



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH

The Rt. Rev. Robert Duncan
Bishop

24th August, A.D. 2008
St. Bartholomew

TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH:
My dear Brothers and Sisters,

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father in the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Very shortly you will gather as bishops of the Episcopal Church for a special meeting of the House of Bishops. One of the previously announced reasons for your gathering is to consider a charge brought against me by five priests and sixteen lay people. The charge is a charge of “abandonment of the Communion of the Church.” While it appears likely that the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh will end its constitutional union with the Episcopal Church by action of its Annual Convention this fall, that action has not yet occurred. My support for that action is well known, as are the repeatedly argued theological and ecclesiological reasons. Nevertheless, to speak and write in support of an action not yet taken, is not the same as taking the action. Moreover, the action, when taken, will be Convention’s action, not mine. Only after clergy and people act, will I act. My letter to the Presiding Bishop, dated 14th March, 2008,¹ remains an accurate and true statement of my continuing submission to the ordination vows I took within the Episcopal Church.

The proper forum to determine whether I have violated constitution or canons would be a church trial, as I am a Bishop of this Church. But such a trial would have required due process and all the protections of the trial canons. The course chosen by my local opponents, accepted by the Title IV committee and embraced by the Presiding Bishop was an expedient course, requiring none of the justice, none of the expense, none of the rights of the accused, none of the lengthy timetable. Need I add that in pursuing the abandonment shortcut, even the specific protections of that course of action have been ruled not to apply?² So ignoring all the protections of the trial canon and violating the few protections of the abandonment canon, a timetable is set whereby the head can be removed from the body before the body acts. For a Church so committed to justice, what kind of justice is this?

The moral abyss into which our beloved Church has descended could scarcely be plainer than in this matter. Never mind what is right or noble or holy. Never mind what the apostles and saints who went before us intended as they laid the foundations upon which we have been called to build. It is all about what is expedient. It is all about what can be achieved by short-cuts and misapplied power, about winning by whatever means are available.

Given that I have been judged guilty by the Title IV disciplinary committee (without even any knowledge, prior to their findings, that there had been charges brought against me), and given the

¹ Letter to the Most Revd Katharine Jefferts Schori, 14th March 2008

² No inhibition prior to presentation to the House. No majority of all those entitled to vote.

determination of the Presiding Bishop and her chancellor to proceed in this direction³ (despite the unwillingness of the three senior bishops to concur in inhibition and despite protests of various attorneys and standing committees) and given the ruthlessness of my opponents both locally and nationally, I cannot see a way to bring myself to be present at the coming meeting of the House. In light of all that has happened so far, what kind of “hearing” can I expect the leadership to accord me? You will have to decide together what is right or wrong without benefit of my presence. The constitution and canons are more than plain “in their literal and grammatical sense” and the public documents and charges, together with my response, have long been in your hands.

If, in the House’s judgment, you choose to proceed despite my protest and that of so many others, I do ask that you who would deprive me of my see and of my priestly ministry express the courage of your convictions in a roll call vote. To do less will be but one more exercise in expedience and moral failure.

The Clergy Conference of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh will be meeting from the 17th to the 19th of September. Our focus will be on addressing the apologetic and missionary challenge posed by Islam to the Christian Church here in America. This focus notwithstanding, please be assured that the Special Meeting of the House of Bishops will be in our prayers at Ligonier as all of you meet in Salt Lake City.

On a personal note, it was good to see so many of you, and to visit among you, at the recent Lambeth Conference. May you be led in the days ahead to do what is right and good and faithful, which is surely the goal of all of us who desire to follow the Lord Jesus.

Faithfully in Christ,

+ B.B. P. Hsburz

Attachments (2)

³ Letter from David Booth Beers to John H. Lewis, Jr., April 7, 2008