

## **Holding onto the Works of Love: A Response to Ephraim Radner and ACI on the Anglican Communion**

By Michael Poon

*“Which deception is most dangerous? Whose recovery is more doubtful, that of him who does not see or of him who sees and still does not see? . . . To cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception; it is an eternal loss for which there is no reparation, either in time or in eternity.” (Søren Kierkegaard, Works of Love, Part I, Chapter 1.)*

I thank Dr Radner for responding to my article on the Global South Anglican website [How much is the Global South worth: Response to the Anglican Communion Institute on GC2006.](#)

I am happy that Dr Radner agrees with me the Primates’ Meeting is now the “most natural” and “effective center of decision-making within the Communion”. Yet, he misreads me by suggesting that my main interest is on power politics and power redistribution – “who controls the power-levers”, and not putting “our eggs in [the same] basket”. This would seriously misunderstand the present crisis. I have made this clear in my earlier articles [Striving for the Soul of the Communion: It is not a World Cup Football Match](#) and [On Being Servants for the Greater Cause: A Response to Stephen Noll on Rowan Cantuar.](#)

To borrow Kierkegaard’s phrase, Christian life is about “the works of love”: the works of love we as a Communion have received from Jesus Christ, and how we together should love God and our neighbours as ourselves. I suggest this is the “corporate gifts” and “hard work of the past” that we should not “squander”, to use Dr Radner’s words. The point for discussion is this. Has the Communion been holding onto the works of love? And, what should be our present tasks of love?

My purpose in this essay is to continue this conversation in public with Dr Radner, and invite him to explore how we can hold onto the “works of love”.

### **Has the Communion been holding onto the works of love?**

Radner speaks out against unilateral actions that “leave behind the hard work of the past”. He suggests the Global South is squandering the corporate gifts of the Communion.

What “corporate gifts”, I wonder? The Global South has been insisting all along the post-liberals in North America have let go of the central moorings of Christian faith and the Anglican heritage. They “squander” the faith that was once delivered to the saints. I am puzzled why Radner turns this around to say that it is the Global South that has become the culprit.

What Radner perhaps refer to is the hard work in structure building. He shows remarkable confidence in the present hierarchy at Lambeth and the Anglican Communion Office to solve the Communion ills. He contends the Global South is in danger of sidetracking the good course the Communion is now on. They have rocked the boat and disturbed the peace.

Let’s then reflect on the “spectacular emergence of the Communion”, using Radner’s words. What has it accomplished? What has it done to our Anglican heritage? How is it shaping the Anglican ethos?

In my earlier essays, I have suggested the present Communion structures are of recent origins. Let me summarise. The Communion underwent several structural changes in the past one hundred years. The earlier missionaries focused their energy in establishing local churches in

far-flung mission field. They did not consciously seek to form local “Anglican churches”. A deliberate shift occurred in the late nineteenth century. There were deliberate attempt – for example by the Church Missionary Society – to impose Anglican polity on local churches in the mission fields.

The self-understanding of the Communion also shifted in the last century. Up to the 1960s, it saw itself more as an instrument that furthered the eventual reunion of “Christendom”. Stephen Neill was possibly one of the last exponents of such vision. Since the end of the Second World War, new geopolitical dynamics began to shape the Anglican Communion. The Communion had to find an international role in the World Council of Churches. It refined itself along denominational lines. (See my articles in the GSA website: [Deliver us from Corporate Perversion: A Conversation with Drs Ephraim Radner and Graham Kings on the State of our Communion](#); and [Farewell to Babel: Rowan Cantuar as Servant of Unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Communion](#)).

The idea of “province” and “Canterbury” as we understand them is new. These institutions (as we now understand them) emerge out of a time of Communion-building that runs in parallel with nation-building in the wider world. To support my argument, let’s look at the dates of inauguration of the thirty-eight provinces of the Communion. (See Table I.) The Communion consisted of only ten provinces at the end of the Second World War – to be accurate, eleven, to include the now defunct Holy Catholic Church in China. Twenty-one of the thirty-eight provinces came into existence since 1969. Nine of them were formed since Lambeth 1988.

