



COMMUNION IN CRISIS

Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Communion

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In 2003, V. Gene Robinson was consecrated as the first openly gay and partnered bishop in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) and the global Anglican Communion. A media frenzy ensued and observers both within and outside of the Episcopal Church predicted a significant schism within the ECUSA and between the ECUSA and the Anglican Communion. While there have been some defections from ECUSA, those leaving are a relatively small group and ECUSA remains part of the Anglican Communion (though some provinces within the communion have declared their relationship with the Episcopal Church to be broken or impaired).

This case study considers the nature of unity and division within this religious community. It considers the history of the Anglican Communion and its structure and historical debates over homosexuality. It also illustrates the significant diversity of perspectives within the communion based on doctrinal, social, and geographical grounds. The 1998 Lambeth Conference, the decennial gathering of Anglican bishops, serves as the initial event from which the “crisis” of Robinson’s 2003 consecration developed.

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Introduction

November 2, 2003, was a day filled with great joy for many members of the Episcopal Church and worldwide Anglican Communion, as well as a day of disappointment and despair for others.¹ On this day, Vicky Gene Robinson was consecrated as the Bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire. While the consecration of bishops in the Episcopal Church—which is a lifetime appointment—is always “big news” in the ECUSA, this consecration received extensive national and international media coverage. Robinson was the first openly gay and partnered bishop for the ECUSA and the Anglican Communion.

Robinson remembers the day very clearly:

About 4,000 people gathered amidst unbelievable security. There had been all kinds of death threats and we wanted to make sure that it was safe for everyone. I remember strapping on my bulletproof vest just before the consecration, and yet at the same time feeling very calm. I had gotten up and said my prayers that morning and just felt very calm.²

Born in 1947, Robinson grew up in rural Kentucky, graduated at the top of his high school class and attended The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, an Episcopal-related college. During college he left the evangelical church of his youth and began to sense a call to ministry within the Episcopal Church. Soon after completing seminary and becoming ordained, Robinson married and had two daughters. In 1986, he and his wife divorced amicably. A year later, Robinson met his current partner, Mark Andrew. He continued to serve the church in the Diocese of New Hampshire during this time. In June 2003, he was elected to serve as bishop for the diocese. Members of the diocese had witnessed his ability to inspire and to be a good pastor during his 18 years of ministry among them. Later that year, the Episcopal Church formally consecrated Robinson, making him part of the apostolic succession.^{3,4}

A statement from the heads of the 38 churches that comprise the Anglican Communion, issued days before Robinson’s consecration, stated, “If his consecration proceeds, we recognize that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the communion itself will be in jeopardy.”⁵ Afterward, the Archbishop of Nigeria stated that the ECUSA had an “impaired communion” with the rest of the Anglican Communion. Within the ECUSA there were similar statements of disbelief and dismay. An Episcopal priest described the sentiment of his church: “My people are not homophobes, nor are they bigots,” he said. “What is disturbing them is that the Episcopal Church is now in a state of anarchy. There are no longer any objective standards.”⁶

1 A note on terminology: The word “episcopal” refers to matters pertaining to bishops within a church’s hierarchy. When the word is capitalized, it refers to a specific Christian denomination within the United States, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. This denomination is referred to throughout the text as either the Episcopal Church or the ECUSA. Episcopalians are also Anglicans because they are descendents of the Church of England. The Anglican Communion refers to an international federation of churches, all of whom are in communion with the See of Canterbury, which is the historic head of the Church of England. The Church of England is the church from which all the churches in the Anglican Communion are descended.

2 Quoted in Boyer, Peter. 2006. “A Church Asunder.” *The New Yorker*, April 17. Accessed here: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/04/17/060417fa_fact5 in October, 2008.

3 The apostolic succession is one of the four key elements of the Anglican tradition; it is the belief that bishops can trace their authority back to the original 12 disciples through the laying on of hands in the service consecrating the bishop.

4 This brief biological sketch is drawn from a variety of sources.

5 Quoted in Laurie Goldstein, “Anglicans Warn of Split if Gay Man is Consecrated.” *The New York Times* (October 17, 2003). Accessed on 11/20/2008 in <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9904E4DA143EF934A25753C1A9659C8B63&scp=3&sq=Gene+Robinson+consecration&st=nyt>.

