

Open Minds

The Newsletter of Albany Via Media

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A Word from the Editors

As Albany's diocesan convention recedes into memory, picnics, barbecues, and other outdoor activities push local Episcopal concerns to the background. However, as the articles in this issue of *Open Minds* demonstrate, there is plenty going on in the Anglican world. Canterbury has pushed back against the Episcopal Church in response to the ordination of a lesbian bishop in Los Angeles; the Church of England has taken an important step toward ordaining women to the episcopate; and discussion of the Anglican Communion Covenant continues, with an important vote by the Church of England now just three months away.

While we pray for the swift, complete recovery of his predecessor, Christopher Jones, we rejoice that our new webmaster, Bill Hammond, is up to speed and the site is drawing interesting exchanges. We urge you to add your voice there and on our blog, *Openly Episcopal in Albany*. It's your Episcopal Church too!

Bob and Marya Dodd

Albany's Convention Endorses the Covenant

Albany's 142nd Diocesan Convention has come and gone, leaving the few AVM-ers who attended it with a familiar feeling of having spent the weekend on a strange planet. Coached by three purple shirts – Bishop Love, retired Archbishop Drexel Gomez (head of the Covenant Design Group), and Archbishop Rowan Williams (recorded) – the Convention endorsed the Covenant by a vote of 314 to 76.

Was discussion of the Covenant belated and inadequate? We believe it was. Was the parade of bishops coercive? Again, yes. However, the very wide margin of the vote makes it clear that *the result represents the will of those present in that place and at that time.*

How accurately it reflects sentiment in the pews is less clear. When, a few years ago, a businesslike one-day meeting in the see city morphed into a three day “family reunion” (Bp. Love’s description) in the Adirondack woods, Convention lost much of its appeal for moderate and liberal Episcopalians. A parade of TEC-averse visiting speakers (e.g. +Nazir-Ali and ++Gomez) has added to a sense that Albany’s Convention is of, by, and for conservatives. It is hard to fault the many moderates and liberals who stay home, but their absence obviously skews the electorate to the right.

A three day stay at Camp of the Woods is also expensive: Sending a priest and three lay deputies for three days costs about \$1000, more than many parishes can afford in hard times. Not every church has deputies who will pay their own way, so it is not surprising that some 30 parishes passed up Convention this year.

Two years ago, AVM supported a resolution to shorten Convention and return it to Albany. Bishop Love ruled it out of order, unwisely in our view. Every Albany Episcopalian is taxed for Convention, and decisions made there affect every one of us. Hence discussion of its time, location, and format is not only in order but overdue. The Windsor Report, which has almost scriptural status with conservative-evangelicals, counsels that

“What affects all should be decided by all.”

Amen to that!

The AVM Board

Aftershocks from Los Angeles

The last issue of *Open Minds* announced the consecration of a partnered lesbian, Mary Glasspool, as a suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles. This bold step was a magnitude seven earthquake for those Anglicans here and abroad who have not yet gotten used to +Gene Robinson or even, in some quarters, +Barbara Harris. In anticipation of aftershocks to come,

Presiding Bishop Schori wrote to her fellow primates in March, when Glasspool's consent was assured:

“Know that this is not the decision of one person, or a small group of people. It represents the mind of the majority of elected leaders in the Episcopal Church, lay, clergy, and bishops, who have carefully considered the opinions and feelings of other members of the Anglican Communion as well as the decades-long conversations within this Church. It represents a prayerful and thoughtful decision, made in good faith that this Church is ‘working out its salvation in fear and trembling, believing that God is at work in us.’ (Phillippians 2: 12-13).”

Among the first to condemn +Glasspool's elevation were leaders of England's conservative Anglican Mainstream. “Sadly,” they wrote, “this shows that TEC has now explicitly decided to walk apart from most of the rest of the Communion.” They added that a consequence should be the Episcopal Church “withdrawing or being excluded from the Anglican Communion's representative bodies.”

The same theme appeared in the Archbishop of Canterbury's May 28 Pentecost letter. In it, he proposed that members of provinces “that have *formally*, through their Synod or House of Bishops, adopted policies that breach any of the moratoria requested by the Instruments of Communion and recently reaffirmed by the Standing Committee and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) should not be participants in the ecumenical dialogues in which the Communion is formally engaged.” He added that, “Particular provinces will be contacted about the outworking of this in the near future.”

