

Saving Anglicanism

An Historical Perspective on Decisions
Facing the 75th General Convention
of the Episcopal Church



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An important item on the agenda of the 75th General Convention is the crafting of an appropriate response to the Anglican Communion and the Windsor Report. Whereas the Special Commission on the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion has proposed, within a thought-provoking theological perspective, a set of 11 resolutions for consideration by General Convention, there is also a broader historical context that should be taken into account by those who must vote on these resolutions, on variations of them, or on replacement resolutions that have or might be proposed. By no means does the 75th General Convention have a simple job to do in responding to events set in motion by the 74th General Convention, we need to bring a wide range of theological perspectives and a careful understanding of church history to bear as we chart the best course for the Episcopal Church to pursue.

The future of the Anglican Communion, perhaps its very existence, is uncertain, and the Episcopal Church is properly apprehensive about it. Of even greater concern, though little remarked upon, is the future of a distinctively Anglican approach to the Christian Gospel.

In what follows, we will review some of the events that have placed our church in the situation in which it now finds itself, and we will consider strategic and tactical considerations that should inform any actions taken by General Convention.

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"Militant Traditionalists"

The Episcopal Church, and, by extension, Anglicanism itself, is under attack from within. This is not a new phenomenon, but one that has been in evidence for thirty years or more. It has co-opted too much of the goodwill and faithful reserve of our conservatives, and it has twisted "traditionalism" into a wholesale rejection of the Episcopal Church. Because of their response to the actions of General Convention 2003, the insurgents within the Episcopal Church have seemed preoccupied with issues of homosexuality, but their real concerns and objectives are much broader. The troubles in the church are often characterized as reflecting a split between liberals and conservatives, revisionists and orthodox, reappraisers and reasserters. Some of those most unhappy with the Episcopal Church portray themselves as defending the "faith once delivered to the saints" against a radical revisionism informed by a secular Zeitgeist and the "gay agenda." They acknowledge no middle ground between these theological landscapes, and they seek not compromise, but the capitulation of their opponents, which is to say, most Episcopalians. Whereas it is painful to make these assertions, Episcopalians need to recognize that their church is beset by more than simple disagreements.

Who are these insurgents? Most come from the conservative-evangelical wing of the church, though not all who call themselves Evangelicals or conservatives are seeking "realignment." Less prominent

are some uncompromising Anglo-Catholics. These two groups subscribe to inflexible, legalistic visions of Christian morality and are inclined to favor authoritarian, hierarchical politics over more democratic ones. Theirs is an odd marriage of convenience, an incongruous alliance of low- and high-church devotees who have, at least for now, agreed to put aside their differences on liturgical and ecclesiastical issues such as the ordination of women. Whereas the Evangelicals deplore the Episcopal Church's failure to read the Bible exactly as they do, Anglo-Catholics are equally upset by the church's failure to view traditional church teachings—on divorce, abortion, and male-only clergy, for example—as they do. Each of these groups is, at its heart, opposed to the Enlightenment and to the modern world that developed from it. While often calling themselves "orthodox Anglicans," they reject the theological toleration that is most characteristic of Anglicanism. As befits their relative numbers, the insurgents usually speak with an Evangelical voice.

Given their heterogeneity, and because some of the names they use to describe themselves ("orthodox," for example) are difficult to de-

fine, misleading, or self-serving, it is difficult to know what to call the insurgents. Perhaps "militant traditionalists"—they frequently refer to themselves as "traditionalists"—will do. This emphasizes commonalities in both outlook and tactics people in this group are willing to employ. The identification can be shortened to "traditionalists" when the militant part is

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understood from context and we are not discussing people who simply honor our ecclesiastical past. When necessary, we can refer to “[militant] Evangelical traditionalists”—some would prefer the term “neo-Puritans”—or to “[militant] Anglo-Catholic traditionalists.”