6 Quoted in John Rather, “Gay Bishop Angers Some Episcopalians.” *The New York Times* (November 9, 2003).

Reports of the crisis in the Episcopal Church had been swirling since August 2003, when the ECUSA's House of Bishops confirmed Robinson's election by the Diocese of New Hampshire.⁷ The ECUSA is a relatively small, mainline protestant denomination with 2.3 million members. It has been known for its relatively wealthy membership (it ranks third in status indicators after Unitarian Universalists and Jews) and political influence (with more 20th century American presidents as members than any other denomination).⁸ However, like all mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S., its membership has been dropping since reaching a peak of 3.6 million members in 1966.⁹

The consecration of Robinson has become a frequently cited reason for the perpetuation of a sense of crisis within the ECUSA. Since the consecration, four of the ECUSA's 110 dioceses have voted to leave the ECUSA. The ECUSA, however, has not recognized the legality of them having done so, and there is no clear legal precedent for adjudicating the distribution of church property.¹⁰ In media coverage of each of these departures, the consecration of Robinson is consistently mentioned as a primary motivating factor, along with interpretation of biblical authority, and, less frequently, the ordination of female priests.

Was the consecration of Robinson the crisis the media portrayed it to be? If it was, then why haven't the dire predictions of a global or even national schism come to pass? At least part of the answer lies in the unique organizational and authority structures that exist within and between the Anglican Communion and the ECUSA. Both entities descended from the Church of England.

A Brief History of the Churches

The Catholic Church in England becomes the Church of England

Issues of sexuality and marriage sparked the beginning of the Church of England. Many are familiar with the story of Henry VIII's desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon in hopes of producing a male heir. Because the Pope would not nullify his marriage, Henry made an argument that the church should submit to the monarch rather than a foreign Pope. In 1531, the clerics of England transferred their allegiance to the king. His Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, annulled Henry's marriage. Under Queen Mary Tudor (who reigned from 1553-1558), the English church returned to the discipline of the Roman Catholic Church, but under Elizabeth I the Church of England became firmly established in 1558. The Church of England began to see itself as the *via media* or the middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism, with the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*¹¹ and the adoption of the 39 Articles in 1563 outlining the content of the Anglican faith.

The Birth of the Episcopal Church in America

Within 100 years of the establishment of the Church of England, the nation of England became a rising imperial power setting up colonies throughout the world. With the colonists came their religion. The Church of England was

7 The ECUSA's governing structure provides for two legislative bodies, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies, to meet once every three years at a General Convention. At the General Convention, delegates and bishops discuss and pass resolutions and a budget, endorse various initiatives, attend to the liturgical calendar, and generally address important issues facing the church.

8 Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 31.

9 Sumner, David E. 1987. *The Episcopal Church's History: 1945-1985*. Wilton, CT: Morehosue-Barlow. Page 161.

10 In the U.S., there is no clear legal precedent for this decision. One common way the courts have ruled is in favor of the highest authority structure in the church. But that is precisely what is being disputed – is the highest authority the ECUSA or is it the Anglican Communion?

11 The *Book of Common Prayer* (or *BCP*) provides prayers and liturgical rites that inform Anglican worship and theology. The *BCP* has undergone many revisions and now there are several different *BCPs* that are specific to different Anglican provinces. For example, Scotland, New Zealand, Brazil and the U.S. all have separate *BCPs*; however, they share much in language and form with the *BCP* of the Church of England.

first established in the American colonies in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Up until the late 1780s, the Church of England in the American colonies relied on English bishops for authority and guidance.

In 1783, the first American bishop, Samuel Seabury, was elected by 10 fellow priests. Upon election to the episcopate, a priest must be consecrated by three other bishops. Seabury traveled to England seeking consecration. This proved a problem, however, since it included an oath of allegiance to the English monarch. Seabury then appealed to bishops in the Scottish Episcopal Church, who at the time also refused to recognize the English monarch. Bishops from the Scottish Episcopal Church consecrated Seabury in 1784. At the time this was considered an irregular ordination, but it was later recognized as valid by American bishops who had been ordained in England.^{12,13} In 1789, when the United States gained independence from England, the Protestant Episcopal Church was formed. The ECUSA descended from these first American churches.