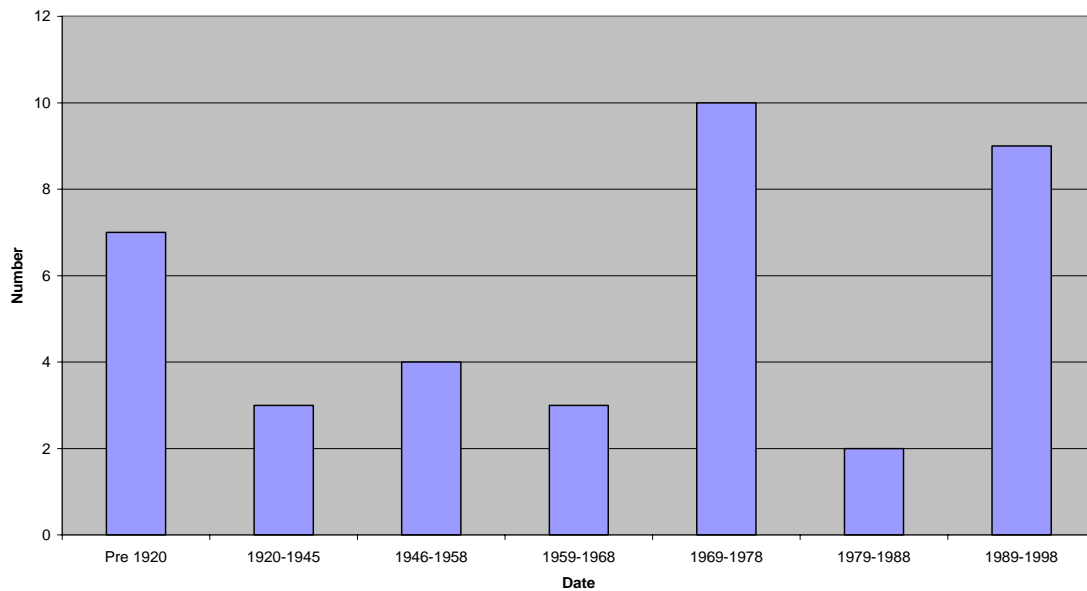
**Table 1: Date of Inauguration of Provinces**

(Compiled from information in the Anglican Communion Website, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* and Wikipedia)

Provinces	Date of Inauguration
Church of England	597(?)
The Episcopal Church in the USA	1784 (?)
The Church of the Province of Southern Africa	1853
The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand & Polynesia	1857
The Anglican Church of Canada	1862
The Church in the Province of the West Indies	1883
The Church of Ireland	1890 (?)
The Church in Wales	1920 (?)
The Scottish Episcopal Church	1929 (?)
The Nippon Sei Ko Kai	1930 (?)
The Church of South India	1947
The Church of the Province of West Africa	1953
The Church of the Province of Central Africa	1955
The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East	1957
The Church of the Province of Uganda	1961
The Anglican Church of Australia	1962
Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil	1965
The Anglican Church of Kenya	1970
The Church of the Province of Myanmar	1970
The Church of North India	1970
The Church of Pakistan	1970
The Anglican Church of Tanzania	1970
The Church of Bangladesh	1970

The Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean	1973
The Church of the Province of Melanesia	1975
The Anglican Province of Papua New Guinea	1976
The Episcopal Church of the Sudan	1976
The Church of Nigeria	1979
Iglesia Anglicana del Cono Sur de America	1981
The Episcopal Church in the Philippines	1990
The Anglican Church of Burundi	1992
Province de L'Eglise Anglicane Du Congo	1992
L'Eglise Episcopal au Rwanda	1992
The Anglican Church of Korea	1993
La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico	1995
Church of the Province of South East Asia	1996
Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America	1998
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui	1998

Dates of Formation of Provinces



Wait a minute, some may say. The Church of Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland would object to my dating of their provinces. Yet this proves my argument. The Anglican Communion website does not give the dates of inauguration of the more ancient provinces. This is not due to neglect, but because there wasn't a formal date by which these older churches "join" the Communion. Their histories were woven with the wider histories of Christianity, and did not fit nicely into the Communion structures anyway.

This also applies to the younger churches. They also have their own histories that predate their formal entry to the Communion. A church does not come into being because of top-down decisions from Lambeth, New York or elsewhere. Mission initiatives happened in haphazard and precarious ways at local levels. Anglican churches were not simply built by white Anglicans alone. Missionaries from other traditions and races contributed as much or more to their birth. For example, London Missionary Society Chinese recruits from Australia were instrumental in building up the Anglican Church in Hong Kong and South China. China Inland Mission worked closely with Church Missionary Society in Sichuan, China. The shifting fortunes in world politics also came into play. Political realignments brought once

united regions under separate episcopal jurisdictions. The Communion was never conceived by a pureblood Anglican ethos.

