Hearing the Echo

Speech delivered by Alice C. Linsley at the International Catholic Congress of Anglicans

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Thank you for that lovely introduction, Bishop Hewett. Of all the introductions I have received, that is by far the most recent.

I would like to begin by expressing our thanks to those who served us this meal. Mr. Ernesto Perez and his wait staff have served us well all week. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Isn’t it amazing that about 300 of us Anglicans had dinner together and we agreed on only two choices?

When it comes to food, I’m in favor of dual integrities!

I wish to express gratitude to our patrons: Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali and Bishop Keith Ackerman, two faithful leaders in whom Christ’s light shines. They, and many others here who faithfully serve Christ in His Church, are a great inspiration.

It is a pleasure to be at this gathering of Christ-followers in the Anglican Way. I am thankful for the thoughtful and stimulating engagement we have found here this week. May our conversations continue beyond this Congress be edifying and may we find ways to strengthen our bonds of affection.

I am humbled to have been asked to speak, though I do so with some apprehension. You see, the last time I spoke at a Forward in Faith sponsored conference I was in Melbourne, Australia and shortly thereafter that FiF chapter folded.

Many of the FiF Australia leaders went to the Ordinariate, leaving a leadership vacuum. Perhaps we can take a lesson from that turn of events that will enable us to strengthen the witness of Forward in Faith in our home regions. Ideally, there must be no more draining away of Anglican Traditionalists. Catholicity is salt that preserves and enhances our Anglican flavor. More catholic Anglicans are needed, though our perspective is often misunderstood and not always welcome.

Frankly, I do not understand the disdain some hold for Anglo-Catholicism and Anglican Traditionalists. Do they do not recognize how many Traditionalist Anglicans were the first to oppose the radical changes and have continued to fight the good fight for more than half a century? Anglican Traditionalists have been telling the truth about the Gospel and the priesthood because you care for people and you love the Church. I for one, thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am living proof that your witness bears fruit.

In seminary my Anglican Polity professor was Dr. Jeffrey Steenson, now Monsignor Steenson, and the first ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of Saint Peter, which provides for former Anglicans who have become Roman Catholics. At that time, he was at the Anglo-Catholic parish of Good Shepherd in Rosemont, Pennsylvania.

Dr. Steenson planted a seed of doubt about women priests in my mind when he challenged me to show him one example of a woman priest in the Bible. Of course, I couldn't. The best I could do was to trot out the casuistry of feminist theologians, and even then I recognized the poverty of their scholarship.

Dear Dr. Steenson was *persona non grata* in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania where I was ordained in 1988. That is the same diocese that put forward Barbara Harris, the first African American female bishop, Geralyn Wolf, the first female bishop to have converted from Judaism, and Mary Glasspool, the first partnered lesbian bishop. I knew them all and had conversed with them on more than one occasion. Their perspectives on the priesthood were informed by feminism and Process Theology. Our paths diverged dramatically once I began to consider questions about the origin and nature of the priesthood from the perspective of anthropology.

It is remarkable that the Diocese of Pennsylvania even considered me for the priesthood since I was far more a traditionalist than the other women. In retrospect, I see that it happened exactly because of ECUSA's on-going radicalization and growing intolerance. The parish that put me forward for ordination was the Church of the Good Samaritan in Paoli, Pennsylvania. It was the evangelical flagship at that time and the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania was glad to have that parish contribute a woman for its latest celebrated cause. Besides that, Good Samaritan was the mission founded by Good Shepherd, Rosemont, and my approval was a slap in the face to Fr. Steenson and all that he represented.

All the more wonder then that Dr. Steenson should have been so patient with this sinner, inviting me to a service of the Blessed Benediction, and helping me to understand some of the deeper mysteries of our Eucharistic faith.

