

April 16, 2009

To Bishop James Cowan, Executive Officer Bruce Bryant-Scott and Diocesan Council:

This is an open letter to explain why I have felt it necessary to leave the Anglican Church of Canada. I hope that the explanation of my action helps others to understand the issues involved more fully, and comprehend why a reasonable and informed person could choose to leave the institution that has nurtured her spiritual growth since birth. It is not without regret and certainly not without pain and considerable soul searching. These few paragraphs cannot possibly summarize the hours, years and decades I have spent in wrestling with and researching the theological disputes plaguing the ACoC. I have to say that I believe that I have been forced out of an institution that upholds on paper the Gospel I believe, but preaches and practices a revisionist gospel, "which is no gospel at all" (Galatians 1:7).

I believe the Diocese of British Columbia has not dealt with the cause of division in this diocese. This avoidance has caused the Diocese to look like it cares more for buildings than it does for its people, who are so discontented with the situation in the ACoC that they are choosing to leave it. Rather than deal with the theological concerns of conservative Anglicans, the Diocese is more than willing to allow conservatives to "vote with their feet."¹ Of 395 people on the roll of St Matthias, only 24 (as recorded at the subsequent St Matthias Vestry) remained in the ACoC following the vote to join the Anglican Network in Canada. Of those who voted, 94.5% elected to rejoin the worldwide Anglican Communion, from whom we had been cut off by the actions of the ACoC, which led 22 Provinces to declare broken and impaired communion with the ACoC. We now number among 3500 Canadians of 28 parishes who have taken the same stand, along with 71 priests and 3 bishops. ANiC average Sunday attendance is 3500, making ANiC larger than 13 ACoC dioceses (2001 ACoC statistics).² 100 000 American Anglicans have also made this decision.

Surely, the Diocese now must realize that the situation is bigger than just individuals voting with their feet, but whole groups of people, entire parishes, are so discontented with the theological situation in the ACoC that they are prepared to consider leaving it, and are leaving it. And it must be noted that the situation is not what it was 10 years ago. Now there is somewhere within the Anglican Communion to go. Now there is an emerging province, the Anglican Church³ in North America, where orphaned Anglicans can come under orthodox Episcopal authority.⁴ And worldwide, this orthodox theology for which we stand, is in the majority. It must be noted that the ACoC and The Episcopal Church of the U.S.A. are completely out of step with the Anglican Communion. Is this not a situation which should stimulate institutional self-analysis? Sadly, the Diocese continues to focus its efforts on marginalizing those who are dissatisfied with the current status quo in the ACoC. The Diocese does not seem to be responding to this wake up call with soul searching, but with anger and defensiveness.

I could give many examples of why I am leaving the ACoC, but one or two will have to suffice. The "progressive Christianity" of St. Andrew's Cowichan Station makes me wonder why they are allowed to use the Anglican facility when they have advertised on their website that they are seeking to change traditional beliefs, with assistance from the Canadian Centre for Progressive

Christianity.⁴ Based on their website, St. Andrew's parishioners are taught to doubt all the basic tenets of Christian doctrine. Yet, those who have the temerity to stand for traditional Christian doctrine are referred to by the Diocese as those who have gone to "another faith community."⁵ We, who are recognized⁶ by the Primates as fully Anglican, are thought to be of another faith by our former Diocese?⁶ How is this possible? Maybe the Diocese knows the faith they promote is not the same as that promoted by the rest of the Communion...

Another reason I am leaving the ACoC is the fact that my tithes are used to support and promote a false gospel. I cannot conscience my tithes going to support Sorrento Centre and Vancouver School of Theology where the likes of John Shelby Spong are guest lecturers and where Buddhist meditation, paganism, witchcraft, reiki, wicca and faery/feri traditions are promoted.⁷ These institutions are leading laity and clergy away from the Gospel. This dissatisfaction has been brought to the attention of the Diocese at the Synod level. For example, Rev. Andrew Hewlett brought a motion forward to divert money budgeted for Sorrento to Camp Columbia for this very reason in the late 1990's. We are not leaving without first having exhausted our avenues of process and protest.

