



BY RANDALL FAHEY

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One of the major reports to be received at General Synod this month concerns the role of the Primate in the Anglican Church of Canada, including possible recommended changes to Canon III. General Synod 2007 commissioned this, and a hard-working Task Force under the Chair of Bishop Michael Ingham has produced a detailed and thoughtful report.

It comes as a surprise to many Canadian Anglicans that the “senior” Archbishop in our church has very limited episcopal privileges. He does not have a seat or diocese. With two exceptions he may not participate as the chief consecrator of new bishops, and may only attend consecrations

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with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop. He has no canonical right to preside at the Eucharist, except for the Chapel at Church House and he may not conduct baptisms or confirmations. A Primatial Pastoral Letter may be blocked from circulation by a diocesan bishop. He is the Chief Executive Officer of Church House, chairs the Council of General Synod, and General Synod, and represents the Canadian Church internationally. This is certainly not the case for other Primates of the Anglican Communion who have much more authority and privilege.

Bishop Ingham spent hours reading hundreds of archival documents, and former Primates were interviewed. Additionally, following a creative information exercise from the Task Force, the Council of General Synod and all the Ecclesiastical Provincial Synods were asked for input.

It should be recalled that the senior Ecclesiastical Provinces formed the General Synod in 1893. The Office of Primate was created and only the House of Bishops from among the Metropolitans elected him. The first nine Primates functioned as bishops within the diocese in which they were elected, but no powers were given to the Office of the Primate itself. Additionally, no financial support was set aside, with the Primate supported by the good graces of his own diocese. The demands of the office meant that suffragan bishops were necessary for the “sponsoring” dioceses and the burdens of the office became intolerable (several Canadian Primates died in office). By 1969 the idea of a “detached” Primacy was formed and financially supported. Although the election of the Primate (Canon III) was broadened to the General Synod, the episcopal and pas-

toral privileges have remained very restricted.

What did the Task Force learn in its work? Clearly there is a need to renew and refresh the role of our Primate, and these are reflected in the recommended changes to Canon III coming to General Synod. First, diocesan bishops should be expected to invite the Primate to preside at sacramental services when he is able. Secondly, while the Primate may not have a Diocesan See, he does have a major pastoral role for the House of Bishops. His duties as a Chief Consecrator include both the Bishop Ordinary to the Forces, and the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop. However, he should be invited to play a prominent “visible” role at the ordination of all bishops and to be an ongoing pastor to the House. Thirdly, although he is regarded as Senior Metropolitan, that role has never been defined. He is *primus inter pares* — first

among equals, and the Task Force recommends that he be recognized as the chief installer of new Metropolitans. Herein lies an interesting controversy because some of the Ecclesiastical Provinces see this recommendation as unduly challenging their constitutional authority. They are surprisingly reluctant to surrender any powers to General Synod. Fourthly, the Task Force is suggesting that once and for all we abandon the idea of a Primatial See (diocese) or a National Cathedral.

Finally, we should recognize that our Primate is a prophetic leader in mission for our Province and should be expected and permitted to speak responsibly, but freely, to the national church and the world. I very much look forward to supporting the recommendations of the Task Force. Please pray for our wonderful Primate, the Most Rev. Fred Hiltz.

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BY NISSA BAUSBAUM

A recent headline/sentence from an article in the Globe and Mail about the aftermath of the Indonesian tsunami has caught my attention and made me think twice. This headline read, “five years after the tsunami almost wiped it off the map, Banda Aceh has bounced back and now sees the deadly wall of water as ‘God’s blessing.’”

The article went on to describe an interview with a man named Wahyu, who lost his mother and younger brother in this natural disaster, along with his infant niece who was ripped from his arms by the force of the water. It was Wahyu who concluded that, “the tsunami was God’s blessing to us,” making Banda Aceh a better place because the people are no longer fighting in a civil war. Instead, they have begun to work together. “God gave us this peace,” he said.

## Is it God or is it us?

In her book, “A Quiet Courage, Inspiring Stories from All of Us,” Canadian journalist Paula Todd recounts a number of her television interviews with people who have suffered some form of tragedy and have managed to move beyond the experience, turning their pain into something positive. About these people, the author writes:

“Incredibly, some thrivers have told me they cannot wholeheartedly regret what happened to them — the crippling accident, a painful loss, a serious illness, a grave error — because they believe that without it they would not be the much more accomplished, emotionally attuned person they are today. Without that which hurt them, derailed them, almost destroyed them, they believe they might never have undergone the forced emotional evolution that gave birth to their new, stronger self.”

What Todd discovered amongst those she interviewed reflects the same sentiment that Wahyu describes when he refers to the good that has come to his country as a result of the devastation caused by the tsunami. What is different, however, is

their understanding of the cause of their pain. In none of Todd’s interviews is there ever a suggestion that God created the suffering in order to make something good happen.

For many of us, an experience of pain or tragedy has, indeed, proved in hindsight to be the very thing that has placed us on a road that we likely would not have chosen to travel. For me personally, it was my father’s death when I was only a teenager. In a previous parish where I served, one particular situation stands out as exemplary of this reality — a fairly young person was diagnosed with cancer and, as a result, completely changed his lifestyle. Following the diagnosis, this person lived for a little more than three years, but in those three years he practiced an intentionality about living that he had never done before because, as he put it, “the clock started ticking much faster than he had expected it would.”

There can be no question that the pain we experience through some form of devastation and tragedy is often the catalyst for each of us to reassess our lives and, according to this

reassessment, to begin to act differently; more often than not, this difference reflecting a much less self-oriented view of the world. Most assuredly, the essential place of the crucifixion alongside the resurrection is, for a Christian, exemplary of our recognition of the centrality of death in the birth of new life. Yet, to describe the crucifixion — or, for that matter, any other tragedy our world endures — as God’s blessing, is for me a travesty.

Surely it must be bad theology to suggest that a loving God would intentionally cause the innocent to suffer in order to wake up the guilty. While I am well aware that scripture is full of this kind of tit for tat description of divine and human interaction, I simply refuse to believe that such description is anything but reflective of our feeble attempts, from an extremely limited human perspective, to explain the workings of the universe. As we do this, it disturbs me that the same Spirit who gives life becomes a capricious God who wills the innocent to die.

Beyond what this perspective says about God, it also enables us to shirk our own responsibility

for much of the innocent suffering we encounter in our world. God the Father plans for his Son to die in order that the world is redeemed. While this is certainly traditional atonement theology, a more contemporary understanding of the crucifixion would suggest that Jesus died “because” of our sins rather than “for” them. Unfortunately, the belief that God plans devastation and destruction to prove a point continues to permeate much of our thinking; witness the interpretation of the tsunami as “God’s blessing.”

It is, indeed, a blessing that a country involved in a 30-year civil war now lives in peace. It is, however, sad commentary that it took a horrific event to make this happen. And it is even sadder commentary that we then go on to describe such an event as having been orchestrated by God to ensure that it would happen.

I for one hope and pray that one day we human beings will learn to act in foresight rather than hindsight, thereby eliminating the necessity to put the blame on God for so much of the world’s tribulation.

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