The future was indeed near. On June 7, the Rev. Kenneth Kearon, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion Office, announced that, with immediate effect, American members of several of the Communion's ecumenical committees were asked to stand down. At the same time, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Province of the Southern Cone were queried about activities that might require their members to absent themselves as well.

The next day, at a press conference during the Canadian church's General Synod, Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori described the decision by Lambeth Palace to remove Episcopalians from international ecumenical committees as “unfortunate.” “I don't think it helps dialogue to remove some people from the conversation,” she said. “We have a variety of opinions on these issues of human sexuality across the communion ... For the archbishop of Canterbury to say to the Methodists or the Lutheran [World] Federation that we only have one

position is inaccurate. We have a variety of understandings and no, we don't have consensus on hot button issues at the moment."

Jefferts Schori went on to observe that in imposing penalties on the Episcopal Church, Abp. Williams had short-circuited the Anglican Covenant process. For although such penalties are envisioned in the Covenant's fourth section, the document itself has not yet been approved by a significant number of provinces.

One of many troublesome points in Abp. Williams's Pentecost letter was that although he acknowledged that cross-border interventions by foreign bishops violate a Communion moratorium, they are less grave than ordination of a homosexual bishop. Asked about this distinction, Jefferts Schori replied, "I don't think he understands how difficult and how painful and destructive it's been both in the church in Canada and for us in the U.S. ... when bishops come from overseas and say, 'Well, we'll take care of you, you don't have to pay attention to your bishop.'" Such actions "destroy pastoral relationships. It's like an affair in a marriage. It destroys trust." She added that the church has long taught that bishops should stay home and tend to the flocks to which they were first assigned.

An opportunity to get clarification of Lambeth's position came on June 18, when the Communion's Secretary General interrupted his vacation to meet with the Episcopal Church's Executive Council. During a stormy session that was reported widely (e.g. on "Thinking Anglicans" and "Episcopal Café"), Fr. Kearon reiterated Abp. Williams's position that those who are not aligned with the Communion's faith and understandings cannot represent the Communion in ecumenical discussions.

As if passions were not running high enough, an incident at London's Southwark Cathedral raised them a notch higher. Bishop Jefferts Schori had been invited to preach there on June 13 and did so, but at Archbishop Williams's request, she carried her mitre instead of wearing it. She told the Executive Council that in the week before her visit, Lambeth had also pressured her office to provide evidence of her ordination to each order of ministry. She called the requirements, which put Southwark's Dean Colin Slee in an awkward position, "nonsense" and said of the situation, "it is bizarre; it is beyond bizarre."

"Mitrgate," as bloggers dubbed it, is a sideshow: Its most lasting result may be widened knowledge of how to pronounce Southwark (*suth*-erk)! However, the Archbishop's punitive steps against the Episcopal Church, though minor so far, are grounds for concern. In her Pentecost letter to the Church, the Presiding Bishop identified one issue among many issues:

“We are further distressed that such sanctions do not, apparently, apply to those parts of the Communion that continue to hold one view in public and exhibit other behaviors in private. Why is there no sanction on those who continue with a double standard? In our context bowing to anxiety by ignoring that sort of double-mindedness is usually termed a ‘failure of nerve.’ Through many decades of wrestling with our own discomfort about recognizing the full humanity of persons who seem to differ from us, we continue to work at open and transparent communication as well as congruence between word and behavior.”

Surely, the Presiding Bishop is not alone in feeling that our Church has been singled out unjustly. Now that Archbishop Williams has made good on his prediction that actions will have consequences, it remains to be seen whether the restrictions that he has imposed on the Episcopal Church will lead to further consequences.

Are there more aftershocks to come, or perhaps another quake?

The Church of England: Another Crack in the Glass Ceiling?

Progress toward full equality for women in Anglican orders has been slow and uneven. Fifteen of the 38 provinces have agreed to ordain female bishops, but just four provinces – our Episcopal Church; the Anglican Church of Canada; the Anglican Church of Australia; and the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia -- and the extra-provincial Episcopal Church of Cuba have done so.

