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THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Can it survive the corruption of the western Church?

David Phillips

Over the last few weeks the Anglican Communion has begun to crumble. Several provinces have broken communion with the schismatic diocese of New Westminster in Canada where authentic Anglicanism is only to be found in a number of small but thriving parishes. In New Hampshire, USA, an openly homosexual Bishop has been elected and now the Bishop of Oxford has shown his true colours by appointing as Bishop of Reading the homosexual activist Jeffrey John. During the incumbency of George Carey his occasional outbursts on the matter of homosexual practice had a restraining effect in England and by all accounts on the Communion as a whole. However, the new Archbishop, Rowan Williams, is at heart in agreement with the schismatics in endorsing immorality and therefore the floodgates have been opened.

Church Society predicted that in the Church of England those Bishops who are committed to the radical homosexual agenda would now act. The Bishops of Lincoln and Worcester have been most forthright so far in promoting immorality and now Richard Harries has openly joined their ranks. It is small wonder that George Carey was reportedly so unhappy with the appointment of his successor; in a few short months all his hard work in holding the show together is being undone. The one possible silver lining is that other Bishops within the Church of England are waking up to the severity of the situation and appear to be willing to break ranks.

What hope is there for the Anglican Communion? The flourishing churches of Africa and Asia have their own problems that are far more serious than the petty attempts of westerners to justify immoral behaviour. Of course they will have an emotional attachment to the Church of England and reason to be grateful for past financial support. However, if the Communion is to have a meaningful future then it is the churches of the global south that must seize the initiative. Praise God that there are amongst the Primates men who appear to be willing to take this step.

What will be the effect of this in the western Anglican Churches? I would hope that some will feel rebuked and will, as a consequence, repent of their errors, this is always one of the chief goals of discipline, godly confrontation and separation. Some, for whom unity is a key motivation, may well come to see that radical innovation can only ever divide and therefore oppose it on this grounds. But it would be unwise to think that these will necessarily be sufficient. Those who are pursuing this radical agenda are at heart convinced that they are right and that the Church must change. It is folly not to understand the depth of their convictions, or to think that they are not sincere and often entirely consistent in their actions. They will not necessarily be constrained by the opposition of others; they are too convinced of the rightness of their cause. It seems plain that the battle was lost in the US and Canada years ago when those who upheld biblical morality and truth failed to oppose liberalism effectively. In England much the same thing has now happened. The timid response of most evangelicals and the unwillingness to ever do much more than keep talking has contributed to the present perilous state of things. Evangelicals like to think of themselves as the mainstream, but they are being swept out to sea.

Hope for the Church of England lies in a dramatic change of heart. There needs to be recognition that liberalism and Christianity are in reality two different religions. If evangelicals do not wake up to this fact and start acting on it, there will be no hope for the Church of England. But we have

every reason to believe that the churches of the global south will continue to flourish whilst they uphold biblical truth.