

# The Annotated Mark Lawrence

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The Very Rev. Mark J. Lawrence is the controversial bishop-elect of South Carolina. He cannot be consecrated unless and until he receives the consent of a majority of the standing committees of Episcopal Church dioceses, as well as the consent of a majority of the bishops with jurisdiction. In my essay of October 16, 2006, "[No Consents: A Crucial Test for The Episcopal Church](#)," I urged the withholding of consents, not because of theological concerns—I know little about the bishop-elect's specific beliefs—but because of Lawrence's seemingly tenuous commitment to The Episcopal Church and because of a well-founded fear that, if consecrated, Lawrence might attempt to remove the entire South Carolina diocese from The Episcopal Church. Others have shared my concerns, and both [Via Media USA](#) and [Episcopal Forum of South Carolina](#) have written to bishops and standing committees to express their reservations.

Lawrence has apparently received a number of requests for clarification of his views by those who must grant or withhold consent. On December 4, Simon Sarmiento posted a response by Lawrence to such requests on his Web site, [Thinking Anglicans](#). "Mark Lawrence Answers"—I presume that Sarmiento added the title—comprises a letter to "Bishops and Standing Committee Members," followed by questions and answers. Lawrence may well have written other responses to inquiries, but only "Answers" has been made public.

I am pleased that Fr. Lawrence has seen fit to respond to questions that have been put to him. (It is unclear whether his response on Thinking Anglicans was intended to be made public, but, now that it has been, Episcopal News Service has written a [story](#) about it.) I am equally pleased that he seems not to have succumbed to the temptation to tell people what they would like to hear, irrespective of his true beliefs. This is not to say that Lawrence's answers are completely candid, however. The Mark Lawrence I see in "Answers" seems to be the same Mark Lawrence of whom I wrote in October. My view remains that consent to consecrate South Carolina's bishop-elect should not be given.

I believe that "Answers" demands a response from Lawrence's critics. A number of bloggers (for example, [Mark Harris](#) and [Tobias Haller](#)) have

already remarked on it briefly. Because I have written at length on the matter of consents for the South Carolina bishop-elect in what Lawrence calls a “misleading article,” I feel compelled to take on the task myself. There is no reason for me to repeat what I have already said, none of which seems to require any revision, so I will simply annotate the latest material from Lawrence. (Readers unfamiliar with “No Consents” are urged to read it before proceeding.) “Mark Lawrence Answers” is reproduced below. My comments are in the footnotes.

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## Mark Lawrence Answers

6 November 2006

William Temple

Dear Bishops and Standing Committee Members:

Thank you for affording me this opportunity to respond to your concerns, particularly regarding my suitability as a colleague in the House of Bishops. I know you are aware of the profound theological differences within The Episcopal Church in this year of 2006. There is little hope that it will cease to be a continuously expanding perimeter in the near future. The question for each of us is at what point we reach the place where our Episcopalian or Anglican commitment to comprehensiveness for the sake of the truth exhausts its elasticity.[\[1\]](#) For me that was with the consent to Canon Robinson’ [*sic*] election at the General Convention in 2003. I was a deputy at that convention, serving on the Consecration of Bishops committee. When our committee voted to send his election to the House of Deputies for approval I felt constrained to write the minority report opposing the committee’s recommendation.[\[2\]](#) As today is the observation of Archbishop William Temple in our calendar, I cannot resist mentioning a statement of this wonderful theologian that now seems prescient for our times and influenced my position in Minneapolis. “The Church must be very clear in her public pronouncements so she may be very pastoral in her application.” I thought we were being anything but clear in our decision in 2003 and it has carried over into GC 2006.[\[3\]](#) From this involvement in the committee on

Consecration of Bishops you can see I am no stranger to this matter of consent and for what it may raise in issues of conscience, as well as process. I certainly hope you chose to support the consent process of South Carolina's election. But I understand that these are less than pacific times in the life of our dear and distinguished Church.

I have loved and served this Church of ours over the last thirty plus years, even when I have found her incorrigibly frustrating. When I have spoken or written critically of her it has not been from a posture of having rejected TEC, but from one of commitment, even investment of my life and my family's life in the Church's common call to serve our Lord. We have sacrificed much for this Church, as I'm sure each of you has over many years. I believe it is symptomatic of these times, that I who have adhered for 26 years to my ordination vows am now peppered with requests for me to affirm in advance my commitment "...to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church..." partially from a misleading article<sup>[4]</sup> and letter written by a group which presents itself, wrongly enough, under the noble and historic phrase, *Via Media*.<sup>[5]</sup> None of us can predict where the angle of repose for this period of profound re-formation will settle. You will find here my answers to questions presented by other concerned bishops. Hopefully they will provide you what you need to make an informed decision. We are each called to be players in it—you and I—regardless of how this consent process for me unfolds. I wish you God's blessings whichever way you are led to decide, whether for or against me. May we remain united in Christ and servants in his Kingdom and his Church.<sup>[6]</sup>

Sincerely,

The Very Reverend Mark J. Lawrence

## **1. In what ways will you work to keep the Diocese of South Carolina in The Episcopal Church?**

Although this appears to be a reasonable and straightforward question, it is actually anything but. I might as well have been asked while I was engaged to my wife, Allison, "In what ways will you work to keep your wife from leaving her commitments?" The question assumes something that has yet to be demonstrated by any prior action. Unless, of course, one makes the assumption that the request of the Standing Committee for Alternative

