

A Word in Time: An Open Letter to the Anglican Communion

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We the undersigned contributors to www.Covenant-Communion.com believe that “a word in time” is now needed in order to assist the Communion to move forward in a constructive manner following the Lambeth Conference. We would like to speak such a word by specifically addressing the points Bishop Bob Duncan raises in his email to Bishop Gary Lillibridge, which has now been made public with Bp. Duncan’s permission. Our reflections are offered with all due respect for Bishop Duncan as a dear friend to some of us, and one whom those of us who know him personally admire as a stalwart in the faith. Bishop Duncan’s words are quoted in italics with our reflections following.

1. The first difficulty is the moral equivalence implied between the three moratoria, a notion specifically rejected in the original Windsor Report and at Dromantine.

Actually, it is largely American and Canadian liberals that have implied a moral equivalency between the two. We think most people are clear that the crisis in our Communion was precipitated by specific American and Canadian actions. In any event, *someone* has to be the first to give up their “rights” (either Bishop Duncan and the GAFCON folks by agreeing to moratorium #3 in clear terms, or the American and Canadian leadership by agreeing to moratoria #1 and #2, as well as an immediate cessation of the lawsuits and ecclesiastical trials). Who will be the first to display an act of Christian charity and self-giving on behalf of the Communion at this critical turning point in the life of the Communion?

Our understanding of the comments from the Windsor Continuation Group hearings at the Lambeth Conference is that no one really expects the jurisdictional crossings to cease without the concomitant cessation of blessing same sex unions and assurances of refusal to consent to the consecration of a bishop in a same sex relationship.

2. This process cannot be stopped — constitutions require an automatic second vote, and to recommend against passage without guarantees from the other side would be suicidal.

We recognize the canonical difficulties this presents. A constitutional change requires a second vote in the following year or the proposed constitutional change fails for lack of a second reading. Not even the Archbishop of Canterbury can change this requirement. Further, we understand that these dioceses are fearful of further legal repercussions that a delay would entail.

We suggest this is such a crucial issue that Dr. Williams convene a meeting, preferably in person, by September 30th, to work through an agreement on the assurances of the moratoria as well as the “safe haven” for those in the American and Canadian churches who feel the need for protection. We respectfully submit that this meeting be chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury and include the bishops of Ft. Worth, Pittsburgh, Quincy, the primate of Uganda, the primate of the Southern Cone, the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, the chair of the Windsor Continuation Group, and perhaps two bishops

agreed to by all other parties. This meeting should be held at a neutral site without attorneys present. Such a meeting would acknowledge the urgency of the matters under consideration and give an opportunity to the parties to work through the implementation of the moratoria requested.

3. The third reality is that those already separated parishes and missionary jurisdictions . . . will never consent to the "holding tank" whose stated purpose is eventual "reconciliation" with TEC or the Anglican Church of Canada.

This complaint presupposes that TEC and Canada will continue undisciplined in their acts that have “torn the fabric of the Communion.” The goal is the restoration of good order in the Church that would make possible deeper relationships in Christ. We envision an Episcopal Church and Anglican Church of Canada that are fully reconciled to the rest of the Anglican Communion through commitment to a freely entered into Covenant. We believe this goal is possible given patience and perseverance, even if it must be accomplished diocese by diocese, and in some places, parish by parish. This reconciliation would include a common life that would respect (i) the principle of communion as the limit of autonomy as articulated by the Windsor Report (para. 82) as well as (ii) Lambeth Resolutions and other official acts of the Instruments of Communion that have come to serve as boundary markers in our mutually shared discernment.

The “holding tank”—“safe haven” might be a more accurate and positive description—would be the basis for these dioceses and congregations to continue as full members of the Anglican Communion without fear of legal or ecclesiastical reprisals. Recall Dr. Williams’ ecclesiological statement that provinces are not primary units but secondary to the direct relationship between each diocesan bishop and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Such a “safe haven” would provide each diocese and congregation with a direct relationship to the Archbishop of Canterbury, not through the provincial primate.

There is a difference, in our view, between being culturally Anglican and being ecclesologically Anglican. An ecclesiological Anglican relates directly to the Archbishop of Canterbury through his or her own bishop and not through the primate. A cultural Anglican uses the Anglican forms and formularies, rites and ceremonies, but does not have that direct ecclesiological relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Why settle for an uncertain connection with +Canterbury through an intervening province when one can have a *direct* relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury—as evidenced, among other things, by a decennial invitation to Lambeth?

4. The fourth matter is that the legal proceedings brought by TEC and ACC against many of us have been nowhere suspended by these aggressor provinces, with no willingness to mediate or negotiate though we have proposed it repeatedly, not least since Dar es Salaam.

We recognize the validity of this complaint, hence, the need for an immediate meeting between the principals proposed above. Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof” made the comment that if we all live by “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” the whole world will soon be blind and toothless.

We believe some pressure has to be brought to bear on the American Church at such a meeting to stop the legal proceedings. The reason for withdrawing the lawsuits is for the sake of fostering relationships which are of utmost importance in Anglicanism. The rationale is: “I give up my

‘right’ to sue this church/diocese for the sake of the possibility of reconciliation. I acknowledge the ‘safe haven’ as a place of integrity within the Communion until we can work out our differences, regardless of however long it might take.”

Ultimately, we think, the issue is whether one wants to be a cultural Anglican with either an attenuated or no direct relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury, with relationships and recognition of Holy Orders, Communion, etc., having to be negotiated diocese by diocese, or an ecclesiological Anglican with a direct relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury, with relationships and Holy Orders, etc., being much clearer. We believe that the overwhelming majority of Anglicans certainly prefer the latter, and are willing to do those things necessary to preserve the unity of the Communion on the appropriate basis.

Faithfully,

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