The particular nature of governance of the Episcopal Church emerged as a compromise between two competing organizational visions. One was the more democratically-oriented “reformed” perspective, which advocated for the inclusion of clergy and laity in decision-making. The second, competing perspective was more strongly influenced by the hierarchy, structure, and complete authority of bishops as characterized by the organizational structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

The ECUSA today is governed by a General Convention meeting every three years. The convention is composed of two houses, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies, the latter of which includes both laity and clergy. The first General Convention noted that it was “seeking to keep the happy mean between too much stiffness in refusing, and too much easiness in admitting, variations in things once advisedly established.”¹⁴

The Anglican Communion Today

Today the Anglican Communion has 77 million members within 38 provincial (often national) churches each of which has a historic relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as the *primus inter pares* or the “first among equals” among the bishops as well as one of the four “Instruments of Unity” through which the communion seeks to act or speak collectively.

The instrument with the widest public recognition is the Lambeth Conference. Held each decade, this meeting of the bishops of the 38 member churches is led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lambeth was conceived as a way to encourage unity in the faith by fostering relationships among the bishops. However, the resolutions and business of the council were not intended to be, nor are they today, binding on any of the participating churches. As Archbishop Longley, the convener of the first Lambeth in 1867, stated:

It should be distinctly understood that at this meeting no declaration of faith shall be made, and no decision come to which shall affect generally the interests of the Church, but that we shall meet together for brotherly counsel and encouragement...I should refuse to convene any assembly which pretended to enact any canons, or affected to make any decisions binding on the Church.^{15, 16}

12 The consecration of three American bishops without the oath of allegiance was approved by the English Parliament in 1786 before American independence.

13 Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 35.

14 Quoted in *Ibid*, page 37.

15 From the paper “Unity and Diversity in the Lambeth Conference” by Christopher L. Webber posted on <http://episcopalmajority.blogspot.com/2008/01/brief-history-of-lambeth-conference.html> and accessed 11/20/2008.

16 The other two Instruments of Unity (in addition to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lambeth Conference) are: (1) The Anglican Consultative Council, a meeting every three years of bishops, clergy, and laity from the 38 member churches. “The role of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) is to facilitate the co-operative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion, exchange information between the provinces

Until 1978, Lambeth Conferences were dominated by English-speaking bishops familiar with parliamentary procedure. But the last four conferences have intentionally sought greater participation from bishops serving outside of Great Britain and North America. This intentionality was largely the work of liberals in the Western churches. Lambeth 1988 was the first conference in which bishops from the global South (countries in the southern sphere of the planet) outnumbered those from the North. Preparation for Lambeth 1988 included the provision of study packets of material to be covered at the conference and pre-conference meetings at which African bishops would articulate social problems relating to poverty and failed attempts at “development.” By Lambeth 1998, there was a series of preparatory meetings for bishops from the global South for instruction in parliamentary procedure as well as issues facing the Northern churches, including homosexuality.

Views on Homosexuality within the Episcopal Church USA

The Episcopal Church has been wrestling with the issue of homosexuality for decades. Attendees at the 1976 General Convention (the triennial conference for reformed churches) passed two resolutions supporting the homosexual community—one stating that homosexuals are “children of God” and deserving of “pastoral concern and care” and another stating that homosexuals should be given “equal protection of the laws with all other citizens.”¹⁷ Those at the convention also created a *Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs*, which studied the question of ordination for gays and lesbians. The commission reported back in 1979 and a resolution passed stating, “We reaffirm the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity, and sexual chastity as the standard for Christian morality...Therefore we believe it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.”¹⁸ Various resolutions reaffirming the church’s stances as declared in 1976 and 1979 continued through the 1980s.