Primal Oversight was an initial step of departure, which I do not believe it needs to be.<sup>[7]</sup> As you are well aware, The Episcopal Church, because of its reliance on constitutional and canonical autonomy, rather than the bonds of affection, has acted not merely unilaterally, but also precipitously towards the considered position of the vast majority within the Anglican Communion, and is now itself in a state of increasing disarray.<sup>[8]</sup> This action of TEC is quite different from a respectful request made by an aggrieved diocese to the acknowledged Spiritual Leader of our Communion.<sup>[9]</sup> Certainly we concede that the Archbishop of Canterbury has, heretofore, no jurisdictional authority in these matters.<sup>[10]</sup> Yet we also know The Episcopal Church's action in 2003, unlike the APO request, has caused more than a few Episcopalians, as well as the worldwide Communion, much consternation.<sup>[11]</sup> I would ask you to consider the fact that many of us want to remain in the Anglican Communion as well as The Episcopal Church. I would also suggest that you consider that the Diocese of South Carolina, in its recent request for APO, is actually seeking to find a way to remain at one and the same time in TEC and in covenant with the Communion.<sup>[12]</sup> It serves none of us well to ignore the developing crisis and take refuge in polity which is proving to be no longer sufficient for the challenges we presently face.<sup>[13]</sup> I have sought, however inadequately, in several of my writings to not only identify the problem, but to go beyond merely admiring the complexity of the crisis, (a peculiar practice which the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seemed to think was a profound enterprise). Frankly, absurd as it may sound, some have criticized me for actually suggesting a different path forward in this ever-changing world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As if somehow the very suggestion that our polity was insufficient for the day, disqualifies one from being guided by it or taking vows regarding it—an odd assumption at best.<sup>[14]</sup> I just happen to be someone who does not believe that our discipline, as articulated in our Constitution and Canons, came to us by oracular revelation.<sup>[15]</sup> Not that I suggest disregarding them—far from it. In fact I suggest if they had been adhered to in past years we might not be in the unfortunate situation we find ourselves in at present.<sup>[16]</sup> Still they are evolving documents that govern our common life and need to continually be adapted to new eras. We have challenges today that call for a progressive reappraisal of our polity. This can only happen as ecclesial ideas are brought forward to deal with the exigencies of the day, as, I hasten to add, they have often been in the past.<sup>[17]</sup>

With that said, back to your question. I shall commit myself to work *at least* as hard at keeping the Diocese of South Carolina in The Episcopal Church, as

my sister and brother bishops work at keeping The Episcopal Church in covenanted relationship with the worldwide Anglican Communion.[\[18\]](#)

## **2. What would be your response if the convention of the Diocese of South Carolina voted to leave The Episcopal Church?**

I don't think that speculative questions of this nature as to what a person will do in some imagined future are either reasonable or helpful. I mean no disrespect by this, but I will say in all fairness, I can think up many such questions of an imagined future crisis that could send any of us into a conundrum of canonical contradictions.[\[19\]](#)

## **3. Will the Presiding Bishop be welcome to preside at your consecration?**

This would be a most unwelcome situation for the vast majority of priests and laypersons of the Diocese of South Carolina. I am sure you know how disruptive this would be for my ministry, the office of the bishop, and for the diocese. This is not a justice issue that needs to be imposed upon a prejudiced body as a matter of authority. It is an issue of conscience that St. Paul thoroughly addresses in his First Letter to the Corinthians. Where there is good will, a desire to please Our Lord, and a respectful deference for the other's good, a resolution that is good for the Diocese of South Carolina, and The Episcopal Church ought to be able to be agreed upon by all.[\[20\]](#)

## **4. Do you intend to participate fully in attending meetings of the House of Bishops, including Eucharist?**

Yes, unless the in participating in Eucharist on some given occasion, (because of the state of my inner life or conscience), should put my spiritual health in jeopardy.[\[21\]](#)

## **5. What is your response to the request of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of South Carolina seeking “alternative primatial oversight”?**

Here is the prepared answer I gave to the following question at St. Phillip's

Church during the “walkabout” in Charleston. I believe it addresses yours.

**The Diocese of South Carolina is among those dioceses which have requested Alternative Primalial Oversight. Do you support this decision? If so, what issues does it raise? Please make reference in your answer to: a) the authority of Holy Scripture b) catholic ecclesiology c) Anglican identity. [22]**

I too am a member of a diocese that has asked for Alternative Primalial Oversight, though I was not a member of the Standing Committee that took the action. [23] When it came out in the newspaper that week I thought, well I’ll need to address it on Sunday. I read the lectionary lessons for the coming Sunday, but there was nothing to address the subject there. But in one of those serendipitous convergence I have come to expect while traveling this road in the Kingdom of God, the collect for the Sunday after the Standing Committee of the Diocese of San Joaquin asked for alternative primalial oversight, reads as follows:

*Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through ... (BCP, p. 230)*

This collect, most likely composed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, is rooted in the teaching of the New Testament, particularly Ephesians 2:20-22 and 4:3-4. It is also rooted in one of the essential teachings of the Anglican Reformation—that no human assembly or institution may claim to be the Church of God unless it is founded on the teaching of the apostles. The apostolic Church is founded not on institutional or sacramental continuity alone. What is often referred to, as “Apostolic Succession” is more than merely the laying on of hands from bishop to bishop in sacramental a chain back to the apostles. Equally essential for the church is the teaching of the apostles and prophets succeeding from one generation to another. This is stated clearly in Articles XIX, and XX in the Articles of Religion, (see BCP, page 871).

