

## **Archbishop Peter Akinola's speech at Gafcon**

This is the full text of the opening address to the Gafcon meeting in Jerusalem by the Rt. Rev'd Peter Akinola, Archbishop of Nigeria

### **Gafcon – a rescue mission**

People of the living God, welcome to Jerusalem. Welcome to Gafcon. One of the marks of apostolic ministry is signs, wonders and miracle[1]. There are many in today's Church, who would lay claim to apostolic authority without holding on to apostolic faith nor do they manifest any of the marks of the apostles. In Gafcon, I have seen signs and wonders. That we are able to gather here this week is a miracle for which we must give thanks to God.

There have been many seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but as a testimony that the Lord our God is firmly in control of Gafcon, he has graciously removed them. A conference of this magnitude would normally require several years of extensive planning, consultations and fund raising. We had barely five months to put this conference together. The Lord raised men and women who gladly and willingly offered their time, skill and money to make it happen.

I am very grateful to the members of the leadership team for their selfless and sacrificial roles in helping to deliver this conference, [please stand for recognition] We are deeply grateful to all provincial, diocesan and parish local committees, the donors, the tour agents, the travel agents, the Jordanian and Israeli governments for allowing us to meet here and in Jordan. Brethren, we appreciate the labors of love of the theological resource group. I must also thank in advance all those who will provide leadership in worship, workshops and plenary. We are heavily indebted to the various sub-committees and their leaders. God bless you all.

### **Why are we here? What have we come to do?**

The Global Anglican Future Conference (Gafcon) holding here in the holy land this week has understandably elicited both commendation and contempt in varying measures from all who claim a stake in shaping the future identity or in destroying the traditional identity of the global Anglican Communion.

Those who failed to admit that by the unilateral actions they took in defiance of the Communion have literally torn the very fabric of our common life at its deepest level since 2003, are grumbling that we are here to break the Communion.

Similarly, those who fail, for whatever reason to come to terms with the painful reality that the Communion is in a state of brokenness and lacked the ability to secure a genuine reconciliation, but simply carried on the work of the Communion in a manner that is business as usual are not happy with us. And of course there are those who argue that while there may be some justification for Gafcon; why not call it after Lambeth 2008.

But thanks be to God that there are millions of people around the world including members of other denominations and those of other faiths who not only share our concerns but have chosen to partner with us and are praying for us.

For those of us gathered here in the Name of the Lord, and on behalf of the over 35 million faithful Anglicans we represent[2] Gafcon is a continuation of that quiet but consistent initiative, a godly instrument appointed to reshape, reform, renew and reclaim a true Anglican Biblical orthodox Christianity that is firmly anchored in historic faith and ancient formularies.

Be that as it may, we must note that we cannot understand our present circumstance without locating it within the context of the controversies of the past decade. Every responsible historian knows that his task is predicated on the treasury of past events – rightly interpreted, as the compass for the present and guide for the future. For this reason, Gafcon takes its bearings from the tides of varied opinions and equivocations that have characterized our Communion in the last few years and exposed our once robust reputation as children of the Reformation to scorn. We were well-known for our stand on Scripture as the foundation stone of our tradition and reason.

The underlying objective of Gafcon necessarily compels a deep and honest reflection on the theological and ecclesiological inconsistencies of the past decade at the highest and most sacred levels of our Communion[3]. While not contesting the right to personal opinions and attitudes to this new situation, we must disabuse our minds of the unworthy views about Gafcon being a monster on the horizon, or even a strange breed of Anglicanism devoid of antecedent factors.

Whichever way you look at it, the Communion is deeply in trouble. This is not only because of the actions of TE and the Anglican Church of Canada but also because the hitherto honored Instruments of Communion, in recent years have, by design become instruments of disunity, putting the Communion in an unprecedented brokenness and turmoil.

