



Episcopalian Recovery

by Jonathan Aitken

EVANGELISM AND THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH are not comfortable bedfellows. The discomfort shows up in many ways, starting with empty pews, as Episcopalian congregations have shrunk disastrously from 5 million to below 2 million churchgoers in the past decade. Attitudes are one part of this problem. Not for nothing are these up-market Protestants known as “the frozen chosen,” for the warmth of their evangelistic outreach has long been conspicuous by its absence. These days Episcopalians don’t seem to pay more than lip service to Christ’s Great Commission, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Instead they have become an extraordinarily fractious and inward-looking group of Christians, hell-bent on doing battle with each other on a range of divisive issues that have come to a head over the ordination of actively gay bishops and the celebration of same-sex marriages.

In later articles over the next few months, your High Spirits columnist will attempt to penetrate the murky sagas of Episcopalian infighting which is now leading potentially towards schism, expulsion from the Anglican Communion, and a *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* series of court cases that will make parishes poor and secular lawyers rich. But before examining these sad stories as they unfold, I bring good tidings about one important Anglican church that is flourishing, growing, and evangelizing. My report features Holy Trinity of Raleigh, North Carolina, and its 76-year-old rector emeritus, Canon Michael Green.

In the world of Anglican evangelism, Michael Green is a superstar. For the last decade of the 1990s, he was special adviser to the archbishops of Canterbury and York on evangelism. Before that he was professor of evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver. He

has written over 45 books of which perhaps the most successful and scholarly is his *Evangelism in the Early Church* (1970, 2003), and with legendary energy he practices what he preaches and writes.

I first met Michael Green at Oxford where, after a spell as rector of the university’s most popular church, St. Aldates, he had become senior tutor at Wycliffe Hall Theological College. Being one of his students for two years was the greatest inspirational and educational experience of my life. For in harness with Wycliffe’s principal, the eminent theologian Dr. Alister McGrath, Green not only taught his pupils, he led us from the front into sleepy parishes and dioceses where he woke up the whole community, churched and unchurched, with outreach campaigns of powerful, persuasive, and intellectually compelling evangelism.

No one ever forgets a good teacher. Almost everything I ever learned about preaching the Gospel or telling a testimony story with a Christian message was taught to me by EMBG—the initials Michael signed on the bottom of our essays or comment cards on student sermons. He knows just about everything there is to know about building a church, growing its congregation, reaching out to the wider community with superb evangelistic talks, and recruiting the most improbable people (I was one of them) into various forms of service to the Lord.

When I heard that Michael had taken a “retirement job” (certain to be a complete misnomer in his case!) in the American South in his 75th year, I wondered whether his evangelistic skills would travel well from Oxford to Raleigh, particularly to a church caught in the crossfire of Episcopalian controversy. I need not have worried (O me of little faith). For Holy Trinity

Raleigh is today a huge success story. Of course the glory goes to God for its growing 500-strong congregation, its full pews and coffers, and its ambitious initiatives (of which more later). But there are two earthly explanations for this good news. One is the hard work of Michael Green and his team. The other is that Holy Trinity Raleigh is not an Episcopal church at all. Like so many like-minded churches of that denomination, it has declared its independence as a free-standing Anglican church and refused to accept the authority of the hierarchy of bishops who lead the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA).

WHY HAVE THE GOOD, DECENT, LOYAL, middle-of-the-road Episcopalians of Raleigh severed their relationship with ECUSA? It is not because their caps fit any of the pejorative names they are called by some of their liberal opponents, i.e., schismatics, fundamentalists, opponents of women leaders, homophobes, or theological troublemakers. Those labels are patently absurd to any objective observer who has spent a little time with the faithful of Holy Trinity Raleigh. The same is true of several other ex-ECUSA congregations I have visited, such as the worshippers in Falls Church, Virginia. The pastor of that fine church, the Rev. John Yates, recently co-authored with his parishioner Os Guinness an article in the *Washington Post* headlined, "Why We Left the Episcopal Church." In that article Yates and Guinness spelled out their secessionist case with brutal clarity:

The American Episcopal Church no longer believes in the historic, orthodox Christian faith common to all believers. Some leaders expressly deny the central articles of the faith—saying that traditional theism is "dead," the incarnation is "nonsense," the resurrection of Jesus is a fiction, the understanding of the cross is "a barbarous idea," the Bible is "pure propaganda" and so on....

These are the outrages we protest. These are the infidelities that drive us to separate. These are the real issues to be debated. We remain Anglicans but leave the Episcopal Church because the Episcopal Church first left the historic faith. Like our spiritual forebears in the Reformation, "Here we stand. So help us God. We can do no other."

In similar forms this clarion call is electrifying Episcopalians all over the United States. About 200 churches have now broken away complete-

ly from ECUSA, and another 200 or so are well on their way to doing so as a result of joining what is called "The Network"—an Episcopalian departure lounge of congregations in search of more faithful bishops. But what

These days Episcopalians don't seem to pay more than lip service to Christ's Great Commission, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

happens when the frozen chosen thaw out and arrive in these new pastures? The answer is that they are making three major moves spearheaded by the Network—a church planting initiative, a youth ministry initiative, and a good news initiative, the last being Networkspeak for evangelism.

Michael Green has now been appointed leader and coordinator of the Network's evangelism initiative. He is already off and running in 16 regions of the United States with training programs and evangelistic campaigns. I caught a glimpse of what he is up to when I visited him recently in Raleigh. He has freed himself up for full-time evangelism by finding a successor for the rectorship of Holy Trinity in the Rev. David Drake, who was recently ordained by the Anglican bishop of Bolivia (no kidding!), one of several Episcopal angels from exotic foreign dioceses who have rushed into American parishes where ECUSA bishops now fear to tread.

So Michael Green, 76 but going on 36, will devote all his time and energy to doing on a big scale what we did together on a small scale earlier this year in Raleigh. Michael had organized a whistle-stop program of seven evangelistic talks in two days, taking me to prisons, country clubs, restaurants, ladies lunches, young businessmen's breakfasts, and a meeting of legislators in the state capitol. Preaching the Gospel in such places (which ECUSA rarely reaches) is a Michael Green speciality. If his evangelism catches on across the country, the new Network Anglicanism will come very much alive even though the old Episcopalianism may be dying. ❧

Jonathan Aitken, *The American Spectator's High Spirits columnist*, is the author of *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace, to be published in June by Crossway Books*. His biographies include *Charles W. Colson: A Life Redeemed (Doubleday)* and *Nixon: A Life, now available in a new paperback edition (Regnery)*.