What is being asserted in these two articles is the priority of Holy Scripture over the authority of the Church. The church as St. Paul taught in his Letter to the Ephesians, and as the above collect ascribes, is built upon the teaching of the apostles as found in Holy Scripture; and it is called to live under and in

obedience to the Word of God. The uniqueness of the Anglican and Episcopalian understanding of the Church is that it has held both of these understandings toward the nature of the Church at the same time. It has held the catholic argument that institutional continuity is essential for the identity of the Church. This continuity is sacramentally and visibly expressed in the office of the bishop, the episcopacy. It has also believed in the need to conform to the teaching of the apostles, grounding our belief and practice in the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. Consequently we have been eager to seek unity—striving to maintain the visible unity of the Church, reaching out to Roman Catholics in one direction, and towards our Protestant brothers and sisters in the other, but not seeking this unity at the expense of either of these two truths of the Church. Holding institutional continuity and the need to be under the ever correcting and reforming authority of the Bible. If the questioned [*sic*] should be raised, as it often is, as to who interprets Holy Scripture when different factions or parties in the church disagree, the answer has traditionally been, we turn to the consensus of the faithful. So interpretation of debated texts of scripture is not up to one individual priest or bishop, one local congregation, or even a provincial or national church. We need in such a case to seek the consensus of the faithful through out [*sic*] the worldwide Anglican Communion, and even to give appropriate regard to how the historic church has understood such disputes, as well as what the various branches of Christendom teach on the matter.[\[24\]](#)

The unity of the church needs this considered reflection. Even more essential to our unity with one another is the source of all unity in the Church. As John Stott has observed, “Christian unity arises from our honoring one Father, one Savior, and one indwelling Spirit.” So fundamental to our unity with one another in the church is our unity with the Holy Trinity. It is this unity which raises a series of elementary questions. How can we foster a unity pleasing to God if we deny the very revelation God has given us about himself or the Christian life?[\[25\]](#) How can we be eager for unity with one another if we deny the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ? How can we say the Holy Spirit is leading the Church through the parliamentary procedures of General Convention if the results of these procedures deny the very truth the Spirit of God has revealed through the teachings of the apostles and prophets? Is it not upon this very teaching that the Church is founded? Of course. It is upon the doctrine of the apostles that the church is built and only upon their doctrine that we can maintain our unity.[\[26\]](#)

I need to say it clearly, I am eager for such unity. A unity drawn not along

narrow lines of biblical interpretation, but from an inclusive and comprehensive use of the Bible. I am most eager to remain a Christian in the Anglican tradition. This is a tradition, which as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has recently stated, has maintained “the absolute priority of the Bible, a catholic loyalty to the sacraments and a habit of cultural sensitivity and intellectual flexibility.” Unfortunately The Episcopal Church has frayed in recent years this strand woven of three cords by our misguided passion to be culturally sensitive and intellectually flexible. In its desire to be perceived as relevant to one segment of our culture it has lost its commitment to the Gospel—which is the only hope we have to offer this segment or any other for that matter. In its desire to be more relevant than thou, TEC has cast aside scriptural faithfulness, particularly the broad and demonstrable teachings of the New Testament that would convict our lifestyle of sin, and call into question our overly permissive approach to morality. Even more disturbing is our grave disregard of fundamental Christian doctrines such as the nature of God, the uniqueness of Christ, the integrity and unity of the Spirit’s work, and the need of humankind for the redemptive work of the cross—at times assuming our sexual proclivities, given by nurture or nature, are, by that fact, necessarily God-given.

I am personally saddened for those gay and lesbian Christians within the church that so much of the debate has focused upon homosexual behavior and relationships. It has too often given way to bigotry or to an easy self-righteousness among heterosexuals. Nevertheless, it is for now the place where the battle lines have been drawn. Regardless of how I wish it had been elsewhere, it is where the larger issues are being debated, leading to a crisis in the worldwide Anglican Communion. The unity of 80 million Christians is at stake. As Archbishop Williams has recently stated, “...the decision of the Episcopal Church to elect a practicing gay man as a bishop was taken without even the American church itself...having formally decided as a local Church what it thinks about blessing same-sex partnerships.”[\[27\]](#)

So when the Standing Committee of our diocese, like the Diocese of South Carolina, asks for Alternative Primatial Oversight it is because recent parliamentary procedure to convince The Episcopal Church that it has erred has proved fruitless.[\[28\]](#) Like an addictive or dysfunctional family, this exclusive pursuit of “cultural sensitivity” has led to destructive patterns of behavior.[\[29\]](#) So perhaps our Standing Committee’s action of disassociation, along with seven other dioceses at present, will demonstrate the seriousness of TEC’s dysfunction. I love this Church enough to practice what those in the

counseling professions call tough-love. Underneath all the discussions of human sexuality, our message is this, The Episcopal Church, in its obsession to be what it has termed inclusive, has excluded the priority of Holy Scripture, as well as the historical continuity of the catholic faith. Of course I would not want to make a similar error in either my passion for scripture or in my commitment towards historic catholicity. I am an Anglican—I want all three: the Primacy of the Bible, historic continuity, and cultural sensitivity and intellectual flexibility.[\[30\]](#)