Brethren, we spent much of our God-given precious time travelling long distances and at huge costs, meditating and praying earnestly about what we thought were common concerns, urging for a listening process while assuring people with different sexual orientation of God's love and our pastoral commitment to them, putting out carefully-worded communiqués and urging for restraint with regards to any attempt at defying time-tested limits.

## **Pre-Lambeth 98**

Human memory is very short. Therefore, permit me to suggest that we need to retrace our steps to some of the events that preceded Lambeth '98 when some, particularly the Global South of the Communion sensed the crisis ahead. It was the Second Anglican Encounter in the South, which was held in Kuala Lumpur from 10th-15th February 1997 with the theme, 'The Place of Scripture in the life and Mission of the Church in the 21st Century'. The theme was in the context of a premonition that the Communion was 'at a time of difficulty and confusion in some provinces and of growth, martyrdom, dynamic missionary encouragement and quiet but powerful witness in others'.

Looking back, one must confess that some of the resolutions couldn't have been more prophetic. Take for instance the Encounter's resolution about 'Scripture, the Family and Human Sexuality':

Reflection on our Encounter theme has helped further to deepen our resolve to uphold the authority of Scripture in every aspect of life, including the family and human sexuality.

Therefore:

6.1 We call on the Anglican Communion as a Church claiming to be rooted in the Apostolic and Reformed Tradition to remain true to Scripture as the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct;

6.2 We affirm that Scripture upholds marriage as a sacred relationship between a man and a woman, instituted in the creation ordinance;

6.3 We reaffirm that the only sexual expression, as taught by Scripture, which honors God and upholds human dignity is that between a man and a woman within the sacred ordinance of marriage;

6.4 We further believe that Scripture maintains that any other form of sexual expression is at once sinful, selfish, dishonoring to God and an abuse of human dignity;

6.5 We are aware of the scourge of sexual promiscuity, including homosexuality, rape and child abuse in our time. These are pastoral problems, and we call on the Churches to seek to find a pastoral and scriptural way to bring healing and restoration to those who are affected by any of these harrowing tragedies.

This Second Trumpet was used by God to make the majority of the Bishops who participated in the Lambeth Conference 1998 stand together to assert the authority of the Bible against the revisionist agenda that was being peddled then.

### **Post-Lambeth Reactions**

Paradoxically, that which was universally hailed as the triumph of biblical truth was, soon after the Lambeth Conference, lamented by a self-conceited typical American bishop, Jack Spong of Newark (now retired) as a disastrous condescension to stone-age logic. He actually said that the Africans were theologically "animistic and superstitious" and ignorant of scientific advancement. Lest some interpret this as a racial rather than a doctrinal issue, Barbara Harris (a black woman), Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts, even said the African Bishops' loyalty had been "bought with chicken dinners" by the conservative American Anglican Council. Of course, these slanders were calmly repudiated by noted African voices such as my most worthy predecessor- The Most Rev. Joseph Adetiloye, who said: "We in Africa hold the Bible as our authority for the Christian life. Therefore we will stand by the Word of God. To do otherwise, I'm afraid, would be impossible..."

Many American revisionist dioceses and congregations withdrew their financial assistance to needy African dioceses. Responding to this development, Bishop John Rucyahana of Rwanda who had been affected by that action said, "This has happened to many other African countries and African churches. Our opinion and independence of mind is being choked by [patronizing generosity] via the gifts of money. That is manipulation and dehumanizing to think we will do what people want because they have money."

Clearly the bedrock of the revisionist perspective is the humanist, rather than theological approach. This is the crux of the problem: they are going in the opposite direction from what Biblical orthodoxy demands, and with such a mindset, a meeting-point with those who are labeled conservatives – who have chosen to stand where the Bible stands, becomes a very remote possibility.

