When the General Convention of The Episcopal Church voted in the Summer of 2003 to confirm as bishop a divorced man involved in a sexually active same-sex relationship, and to allow for same-sex blessings in those dioceses whose bishops approved of them, its delegates plunged the churches of the Anglican Communion into crisis. Despite the confident claims of those who favored these actions that any disagreements would soon pass as (they claimed) had happened with The Episcopal Church’s decision to ordain women, the consequent reaction has been unprecedented in the 400 years since the Church of England parted ways with the bishop of Rome. In response to the action of General Convention 2003 (and similar actions of the Anglican Church of Canada), an emergency meeting of the Anglican primates warned that if the consecration of Gene Robinson as bishop were to take place, the future of the Communion would be “put in jeopardy” and that the action would “tear the fabric of our communion at its deepest level.” When the bishops of The Episcopal Church (including then Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, who had signed the unanimous statement of the Primates) ignored this urgent plea, and confirmed Gene Robinson as bishop in the diocese of New Hampshire, Anglican provinces all over the globe immediately began declaring themselves out of communion with The Episcopal Church. In a short few months’ time, most Anglicans in the world were out of, or in impaired communion with, The Episcopal Church.

Despite this response, those who controlled the administrative machinery in The Episcopal Church claimed that the disagreement was not about substantial matters, and should not be communion-breaking. Strongly dissenting from this optimistic assessment, protesting Episcopalians and Anglicans worldwide began to characterize the actions of General Convention 2003 in terms of apostasy. They accused The Episcopal Church of having

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repudiated the clear authority of Scripture and the 2000-year-tradition of catholic Christendom. Again, those who had approved the new measures were predictably consistent. They insisted that the authority of Scripture was not at stake, merely that there was a difference about its interpretation. Nonetheless, despite the hopeful reassurances of the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church and the Archbishop of Canterbury that the disagreeing factions had more in common than separated them, the vast majority of Anglicans did not agree that they shared this commonality.

In early 2004, representatives of those American Anglicans who opposed the actions of General Convention formed themselves into a Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, claiming to represent the future of an authentic Anglican voice in the United States. Predictably, the responses to this action were diametrically opposed. Almost immediately, bishops in The Episcopal Church accused the Network of being schismatic and of trying to “destroy The Episcopal Church.” At the same time, Anglican primates representing the majority of the world’s Anglican Christians immediately recognized the Network as the legitimate expression of Anglicanism in the United States and repudiated TEC as having abandoned the Christian faith.

On October 18, 2004, the Lambeth Commission stated in the Windsor Report that, unless reversed, the actions of The Episcopal Church would mean that it was choosing to “walk apart” from the Anglican Communion. In February 2005, the Anglican Primates, meeting at Dromantine, Ireland, requested that The Episcopal Church and The Anglican Church of Canada “voluntarily withdraw” their members from the Anglican Consultative Council until the next Lambeth Conference. The Anglican Consultative Council, meeting in June 2005, concurred with this request.

At General Convention 2006, The Episcopal Church responded ambiguously to the requests of the Windsor Report. A resolution affirming the authority of Scripture that quoted the Windsor Report directly was modified in committee to drop the Windsor language. GC 2006 responded to Windsor’s request to apologize for “breaching the proper constraints of the bonds of affection” by changing the language to “straining” the bonds of affection. GC 2006 responded to Windsor’s request for a moratorium on the election and consecration of bishops living in same-sex unions by promising “to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.” Many bishops stated afterwards that they would not abide by even that resolution. The Windsor Report’s request that TEC put a moratorium on the blessing of same-sex unions was not addressed. The General Convention elected as its new Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, who had not only supported the election of Gene Robinson, but whose Diocese of Nevada permitted same-sex blessings.

In September 2006, the Global South primates met in Kigali, Rwanda, and expressed their regret that The Episcopal Church demonstrated “no clear embrace of the minimal recommendations” of the Windsor Report. The primates expressed their approval of not only the Network dioceses, but also the newly formed “Windsor dioceses” in The Episcopal Church. Most significantly, they requested that steps be taken toward the formation of a “separate ecclesiastical structure of the Anglican Communion in the USA.” The Kigali Communiqué received and commended “The Road to Lambeth,” a report commissioned by The Primates

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of the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA) in February 2006, which stated that “the time has come for the North American churches to repent or depart.” The CAPA bishops warned that if the crisis were not resolved before the Lambeth Conference of 2008, they would not attend Lambeth: “We will definitely not attend any Lambeth Conference to which the violators of the Lambeth Resolution are also invited as participants or observers.”

In February 2007, the Anglican Primates met in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In the Communiqué to which all agreed (including TEC Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori), the Primates expressed that General Convention 2006 had been unclear about its intention to abide by the Windsor Report. They established a deadline of September 30 for The Episcopal Church to clarify its stance by (1) committing itself not to recognize any rite for blessing same-sex unions; (2) confirming that no candidate for the Episcopate living in a same-sex relationship would receive consents; (3) participating in a pastoral scheme providing a primatial vicar for dissenting parishes; (4) suspending all legal action over property disputes with dissenting parishes.