This, then, deals with two of your requests—that, in my response to your question, I address the authority of Holy Scripture and our Anglican identity. I have not to my satisfaction, however, adequately dealt with the issue of catholic Ecclesiology. I'm not sure others in the church have either. We have asked the Archbishop to respond without presenting a thorough doctrine of ecclesiology from which to act. The Stanford economist Paul Romer once said, "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste." It would be unfortunate if we do not use this current crisis in the church to do some hard thinking about what God is calling the Anglican Communion to become in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Windsor Report identified four instruments of Unity, The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and the Primates Meeting. Of these four instruments, three are less than a 150 years old, and two are less than 40! The Lambeth Conference first met in 1867 (over the protests and concerns of the Archbishop of York—fear of broadening jurisdictional authority); the ACC was established after Lambeth in 1968; and the Primates first gathered in 1979. These would seem to be evolving attempts of the Anglican Communion to adapt its practical life and ecclesiology to globalization—an increasingly global church trying to come to grips with a nascent global age. Now we've entered further into such an era, what Thomas Friedman has described as a flat world, (see his book, The World Is Flat). It strikes me as I reflect back on General Convention in 2006 that many in the church were like the union bosses in the steel mills in the late '70s and early '80s. Getting more for the workers in the short term but not recognizing that the company was investing more and more abroad, and not investing in updating the local regional mills. The world was changing and they didn't fully grasp the change. There's no going back to isolationism in the world or the church. I believe the mantra of autonomy will prove to be a hindrance to the future which the Anglican Communion, and The Episcopal Church, as a constituent member of the Communion, is called to forge. When farmers in the San Joaquin Valley decide whether or not to plant a cherry orchard they evaluate the market in Japan. When a farmer

decides about a crop of cotton he needs to know what's being grown in Turkey and Egypt, and the demand for fabric in China. Those of you in the business world know a similar thing is true for you. This present crisis in the Anglican Communion is a sign that among other things we have entered into an ever-flattening world. We need to have an Anglican ecclesiology that takes seriously this new era.[\[31\]](#)

Alternative Primatial Oversight is a temporary gasp for air—necessary perhaps, but temporary. I'm in favor of some new and prescient thinking about the way the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion lives out our unity in Christ. There is no going back to pre-2003. Time to chart a path for the future. This is one of the things I believe the request for APO is trying to communicate to the leadership of TEC, along with trying to keep those of us who understand our baptismal and ordination vows to keep in step with apostolic teaching and fellowship, and in covenant with the worldwide Anglican Communion. Ironically, at this point the “conservatives” are being progressive, and the “progressives” strike me as digging in their heels for the past. Time to move ahead. The way the world works has changed and so should we. I hope we in The Episcopal Church can catch up.[\[32\]](#), [\[33\]](#)

## **6. Do you recognize Katherine Jefferts Schori as Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church and as your Primate?**

I recognize Katherine Jefferts Schori as the legitimately elected Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.[\[34\]](#) Sadly, I also recognize that her actions as bishop of Nevada in condoning same sex blessings, for which she has expressed no regret, put her in violation of the Windsor Report[\[35\]](#) and, consequently, compromise her ability to function in primatial authority and relationship.[\[36\]](#) This is not merely a consequence of her stated views, (which is one thing), but her considered actions after the Primate's Covenant in 2003, as well as subsequent Primatial Communiqués, i.e. Dromantine, regarding the bonds of affection.[\[37\]](#) How one parses the difference between elected Presiding Bishop and Primatial representation is one of the ecclesial challenges that, to a greater or lesser degree, those who have asked for APO must presently grapple.[\[38\]](#)

## **7. Will you uphold the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church as now constituted?**

Yes, as I have for the last twenty-six plus years of ordained ministry! One, however, should be cognizant of the essential fact that this upholding of the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church includes the essential fact of remaining

***“...a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church... propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer...”*** (Preamble to the Constitution)

Unfortunately, when this vow is looked at in it's [*sic*] entirety, all Episcopalians may at some point in the not too distant future be asked to declare allegiance to one portion of the Constitution and Canons at the expense of another. Frankly, this is because in more than a few highly publicized actions, bishops and priests of this Church have acted contrary to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church.[\[39\]](#), [\[40\]](#)

## **8. Some further thoughts regarding our present predicament in The Episcopal Church.**

As an upcoming article in The Living Church[\[41\]](#) will I hope make clear, neither the Standing Committee of South Carolina nor I have made plans to leave TEC.[\[42\]](#) But I fear many of the above questions, which swirl around vows and canons, profoundly miss the real question of the moment. The questions that bishops and Standing Committees keep posing to me, in one form or another—and I might add, contrary to rumors, most of which have answered [*sic*—go back to the question of whether South Carolina and I are leaving The Episcopal Church. That is neither the most relevant nor, ultimately, the most important question that needs to be asked.[\[43\]](#)

We in TEC, conservatives and liberals, orthodox and progressives, reasserters and reappraisers, (or whatever monikers you prefer to use...most of us know the players), are like a married couple living in the same house, sleeping in separate rooms, having harsh words too frequently, making cryptic comments to one another as we pass in the hallways. We have lived like this for years, sharing a common history that we have interpreted in such vastly different ways, and teaching increasingly different values to our children. We each remember slights; snubs and embarrassments foisted on us before our chagrined friends and neighbors by what we each perceive as the other's

selfishness, and at times even rude arrogance.