My sympathies were always with the Anglican Traditionalists, even as a priest. However, in those early years I didn't understand how my being at the altar caused confusion, nor did I recognize the inherent dangers of this innovation. Bishop Nazir-Ali touched on some of those dangers in this excellent talk on “The Necessity of Unity in Truth for the Church’s Mission.”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our Great High Priest. The Church is His bride. One day there will be a great wedding feast and our Lord and King will then be enthroned forever and His Queen, the Church, will also be exalted. Christ is the head of the Church. He is kephalē, the master and the husband in relation to the Church. To speak of Jesus Christ and the Church in any other terms is to set forth an errant Christology. We do so when we place females at the altar.

If that is not explicit enough, we should remember that the Greek word ke-phalē is related to the Greek word phallōs, a reference to the male reproductive organ.

During my six years in the Antiochian Orthodox Church I came to appreciate the power of images. To those who ask me about women’s ordination, I pose this question: “Were we to contemplate the Blessed Mother of Christ and the Incarnation, would we place before our eyes a masculine image? Why then would we place before us a feminine image in the contemplation of Christ our Great High Priest giving Himself to us and for us?

As Anglicans in the Catholic Faith, we recognize the distinction between adoration as worship and veneration as giving honor where honor is due, especially to the Blessed Theotokos. This distinction between worship and veneration is one that I understand as an anthropologist. However, this distinction is not widely recognized among Protestants who have a tendency to iconoclasm. Yet they understand the value of images in social media, in stained glass, in the image of the Cross, and in textbooks. Veneration is something that Anglicans must learn if we are to experience the fullness of the communion of saints. Further, we will be blessed in showing the proper honor to the Blessed Woman of Genesis 3:15, the Mother of Christ our God.

I wonder if some Anglicans accept women at the altar as a sort of compensation for the lack of female imagery in the churches. Would this be corrected were Anglican churches to have a central icon of the Blessed Theotokos, as is done in the Orthodox churches? What if we too were to celebrate the “holy myhrr-bearing women” who were the first witnesses to the Resurrection? Have the women of our parishes heard that the Bible is essentially the story of the Woman who would conceive and bring forth the Seed who would crush the serpent's head? Are they aware that the Prayer of Humble Access alludes to a woman who Christ commended for her faith?

Catholic Anglicans uphold the faith once delivered, and the integrity of the all-male priesthood. We value the historic liturgical tradition of the Anglican Way. We understand that Anglican orders are valid and of greater antiquity than generally recognized. The apostolic order of priests was already established in Britain by 44 A.D and there is much archaeological, anthropological and linguistic evidence linking its founding to the Christ-following members of the Sanhedrin who alone were qualified to ordain priests.

Catholic Anglicans are not afraid to face reality and speak against the lies of our time. In his recent Pastoral letter, Bishop Paul Hewett made is profound observation: *“It is an illusion to believe that same sex marriage or ordination of women or abortion or divorce on demand can in any way promote justice or freedom or equality for victim groups. Illusion, as with addictive behaviours, solves nothing, but is in fact a slippery slope to infinite unraveling, infinite unreality, infinite unlife, and ever less being.”*

Our primary obligation is to uphold and defend the whole of that sacred deposit and sacred order that has been delivered to us by our faithful ancestors who gave their lives, often as martyrs, to preserve the unity of the Church in Truth.

Catholic Anglicans have a special role to play in the revitalization of Anglicanism worldwide. We have a responsibility to oppose feminism, process theology, reductionism, fundamentalism, and iconoclasm. Fundamentalist readings of sacred texts such as the Torah, the New Testament, or the Quran tend to result in iconoclasm. In the past year we have seen tragic examples of this with Islamic fundamentalist smashing statues and destroying icons in Iraq and Syria.

Anglican catholics are duty-bound to stand at the crossroads and direct others to the ancient paths. The Prophet Jeremiah received this message from God: This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." (Jer. 6:16)

But the people said, "We will **not** walk in it."

In refusing to walk in the ancient paths, people have become lost. The disorientation is so great that they no longer know good from evil, truth from falsehood. They have no idea how far they have wandered from their Creator's boundless love.