The American House of Bishops responded by rejecting the primatial vicar scheme at their Camp Allen meeting in March 2007. At their September meeting in New Orleans, they responded to the request of the Primates at Dar es Salaam for clarity by offering more unclarity. While acknowledging that those whose “manner of life might present a challenge” to the communion included those involved in same-sex unions, the HOB did not specify that they would not consecrate such as bishops, but only that they would “exercise restraint.” The bishops requested that Gene Robinson be issued an invitation to the upcoming Lambeth Conference. To Dar es Salaam’s request not to authorize same-sex blessings, they promised not to authorize public same-sex blessings, and same-sex blessings continued in many dioceses. The request to cease ongoing legal action was ignored, and the lawsuits continued.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams’ response to all this was disappointing to many. Several months before the New Orleans meeting, Williams had already extended Lambeth Conference invitations to all TEC bishops except Gene Robinson, including bishops who had participated in Robinson’s consecration, bishops in whose dioceses same-sex blessings were taking place, as well as bishops who were pursuing the forbidden lawsuits against dissenting parishes. At a press conference at the end of the New Orleans House of Bishops meeting, Williams stated that the Primates’ September 30 deadline was not an “ultimatum” or deadline after all. Further, in the upcoming months, Williams made it clear that, unlike its predecessors, the upcoming Lambeth Conference would make no resolutions, dashing hopes that Lambeth might be the occasion at which the Anglican Communion’s ongoing crisis might be resolved.

Immediately following the perceived failure of the New Orleans House of Bishops meeting to agree to the Dar es Salaam requests, members of the Anglican Communion Network, the Anglican Mission in America, the Convocation of Anglicans in North America, the Reformed Episcopal Church, the Anglican Essentials Federation of Canada and other Anglican and Episcopal groups from the United States and Canada met September 25-28, 2007 to form the Common Cause Partnership. They stated this...
developments in the current crisis, responded to GAFCON the
day after the release of its communiqué with a public statement
that denied GAFCON’s fundamental assertion. Williams claimed
that the uniqueness of Christ was “not in dispute” in the Com-
munion. To GAFCON’s claim that “another gospel” was being
proclaimed, Williams insisted: “This is not the case.”

The Global South Primates who had endorsed “The Way to
Lambeth” were true to their promise. Of the 880 bishops invited
to the Lambeth Conference, approximately 280 did not attend.
The disproportionate number of American bishops who attended
Lambeth, in comparison to TEC’s actual size, means that the
GAFCON bishops represented rather than the majority of Anglicans
worldwide, while those present at Lambeth actually represented
less than half of the Communion.

What lies behind this profound disagreement among mem-
bers of the same worldwide communion? A majority in the
United States (but a minority worldwide) insists that the ordina-
tion of a gay bishop and the approval of the blessing of same-sex
relations is nothing radical, but merely a consistent development
of Anglican theology and polity; the North American minority in-
sists to the contrary (supported by the worldwide majority), that
such action is a complete repudiation of not only Anglican but
Christian identity. Anglicans worldwide had been able to live to-
gether despite theological differences between Anglo-Catholics
and evangelicals, despite differences in liturgy between high and
low church worshipers, despite differences about the permissibil-
ity of the ordination of women, and despite differences in culture
between affluent Anglicans in Britain, Australia, the US, and
Canada, and the impoverished Anglicans of the so-called develop-
ing world in Africa and Asia. What was it about this one action
that meant heirs to the English Reformation could no longer live
together?

Despite outward appearances, the crisis created by The Epis-
copal Church’s actions at General Convention 2003 is not prima-

14“Anglican Bishops Take First Steps to New Structure,” n.p. [cited 8 August
2008]. Online: http://www.acn-us.org/archive/2007/09/anglican-bishops-take-
first-steps-to-new-structure.html.
15“GAFCON Final Statement,” n.p. [cited 8 August 2008]. Online:
http://www.gafcon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=
79&Itemid=31.
/07/jerusalem-declaration.html.
17“Archbishop responds to GAFCON statement, 30 June 2008,” n.p. [cited 8
18“What the Lambeth Conference Accomplished,” n.p. [cited 8 August
what-the-lambeth-conference-accomplished.
Evaluations

It is clear that there is a crisis of identity in mainline western Christendom, and that it transcends denominational lines. How then to explain this? Several interpretations of the crisis have been particularly prevalent, but are unhelpful because they have not been properly theological.

1. The Political Analogy

The analogy most frequently used to describe the crisis borrows terms derived from secular Western (particularly American) politics and from the politically driven “culture wars” prevalent in the general society, adopting the political categories of “liberal” and “conservative,” “left-wing” and “right-wing,” “progressive” and “reactionary.”

There is some superficial truth to this assessment. Current polls indicate that the Democratic party is largely becoming the party of the secular and religious left in the United States, while traditional religionists are more likely to vote Republican.

In one example, Robert Reich, well-known economist, former Harvard professor and Secretary of Labor for the former Clinton administration, suggested that the future divide in American politics would be between those who had allegiance to a “higher cause” and who “believe that truth is revealed only through Scripture and religious dogma,” on the one hand, and, on the other, those whose primary allegiance was to “the individual,” to “life in this world,” and “who believe in science, reason, and logic,” with the implication that advocates of traditional religion were enemies of the Western democratic experiment.

