

# REFLECTIONS ON THE CRISIS OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

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A recent Associated Press article is entitled “ *US Episcopalians opposed to gay bishop consider split*”<sup>1</sup>. In a local edition of the newspaper a medical doctor expressed shock that the Church is poised to fracture all over one gay man being consecrated a bishop. His conclusion is, “*If the church’s definition of what constitutes morally acceptable behavior for its leaders turns on the issue of sexual orientation... then maybe it’s not the church I thought it was.*”<sup>2</sup>

The problem, in our sound bite culture, is that such comments are taken as valid summations of the debate that is before us. Many in the rank and file are left confused why the ordination of one man should be such a watershed event, not just for the American Church, but also for the entire Anglican Communion. What such sound bites fail to take into consideration is that the American Church’s approval of Gene Robinson is merely the symptom of a theological disease, and it is the threat of this disease that has rallied the entire Communion. It is infecting all parts of the Body of Christ and for biblical Christians it is a disease that, left unchallenged, will prove spiritually fatal for individuals as well as for the Church. Lest someone prematurely conclude that this analogy is far too dramatic, the scope of this paper is to consider the ramifications of Gene Robinson’s consecration through the lenses of systematic theology because it is through this discipline that the interconnectedness of truths becomes most apparent. It is the thesis of this presentation that the decisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention go far beyond ordaining

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Zoll, Associated Press, “*US Episcopalians opposed to gay bishop consider split*,” *Last Updated: Oct. 17, 2003*

<sup>2</sup> John Sargent, *The Tennessean*, October 28, 2003

a non-celibate gay man or the blessing of “same-sex unions” but in fact adversely touch most of the key concepts of Christian theology. Let us consider these concepts in their logical order.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

Studies of theology properly begin with the question of epistemology; *“How do we know what we know?”* This is not an empty academic exercise because it is the starting place for any search for truth and is often the starting place in the debate before us. Many times I have had heard people say, *“Well that’s just your opinion”* or *“That’s just how you interpret the Bible”* or *“Just because something is wrong for you does not make it wrong for me.”* The Presiding Bishop even encouraged this kind of confusion when he gave a talk to the Church’s young people and called on them, *“to guide their elders in the practice of a ‘graced pluralism.’”*<sup>3</sup> Later in a pastoral letter Griswold said, *“I find it illuminating to think of these webs of relationships which constitute our lives as being forcefields of energy in which our various perspectives and ways of embodying the gospel constantly interact – challenging and enlarging one another and thereby more fully revealing God’s truth. Difference, and the capacity to welcome otherness, are essential to the vitality of these various forcefields.”*<sup>4</sup>

The common denominator between these various quotes is epistemological agnosticism. The Bible is convoluted, my interpretation is as valid as your interpretation and embracing pluralism is the key to unity. We cannot know objective truth and so we are left to swim and/or drown in our own private sea of subjectivity. Since we cannot know anything for certain, except that we cannot know anything for certain, then your guess is as good as mine.

Biblical Christianity stands in opposition to this modern view of subjective and pluriform truth. Truth is objective because it is based in the Triune God<sup>5</sup>, Jesus is the incarnation of that Truth<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Nunley, *“Griswold bonds with Gen-Xers at Indianapolis conference”*, Episcopal News Service, June 28, 2002

<sup>4</sup> Frank T. Griswold, Pastoral Letter, *“For the clergy of the Episcopal Church,”* August 20, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Ps 31:5

<sup>6</sup> Jn 14:6

we can know the Truth and by it be set free.<sup>7</sup> Our historic faith has taught that while God is incomprehensible, He is knowable and so while our knowledge is limited, we can know what we know with certitude. When the Old Testament prophets spoke, they did not begin, *“In my opinion.”* Instead they said, *“Thus saith the Lord.”* The Apostles of the New Testament spoke for God with equal conviction. St. John said, *“This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*<sup>8</sup>

It is also been the position of biblical Christianity, certainly since the Reformation, that truth comes to us not as the Presiding Bishop suggests, through the revelation of the interaction of various forcefields, but instead through the revelation of Holy Scripture. If we come to an understanding of God simply because we share our experiences with one another, then we have no way of knowing that our conclusions are correct. If, however, we come to our understanding of God because of God’s self-revelation, then we can be sure of what we know. As one theologian put it, *“...man can know God only in so far as the latter actively makes Himself known. God is first of all the subject communicating knowledge to man and can only become an object of study for man in so far as the latter appropriates and reflects on the knowledge conveyed to him by revelation.”*<sup>9</sup>