If there is one concern that I hope we all share it is that the Anglican Way be God’s way; that Anglicans walk along the tried and true paths, and that our Bishops exercise true spiritual authority in leading us. One threat to this is the temptation to create a designer church or to seek to reproduce the late great Episcopal Church. No new ground can be won by facing backward. We have entered upon a great adventure as pioneers on a new frontier.

I come from Kentucky, the land of Daniel Boone, a trail-blazing frontiersman. It was through the Kentucky wilderness that the explorers Lewis and Clark journeyed on their way to the Pacific. Just as the frontiersmen of Kentucky followed the ancient trails shown to them by the native Americans, so let us pioneer a path that corresponds to the old way. Let us walk the trail that is well known by the natives of our catholic Faith.

We have the road map within us by virtue of our baptism into Jesus Christ. Baptism marks the beginning of our Christian profession and provides the structure and framework for the whole of our common life as disciples and disciple-makers.

***So We yield thee hearty thanks most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate us with thy Holy Spirit, to receive us for thy own children by adoption, and to incorporate us into thy holy Church.***

In Baptism, we are buried into Christ, receiving the seed of immortality. This enables us to hear the Gospel and see the reality of God in our lives. St. Cyril of Jerusalem said:

*"See, I pray you, how great a dignity Jesus bestows on you. You were called a Catechumen, while the word echoed round you from without; hearing of hope, and knowing it not; hearing mysteries, and not understanding them; hearing Scriptures, and not knowing their depth. The echo is no longer around you, but within you; for the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:9, 11) henceforth makes your mind a house of God. When you have heard what is written concerning the mysteries, then you will understand things which you knew not."* From the Catechetical Lectures

Consider the physics of sound waves. If you shout in a large canyon the sound will reflect off of the solid canyon walls and you will hear an echo. If the canyon wall is more than about 56 feet or 17 meters from where you are standing, the sound wave will take more than 0.1 seconds to reflect and return to you. The echo is proof that something is there of substance and solidity. The echo is proof also that something massive is at a distance from us. The echo of which St. Cyril speaks is proof of the substance of the Gospel or more accurately, proof of the Word Incarnate, who is the very heart of the Christian faith which we have a duty to preserve.

On the other hand, if you are near the wall, as for example, in a shower stall, when you shout no echo is heard. The echo in the canyon tells us that we are still a distance away from God, but God is there and very real. Writing to the Ephesians, St. Paul explains: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” St Cyril tells us that the Baptized receive the echo within them. The echo is heard inwardly and “then you will understand things which you knew not.”

The echo confirms absolutely the existence of Christ our God, but it cannot tell us His Nature, for that is a matter of revealed truth and we find that in the Scriptures by which God has superintended the preservation of the oldest known religious hope, what we call Messianic expectation; the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From of old, long before the time of Abraham, there was expectation in the ancient world of a Righteous Ruler who would overcome death and lead his people to immortality. The American mythologist, Joseph Campbell, calls this the "Monomyth" and anthropological studies of the widely dispersed peoples in the R1 Haplogroup confirms the spread of this expectation.

There is an important principle in anthropological investigation. That principle states: The more widely dispersed globally a culture trait, a practice or a belief, the older it is. So how old is Messianic expectation? It was already well established among the widely dispersed ruler-priests by 3500 B.C. This means that the core of our Christian Faith is the oldest known religion in the world.

Today the Church is the single entity that preserves the hope of bodily resurrection through the agency of the Righteous Ruler, the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

***And humbly we beseech thee to grant, that we being dead to sin, and living to righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin; and that we be made partakers of his resurrection; so that finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, we may be inheritors of thine everlasting kingdom; Through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

The Church's mission is to baptize into this hope, nurture in this hope, and equip disciple-making disciples to share this hope. We need well trained clergy for that mission. We need well catechized laity for that mission. That means exploring creative means of theological education for all who seek it. And there is something more that needs to be done, something that the Church did very well in the past, but which it has failed to do in modern times. We must help people learn to discern truth from falsehood. We are bombarded by lies daily. The Church is the single entity that is able to identify lies and speak against the often subtle and sophisticated falsehoods that confront us.