I mentioned earlier the past sixty years was a time of Communion-building. I did not only refer to the creation of ecclesiastical provinces. New instruments came into being to give a Communion a more focused identity. The office of Canterbury rose into prominence. More than this, subtle efforts arose especially since the 1990s. Issues that potentially could divide and split the Communion began to surface. For the first time, Lambeth faced a vocal Global South. Recall how in Lambeth 1948 Canterbury and the Communion machineries handled the uproar surrounding Florence Li's ordination. The ecclesiastical and political climates in the 1990s were different. Canterbury could no longer manage the Communion as extension of the Church of England's foreign affairs. He could not assume a letter or phone call to white bishops in some far-flung mission fields would solve the problems right away.

The hierarchies in Lambeth and the Communion Office from the 1990s then had to devise instruments to shape public opinion and negotiate the now multicultural Communion. Information technology and public media were obvious choice. This is why I referred elsewhere to the Anglican Communion website as the unrecognised fifth instrument of the Communion. It epitomises the array of public shaping devices that just "came out" in the 1990s – as the golden calf did (Exodus 32; 23-24) – to lead the Communion forward. The Communion was becoming impatient with discerning the Word of God. The obvious alternative was to make an icon to be the rallying point for the disorganised Communion. The Anglican Communion Office and the Secretary-General became important interpreters and gatekeepers of the Communion. Note too the glossy Anglican World magazine and the issuing of Archbishop of Canterbury photo-postcard. (I discovered this in a humorous incident, but it would be too uncharitable to share this in public.) We even have the Compass Rose Society to be the unofficial fund-raising arm in the Communion.

Notice all these happened before the present chair at Canterbury assumed office. These unspoken instruments took on a life of their own. How accountable are these instruments to the formal structures? Are they under the discipline of the Gospel? What do they say about our Communion? I am not aware there is any Protestant "denomination" that has fashioned such set of emperor new clothes as ours.

Dr Radner said: "I frankly do not care what structure we have so long as . . . together-in-prayer is the reflected result". I beg to differ. Structures do matter. They embody communal values and shape the character of public discourses. The crucial issue is that of authority. Peter Jensen pointed out that the crisis of the Communion "goes back to the authority of scripture and our willingness to be subservient to its teaching". (See *Crisis in the Communion: the Way Forward for Evangelicals. Have we a plan?*) I agree. The Global South leaders insist on this all along.

The Communion ethos based at Saint Andrew's House and New York needs radical cleansing. It creates a globalised rather than a catholic Communion. Far from it I am suggesting the Global South to have any share in controlling such power-levers. *Sola Scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers take on a new relevance today. This is what I am defending.

It is not an oversight that Canterbury and Anglican Communion forgot to appoint people outside the West to assume leadership. The present structures already biased the way how appointments are made. (See my earlier articles [\*Contrapuntal Notes to Rowan Cantuar's Music: A Response to the Consultation Paper on the Covenant Proposal of the Windsor Report, March 2006.\*](#))

If the runaway instruments remain unchecked, the Communion stands to lose some of the best people from the non-Western world. These instruments set back the hard work of our

forebears. Archbishop Yong Ping Chung is a case in point. Why a former chairperson of the Anglican Consultative Council and MISSIO would become one of the most vocal critics of the establishment in the Communion Office? We may wish to reflect on this. That happened again before the present “liberal” Archbishop of Canterbury assumed office.

### **Does our “hard work” ready us for the present challenges in mission?**

The Provinces outside the western world are of recent origins. These churches and their wider societies do not have mature infrastructures. Many are in abject poverty. These make them vulnerable to external influences. Jensen put it in the same article: “Sound and faithful churches of today may become the latest victim of liberalising cultural change tomorrow.” Those churches outside the West who enjoy economic prosperity may be able to join in the game in “controlling the power-levers”. These churches may also be in danger of becoming privatised and marginalised in their own societies. The recent Anglican ethos may well enfeeble them further in their mission.