Thus we can know, with certainty, about God and about how God intends for us to live. That in fact is what makes all communication of the truth and life in community possible. If you claim that murder is wrong because God had revealed it to be so, and my only rejoinder is that it all depends on your interpretation, then communication and community become impossible and we spiral into chaos. Those who claim that there is not objective truth about morality seem to find certitude in the statements of the Baptismal Covenant of seeking and serving Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace among all people and respecting the dignity of

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<sup>7</sup> Jn 8:32

<sup>8</sup> Jn 20:31

<sup>9</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1941, p.34

every human being.<sup>10</sup> So even epistemological agnosticism has its limitations. In the end, all of us believe in absolutes, even if it is an absolute that there are no absolutes. This position is as astute as a sociological professor of mine, who in an attempt to share her acquired wisdom, gave us her “10 Eternal Truths.” Eternal truth #1 was “Nothing Lasts Forever” and the tragedy was, just like our Church, she did not see her own folly.

#### AUTHORITY

As the days of his consecration approached, Gene Robinson’s mantra was that he was going ahead with the consecration unless God told him otherwise. This presents a question of how God would accomplish that communication. There is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, two thousand years of consistent interpretation by the Church on biblical morality, the 1998 Lambeth Conference, the 2002 Hong Kong meeting of the Anglican Consultative Counsel, the Report of the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church<sup>11</sup> and the emergency meeting of the Primates of the Anglican Communion in October 2003. All of these sources, either indirectly or directly, objected to the consecration. Short of a repeat of the deaths of Annanias and Saphira, one wonders what the Holy Spirit had to do to get Gene’s attention.

The turning point of the Reformation was over the matter of authority. The presenting issue was the sale of indulgences but that was not the core issue. One wonders if Luther did not come under the accusation of splitting the Church just over fundraising. The underlying matter was whether or not the Church has the right to teach as doctrine something that could not be proven by Holy Scripture, particularly when it is repugnant to Holy Scripture? The Roman Church of that day essentially said that its power was innate, while the Reformers claimed that the Church’s authority was derived. Anglicanism agreed with the Reformers and that is why Article XX of the Articles of Religion limits the Church’s authority to “*keeper of Holy Writ, yet as it ought not to decree any thing against the*

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<sup>10</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.305

<sup>11</sup> Adopted by the House of Bishops on March 18, 2003 at Kanuga in North Carolina

*same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed as necessity to Salvation.*"<sup>12</sup>

Without the universal authority of Holy Scripture, which teaches the Church what is to be believed by all people, at all times, and in all places, the Church is reduced to opinions that are experiential, personal and dictated by the prevailing culture. In a recent hearing about the General Convention, the delegates defended their votes not with reasoned biblical argument. Instead they offered anecdotal evidence ("*I had a gay roommate in college*"), spiritism ("*My departed father told me through a dream that it was okay*"), or logical fallacies ("*If he had left his wife and moved in with a woman instead of a man I would not have voted for him*").<sup>13</sup>

It is disingenuous to make the accusation of "proof texting" when Christians appeal to specific texts to derive their beliefs. Being under the authority of Scripture is what Christians are expected to do because in doing so they follow in the steps of their Master. Jesus consistently defended both his ministry and his claims as Messiah by quoting the sacred texts. 26 times the phrase "*it is written*" is used in the Gospels. The Book of Acts commended a group that sought the truth in Holy Scripture saying, "*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*"<sup>14</sup>

In his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*<sup>15</sup> Robert Gagnon offers a careful and exhaustive study of the biblical texts. At the beginning of his book he states, "*...if a clear, unequivocal, and persuasive stance in the Bible can be shown to exist – across the Testaments and accepted for nearly two millennia of the church's existence – then the burden of proof lies with those who take a radically different approach to the issue.*"<sup>16</sup> He then goes on for nearly 500 pages to show a consistency between the two Testaments and the

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<sup>12</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.871

<sup>13</sup> Paraphrases of responses made by delegates at an open forum at St. Georges' in the Diocese of Tennessee, September 6, 2003

<sup>14</sup> Acts 17:11

<sup>15</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics*, Nashville:Abingdon Press, 2001

