to Christian Howard
from AB. Scott.

74

FROM
Paul Gibson

DEPARTMENT

SENDTO
The Primate

DATE
31.1.78

SUBJECT
Christian Howard's request for theological rationale for Anglican reluctance to break communion.

MESSAGE

Ed Thain raised this matter with me in conversation a couple of weeks ago and some of my comments may have reached you through him. Essentially, I have two observations:

1. Has the myth of uniformity in faith and order ever been solidly grounded? Even in the New Testament there are many theologies, some of them parallel and some of them conflicting. Even if ultimate checks on drift in belief and practice are eventually neccessary, is it not true that the gains represented by every orthodoxy protected are balanced in some measure by the insights rejected in the related heresy? And it is because the heresies do contain insights that they keep coming back to haunt us in new and unexpected forms. The containing of diversity rather than the pursuit of uniformity is always, in my opinion, the better way.

2. If there is a fundamental Anglican principle it is that of pluralism -- or even , I hope, of dialectic. The willingness of a community to contain and even foster apparently conflicting beliefs and practices is no affront to truth for truth in any absolute sense of the word always remains beyond the relative situation. Only if we refuse to break communion in spite of tensions in faith and order do we retain the framework in which the thesis and antithesis of our disagreements are open to the synthesis which God will bring us from his future. That openness to the future is, for the theologian, the essence of faith.

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