### **Crossing the 'Rubicon'**

Between the Lambeth Conference in 1998 and 2003, several dioceses in the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) continued with impunity to legitimize open same-sex unions. The election and proposed consecration, in 2003, of a man in an active homosexual relationship, Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in defiance of Resolution 1:10 of Lambeth 98, inflicted the most devastating wound on the pastorally responsible listening process recommended by that conference. Throughout the Communion, there was widespread outcry against that proposal. For ease of reference the text of Lambeth Resolution 1.10 is appended to this address.

The Primates' meeting in October 2003 at Lambeth Palace discussed this development with deep concern and came up with this statement:

"We ... re-affirm the resolutions made by the bishops of the Anglican Communion gathered at the Lambeth Conference in 1998 on issues of human sexuality as having moral force and commanding the respect of the Communion as its present

position on these issues. We commend the report of that Conference in its entirety to all members of the Anglican Communion valuing especially its emphasis on the need "to listen to the experience of homosexual persons..."

"Therefore, as a body we deeply regret the actions of the Diocese of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church (USA) which appear to a number of provinces to have short-circuited that process, and could be perceived to alter unilaterally the teaching of the Anglican Communion on this issue. They do not. Whilst we recognize the juridical autonomy of each province in our Communion, the mutual interdependence of the provinces means that none has authority unilaterally to substitute an alternative teaching as if it were the teaching of the entire Anglican Communion.

"To this extent, therefore, we must make clear that recent actions in New Westminster and in the Episcopal Church (USA) do not express the mind of our Communion as a whole, and these decisions jeopardize our sacramental fellowship with each other..."

At that point, the red lights were unmistakable and the appropriate note of caution was sounded by the Primates:

"If his consecration proceeds, we recognize that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy. In this case, the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognized by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves to be out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in Communion with provinces that choose not to break Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA)."

Sadly, in spite of the Primates' godly admonition, prophetic and timely warning the consecration went ahead. This singular defiant action put our Communion in total disarray as some provinces like West Indies and Southern Cone declared a state of impaired Communion with ECUSA and others like Uganda, South East Asia, Kenya, Rwanda and Nigeri broke off sacramental communion with it.

It was now clear that ECUSA by its own deliberate action had made its choice to walk apart from the rest of the Communion.

For most of us, this was the point when the truth of the African proverb that "a dog that is heading for self-destruction stops heeding the hunter's whistle" became clear. We also recalled the question posed by Prophet Amos, "Do two walk together except they have agreed to do so?"[4]

Some people interpreted our response as a judgmental attitude, but we knew we had come to that point when we had to stand up for our convictions based on the word of God and the faithful witness of a long succession of Anglicans, rather than fall for anything in the name of enlightened logic and dictates of modern cultural trappings.

### **Meetings and More Meetings**

More efforts were still made in an attempt to manage the crisis, and we remember in particular the Dromantine meeting of the Primates in 2005 where ECUSA and Canada were given time to respond to the questions put to them by the Windsor report and also to consider their place within the Anglican Communion[5].

To our utter dismay, it became apparent that our sober resolutions were, in the aftermath, trivialized by some of our most respected leaders. As if that was not bad enough, our corporate integrity was abused and the pains and concerns shared so open-mindedly ridiculed and betrayed by the flagrant compromises of those entrusted with the responsibility of guarding divine and eternal truths. These rather reckless departures from our painstaking resolutions turned delicate matters into what became more of a pastime for merely pious rhetoric at the expense of the spiritual welfare of our Communion which was evidently in jeopardy.

In the light of this, the Conference of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA) commissioned a group that came up with The Road to Lambeth which was endorsed by several Provinces[6] including Nigeria.

The last major meeting that considered this issue was the Primates' Meeting in Tanzania in February 2007. After long and painful hours of deliberations the primates gave TEC a last chance to clarify unequivocally and adequately their stand by 30th September, 2007.

Strangely, before the deadline, and before the Primates could get the opportunity of meeting to assess the adequacy of the response of TEC and in a clear demonstration of unwillingness to follow through our collective decisions which for many of us was an apparent lack of regard for the Primates, Lambeth Palace in July 2007 issued invitations to TEC bishops including those who consecrated Gene Robinson to attend the Lambeth 2008 conference.