I see a great deal of pseudo-science and half-truths among anthropologists who disdain religion in general and Christianity in particular. Their scholarship is like a map out of which numerous holes have been cut. Is it any wonder that so few anthropologists are people of faith? In the universities they are never shown the whole map. They miss the trails that lead to verification of the core of Christian belief and the veracity of Scripture.

The Church can help seekers to discern distinctions, to think critically and constructively, and to recognize and honor God-established boundaries because these are real. Spiritual purity is distinct from spiritual impurity. The Son did not die to make us semi-pure. There is a realness to this distinction that the world cannot grasp.

Likewise, God did not create a gender continuum. Male and female is a real distinction.

God is real. By virtue of our baptism we recognize God's realness as an echo. In our confirmation, we make a mature commitment to our baptismal covenant, and by the laying on of the bishop’s hands with prayer, God strengthens the work of the Holy Spirit in us for the daily increase of divine grace in our lives and ministries.

The echo to which St. Cyril refers confirms absolutely the existence of Christ our God, but it cannot tell us His Nature, for that is a matter of divine revelation and we find that in the Scriptures by which God has superintended the preservation of the oldest known religious hope that the Divine One would come to our aid and deliver us from sin and death.

I’ve been told that Process Theology ruled the day at Lambeth 2008 under the guise of indaba. As an anthropologist I have studied many African cultural practices, and I know that indaba could never work at Lambeth. Indaba pertains to problem resolution in a village where everyone is a blood relative and where the first priority of all involved is the preservation of the oneness of the community. It is quite evident that Lambeth failed to preserve the oneness of the Anglican worldwide community. Certainly right-believing Anglicans were not fooled by the controlled conversations that directed people away from resolution. The “endless conversation” was designed to obfuscate, not clarify, the real issues. The reflections revealed “elasticity” of doctrine, driven by a desire to accommodate secular culture.

Colin Johnson, Bishop of Toronto, while at Lambeth said that he comes from a community with "a very large lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual population” and he was determined through Indaba to keep that in the conversation. Frustration was high as it was evident that no progress was being made, despite the window dressing to make it seem that there was progress.

Bishop Mouneer Anis described Lambeth as a "*great wall being put up by the revisionists*" and said that the Communion's divisions over homosexuality are symptomatic of "a much deeper illness." The Church has become infected with a deadly cancer, and as is often the case with cancer, the disease is not recognized until in the later stages. People just go on as if there were nothing wrong. That is what happened in the Episcopal Church.

Upon his return from Lambeth, M. Thomas Shaw, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, said that he would continue to ordain gay clergy, and gave the nod to the clergy of his diocese to continue to bless same-sex partnerships. Nothing that happened at Lambeth made him aware of his terminal illness.

We should not be discouraged by this depressing tale from our recent past. From the beginning, the Church has been "sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." This Congress is modeled on the great Anglo-Catholic Congresses in England in the early 20th century. It is to be a prophetic call to return to the Fathers, with renewed commitment to the Gospel, the extension of the Kingdom, and the cure souls, ministering to rich and poor alike, throughout the world. It is hoped that we might let our Lord form His mind in His Church, so that we as Anglicans overcome our ecclesiastical deficits and grow in the mind of Christ.

There are some who look back with yearning to a time when the Church was undivided. With apologies, especially to my Eastern Orthodox sisters and brothers, if we are honest, we must admit that the church has never been undivided. St. Paul warned the churches about factions based on personalities.