In conflict with these resolutions, Bishop John Spong of New Jersey ordained in 1989 a man that was openly gay and partnered. In 1990, Bishop Walter Righter ordained another non-celibate gay male to serve as a deacon. In response, the 1991 General Convention passed a resolution on human sexuality, again calling for more study and directing dioceses to “enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues.” At the 1994 General Convention, Bishop John Spong introduced what he termed the “Koinonia Statement,” a letter written to the House of Bishops, stating that “homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally neutral” and that “ordained ranks of the church are open to all baptized Christians and that through our regular screening process we will determine who is both called and qualified. We are aware of the presence in the church of gay and lesbian clergy.”¹⁹ The statement was signed by 90 bishops and over 140 deputies.

By 1995, the issue again gained prominence when several of the ECUSA bishops indicated increasing concern with the Episcopal Church’s stance on the issue of homosexuality, and 10 bishops accused Bishop Righter of heresy for his 1990 ordination of a gay deacon. These charges were dropped in 1996 by the bishops hearing the case because they did not believe that what Righter had done violated a “core doctrine” of the church: “the court could not find any ‘full and clear authority of the church’ or ‘full and clear expression at this time and in this case’ on the moral

and churches, and help to co-ordinate common action. It advises on the organization and structures of the communion, and seeks to develop common policies with respect to the world mission of the church, including ecumenical matters.” Attendance is by invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/index.cfm>, accessed 11/20/2008. (2) The Primates’ Meeting is an annual meeting of the presiding bishops of the 38 churches. Attendance is by invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Begun in 1979, the meetings have been arranged with the purpose of providing an opportunity for “leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation.” <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/primates/index.cfm>, accessed 11/20/2008.

17 The complete resolutions 1976-A69 and 1976-A71 can be found here: http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1976-A069 and here http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1976-A071, respectively.

18 The full text of Resolution 1979-A053 can be found at http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1979-A053. This was accessed 11/25/2008.

19 The entire text is available here: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/koinonia.html> and was accessed on 12/1/2008.

teaching regarding homosexuals.” The 1979 Resolution prohibiting the ordination of homosexuals “was ‘recommendatory only’ and not binding on its own terms.”²⁰

While some liberals in the church may have viewed Righter’s acquittal as a victory, the combination of that case, the outspoken nature of Bishop John Spong, and the inability of the church to take a clear stance on the issue of homosexuality incited conservative elements within the ECUSA to better organize. By the mid-1990s, several groups identifying themselves as “evangelical” began to mobilize around a cluster of issues, often with homosexuality as a rallying point.²¹ By 1998, two of these groups exerted substantial influence: the Ekklesia Society and the American Anglican Council.

The American Anglican Council (AAC) was founded in 1995, largely through the efforts of Bishop Halden of Pittsburgh. The AAC’s mission states, “The American Anglican Council is a network of individuals (laity, deacons, priests and bishops), parishes, and specialized ministries who affirm Biblical authority and Christian orthodoxy within the Anglican Communion.” Narration of the AAC’s founding continues on the group’s website :

We were all concerned that the church’s elected leadership continued to move further and further away from the historic biblical Christian faith, as if locked in a downward spiraling dance of death with the postmodern Western culture. . . We also realized that our collective dependency over the state of the Church was somewhat unjustified. We were reminded that the 2.4 million member Episcopal Church does not exist in a vacuum but is the American Province of the Anglican Communion—some 80 million members worldwide. If we looked myopically at the church in this country, it might appear that “the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint” (Is. 1:5). However, if we looked at the health and vitality in much of the Anglican Communion, we had much reason to hope for healing and restoration in the Episcopal Church, if we were obedient to the vision God would give us.²²

Rev. Bill Atwood founded a second group, the Ekklesia Society, in 1995, shortly after his coordination of a conference to discuss missions and evangelism. He travelled to parishes and dioceses in the global South, hoping to connect the financial advantages of the global North to the spiritual resources of the global South. Much of this involved building networks of orthodox Anglicans and coordinating development projects in the South.²³

A Rwandan Church in Little Rock, Arkansas: Mission Outreach from the Global South

The growing ties between the global South and conservatives in the global North, especially conservative Episcopal churches in the U.S., significantly influenced the unfolding of Lambeth 1998. Preceding the conference, several notable events brought to the fore differing positions on homosexuality that had been simmering within the ECUSA and the Anglican Communion over the prior decade.