Now, when Standing Committees and diocesan bishops want promises from me, (though I have kept my ordination vows to adhere to the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church for the past 26 years),[\[44\]](#) it strikes me analogous to the above wife and husband having the following exchange. When the wife wants to use the car to take one of the kids to a baseball game her husband, who has the keys to both cars in his hand, says, “Will you promise you will not leave our marriage or seek custody of this child? Otherwise, no keys!” She says, “I hardly know how to answer you my dear. You suddenly want promises, when you haven’t listened for years when I begged you to keep your promises. At least it seems that way to me. And when some of the children have left and not called you for months on end, you only chide and blame them for having left your family the smaller. My heart is heavy from our alienation...and now you keep insisting on promises! Recently I’ve noticed you keep leaving documents of ownership around on coffee tables and counters. You claim it’s your parents who gave the down payment for the house and even the summer cottage. Forgive me, I thought they were both of ours. Have you forgotten it was once a common love that bound us together not documents and deeds? You’ve gotten so upset just because I told our pastor I needed help in our marriage. Isn’t it time you ask yourself a few questions about how we all got in this predicament?”[\[45\]](#)

Now certainly I can imagine various responses to the analogy, which I’ve used to illustrate the dynamics of our common life, especially from those who may see themselves in the broad middle. There are those in the church who find themselves in the middle of the family argument. They don’t like the fact that the two sides in conflict within the family have drawn such rigid and embattled lines in the sand. They want us all to get along, but seem most often to side with the reappraisers, not so much because they agree with their perspective, but because they don’t want to disagree with them. On top of that, they see it as most often the “conservatives” who are leaving the Church and wanting to take their familial inheritance with them. So like a member of a dysfunctional family, who prefers to have everyone get along, he, rather than asserting an opinion on the matters tearing the family apart, saves his animus for those who, feeling abused,[\[46\]](#) make in desperation statements of departure.[\[47\]](#)

My friends, we in TEC are in a grievous state. This demand for promises to Constitution and Canons when many of the great teachings of the faith are up

for grabs strikes me at times like a theatre of the absurd.<sup>[48]</sup> We decline each year in numbers and in our significance to American culture, while growing yearly more out of step with the vast majority of Anglicans across the world.<sup>[49]</sup> When some like me make provocative statements to draw attention to the culture of denial that dims with regularity our too frequently myopic provincial eyesight,<sup>[50]</sup> I am seen by some as unworthy for the episcopate and as a threat to our common unity. On what grounds should consent be denied—for daring to say, “Not only does the emperor have no clothes, but he isn’t getting any new subjects either, and some of those he had once have long left. Maybe its [*sic*] time the emperor reassess his reassessments”?<sup>[51]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> The imagery here is a bit garbled. Theological diversity is not easily measured, but, if it is expanding within The Episcopal Church, it is doing so both on the left *and* on the right.

<sup>[2]</sup> Many favoring the consecration of Mark Lawrence have argued that South Carolina has a right to the bishop of its choice, just as supporters of Gene Robinson argued, in 2003, that New Hampshire had such a right. The argument is undercut, however, by Lawrence’s own attitude, as revealed here. He clearly does not hold the view that a diocese can choose whomever it wants as a bishop, as he vigorously opposed giving consent to Gene Robinson in 2003 and to Barry Beisner in 2006.

<sup>[3]</sup> Some people have asserted that the church should have articulated a doctrine regarding homosexual persons before making one a bishop. This is not necessarily how The Episcopal Church operates, however, and most of those making such an argument would have disputed any formulation likely to be offered by the majority, insisting, instead, that homosexual activity is inherently sinful. That homosexuality is not a bar to ordination was well established in the church by 2003, and it was, therefore, not much of a stretch to make a homosexual priest a bishop. One might argue that Gene Robinson’s living arrangements are in a kind of doctrinal limbo, but reform seldom happens in proper “logical” order, even when accomplished lawfully.

<sup>[4]</sup> Mine, I take it.

<sup>[5]</sup> South Carolina Episcopalians who belong to Episcopal Forum of South Carolina, one of the allied groups of Via Media USA, and who face the prospect of living with a Bishop Mark Lawrence, can hardly be cheered by

these remarks. Lawrence has not reached out to these people, many of whom consider themselves conservative.

[6] Significantly, Lawrence does not refer to *The Episcopal Church*. In any case, what is at issue is not his past behavior, but his future actions.

[7] This is completely disingenuous. The Diocese of South Carolina asked episcopal candidates the degree to which they agreed with propositions such as: “If the Diocese of South Carolina separates in some formal way from ECUSA, I intend to transfer from this diocese to an ECUSA diocese.” (Lawrence answered *strongly disagree* to this one.) Given such an answer, asking how (and whether) a prospective bishop of The Episcopal Church intends to resist or facilitate schism seems a fair question. The careful reader will note that Lawrence never addresses the question asked.

