

NSKK NEWSLETTER

日本聖公会管区事務所だより

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Attending the “Anglican Primates Meeting”

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I attended the Anglican Primates Meeting held in Gramado, Brazil from 19th to 26th May 2003. Although it was a hard trip: 26 hours from Tokyo International Airport (Narita) to Sao Paulo (Guarulhos Airport) via a transit point, and a further 3 hours or more from Sao Paulo to Gramado by plane and car, I felt that the trip was fruitful.

There are 38 primates, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Anglican Communion worldwide. Due to the SARS' epidemic and other reasons, 5 bishops were unable to attend, and 33 primates were present at the Primates Meeting. The contents of the Meeting had been notified to all the members of the Anglican communion through a Pastoral Letter. I am reporting to you all hereunder what I learnt and how I felt through the Meeting, based on this Pastoral Letter.

One of the main themes for discussion during the meeting was “theological education”. At present, almost all the churches in Japan use the latest version of the Prayer Book. It is my understanding, however, that in US or in Britain, various versions of the prayer book are available and any option can be used by each church according to the rector's own idea. On the other hand in Japan, theology and worship have been strongly influenced by the British or US tradition. In Africa, congregations are praising God in the Eucharist, using local music and dance. During the Inauguration Service of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I noticed that African dance was incorporated into the service. Because of the diversity of the Anglican communion and globalization, it has become difficult to use only one pattern of worship worldwide. Theological education in the present society must be established based on such diversified phenomenon. For a long time, I have strictly followed the British/US theology as a “good” model. I think, however, that it is time for us to establish a new theology which is unique and proper to Anglicans in Japan.

Secondly, the sex problem, and in particular the issue of homosexuality was discussed. African bishops are adamant in refusing to accept homosexuals. In US or European society, the reality is that homosexuals have been attending or are coming to church for

Sunday or daily services. The question of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions is a cause of divisive controversy. The meaning of theology is, in my opinion, that we deeply contemplate God's will; how God takes the problems which we are now confronting. We run the potential risk of falling into a conventional legalistic interpretation of Scripture, if we argue existing problems apart from reality. We all know that Jesus Christ showed antipathy against the legalism. What I really feel about theology is that we should consider how Jesus Christ is thinking about our current problems and how He would handle these same problems.

Homosexuals do not chose to be homosexuals; but they are born as homosexuals, that is they are also God's creation. Can we clear out homosexuals from the society, claiming that "homosexuals are wrong" or "homosexuals are sinful persons"? Should we reject those people from our society, Jesus must be hurt by our inconsiderate action. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, seems to be a man of understanding, he speaks about the homosexual problem quite prudently because the matter has yet to be theologically established. Homosexuality is an immediate theological issue over which we should ponder within the context of the Scripture.

Thirdly, the HIV/AIDS problem. During the discussions at the present Meeting, HIV/AIDS was thought of not as a punishment from God, but it is rather an effect of fallen creation and our broken humanity. We were reminded that Christ calls us into community as friends so that we might befriend others in His name. In some African countries, HIV/AIDS has become a serious problem. NSKK has decided to offer US\$10,000 per year for 5 years to Highveld Diocese in Africa to be used for HIV/AIDS education. This action was greatly appreciated by the Primate of South Africa, who expressed that this deed should have been included in the Pastoral Letter. Canon John Peterson of ACC also highly appreciated the NSKK's decision.

For several years now the Anglican Primates Meeting has been held annually. Together with the Lambeth Conference, where all Anglican bishops attend and is held every 10 years, and the ACC which covers the promotion of mission activity within the Anglican Communion, the Primates Meeting has an important function within the Anglican Communion. During the meeting each bishop had the opportunity to meet face-to-face, thereby deepening our mutual understanding.

Finally, I would like particularly to add, that bishops from those countries where their people are continuously living in poverty or in conflicts were both tough and cheerful. This made a very strong impression on me and greatly encouraged me.

A Series of Thoughts which have been in My Mind since the Day of the Ceremony of Enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I made a hurried trip through Europe from the end of February to the first part of March visiting Belgium, Holland and England. In Belgium I visited the grave of my Belgium friend for the first time in seven years. He took command of minsweeping operations during the Gulf War in 1990. He was appointed Commander in Chief of the Belgium

Navy when the war ended, then retired. He loved his family so much and was such a peaceable man that people thought that he would be unfitted to be a serviceman or that he would be unable to attack any enemies. But now I am quite convinced that he was able to be a serviceman as he was engaged in the minesweeping operation.

After visiting my Belgian friend's grave, the next day I passed across the border of Belgium to Holland. There, I asked my friend in Holland to take me to the remains of Woltenburg Concentration Camp which was once located in the northern part of Holland. It was the place where innocent Jewish people were gathered before being sent to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. It is said that in order to keep all information concerning the Camp secret, the German government built schools, hospitals and even Synagogues, thus making people believe that Woltenburg was a peaceful internment camp. But they had to move to Auschwitz or other camps one after another when their turn came, being packed on to freight cars which were used for livestock. More than ten million Jewish people were sent to those camps from Woltenburg. Now there is only one building left where reference works and reference materials are stored and also a stone monument. When I visualized the scene of people gathering together in the Synagogue or theatre at that time, it pained me to think of what they thought of and what they prayed for approaching their own fate. Millions and millions of victims, even babies and children, were packed on to those cattle freight cars and killed by German soldiers. They cannot be forgiven forever. But we could also say those soldiers must have been victims of war. War changes good hearted people into 'devils' so easily. I wonder if there can ever be such a thing as a 'righteous war' at all.