20 Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 47.

21 There has been a long history of evangelicalism within the Episcopal Church, vehemently expressed in the 1960s and 1970s as the charismatic movement swept across the American Christian landscape. Several groups splintered off the Episcopal Church in reaction to the church’s stance on divorce, racial integration, ordination of women, and the adoption of a revised *Book of Common Prayer*. For a summary of some of these movements, see pages 323-336 in Sachs, William L. 1993. *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

22 The full text is available here: http://www.americananglican.org/site/c.ikLUK3MJIpG/b.564139/k.4A14/Our_History.htm and was accessed 11/25/2008.

23 Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 52.

St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, was founded in 1996 by a small group of lay people who, according to one parishioner, "wanted to worship in Episcopal liturgical style in a theologically orthodox parish."²⁴ They petitioned their bishop, Larry Maze, for a minister. Maze believed that the group was drawn together by their opposition to homosexuality, and he refused to recognize them as an Episcopal mission. When he discovered the group had approached Thomas W. Johnston, a South Carolina Episcopal priest, to lead them, Maze prohibited the priest from serving in the Little Rock diocese.

Johnston was a convener of the First Promise Movement, a group of priests who felt that the "first promise" they made in the ordination ceremony, to the "doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ," had come into increasing conflict with the second promise to "obey their bishop." When Johnston realized he might face trial for violating Episcopal Church law, he asked his current bishop in South Carolina to transfer him to be under the authority of Rwandan Bishop John Rucyahana. Johnston had met Rucyahana at a meeting in Flower Mound, Texas, that was convened to prepare African bishops for Lambeth 1998.²⁵ The transfer of authority to Rucyahana was unprecedented. The Archbishop of Canterbury remarked to Bishop Rucyahana, "It is my clear view that what you are doing is completely illegal, and I hope you will quickly disentangle yourself from something that is quite unconstitutional."²⁶ Despite the Archbishop's displeasure, St. Andrew's Anglican Church remains vibrant and no discipline has been exerted over Johnston or Rucyahana for this debatably illegal violation of diocesan authority. St. Andrew's Church became the first missionary outreach to North America of the Anglican Province of Rwanda and was a foundational part of the creation of the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA).

The story of St. Andrew's association with the Rwandan church is told on the St. Andrew's website as follows:

Unbeknownst to Johnston and the new church in Little Rock, leaders in the Anglican Church in Africa had a growing concern that without revival of the Christian faith in the West, the gospel witness in places like the United States would erode. These African evangelical leaders had been praying and seeking God's direction about how they could join in encouraging revival of the faith in the West.²⁷

Southern Bishops Strengthen their Voices: Preparing for Lambeth 1998

Prior to Lambeth 1998, three meetings were held to prepare and inform bishops from the global South. At the first of these meetings, 80 bishops gathered in February 1997 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to discuss the Lambeth 1998 agenda. The group produced two documents, the "Second Trumpet from the South," which covered a range of topics including "prophetic and redemptive witness, mission, people of other faiths, youth, contextualization, the family and human sexuality, church unity, and practical next steps for South-to-South relations."²⁸ A second document, which came to be known as the "Kuala Lumpur Statement," was written by a study group at the meeting. In addition to an affirmation that sexuality should be expressed only between men and women who are married, it acknowledged the growing division between North and South on this issue and suggested a structural challenge within the Anglican Communion:

This leads us to express concern about mutual accountability and interdependence within our Anglican Communion. As provinces and dioceses, we need to learn how to seek each other's counsel and wisdom in a spirit of true unity, and to reach a common mind before embarking on radical changes to Church discipline and moral teaching.²⁹

24 Quoted in Ibid. Page 68.

25 More information on this conference is available later in the case.

26 Cited in Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 69.

27 From <http://www.saintandrews-lr.org/history.htm>, accessed 11/25/2008.

28 Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 58.

29 The entire Kuala Lumpur Statement is accessible here: <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew/kuala.html> and was accessed on 12/1/2008.

