

## Preface

Not the least of my problems in writing this book was the choice of its title. To hit on a suitably arresting phrase or word that would neatly and accurately encapsulate my argument, without simultaneously releasing a shoal of red herrings, proved surprisingly difficult. After much thought, I eventually chose the words printed on the title page.

“Eirenicon” is not a word in common or frequent use. Its very unfamiliarity may have sent some prospective readers to their dictionaries. If yours happens to be the *Concise Oxford*, you will find it defined there as “a proposal tending to make peace”. That word, qualified by “Anglican” (for that is what I am and what is distinctive about the book) gave me exactly what I was looking for.

I realise, of course – how could I not? – that, in present circumstances, to launch a book with such a title is to invite derision. It will be said: “For Anglicans, of all people, who notoriously can’t agree about anything, to offer an eirenicon is a total absurdity.” The Anglican Communion, to borrow the title of a book by Stephen Bates published in 2003, is *A Church at War* – at war with itself. And that, if a sensational, is not an unfair description. If the Church of England, mother church of the world-wide Anglican Communion, is *plausibly* to put forward a proposal to make peace, it must surely first address *itself*, try to heal its *own* self inflicted wounds, to bridge its deep ideological/theological divisions. They are reminiscent of the party factions in the apostolic Church of Corinth in New Testament times which shocked St. Paul (see 1 Corinthians 1-3).

A particularly daunting difficulty in the C. of E. today is that we Anglicans have become so inured to our long standing party divisions, that we are only too apt to take them for granted, almost unnoticed, as part of our inherited environment – so much so in fact that we can hardly bear the thought of parting with them, can scarcely imagine Anglican

life without them. We have come to cherish what we smugly like to call our “diversity”, a word dear to some of our less thoughtful bishops.

But that is not the case with the current rifts in our world-wide Communion. Their gravity first became widely apparent in the bitter shenanigans at the (1998) Lambeth Conference; it was the first time since these ten yearly gatherings from across the world began in 1867 that such scenes have marred their harmony. In the troubled decade which followed, culminating in Lambeth 2008, the patient, prayerful and persistent diplomacy of two sharply different Archbishops of Canterbury has succeeded in preventing formal schism. But the regrettable impatience of a group of conservative evangelical prelates, mostly from Africa, precipitated the next worst thing – a rival, breakaway conference in the Holy Land under the specious slogan of Global Anglican Future – GAFCON. This has created new tensions. All efforts, if only to agree to disagree, deserve the prayerful support of all sensible Anglicans. This book is not intended in any way as a criticism of the efforts of those working for peace.

I am (I hope) not so conceited or foolish as to imagine that where such strenuous efforts, through no fault of their own, have failed, I have found some magic formula, pretentiously dressed up as an “eirenicon”, which, hey presto, will do the trick! Instead, what I am offering here is nothing slick or clever, but simply a rather different *approach*, and a long-term one at that, based upon a long lifetime’s experience, observation and reflection in the remote rural backwoods of the Church of England.

This new approach will be by way of a gadget and a technique the very existence of which is sure to be new to readers. The gadget is called an ecclesimeter and the technique as well as the *purpose* of using it, ecclesimetry. This, by some accounted the art, by others the science of accurately gauging the churchmanship of an individual or parish, is obviously a matter of precision. You are not obliged to believe in its existence, but if you are prepared to suspend disbelief it will help. You will, I trust, be braced and ready for a gruelling trawl, in successive chapters of the four basic aspects of churchmanship, one by one, enabling us to complete a positive reformulation of churchmanship as an invaluable peacemaking tool.

If that does turn out to be the case, as I believe it will, its uses will not be confined to bringing peace and harmony within the Anglican fold. Our attention must turn as well to the wider ecumenical field. For not only is the Anglican Communion, and, within it, the Church of England at present bitterly divided within itself, and hampered thereby from bearing effective witness to the Gospel, but – if we substitute “deeply” for “bitterly” – so is the entire Christian world.