At this point, it dawned upon us, regrettably, that the Archbishop of Canterbury was not interested in what matters to us, in what we think or in what we say.

For the avoidance of doubt, I need to reiterate the most agonizing part of it all which is the fact that thrice, in the course of these crises, we have met as Primates of the Communion and have been unable in good conscience on each occasion to share in the Lord's Supper with leaders of TEC and the Anglican Church of Canada. What else can more powerfully and most vividly demonstrate our brokenness? No

solution has been found to this fundamental issue. Until sacramental communion is restored, we remain sadly, broken. This is the stark reality our leaders continue to ignore and of course to the peril of the Communion.

As the Lambeth Conference 2008 approached and invitations were being sent out as though it was business as usual, some of our Provinces counseled the Archbishop of Canterbury to consider shifting the date<sup>[7]</sup> until the time for a meaningful fellowship and healing of relationships could be discerned. In addition, it would give the provinces of the Communion space to conclude and ratify the draft Anglican Covenant. Rejecting all entreaties, Lambeth Palace chose not to be bothered about that which troubles us; decided to stick to its own plans and to erect the walls of 2008 Lambeth Conference on the shaky and unsafe foundations of our brokenness.

### **Why Gafcon?**

We cannot succumb to this turmoil in our Communion and simply watch helplessly. We have found ourselves in a world in which Anglican leaders hold on to a form of religion but consistently deny its power. We have a situation in which some members of the Anglican family think they are so superior to all others that they are above the law, they can do whatever they please with impunity. As a Communion we have been unable to exercise discipline. In the face of global suspicion of the links of Islam with terrorism, Lambeth Palace is making misleading statements about the Islamic Law, Sharia, to the point that even secular leaders are now calling us to order! We can no longer trust where some of our Communion leaders are taking us.

Repeatedly, those of us in the leadership team of Gafcon have been advised by all levels of our ecclesial structures to avoid a vacuum. All our bishops and wives who would normally look to the Lambeth Conference for fellowship but now could not along with senior lay leaders and selected clergy to whom Lambeth authorities are not willing to listen should meet in another forum for prayerful deliberation on matters critical to our common life and mission. Thus Gafcon is a rescue mission.

Our beloved Anglican Communion must be rescued from the manipulation of those who have denied the gospel and its power to transform and to save; those who have departed from the scripture and the faith 'once and for all delivered to the saints' from those who are proclaiming a new gospel, which really is no gospel at all, {Gal 1.} In the wisdom and strength God supplies we must rescue what is left of the Church from error of the apostates.

Brethren, we are here

· Because we are bound together in a godly fellowship by the Gospel - the gospel that shaped the theological and ecclesiological foundations of our Church, the same gospel with its transforming power that made the difference in the lives of our

heroes like Thomas Cranmer, William Wilberforce, the Clapham brothers and Ajayi Crowther.

- Because we are convinced that Gafcon is a veritable tool within the Communion which God is using to bring together all who are concerned not only about the need to preserve the faith, but also to persevere and bequeath a legacy of wholesome, undiluted faith to future generations of Anglicans. It is God's gift to the Anglican Communion and to the world.

- To draw fresh inspiration to enable us to 'contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints' both for our sake and for the sake of future generations of Anglicans.

- Because we want to renew our commitment to our sacred duty to preserve and proclaim uncompromisingly, the undistorted word of God written to a sinful and fragmented world. Gafcon is a meeting of ordained and lay leaders concerned about the mission of the Church and how best to carry it out and be poised to address the ever-present challenges of self-reliance, good governance, overcoming corruption and to prepare a strong and stable platform for upcoming generations.

- Yes, Gafcon offers fresh hope for a meaningful spiritual haven for orthodox Anglicans who can no longer hold out and be truly Anglican under revisionist leadership.