Additionally, many of the controverted issues in the churches concern sexuality, and the partisan divisions of U.S. politics reflect the divisions within the churches on these issues. Those identified as political liberals tend to be more tolerant of sexuality out-

side of marriage, the loosening of restrictions on abortion and pornography, and the affirming of gay rights. To the contrary, those identified as political conservatives tend to oppose abortion on demand, to favor restrictions on pornography, and to oppose the restructuring of marriage by legislation allowing for same-sex civil unions or marriages. Both the “religious left” and the “religious right” unfortunately encourage this political interpretation of the crisis, with progressive Christians accusing those who disagree with them of Nazi-like or Ku Klux Klannish tactics. The Rev. Martin Smith of the Episcopalian Cowley Fathers of Cambridge, Massachusetts compared the assembly of Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference of 1998 to “one of Hitler’s Nuremberg Rallies.” After the vicious murder of the young (Episcopalian) gay man Matthew Shepard in Wyoming, it became commonplace for liberal Episcopalians to suggest a connection between Shepard’s murder and the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Following The Episcopal Church’s 2003 General Convention, the supporters of Robinson’s consecration were quick to find connections between the opposing American Anglican Council and various shadowy and well-funded right-wing conspiracies. Many feminist and gay theologians have been quick to characterize the differences in The Episcopal Church as a power struggle of liberation to overcome the oppression of an entrenched white male patriarchy, missing the irony that those opposed to the actions of General Convention have been excluded from the power structures of The Episcopal Church for years, and that the strongest repudiation of TEC’s actions has come from the vast majority of those non-white Anglican Christians who live in Asia and Africa. Again, at the recent Lambeth Conference 2008, the number of TEC bishops attending was completely out of proportion to its proportional membership in the Anglican Communion.

On the other hand, more than one representative of traditional religious faith has suggested that Christians cannot vote for Democratic candidates because the Democratic Party supports abortion rights and same-sex civil unions. At least some who call themselves conservative Christians have embraced the presidency of George W. Bush as the administration of a “born-again” Christian, in contrast to the perceived ethical and political corruption of the previous administration. Some of the most avid support for the Bush administration’s preemptive invasion of Iraq (at least in the US) has come from self-styled conservative Christians. When N. T. Wright, prominent Anglican evangelical biblical scholar and bishop of Durham, questioned whether the war policies of American President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were compatible with traditional “just war” theory, at least one writer accused him of being a leftist complicit in genocide.

This tendency to categorize current theological disagreements between those who call themselves Christians in terms of secular political categories is erroneous, first, because it is a category mistake. Politics deals with penultimate issues, specifically the manner in which human beings live with each other in society. Christian faith is concerned with ultimate issues, namely humanity’s relation to God and God’s purposes for humanity. While Christian beliefs certainly have implications for our relations to our fellow human beings – including the social relations of civil life, economics, war and peace, and other political matters – to re-

28Note the recent opposition to the approval of Mark Lawrence, graduate of Trinity School for Ministry, as bishop of South Carolina. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori rejected Lawrence’s initial election on a technicality – some diocesan standing committee approvals were received electronically rather than by paper – and his second overwhelming election in South Carolina received a bare majority approval by TEC diocesan standing committees.

duce the theological to the political is to engage in a form of idolatry, elevating the creature to the status of the Creator. To the contrary, Christian political theology finds its center in the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the exclusion of all other lords. The political implications of this claim were made clear in the first few centuries of the Church’s existence when Christians refused to acknowledge that Caesar was Lord, and Christian martyrdom became one of the classic types of Christian discipleship. In countries like the Sudan or Uganda or Indonesia, Christian martyrdom has been and continues to be a reality of being a disciple of Christ.

Subverting Christian faith to contemporary political agendas also confuses social realities that need to be kept distinct. The sphere of the state and the government is not the same sphere of sovereignty as that of the church. Nor is it the sphere of the family or the workplace. What is permissible in one sphere may be quite out of order in another. So the civil government might well have an interest in the prevention of certain kinds of discrimination in the workplace or housing against persons who identify themselves as gay or lesbian without implying either that the Christian church should recognize same-sex sexual activity as holy or worthy of blessing, or that the family should agree that there is no inherent value in preserving heterosexual marriage as the only morally permissible context in which to harness the energy of sexuality and to raise children.

From a Christian perspective, the correct approach is to assess current political disagreements in light of the norms of the gospel—the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ—rather than vice versa. To characterize differences between Christians in terms of the political categories of left and right reflects a cultural captivity of the churches to a secular agenda. It is far from obvious that the political ideals of either political party in the current American scene are compatible with this gospel. For example, there is the rampant consumerism that too often lies behind political appeals to the state of the economy by both parties. Christians need to be reminded that, as the author of the Book of Wisdom says, to be obsessed with material possessions—what we call “consumerism”—is to make a covenant with death (Wisdom 1:18-2:1). (A more properly theological focus would have to take into consideration a central emphasis of both Scripture and the tradition: how economic policies affect the poor.) Moreover, the obsession with sexuality so prevalent in contemporary entertainment that is decried by cultural conservatives itself reflects the rampant consumerism of our culture. Sex sells.

The political categories of “conservative” and “liberal,” “left” and “right,” are (in themselves) meaningless categories. Liberal and conservative are relational terms, always having reference to some other reality. One can never be simply a liberal or a conservative, but always a liberal or conservative in relation to something other. Whether one is liberal or conservative is worthwhile only to the extent that the something about which one is liberal or conservative is worth conserving or liberalizing. In terms of contemporary American politics, the political options are so many variations of Lockean post-Enlightenment liberalism. As Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out, the real alternatives here are between “conservative liberalism,” “liberal liberalism,” and “radical liberalism.” David T. Koyzis argues persuasively that the distinctions between so-called liberals and conservatives in American culture are merely differences along a continuum, reflecting arbitrary points at which one wishes to arrest the logical implications of Lockean liberalism.