These militant traditionalists, led mostly by a small number of Episcopal bishops, have engaged in many schemes and skirmishes over the years designed to “protect” the “orthodox” from unorthodox thoughts, from what they have seen as the abandonment of traditional (and immutable) church doctrines. Their activity increased after the Episcopal Church adopted the 1979 prayer book and began ordaining women. The traditionalists have been especially fond of creating organizations to advance their viewpoints. Their most successful creation has surely been Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, which has trained so many of the most troubled conservative clergy in the Episcopal Church and elsewhere. Distressingly, some of their institutions have been described as intended to create a “church within a church.” Other of their creations can only be described as pressure groups. In roughly chronological order, we have seen the birth of the Evangelical and Catholic Mission; Episcopal Synod in America; Episcopalians United for Reformation, Reform and Revelation, Inc. (later Anglicans United); the American Anglican Council; Ekklesia Society; First Promise; Forward in Faith/North America; the Anglican Mission in America; and the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes. Other schemes have tended toward the mean-spirited and the bizarre, as traditionalist bishops

sought ways to support their perceived friends and attack their reputed enemies. For example, they brought a presentment—ultimately unsuccessful—against Bishop Walter Righter for ordaining a gay man; supported recalcitrant Anglo-Catholic priests Samuel Edwards and David Moyer through canonical legerdemain; and registered “Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Inc.,” in a strange scheme to steal, if not the Episcopal Church itself, at least its name. Recently, a group called Lay Episcopalians for the Anglican Communion has surfaced. Its ostensible goal is to bring presentments against Bishop Gene Robinson and those bishops who participated in his consecration. These various maneuvers, along with the introduction of reactionary and misleading resolutions at General Convention, have not been particularly successful when the Episcopal Church, or responsible elements of it, has resisted them. Failure seems only to increase the resolve of the militants, however.

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In the last decade, militant traditionalists found a formula that seemed to work for them. The American Anglican Council, with the help of the Institute for Religion and Democracy, a conservative advocacy group formed by ideologues from the Reagan administration, cultivated an image of respectability as the focus of opposition to the “liberal” drift of the Episcopal Church. The most important element of the formula was money—lots of it—mostly from foundations of rich entrepreneurs with radically conservative agendas often more political than religious. Another key ingredient was the realization that their crusade was a mar-

ginal enterprise within the Episcopal Church itself and was therefore doomed as a domestic movement. The other side of this realization was that worldwide Anglicanism, measured by number of members, was becoming less liberal because its greatest growth was in areas of the world that had been evangelized by English Evangelicals. The Episcopal Church seemingly could not be intimidated from within by a tiny “orthodox” minority—no one has suggested that the traditionalists represent as much as 15% of Episcopalians—but the church was not prepared to defend itself against the assaults of an increasingly rightward-moving Anglican Communion. Thus, when General Convention 2003 assented to the episcopal election of partnered gay priest Gene Robinson, the appeal for redress went not to fellow Episcopalians but to the wider Anglican Communion.

Traditional Anglicanism

The greatest contribution of Anglicanism to Christian thought has always been embodied in the phrase *via media*. From its beginning in the Church of England, Anglicanism has been neither completely Protestant nor completely Catholic. It took some time to find its genius, however. Many beheadings and immolations preceded the Elizabethan Settlement, which embodied the notion that mandating uniformity of worship was a better path to peace and unity than mandating uniformity of belief, whether of theology or morals. As an organizing principle of the Church of England, this idea was not

completely secure until the English Civil War dealt a decisive blow to Puritan excesses. To put the matter into modern terms, the pragmatism of the Settlement had the effect of facilitating mission within the church and diverting English Christians from endless and irresolvable disputes over doctrine and morals. This did not, nor should it have, put an end to disputes.

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In practice, parties developed within Anglicanism that struggled for ascendancy; the church, as long as no party overwhelmed the others, was the better for it. From a theological perspective, Anglicanism’s reluctance to codify dogma ultimately freed it from an ancient worldview and left it more susceptible to the leading of the Holy Spirit. (“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the

truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” —John 16:12–13, NRSV) The traditionalist take on the matter is, of course, less charitable.

