

In favor of expressing a desire to enter full communion with the ACNA

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Should the Church of England remain in communion with The Episcopal Church while failing to enter full communion with the ACNA, I fear we shall be inducing “fundamentalism” within our own church, and outside of it.

“Fundamentalism” is indeed a “loaded word” - it is also highly pejorative, but I believe that it's probably the most fit word to describe what a likely effect will be of a prolonged period of time continuing in full communion with The Episcopal Church, without entering such with the ACNA. Indeed, I believe that entering full communion with ACNA will do a great deal to stem the tide of fundamentalism which will likely come from our continuing communion relationship with The Episcopal Church.

Many have alleged that the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church has denied the resurrection and the divinity of Christ; in a separate paper, I investigate these claims and have endeavoured to show that, while she has never denied such in simple words, she has indeed made statements which amount to denials of the church's doctrines of the resurrection and of the divinity of Christ.¹ Moreover, there has been little outcry within TEC itself regarding this situation. It is at times denied; and as far as I know, even the Communion Partner bishops have not seen fit to address it in proposed resolutions for this last General Convention of TEC, perhaps afraid of repercussions – or perhaps simply acknowledging the futility of their presence within General Convention. But what is telling here is that no significant faction within TEC has undertaken a visible effort to address this situation. It seems that faith in the risen Christ within TEC has been profoundly undermined.

The Episcopal Church has long been associated with various forms of “extremism,” utterly serious breaches of church discipline with little response, and other things which seriously offend individuals and churches with which we would like to maintain good relations - advocacy of the legality of partial birth abortion, clergy members writing liturgies involving such things as Asherah worship or group sex, continual practice of clown eucharists despite vehement protest, to name but a few. And of course, it has prompted a great deal of anger with its policy on consecrating actively gay bishops.

These things have become well-known to many in other denominations, as sites which are critical of such trends within the Episcopal Church have become widely read across denominations, with the site <http://standfirminfaith.com> sometimes exceeding the internet traffic of the whole site of The Episcopal Church itself.²

1 cf. “What do people mean when they say that Presiding Bishop Schori has denied the resurrection or the divinity of Christ?”

2 as based on Alexa traffic ratings – episcopalchurch.org is a site of more than 21,000 pages and includes the Episcopal News Service center “Episcopal Life,” sermon archives, church growth materials, etc. etc.. The site <http://virtueonline.org>, which is almost exclusively given to criticism of TEC, also approximates episcopalchurch.org in traffic ratings. Blogs defending TEC in general vastly outperform the top blogs critical of TEC – it seems that the people most loyal to TEC are doing very little reading about their church. One consequence of this is: there are probably

However, all of the things are, in my opinion, of very little concern compared to the spectre of a church losing its faith in the risen Christ.

Though churches or individuals may consider these things to be undesirable in themselves, they also feel: these things are also undesirable because they would undermine our faith in Christ and relationship with Him – which in a certain sense, is the whole point of refraining from such things.

I engage in online ministry, and have noted an increase in such comments on the net as “you can't be a Christian and be an Episcopalian or Anglican” by persons from other churches. Friends of mine report such remarks being made in face-to-face conversations. Though I wish persons saying such things would educate themselves on the matter so as to have a more articulate way of describing the situation other than “you can't be a Christian ...” etc., I do find this trend highly disturbing.

A few weeks ago Giles Fraser noted in a blog posting his disappointment at how speakers were sometimes required to sign a statement of faith before being allowed to give papers or sermons at Christian Union events. I fear that this trend will only increase if the Church of England has as its sole communion partner in the United States a church whose Presiding Bishop can reasonably be said to have denied the doctrines of the resurrection and the divinity of Christ. I fear that persons within our church will be more inclined to hold fast to particularist doctrines, principles, and practices in situations where dialog is more in order, simply because they fear for the corruption in the church. I fear that persons and Christian institutions outside of our church, witnessing that the Church of England is in full Communion with The Episcopal Church but not its Christologically sound counterpart, will also be more inclined to avoid certain types of stimulating reading, to throw up unnecessary obstacles to ecumenical cooperation and understanding, and to generally act in ways characteristic of one who feels that one's church's teachings, practices, and faith are in danger of being undermined.

In undertaking ecumenical online ministry as an Anglican layman, I have already felt such effects, and expect them to increase with time. Situations have arisen where initial enthusiasm for coming together in Christ was replaced with skepticism, or complete avoidance, when it was discovered that I am Anglican.

If our church is to enter communion with the ACNA, we will be doing a number of things:

- 1) We will enter a communion partnership with a group of people who is able to help us in addressing the very earnest situation within The Episcopal Church
- 2) It will be more apparent to our members, and those with whom we have ecumenical ties, that we are serious about our Christology, in having engaged a Christologically sound Anglican church on the same territory as TEC, thus enabling us to carry out our mission of transformation there which has become direly necessary.

many who are not aware of what is going on, and can still be reached with the message of Christ.

- 3) It will be more clear to the world that it is simply false that the word “Anglican” means nothing more than “people who get together from time to time, but hold no common faith.” That we are not a confessional church, that we are not “particularist” on non-kerygma issues, but that we do indeed hold high our faith in the Gospel and those things which bind all Trinitarian Christians. We will make more clear to the world that we believe: that though faith is not simply a series of propositions or intellectual assertions, it does have a cognitive dimension, and includes beliefs, rather than being simply characterized by emotive utterances aimed at motivating adherents to undertake actions according to a given ethical framework. In emphasizing that faith does indeed engage our minds, and our beliefs, we will be doing a great deal in vouchsafing responsible scholarship, and ecumenical understanding of what binds all of us together who are in Christ. And we will be encouraging genuine discourse and engagement, with all the work and patience this entails, in the place of rhetoric characterized by emotive or political soundbytes.

The ACNA has in its ranks many who are excellent church planters, evangelists, scholars, and persons who are capable of engaging in productive ecumenical dialog. They understand our formularies, and what it means to be a creedal, but non-confessional church body. In this new digital age which has come upon us, a great deal of work can be done across parochial and diocesan boundaries in ministry – simply by the creation of compelling materials, and stimulation of dialog in internet-based for a. It is no longer necessary to physically enter a parish building in order to reach out to members of that parish. I would suggest that through mission cooperation with the ACNA, a great deal can be done to reach out to those members of the Episcopal Church who are doubting, and wondering if Christ may indeed be more than a set of ethical principles, and a warm, affirming ethos for fostering adherence to such principles. That the words in their prayer books may address realities which are more than poetic descriptions of people working together for a noble cause. That their neighbors sitting in the pews of other churches might not be “leaving their brains at the door” when they express a faith in the risen Christ, but may indeed be worshiping and serving their sovereign Lord. That the unity that we have in Christ with Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostalist, Anabaptist Christians – may include an agenda of social action, but is infinitely more than just that.

And I fear that if we do not acknowledge that there is a great need here, and take on a communion partnership with a capable church which is in that very mission field we must address, as long as TEC remains in communion with us – that we will sow anxiety, doctrinal particularism, and ecumenical isolation, by appearing to ignore a grave challenge to our own faith, and to the faith of Trinitarian Christianity at large.

This is the “fundamentalism” which I fear, should we fail to embrace the opportunity to enter into communion with the ACNA.