The term “sphere-sovereignty” originates in the political thought associated with the school of Dutch Reformed Calvinism associated with Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. It has parallels to the principle of “subsidiarity” found in Roman Catholic papal social encyclicals. For a discussion, see David T. Koyzis, Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003).
Again, the terms “conservative” and “liberal” make sense only if understood in terms of a spectrum, in which “moderate” represents a compromising position. Historically, Anglicans have occasionally claimed to be a bridge church, and at least some supporters of General Convention’s actions have claimed the high ground of the Anglican via media, this despite the fact that the approval of same-sex activity and gay bishops departs not only from traditional Anglican teaching but is opposed by the great majority of Christians worldwide and the virtually unanimous Christian tradition. Does it really make sense to claim that an innovative position consistently rejected throughout history by all but a small minority of modern Western affluent Christians represents the moderate position? At least one Episcopal bishop has tried to quell controversy in his diocese by claiming that most Episcopalians are in the “middle” on the controverted issue, without recognizing the logical impossibility of there being “a middle” on a question that can only be decided in terms of “yes” or “no.” If the right disapproves of Robinson’s consecration, and the left approves, what position does the vast majority in the middle hold? Does the middle position simultaneously approve and disapprove of gay bishops? Still, the actions of General Convention have shown that the claim to Anglican moderation is an equal opportunity temptation. One of the major opposition groups to the actions of General Convention has named itself Anglican

2. A “Fundamentalist” Takeover

If political analogies prove inadequate to assess the current crisis, so does the assessment of “Fundamentalism.” There is much about the current situation that echoes the Fundamentalist/Liberal crisis in American Protestantism of the 1920s and 30s or the Modernist crisis of the early 20th century in the Roman Catholic Church. But in its original context, Fundamentalism had a specific meaning. Fundamentalists were a group of American Protestants who resisted the use of biblical historical criticism and affirmed a group of positions identified in a series of books entitled The Fundamentals. Similarly, among Roman Catholics, the “Oath Against Modernism” represented an attempt to maintain the edifice of Tridentine Catholicism against theological innovation during the early 20th century. But the categories of Protestant Fundamentalism and Tridentine Catholicism hardly apply in the current context. Anglican Christians endorsed the tools of biblical criticism in the 19th century, decades prior to the rise of Protestant Fundamentalism, without simultaneously endorsing the theology of Liberal Protestantism. One thinks of the tradition of scholars like B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, the Lux Mundi school of Anglo-Catholics, of Sir Edwin Hoskyns and Noel Davies, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, C. F. D. Moule, and contemporary biblical scholars like Bishop N. T. Wright and Christopher Seitz. While all were highly critical of the main thrust of Liberal Protestant theology, none could be classified as Fundamentalists. In the Roman Catholic Church, critically orthodox scholars like Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and Yves Congar were held in suspicion before Vatican II, but they were hardly Modernists, and,

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32Bishop Rob O’Neil of Colorado, in a December 2003 pastoral letter to clergy and congregations.


after Vatican II, found themselves at odds with many of the changes they were said to have initiated. There are of course, contemporary Protestants who rightly identify themselves as Fundamentalists (for example, the late Jerry Falwell or Tim LaHaye, the co-author of the popular Left Behind novels), but in the current conversation, “Fundamentalism” operates not as a descriptive term, but only as a term of opprobrium.

The current use has some resemblance to an earlier one that associated Fundamentalism with a kind of ultra-orthodox defensiveness, made evident by suspicion of such examples of modern biblical scholarship as the Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible, or in opposition to cultural practices such as drinking alcohol, dancing, smoking, movie attendance, or playing cards. In a previous generation, the evangelical scholar E. J. Carnell assessed this version of Protestant Fundamentalism as a “cultic orthodoxy,” in distinction to the more critical and open orthodoxy of what was then called Neo-Evangelicalism.35 But if all Christian orthodoxy is “Fundamentalism,” then the accusation of Fundamentalism is redundant – it is simply a way of saying that one’s opponent upholds an orthodoxy of which one disapproves.

3. Diversity and Inclusiveness

A third and equally unhelpful assessment of the current crisis contrasts a theology of diversity and inclusion with a theology of monolithic exclusivity. Supposedly the supporters of gay bishops and the blessings of same-sex relationships are preaching a theology of openness that excludes none of those whom God loves, while those who oppose the same are practicing a theology of exclusion and intolerance. The appeal here is often to a theology of baptism. All who are baptized (including gay Christians) should fall within Christ’s saving embrace. Former Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning created the slogan that has become a mantra for the advocates of inclusion: “There will be no outcasts in The Episcopal Church.”

As with the political and Fundamentalist analogies, explanations in terms of inclusion and diversity versus intolerant exclu-

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For what follows, see Koyzis, Political Visions, 201-214.
sity depends on respecting the differences between the social spheres. Where these differences are not properly acknowledged, clashes can take place between the different spheres of social sovereignty. For example, where boundaries between family and work are not acknowledged, paternalism and nepotism flourish. When governments violate distinctions between the spheres of the state and the family or the workplace, they become autocratic. When parents, progeny, and siblings violate the differences between their roles, incest occurs. The very preservation of societal pluriformity or structural diversity depends on a kind of exclusiveness, a willingness of different social organizations to respect each other’s social space.