I cannot help but note the pervasive influence of our culture's anti-Biblical values on the religion of the Diocese of B.C. Jesus calls people to follow him. But He also calls people to repentance. He calls people to leave the desires of this world and to embrace Him. He calls people to change. I do not see the Anglican Church of Canada echoing Jesus' call to repentance and new birth. I see the ACoC embracing the culture of this world and rejecting the Bible.

Our leadership has sought to impose revised theologies of the Trinity, of Christology, of redemption, and of humanity upon us. Now revisionist theology is being preached and believed popularly. Pantheistic, relativistic, pluralistic, neo-Gnostic and even pagan teachings are woven into the theological fabric of the ACoC. Pansexual and relativistic morality has replaced the Biblical call to sexual purity and holiness. When clergy of this Diocese refuse to talk about sin and preach instead about brokenness, they minimize the need for the atonement, not to mention personal responsibility.⁸ When clergy of this Diocese refer to the Resurrection only as a metaphor, it is stripped of its power.⁹ I cannot avoid the fact that ACoC leadership, and many Anglicans in most parishes have a theology now, which is inconsistent with the theology I have received in evangelical, traditional, and conservative, orthodox parishes. There are two gospels in the ACoC: the traditional orthodox Gospel and the "inclusive" revised gospel. As the Primates said in Alexandria, there are two religions locked in a spiritual war in the Anglican Communion. Archbishop Gregory Venables said, "One is Christianity, the other is not."¹⁰

In its official publication, the Diocese has allowed revisionist theology to be advocated and spread. Rev. Halladay included this description of God in his favourable review of the book *Joseph's Bones* in the October 2008 Diocesan Post:

this is a story about a deity that is in transition, a deity who was himself once a formless void, who creates humanity so that he might know himself. This is not a God that knows everything, but is rather a God that needs to be taught, not about earth or about heaven or about power or about people, but about himself. God,

so goes the argument, needs humanity in order to come to a greater understanding of himself, who he is and what he does.¹¹—

This creative theology inverts God's relationship with humanity, putting humanity in the driver's seat. This makes an idol of humanity. Non-Christian teachings such as these draw people entirely away from God's revelation of Himself in Scripture.

In a moment fraught with irony, on January 15th, 2009, in a Diocese of Niagara Q & A, Primate Fred Hiltz spent almost seven full minutes trying to define the Gospel, and in my opinion failed. Surely the Gospel is more than an "excellent liturgy," "Christ-centred preaching" and "telling stories," especially these days when one must define what one means by "Christ."¹²— According to Rev. Karen Fast, "Christ" can mean many things to many people at different times, and "that is how it should be."¹³— If people are content to follow a leader who cannot define the Gospel with reference to the Word of God, then there is very little hope left for the ACoC.

The ACoC leadership claims that they hold buildings in trust. I believe it no longer holds the Gospel in trust. Those who have been given a trust to pass on the gospel need to prove themselves to be faithful. The ACoC leadership has failed in a most fundamental way: they have ceased to uphold the Gospel. That is why things have come to this impasse. The following verses apply:

1 Corinthians 4:2: "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

I Cor. 15:2: "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain."

The ACoC advises that pastoral care of those involved in serial unrepentant sin consists of affirming them in their sin by giving them Eucharist. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 Paul instructs us to distance ourselves from Christians who profess belief but do not exhibit submission to Christ's will for their lives, those who continue in unrepentant sin. We are to do that for the sinners' own good. Being put out of the Christian community was for Paul a way of identifying how serious the sin was, in order to bring about repentance and reintegration into the community. This is what those bishops who boycotted Lambeth 2008 were doing. They cannot be in fellowship with fellow bishops who approve of blessing sin. Two hundred plus bishops stated by their absence from Lambeth that they believe that the ACoC leadership has failed to uphold the Gospel. This fundamental disconnect cannot be reconciled while the ACoC continues to tap dance around the call to repentance issued in the Windsor Report, and justifies its continued defiance of that repeated call.

