

False Choices and Bad Decisions

Facts behind “Choose This Day”

The video “Choose This Day” and its companion “The Decision,” packaged together on a DVD currently being distributed by the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes*, claim that Episcopalians are faced with an important decision. They are correct. Unfortunately, just about everything else in the videos is misleading, inaccurate, and contrary to traditional Anglican approaches to Scripture.

- *The videos claim that the Episcopal Church leadership has espoused a pagan, alien, non-Christian religion.*

Fact: According to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), “The creeds are statements of our basic beliefs about God” (p. 851). General Convention 2003 did not change the BCP, and, in Resolution C051, affirmed that “our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate.” So what is non-Christian about this?

Fact: The decisions of the Episcopal Church are arrived at in a democratic manner after full, prayerful, and open deliberation. They are the responsibility of General Convention, whose deputies represent the full spectrum of the church. The “controversial” decisions of 2003 were passed by large majorities.

Fact: The videos make being Christian a question of sexual ethics relying on a specific interpretation of seven Bible verses, rather than an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and his Gospel message.

- *The videos claim that Episcopal Church leaders have rejected the authority of Scripture and have “deliberately altered” Scripture, which they describe as “unchanging.”*

Fact: Anglicanism has never considered Holy Scripture to be inerrant or its meaning fixed. For example, the 1562 Articles of Religion state in Article VI that Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation and that no one may be required to believe things not found in scripture, but it does not insist that everything in Scripture must be believed. In fact, Article VII states explicitly that parts of the Old Testament are *not* binding on Christians.

Fact: The Catechism states that we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God “because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible” (BCP, p. 853). It further explains that we “understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.” As the great Anglican theologian of the 16th century, Richard Hooker, stressed, Anglicans read Scripture through God’s gift of reason and in light of tradition. Thus, meaning is not simply embedded in Scripture, which is subject to interpretation and re-interpretation.

Fact: The Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, which was appointed to make recommendations about how the Anglican Communion could respond to current controversies, warns against rigid claims about the authority of Scripture: “Scripture itself, after all, regularly speaks of *God* as the supreme authority. When Jesus speaks of ‘all authority in heaven and earth’ (Matthew 28.18), he declares that this authority is given, not to books that his followers will write, but to himself. ... Thus the phrase ‘the authority of Scripture’, if it is to be based on what Scripture itself says, must be regarded as a shorthand, and a potentially misleading one at that, for the longer and more complex notion of ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised through Scripture’.” (The Windsor Report 2004, paragraph 54)

* The DVD and its main feature are called “Choose This Day.” “The Decision” is a “special feature” on this disk. Both may be viewed on the World Wide Web at <http://anglicandecision.com>.

Fact: Scholars are not agreed as to the meaning of the passages of Scripture often cited as supporting the assertion that same-sex sexual expression is contrary to Scripture. Moreover, Anglicans traditionally interpret Scripture by considering passages in context, including the larger context of other passages that might suggest a different line of thought or action.

- *The videos suggest that General Convention acted contrary to its own rules in assenting to the election of Bishop Robinson and by authorizing the use of liturgies for same-sex blessings.*

Fact: General Convention scrupulously followed its canons and constitution. This was acknowledged unambiguously by the primates of the Anglican Communion provinces in their February 2005 communiqué: “At the same time, it is acknowledged that these developments within the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada have proceeded entirely in accordance with their constitutional processes and requirements.”

Fact: General Convention neither authorized the use or preparation of liturgies for blessing same-sex relationships nor created any new sacrament. Rather, it affirmed that local faith communities might experiment with such liturgies, while acknowledging that “differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions; and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same” (Resolution C051). This resolution did say that local faith communities “are operating within the bounds of our common life” if they experiment with such blessings.

- *The videos claim that the Episcopal Church has been on the road to heresy ever since it refused to try Bishop Pike in 1966.*

Fact: The Episcopal Church can hardly be said to have endorsed James Pike’s views. The House of Bishops voted to censure Bishop Pike’s theology as “offensive” and “irresponsible.” Bishop Pike resigned as a bishop and left the Episcopal Church.

- *“The Decision” praises congregations that have left the Episcopal Church for some kind of “Anglican” affiliation with an overseas diocese.*

Fact: Such a choice creates schism by dividing the Episcopal Church.

Fact: The Windsor Report (paragraph 155) and other recent documents of the primates have condemned cross-border interventions by one province in the affairs of another. In fact, the primates promised “neither to encourage nor to initiate cross-boundary interventions” in their February communiqué, a promise that several have failed to keep.

Fact: The two congregations featured in “The Decision” supposedly affiliated with the Diocese of Recife in Brazil and its bishop, but that bishop and 32 of the clergy of the diocese have been deposed by the Episcopal Church of Brazil. In fact, the congregations are affiliated with a rogue group unrecognized by the Episcopal Church of Brazil and not recognized by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop of the Southern Cone has somehow claimed to have offered this group sanctuary in his province, but this is yet another cross-boundary intervention of the sort condemned by the primates.

The choice is yours: You can uphold the historic traditions of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion by remaining open to discussion of different interpretations of Scripture—or even agreeing to disagree—while continuing to worship with *all* Episcopalians, or you can accept the judgmental rhetoric and schismatic conclusions of these videos.