

Dear Brothers and Sisters

This last Tuesday James Cowburn, Ric Turner (your churchwardens), Dave Buckley (our Youth Minister), Justin Mote (our Associate Minister) and I joined over 800 Vicars and churchwardens at a conference at All Souls' church in London. Briefing us on the recent Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem, where over 1200 church leaders gathered from around the world (including 300 Anglican bishops), we came away challenged but excited about the future.

We were addressed by Henry Orombi (the Archbishop of Uganda), Greg Venables (the Archbishop of the Southern Cone), Dr Jim Packer (the elderly Anglican theologian and statesman - who is being threatened with legal action by his Canadian bishop!) and Peter Jensen (the Archbishop of Sydney who has become a dear friend and preached at St Andrew's just a couple of years ago). Though very different, their message was clear and they spoke as one.

In the last 50 years a growing trend of 'liberalism' has crept into the church. It has led people to deny that Jesus is God, that he was born of a virgin, that he physically rose again, and that he is the only way we may be saved. It has also led to a liberal attitude in the area of human sexuality, and a growing acceptance of same-sex relationships. These attitudes have then resulted in major actions:

- In 2002 the Diocese of New Westminster (Canada) endorsed the blessing of same sex relationships, and
- in 2003 Gene Robinson (a man who is in a homosexual relationship) was consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire (USA).

Those actions took place despite the fact that in 1998, at the last Lambeth Conference (a ten yearly gathering of all the Anglican bishops from around the world) a resolution was passed which established the traditional, biblical, view of human sexuality as the 'Anglican' position.

But since then, Anglicans in the USA and Canada, often supported by leaders in this country, have advanced an agenda to challenge this. Repeatedly there have been meetings at which bishops and Archbishops have agreed to 'hold the line', only for some of them to go home and do the exact opposite. The last major meeting that considered the issue was the Primates' (the most senior leaders of each Anglican church) Meeting in Tanzania in February 2007. After long hours of deliberations the Primates gave the American Episcopalian church one last chance to clarify unequivocally their position by 30th September, 2007.

But before the deadline, Lambeth Palace issued invitations to this year's Lambeth conference to those very American bishops who had consecrated Gene Robinson. It then became clear to many of the Primates and bishops that there was no real intention to discipline or to correct sin. Archbishops Orombi and Venables talked of how again and again at meetings the concerns of those Primates who held to the standards of the Bible were sidelined and ignored.

It is this which has led many bishops to decide that they cannot in good conscience attend this year's Lambeth conference. As our own Bishop of Lewes, Wallace Benn put it, "How could I sit down at Lambeth and eat food, and take Communion, with those American bishops who have been persecuting my friends? How could I pretend everything is all right, when it isn't?"

The stark reality is that those Americans and Canadians who have taken a principled stand against their bishops for the wrong actions are now having their property taken off them. They are being taken to court, they are having their licenses revoked and their ministries

vilified. Those faithful churches and ministers (including Dr Packer) have left their dioceses and Provinces not because they no longer want to be Anglican, but because they cannot disobey the Word of God and sanction what the Bible calls sin. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the formal Anglican structures have not provided for these persecuted congregations and have stood by as they have been attacked. So individuals, churches and even whole dioceses had begun to leave the Anglican church, thinking no-one wanted them.

It was Archbishop Peter Jensen who told us of the courage of Archbishop Venables in being prepared to cross Provincial boundaries and to accept these churches and ministers into his own Province. At that, the whole audience stood to clap and show our support for such a principled action. That is the kind of leadership which should have been shown years ago.

So, late last year concerned about the future of the Anglican Communion, aware that many bishops were not going to Lambeth, senior Anglican leaders began to talk about the need for a conference whereby Anglicans who hold to the Bible and the traditional teachings of the church could gather from around the world to pray and discuss the future. They wanted to resist the spread of this liberalism and to provide a haven for those who were in danger of leaving the denomination. That was what brought about GAFCON - the Global Anglican Future Conference which took place last week in Jerusalem.

The speakers at Tuesday's meeting made it clear that GAFCON is not splitting the Anglican Communion, the 'fabric of the communion has already been torn' by those who have acted against Scripture, against Tradition and in the face of what the Primates have asked and pleaded. Neither is GAFCON leaving the Anglican Communion. In 2003 one group in the Communion broke the boundaries, and as a result the Communion will never be the same again. We are one Communion as a result of the actions in 2002 and 2003 it is far looser. Ironically, this enables a movement like GAFCON to arise.

GAFCON has produced a Statement and a Declaration (which is attached). By signing up to this Declaration, People, Parishes, Dioceses and Provinces will be forming a Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans around the world who are orthodox, who will sit under the authority of the Bible and who will want to engage in global evangelism and mission together. In addition GAFCON has set up the Primates' Council (not just anyone, but the most senior Anglican leaders) who will offer help to Anglicans globally whenever they experience the extreme persecution that took place in Canada, so that never again will people be left on their own.

Coming away from All Souls' Church we felt exhilarated. Here at last is the leadership we have been praying for. The Primates who called the GAFCON conference are passionate and biblically faithful. They are humble and bold at the same time. And they will not flinch when faced with the hostility of the liberals who will continue to push their agenda forward.

So what does this mean for us? Well, please pray as we work that out. Our own Church Council will be meeting soon to discuss the Statement and Declaration and to think through what we should do. It would be helpful if we could hear from you as to what you think after reading it and praying about it. I also intend to discuss it with others in our deanery and diocese, and with our Bishop.

It seems to me that for very good reasons a standard has been raised, and that now is the time for all who love the Bible, for all who love the Church, and for all who love the Lord Jesus to rally to that standard.

Yours in our Lord Jesus

David Gibb