Anglican diversity, even as construed by its most liberal apologists, has its limits, and the theology of any who assert a unique claim to truth presents difficulties. Neither the belief that there is an absolute truth nor that some particular group is in possession of it is, in itself, destabilizing to a theologically tolerant church. If, however, such a belief entails an imperative to purge the church of “falsehood” or is seen to grant unfettered license to pursue ad-

vancement of its vision, that belief must be kept in check—perhaps even excluded from the circle of Anglican acceptability.

The current danger is that the militant traditionalist coalition insists that *its* way is the only proper Christian path and that error must be purged from the church. Whereas it is unclear what era serves, for the traditionalists—they would likely not all agree on this point—as a model of perfect and orthodox truth, it is clear that that era is not the modern age. Were the militants to achieve ascendancy, they would remake Anglicanism into a narrow Christianity unable to speak meaningfully to rapidly evolving Western societies, in spite of whatever appeal their theology might have elsewhere. Meanwhile, the parties to this alliance of convenience would be freed to dispute with one another and fragment, as has been characteristic of so many other Christian movements that have focused on purity of doctrine.

The militant American traditionalists, having found like-thinking Anglicans outside the U.S., have taken to pledging their allegiance to an all-precious Anglican Communion. This is ironic on many counts, but most notably for the fact that the movement and its international allies are the least Anglican—in the more abstract sense—of the world’s Anglicans. Until recently, the typical Episcopalian had never heard of—or, certainly, never thought much about—the Anglican Communion. The tactic of promoting the An-

glican Communion as a precious union was a brilliant move designed to bring reactionary pressures to bear on the Episcopal Church from the outside. Traditionalist Episcopal Bishops now regularly declare their allegiance to the Anglican Communion to be above that to the Episcopal Church—this, despite their formal vows to support the Episcopal Church, vows that do not even mention the Communion—and traditionalist clergy encourage the same attitude among their innocent parishioners.

The Episcopal Church actually predates the Anglican Communion, of course, and it is not an exaggeration to say that the Communion was able to develop only because its constituent prov-

inces (i.e., churches) agreed that their autonomy would be preserved. Until recently, the Anglican Communion has been more akin to today’s British Commonwealth than to, say, an integrated, international church like that of the Roman Catholics. Despite what anyone says, it remains, at least for now, a *fellowship* of autonomous churches, having a ceremonial head with no formal authority, and without a *curia* empowered to make binding decisions for its members. The decennial Lambeth Conference, the first entity specifically identified with the Communion, has always been more about fighting the losing battles of the past than about articulating a meaningful Christian vision of the future. Fortunately, its resolutions have heretofore been understood as representing only the consensus opinion of the attending bishops.

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However important the Anglican Communion may be as a symbol of Christian unity, unity among Anglican Communion partners would seem to be no more important than unity between Communion provinces and other Christian churches; Jesus prayed, after all, that we may all be one. *Anglicanism*, on the other hand—an approach to Christianity that fosters unity while encouraging advances in Christian understanding—is a precious gift of God cherished by many both within and outside of the Anglican Communion.

The "Crisis"

Ever since Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh and his allies declared a "crisis" in the Anglican world in response to the 74th General Convention's consent to the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire, the Anglican Communion has shown little ability to do anything other than to react reflexively to events.

As he had done when the episcopal appointment of celibate homosexual cleric Jeffrey John was challenged by Evangelicals, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams caved under pressure and called an emergency meeting of the Anglican primates, setting in motion a process that has been predictable at every turn. The actions of the archbishop, known as a liberal sympathetic to gays within the church, have been perplexing to many. From the time he became leader of the See of Canterbury, he has indicated a willingness to subordinate his own views—

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he is an internationally acclaimed theologian—to the perceived needs of his office. Archbishop Williams presides over a church, the Church of England, which is under many of the same pressures from traditionalists as our own, and he is the ceremonial head of a Communion increasingly dominated by angry voices from newly empowered former colonies whose social and political arrangements align comfortably with similarly reactionary religious views. The archbishop seems determined to keep his fractious realm intact, even if its fundamental nature has to change to maintain the appearance of unity or if he has to ignore the offense when a primate encourages the local government to violate basic human rights.

