



ENCOMPASS

News and Events from the American Anglican Council • First Quarter 2015

Church of England Parish Hosts Muslim Prayers

BY THE REV. CANON PHIL ASHEY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Right now, in Syria and Iraq, militant Islamists are taking over churches by force and turning them in to mosques. In the Church of England, apparently, all that's needed is an ask. On March 6, in the heart of London, St. John's Waterloo hosted a Muslim prayer service or "Jummah" in the sanctuary, on consecrated ground. Apparently the "Inclusive Jummah" was exclusive of anything Christian—hence what appears to be the covering up of all Christian imagery so as not to offend the worshippers.

Can you think of anything more bewildering, more offensive to Anglican followers of Jesus Christ and others who are suffering persecution at the hands of radical Muslims—watching their children beheaded by ISIS in places like Mosul, Iraq because they would not deny Jesus Christ? What does this look like to Christians who have watched their relatives and friends be blown up during Sunday worship services by Islamic extremists in Pakistan? And what sense could they possibly make of the relative silence and inaction of the bishops in the Church of England who are overseers of this church—the Bishop of Southwark, the area bishop who directly oversees this congregation, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury who is, apparently, the patron of St. John's?

Well, there has been an "apology" by the Vicar of St. John's, in a joint statement from the Bishop of Southwark. But in fact it isn't an apology at all. The apology is only for the "offence" that it caused, for the "infringement" of the "guidelines and framework" of the Church of England. There is no acknowledgement that this service denied a core doctrine of the Christian faith. No acknowledgement that it was simply

wrong to cover up Christian symbols and to permit a prayer service that begins with the assertion that only Allah is God and Muhammed his prophet. There is no acknowledgement



Video posted on YouTube showed a Muslim prayer service in the sanctuary of St. John's Waterloo, London on March 6. The Rev. Giles Goddard, Vicar of St. John's, welcomed and participated in the event.

of the complete denial of the core Christian doctrine held by the Church of England in the Thirty Nine Articles, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and its Ordinal, and the Creeds—that we believe in the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no acknowledgement of the incompat-

ibility of Christianity and Islam on this issue of "the one true God," the denial of the first five Articles of Religion which witness to the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ and, with Article 18, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of all people, at all times, everywhere.

It is inconceivable that Anglicans in other parts of the world will accept this fundamental denial of the Christian faith. Neither will many ecumenical partners, especially Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Evangelical. This does not bode well for the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury as the chief spokesman for the Anglican Communion and the *primus inter pares* (first among equals) among the other Archbishops and Primates.

The canons of the Church of England empower the Archbishop to take some action if he chooses to do so: "The archbishop has throughout his province at all times metropolitan jurisdiction, as superintendent of all ecclesiastical matters therein, to correct and supply the defects of other bishops..." (C17.2, the Canons of the Church of England). But will he choose to do so?

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Why Biblical Christians Should Stand Together



Members of the Common Ground Christian Network met in early March to discuss concerns over religious liberties in the U.S. and abroad. Virginia Congressman Frank Wolf (center) addressed the group and highlighted his new non-profit, the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative, an advocacy organization that promotes religious liberty.

BY ROBERT LUNDY, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

I interviewed for a position at the American Anglican Council in 2007. When I saw the job posting I immediately Googled “Anglican.” Images of old cathedrals, coats of arms and British royalty were among the top hits. When I came to the AAC’s page I read their statement of faith. Everything I read seemed consistent with my beliefs. Sure there was lots of flowery language and some old-school churchy words but I essentially didn’t have any problems. So when I actually got the job of communications assistant I didn’t think there would be a conflict between my convictions as a life-long Southern Baptist and the Anglican Communion’s teaching.

As I continued working, I encountered some things that gave me pause. Number one, this Southern Baptist was a little wary when the Anglicans drank alcohol. Not as upsetting but equally foreign to me were the positions of priest, bishop and archbishop. In the Baptist church the leader is the pastor and the deacons (and the choir sometimes but that’s an unofficial leadership role). When you add in the clothes they wear; collars, cassocks, cinctures, stoles, surplices, mitres, albs all the way to the occasional zucchetto, I wasn’t in Kansas anymore.