<sup>16</sup> Gagnon, p.28,29

validity of the Church's traditional interpretation of those texts. The overwhelming vote of Lambeth 1998 shows that those of the radically different approach have failed to meet the burden of proof. In fact in most of the discussions that I have attended, there is little or no attempt to do so. More often the Scripture is dismissed with statements such as, "*Well the same texts also tell you that you can't eat pork or wear clothing of mixed material,*" which only succeeds in revealing the ignorance of the speaker concerning principles of biblical interpretation. Article VII of the Articles of Religion makes it clear that the Old Testament is not contrary to the New and while Christians are free from the Laws that have to do with Ceremonies, Rites and Civil Law, "*no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called moral.*"<sup>17</sup> So in this case, while homosexual activity falls under the Moral Law and is therefore still forbidden, its penalty of death is under Israel's Civil Law and therefore is not binding. Someone who claims to be confused about the difference between laws about eating shrimp and laws about sexual morality is either intentionally clouding the issue or is so ignorant of the Scripture that they should excuse themselves from the discussion.

Another approach that fails to meet the burden of proof is to claim that it is not Anglican to take the Bible literally. But isn't it interesting how all clergy become literalists during stewardship season? It does not reduce the authority of Holy Scripture to understand that the Bible is made up of many different types of literature and so it would be just as great a mistake for someone to take *all* of the Bible literally as it would for someone to take *none* of the Bible literally. The person who wants to say that the Levitical injunction against homosexuality<sup>18</sup> is not to be taken literally then must explain why the Levitical command to love our neighbor as ourselves<sup>19</sup> is binding.

A third approach that fails to meet the burden of proof is to claim that because Jesus does not mention homosexuality, then it must be either tacitly approved or at least a non issue. This line of

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<sup>17</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.869

<sup>18</sup> Leviticus 18:22

<sup>19</sup> Leviticus 19:18

reasoning has two problems. First it commits a logical fallacy of making an argument from silence. Jesus also never said anything about pushing your grandmother down an elevator shaft but His silence on that matter cannot be construed as approval (even if your grandfather is for it). Gagnon points out that because Jesus made a very clear statement that He had not come to negate the Law but to fulfill it, any silence about homosexuality would be more reasonably interpreted as Jesus' agreement with the Old Testament Law on that topic.<sup>20</sup> The second problem with the argument from silence is that while Jesus did not use the word "homosexual," He did address immoral sexual behavior and used a generic word (*porneiai*)<sup>21</sup> that in His day would have been understood to include homosexuality along with incest and bestiality.

To me the most interesting approach, that also fails to meet the burden, is the one taken by the Presiding Bishop. It is his claim that because the Bible was unaware of sexual orientation then the Bible does not address homosexuality, as we know it today. Thus any passages about it are referring to exploitive relationships and are therefore irrelevant in a discussion about same sex unions.<sup>22</sup> This line of argument has two fatal flaws. First it ignores the historic evidence that the ancients were very aware of non-exploitive homosexual relationships.<sup>23</sup> St. Paul condemns the relationships between same sexes in Romans 1 not because they are exploitive but because they are birthed in idolatry. It is the original sin of humans putting themselves in the place of God. How well this image matches the malignant narcissism of our age and perhaps even explains the current surge of homosexuality. Second, advocates of homosexuality cannot have it both ways. If homosexuality was a valid alternative lifestyle then it would have existed throughout history and therefore been addressed by Scripture. But if it is a new phenomenon, unknown in the days of the Bible's authors, then advocates have the burden of proving it as a valid alternative lifestyle rather than a modern distortion of God's created order.

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<sup>20</sup> Gagnon p.185-228

<sup>21</sup> Mark 7:21-23

<sup>22</sup> Rachel Zoll, Associated Press, "Episcopal Leader Defends Gay Bishop," September 30, 2003

<sup>23</sup> Gagnon, p.347-360, 380-395

In a previous quote from Frank Griswold, that included the references to various “forcefields” interacting and therefore more fully revealing God’s truth<sup>24</sup>, we can understand that Griswold sees revelation as ongoing. There are many like him who believe that because revelation is ongoing then the Church has the right to move beyond Scripture. That certainly is the view of Mr. Spong, but it was also the view of Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy and Sung Myung Moon, and countless other cult leaders. Often in discussions one hears the comment that the speaker is not for Robinson’s consecration or same-sex unions because the Church has not made up its mind yet. But what is going to make up the mind of the Church if not Holy Scripture? Some would say the Holy Spirit. But how do we discern if it is the Holy Spirit? If ongoing revelation is true, then what becomes our canon or measuring rod? Our Prayer Book answers that question in the catechism. “Q. How do we recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit? A. We recognize the truths taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.”<sup>25</sup> The Holy Spirit grants the Church ongoing *illumination* in order to understand the Scriptures and apply them to our day, but the Holy Spirit does not give us ongoing revelation, particularly ongoing revelation that contradicts the Word of God written. As the ultimate author of the text, the Spirit of Truth cannot contradict Himself any more than God can ungod himself.