But even here, within the same social organization, it is necessary to exercise a kind of exclusivism in order to preserve peaceful social functioning. A club that owns a space of park land can choose to leave it as a park or set up a golf course, or turn the space into a track for a motorcycle club. It cannot do all three. If the motorcycle riders are allowed to ignore the club’s decision to reserve the space as a golf course, it will be impossible for the golfers to use it as a golf course.37

The third kind of diversity is what Koyzis calls spiritual or directional diversity. Directional diversity is that pluralism of different worldviews, religions, and political philosophies that characterize modern western societies. Directional diversity is a good thing in the sense that it is preferable to its alternative: a monolithic society in which a single ideology or religious world view is imposed from above, as existed in most pre-modern societies, and still exists in totalitarian systems today. Where directional diversity is not allowed, religious wars, holocausts, and gulags take place. This does not mean that the pluralism of directional diversity is a good thing in itself. No one is able sincerely to believe that the world would be a better place if everyone else endorsed a worldview with which he or she were strongly in disagreement.

To be committed to any worldview implies necessarily that one believes that it would be better if others accepted one’s own worldview. Directional diversity is only a good thing insofar as we believe that persuasion is a better means of convincing others of the truth of our own convictions than coercion.

The appeal to diversity and pluralism in The Episcopal Church by those who support a gay bishop and the blessing of same-sex relations is incoherent in that it does not clearly distinguish between these various kinds of diversity. The implicit logic seems to be that because societal diversity is a good thing, diversity is always and everywhere good in itself. But the advocates of Robinson’s consecration, despite their talk about the value of diversity, cannot logically embrace directional diversity as a good in itself. They cannot believe that The Episcopal Church would be better off if the traditionalists in TEC continued to believe that homosexual activity is sinful. Rather, they believe that their position is morally and intellectually correct, and they consistently act as if they believe that the traditionalists should come around to believing the same thing.

At the same time, one can begin to understand something of the anger of traditionalists if one understands that even a golf club must have rules. One can imagine the irritation of members of a golf club who were suddenly told that their course must now allow motorcycles on the grounds because motorcycles, like golf carts, are wheeled vehicles. How much would the anger intensify if the golfers could only hire caddies that were provided by the motorcycle club, caddies who themselves were not golfers, but motorcyclists, and who ridiculed golfers as “golfamentalists”? To compound the irritation, imagine the new motorcycle club insists that it is really still a golf club, insists that the original golf club members continue to pay their dues, and insists that die-hard golfers should attend constant dialogues where they are forced to hear about the virtues of motorcycling. This is not far from the reality of what is called the virtue of “diversity” in today’s Episcopal Church.

What has happened in The Episcopal Church is that an uneasy truce that allowed for a certain directional diversity within a single ecclesial body has broken down. Historically, Anglicans have identified themselves as a reforming movement within the Western Catholic Church. Anglicans have differed on the extent of both their understanding of Anglicanism’s catholicity and on

37The golf course analogy is not my own, but I do not remember where I first heard it. The parallels I draw to The Episcopal Church are my own.
what in the Medieval Church needed reforming. Nonetheless, evangelicals, Anglo-catholics, and even historic broad church Anglicans were united in a commitment to the priority of Scripture as interpreted by the historic Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, to the authority of the ecumenical councils of the undivided church of the first few centuries, to worship using the forms of the Book of Common Prayer, and to the historic episcopacy. Even this diversity within historic Anglicanism was exclusive of certain positions.\footnote{A point made by Stephen Sykes in his classic critique of Anglican “comprehensiveness,” The Integrity of Anglicanism (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 8.}

It excluded those Christians who rejected episcopacy and those who rejected infant baptism, as well as those who insisted that communion with the bishop of Rome was necessary for Christian identity. And Anglicanism was capable of maintaining its identity amidst the diversity resulting from genuine disagreements among evangelicals, Anglo-catholics and broad church types because all agreed to embrace these minimal structures of unity and identity, and none of the three groups insisted on foisting its distinctive on the other two.

The introduction of Liberal Protestantism into this mix complicated the nature of Anglican diversity, for Liberal Protestants did not value the historic structures of Anglican unity. They did not believe many of the items in the historic creeds, did not consider the ecumenical councils binding, and held to an understanding of Scripture that was at odds with the way that evangelicals, Anglo-catholics, and even broad church Anglicans had affirmed its primacy. In the late 19th and early 20th century, it became commonplace for Liberal Anglicans to reject belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ (William Sanday), the deity of Christ (The Myth of God Incarnate),\footnote{John Hick, ed., The Myth of God Incarnate (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977).} and even the existence of God (the Sea of Faith Movement).

It is debatable whether Liberal Protestantism should have been allowed to be included as simply another party in the Anglican mix, given that liberalism denied several of the key tenets of Anglican identity that enabled Anglicans to stay together despite party differences. Nonetheless, it could be argued that liberal Anglicanism could be included in the mix precisely as a dissenting movement, and as long as it was realized that liberal Anglicanism did not alter the church’s public faith. Since liberals were willing to worship according to the Prayer Book, to say the Creeds and affirm the importance of Scripture (even if taking neither “literally”), and to respect the office of bishop (as a political role, if nothing else), they were able to function within the limits of historic Anglican identity.

