

To the Eames Commission

9 February 2004

Dear Friends

I must begin by expressing my deep gratitude to you for undertaking this most testing of jobs for the sake of the Communion. The Primates of the Communion have repeatedly asserted that they wish to remain a Communion, rather than becoming a federation of churches; and the task of this Commission is to help make this more of a reality at a time when many pressures seem to be pushing in another direction.

The difficult balance in our Communion as it presently exists is between the deep conviction that we should not look for a single executive authority and the equally deep anxiety about the way in which a single local decision can step beyond what the Communion as whole is committed to, and create division, embarrassment and evangelistic difficulties in other churches. The Pauline principle that in the Body of Christ we should 'wait for each other' (I Cor 11.21) at the Lord's Table needs to be thought about in its relation to our present problems.

But we also have to think about what it means to be a Church existing not by human concord or agreement but by the free choice of God: 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you' (Jn 15.16) is a word fundamental to the whole being of the Christian Church. The question is how we hold together the belief that membership in the Church is God's gift, so that communion always pre-exists ordinary human agreement, and the recognition that a Church faithful to the biblical revelation has to exercise discipline and draw boundaries if it is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and not its own concerns.

You will not be dealing with a problem that is simply about biblical faithfulness versus fashionable relativism. There are profound biblical principles involved in all the points so far mentioned, which may point to different emphases and solutions. You will need to be aware of the danger of those doctrines of the Church which, by isolating one element of the Bible's teaching, produce distortions – a Church of the perfect or the perfectly unanimous on one side, a Church of general human inspiration or liberation on the other. Anglicanism has had to deal with such tensions from its beginnings – and indeed, so has the Church overall. You will be drawing on a variety of historical and theological resources from every age in confronting the contemporary challenge.

Countless people in the Communion and beyond will be praying for you, so take courage from that fact. I wish you every blessing and every gift of discernment and courage in your vital work, praying that its results will be for God's glory and the advancement of his Kingdom.

Yours ever in Christ,

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