In his book, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*<sup>26</sup> William Webb comes to the same conclusion as Gagnon but takes a different and interesting approach. He speaks of following a hermeneutical trajectory to address cultural issues not directly addressed by the Bible. As the Scriptures move from one Testament to another, the will of God unfolds and becomes more evident. In that movement is a trajectory that can be followed to make biblical conclusions that are beyond the cultural constraints of the texts. With the matter of slavery, you see a movement from humane treatment of slaves in the Old Testament to Paul’s appeal to Philemon to free Onesimus in the New. Following that trajectory

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<sup>24</sup> Frank T. Griswold, Pastoral Letter, “For the clergy of the Episcopal Church,” August 20, 2003

<sup>25</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.853

<sup>26</sup> William Webb, Downers Grove:IVP, 2001

would then make support of the civil rights movement in the 1960's a biblically informed conclusion. The same logic can be applied to women's issues. But you do not see a similar trajectory for homosexuality in the Bible. It is an abomination in the Old Testament<sup>27</sup> and it is equated with idolatry in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup>

The Reformation established that the Scripture are the ultimate authority but some today make themselves the ultimate authority by virtue of appeals to reason or personal experience. They bring up the supposed "Three Legged Stool" of Anglicanism (Scripture, Tradition, Reason), which in actuality does not exist as typically presented. Hooker and Jewel certainly did not understand these sources as three *equal* sources of authority. Here are the words of Richard Hooker, the supposed champion of the "Three Legged Stool." *"Unto the word of God, being in respect of that end for which God ordained it perfect, exact, and absolute in itself, we do not add reason as a supplement of any maim or defect therein, but as a necessary instrument, without which we could not reap by the Scripture's perfection that fruit and benefit which it yieldeth."*<sup>29</sup>

Because of the Bible's primacy in Anglicanism, the Episcopal Church decisions at the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention are no less than acts of rebellion against the revealed will of God. Further, to ascribe these actions to the Holy Spirit, when it is contrary to the Word written by the Holy Spirit, is blasphemy. What the Church must do is to return to a respect of and humility towards the Scriptures as modeled by one of the greatest minds of the Church's history, St. Augustine. He said, *"I have learned to yield such respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture. Of these I do firmly believe that the authors are completely free from error; and if in these writing I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to the truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said or I myself have failed to understand it."*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Lev 18:22

<sup>28</sup> Rom 1:18-31

<sup>29</sup> Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Dutton:New York, 1963, Vol I:316 (III:VIII:10)

<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine, *Letters*, 82.3

## THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD

Historic theology teaches us that the Scriptures reveal that God is perfect.<sup>31</sup> Indeed God has given us enough of His self-revelation that various attributes or perfections can be discerned in the Scriptures. These reveal God as a personal Being unlike any other. One such attribute is omniscience or the quality of being all knowing. In his book, *Know the Truth*, Bruce Milne describes the relevance of this attribute. *"This perfection is fundamental to the finality of God's self revelation. If God knew only in part, his truth would be only provisional. The lordship of God means that we do not await further revelation which might supercede his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ...God's omniscience is also the basis for the Holy Spirit's work of revealing the mind and unity of God in Scripture, thereby guaranteeing its reliability and finality (Jn 16:13; 17:17)."*<sup>32</sup>

Gene Robinson in an interview on the Today Show, where he was crowing about his consecration, repeated, *"God is doing a new thing."*<sup>33</sup> Besides being a blatant expression of narcissism, this reflects a deficient theology of the being of God. God's "new thing" was the full and final revelation of Jesus Christ, not in the advancement of Gene's agenda. What would cause God to do a "new thing" that involved contradicting Himself by contradicting the Spirit inspired Scriptures? Has God received some new information or is this "new thing" evidence that God is evolving and expanding? Such a god is not the Christian God who is omniscient and who specifically tells us in Scripture, *"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind."*<sup>34</sup> If God contradicts Himself or changes His mind on one thing then He can contradict Himself on all things. Perhaps the next "new thing" this god blesses will involve abandonment of the Ten Commandments. Such a god cannot make the claim of being truthful and therefore could not demand trust and allegiance. If God is a god who lies or changes his mind, then how can we have any assurance about our future and the world to come?