Flower Mound, Texas, was the site of the second meeting. Four conservative groups from the North organized the conference: the Ekklesia Society, the Episcopal Dioceses of Dallas and Fort Worth, and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. The conference was attended by 49 conservative bishops and archbishops with the intent of discussing two key Lambeth agenda items: international debt and homosexuality.³⁰ A major purpose of the meeting was to facilitate connections between conservative Northern and Southern bishops. Northern bishops had a mandate to inform and empower Southern bishops to participate forcefully and actively at Lambeth. As one Ugandan bishop reflected:

During Lambeth you meet for so short a time, you're a big body of people, everything can be skimmed through and you won't understand. But the people who called us in Dallas did give us a lot of information about that, so we were able to help ourselves to understand what was going on in the Episcopal Church.³¹

This group produced "The Dallas Statement," which explicitly links issues of international debt, Western consumerism, and homosexuality. The statement concludes with a section on accountability in which the bishops suggest that the annual Primates' Meetings (see note 16), be given greater responsibility: "We call upon the Lambeth Conference to empower the Primates' Meeting to become a place of appeal for those Anglican bodies who are oppressed, marginalized, or denied faithful Episcopal oversight by their own bishops."³²

The final meeting was held in Kampala, Uganda. This was a smaller meeting with bishops from Central and East Africa. The attendees expressed a strong concern about the American church, and encouraged African church leaders to more fully understand and participate in the Lambeth Conference, the structure and decision-making processes of which were decidedly Western. In the words of one of the bishops who planned the meeting: "Because they [the African church leaders] don't know the procedures, the parliamentary procedures of the Lambeth conference, [Africans] go just to rubber-stamp what the West is doing. And I wanted that to come to an end."³³

Lambeth 1998 and Homosexuality

Lambeth 1998 was attended by 750 bishops from 37 provinces. Just under half came from Africa or Asia.³⁴ At Lambeth conferences, working groups draft verbiage for resolutions that are then discussed and considered for adoption during the final week of the three-week conference. In 1998, the section "Called to Full Humanity" included 15 sub-sections ranging from "Religious Freedom and Tolerance" to "International Debt and Economic Justice" and including "Human Sexuality." The bishops who attend these sessions likely have different levels of familiarity with the issues being discussed. This excerpt from a letter written by an American bishop to his diocese in Washington state provides an example of the challenge this presented for the topic of homosexuality: "I was in a group with a bishop from a diocese in the South Pacific consisting of small island villages. There is no term in his language for homosexuality, and he had never discussed the subject, taboo in his culture."³⁵

In 1998, antagonism concerning the proper stance of the church on homosexuality surfaced early in the conference. A bishop from Rwanda suggested that the American bishops who signed the Koinonia Statement citing homosexuality as "morally neutral" be declared outside the communion.³⁶ In an event widely publicized in the news

30 LeBlanc, Doug. "The Dallas Statement." <http://members.core.com/~figueroa/dallas.htm>, accessed 12/1/2008.

31 Quoted in Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 61.

32 From LeBlanc, <http://members.core.com/~figueroa/dallas.htm>, accessed 12/1/2008.

33 Quoted in Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 63.

34 Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 4.

35 Bates, Stephen. 2004. *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality*. London: I.B. Tauris. Page 137; Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 133.

36 Ibid.

media, Bishop Chukwuma of Nigeria attempted to exorcise a demon out of Richard Kirker, a member of the British Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement organization. Kirker replied to Chukwuma: “May God bless you, sir, and deliver you from your prejudice against homosexuality.”³⁷

Despite the media’s focus on the issue of homosexuality at Lambeth 1998, just one out of the 93 resolutions that were passed directly addressed homosexuality: Resolution 1.10, “Human Sexuality.”³⁸ The resolution, which passed 526-70 with 45 abstentions, rejects homosexual practice because it is “incompatible with scripture,” and advises against same-sex blessings and ordination of those in homosexual relationships. At the same time, it notes that homosexuals are “full members of the Body of Christ.”³⁹ Numerous amendments were proposed, but they were either voted down or not voted on at all. Bishop William Swing of California remarked, “The feeling level in the debate [over the resolution] was actually a lot worse than the final resolution. It was worse than liberal vs. conservative; it was Black vs. White, Imperialists vs. Natives, North vs. South. It was raw.”