St. Basil the Great, in his treatise On the Holy Spirit, directed these words against the Arians:

*“Just as a hunter hides his traps, or an ambush of soldiers camouflages itself, so these questioners spew forth elaborately constructed inquiries, not really hoping to learn anything useful from them, because unless you agree with them and give them the answer they want, they imagine that they are fully entitled to stir up a raging controversy.”*

Blessed Basil also wrote: *“Every man is a theologian; it does not matter that his soul is covered with more blemishes than can be counted. The result is that these innovators find an abundance of men to join their factions. So ambitious, self-elected men divide the government of the churches among themselves, and reject the authority of the Holy Spirit. The ordinances of the Gospel have been thrown into confusion everywhere for lack of discipline; the jostling for high positions is incredible, as every ambitious man tries to thrust himself into high office. The result of this lust for power is that wild anarchy prevails among the people; the exhortations of those in authority are rendered utterly void and unprofitable, since every man in his arrogant delusion thinks that it is more his business to give orders to others than to obey anyone himself.”*

In Letter 90, St. Basil wrote: “The dogmas of the Fathers are held in contempt, the Apostolic traditions are disdained, the churches are subject to the novelties of innovators.” This he wrote to “To the Most Holy Brethren and Bishops Found in the West” whose authority he recognized.

Though there always have been divisions in the church, there is unity in our future. Our spiritual unity is in Christ and will be fully evident in the eschaton, and this is of the Lord’s doing. Our mission is to be the Church in love with her Lord and Master. Now the Church suffers, but the mystery hidden for the ages is being made manifest for all the world to witness. Our suffering is his suffering. “Yet saints their watch are keeping. Their cry goes up ‘How long?’ And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.”

Until that day, C. S. Lewis reminds us what needs to be done. In God in the Dock, He wrote:

“We are to defend Christianity itself — the faith preached by the apostles, attested by the Martyrs, embodied in the Creeds, expounded by the Fathers. This must be clearly distinguished from the whole of what any one of us may think about God and Man. Each of us has his individual emphasis: each holds, in addition to the Faith, many opinions which seem to him to be consistent with it and true and important. And so perhaps they are. But as apologists it is not our business to defend them. We are defending Christianity; not my religion.”

Innovators love to talk about God as if God were mutable. One of the errors of Process Theology, as expounded by Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, is that God is affected by temporal processes and is "becoming" alongside humanity. What bunk! The very order of Creation makes it evident that there is a distinction between the Creator and the creation, between God and Man, between heaven and earth. That is why the Lord taught us to pray that the Father's will be done on earth as in heaven.

Talking God into our own image is to lose our identity, our very being. God is not what we imagine or want God to be. We have no power to make God in our image. Nor can we make ourselves anything other than what God created us. It is arrogant self-delusion to think otherwise. Such spiritual hubris plays out to its logical end in the tragic lives of Bruce Jenner, a man who styles himself as a woman, and Rachel Dolezal, a white woman who styles herself as a black woman.

I spoke before about how my research in Biblical Anthropology helped me detect the deficiencies and falsehoods of Feminism and Process Theology. It also helped me to see the inadequacies of reductionism. Anthropology is the enemy of reductionism. The danger of reductionism is that it always misleads us. There are many examples of reductionism among Christians: Luther's interpretation of 1 Peter 2:9 by which he concludes that all baptized people are priests; the Protestant theory of Sola Scriptura, Young Earth Creationism, etc.

Secular reductionists attribute religious beliefs to non-religious causes. Some view religious faith as a by-product of human evolution. In this view religion enhances survivability for members of a group and so is reinforced by natural selection. Others reduce the religious impulse to superstition, as a way to explain the inexplicable. Religious reductionism views divine law as merely Man's attempt to determine conceptions of right and wrong.

There is also the psychological view that religion is a way to cope with our anxieties. This view actually has some basis in Scripture because all the evidence suggests that the priesthood emerged among Abraham's ancestors out of a need to address blood guilt. The primitive principle is one we recognize as animal sacrifice; blood for blood. And the sacred law that already existed among Abraham's ancestors pertained in large part to blood; for life is in the blood. In the Biblical worldview, blood both pollutes and makes clean. Ancient law codes, such as the Law of Tehut which existed long before the code of Hammurabi, addressed transgressions of boundaries between God and Man and between the individual and his neighbor, and between the individual and his community.

