



Archbishop of Sydney

26 June 2017

Letter to the College of Bishops

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Many of you will know of the recent decision of the Scottish Episcopal Church which amended their canons so as to change the definition of marriage, and hence endorse the marriage of same-sex couples within the Church. This amounts to another significant and sad moment in the life of the Anglican Communion, akin to the consecration of Gene Robinson in 2003.

As you will all know, I consider such an action to be a travesty of the rule of Christ, of the doctrine of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and therefore an abandonment of the principles of Anglican doctrine to which we have committed ourselves in the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of Sections 1-6 of the Constitution. I consider that such a departure from the teaching of Scripture, 'the ultimate rule and standard of faith', casts doubt upon the nature of our communion with the Scottish Episcopal Church, since such communion needs to be consistent with the Fundamental Declarations (Section 6). In time, given the decisions of the Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church, which are yet to be translated into canon law, we shall see a similar disparity of communion with these two provinces.

The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) was formed in 2008, after painful court cases and loss of property, because they believed that the truths of the gospel could not be compromised for the sake of conforming to society's obsession to normalise homosexual behaviour as part of Christian discipleship. Although I recognise that some members of our Church are open to considering a change in our doctrine at this point, our General Synod has on more than one occasion affirmed the importance of marriage as being defined as a life-long union, to the exclusion of all others, of a man and a woman. This is the doctrine of our Church. This is the doctrine of Christ. We depart from this at our peril.

In response to the decision of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the bishops of the Anglican Church in North America, in consultation with many Primates of the Global South and of Gafcon have decided, upon the request of Anglican Christians in Britain, to consecrate a missionary bishop to those who have left the Church of England, or will soon leave the Scottish Episcopal Church, because they cannot abide the ineffective and errant leadership of their synods and some of their own bishops. That the General Synod of the Church of England could not even bear 'to note' a unanimous report from the House of Bishops, which reaffirmed the Bible's teaching that marriage does not include same-sex relationships, is indicative of the challenges to orthodoxy that the Church of England faces. They need our prayers.

The decision to consecrate a missionary bishop does not come lightly. It is very different from the decision of the parish of Jesmond in Newcastle, UK, where an assistant minister of the parish was consecrated a bishop hoping, I believe, to minister *within* the Church of England, despite the lack of canonical process and the agreement of either the Bishop of Newcastle or the Archbishop of York. Rather, the consecration of the Reverend Canon Andy Lines at the end of this month is for the purpose of providing episcopal oversight to those faithful Anglicans who can no longer in good conscience remain under their bishop or be a part of the church

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they once cherished. As a missionary bishop to Europe, Canon Andy Lines would not be ministering *within* the Church of England (which extends to continental Europe) or *within* the Scottish Episcopal Church, but rather to those who have left these churches. Since the Anglican Consultative Council has not declared ACNA to be a part of the Anglican Communion, such a ministry can no more be called 'border crossing' than the ministry of other Christian denominations in the UK.¹

As it turns out, I shall be in Wheaton, Illinois, at the time Canon Lines is to be consecrated as a bishop in the church of God. I have been invited to participate in this consecration and after consulting the Standing Committee of the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney, our Primate and the Archbishop of Canterbury, I have decided to do so.

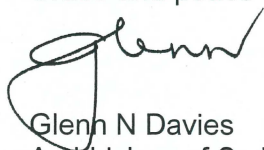
From the Primate's response to this decision and his counsel not to participate, I understand that some of you will disagree and disapprove of my participation. I do not make the decision lightly, nor do I wish to cause division among our episcopal ranks. However, I believe that my participation is an act of solidarity with those who contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Not to participate, since I shall be present, would send a signal of a different kind, and one which I do not believe would bring honour to Christ and his gospel.

In February 1984, my predecessor, Donald Robinson faced a similar situation when he was asked to consecrate the Reverend Dudley Foord to be a bishop in the Church of England in South Africa (as it was then known). He consulted widely and decided that to consecrate a bishop for a church not technically in communion with Canterbury was a gospel imperative. In that case the consecration took place in Sydney at St Andrew's Cathedral and several bishops from around Australia participated, including the Primate and a bishop of the Church of the Province of South Africa (as it was then known).

I cannot see, from this distance in time, that Archbishop Robinson's actions caused any ongoing division in our national Church, and it is my hope that my participation in a consecration on the other side of the world will likewise cause no stumbling block to our fellowship. On the contrary, it is my hope that we would all rally to defend the Bible's teaching on marriage, not merely for the sake of correct doctrine, but that we might preserve the message of the gospel for the salvation of all.

As we celebrate 500 years of Martin Luther's brave efforts to withstand those whose teaching was contrary to the gospel, new days bring fresh challenges for defending the truth.

Grace and peace



Glenn N Davies
Archbishop of Sydney

¹ In response to the suggestion that such a consecration would be prohibited by the Canons of Nicaea, Dr Mark Smith, whose area of expertise is theological development from AD 381-451 has written the following article:
http://churchsociety.org/blog/entry/topical_tuesday_loose_canons_andy_lines_and_the_canons_of_nicaea/