

Southern Cone Primate Gregory Venables replies to Griswold

May 7, 2004

The Most Revd Frank T. Griswold
Presiding Bishop, ECUSA

Dear Bishop Frank,

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I write in response to your letter of May 5th. Since it has found its way all over the internet, I am constrained to respond more broadly than just in a personal note.

With great respect it must be said that considering what you now write in the light of what you have already done brings to mind the old cliché of Nero fiddling while Rome burns. It's like the doctor telling the grieving family that the operation was a success even though the patient has died.

You speak with clarity about your grief over the pain your actions have caused and yet you proceed with your relentless agenda. Do you not see that there is an enormous contradiction here?

The key path to alleviating that pain is repentance. It is simple to turn around and join the spiritual and doctrinal direction of the Anglican Communion and the overwhelming majority of the Christians of history and the world today. When one considers that you were advised by the Lambeth Bishops Conference, the ACC, the Primates, and the Archbishop of Canterbury that to proceed would bring a harvest of pain, it is hard to see why you find the consequences you now experience surprising.

You indicate that the action of the General Convention was constitutional. Of course I am not an expert in the Constitution and Canons of ECUSA, but I do remember the commitment of your General Convention to initiate an "inter-Anglican and ecumenical dialogue on human sexuality issues which should not be resolved by the Episcopal Church on its own (B-020)." (A ten minute search of internet archives shows that!) Many colleagues have also reminded me that you were clear that the official position of ECUSA was parallel to that of Lambeth I. 10 at a number of Primates meetings. When was that changed, or was it just ignored? Of course there is pain when you moved ahead in violation of your own Convention decisions. In addition, I saw the broadcast of objections to Gene Robinson's consecration which were simply and totally ignored.

How can these be constitutional actions?

You cling to the statement that "what we hold in common is much greater than that which divides us..." That statement was made before you chose to be the

chief consecrator at an event you knew would "tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level."

At a time like this, simply celebrating what we hold in common is like a man arguing before a judge that his offence should be overlooked because he hasn't broken other laws.

You cannot offer a band aid to a person who needs open heart surgery.

The situation must be addressed at the root of the disorder. You don't heal a disease by treating its symptoms.

You tell us that "Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight" is moving toward solving the problem in your province. It is not so. First of all it leaves the decisions in the hands of the offending bishops and does not give any substantive protection to parishes that maintain Anglican teaching and practice. In addition, we are aware of ECUSA clergy and parishes who have been ordered by their revisionist bishops not to ask for alternative oversight, threatened if they do, or who live in areas where bishops have publicly stated that they will not allow it. The fact that "some" bishops will arrange for Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight does not mean at all that it can be put in place where it is really needed.

And when did those who hold to the apostolical, biblical faith and practice of Christianity as accepted for 2000 years suddenly become "dissidents"?

You now say that you want to be in conversation. In the light of your previous great reticence to discuss the matter in our meetings this is tragically late in the day.

ECUSA's actions have caused a great and unnecessary crisis in the Anglican Communion that has spilled over into culture, ecumenical affairs, and even interfaith relations. It is tragic and painful indeed. It is the result of your actions and it is also reversible.

You have insisted on autonomy from the Lambeth resolutions, from the Archbishop of Canterbury's plea, from the ACC, and from the Primates to pursue an agenda that is absolutely scandalous to most Christians. That view of autonomy is the opposite of everything Anglicanism has always stood for. Why would you still want to call yourself Anglican? May I urge you either to live as an Anglican conforming to Anglican norms or admit that you have left us and closed the door behind you.

May God guide us in love and truth at this crucial and sad time.

+Greg

The Most Revd Gregory J. Venables
Primate of the Southern Cone of the Americas