[8] Opponents of the consecration of Gene Robinson are upset that their minority position did not prevail, so they have appealed to the Anglican Communion, where, allegedly, Lawrence’s is the majority theological view. This is known in the political area as picking one’s jurisdiction. Whereas there are canons to enforce order within The Episcopal Church, there are virtually none outside it, so bishops and archbishops can make up rules as they go along. Canon law can be changed, but most Episcopalians would prefer to see that done legally, rather than through revolution. The “bonds of affection” argument is the sort of argument that could have kept Congress from passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, after all, violated the sincerely held beliefs of our white brothers and sisters in the South. Congress did what it did because it was the right thing to do.

[9] This is a tricky calculus. Even the Windsor Report acknowledges that consenting to Gene Robinson’s consecration was perfectly within the rights of the General Convention. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on the other hand, has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of The Episcopal Church, and he has repeatedly said so. A request to someone to exceed his or her authority, no matter how polite, is an invitation to that person to sin on one’s behalf.

[10] And still does not.

[11] And what is that consternation supposed to justify? The requests for APO have caused loyal Episcopalians in Pittsburgh much consternation as well, but that was apparently not considered when the diocese asked for APO. I doubt that either of the developments Lawrence refers to has caused the average Nigerian Anglican any consternation at all.

[12] This is not at all clear from the [request](#) from the Standing Committee, which asserts that South Carolina is no longer in communion with The Episcopal Church, which “has, year after year, taken actions and adopted teachings which further and further distance it from the Faith of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” South Carolina has shown a strong preference for being in the Anglican Communion, as opposed to being in The Episcopal Church. The Standing Committee asserted: “As this [covenant-development] process unfolds, we wish clearly to number ourselves among the dioceses and parishes that seek full constituent membership in the Anglican Communion.” Such a blank-check endorsement of developments that have not yet occurred is a clear indication that this is a political statement made for effect, not a wise and considered opinion.

[13] This is not a self-evident assertion. In any case, those expressing their dismay over Episcopal Church polity have offered no constitutional or canonical changes; they have merely acted unilaterally.

[14] This appears to be an allusion to my criticism of Lawrence’s [essay](#) in *The Living Church*. Lawrence can somewhat plausibly deny that he advocated an illegal surrender of the autonomy of The Episcopal Church in his essay. It certainly cannot be denied that he advocated a surrender (“Our very survival, let alone our growth, necessitates the surrender of our autonomy to the governance of the larger church—that is, the Anglican Communion.”). If he meant that this surrender be effected through legal means, that is, by action of the General Convention, perhaps I can be excused my having missed this subtle point, as “General Convention” occurs only once in his essay, and only in reference to what it has done wrong. Such surrender seemingly would require a change to the constitution, which requires two successive regular meetings of the General Convention, and could not be accomplished before 2012. But Lawrence speaks of a “crisis” and admits that implementing his solution will be seen as “undemocratic.” I have surely mistaken his rhetoric if he plans to wait patiently for eight years while the church implements his plan by lawful means.

[15] Nor does anyone else. Is that what is required for them to be obeyed?

[16] Complaints from conservatives that the church does not use its disciplinary apparatus often enough are commonplace. Our traditional Anglican tolerance of diversity does indeed make the church reluctant to discipline clergy, particularly for their doctrinal views. It is relatively easy to bring charges against ordained members of the church, however, and, if conservatives have not done so in cases they feel strongly about, they are partly to blame for it, as canon law does not enforce itself. Bishop John-David

Schofield, Fr. Lawrence's current bishop, complained, in his recent [address](#) to his diocesan convention, about the "11 illegal ordinations in Philadelphia" and about Bishop Jack Spong's "denying the Virgin Birth" and teaching in the Diocese of San Joaquin "without permission from the bishop." In fact, disciplinary action was taken against some of those involved in the Philadelphia 11 ordinations. No doubt, Bishop Spong could be presented for some of his actions, but conservatives have not brought forth charges. In recent years, however, they have done so against Bishops Walter Righter, Jane Holmes Dixon, and Andrew Smith. Many moderates and liberals are, on the other hand, frustrated by the lack of disciplinary actions against radicalized conservatives.

[17] It is ironic that Lawrence makes so much of adjusting our polity to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The primary goal of the adjustment, however, seems to be insuring that church *doctrine* does *not* adapt to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

[18] Since his essay makes it clear that bishops and the rest of the church have done a terrible job in this regard, this pledge does not amount to much.

[19] Lawrence's tack here is one often taken by presidential nominees before Congress. He does not want to answer the question because his readers will not like his answer. In essence, however, he has already answered it. See footnote 7.

[20] Lawrence blames the diocese here, but I suspect that he is not too keen on having the Presiding Bishop at his consecration. The question is irrelevant because our gracious Presiding Bishop surely will be willing to be represented by someone else should Lawrence actually be consecrated.