If we include the Great Schism between the Latin, Catholic West and the Greek and Slavonic Orthodox East, going back with a few breaks to 1054, this has been the case for nearly a thousand years. We in the West look back to the disruption of the sixteenth century Reformation and the later breaks *within* the Protestant world, almost all of which remain unresolved. To Paul's anguished question, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1 v.13) the sad, reluctant reply has to be, "Yes".

In this respect, the last (20<sup>th</sup>) century witnessed what we must surely see as the decisive turning of the tide. From small but significant beginnings in 1910 with the International Missionary Conference at Edinburgh and the associated work of the Student Christian Movement, *divergence* began to be replaced by *convergence*. The Lambeth 1920 Appeal to All Christian People marked a further stage in the development of the Ecumenical Movement, hailed by William Temple as "the great new fact of our era". The largest Christian Communion, the Roman Catholic Church, stood aloof, until with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) called by Pope John XXIII, this changed and Rome began to cooperate. In the 1970's and early '80's hopes ran high, with a genuine *rapprochement* between the Anglicans and Rome marked by a reciprocal visit at the highest level and the official setting up of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the constructive interchanges that followed in succeeding years. It even seemed that the recognised ultimate goal of visible Christian Unity/Reunion, was attainable. For various reasons, in the late 1980's and 1990's these hopes faded. We seemed to have run out of steam, to have reached an impasse. This remains so today. Yet some hopeful signs are not lacking.

In these circumstances a unified Christian churchmanship incorporating the positive essence of each of the four distinctive and *complementary* positions, such as I advocate in this book, could and should be a deciding factor in breaking the current ecumenical deadlock and opening the way to *some* form, not of artificial monolithic uniformity, but of genuine visible Christian *unity in diversity*, safeguarding all integrities and undergirded by universal intercommunion.

If this is indeed attainable as a practical possibility by the action of the Holy Spirit of Truth, Wisdom, Reason and Love, a *further* prospect beckons – the eventual coming together of the three great monotheistic "Abrahamic" faiths, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, under the sovereignty of the unique and universal Son of God, the Head of redeemed humanity who laid down his life for us *all* and lives and reigns for all eternity. Such is the argument considered in its complexity and underlying simplicity, of the concluding chapters.

That then is the intended scope of this book. Who are envisaged as its readers? I have endeavoured in writing it as far as possible to avoid technical language – dare I call it jargon? – so often found in academic theology and so off-putting to the general reader, in the hope of making it as widely accessible as possible. You will judge the extent of my failure or success.

In conclusion I wish to express my warmest thanks and appreciation to all who have given me their encouragement. I can now reveal that three or four years ago I completed an earlier version which I called *Beyond a Joke: A Study in Ecclesiology*. It was an injudicious mélange of the serious and the frivolous that didn't "work". I was trying to be too clever and I had not sufficiently thought through my ideas and their implications. I submitted it to two publishers and they turned it down – to my (subsequent) relief. They were entirely right to do so. I then decided on a further programme of serious reading and hard thinking with the intention of eventually rewriting it as an entirely serious project, but leaving room for light relief. I am deeply grateful to *all* to whom I submitted the original draft, *Beyond a Joke*, for their candid opinions – not least to those who frankly told me they couldn't make head or tail of it!

But some there were who thought it had real possibilities. Among them were my revered old mentor and friend the late Professor C.F.D. Moule, Ronald Blythe, literary critic of distinction and author of *Akenfield* and *Word from Wormingford* and much else, my cousin and godson, John Brian Lott, an old friend Audrey Serreau of Poitiers, France, and Dr. Pamela Tudor-Craig, Lady Wedgwood, friend and art historian. To them all I record my sincere thanks. They are in no way responsible for the present recension, which is all my own work. Pray God it may prove useful.

I cannot conclude this Preface without the warmest and most grateful tribute to Maureen Barsby of Long Melford, Suffolk. From the very inception of this project she has faithfully transformed reams of my untidy longhand into elegant print. Without her unfailing patience and cheerful good humour it could never have got off the ground.

To this I must add a word of warm appreciation for the strenuous efforts of my publisher's editorial staff in preparing my script for publication.

Great Yeldham, 29 December 2008  
J.A.F.