I remember one time we were reciting the Apostles Creed at morning prayers. This was right after I was hired, I left out that part in the creed about the “the holy catholic church.” At the time I thought the Anglicans were somehow pledging allegiance to the Pope or something. Looking back now, I should have asked instead of just keeping quiet. One of the priests who worked with me eventually pulled me aside and asked why I didn’t say it. When I told him why he smiled and told

me how they were talking about the unity of the church in Christ and that it was small “c” catholic.

Since those early days I’ve come to appreciate many things about Anglicans. The way they worship on Sundays and in the daily office has a built-in mechanism that guarantees the worshiper will hear the gospel and have an appropriate description of God before them in the Eucharist as well as the words of the liturgy. I appreciate the God-ordained advantages of being under authority. Provided the bishop and priest are acting in step with a true Christian walk, there is a lot to be said for being under authority and having leaders who are themselves under authority.

Now I still don’t agree with every aspect of Anglicanism but those areas where I am in disagreement are secondary and not ones of primary or communion-breaking importance. Don’t get me wrong, there are some Anglican leaders that espouse a false doctrine. That’s a big reason the AAC exists – to renew orthodox Anglicanism in the face of false teaching. But those false teachers in no way speak for the majority of Anglicans and in no way reflect the roots of Anglicanism.

In early March I was in Washington D.C. for a meeting of the Common Ground Christian Network. The network was established by the AAC and other groups like the Presbyterian Lay Committee to foster cooperation among Bible-believing denominations. Our meeting was on the subject of religious liberty. We heard truly gut-wrenching accounts of Christian men, women and children being slaughtered in the Middle East as they refused to renounce the name of Christ. I was

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Andrew Symes of Anglican Mainstream has done a brilliant job unpacking all of the canons of the Church of England that were violated by this service, as well as the core doctrines. But he also points out that this misguided act of “building trust” with a woman Imam is likely to enrage conservative Muslims as well, further adding to the rage and offense they feel about Western culture. Moreover, this was not merely an act of hospitality—it was a service that led participating Christians to worship someone other than Jesus Christ, who alone is worthy of our worship.

So there are certainly documented grounds for the Archbishop of Canterbury to supply the defects in the response of the Bishop of Southwark. And as a matter of shared principles of canon law among the Churches of the Anglican Communion, our international Anglican brothers and sisters would expect him to do so. The prospects for the Archbishop doing so are rather dim, however.

Under the Church of England Disciplinary Measure (2003), it might be possible to bring an action against the Vicar of St. Johns under Section 8(1)(a) for doing “any act in contravention of the laws ecclesiastical.” But the only persons who have standing to bring such an action are the churchwardens of St. John’s, or a person “who has a proper interest in making the complaint” nominated by the parochial church council (PCC= vestry) by no less than 2/3 of the lay members of the PCC, “or any other person who has a proper interest in making the complaint.” (Section 10(1)(a)).

Well, what about the Bishop of Southwark? Doesn’t he have a proper interest in making the complaint under his canonical authority to “uphold strong and wholesome doctrine and to refute all erroneous and strange opinions?” (C 18). The short answer is “yes, the Bishop can step in.” But for whatever reasons no diocesan bishop has ever done so. In the past, when doctrinal controversies emerged, a Court was not convened—except for a few cases involving disputes over the doctrinal propriety of baptismal fonts, plaques, and other items in the church! Does that suggest an implicit or unwritten consensus in the House of Bishops that no clergy will ever be disciplined unless a complaint is brought against them by a qualified person in the parish? If so, what does that say about the bishops in the Church of England and their willingness to set any boundaries to doctrine, discipline and order?