One must wonder if the Anglican Communion would be on the brink of schism as the Episcopal Church approaches its 75th General Convention had not the archbishop so quickly responded to the anguished cries of the American dissidents and insisted instead that any conflicts be handled in the normal course of Communion business. The precipitate call by Archbishop Williams of an emergency meeting of the primates to be held in October 2003 validated the notion that there was a crisis and that it was "caused" by the action of General Convention. (General Convention also had voted to allow continued experimentation with liturgies for blessing same-sex unions, and the Diocese of New Westminster, of the Anglican Church of Canada, had gone so far as to develop an official diocesan liturgy for the purpose.) Per-

ception inevitably became reality.

That the primates might want to meet to condemn the actions of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada was not a surprise. As right-leaning provinces have grown—not all churches in emerging nations have a traditionalist bias—they have gained increasing influence in Anglican councils, and their leaders have been goaded to greater militancy by Evangelicals in the U.K. and the U.S. This dynamic became plain when bishops, courted and encouraged by the American Anglican Council, succeeded in radicalizing the now notorious resolution I.10 on human sexuality at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. The resolution called for a commitment to “listen to the experience of homosexual persons” and to “minister pastorally and sensitively” to them, while nonetheless “rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture.” The significance of resolution I.10 was not immediately apparent to Western churches, whose bishops were caught off guard by the maneuvering that achieved the final wording.

Militant American traditionalists and their international allies repeatedly have touted resolution I.10 as the “teaching of the Anglican Communion” on the matter of homosexuality. Of course, the Communion has no mechanism—neither the Lambeth Conference nor any other—to articulate a definitive or binding “teaching” on any matter at all, and yet the claim often goes unchallenged. At their May 2003 meeting in Brazil, the primates

issued a pastoral letter saying that because “there is no theological consensus about same sex unions ... we as a body cannot support the authorisation of such rites.” When this letter was issued, New Westminster had already authorized liturgy for blessing same-sex unions, and it was feared that General Convention might do something similar. (It has also been said that Gene Robinson’s election was anticipated.) Canada’s first officially sanctioned public same-sex blessing occurred immediately after the primates’ meeting. Nigeria’s Archbishop, Peter Akinola, promptly announced broken communion with that diocese, lamenting the “failure to ensure strict compliance with resolutions duly passed at our meetings,”

as if resolutions of the Lambeth Conference or the primates, duly passed or not, were some sort of papal directive. The primates’ meeting, the newest and least representative of the corporate Anglican Communion “instruments of unity,” had been meeting with increasing frequency and with increasing calls, particularly by its members, for it to assume substantive power.

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derives from the relationship with Canterbury—the traditional understanding—then the archbishop could declare that that relationship necessarily entails mu-

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tual communion among members. Repudiation of mutual communion would therefore constitute a voluntary withdrawal from the Canterbury relationship and a voluntary resignation from the Communion itself. Such a declaration could be enormously helpful, though it would be admittedly risky for Archbishop Williams and would require imagination and courage.

The main accomplishment of the October 2003 meeting was the establishment of the Lambeth Commission on Communion. This panel was to consider the problem of the maintaining communion. Appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the behest of the primates, it was "to consider his own role in maintaining communion within and between provinces when grave difficulties arise" and to consider "urgent and deep theological and legal reflection on the way in which the dangers we have identified at this meeting will have to be addressed." The Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, Frank Griswold, dutifully signed on to the statement issued at the end of the meeting, which called for establishment of the commission.