Further, Paul writes, Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (I Cor. 6:18-20).

Using the analogy of training, Paul writes, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

If we are to run this race in this 21st century context in a culture which idolizes sex, it stands to reason that we have been called to make our stand for sexual purity. To run in such a way as to win the prize includes not compromising our teaching on sexual ethics.

Sadly, my critique cannot stop here. The St. Matthias discernment process has been unfairly labeled *biased* by Bruce Bryant-Scott. Bryant-Scott even claims to be aware of *misinformation*.¹⁴ And from Myanmar the bishop claims to be aware of *deliberate misinformation*.¹⁵ These unsubstantiated claims are ironic when juxtaposed with the actions of the diocese. I note that at the Extraordinary Synod of 2007, convened to consider the issue of human sexuality, liberal and moderate viewpoints had their approved spokespersons in Dean Peter Elliot and Bishop Victoria Matthews, but the conservative view went unrepresented despite the presence of our Metropolitan (Zacchaeus Fellowship Chaplain), Archbishop Terence Buckle.¹⁶ This is institutionalized bias against conservative Anglicans, not an accusation of bias based on rumour.

Further, our Rector and associate resigned because the parish council chose to complete the discernment process and the congregation chose to pursue a vote to join ANiC. For this honourable action, which they took in order not to be disobedient to the bishop, they are unjustly labeled *betrayers*.¹⁷ The congregation took no vows of obedience to the bishop of the Diocese of B.C. If the bishop has labeled former clergy of the diocese of B.C. as *betrayers*, he also needs to append that label to the several hundred people his policies have driven out of this diocese just in the past 13 months. When a leader tries to enforce conformity to innovative theology through obedience to his office, rather than receive willing obedience through like-minded obedience to Scripture, something is terribly wrong. The Anglican Church of Canada would do better if it dealt with the theological source of the problem rather than quoting canons and insisting on blind obedience to fallible people.

Refusing to discuss the situation of St Mary's Metchosin in the DMRIT Report and at Synod September 2008 indicated to me that the Diocese is not willing to face or deal with the theological concerns of conservatives, and is more than willing to conscience their steady departure from the Diocese. Further, the bishop as Chair of Synod allowed the six St Matthias synod representatives to be characterized as heretics and people who would approve of sexual misconduct, simply for suggesting that negotiation might be preferable to litigation.¹⁸ Together, the above actions and inaction confirmed for me the lack of Diocesan will to address the theological concerns of conservative Christians, and affirmed the leadership's desire to steer the Diocese on an innovative course.

I resign my position as Lay Synod Representative of the Parish of St. Matthias. I have severed my ties to the institution known as the Anglican Church of Canada because I believe that those in authority are not defending and upholding the Gospel against erroneous teaching. Consequently, I cannot in all conscience support an institution, which is leading people astray under the illusion that all theological innovation is acceptable under the *via media* of Anglicanism.

If the individuals of this Diocese do not stand to protest against theological innovation, which even calls into question the divinity of Jesus, this Diocese stands for nothing at all. The 2009 Lenten Meditation, a publication of the PWRDF of the Anglican Church of Canada, states in the March 27th Meditation that Jesus was a sinner and a reformed racist.¹⁹ Were I contributing to the

Discernment Package today, this outrage would take centre stage. This is not *via media*; it is *via nihil*.²⁰—

Sincerely,

Sara Plumpton

Romans 12:1, 2: Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Hebrews 10:26-31: If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Mark 7:1-13: He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 7They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." 8You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

Romans 16:17-19: I urge you, my brothers: watch out for those who cause divisions and upset people's faith and go against the teaching which you have received. Keep away from them! For those who do such things are not serving Christ our Lord, but their own appetites. By their fine words and flattering speech they deceive innocent people.

I Peter 2:22, 24: "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

¹ Bruce Bryant-Scott at St Matthias Sunday March 1, 2009, Q & A.