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<sup>31</sup> Mt 5:48

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, Downers Grove:IVP, 1982, p67

<sup>33</sup> November 4, 2003

<sup>34</sup> Numbers 23:19

The only god that lies and changes his mind is the one that St. Paul identified as *"the god of this world."*<sup>35</sup>

## HUMANKIND

The creation story offers us a clear view of God's intention for human kind. *"And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them...For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."*<sup>36</sup> Marriage and the sexual union that accompanies it are intended so that the two halves may become whole. Centuries before it dawned upon our culture that men are from Mars and women are from Venus; the Bible asserted that the two sexes are different and complimentary. Unlike the angels who are not married, humans need the complimentary other in order to find wholeness.<sup>37</sup> That is why Adam still felt alone even in a garden full of animals. When God spoke about creating woman He said, *"It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him"*<sup>38</sup> and the Hebrew word translated *"suitable"* literally means *"corresponding to."*<sup>39</sup> Adam did not find a mate in the animals because they did not correspond to him; only woman could fulfill that role and he for her. Thus the Levitical injunctions against bestiality are not due to an aversion to sex, but reflect an understanding that in God's created order man can only find his "other half" in a woman. Jesus underscores this understanding in His teaching about marriage. *"Have you not read, that He created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate."*<sup>40</sup> If we take Jesus at His word then we must conclude that it is God who makes us male and female and it is God who joins us together. We cannot expect Him to join together what He did not create and He did not create two men or

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<sup>35</sup> 2 Cor 4:4

<sup>36</sup> Gen 1:27 & 2:24

<sup>37</sup> Mt 22:30

<sup>38</sup> Gen 2:18

<sup>39</sup> New American Standard Bible, note p.3

<sup>40</sup> Mt 19:4-6

two women or a ménage a trois in the garden. He made them male and female and He made them to be one and that is why the parts fit. Sex between a man and a woman is sacramental in that it is a visible and outward expression of an invisible and inward grace; the grace of oneness. That is why this “sacrament” is not to be shared with animals, or members of your own sex, or with anyone other than your spouse. In God’s ideal we are to be one with only one person of the opposite and complimentary sex, unless separated by death.

When the creation story is compared to the homosexual agenda it reveals homosexuality as a counterfeit. First, advocates can claim all they like that God made them homosexual but claiming something and proving it are two separate matters. There is greater evidence that alcoholism is genetically predetermined but that is still not proof that God makes anyone an alcoholic nor is it an excuse to seek the Church’s blessing on alcoholism.

Same sexes cannot compliment one another and so God does not join them together. This is why the argument of natural law is also valid. The parts don’t fit, the quest for unity is frustrated and as a consequence homosexual activities involve acts that the Bible tells us should not be spoken about.<sup>41</sup>

Second homosexuality is a counterfeit lifestyle because it mimics creation. In most homosexual relationships one partner takes on the male role while the other partner takes on the female role. In the ancient world the male temple prostitutes even dressed the part of the female gods and took the passive/receptive role so as to be more culturally acceptable. If homosexuality were indeed a valid alternative lifestyle then why would it not have its own form of interplay instead of mimicking male/female relationships?

Thirdly, it is a counterfeit because it cannot fulfill the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply. Certainly today through modern science, homosexual couples can take extraordinary measures to have a child. But this has not been so since creation as with heterosexual couples. Heterosexual families reflect the created order. Homosexual “families” are a modern mimicry of what God intended since the beginning.

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<sup>41</sup> Eph 5:12

## JESUS CHRIST

In the most radical continuum of the gay agenda, evidenced in the play "*Corpus Christi*" by Terrence McNally<sup>42</sup>, Jesus is presented as a homosexual. The Apostle John's intimate relationship with Jesus, placing his head on Jesus' breast, is interpreted as sexual intimacy, which says vastly more about the authors than about the real Jesus. This of course stands in stark contrast with the Scriptures that Jesus is fully human but without sin, making homosexuality for Him an impossibility.<sup>43</sup>