The statement also indicated that "bishops must respect the autonomy and territorial integrity of dioceses and provinces other than their own," a provision intended to address the expanding practice, encouraged by the American traditionalists, of having Anglican bishops from other provinces visit traditionalist congregations in lieu of, and without permission of, the diocesan. Even more distressing was the reputed removal

of individual parishes from their Episcopal dioceses to dioceses of other provinces. The primates' admonition had no noticeable effect on these practices, and, as a group, the primates have shown no special concern for the violation of diocesan boundaries, an established principle throughout Christendom since the fourth-century Council of Nicaea. (This is not to say that jurisdictional conflicts have not arisen since the days of the Roman Empire. As recently as 1988, the Lambeth Conference saw a need to reiterate the importance of respecting diocesan integrity by passing resolution 72, "Episcopal Responsibilities and Diocesan Boundaries.") One of the benefits to the Episcopal

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Buying time in a crisis by forming a commission to write a report is a traditional Anglican response to conflict, but, from the beginning, the Episcopal Church had reason to fear the outcome of this particular process. Lambeth 1998 I.10 was accepted by the archbishop's commission as the definitive word on the matter of homosexuality—beyond examination by it, at any rate—and the commission made a point of avoiding talking to groups supportive of gays in the Communion, never met with Bishop Robinson, and generally seemed to pay more attention to whoever complained the loudest. A year later, the Lambeth Commission, an international group including only one American, issued the Windsor Report. Although the American traditionalists engaged in some

initial criticism of the report, they soon decided to embrace it—at least their own interpretation of it—arguing that the Episcopal Church needed to “submit to” or “adopt” the Windsor Report unconditionally in order to maintain its membership in the Communion.

The primates met to consider the Windsor Report officially in February 2005. Although no official response to the report from the Episcopal Church would be possible before General

Convention 2006, the more militant primates, seeing an opportunity to press their advantage, did so, and in a particularly authoritarian way. They asked the church, at the upcoming meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, to justify formally the actions of the 74th General Convention and to withdraw voluntarily from meetings of the ACC prior to Lambeth 2008. The ACC, the only international Anglican body that includes all clerical orders, as well as laypeople, has a formal constitution—unlike the primates’ meeting or the Anglican Communion itself—and is not formally subject to the demands of the primates. Despite advice to the contrary, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church (and the Anglican Church of Canada, of which the same request had been made) acceded to the appeal of the primates not to participate in the June 2005 ACC meeting. (Some primates even took offense at the churches’ sending observers to the meeting.) In response to the request for a moratorium on the consecration of gay bishops, the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops also complied, though by declaring a troublesome moratorium on *all* episcopal consecrations until the 75th General Conven-

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The ACC meeting had its tense moments. The Episcopal Church, as requested, offered an explanation for what it had done. Representatives presented *To Set Our Hope On Christ*, a report that explained the long struggle within the church to deal with issues of human sexuality and that offered

a theological justification for decisions of the 74th General Convention. Some of the delegates had been briefed by American militants before the meeting, and, although the Canadian and American presenters were treated graciously by some participants, others were decidedly hostile. Despite the North American churches’ having done exactly what was asked of them by the primates, Peter Akinola was quoted as saying, “It is getting worse. They are just trying to justify their defiance.” The ACC endorsed the continued withdrawal of the American and Canadian churches from ACC affairs, and it requested a constitutional change to make primates ex-officio members of the ACC, neither of which could have been passed had the North American churches exercised their right to participate in the meeting.

The Network

While the communion dealt with the “crisis,” extraordinary events were occurring on the home front. Many of the bishops and clergy most active in the American Anglican Council established the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and

Parishes. (now usually referred to by the more tractable “Anglican Communion Network”) in January 2004. The nature of this organization is evident in a secret letter—its second paragraph includes the request to “[P]lease keep this letter confidential”—from prominent militant Geoff Chapman, a rector in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Chapman’s letter was leaked to *The Washington Post* shortly before the Network was officially created. It explained to supporters:

Our ultimate goal is the realignment of Anglicanism on North American soil committed to biblical faith and values, and driven by Gospel mission. We believe in the end this should be a “replacement” jurisdiction with confessional standards, maintaining the historic faith of our Communion, closely aligned with the majority of world Anglicanism, emerging from the disastrous actions of General Convention (2003).