What could not be allowed if Anglicanism were to maintain its identity amidst diversity would be for any one of the parties who shared its sometimes uneasy truce to impose their distinctive differences on the church as a whole. If, for instance, Anglo-catholics were to succeed in having the Angelus introduced as part of the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer, Evangelicals could no longer pray faithfully as Anglicans. If evangelicals were to succeed in introducing statements denying the reality of baptismal regeneration or of the real presence of Christ into the baptismal or eucharistic liturgies, Anglo-catholics could no longer be practicing Anglicans. Even more so, it would be inconceivable for Liberal Protestantism to become the official theology of Anglicanism, for Liberal Protestants by definition reject key tenets of Anglican self-identity. As recently as 1978, Stephen Sykes could write: “[S]o far as I know, no-one has ever suggested that the modernist movement is really the core of the Church of England . . .”\footnote{Sykes, Integrity, 26.}

But this is precisely what happened at General Convention 2003. In the name of Anglican diversity, the Liberal Protestant party within The Episcopal Church made its own party position the official doctrine and teaching of The Episcopal Church. By agreeing to ordain a bishop involved in a same-sex relationship, and by voting to allow blessings of same-sex relationships in liberal dioceses, General Convention endorsed a theology of sexual-
ity at odds with the plain sense of Scripture, and thus repudiated both sides of Anglican identity that hitherto had made Anglican diversity possible. In dismissing the primacy of the authority of Scripture, General Convention rejected Anglicanism’s Reformation heritage. In ignoring the universal tradition of the church, and the unanimous request of the Anglican primates to defer from its action, General Convention turned its back on its Catholic heritage. And, in making these moves, General Convention’s actions made it impossible for either the evangelical or catholic parties in The Episcopal Church to continue to participate in good conscience. In the name of diversity, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church effectively imposed a monolatry that destroyed the very diversity that had made the stability of Anglican identity possible.

4. A Theological Alternative

It should come as no surprise that the dominant interpretations of the action of General Convention use the non-theological categories of political conflict, “Fundamentalism,” and diversity. After all, the General Convention ignored the results of its own

43It needs to be emphasized that, almost without exception, critical biblical scholars, whether they consider the Bible’s teaching as binding on the issue of same-sex relationships or not, recognize that the Bible unequivocally condemns all forms of sexual expression outside of heterosexual marriage, and that the Scriptures speak of same-sex activity only in the most negative terms. The thesis of a handful of scholars that the Bible condemns only exploitative same-sex relations or cult prostitution or people of heterosexual orientation engaging in same-sex activity, has been rejected by the vast majorithy of critical biblical scholars as without merit. To Set Our Hope on Christ (http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHopeOnChrist.pdf), the document produced by a TEC study committee as justification for its actions in response to a request of The Windsor Report, did not provide a new interpretation of the biblical texts affirming heterosexual marriage or condemning same-sex activity. Rather the document appealed to a new “work of the Spirit,” in effect dismissing the plain teaching of Scripture, and thus violating not only Martin Luther’s hermeneutical principle that the Holy Spirit never contradicts the written Word, but also Article XX of the Thirty-Nine Articles that “it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.”

44It is not clear whether what used to be called “broad church” Anglicanism exists any longer. It seems to have been absorbed by the Liberal Protestant position.

Theologcal Commission that had asked the Convention to refrain from going forward because there was insufficient theological agreement in The Episcopal Church about sexuality. The arguments brought forward during General Convention in favor of Robinson’s consecration and for the blessing of same-sex sexual relationships were marked by their lack of theological substance. Advocates appealed to the personal and the political, and ignored the theological.

If the descriptions of the current crisis confronting the Western mainline churches in terms of the political categories of the culture wars, of “Fundamentalism,” and of inclusion and diversity are woefully inadequate, then another way of construing the crisis is necessary. Since the crisis is theological, only a properly theological description can make sense of it.

As the incoherence of the appeal to a diversity that actually destroys diversity demonstrates, the crisis has to do with identity, specifically, where does one find the identity of the Christian faith? At the heart of the disagreements in the current crisis are two radically different understandings of Christian identity. These understandings are so different as to be mutually exclusive.

Three illustrations from an earlier work by the Anglican biblical scholar Sir Edwin Hoskyns help to make the point. The central thesis of Hoskyns’ monumental work, The Riddle of the New Testament, is that, after we have critically examined the New Testament with all of the tools of biblical scholarship, we still find ourselves with a collection of documents that are thoroughly theological, and that point throughout to the God who has spoken and acted supernaturally in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The first illustration of this theological nature of the New Testament is the notion of truth. Hoskyns points out the peculiarity of the notion of truth in a passage such as Ephesians 4:20-24.
But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (ESV)

Hoskyns notes that the expression, the “truth is in Jesus,” makes little sense to the modern reader. For modern people, as for ancient people, truth has to do with fact, with that which is real as opposed to fiction or illusion. Truth, in this passage from Paul, has a moral dimension lacking in the common sense understanding of truth. Hoskyns points out that when the Greek ἀλήθεια was used to translate the Hebrew Amen in the LXX, a transformation of the meaning of the word took place. For the Hebrews, the truth of Yahweh was an integral part of his character. God was consistent to his nature, and faithful in his promises. If present facts seemed to force one to question God’s fidelity to his promises, God’s nature demanded that he manifest his truth by vindicating his justice. All of God’s dealings with humanity were true. The law that God gave to Israel was true. And God demanded that his covenant people be like him, that they should keep his laws and walk in the way of truth. Truth, in the Old Testament, is based on the revelation of God in history.