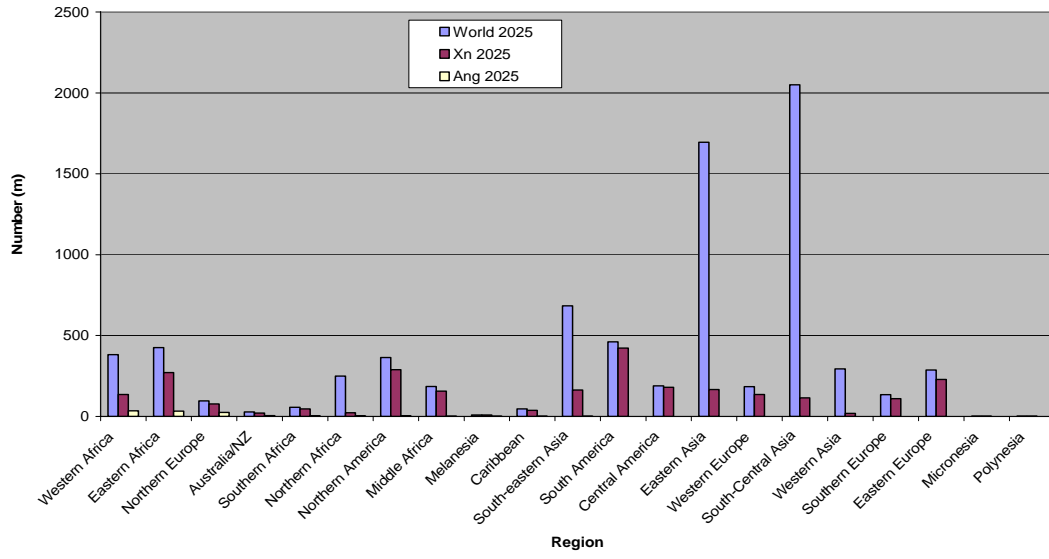
Let me elaborate. Table II and the two accompanying charts show where Anglicans live in twenty years’ time. I list alongside the overall Christian and world population distribution for comparison.

**Table II: Where Anglicans live in AD 2025, compared with Christian and world population (in millions)**

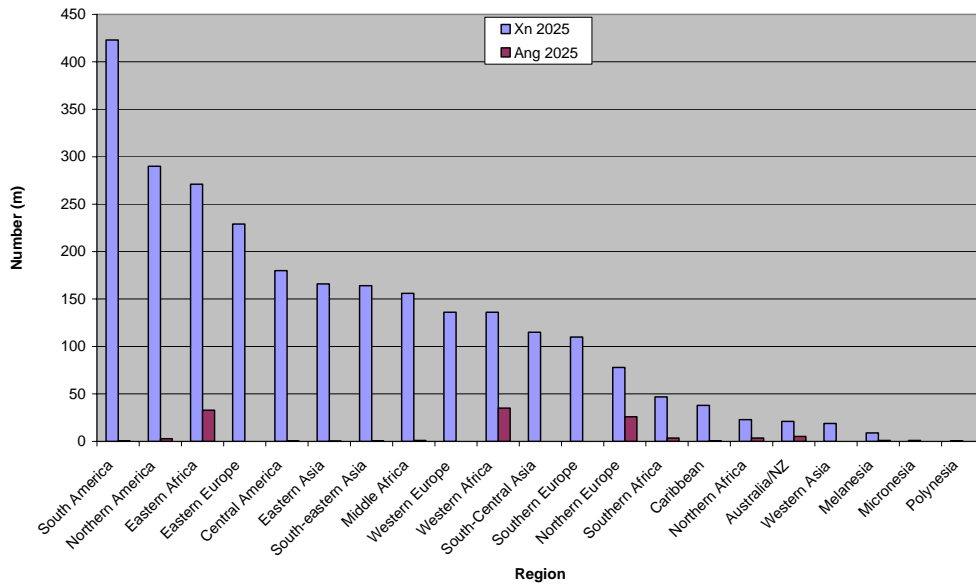
(Source: Table 7-2: "A Panorama of 16,016 numerical trends of 26 varieties, measuring the advances and reverses of Christianity", *World Christian Trends AD30 - AD2200*, edited by David Barrett, Todd Johnson ((Pasadena: William Carey Library, 201), 319-333.)