The Church of England, 40% of whose priests are women, may soon join that club. Its General Synod, which met in York between July 9 and July 13, approved legislation to open the episcopate to women. The first of the measure’s 11 clauses, which expresses Synod’s will to ordain women, passed easily. Debate focused instead on its second clause, which outlines concessions to be made for those who oppose female bishops. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York tried to amend that clause by adding a scheme of “coordinate bishops,” but their resolution failed narrowly. Disappointed traditionalists must now pin their hopes on another Synod vote and a not yet written Code of Practice, which will spell out how the new law will be implemented.

The failure of the Archbishops's amendments illustrates a difference between the English polity and ours. In our General Convention, clergy and laity are represented by one House of Deputies. The Church of England has separate episcopal, clerical, and lay houses. To be approved by the General Synod, a measure must obtain majorities in all three. The amendments offered by Canterbury and York on July 10 passed in the episcopal and lay houses but failed by a handful of clergy votes.

Without minimizing the importance of General Synod's support for women bishops, the draft legislation still faces important hurdles before it can become law:

1) The Archbishops of Canterbury and York will send the bill to the Church's 43 diocesan synods.

2) If the bill receives majority approval in a majority of diocesan synods, it will return to General Synod in 2012 for a second vote. If it fails in the dioceses, the effort to ordain female bishops will go back to legislative square one.

3) Final approval by General Synod requires a two-thirds majority in each of the three houses. If it succeeds, it will move on to parliament. Failing that, it is again back to square one.

4) If parliament approves the bill (very likely, for it is extremely popular), it will go to the Queen for final approval.

Because each step in this process takes time, it is unlikely that the Church of England will seat its first female bishop before 2014. That would still represent swift progress by Anglican standards: Until 1987, even the English diaconate was closed to women!

Whither the Covenant?

In the last issue of *Open Minds*, we noted that most Episcopal dioceses and Anglican provinces have been slow to either endorse or reject the final version of the Anglican Communion Covenant, which was published last December. That remains true, though one more diocese (Albany) has endorsed it and one province (Mexico) has adopted it, thereby committing itself to the Covenant's provisions. The situation may change quickly and dramatically in November, when the General Synod of the Church of England will take up the Covenant. Adoption by the

CoE would improve the Covenant's prospects among progressive provinces, and it would restore some of the prestige that Abp. Williams lost by being outvoted at the last Synod meeting.

Those who see the present, supposedly final, Covenant draft as too weak are rallying around an essay, "A Revised Anglican Covenant," by the Rev. Prof. Stephen Noll. Noll, Vice Chancellor of Uganda Christian University and a former dean and professor at Trinity Seminary (Ambridge), prescribes a wholesale reworking of Communion governance. This would include doing away with the Standing Committee (which includes Episcopal members) and the Anglican Consultative Council (which includes Americans *and* lay persons), and putting control of the Communion in the hands of a Primate's Council. Unlike Abp. Williams, who envisions different Communion ranks for those provinces which do or do not adopt the Covenant, Noll proposes to expel and replace the latter.

Noll's proposal recalls the Vietnam-era saying, "We had to destroy the village to save it." The "reformed" Communion would not be recognizably Anglican. However, the scheme has the blessing of the American Anglican Council¹, whose Chief Operating Officer, Phil Ashey, says² it "seems to offer the substantial changes in Communion governance that would satisfy the concerns of orthodox Anglicans all over the world: GAFCON primates and bishops, non-GAFCON Global South primates and bishops, ACNA and Communion Partners."

The first opportunity to see whether Noll's proposal has support beyond the AAC will come on August 23 to 28, when Uganda will host the second All-Africa Bishops Conference. Sponsored by the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA), the conference is expected to draw more than 500 bishops and observers from Lambeth Palace and overseas. Its theme will be "Securing our future; unlocking our potential," but program details are not yet available.

Whither the Covenant? It is hard to believe that the authors of the 2004 Windsor Report saw it as a new, promising instrument of Anglican unity. In its present form, and especially as re-imagined by Noll, it looks more and more like an instrument of mass destruction.

Keep your eye on the English General Synod this November.

¹ You may recall that the AAC gave birth to the late Anglican Communion Network and is the grandparent of +Robert Duncan's ACNA coalition.

² "The Anglican Covenant: Major Revisions Required." americananglican.org