The letter outlined an elaborate scheme for organizing dissident congregations, evading the financial support of the Episcopal Church, willfully disobeying church canons, and, ultimately, liberating parish property from the Episcopal Church without compensation. Despite denials that the Chapman letter represented any kind of “official” policy, the subsequent activities of the Network have certainly been consistent with the plan it described. Moreover, the Network has increasingly developed the trappings of an Anglican province, with its own office, Web site, newsletter, relief fund, and, most recently, retirement system. It is also creat-

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Anyone doubting that the Network is a fifth column within the Episcopal Church need only view the slickly produced DVD distributed at its November 2005 “Hope & A Future” conference held in Pittsburgh. In the title feature of *Choose This Day*, speakers assert that the Episcopal Church, in consenting to the election of Gene Robinson, “deliberately repudiated Scripture and tradition and embraced a pagan religion,” that “Holy Scripture was deliberately altered,” and

that the church presented a “counterfeit” Gospel to the Communion. Another feature on the DVD, “The Decision,” offers the Network’s solution to these alleged indignities. It urges congregations to abandon the Episcopal Church and to put themselves under the protection of “orthodox” Anglican bishops. Congregations led by militant traditionalist clergy are taking this advice.

General Convention

Until now, the Episcopal Church could not be held accountable for not having a definitive response to the Windsor Report, since an official response necessarily must come from General Convention. After June 2006, the church will no longer have this excuse. Presumably, General Convention will enact a set of resolutions in Columbus, the starting point for which will be those proposed by the Special Commission in “One Baptism, One Hope in God’s Call.”

The Windsor Report begins with a fair description of historical Anglicanism and the nature of the Anglican Communion. It discusses the acceptance of women's ordination within the Communion as an example of how divisive issues can be handled harmoniously. Revisionism creeps into the history, however, to support the argument that Communion-wide consultation and consensus is the expected norm before a province can proceed with some significant innovation. The discussion ignores the fact that the first ordination of a woman to the priesthood in Hong Kong did not come after consultation with the Communion, but occurred a quarter century *before* such consultation. It also glosses over the fact that, after three decades of "reception," parts of the Anglican Communion still claim to be in impaired communion with other parts, refusing to recognize the sacramental actions of ordained women serving as priests or bishops. (Three dioceses of the Episcopal Church, though mandated by canon to do so, still do not ordain women. All three dioceses have joined the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes.)

Based on this mythical normative behavior, the Windsor Report recommends a moratorium on increased recognition of gays in the church, pending greater consensus. It also asserts the need for more central authority in the Communion, consultation on the consecration of bishops, more uniform canon law, and an explicit theological covenant among the provinces. Some of what has been asked of our church already has been granted; the House of Bishops, for exam-

ple, has expressed regret for having given offense to other provinces. Other requests seem increasingly to be described as demands—that General Convention continue an indefinite moratorium on the consecration of gay bishops and the blessing of same-sex unions, that it admit error in its consent to the Robinson election, and that it willingly participate in negotiating a binding covenant with other Anglican provinces.