This moral notion of truth appears in the New Testament as well. Truth is tied to the nature and character of God; only now God’s truth is associated with Jesus Christ. As Paul says:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the uncircumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. (Rom 15:8-9) (ESV)

Hoskyns points out that the “Old Testament conception of truth is thus disturbed by a new historical happening. This is ‘truth in Jesus.’ ” The gospel is the truth because it is God’s action in Christ: “Truth is in Jesus, because Jesus is the Agent of God.” But (as in the Old Testament) the truth that is in Jesus has moral implications for those who hear the gospel message. The “new self,” is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” The agent of this moral transformation is the crucified and risen Christ.

So God’s truth takes place in a particular history. This truth must be imitated not only in the area of knowledge, but in every area of life, including the moral realm. The Old Testament looked forward to God’s final vindication as truth. The New Testament sees this vindication as having been made fully present in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through participation in Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, truth becomes a reality in the lives of Christians. Hoskyns summarizes:

Truth, in short, is knowledge of God through Jesus; such knowledge of God as through Jesus makes men veritably Sons of God. . . . [T]he actual creative element which is at work in the New Testament language is everywhere due to a vigorous recognition that the Living God has acted in a particular history, and that Christian moral and spiritual experience depends entirely upon that particular history.

Hoskyns gives a second illustration of the theological nature of the New Testament in the way in which it treats the crucifixion of Jesus. Hoskyns points out that the New Testament writings repeatedly and consistently apply a theological meaning to Jesus’ death. For example, in 1 Peter 2:21-25, the author appeals to the crucifixion of Jesus as an example to those who are suffering “because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example . . . ” But Jesus’ death is not merely an example. The apostolic writer adds, almost gratuitously, that “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” Jesus’ crucifixion provides an example not because his death is exemplary, but because it is redemptive and sacrifice.

It is clear that early Christians gave theological significance to the

46Hoskyns, Riddle, 40-42.
47Hoskyns, Riddle, 43.
48Hoskyns, Riddle, 67-72.
death and resurrection of Jesus, and that this appears not simply in an isolated passage here or there, but throughout the New Testament. From the earliest times, Christians believed that Jesus’ death and resurrection had redemptive significance – that they did not merely provide an illustration of divine compassion or a motive for enduring suffering, but that they created salvation.

Hoskyns provides a third illustration of the thoroughly theological nature of the New Testament in his discussion of the Synoptic Gospels. Far from being able to discover a non-theological humanitarian Jesus who lies behind the church’s imposed theology of an exalted Christ, a critical examination of the New Testament gospels reveals that they are theological documents, through and through. According to Hoskyns:

All three evangelists record the intervention of the living God in the heart of Judaism at a particular period of history in the words and actions and death of Jesus of Nazareth; all three describe this intervention in the context of Old Testament prophecy; and all three regard these happenings as one great act of God by which his rule is inaugurated on earth and as a result of which those who believe are enabled to do the will of God, are freed from the powers of evil, are forgiven their sins, and are given a confident hope that they will share in the life which belongs to the era that is to be.49

All three Synoptic Gospels agree in finding the significance of Jesus’ acts and teaching in his personal identity. Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom of God and performs the works of God because he is God’s Son.

The three illustrations Hoskyns used to point to the thoroughly theological nature of the New Testament correspond to three central theological beliefs affirmed by historic creedal Christianity.

First, what Hoskyns calls the biblical notion of truth corresponds to the historic Christian understanding of God, creation, and humanity—with historical, ontological, and moral implications. First, at the heart of Christian faith is covenantal monotheism.50 Christians believe in a God who revealed himself in delivering Israel from Egypt and giving the law at Sinai. God’s law is rooted in God’s character as holy, but also as gracious. This holiness and grace are reflected in the created order of the world, and in humanity’s character as created in the image of God. Historically, theologians talked about this correspondence between the law given by God and the ordered nature of the world and humanity in terms of natural law. However, the original point of natural law theology was not to focus on the ability of humanity to know right and wrong apart from revelation, but to emphasize that human good is found in a confirmation to divine law that is expressed in a moral order founded in the biblical doctrine of the creation of the world.51 This divine law has been made known by God through his covenantal relations, beginning with Sinai. The appropriate response to this law is one of humble reception, since God has created humanity out of love, and humanity’s good lies in returning that love.

Second, the failure of humanity to keep divine law has bearing on the centrality of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus for Christian faith. Historically, Christians have interpreted the biblical metaphors that describe Jesus’ death and resurrection in a variety of ways—as redemption from sin, as penal substitution, as a deliverance from death and the slavery of sin, as a new creation, as incorporation into Christ. Throughout all this variety of metaphors, Christians have always believed that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection actually constitute salvation. Jesus saves in the

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49Hoskyns, Riddle, 143-44.


51The focus on “natural law” as providing a knowledge of God apart from revelation is arguably post-Cartesian. This post-Cartesian assumption of an autonomously known natural law is that to which Karl Barth was rightly opposed. In Thomas Aquinas and Richard Hooker, natural law is understood as rooted in God’s creation of the world, a creation which we know about from reading the biblical book of Genesis, and a “natural (moral) law” that we know about from reading the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic law in the Pentateuch. For Aquinas, the “new law,” for Hooker, the gospel, is delivered by Christ, is made possible of fulfillment only by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but nonetheless still preserves the moral content of the “natural law” revealed in the Old Testament. Oliver O’Donovan clearly draws the connection between natural law and a Christian doctrine of creation in his Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).
sense that his life, death, and resurrection forgive sin, and that they effect a change in human behavior. Jesus’ saving death and resurrection bring about a new creation.

Finally, the church has always understood there to be a crucial connection between the work of Christ and his person. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are constitutive of salvation because of who he is. Jesus was not merely a human being in whom God was especially present, but God incarnate, the second person of the divine Trinity become a human being.