Could the Archbishop of Canterbury put pressure on the Bishop of Southwark to take action under Section 10 of the Clergy Disciplinary Measure? Conceivably, yes, in principle. But in practice, no Archbishop of Canterbury has done so since the late 1940’s when ++Geoffrey Fisher publicly rebuked

Bishop Barnes of Birmingham for rejecting any miraculous element in the origins of Christianity. And even when he suggested that +Barnes should feel obliged to resign for such views, +Barnes ignored the Archbishop with impunity. There is no reason to believe the Bishop of Southwark would resign even if, privately or publicly, Archbishop Welby suggested he do so.

The churchwardens of St. John’s have not set boundaries on their Vicar. The Bishop of Southwark has not done so—he is satisfied with the Vicar’s non-apology. To date, no person within the parish “having a proper interest” has been found to bring a complaint. And even if they did, it would be unprecedented for the Court to try this case. And as Bishop Peter Forster of Chester (retired) wrote in 2004, even if the trial of such a case were compliant with the European Court of Human Rights, in the current theological culture of the Church of England where there seem to be no theological boundaries, doctrinal disloyalty is simply not “justiciable” and “Trial of such matters in a court or tribunal would be a nuclear option.”[1]

How tragic that the Church of England would consider affirming its own Articles of Religion, and setting doctrinal boundaries accordingly, a nuclear “madness” that would assure its own destruction. With an Archbishop who has no precedent since the late 1940’s to set boundaries for his own bishops, the Church of England in this case has lost its ability to lead the Anglican Communion.†

[1] P Forster, “The Significance of the Declaration of Assent” (2005) 8 Ecclesiastical Law Journal 162-172 at 172.



Vicar of St. John’s Waterloo, The Revd Giles Goddard, participated in the “Inclusive Jummah.”



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convicted about my public and prayer silence regarding the hell on earth our brothers and sisters in Iraq, Iran, China, Nigeria and elsewhere are experiencing. I was also concerned to hear about what seems to be a concerted effort to curb religious liberties here in the U.S. We’ve been seeing for some time the conflict between religious liberties and the progressive agenda (the Hobby Lobby case, for example). However, when we were briefed on the scope of these conflicts and their legal outcomes around the U.S., it appears like there’s a lot more going on than just naturally occurring conflict.

One of our reasons for working with this cross-denominational gathering is the knowledge that our churches are facing common threats. Threats from within such as un-biblical teaching in churches and seminaries, congregations that are dwindling and depleted resources are common to our denominations. So, too, are external threats like government suppression of public religious expression (i.e. living your faith not just at church/home but at work and elsewhere) and the challenges of a culture increasingly hostile to biblical values and teaching. The mainline denominations (Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and others) have especially suffered from these threats and make up the bulk of the Common Ground Christian Network. However, for the first time, and I

hope not the last, we had a few Southern Baptists sitting in on our meeting. It did my heart good to think of the possibilities when I imagined Southern Baptist, Methodist, Anglican and other churches working to some degree in concert. I don’t think this will happen very soon – but who knows. I remember one time I was with an Anglican bishop who grew up in Pakistan and was chased out of country because of his ministry. I was driving him to Hartsfield airport in Atlanta and he remarked about the number of churches we were passing. I said, “I know, bishop, there is a church on almost every corner down here. I wish they would work closer together.” Without pause the bishop said, “a little persecution will cure that.”

It may not be too long before we find out if the bishop was right. If the current stresses on religious liberty in America morph into something more sinister and overt, how important and beneficial would it be for Bible believing denominations to have already begun working together? What would it mean for Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere if the Church in North America prayed and spoke in unison on their behalf? The benefits of cross-denominational cooperation are numerous. Maybe it’s time we stood together on the common ground we all share.†

The American Anglican Council is a network of individuals, dioceses, parishes and ministries who affirm biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy within the Anglican Communion. By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the American Anglican Council is to build up and defend Great Commission Anglican churches in North America and worldwide through advocacy and counsel, leadership development and equipping the local church. *Encompass* is a quarterly publication of the American Anglican Council.

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