[21] The meaning of this sentence is clear, though the sentence itself is garbled. (I copied this text as it was posted on the World Wide Web. This sentence was as shown in the copy received by Simon Sarmiento.) The question is being asked because a number of bishops of the Anglican Communion Network have, in recent years, attended House of Bishops meetings primarily to register their objections, leaving the meetings early and not participating in common prayer. Presumably, they believe their "spiritual health" is endangered by too close contact with their colleagues as well. If consecrated, I suspect that Lawrence will, like his Network colleagues, qualify his consecration vow to "share with your fellow bishops in the government of the whole Church" [BCP, p. 518].

[22] The question telegraphs what the answer has to be. Lawrence does not disappoint.

[23] Since this was written, the annual convention of San Joaquin, Lawrence's diocese, voted to make radical and schismatic changes to its diocesan constitution. It is a reasonable inference that, as Lawrence took no action to discourage these changes, he approves of them. (I am told that he was unable to attend the convention.) The San Joaquin action is more radical than anything South Carolina did, and I would have expected that a bishop-elect might have exercised some moral authority to protect the good order of the church. I would have been wrong.

[24] It is not clear what procedure Lawrence would have us use to obtain what he would consider adequate consensus. The conspicuous divisions within Christendom are a testament to the difficulty of achieving consensus. The unity of the Anglican Communion, which, until recently, might be considered remarkable, has been the product of a focus on common prayer, rather than on doctrine, i.e., proper interpretation of Scripture. The schisms within Anglicanism, on the other hand, have largely been over theological, not liturgical concerns. If no Anglican province can adopt an innovation without permission of all of Christendom, I fear that Christianity will be unable ever to change in any significant way. Although this may be Lawrence's wish, Christian teaching *has* changed in the past, and, many believe, must change in the future to accommodate new knowledge and circumstances. Even the Windsor Report acknowledges that change in the Church is normative. Those who study change in human communities tell us that change does not usually occur by waiting for consensus, but through innovators whose new ideas are, over time, widely adopted. If we believe that the Holy Spirit guides the Church, we should not fear such a paradigm.

[25] The implication here is that one accepts the authority of Scripture or one rejects it. Apparently, the only proper interpretation of Scripture is Lawrence's. This is not a particularly Anglican viewpoint.

[26] Of course, even the New Testament tells us that the apostles were not always of one mind.

[27] See footnote 3.

[28] Presumably, this is a complaint about the General Convention. Parliamentary procedure is designed to protect the right of minorities to have their say, while allowing for rule by the majority. The message here seems to be that conservatives will abide by the rules of The Episcopal Church as long as their views prevail. If they lose a vote, however, they will run to the Anglican Communion to make The Episcopal Church play nice. Critics of The Episcopal Church have not really made the case that it is important that

Episcopalians and, for example, Anglican Nigerians need always be in agreement. It is not intuitively obvious that the opinion of 17 million Nigerians is more relevant to decisions of The Episcopal Church than that of two million Episcopalians. We should be wary of making theological uniformity into an idol.

[29] Were The Episcopal Church truly sensitive to American culture, it would be hostile to homosexual persons and would follow the model of most states, which have passed repressive laws against homosexual persons.

[30] This is difficult to achieve, and people of goodwill disagree about how to do it.

[31] Lawrence seems fond of this analysis, but its relevance to the Church is unclear. Globalization in the marketplace requires that local decisions be made with access to global information. Local decisions are still local, however; globalization does not require—though it may encourage over time—that everyone have similar goals. Globalization also encourages people in one part of the world to learn from the particular choices made by people elsewhere. It produces not a static world economy in which everyone behaves alike, but a dynamic, evolving one.

[32] It is hard to communicate just how un-Anglican all this sounds. The obsession with correct doctrine is a relatively new and, many would say, pernicious idea in Anglicanism. The genius of the Church of England was the realization of the benefits to be had by eschewing burnings and beheadings, and agreeing to a pattern of common prayer that did not demand uniformity of belief. If this worked well for England, then the obvious conclusion is that ecclesiastical globalization should demand even more, not less, theological latitude if we are to maintain our Anglican heritage and avoid fratricidal fights over doctrine. Given that the Church has, in times past, held demonstrably false beliefs, one might argue that uniformity of belief might be more pernicious than diversity.

[33] The question Lawrence is supposedly answering here is what he thinks of South Carolina's APO request. The answer is, apparently, that he believes it is a necessary action. His answer need not have been so long.

[34] This is an odd locution and, therefore, one that seems to be hiding something. The real question is whether Lawrence recognizes her authority, such as it is. He does not really answer that question.

[35] How does one violate a report? The Windsor Report has, for some in the church, become a source of authority just lower than Scripture.

[36] On the other hand, if she held beliefs like Lawrence's she would have a difficult time relating to most people in her own church. As primate, should she not represent, not oppose, the majority view in The Episcopal Church?

[37] Of how many other Episcopal bishops does Lawrence not approve?

[38] As has been point out elsewhere, views such as Lawrence's, if not represented to the primates by the Presiding Bishop, will certainly be adequately voice by other primates.