At the June ACNA conference Archbishop Foley Beach called for Anglicans to be a repentant, reconciling, reproducing, and compassionate. To this list, I would add conciliar catholicity, because this is the glue that holds us together.

Recently an Anglican theologian noted that, "C.S. Lewis and Dorothy Sayers were closer to the Anglo-Catholic end of things than the Evangelical wing." That statement implies a spectrum within Anglicanism. However, this theological range has definite boundaries at both ends. Anyone who crosses the boundary on either side, abandons the Apostolic Faith and cannot rightly claim to be Anglican.

Anglican ritual does not make one catholic, as Bishop Hensley Henson makes clear in his Cui bono? (1899) against Anglican ritualists. Henson viewed the "doctrinal incoherence" of Anglicanism to have "roots in something far more respectable than an indolent acquiescence in undiscipline or a reprehensible indifference to truth. It reflects the reluctance of considering and responsible English Churchmen to thrust the rough hand of authority into the sphere of religious opinion."

And see to what state of disarray we have come because of this!

Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, "Christianity without a Church exercising spiritual authority is vanity and dissolution."

Bishop Hensen posed this significant and probing question to Lord Halifax: “Apart from all questions of ecclesiastical theory, and considering only the practical worth of that authority of the ‘undivided Church’ to which High Churchman so frequently and so confidently appeal, can it be denied that we are little helped by an authority… which is wholly silent on many subjects of modern perplexity?”

Beloved of Christ, the Church must engage the lost world. The Church can no longer afford to remain silent as the world spirals into madness. This means that bishops must deliberate and they must act. Bishops who exercise true spiritual authority always lead the people in the catholic way, a way that needs no reforming, and no course adjustment as attempted by Protestant interpreters of the 39 Articles.

To what advantage do some insist that the Articles of Religion are our Anglican confession? The Articles had gone through a number of revisions before 1571 and were appreciated by the Catholic minded because of the strength of their arguments against Anabaptists. The 1571 Canon requiring subscription to the Articles instructs the clergy “not to teach anything except what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and what the Catholic Fathers and the ancient Bishops have collected from the same doctrine.”

The Articles alone have never served to stiffen the resolve of Anglican bishops to “trust the rough hand of authority” when it came to heresy. That resolve comes from commitment to the Apostolic Faith, expressed in the Creeds, contained in Scripture, and delineated by the Church Fathers. We are to interpret the Articles of Religion according to the ancient Fathers and not vice versa. Using the 39 Articles as a confession taken out of the context of the Patristic Consensus produces a distortion of The Anglican Way.

In this day when those in the pews look to our Bishops for clear and unambiguous leadership in the face of heresy and apostasy, catholicity must we understood as natural to the Church. The true Church is always and everywhere repentant, reconciling, reproducing, compassionate, conciliar and catholic. These qualities make the Church effective in a world gone mad.

I am reminded of something G.K. Chesterton wrote in The Ball and the Cross:

*Christianity is always out of fashion because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. ...The Church always seems to be behind the times, when it is really beyond the times; it is waiting till the last fad shall have seen its last summer. It keeps the key of a permanent virtue.*

As the realignment and revitalization of Anglicans worldwide continues there is less stench of death and decay. We find common ground in a permanent virtue: the changeless Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit we are becoming the fragrance of Christ's resurrection, a testament to the power of the Lord, the Giver of Life, who makes a sick body whole and raises the dead to life.

My brothers and sisters in the Lord, be encouraged! A marvelous day is coming when the Church will be presented to the Divine Bridegroom wholesome, pure and adorned in glory.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

The Rt. Rev. Eric Menees, Bishop of San Joachin, closed with this prayer of Archbishop William Laud:

O gracious Father,

we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church;

that thou wouldest be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace.

Where it is corrupt, purify it;

where it is in error, direct it;

where in any thing it is amiss, reform it.

Where it is right, establish it;

where it is in want, provide for it;

where it is divided, reunite it;

for the sake of him who died and rose again,

and ever liveth to make intercession for us,

Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

Amen.