Even in more benign perspectives, the Jesus of homosexual proponents still does not match the Jesus of the Scriptures. Their Jesus is all about love, forgiveness and inclusion but seldom is He referred to as the Coming Judge. Their Jesus may call people to repent but it tends to be because of institutional sins or repentance over peace and justice issues. The Jesus of the Bible, however, calls all people to repent, not just for corporate sin and peace and justice issues, but also for all forms of immorality. The Jesus of the Bible not only failed to undo the Old Testament Law on morality but He expanded upon it to even include lust in the heart.<sup>44</sup> It is often mentioned by homosexual advocates that Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery but it is just as often left out that He also told her "*Go and sin no more.*"<sup>45</sup>

Homosexual proponents take a cafeteria-style approach to Jesus and pass by the passages that are problematic for their agenda. This in turn results in a less than accurate understanding of Jesus. He is not just a Savior to forgive, heal and affirm us, but He is also Lord who commands that we obey Him and take up our crosses and follow Him.<sup>46</sup> The Jesus of the Bible says nothing about life being fair and He even promises that it will not be comfortable.<sup>47</sup> Someone once said "*Everyone wants Him as Savior but few want Him as Lord.*" But

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<sup>42</sup> CNN.COM, "CONTROVERSIAL 'GAY JESUS' PLAY PREVIEWS IN NEW YORK," SEPTEMBER 23, 1998  
WEB POSTED AT: 1:49 A.M. EDT (0549 GMT)

<sup>43</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>44</sup> Mt 5:27-30

<sup>45</sup> Jn 8:11

<sup>46</sup> Mk 8:34

<sup>47</sup> Mt 10:34

Scripture does not give us that option. Unless we call Him “Lord” we will not be saved<sup>48</sup> and if we do not keep His commandments we cannot say that we love Him.<sup>49</sup> Thus sexual disobedience puts our souls at risk and this is the proverbial bottom line of this crisis. The Episcopal Church is currently painting such a warped image of Jesus that He becomes a proponent of a lifestyle that the Scriptures tell us will keep people out of the kingdom. That Jesus is other than the One presented to us by the Apostles.

*“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”<sup>50</sup>*

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Reformers rescued the Reformation from the radical spiritualists also by stressing the primacy of Scripture. Some of these radicals, having thrown off the constraints of the Roman Church, even justified murder and adultery because “*the Spirit told me to.*” The Reformers found these men heretical and Luther is said to have quipped that the only thing worse than one Pope was a thousand little ones.

Anglicanism from its inception has been suspicious of those who claim Spirit inspiration when their words or deeds contradict Holy Scripture. Calvin repeatedly taught an indissoluble link between the Word of God and the Spirit of God, which is a logical connection given that the later inspired the former.<sup>51</sup> This belief was embraced by Anglicanism and can be seen in the Canon of the Mass. The liturgy of the Table is not possible without the liturgy of the

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<sup>48</sup> Rom 10:9

<sup>49</sup> Jn 14:15

<sup>50</sup> I Cor 6:9-11

<sup>51</sup> 2 Pet 1:20,21

Word, because it is the Word that introduces the Holy Spirit who makes the sacrament possible. Otherwise the sacrament is dependent upon the manipulations of the priest, which is no more than magic. Where the Spirit is, is where the Word is and where the Word is, is where the Spirit is. Thus we pray, "*...vouchsafe to bless and sanctify, with thy Word and Holy Spirit, these thy creatures of bread and wine...*"<sup>52</sup>

The Spirit inspired the Sacred Texts and as the Spirit of Truth<sup>53</sup> He cannot lie. Thus it is inconceivable that the Spirit would contradict Himself and lead the Church to consecrate Gene Robinson. What is the test that the Spirit has spoken? As mentioned earlier, it is as our catechism says, "*We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.*"<sup>54</sup> Also as mentioned earlier, it is therefore nothing short of blasphemy to ascribe Gene's and the Church's sin to the Holy Spirit.