² http://www.anglicannetwork.ca/pdf/anic_parishes.pdf.

³ "The FCA Primates' Council recognizes the Anglican Church in North America as genuinely Anglican and recommends that Anglican Provinces affirm full communion with the ACNA." GAFCon Communique Issued – ACNA Recognized, Communique from the GAFCon / FCA Primates' Council, April 16, 2009 http://www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon_communique_issued_-_ACNA_recognized/

⁴ "If you are currently working toward creating a progressive congregation or helping a formerly traditional one move in that direction, we need to know what has worked for you. And, we hope that the ideas shared elsewhere on this site, will help you with your work." Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, April 16, 2009, http://progressivechristianity.ca/ccpc/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15&Itemid=28; "This is the organization that the progressive nature of parish life at St Andrews draws from." Cowichan Station Church. CA, April 16, 2009, <http://cowichanstationchurch.ca/progressive.html>

⁵ "St. Matthias parishioners vote to join ANiC" Mar 9, 2009, Anglican Journal, <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/nc/100/article/st-matthias-parishioners-vote-to-join-anic/>.

- 6 Alexandria Communique, “Deeper Communion; Gracious Restraint,” February 5, 2009, Anglican Communion News Service, April 16, 2009, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/2009/2/5/ACNS4574>.
- 7 Bishop John S. Spong, A Call for a New Reformation. April 1998. Diocesan News, Diocese of Newark, The Episcopal Church. <http://www.trushare.com/37JUN98/JU98SPNG.htm>; Sorrento Centre insert, Diocesan Post, March 2009; <http://www.vst.edu/pdfs/WomenSpirit06.pdf>.
- 8 Chris Page, “Broken,” October 28, 2008, Accessed April 16, 2009, <http://inaspaciousplace.blogspot.com/2008/10/broken.html>.
- 9 Harold Munn, Easter Letter 2007, Accessed April 16, 2009, <http://www.stjohnthedivine.bc.ca/openletters/2007easter.asp>.
- 10 “Primates Meeting Alexandria EG 2009: Debriefing,” February 22, 2009, Anglican TV Ministries, Accessed April 16, 2009, Kevin Kallsen. <http://anglicantv.org/node/203>.
- 11 Andrew Halladay, “My Date with the Devil: A review of *Joseph’s Bones* by Jerome M. Segal,” October, 2008, Diocesan Post.
- 12 “Fred Hiltz tells us what he thinks the Gospel is,” March 8, 2009, Anglican Samizdat, Accessed April 16, 2009, <http://anglicansamizdat.wordpress.com/page/6/>.
- 13 Rev. Karen Knaus Fast, “Our Mission Statement and Other Thoughts” Sermon December 2nd, 2007, St. John the Divine, <http://www.stjohnthedivine.bc.ca/openletters/20071202sermon.asp>.
- 14 “St. Matthias parishioners vote to join ANiC” Mar 9, 2009, Anglican Journal, <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/nc/100/article/st-matthias-parishioners-vote-to-join-anic/>.
- 15 “Our Bishop sends letter from Myanmar,” March 12, 2009, Diocese of British Columbia, Accessed April 16, 2009, <http://www.bc.anglican.ca/content/Bishop'sPastoralLetterMarch2009.pdf>.
- 16 The Zacchaeus Fellowship is an ex-gay ministry originally formed to give ex-gay Anglicans a voice in the debate in the ACoC. www.zacchaeus.ca.
- 17 <http://www.bc.anglican.ca/content/Bishop'sPastoralLetterMarch2009.pdf>.
- 18 See DVD of Synod 2008 held at Synod Office for debate on Motion 29.
- 19 “Peace and Compassion: In Faith, Join Hands, Inspire Hope,” PWRDF, Anglican Church of Canada, Accessed April 16, 2009, http://www.pwrdf.org/fileadmin/fe/files/res_lent09_meditation.pdf.
- 20 via media: middle way; via nihil: way of nothing.