individually and collectively, are responsible to their Creator for their acts, motives, thoughts and words, since "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ..."

Sanctity of Human Life

Every human being, from the time of his conception, is a creature and child of God, made in His image and likeness, an infinitely precious soul; and that the unjustifiable or inexcusable taking of life is always sinful.

Man's Duty to God

All people are bound by the dictates of the Natural Law and by the revealed Will of God, insofar as they can discern them.

Family Life

The God-given sacramental bond in marriage between one man and one woman is God's loving provision for procreation and family life, and sexual activity is to be practiced only within the bonds of Holy Matrimony.

Man as Sinner

We recognize that man, as inheritor of original sin, is "very far gone from original righteousness," and as a rebel against God's authority is liable to His righteous judgment.

Man and God's Grace

We recognize, too, that God loves His children and particularly has shown it forth in the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that man cannot be saved by any effort of his own, but by the Grace of God, through repentance and acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Christian's Duty to be Moral

We believe, therefore, it is the duty of the Church and her members to bear witness to Christian Morality, to follow it in their lives, and to reject the false standards of the world.

III. CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

In the constitutional revision which must be undertaken, we recommend, for the consideration of continuing Anglicans, the following:

Retain the Best of Both Provinces

That the traditional and tested features of the Canadian and American ecclesiastical systems be retained and used in the administration of the continuing Church.

Selection of Bishops

That a non-political means for selection of bishops be devised.

Tripartite Synod

That the Church be generally governed by a Holy Synod of three branches (episcopal, clerical and lay), under the presidency of the Primate of the Church.

Scriptural Standards for the Ministry

That the apostolic and scriptural standards for the sacred Ministry be used for all orders of Ministers.

Concurrence of all Orders for Decisions

That the Constitution acknowledge the necessity of the concurrence of all branches of the Synod for decisions in all matters, and that extraordinary majorities be required for the favorable consideration of all matters of importance.

Re-establishment of Discipline

That the Church re-establish an effective permanent system of ecclesiastical courts for the defense of the Faith and the maintenance of discipline over all her members.

Constitutional Assembly to be Called

That our bishops shall call a Constitutional Assembly of lay and clerical representatives of dioceses and parishes to convene at the earliest appropriate time to draft a Constitution and Canons by which we may be unified and governed, with special reference to this Affirmation, and with due consideration to ancient Custom and the General Canon Law, and to the former law of our provinces.

Interim Action

In the meantime, trusting in the everlasting strength of God to carry us through all our trials, we commend all questions for decision to the proper authorities in each case: Episcopal, diocesan, and parochial, encouraging all the faithful to support our witness as subscribers to this Affirmation, and inviting all so doing to share our fellowship and the work of the Church.

IV. PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP

Prayer Book - The Standard of Worship

In the continuing Anglican Church, the Book of Common Prayer is (and remains) one work in two editions: The Canadian Book of 1962 and the American Book of 1928. Each is fully and equally authoritative. No other standard for worship exists.

Certain Variances Permitted

For liturgical use, only the Book of Common Prayer and service books conforming to and incorporating it shall be used.

V. PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

Intercommunion with other Apostolic Churches

The continuing Anglicans remain in full communion with the See of Canterbury and with all other faithful parts of the Anglican Communion, and should actively seek similar relations with all other Apostolic and Catholic Churches, provided that agreement in the essentials of Faith and Order first be reached.

Non-Involvement with Non-Apostolic Groups

We recognize that the World Council of Churches, and many national and other Councils adhering to the World Council, are non-Apostolic, humanist and secular in purpose and practice, and that under such circumstances, we cannot be members of any of them. We also recognize that the Consultation of Church Union (COCU) and all other such schemes, being non-Apostolic and non-Catholic in their present concept and form, are unacceptable to us, and that we cannot be associated with any of them.

Need for Sound Theological Training

Re-establishment of spiritual, orthodox and scholarly theological education under episcopal supervision is imperative, and should be encouraged and promoted by all in authority; and learned and godly bishops, other clergy and lay people should undertake and carry on that work without delay.

Financial Affairs

The right of congregations to control of their temporalities should be firmly and constitutionally recognized and protected.

Administrative Matters

Administration should, we believe, be limited to the most simple and necessary acts, so that emphasis may be centered on worship, pastoral care, spiritual and moral soundness, personal good works, and missionary outreach, in response to God's love for us.

The Church as Witness to Truth

We recognize also that, as keepers of God's will and truth for man, we can and ought to witness to that will and truth against all manifest evils, remembering that we are as servants in the world, but God's servants first.

Pensions and Insurance

We recognize our immediate responsibility to provide for the establishment of sound pension and insurance programs for the protection of the stipendiary clergy and other Church Workers.

Legal Defense

We recognize the immediate need to coordinate legal resources, financial and professional, for the defense of congregations imperiled by their stand for the Faith, and commend this need most earnestly to the diocesan and parochial authorities.

Continuation, Not Innovation

In this gathering witness of Anglicans and Episcopalians, we continue to be what we are. We do nothing new. We form no new body, but continue as Anglicans and Episcopalians.

NOW, THEREFORE, deeply aware of our duty to all who love and believe the Faith our Fathers, of our duty to God, who alone shall judge what we do, we make this Affirmation. Before God, we claim our Anglican/Episcopal inheritance, and proclaim the same to the whole Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.