

Division in the Episcopal Church

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In the past three years, the church has faced much turmoil, reaching its peak with the consecration of a non-celibate homosexual bishop, Gene Robinson. The Episcopal Church cannot function if it is divided and thus forth, it is most beneficial that it should split. The Episcopal Church must divide peaceably because the theologies of the orthodox and revisionists are polar opposites; the revisionists have not sought action to comply with the Windsor Report; the current conflict, with its lawsuits and persecution, reflects poorly on the church; and the Bible instructs Christians to settle disputes in a gentle way. Martin Luther prompted the reformation in Germany and when asked to recant his actions Luther asserted, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.” (Memorable Quotes n.p.) Just as in the time of Luther, Episcopalians must decide how to react to this controversial situation in the church, keeping in mind the traditional faith that has impacted the lives of many in the past.

The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, or ECUSA, should split because of divergent theologies among the orthodox and revisionists. The two theologies have become increasingly diverse to the point at which now the two are irreconcilable and to compromise or merge beliefs is unthinkable.

Newer universal and progressive theologies of the revisionists teach that there are many ways to the Father, Scripture is too exclusive and has limited authority, and humans only make mistakes, rather than sin, and are not accountable for their mistakes. The progressive perspective lacks an absolute truth and authority, dismissing issues to be decided by the “if it feels good, it’s probably okay” viewpoint. Universal theology denies the human need of salvation and redefines

the nature of God to be only a force of love rather than the Creator of the universe who reigns perfectly and is involved in our lives and hearts (Brust, “Equipping” 8).

In contrast, orthodox theology teaches that Jesus is who he claimed to be, affirms Biblical authority, and agrees with Romans 3:23, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, and therefore all humans need to be reconciled through salvation found only in the way, Jesus Christ (Brust, “Equipping” 8). This traditional faith has been challenged and denied by many revisionists within the church. It is the time to “choose this day whom you will serve” (Bible n.p.) and stop prolonging the ultimate separation of ECUSA (Brust, “Equipping” 1).

The orthodox and revisionist theologies are entirely incompatible; neither side is willing to budge. It is not possible to remain in communion as a church if doctrine is not alike.

Another reason promoting the necessary separation of orthodox and revisionist Episcopalians is that revisionists in the church have not sought action to comply with the Windsor Report. The Windsor Report was created as a result of the Lambeth Commission 2004 discussing and clarifying the position of the Anglican Communion, and also indicating measures that ought to be taken concerning the prevention of a possible schism of the church.

Furthermore, the issue at heart was not and is not about the “ministry to or ministry by persons of homosexual orientation in the church life.” (Lambeth Process n.p.) The conflict lies in the church’s changing perspective of Scriptural authority and submission to Christ alone. The Windsor Report was sent out to proclaim the need for unity within the 38 provinces of the Anglican Communion, not to solely dispute human sexuality.

Those actions suggested in the Windsor Report have not been pursued to compliance. Such actions include moratoria of same sex unions, moratoria of the ordination of non-celibate homosexuals like Robinson, and an invitation for bishops to express regret for permitting same gender blessings. ECUSA has been requested to display regret for recent actions that have upset

the Communion and seize the opportunity to form a covenant among the Anglican Communion (Brust, “Walking” 12). In addition, the Report also comments on a repeal of “boundary crossing” or alternate Episcopal oversight—bishops engaging outside of their diocese to support and lead parishes who do not agree with their diocesan bishop or who do not wish to remain under his leadership. (Brust, “Equipping” 8)

Since the publication of the Windsor Report, sent out by the Anglican Primates, revisionists have ignored or disagreed with the report. Bishops have only displayed regret for offending the feelings of the Communion, rather than admitting the immorality untraditional actions that took place. Same sex blessings have continued throughout the country. For example, priests Michael Hopkins and Susan Russell and retired bishop Otis Charles have each been blessed with their same sex partners. Just recently, two practicing homosexuals have been nominated for the position of Bishop of California. The church still remains divided on foundational faith issues that go beyond human sexuality and penetrate the truth of the Word.

Also encouraging a church split is the evidence that the mission that God has called the Christian to is being hindered by the current conflict, particularly because of lawsuits and persecution, and thus is reflecting poorly on the church. Solomon, in his Godly wisdom, states that a good name is to be cherished more than earthly treasures, but the disunity and arguing within the church is labeling ECUSA as a hypocritical organization rather than God’s witnesses. (Bible n.p.)

Many orthodox Episcopal churches are being persecuted by revisionist bishops. The majority of orthodox churches who have decided to be faithful Anglicans have had to leave the church buildings to stand up for their beliefs. Christians who wish to retain the properties and remain traditional parishes under the Anglican Church are facing lawsuits filed by bishops because of the Dennis Canon which affirms that the diocese, not the parish, has the right to the

church building and property (St. James n.p.). Bishops have gone so far as to inhibit orthodox priests, replace the parish's vestry, or even physically take over the church buildings by invading files and changing locks on church doors. Thus, as individuals and parishes leave, church membership is declining in ECUSA.

The Christian mission is to share the love of God and the grace that is found in Jesus Christ that leads a person to transformation in his or her heart and life through the Spirit. The Bible provides several positive examples of persons settling their disputes in a peaceable way.

In the Old Testament, Abraham and Lot parted ways and took different territories. Both were then able to continue their occupations and live at peace with each other. Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement concerning their mission, and agreed to go their separate ways in Acts of the New Testament. When action is taken to agree to disagree, resolutions are found more easily.

In the Gospels, as Jesus called men to be his disciples, He said "follow me." (Bible n.p.) He required that they leave everything that hinders them from completing His mission. ECUSA has become too preoccupied with its disagreements to fill out this calling. A split of ECUSA and the traditional Anglican Church will benefit the church in that it will shift its vision off of its own problems and refocus on Christ who is God the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Bible n.p.) and the work He has called all Christians to carry out.

In addition, in Matthew 18, Jesus gives a model for conflict resolution if a brother or sister in Christ sins against a person. First, the person who has been offended is to confront the offender in a gentle, but firm, way. If that does not break through the ice, then, the offended should take along a few witnesses, and finally resort to the authority of the church to settle the dispute. If all of the above steps to solve the issue do not work, it is no longer the offended person's problem to deal with, and the relationship may remain broken. (Bible n.p.)

Recently, the Falls Church Episcopal confronted Bishop Lee about the consecration of Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson taking place in 2003; the Falls Church took initiative to abide by the Matthew 18 Principle. This is just one church following the Bible's instruction to attempt to restore respect between the parish and diocese before leaving the church (Vestry Letter to Lee n.p.).

ECUSA is journeying through trying times of a person's courage and determination facing off against false doctrines, persecutions, and blatant defiance of attempts to restore peace. The church cannot make it together if it cannot decide to agree on the basic fundamentals of the faith. ECUSA will not survive if it is a separated union; as Mark 3:24 affirms, "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." (Bible n.p.) The same applies for the church: If it is built on multiple "sandy" foundations that are not Christ the "rock", then it will not last (Bible n.p.). A split has become so necessary because of this. If ECUSA seeks to divide peaceably, two new branches of the Vine may have individual opportunities to produce fruit rather than both remain barren because of arguing and conflict. (Slaton n.p.)

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