#### REDEMPTION AND SANCTIFICATION

If the departures from the traditional teachings of the Church mentioned in the previous categories are embraced, then redemption and sanctification become a house of cards that collapses and the Church loses its evangelistic mandate. It is not an accident that the same clergy of our Diocese who signed an ad supporting the consecration of Gene Robinson, also signed a Universalist document last Advent.<sup>55</sup> If I can know nothing for certain, if I can move beyond Holy Scripture, if God and Jesus are whoever I make Them to be, and if the Holy Spirit is revealed through subjective evaluation, then redemption is replaced by affirmation and sanctification is a quest for personal authenticity. Any discussion of sin is labeled as judgmentalism and any call to repentance and sanctification is nullified by comparative culpability. "*Who are we to call homosexuals to repent when we are all sinners?*" And since we have no grounds to call a specific person to repent then we do not call anyone to repent and therefore we are all in the same condition. But since God is love,

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<sup>52</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.335

<sup>53</sup> Jn 14:17

<sup>54</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.853

<sup>55</sup> "An Advent Affirmation", *The Tennessean*, December 2002

everyone everywhere must be in a condition of grace and acceptance and since we are all accepted the only thing left unclear is why Jesus had to die in the first place.

## THE CHURCH

The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with Christ Jesus as its Cornerstone.<sup>56</sup> Our catechism tells us that the Church is catholic because it teaches “*the whole Faith to all people...*” and it is apostolic because “*it continues in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles...*”<sup>57</sup> Thus when the Church moves away from the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, it also moves away from the Cornerstone and thereby places itself in grave peril. When the Church departs from the historic faith and fails to continue in the teaching of the Apostles, it can no longer call itself catholic or apostolic. The bishops of our church are supposed to be in the line of the apostles and at their consecrations they vow to “*guard that faith, unity and discipline of the Church.*”<sup>58</sup> Having successors to the Apostles is meaningless, however, if they do not guard the faith that was delivered by the Apostles.

In an interview on National Public Radio, David Steinmetz of Duke Divinity School succinctly summarized the current crises of the Church.<sup>59</sup> He defined schism as a division in the Church over matters of practice or discipline, such as schism over the date of Easter. Heresy, however, is aggravated schism due to falsifying Christian teaching. The responses from the Anglican Communion to Gene’s consecration shows that the vast majority of the Communion considers this action to be a falsifying of Christian teaching and therefore heresy.

Dr. Steinmetz went on to say that in a recent conversation between the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope placed the matter of women’s ordination in the category of catholic

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<sup>56</sup> Eph 2:20

<sup>57</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p.854.

<sup>58</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p518

<sup>59</sup> National Public Radio, Weekend Edition, Interview of David Steinmetz by Liane Hensen, aired November 2, 2003.

order, while approval of homosexuality falls in the category of faith and morals. Thus one cannot be compared to the other and the consequences of these separate actions are also different. A departure from catholic order puts a Church in impaired communion with the rest of the Body of Christ but heresy separates a Church from the rest of the Body.

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Given the perspectives mentioned above, the situation calls for drastic action. Someone said in a recent meeting, *"let's keep this in perspective, he is not a Bishop Spong."* I agree. This situation is far worse than Mr. Spong because he could be dismissed as an aberration, one who does not represent the official position of the Episcopal Church. But the actions of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention now present as official policy a heresy that, as previously argued, has separated our denomination from the holy catholic church and promotes a lifestyle that will prevent people from entering the kingdom of God. Given that we blatantly ignored both the Resolutions of Lambeth 1998 and the October 2003 Statement of the Primates, the Episcopal Church would even be hard pressed to justify calling itself Anglican. If any other group had separated itself from its Communion, became a small culture-driven religion and promoted doctrines that send people to hell, they would be labeled a cult. It is becoming increasingly difficult to defend the Episcopal Church from that accusation. These are matters of heaven and hell and they demand drastic actions but drastic actions are not the same as impetuous actions. Thus I make a distinction between immediate and future responses to the crisis.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: Following the General Convention I read the Scripture, prayed and spoke with a number of bishops, priests and laity whom I respect. What I did not hear from these sources was a common theme and so my conclusion was that I have not heard any *new* direction from the Master. My immediate response to the crises therefore is to continue with my last marching orders i.e. to tell people about Jesus, to serve the Bishop, and to do all that I can

to grow All Saints' Parish. I am indebted to our Bishop for his call, his support and his leadership and it is my intention to support him through to his retirement. The only thing that would circumvent this intention would be if ever loyalty to the Bishop came in conflict with loyalty to Christ or to His Church.

That said, on November 2, All Souls Day 2003, I began to consider myself as an Anglican priest doing missionary work in the Episcopal Church...for now. Given the gravity of the situation, I will not be able to continue with status quo indefinitely. Doing nothing is not an option. The irony of Gene's ceremony being on the day that we pray for the dead was not lost to me but I need to be sustained by more than irony and so I look to the future for action.