- We are here because we know that in God's providence Gafcon will liberate and set participants [particularly Africans] free from spiritual bondage which TEC and its Allies champion. Having survived the inhuman physical slavery of the 19th century, the political slavery called colonialism of the 20th century, the developing world economic enslavement, we cannot, we dare not allow ourselves and the millions we represent be kept in religious and spiritual dungeon.

- Because we know that together as lay leaders, clergy and bishops of our Church we can banish the errors plaguing our beloved Communion-for we will not abdicate our God-given responsibility and simply acquiesce to destructive modern cultural and political dictates.

- We are here because we know that in spite of the fractures in our Communion, as orthodox Anglicans, we have a future and so we are here in the holy land to inaugurate and determine the roadmap to that future.

And from what better place in the world could we take the fullest advantage of the most powerful reminders of the life and ministry of our Lord and only Savior Jesus the Christ than here in the holy land where he was born, grew up, served; was killed, rose again for our justification, ascended to heaven and now seated at the right hand of God the Father, interceding for us.

It was here in the holy land that our Lord Jesus the Christ of God gave the command to go and proclaim the sacred message of salvation and to disciple those who believe. From here, brethren, the recipient Church in the power of the Holy Spirit went out to the world and began the gradual process of its transformation.

So far, I have tried to address the whole question of 'why and how' we got to where we are in the life of our beloved Anglican Communion. The challenge we must now address is, where do we go from here and what is the roadmap for that journey? As we participate in the various workshops and plenary sessions, I ask that we give some prayerful consideration to the following questions:

In the light of the fact that the Communion is in a state of brokenness in fellowship and sacrament, are we reconcilable; is there anything that can be done which has not been articulated for the restoration of sacramental Communion?

A sizeable part of the Communion is in error and not a few are apostate; is the Communion correctable from within or must it be from without?

A growing number of our people are already talking about what they call 'unavoidable realignment' for the rescue operation within the Communion; is that the best way forward and if not, what are the alternatives?

To some, Gafcon is the metamorphosis of Capa and the Global south. Is it? Put in another way, what is the place of Capa and the Global south which historically antedate Gafcon in an all-embracing and truly global Gafcon?

We know that the expert 'divide and rule' agents of TEC and Lambeth have been at work using money and other attractions to buy 'silence and compromise' from some gullible African and Global South Church leaders; hence we have begun to see signs of disunity in our ranks. How do we forestall this danger in Gafcon?

Can we here begin to discern the content and nature of that future we long to see and work for as Anglicans?

What sort of recognizable structure and funding must Gafcon as a 'movement' in the Communion have to be able to achieve the tasks set for it?

As I conclude let the world be informed that be it by birth or by conversion the men and women in Gafcon are people who have grown to be Anglican Christians by conviction, upholding the tenets of Anglican biblical orthodoxy. We have no other place to go nor is it our intention to start another church. Anglicans we are, Anglicans we'll remain until the LORD shall return in glory to judge each one according to his deeds.

And finally fellow pilgrims it goes without saying that we have committed so much prayer and material resources to this conference and pilgrimage. We have not come here to fantasies or day dream. This is the land in which the LORD our God manifested his glory and power in concrete actions in empirical history.

The program, painstakingly designed with you in mind, is therefore fairly elaborate with variety of activities such as pilgrimage to holy sites, liturgical worship, devotional prayer sessions, workshops, Bible study and several plenary sessions. I urge you; please make Gafcon a worthwhile event. Be involved. Be punctual in attending all sessions. Participate fully and actively. Only by so doing can we together this week here in the holy land, come up with practical, realistic and actionable decisions that will honor God and bring blessing to our Communion. Let us walk, work and pray together here in Jerusalem to inaugurate that glorious future of the Anglican Communion.

And now to the King Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God be all honor, glory, dominion and majesty, for ever and ever. Amen.

---