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## WISDOM AND CHARITY: OLD AND NEW

It is time to bring you up to date on the crisis in the Anglican Communion. Pleasant it is not, but while thinking about such things is not pleasant, it is necessary and in some ways helpful. From the beginning the Church of God has had difficulty within her institutional life, and our time is no different. And yet we believe as our Lord taught us that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church. Over against the trials of heresy and schism, of error and hard heartedness, the Holy Ghost has burned within the lives of God's people and forged a wisdom and charity that is his gift and which shall not pass away but have its perfect end in the Kingdom of God. We have good hope that we shall see God no longer through this glass darkly, but face to face.

In February, the Primates of the Anglican Communion met to consider the Windsor Report and issued a powerful and decisive statement. In it they asked the Episcopal Church of the United States to do four things: first, to repent of having broken the bonds of affection in the Church; second, to place a moratorium on the consecration of practicing homosexuals as Bishops; third, to place a moratorium on same-sex unions; and fourth, to withdraw voluntarily from the Anglican Consultative Council, which is constituted of clerical and lay representatives from all over the Anglican Communion, and which acts to enhance the ministries of the communion as a whole.

In March, the House of Bishops convened and responded to the Primates' statement. In response to the four points of the Primates, the Bishops of ECUSA offered a covenant. In it, first, they expressed their regret, apology, and offered repentance for having broken the bonds of affection by not consulting adequately with the larger communion before the election and (pseudo) consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. Second, they imposed a voluntary withholding of their consents for the consecration of any Bishop until the General Convention of 2006. Third, they placed a moratorium on same-sex unions until the General Convention of 2006. And fourth, they have voluntarily withdrawn from the deliberations of the Anglican Consultative Council, although recently they said they will send observers.

There were many and various responses to this covenant, which presented a range of perspectives. The Moderator of the Anglican Communion Network, Bishop Duncan, said that at last the House of Bishops had taken some measure, although a small one, of the position of the rest of the Anglican Communion. But a fiery reply

issued from the Archbishop of Nigeria, Peter Akinola, who saw the whole thing as inadequate and a subterfuge for continued arrogance and disobedience.

Perhaps the most significant response to the covenant of the House of Bishops was a letter crafted by twenty-one Bishops of ECUSA, which affirmed their intent to remain a part of the Anglican Communion, and called for the establishment of a bi-partisan commission to ask "the question of our ability to walk together with one another and in a wider Communion." This question echoed the ultimate concern of the Windsor Report. Some of these Bishops are part of the Anglican Communion Network, some are not. I was very pleased to see on the list the name of our old friend, Jeffrey Steenson, who was recently consecrated Bishop co-adjutor of the Diocese of the Rio Grande. This same group sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury requesting a meeting with him.

Well, where are we, and what does all this amount to? As I have said before, we cannot be in a spiritual relation to a process, even a process conceived by the Primates of the Anglican Communion. A process is just that, an abstract conception that is being worked out and affected in its very working. As Anglicans, our spiritual relation to the Church of God is ordered through a Bishop. The Bishop has really only one vocation and that is to proclaim and to propagate and to defend the substance of the Christian Faith. All geographical jurisdictions follow the supreme priority of this primary vocation. In other words geographical jurisdiction must follow spiritual jurisdiction. Without the latter the former is nothing.

Our own Bishop, Henry Luttit, has stated unequivocally that he is in compliance with the Windsor Report. And he expects us to be in compliance as well. There is no problem there. As long as he is, we shall be.

But now, this brings me back to the beginning of my thoughts. The Primates' Communiqué of February included something else that I believe is at the center of our crisis. Way down the list at the penultimate paragraph, number twenty-one, the Primates renewed their commitment to "the discernment of theological truth and the development and improvement of theological education" throughout the Communion.

For me this is perhaps the most important thing that was discussed at the entire meeting. Oh yes, there must be the disciplining of ECUSA and the teaching of the Church and her moral life must be upheld and defended for the sake of our spiritual life which is the essence of Communion. This is to talk about the Church's very life.

But the question arises as to what the mind of that life is, and what might be the charity given and received in the light of that mind. Our present crisis stems from nowhere else than from the radical insufficiency of the knowledge of the authorities and theology of the entire Christian Church, and more specifically of the Anglican Way. These were for centuries articulated in the Prayer Book and the Articles of Religion and in the Ordinal. Through these we held our spiritual life in concrete continuity with the historic Church of God. Each and every Bishop, Priest, and Deacon found his identity and responsibility in these authorities. They were the poetic (Prayer Book) and systematic

(the Articles of Religion) and practical (the Ordinal) shape of Christianity that sprang up in the English speaking world.

It is no wonder, therefore, that having eradicated our theological and liturgical roots, we not only fail to recognize the truth, but we fail as well to love truly.

This is the crux of the matter. The breaking of the bonds of affection is indeed the most heinous sin in this whole wretched affair. St. Augustine dealt with this centuries ago in the Donatist controversy. He pleaded for the common life of charity as that which binds what we know of the truth into one godly life. He knew and articulated so clearly the fact that one cannot love what one does not know. In the end this activity of the mind and the heart was the final happiness of the soul set on God; for knowing and loving are the acts of the triune God in himself, and we are included in his glorious life by his grace.

And so for our day in the life of the Church of God, theological clarity is of the greatest importance. For her people to know the truth of God, the Church must know her own theology, and for her people to be in love with one another this truth must be known and shared. Apart from this, from the wisdom and charity that is old, we shall not know the truth nor love one another in the time at hand. The gates of Hell shall not prevail. That is promised by our Lord. But that promise is fulfilled only because in the freedom of the truth of God, God's people have loved him, and one another.

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