Nearly all bishops from the global South voted in favor of the resolution.⁴⁰ So too did many liberal and moderate American bishops. While some yes votes from the global North fully endorsed the resolution, others were reported to have supported it because they hoped it would satisfy homosexuality opponents and prevent more restrictive resolutions from being put forward.⁴¹ Others feared being perceived as racist or colonialist. Some reluctant supporters focused on a couple of hopeful sentences in the resolution that would “commit [the bishops] to listen to the experience of homosexual people” and that “call[ed] on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation.”⁴² Finally, others felt that they were assenting to the broader consensus within the global communion.

Following passage of the resolution, over 150 bishops, including some who voted for it, signed a pastoral statement addressed to gay and lesbian Christians apologizing for inadequately listening to the experiences of homosexual Christians.⁴³ A liberal group, Affirming Catholicism, sent a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury arguing that Resolution 1.10’s statement that homosexuality is incompatible with scripture “lacks the customary reflective balance of scripture, tradition, sound scholarship and pastoral discernment found in classical Anglican approaches to controversy.”⁴⁴ It also pointed to other revisions to Anglican thinking that move away from biblical literalism, such as divorce.⁴⁵

37 Bates, Stephen. 2004. *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality*. London: I.B. Tauris. Page 137; Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 5.

38 For a list of all the resolutions passed and their text, see: <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/>

39 Full text can be found: <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm> and was accessed on 12/1/2008.

40 The only African bishops who spoke against the resolution were from South Africa. Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of Cape Town, advocated against the resolution, stating, “It is a matter of ordinary justice. We struggled against apartheid in South Africa because we were blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about. It is the same with homosexuality.” Cited in: Bates, Stephen. 2004. *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality*. London: I.B. Tauris. Page 129.

41 For example, a bishop serving in England but originally from Uganda argued to use the word “abstinence” instead of “chastity” for fear that chastity could be interpreted as condoning homosexual monogamy. See Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 77.

42 From <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm>, accessed 12/2/2008. See also Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 78; Bates, Stephen. 2004. *A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality*. London: I.B. Tauris. Page 137; Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 139; Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 7.

43 The brief letter and its signers can be found here: <http://www.whosoever.org/v3i2/lambeth2.html> accessed 12/2/2008.

44 Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 2008. *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible and Authority are Dividing the Faithful*. Westport, CT: Preager. Page 8.

45 Liberals will often state in the debate that Jesus’ teaching on divorce is clear and straightforward, though the communion generally allows priests to divorce and remarry; whereas Jesus offers no direct teachings on homosexuality in the Gospels.

An Increasingly Global *Church* or Just Historically Related *Churches*?

In the decade since the passage of Resolution 1.10, the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church USA have continued to wrestle with diocesan boundaries and Episcopal authority; in short, they wrestle with what it means to be “in communion.” Because the resolution both rejects homosexuality as “incompatible with scripture” but affirms that homosexuals are “full members of the body of Christ,” individual churches and dioceses have followed their own paths in determining the extent to which they include homosexuals as members of the church.

The founding, growth, and controversy of the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) occupies the most conservative end of the spectrum. Following the founding of St. Andrew’s Anglican Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, as the first American Anglican church under the oversight of an African bishop, the AMiA grew to 21 parishes and over 140 networked congregations by 2008.⁴⁶ Though most of the member congregations have never been affiliated with the ECUSA, the AMiA has also attracted congregations who previously dissociated themselves from the ECUSA.^{47, 48} The consecration of these missionary bishops to be leaders of American congregations has been viewed negatively by various constituencies throughout the Anglican Communion.⁴⁹ Those on the liberal end of the spectrum view the conservative AMiA as the primary source of Anglican disunity. Conservative bishops, in contrast, argue that it is the public blessing of same sex-unions and ordination of declared non-celibate homosexuals that pushes churches out of the ECUSA and threatens the Anglican Communion.^{50, 59.}

Since 2000, conservatives and liberals in the ECUSA and in the Anglican Communion have continued to debate issues of sexuality and biblical authority sparked by an increasing advocacy, primarily by North American members, for the full participation of homosexual members in the church and its offices. The Anglican Communion continues to examine its structures and its ability to encompass diverse views on issues like homosexuality and the ordination of women.

