

Bishop of Washington Offers Thoughts on Proposed New Anglican Province

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To the Clergy and Congregations of the Diocese:

Last Thursday a front page article appeared in the New York Times, and a smaller article in the Washington Post, about the proposed formation of a new non-geographical province within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Episcopal Church. The proposed archbishop of this envisioned province is Bob Duncan, deposed bishop of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. First and foremost, let me assure you that the formation of a non-geographical province within an existing province is highly unlikely. Before the establishment of any such province, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church would have to give her consent, and it is difficult to imagine that she would do so. If consent was given, the Archbishop of Canterbury would then form a committee of primates to discuss the feasibility of forming the new province. If two thirds of the primates felt that such a new province would assist and strengthen the ministry of the Anglican Communion, then the primates would forward their recommendation to the Archbishop of Canterbury who in turn would forward his recommendation to the Anglican Consultative Council for final vote and action. At present, neither two-thirds of the primates, nor the Archbishop seem favorably disposed to this development.

The gathering in Wheaton, Illinois of Duncan, Martyn Minns and several hundred of their supporters who seek the formation of the non-geographical province came as no surprise to most of us in the House of Bishops. But the press it has received, especially in the New York Times, was well beyond what was warranted considering that the proposed province is, at most, about 5 percent of the size of the Episcopal Church and that its chances of recognition are dim. I realize, however, that this most recent installment in the media's coverage of how the sky is allegedly falling on the Episcopal Church caught many members of our diocese by surprise, and I want to allay their anxieties. We face our share of problems in the Episcopal Church, but wholesale defections to a movement committed to denying gay and lesbian Christians the birthright of their baptism is not one of them.

The Archbishop of Canterbury wisely did not invite any of the bishops consecrated to serve in the Nigerian, Ugandan, Rwandan or Kenyan incursions into the United States to last summer's Lambeth Conference. Nor did he invite bishops of the Reformed Episcopal Church, which broke from the Anglican Communion almost 130 years ago. Williams seems unlikely to reverse course now. He knows that the leaders of the proposed province have been working, overtly and covertly, to undermine the Episcopal Church for almost a decade, so what was a front page story to the editors of the New York Times was old news to him. It would be folly for the Archbishop to even consider recognizing a non-geographical province because it would unleash chaos in the Communion, with theological minorities in every jurisdiction seeking to affiliate with like-minded Anglicans in other provinces. Unfortunately, the Archbishop has contributed to the confusion and anxiety the leaders of the proposed province have sought to foster by meeting on

numerous occasions with Duncan and his allies. These meetings have bestowed an unwarranted sense of legitimacy on those who seek to deconstruct the Anglican Communion.

What Duncan and Minns propose – that Duncan become the Archbishop of a newly minted non-geographical province with the support of GAFCON primates such as Peter Akinola of Nigeria and Henry Orombi of Uganda – is a rejection of the respectful diversity and generous orthodoxy that defines the Communion. It is a repudiation of the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury in our communal life. It flies in the very face of what it truly means to be an Anglican. For Minns to suggest that he is leading a “new reformation” is ludicrous and demeans the historicity and value of the real Reformation as we know it and live it. The movers of the proposed new province embarrass themselves, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion by the self-serving media coverage they have worked so hard to achieve. The news of the proposed province appears at a time when more than 28 million Americans are living on food stamps, one out of every 10 new mortgage holders is facing foreclosure, unemployment is at its highest level in decades, the auto industry is “tanking” and the real danger of deflation or a possible depression looms large on the horizon. In the global south, millions live on \$1 a day, and wars, ethnic and religious violence, poverty and the AIDS epidemic continue to wrack the African continent. To learn in this context that Duncan, Minns and their allies think that the most important issue facing the church is the sexuality of the Bishop of New Hampshire suggests a level of self-absorption that is difficult to square with the teachings of Christ. And to learn that the New York Times considers the complaints of these deposed, retired and irregularly consecrated bishops to be front page news suggests a fixation on “culture wars” reporting that deprives readers of a true sense of the challenges facing the church in this country.

I write this to you because our clergy and congregations need to know the current status of the irregularly proposed new province within our church. I also need to share with you my disappointment in the behavior of men who were once bishops in the Episcopal Church. Some of these men have been my friends, but they have now taken their own personal agendas for power and control beyond the limits of common Christian charity and decency. As you may already know, the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church has deposed Duncan and John-David Schofield as bishops and priests in the church, and the Presiding Bishop has recently inhibited Bishop Jack Iker of Fort Worth and determined that he has renounced his orders. The case of Keith Ackerman, the former Bishop of Quincy, remains to be reviewed.

During this season of Advent, please keep Rowan our Archbishop in your daily prayers, as I know you will continue to pray for Katharine our Presiding Bishop and primate. Pray for the church, the body of Jesus Christ, that it might be a center of strength and a beacon of light and hope during these very tough economic times for those we serve here in the Diocese of Washington and in the global community.

In Christ’s Peace, Power and Love,

The Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, D.D.
Bishop of Washington