Dear Archbishop John

Thank you for your communication. Our ACI Board Bishop +Michael Scott-Joynt has also been in helpful contact over the Communion Partners initiative, as he and +NT Wright, +Donald Mtetemela, +Drexel Gomez, and others attended earlier meetings – even meetings including the several bishops (4 out of the 21 in attendance) now moving toward a ‘new province’ idea.

We are beginning to see the initiatives in individual dioceses of TEC to move forward with the same sex agenda (Colorado, Virginia, North Carolina, most recently). This includes various forms of approval: of blessings, quasi-marriage rites, acceptance of non celibate ‘partnered’ gay and lesbian clergy, and so forth. This was always only a matter of time.

What has been of debate is what to do. One side believes the Communion has the responsibility, the capacity, and the duty to bring discipline to bear, in order to protect what God has blessed in His providential care of the Anglican Communion. It sees the Communion as that which must be given priority. It also believes, as with Justin Martyr, that when such actions are taken by ‘progressives’ the orthodox position is seen more clearly, and that therefore one can and must stay and bear witness. This is also a position of some strength and security given that the polity of this (American) church allows for such a witness due to the lack of metropolitan authority lawfully accruing to the office of Presiding Bishop. That this is being contested is all the more reason to fight to defend what the canons themselves constrain. Our prayer has been for the Communion to respond through its Windsor and Covenant work, and through its Instruments, to declare that part of TEC unwilling to abide by communion teaching and life in a diminished status, thus allowing the Communion Partner Dioceses and Rectors a way to assent to Communion life and teaching. We pray for your work in several of these aspects of our Communion life.

The other position is less confident about the discipline the Communion might bring to bear. It also has a different view of being Anglican, according to a confession, and so also has a different view about what is to be done. It seeks to create replacements and alternatives. The danger here is that it engages ‘a strong opponent’ in such a way that legal battles inevitably ensue, and that it also creates a new kind of ‘Anglicanism’ that will simply continue to fissure and break up. It believes in this new form of ‘Anglicanism’ and so departs company with the view of Communion Partners.

One serious question, then, plagues the matter of cooperation between these two groups. It has been clear that for the second position—the new province position—to gain strength, it must say that staying and fighting is not just ineffective, but wrong. And it has indeed done so. Bishop Duncan has spoken of the Communion Partner way as flawed and doomed to failure. His idea of ‘cooperation,’ then, entails predictions of defeat of the CP Dioceses, Bishops, Rectors and Primates, and then welcoming CP into his new province.

His supporters have been even more forthright on the matter and have denounced CP as detrimental and anti-Christian. If staying and fighting means that CP Bishops and Rectors are not joining a movement which requires growth for credibility, in the nature of the case, one can see how this position is forthcoming and inevitable.

We say this not to ratchet up the stakes or to indulge in rhetoric to gain your support, but rather to underscore how difficult the idea of cooperation is at the level of principle and practice. When we wrote as we did recently of the need to support one another (following the Mere Anglicanism Conference) and so to develop protocols so that Communion Partners would not be objects of recruitment efforts by new province supports, we were told that ‘the new province must increase, and CP decrease.’ This is a consistent message and one whose logic is clear and may follow from the very design of new province thinking.

For this reason we are happy to discuss the practical dimensions of ‘cooperation’ if set against this kind of backdrop of candor and honesty. It does no good to have the new province leaders speak of cooperation whilst plotting to grow their numbers in direct proportion to declaring a conservative intention to stay and fight benighted and wrong. Communion Partner parishes are amongst the largest in the country. Their Bishops number 13 Diocesans. The new province leaders are from four small dioceses, and the others from a mix-and-match collection of continuing churches and recently consecrated bishops (AMiA, CANA, and so forth).

Much more could be said. We agree that some kind of cooperation makes sense. We also do not support the basic principles of a ‘new province’ idea (leaving aside problems inherent in its membership), but will commit to prayer for their discernment. What is needed is a clear set of protocols governing the ‘cooperation’ and especially a commitment from ‘new province’ people to refrain from recruiting parishes inside CP dioceses – something they have not publicly agreed to honor. Here is the neuralgic point.

We agree that meetings and cooperation should be forthcoming. We trust you see the challenge facing this, from the side of those who need to ‘increase’ in order to maintain their identity, but who should be asked to refrain from doing so if it cuts into the conservative commitment to stay and fight through the Instruments, Windsor, and Covenant.

Thank your for your hard work for the Communion and for your communications over this important challenge. We understand that Bishop MacPherson will do as you have requested: ask the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates to commit to support the Communion Partners. For our part, we commit to seek strong protocols governing our relationship with the new province leaders, and so keep attention where we believe it should be focused: on the overreach of the Presiding Bishop and her misuse and manipulation of the constitution of The Episcopal Church.

Yrs in Christ--