Following Robinson’s consecration in 2003 and the 2004 public blessing of same sex unions by the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed a special commission to:

Examine the legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church (USA) to appoint a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its bishops...and the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may relate to one another in situations where ecclesiastical authorities of one province feel unable to maintain the fullness of communion with another part of the Anglican Communion.⁵¹

This commission generated what came to be known as the Windsor Report in September 2004. The report recommended a moratorium on consecrations of homosexual bishops and same-sex unions, but stopped short of recommending discipline against either the Episcopal Church in the U.S. or against the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada.

These actions have prompted churches opposed to homosexuality to abandon the oversight structure of the ECUSA. In addition to the Anglican Church in Rwanda, the ECUSA dioceses have broken off to affiliate and come under the

⁴⁶ Statistic from AMiA’s website: www.theamia.org, accessed on 12/3/2008.

⁴⁷ Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 133.

⁴⁸ The ECUSA has a history of congregations disaffiliating and forming their own organizations. From 1977 until 1985, John Sumner, a church historian, lists five groups ranging from 10-100 parishes which left ECUSA.

⁴⁹ Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 140.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Page 137.

⁵¹ The Windsor Report and other official documents related to it are available here: <http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/downloads/index.cfm>

authority of the Church in Nigeria (affiliated with the Convocation of Anglicans in North America) and Archbishop Greg Venables' Southern Cone Province in South America.⁵²

Some 650 bishops attended Lambeth 2008, down by about 100 compared to 1998. The Archbishop of Canterbury did not invite Bishop Gene Robinson or several bishops who had been “irregularly” consecrated. Many of the bishops who were invited but chose not to attend as a sign of protest held a conference the same summer in Jerusalem called the Global Anglican Future Conference.⁵³ As the communion is pulled from both the liberal and conservative edges, one argument that is beginning to circulate in conservative circles is the rejection of the symbolic authority granted to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Some regard his appointment by the secular government of Great Britain as illegitimate—“a remnant of colonialism.”⁵⁴

Conclusion: Seeking Consensus on Communion

Perceptions vary as to whether or not the consecration of Gene Robinson precipitated a crisis in the Episcopal Church or Anglican Communion. One anthropologist who has studied the Anglican Communion writes:

The current “crisis” in the Anglican Communion may fundamentally be the result of increased global connectivity that is forcing the communion’s member churches to come to grips with what exactly they mean by “global Anglicanism.”⁵⁵

The sense of crisis in the Episcopal Church is not a recent phenomenon. In the past fifty years there have been several events that have left some in the church feeling a sense of crisis: the ordination of women and the adoption of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* are the most salient examples. In reaction to both events, some churches left the Episcopal Church and either founded new denominations or functioned as independent churches.

Despite tensions within the ECUSA and between the ECUSA and larger Anglican Communion, predictions of a significant schism and even a formal split between the ECUSA and Anglican Communion have not materialized. Disassociation with the ECUSA has been localized to four of the 110 American dioceses, with the majority of churches within these dioceses leaving the ECUSA in 2007 and 2008. Meanwhile Bishop Robinson continues to preside over the Diocese of New Hampshire. The debate about the role and interpretation of scripture, the appropriate authority structures, and the nature of the communion’s comprehensiveness are likely to continue as they have with greater and lesser intensity since the founding of the Church of England in the mid 16th century.

52 In popular media coverage of the splits, property ownership is reported as an area of significant controversy. Precedent has been set in the U.S. courts that the guidelines of the highest body of the church should be followed regarding property ownership. ECUSA argues that it is the highest body (which would lead to churches and dioceses needing to negotiate with the ECUSA to buy the buildings and land which they currently use), while churches and dioceses that are splitting off argue that the Anglican Communion is the highest body (thereby hoping to keep their property).

53 GAFCON’s website is http://www.gafcon.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=31.

54 From a letter for the Archbishop of Uganda found at <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=8769> and accessed 12/1/2008.

55 Hassett, Miranda. 2007. *Anglican Communion in Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 254.