In London, we discussed the role of the Anglican Consultative Council and about assistance for the 'heavy debtor' nations. The discussion started with the definition of what the heavy debtor nations were. Are they limited to the heavy debtor nations and nations in extreme poverty restricted by IMF and the World Bank? Is it possible to include such areas where people are in reality almost starving? And so on. There exist lots of 'poor districts and areas' even though the countries themselves do not stand in such a crucial situation. In these cases we are able to think of many measures and tactics that can help those people from a basic church level and not through international organizations which have to go through so much red tape to make the aid a reality.

The problems of AIDS infection are quite serious in Asia and Africa. NSKK keeps the offerings of church members for the assistance for heavy debtor nations and we have been talking of programmes for making good use of these donations. Talking about this programme with ACC was one of the important objects of this trip.

We attended the Ceremony of the enthronement of the new Archbishop of Canterbury on February 27th. The narrow streets and the square of the old town of Canterbury were overcrowded with Anti-Iraqi War demonstrators. We elbowed our way through the crowds of demonstrators into the precincts of the Cathedral. When we passed through the gate we went through severe baggage inspections just as we had at the airport, but fortunately not inside our shoes. This made us feel the serious air of apprehension concerning the Iraqi War among people.

The worship service of the Ceremony was to begin from three o'clock but the procession of attendants to the Ceremony started to move at ten past two and continued until Prince Charles took his seat in the Cathedral at three o'clock. The splendid solemnity created an atmosphere of gorgeousness which was beyond my imagination. The chair on which the Archbishop sat is called the 'Chair of Augustine' and is made of stone. The Bible on which the Archbishop made his oath at his enthronement ceremony is called the 'Canterbury Gospel' which was scripted in Italy between the fifth and sixth centuries and was a gift from Pope Gregory the Great to St. Augustine. Now it is kept in the library of Cambridge University. After all, this stone chair and the Augustine Gospel are truly symbols of British tradition.

It is said that the contents of the enthronement ceremony have changed with the times. One of the characteristics of this ceremony was the reading of the New Testament by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster who represented the whole Catholic Church worldwide; There could be seen many aspects of the different stages of ecumenism. Many representatives of different denominations and religions were invited. The beating of African drums showed the worldwide extent of Anglican Church and we could understand the fact that deaf-and dumb persons must have been invited among those representatives through the demonstrations of sign language translation. The Lord Chancellor, Prime Minister Blair, Mayor of London and many high government officers etc. attended. I took it for granted that there were lots of representatives of English society who attended as the Church of England is the established national Church in England.

While the gorgeous ceremony was going on, I was thinking of another matter. What does this solemn and gorgeous ceremony mean to the people who have been suffering from wars, disease and poverty. Of course I would also like to rejoice and celebrate in the ceremony as it marks the starting point of a new era for the Anglican Church. But after I encountered the anti-war demonstrators and the roar gushing out from those demonstrators in front of the gate of the Cathedral; and more, thinking of the serious problems of AIDS and poverty that we talked about at the ACC conference two days before, I was quite dubious whether this great ceremony would remain only as the impression of the gorgeousness and solemnity of the Church of England without any relation to the matters of the world outside.

But when the Archbishop started to deliver his sermon, the solemnity began to appear just as it was provided for in his sermon. I would like to quote a part of his sermon from my judgment as follows.

'We live as Christians reading the Bible and practicing the sacraments and saying creeds. But on the other hand it is true that we live in some community with different religions and creeds. We have to and are able to learn many things about our humanity from other and different cultures. We grieve or protest about war, about debt and poverty, about prejudice, about the humiliations of unemployment or the vacuous cruelty of sexual greed and unfaithfulness, about the abuse of children or neglect of the helpless elderly. To these problems, we have to acquire the dignity of man as the 'image of God' with all the people in the world.'

There are some who maintained that the sermon delivered by the new Archbishop at the ceremony of enthronement did not show any political intentions even though the outbreak of the Iraqi War was so close an event in time. But I think he chose the contents of his sermon for the 'time and place' of the ceremony of enthronement and that they were most political because it was delivered in front of many religious and social representatives from all over the world and in front of Prime Minister Blair himself. His message was telling us how human beings should be as a universal figure and he referred to the roots of all sorts of problems. He did not mean only the critical occurrence of the war but insisted that we repent and reform from the deepest part of our bosom. (If it was concerned only with the war, he had already issued a joint communique against the war with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster a week prior. And also the Church of England issued the resolution against the Iraqi War two days before).

While I was writing this article, the Iraqi War started and after a month it ended. Now I recall in my mind again the sermon of the Archbishop in which he appealed to us to reflect on the 'dignity of man as the image of God'. If we think of the tragedy of the war with its deep pain and suffering and of the children as the innocent victims of the war, we should now step on to the road together to pursue the 'dignity of man'.

The Rev. Laurence Yutaka Minabe
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NSKK Recent Missionary Activities:

NSKK's overseas financial aid programmes:

(1) Monica Hisano Scholarship: Baht 281,850 (¥800,000)

Scholarship for female students of Nursing College in Thailand. This will be appropriate for 4-year school fees in Nursing College.

(2) Republic of South Africa: NSKK has decided to contribute US\$10,000 to Highveld Diocese, South Africa to support AIDS eradication activity. As a part of aiding heavy debtor countries, which is a resolution of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, the NSKK's present contribution is to promote eradication of AIDS (mainly on HIV/AIDS education of the general public as well as to those who are involved in the HIV/AIDS activities). It is scheduled that the contribution will be continued for five years from now.