The 75th General Convention cannot undo the work of the 74th Convention. Because the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes has regularly asserted that the Windsor Report demands more of the Episcopal Church than it actually does—Network Moderator and Bishop of Pittsburgh Robert Duncan has said that the Windsor Report failed to identify "the disease of false doctrine" as the real problem confronting the Communion—it is virtually certain that it and its allies will not be satisfied, irrespective of what General Convention does. Indeed, there is evidence that the militant traditionalists are preparing to be unhappy—and to appeal again for redress to the wider Communion—no matter what

happens in Columbus. The May 6, 2006, failure of the Diocese of California to elect a second openly gay Episcopal bishop merited a scathing press release from the American Anglican Council that included this passage:

How will activists respond to the fact that a diocese which has for years been a bastion of amorphous Christianity and aggressive revisionism chose a white, heterosexual, Southern

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male as bishop? Did the diocese succumb to reported pressure from the national Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA), including Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, to avoid electing a partnered homosexual? Is such pressure in fact part of a coordinated strategy intended to mislead the Communion? ... All eyes now turn to Columbus, where General Convention is expected to continue its obfuscation of the issues and present an unacceptable fudge to Episcopalians and Anglicans worldwide. It is imperative that the Anglican Communion follow Christ's exhortation in analyzing General Convention 2006: "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment" (John 7:24).

Apparently, the AAC cannot take "yes" for an answer. The militant traditionalists can be expected to react with similar vitriol to General Convention.

Given the facts on the ground, what should be the objectives of the Episcopal Church at General Convention, and how can those objectives be realized? No doubt the Special Commission considered these questions explicitly, but it did not deal with them in its report, giving only its proposed resolutions as evidence of its best thinking. Are these resolutions aimed at compromise, at affirming the work of the 74th General Convention, at seeming to be cooperative while actually resisting pressures from the Communion, or at something else? The answer is not clear, but they seem designed to yield to outside pressures at least enough to keep the Episcopal Church within the Anglican

Communion and to keep the discussion going. Those most opposed to the actions of the 74th General Convention, however, have declared themselves tired of talking, and are demanding unqualified acquiescence to their demands.

Wrongheaded

Although it has become commonplace to assert—sometimes in resignation—that the Windsor Report represents the only way forward for the Anglican Communion, the report is fundamentally wrongheaded. False premises were asserted by dissident American bishops, accepted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, echoed by the primates, and passed along to the Lambeth Commission without reexamination. The theory used by the Lambeth Commission is that one province offended other provinces by doing something contrary to those provinces' beliefs. Conflict resulting from such situations can be eliminated by preventing future offenses, which can be done by putting into place mechanisms to suppress change until Communion-wide consensus is reached.

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Allowing this logic to stand unchallenged will lead to the eventual imposition of coercive mechanisms on the Anglican Communion to enforce not unity, but uniformity and stability. The outcome could be a decision-making system even more stultified than that of the Roman Catholic Church; instead of a system in which at least *someone* can move the church forward, it is a recipe for a system in which *no one* can do so. Of course we might sim-

ply make the Archbishop of Canterbury an Anglican pope. (Read carefully the proposed Anglican covenant in Appendix Two of the Windsor Report if you think this an impossible outcome.)

It is deplorable that Anglicanism has failed to find a way to get off the path it has followed ever since the militant traditionalists appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury three summers ago. There is an alternative path available. It likely has been overlooked by the Western churches simply because they have been too busy pursuing a strategy of obsequious defensiveness, which has caused them to overlook the obvious.

The Windsor Report solution to conflict among loosely connected, diverse provinces is to restrict freedom of action of all provinces in a way that has never been done before and to tie them together more tightly. What the Lambeth Commission missed, however, is that a major *cause* of the current uproar is that the Communion *has*, in recent years, been tied more closely together. Not only are the primates—a group with more than its share of argumentative, self-important, ambitious males—meeting with greater frequency, but the Internet has made it possible for anyone who feels aggrieved in the Communion to communicate that distress instantaneously halfway across the world. We have become a community of crybabies in which everyone seems to want to fix somebody else's problem.