<b>Region</b>	<b>World 2000</b>	<b>Christians 2000</b>	<b>Anglicans 2000</b>	<b>World 2025</b>	<b>Christians 2025</b>	<b>Anglicans 2025</b>
Eastern Asia	1485	115	0.19	1695	166	0.24
South-Central Asia	1491	74	0.06	2050	115	0.07
South-eastern Asia	519	111	0.43	684	164	0.57
Western Asia	188	13	0.05	294	19	0.06
Eastern Europe	307	220	0	288	229	0.01
Northern Europe	94	78	27	96	78	26
Southern Europe	144	120	0.03	135	110	0.04
Western Europe	183	140	0.08	184	136	0.08
Caribbean	38	30	0.59	47	38	0.7
Central America	135	130	0.24	189	180	0.32
Northern America	310	261	3.2	364	290	2.9
South America	346	321	0.26	461	423	0.33
Melanesia	6.8	5.8	0.52	10	9.1	0.94
Australia/NZ	23	18	4.9	28	21	5.1
Micronesia	0.54	0.51	0	0.96	0.88	0
Polynesia	0.63	0.58	0	0.91	0.83	0
Eastern Africa	247	151	17	426	271	33
Middle Africa	96	78	0.44	185	156	0.97
Northern Africa	173	16	2.3	249	23	3.6
Southern Africa	47	39	2.8	56	47	3.6
Western Africa	222	76	20	382	136	35

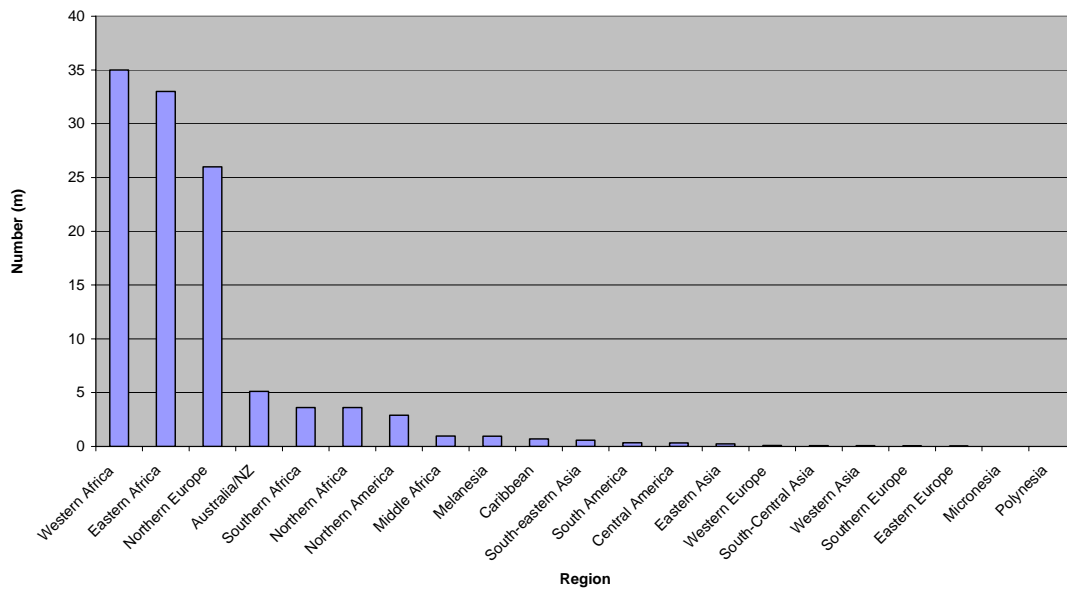
The situation Anglicans find themselves in AD2025



Where Christians live in AD2025



Where Anglicans live in AD2025



It is obvious from the tabulation the gravity of Christianity has shifted to the non-Western world, and that Anglicans live mainly as tiny minorities around the world. To define this more closely:

- (1) Anglicans continue to live as Anglophones; the overall Christian communities are no longer so. In the top ten Christian concentrations around the world, only Eastern and Western African Anglicans count as numerically significant communities. In the top five regions – South America, North America, Eastern Africa, Eastern Europe, and Central America – except for Eastern Africa, Anglicans make little numerical impact.
- (2) Africa should obviously take up leadership in the Communion. Numerically they are the strongest.
- (3) Anglicans are numerically negligible in densely populated regions; in particular, in South-eastern Asia, Eastern Asia, and South-central Asia.
- (4) Anglicans have not made any significant inroads in cultures outside historical colonial influences.

We clearly cannot interpret the world in terms of east-west divide. It is even unhelpful to see the Communion crisis as a struggle between the west and the Global South. It is more fruitful to explore new opportunities that arise from the new population and political configurations.