What seems clear is that the 2003 General Convention of The Episcopal Church repudiated all three of these crucial elements of Christian faith, all three thoroughly grounded in the theology of the New Testament and the historic faith of evangelical and catholic Christendom.

By affirming the consecration as bishop of a divorced man living in a same-sex relationship and approving the blessing of same-sex relationships, The Episcopal Church endorsed a common sense notion of truth, that truth is a correspondence with the facts or what we “know to be the case” – the “facts” here being what contemporary society says about homosexual practice – and that truth has nothing to do with moral behavior, except in the sense of embracing an abstract diversity and inclusivism. But if we understand our minds and wills to be formed by obedience to the God who has revealed himself as truth in his covenant with Israel, and in becoming one with us in Christ, then we must understand our sexuality in the light of that truth. Where else can we look to hope to understand the purposes of our sexuality, apart from the true Word that God has spoken? God’s Word of truth tells us that we are created, fallen, and redeemed by Christ, and that our sexuality is symptomatic of both our createdness and our fallenness. The truth that is in Christ tells us that God has created us in his image, and that he has done so by creating us male and female, and that lifelong heterosexual marriage provides a divinely intended illustration of the covenantal and eschatological union between God and Israel and Christ and his church. The truth that is in Christ asks us not to be conformed to the so-called truths of our contemporary society, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds so that we can discern the good and accept-
able and perfect will of God, and to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1-2). I am afraid that the different understanding of sexuality that was approved at General Convention comes from listening to another truth than the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

That another notion of truth is operating among those who control the administrative machinery in The Episcopal Church has been made clear repeatedly. Former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold spoke repeatedly not of the certainty that comes from God’s historic revelation in Christ, but of an uncertainty that leads to a continuous search for new truths, and of a “field” “beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing.” Bishop Charles Bennison, Jr. has stated that “Because we [the church] wrote the Bible, we can re-write it.” Bishop Gene Robinson himself has stated that, “Just simply to say that [something] goes against tradition and the teaching of the Church and Scripture does not necessarily make it wrong.”

The second fundamental affirmation of Christian faith dismissed by General Convention was the church’s historic understanding of soteriology and the identity of Jesus Christ as Savior. What do we mean when we say that “Jesus saves”? Do we mean by this statement that the person and work of Jesus Christ are constitutive of a salvation we can find nowhere else? Or do we mean that the person and work of Jesus Christ are rather illustrative of a salvation we can find elsewhere as well? While Scripture and the catholic and evangelical tradition of the church have embraced the first answer, the leaders of The Episcopal Church have as clearly endorsed the latter. In response to the question whether “belief in Jesus is the only way to get to heaven,” Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori responded notoriously: “We who practice the Christian tradition understand him as our vehicle to the di-
save themselves? Or, rather, do we view Jesus as shedding light on a salvation whose ultimate source is really our own political and ethical activity? The message of inclusiveness embraced by The Episcopal Church’s General Convention seems to be that we do not need a divine Savior because we are quite capable of saving ourselves by our own political and ethical activity. Inclusiveness is salvation, and exclusivity is the only damning sin.

It is clear, then, that there is a dividing line in The Episcopal Church, and there are only two possible positions to take. There is no via media that can avoid decision about the issues with which we are confronted. But the dividing line is not a political decision for one side or the other in the current cultural wars, nor is the decision between an anti-intellectualist fundamentalist rejection of biblical scholarship and a critical embrace of sophisticated historical and literary tools, nor does the divide fall on the question of whether or not one embraces tolerance and diversity. Rather, the crucial question to be answered by those who claim to be Christians today is (as it has always been): “What do you think of the truth as it is in Christ?” If we understand the person and work of Jesus Christ to create salvation, this will affect how we understand Scripture, and how we live. If Jesus really saves, then God is a God who acts and speaks, and the truth as it is in Jesus – witnessed to in both Scripture as well as evangelical and catholic tradition – will be constitutive not only for our understanding of salvation, but for our politics and ethics as well.

This brings up the question of dialogue, and here I find myself at odds with the frequent suggestion in the current debate that dialogue can lead to reconciliation and rapprochement. If there is disagreement in the churches about the basic question of whether or not the person and work of Jesus Christ are constitutive of our salvation (and there is), and if there is a corresponding basic disagreement about whether or not the Word spoken by God in Christ is a True Word, a definitive Word, then on what basis can dialogue take place? One is tempted to say that the current challenge is not to dialogue, but to evangelize churches that are full of apostate Christians.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the good news of Christianity is very good news. The truth Christians em-

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The Presiding Bishop’s position is clearly “pluralist” – the belief that Jesus is the way (or “a way”) of salvation “for Christians,” but that other religions have their own “ways,” equally valid for those who practice them.
brace is a truth spoken in love. We believe that God really has made himself known in Jesus Christ, and his Word in Jesus is Yes to humanity. But, as Karl Barth has reminded us, that Yes also includes a No. There are, nonetheless, different ways to say that No. In the present crisis, there is a temptation to say the No in a way that overlooks the Yes. One can and should speak the Good News of Jesus Christ in such a way that it is good news. The good news that we have to proclaim is that God has given us his truth in Jesus Christ, that Christ has delivered us from the necessity to save ourselves by our own political or ethical activity, or to justify ourselves by our own claims to inclusion, and that the truth of the gospel means that, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Eph 4:16)

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