People sometimes speak of the Anglican Communion as a family, and this can be a useful metaphor. Consider then, a typical

husband and wife. Even the most compatible marriage partners invariably do not agree on everything and do not share exactly the same interests. To make such a relationship work, there has to be a certain give-and-take: perhaps the husband cannot play poker with the boys three nights a week, and the wife cannot spend 80% of her income on new clothes. Every couple, however, also has to deal with incompatibilities not subject to healthy compromise, interests or passions of one partner that the other partner dislikes or to which he or she is indifferent. The

resolution of conflicts over such deeply held passions is not to be found in forcing uniformity of interests, but in disengaging enough so that one party can pursue an important aspect of his or her life without giving offense to the other. So it is with the Anglican Communion. Is it not as likely that catastrophic conflict can be avoided—as it has been avoided for the past three centuries—not by getting *more* engaged in one another's business, but by becoming more tolerant and *less* engaged? To interpret

the current conflict in psychological terms, the Episcopal Church did not *make* traditionalists unhappy, they *chose* to be unhappy. They could have made a different choice. Perhaps the salvation of the Anglican Communion lies in less communication, less consultation, and less caring for one another.

Were we seriously to promote or to insist upon disengagement—which might entail nothing more than a return to the *status quo ante*—the traditionalists will surely cry foul. “How can we tolerate theological error?” they will ask rhetorically. To

What the Lambeth
Commission missed,
however, is that a
major *cause* of the
current uproar is that
the Communion *has*,
in recent years, been
tied more closely
together.

which we must reply that we are prepared to abide what we view as their theological error and think it meet and right that they should be as generous. Perhaps we should reply in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick's famous 1922 sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?":

The new knowledge and the old faith cannot be left antagonistic or even disparate, as though a man on Saturday could use one set of regulative ideas for his life and on Sunday could change gear to another altogether. We must be able to think our modern life clear through in Christian terms, and to do that we also must be able to think our Christian faith clear through in modern terms.

The Decision

The breadth, length, and complexity of the resolutions proposed by the Special Commission surprised many. Clearly, the group methodically enumerated all that had been asked of the Episcopal Church and considered some related matters as well. It then acted with the predictability that we have seen from the rest of the Communion in the past three years to fashion proposals intended to mollify the church's detractors without conceding anything more than was seen to be necessary. A complete analysis of the resolutions themselves is beyond our scope, but useful commentaries are available elsewhere.

Passing the 11 resolutions or a set of resolutions not too different from them may buy more time, but one has to question the purpose in so doing. Unless the Anglican Communion gets off its current path, its character will be destroyed and the theological essence of Anglicanism, the

comprehension of Richard Hooker, will be extinguished. Our object, then, despite what the militant traditionalists tell us, must first be to save *Anglicanism*, not to save the *Anglican Communion*, which we cannot allow to become an object of idolatrous veneration. Recent history suggests that our response in typical Anglican rhetoric—the subtle, nuanced, ambiguous language that has allowed us to, as the traditionalists say, "fudge" so often in the past—will, in the current climate, be misinterpreted, ridiculed, and used to stage new attacks on our church. Perhaps the decision of General Convention will be that this is a chance we must take, but it is not our only option.

We should consider making a more principled, straightforward, and courageous response. We should consider the novel ideal of proclaiming the Gospel as we understand it and defending

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the approach to theology that most theologians in our church actually use. In simple, clear sentences we could express our sorrow for the hurt that others have experienced and express our sincere desire to remain in communion with all our sister provinces. We could remind others of Bishop Desmond Tutu's explanation

for how we have always maintained communion—"we meet"—and insist that removing the Episcopal Church or its representatives from Communion discussion is hardly characteristic of the Anglican way. Before the Communion creates more rules, we could insist that existing ones be observed. Before we cede authority to others, we could insist that those to whom we have ceded no authority refrain from intimidation. And we could declare that that name-calling, misrepresentation, and

subversion are unbecoming a Christian and unacceptable in a bishop.

We could, in other words, insist that we have as much right to make claims on the Communion as it does on the Episcopal

Church. Most importantly, however, we could declare our commitment to save Anglicanism at all costs and to save the Anglican Communion if at all possible.

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