FUTURE RESPONSE: The meeting in Dallas, besides being one of the spiritual highlights of my life, was a watershed event for me. The image presented there, of the Anglican Communion as a constellation that is going through realignment, was the perfect metaphor. It is the realignment of the future that I see to be the best hope for orthodox Anglicans. The Primates warned that if the consecration of Gene Robinson happened that it would "*tear the fabric of the Communion at its deepest level.*"<sup>60</sup> It did and the tearing has begun. It is inconceivable to me that Griswold could sign the letter of the Primates warning about the effects of the consecration, then become Gene's chief consecrator, and then call the clergy to walk in unity. Frank has abdicated his role as Presiding Bishop and we cannot look to him for guidance.

And as goes the Communion, so goes the Episcopal Church and as goes the Episcopal Church, so goes the Diocese. Impaired communion and excommunications are being issued from around the Anglican World. The Primates of the Global South, representing 50 million Anglicans stated, "*...the authorities within ECUSA consider that their cultural-based agenda is of far greater importance than obedience to the Word of God...*" and they said further, "*...we can now have no basis whatsoever for any further confidence that ECUSA will pay any regard to the finding of the recently announced Commission set up by the Archbishop*

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<sup>60</sup> *A Statement by the Primates of the Anglican Communion, Episcopal News Service, 16 Oct, 2003.*

of Canterbury.”<sup>61</sup> I share with these Primates the belief that ECUSA is incorrigible and Scripture instructs the Church what to do with the incorrigible.<sup>62</sup> St Paul tells us that while we are not called to judge the world we are called to judge the Body of Christ and if anyone claims to be a brother, but is involved in unrepentant sin that we are not to associate with them.<sup>63</sup> Further Paul states, “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”<sup>64</sup>

Cries for unity, such as those made by the Presiding Bishop in a letter to the clergy are misguided. He said, “...our church is larger than any one point of view and must embrace all”<sup>65</sup> and he went on to say that we should be “catholic in spirit.” But he misses the point. A Church that embraces all points of view is not catholic in faith and therefore cannot be catholic in spirit.

What we can conclude from the response of the Anglican Communion and from the teaching of Holy Scripture is that the Trojan horse of dialogue needs to be taken to the glue factory. Our communion is at best impaired and for many clergy and laity our relationship with the National Church has ended unless they reverse the decisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention and Gene Robinson vacates his see. The tear has produced two churches if not two religions and communion is not possible without repentance. We can remain civil and do the business of the Diocese, like two divorced parents who cooperate out of love for the child, but common mission is not possible without a common faith. I will not be separated from the Anglican Communion as long as it remains faithful to the apostolic faith and so I await the realignment of the Communion. Here is my dream list for the future:

- ❖ The Diocese of Tennessee formally repudiates the decisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention.

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<sup>61</sup> *Statement of the Primates of the Global South in the Anglican Communion, AAC News, November 3, 2003*

<sup>62</sup> Mt 18:15-17

<sup>63</sup> I Cor 5:9-11

<sup>64</sup> 2 Thes 3:14

<sup>65</sup> *The Office of the Presiding Bishop, Letter to the Clergy, 10/27/2003*

- ❖ The Diocese of Tennessee withholds all giving to the National Church and gives ECUSA one year to repent.
- ❖ A new House of American Bishops is formed, made up of those who rejected the decisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention and could sign a document similar to *A Place To Stand*<sup>66</sup>
- ❖ Dialogue towards unification, using the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral<sup>67</sup> and *A Place To Stand* as introductory documents, begins between the new House of Bishops and the Continuing Churches.
- ❖ Failing ECUSA's repentance, the Diocese of Tennessee realigns itself with orthodox Anglican Dioceses and Provinces who have formally separated themselves from ECUSA.

I must confess to the sin of being double minded. On one hand, I have never been more confident about a conviction. This is not about property or endowments or pension funds. This crisis is about the souls for whom Jesus died and the Episcopal Church placing those souls at risk. As Luther said, unless proven wrong by the Fathers and the Scriptures, I will not recant, here I stand, I can do no other.

On the other hand I am but a man and am as susceptible to blindness and error as any other and so I could be wrong. If so I hope for the prayers of our Lady and all the saints, and I cast myself onto the mercy of Jesus. May He hide us in His wounds and have mercy on us all. Amen.

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<sup>66</sup> American Anglican Council Website

<sup>67</sup> Book of Common Prayer, 1979, p876, 877