

A House Divided: Reflections on General Synod 2007

by George Egerton (Published in part in the Summer 2007 edition of the *Anglican Planet*)

In 1995 the Anglican Church of Canada published a study guide on Homosexuality: *Hearing Diverse Voices -- Seeking Common Ground*. Like many efforts at 'dialogue,' this effort soon turned to pro-revisionist education, persuasion, and then coercion for the un-persuaded -- most notably in the Diocese of New Westminster which pre-empted the authority of General Synod and the deliberations of the global Anglican Communion by instituting the 'local option' to bless same-sex unions in 2002. Meeting in Winnipeg twelve years after *Hearing Diverse Voices*, General Synod 2007 failed utterly at finding Common Ground. There is just no common ground on the contentious topic of revising Christian sexual morality and the nature of Christian marriage to accommodate blessing of homosexual behavior and unions.

It is clear that a generation of debate on human sexuality has served not to enlighten and build a new *consensus fidelium*, as revisionists promised, but rather to divide churches deeply and irreparably. The 2007 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, as well as the simultaneous Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, were both absorbed with the topic; both churches narrowly defeated proposals to authorize blessing of same-sex unions; and both churches remain largely paralyzed for much of their mission, programming, and evangelization, while in seemingly irreversible demographic and financial decline. Remarkably, General Synod's national statistical reporting appears to be in arrears and disarray, as the most recent figures on such key indices as membership, identifiable givers, Easter communicants, and financial giving were for 2001, six years ago, rather than the up-to-date triennium reporting that was once the standard. Even the depressing trends indicated in the 2001 figures drew no attention or concern at Synod.

The deep divisions of Synod inevitably strained the civility and clarity of debates and procedures. Although Archbishop Andrew Hutchison, the retiring Primate, presided with skill and fairness, there were many procedural tangles and confusions. Perhaps the most telling episode of Synod occurred when a delegate from Alberta asked the Chancellor Ron Stevenson for a clarifying ruling during the debate on Resolution A186, which was to resolve that the blessing of same-sex unions was not in conflict with the core doctrine of The Anglican Church of Canada. As procedural struggles had reduced the voting percentage required for passage to 50%, the question was whether a subsequent Synod could reverse the vote by the same 50% plus one minimum requirement. The Chancellor replied 'yes,' regardless of how the present voting went. The resolution passed, but only by a narrow majority in the House of Bishops. This leaves Synod with the astonishing conclusion that it can define what is or is not in conflict with the church's core doctrine by 50% voting majorities. The absurdity of this was heightened by the qualifier to the resolution added by Bishop Michael Ingham of New Westminster, modifying core doctrine with the bracketed words "(in the sense of

being credal)". By logical inference this could be used, imaginatively, to sanction murder, since it would not be in conflict with Anglican core doctrine (in the sense of being credal).

If there was much confusion at Synod, attempts to bring clarity were not welcome when it came to examining Resolution A183: Report of the Windsor Report Response Group. With the Primates Committee representing global Anglicanism's attempt to bring some monitoring and discipline to errant Provinces, the telling question was whether the Canadian church would address the failure of the Diocese of New Westminster to comply with the procedures outlined in the Windsor Report and return to the agreed Lambeth teaching on sexuality and marriage, while instituting a moratorium on homosexual consecrations and same-sex blessings. An amendment to the resolution which would have indicated the willingness of the Anglican Church of Canada to abide by Lambeth teaching (1:10 of Lambeth 1998) and invoke a moratorium on same-sex blessings, was defeated. In voting for accepting the obfuscations of the Report by the Windsor Report Response Group, General Synod clearly indicated that, like The Episcopal Church, it will go its autonomous way and defy the admonitions and discipline of the global Anglican Communion.

Not all the news at General Synod was bad and sad for conservative Anglicans. Anglican Essentials Canada and its sub-groups, the Anglican Network and the Anglican Federation, worked closely with delegates and had articulate voices on the floor of Synod speaking the cause of orthodox Christianity and classical Anglicanism. Perhaps the courage and effectiveness of Essentials members at Synod represented their most impressive representation since their launching in 1994. Many found the hospitality and guidance offered by Essentials to be a virtual oasis in the shifting sands of General Synod. The election of a faithful new Prolocutor (Steven Andrew) and a large representation of conservatives on the next Council of General Synod gives cause for hope for those who will continue to struggle from within the church to return it to its orthodox roots.

But for many, the nature of votes at General Synod, the statements by revisionist Bishops and other leaders that the blessing of same-sex unions or marriages will continue, and the eagerness of the new Primate, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, to lend support to Bishop Ingham's agenda, indicate that the Anglican Church of Canada has chosen to 'walk apart' from the global Anglican Communion, in step with The Episcopal Church. All the signs are that a radical realignment of Anglicanism is imminent, as the American church defies the global Communion and the Canadian church aligns with American revisionists. This course will see the culmination of the besetting sin of Anglicanism in the West, cultural accommodation of worldly trends, rather than prophetic discernment and resistance from the foundation of scripture, tradition and reason. By the time of Lambeth 2008, let alone General Synod 2010, the face of Anglicanism will have changed beyond recognition.

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