[39] Although, at first, it seems otherwise, Lawrence's answer is, if not "no," then certainly "maybe." It is tiresome once again to see the preamble of the constitution of the General Convention trotted out in an argument about some alleged fealty that The Episcopal Church owes to The Anglican Communion. The preamble was added to the constitution in 1967 to make it clear that the church could officially be called "The Episcopal Church." The reference to the Anglican Communion was apparently intended simply as an identifying description of the church, and it was not debated or modified in debate. The preamble neither grants to nor withholds from anyone the power to do anything. (See [\*Annotated Constitution and Canons\*](#), pp. 3–7.) Even were the Communion to eject The Episcopal Church from its membership, Lawrence's ordination vows would be unaffected. What he is saying, however, is that his real commitment is to the Anglican Communion—at least when it agrees with him—not to The Episcopal Church. This was obvious in his response to another assertion on the South Carolina questionnaire: "As a priest, I should not follow my bishop's direction when it conflicts with Scripture, traditionally interpreted by the Anglican Church." Lawrence's response to this proposition was *strongly agree*. (There is, of course, no Anglican Church, and it is not clear who might decide what is the traditional interpretation of Scripture by the Anglican Communion.) It is the greatest of ironies that the Diocese of San Joaquin just passed, on first reading, a constitution amendment very much in the spirit of the preamble cited by Lawrence: "The Diocese shall be a constituent member of the Anglican Communion and in full communion with the See of Canterbury." Provinces (i.e., churches) are members of the Anglican Communion, not dioceses, of course. Should San Joaquin remove itself from The Episcopal Church, it would *remove* the diocese from the Anglican Communion, not assure its inclusion. In any case, membership in the Communion and being in communion with Canterbury cannot simply be declared unilaterally. Where is the collaborative decision-making of which conservatives are supposedly so fond?

[40] If one wants to know what sort of bishop Mark Lawrence will be, one only has to consider that, in this and other answers, he reasons and threatens to act as do bishops of the Network, bishops Duncan, Iker, Schofield, etc. The church does not need more bishops of this ilk, some of whom may be presented for their own “extracanonical” behavior before Lawrence’s proposed consecration date.

[41] Apparently, this is a reference to an [interview](#) with Mark Lawrence posted on the magazine’s Web site on December 6. Readers of “Answers” will not find much new in the interview.

[42] This is not a categorical denial that the diocese or Lawrence will leave the church.

[43] Clearly, many Episcopalians think that the question is more important than Lawrence does. Lawrence is belittling the question as a way of not answering it. He would do well to allow those being asked for consent to decide what questions are relevant to making their decision.

[44] Lawrence is again insisting on what a good boy he has been. George Washington was a fine British subject before he was chosen to lead the Continental Army against British Redcoats. (See also footnote 6.)

[45] No one is arguing that there are not serious disagreements within The Episcopal Church. This analogy is fundamentally defective, however. The purveyors of “realignment” are fond of dividing the church into the “orthodox” (or conservatives) and the “liberals.” This analysis suggests that dividing everything 50-50 in any breakup would be fair. (The wife on one side; the husband on the other.) In reality, however, the church is divided into an unhappy minority (10%, perhaps a bit more) and everyone else. The larger group includes many whose theology is quite “orthodox” but who see no need for schism to isolate themselves from the “apostates” in the church. Another group just abhors church politics. Rather than marriage as a metaphor for The Episcopal Church, one might better choose a ’60s commune, in which all goods are held in common and new members enter with as much or as little as they happen to bring. People come and go all the time, but a crisis develops when a small group of commune members band together and insist on taking their “share” when they leave to form a rival commune.

[46] The “abuse” that Lawrence talks about is much alleged, but seldom credibly documented. We are all sinners and often treat our fellow Christians with less than perfect charity. Disagreement, however, is not abuse. Nor is the valid application of disciplinary canons.

[47] In fact, the “conservatives” are different in their willingness to ignore canons because they believe they are in the right. It is true that some in the middle simply want to “get along.” (There are worse motivations.) Others, however, are truly tolerant of diverse opinions and actually see the Anglican tendency to live and let live as a virtue. Clearly, Lawrence is disdainful of this group, whatever their motivation.

[48] Lawrence is being asked few theological questions because everyone knows, at least generally, where he stands. If he is unwilling to support the polity of the church, then there is no need even to discuss theology, and there is a severe impediment to his being consecrated a bishop.

[49] This is an interesting observation. The sad divisions of The Episcopal Church look very much like divisions within the Church of England. Our churches, in this respect, are quite similar, though the artifacts of establishment make many surface features of the Mother Church seem alien to Episcopalians. What is significant is that The Episcopal Church and the Church of England (as well as churches in Scotland, Canada, and elsewhere) are not conspicuously growing apart. If these churches have, over the years, moved to the left of some mythical Anglican center of the past, churches in Nigeria, Southern Cone, and elsewhere have moved in the opposite direction. No Anglican province is the theological clone of the Church of England in 1662 or some other period that the conservatives want to conserve. If, over the next few years, liberal Episcopalians were to attract another 20 million Americans to The Episcopal Church, where would Lawrence’s argument be?

[50] The “provincialism” of provinces seems to be a favorite theme of the bishop-elect. One person’s myopia is another person’s sensitivity, however, and the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral suggests that accommodation to local circumstances is a fundamental trait of Anglicanism. It is ironic that The Episcopal Church is criticized for accepting the values of its society, but the “realignment” advocates are quick to excuse Archbishop Akinola’s accommodations to the homophobic attitudes endemic to Nigeria.

[51] It might have been a better strategy simply to answer questions without editorializing, rather than pleading “poor me” and taking umbrage at being asked questions at all.

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