Resolution on the Anglican Communion

This resolution invites us to affirm the life of the Anglican Communion. We have decided not to adopt the Anglican Covenant. Some thought it was un-Anglican. Others that it would not achieve its purpose. Others were troubled by the fact that its genesis was in a single complex of issues.

I believe that the movement to develop the Anglican Covenant has been a genuine and honourable attempt to heal the life of the Communion. Across the Communion, it has focused attention and thinking on what it means to be a Communion and what is special about the Anglican Communion.

In the Scottish Episcopal Church, we have been part of that movement and it has developed our thinking. Like my colleagues in the College of Bishops, I have taken part in many meetings across my own diocese. We have talked about how Communion means that as we grow closer to God, we grow closer to one another. We have explored the way in which Communion is spiritual before it is institutional - decentralised before it is centralised. We have seen unity is the prize when we learn to express, honour, celebrate and transcend diversity.

The Anglican Communion matters deeply to us in the Scottish Episcopal Church. In this Motion we invoke the history of Samuel Seabury, consecrated in 1784 by the Scottish bishops as the first bishop of the church in the United States of America. We believe that we were part of the founding of the Anglican Communion. We want to be part of the re-founding - the bringing to birth of a new phase of Communion life. The Anglican Communion also matters to us because we are a small church and are enriched by being part of a bigger whole. And I am convinced that we discern that our particular attitude to authority - rooted in the collegiality of a College of Bishops - is echoed in the aspiration to a dispersed rather than centralised authority which is the vision of the Anglican Communion

So our decision not to adopt the Anglican Covenant is not a decision to reject the Anglican Communion. Nor are we indifferent to deeply held differences of view which are held across the Communion. For those differences are also present in this church and they are part of our daily life and relationships. We hold a range of views. They are expressed with integrity, listened to with care and we are committed to living creatively with our diversity

But our decision not to adopt the Anglican Covenant says that we think that this was not the right way. We needed a number of responses to consider - not just one. And we needed to recognise that what brings division and difficulty to our life as a Communion is a number of inter-related issues, not just one - not just the single complex of issues around human sexuality.

The Motion calls for new bonds of shared mission at the heart of Communion life. Much of what is needed to develop those bonds is already in existence, There are the four Instruments of Communion. There are networks - family, environment. There is the Anglican Alliance, There is Continuing Indaba - for which I serve as Chair of the Reference Group. It links together dioceses in groups of three across the world in conversation about mission. There are Diocesan Companionship Links in which we are all involved. I spent part of last week at the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion in London. Round the table the Communion was present - Cuba, Malawi, England, Ghana, South Africa, Burundi, Pakistan, Scotland. We are bound together in the

love of God, in prayer and worship. The Communion is not broken. Yes there is always brokenness but our view as a church is that the Anglican Covenant is not the right or only means through which that can be healed.

In my past life, I learned two important lessons about the nature of conflict. I think that they are relevant now. The first is that what is experienced as sharp conflict is seldom as simple as the collision between two views in direct and equal opposition to one another. It's never just one issue. It's always a complex of inter-related issues. And it isn't just the issues - its the strength with which they are experienced. 'Why this issue?' we say. 'And whence the passion?'. Sometimes we used to say that 'there is more going on'. And I think that there are two other things going on around the Communion which have made the human sexuality issues particularly difficult to deal with

The first is one to which we are tangentially linked through the Seabury story - it is the legacy of history. The sharp word is colonialism. What it means is that people assert independence of thought and action more strongly - challenge authority more resolutely - when relationships are shaped and conditioned by the legacy of history. In the Anglican Communion, that history affects interactions between the New World and the old world and between the developed and the developing world. We need to understand and be sensitive to our history so that we can transcend it. To transcend it means that we together build a post-colonial Anglican Communion.

The second I learnt about at the Primates Meeting in Dublin last year. Another of the great diversities of Communion life is the way in which we exercise authority. A bishop in the Church of England does not exercise authority as we do in Scotland - different again in America and in Nigeria and in Hong Kong. And I believe that much of the misunderstanding in Communion life has been around misplaced expectations about what each of us can promise and deliver.

You may hear as unwelcome news the suggestion that there are several different strands to Anglican issues. On the contrary, I believe that it is good news and for this reason. Where there is just one issue, people line up predictably on one side or the other. But if we acknowledge the complexity of what is actually happening, we can see that the stances which people adopt are very much less clear cut and predictable. It becomes possible to have dialogue across division in ways which at present are difficult.

Our Communion is a gift to the world. A global institution which is determined to exist largely without centralised authority and which prizes unity in diversity - such a Communion models things which are very important for the world community. Such a Communion is attractive in mission because it has learned to transcend conflict. I believe that we now have a historic opportunity to reshape the Anglican Communion so that it may become an instrument of God's mission to the world. We as a church - a small church with a part in the founding history - are by God's grace called to play our part in that rebirth

I ask you to support the Motion