How then do we as an Anglican Communion engage in *mission Dei*? Are we connecting with those from other traditions in promoting God’s mission? Are we encouraging the Global South to be more self-reliant? Can we explore new ways of mission that are not tied to the liberal values of the west? This set of questions puts a new nuance to Dr Radner’s words: “Christian communion, in the end, is surely more than who controls the power-levers. It is about, in a deep way, the gift of self in the love of Jesus Christ on behalf of others joined to His mission and heart. . . . I frankly do not care what structure we have so long as that togetherness-in-prayer is the reflected result.” I would wish to carry this statement to its logical conclusion. Look beyond the present Communion structures then. Restore the older Communion vision to work for the unity of all Christians. Should not the Communion encourage closer partnership among Christians at local levels? Are the present Communion instruments an obstacle to the furthering of Christian witness?

The temptation facing the Communion is to continue its present unchecked course. This goes well with the “small is beautiful” and “quality and not quantity” attitude. This turns the Communion into private clubs for the elite around the world. Anglican ethos can become some form of philosophy and lifestyle. The temptation for younger churches in the global South is to find comfort for their tiny minorities in the pomp offered by the West. A mitre can so easily become a crown and gateway to glitz at Lambeth and New York.

Thus we should applaud the leaders among the Global South who reject this temptation. They rediscover the spiritual underpinnings of their ecclesiastical life in the written Word of God. The instruments of the Communion now turn back to the west with a vengeance. You see, as I referred earlier in this article, the Anglican Communion Office and Lambeth devised an array of devices to organise the rest of the Communion. These Communion instruments do not have much bearing on church life in England and the United States. For the first time in Communion history, the Global South reverses the table and holds Canterbury and ECUSA accountable to Communion decisions. ECUSA quaked and Lambeth stuttered. They could not conceive a Communion without ECUSA. If Nigeria were the culprit, Lambeth Palace would surely have thrown it out right away as rubbish in the handbag. Some may construe cross-boundary intervention as 9/11 events. World problems arrive on America’s home soil, and rattle ECUSA to the core. Why such display of indignation? The west had once scrambled for Africa. It carved out the world into spheres of influences. It intervened in every imaginable way in other societies in the name of God, the King and lately human right. Why such hypocrisy in ECUSA leadership, especially if it has already walked apart?

Dr Radner is right. History is not kind to the Church of Christ in its claims to enact Christian communion. The history of the Holy Catholic Church in China is a case in point. The Church has become so financially dependent on ECUSA’s money that for all its international connections it came to a terrible end with the Communist take over in 1949. The Church was completely unprepared for the political change. The church structure that ECUSA propped up collapsed. This did not mean of course Christianity ended then. Out of the clearing of space – not by Canterbury’s will – came a new church today that is able to offer a new interpretation and fresh contribution to Christianity.

Do not misunderstand. I am not proposing some federal arrangement. There is something more fundamental. The Communion needs to come to a more sober estimate of itself and submit again to the authority of the written Word of God. It is incumbent upon the Primates to set servant models for the rest of their bishops, and reform the Communion Office and instruments accordingly.

To rephrase Dr Radner’s word, secular authorities have not been kind to the church of Christ. At the same time, the history of the church also speaks of “the pride of man and earthly glory”. Indeed, church institutions have often failed in their works of love and caused awful suffering in this world. This is why I do not assume that there is some better way to preserve the hard work of the past but to reform the Communion under the authority of the Word of God. To imagine that the present Communion can be rescued by the power brokers in Britain and ECUSA is to throw away our share in the City of God.

Finally, a postscript. Guess where the following comes from:

The worldwide Anglican Church does not exist—at least not in the form that one might think. There are millions of Anglicans, many thousands of parishes, and hundreds of dioceses. There are nearly 40 independent Anglican national churches, none of which has authority over any other. But there is no central administration: no Pope, no Patriarch, no overall director. . . . The Lambeth Conference, The Primates Meeting, The Anglican Consultative Council, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who

is more the media spokesman for the church than its leader. . . . The Archbishop of Canterbury is selected by the government of Great Britain rather than by any unified church process.

It comes from the website of the Society of Archbishop Justus in America, a society that works closely with Anglicans-on-line. (See <http://www.anglican.org/church/NoCentral.html> [accessed 22 July 2006]). Those who are of more liberal outlook in America agree with Sydney and Nigeria after all.

*Feast of Saint James the Apostle, 2006*