Setting the Record Straight

Revised July 14, 2006

There are a number of pieces of misinformation circulating in the wake of General Convention. The following is an attempt to set the record straight.

Claim: That only two or three of the autonomous churches of the Anglican Communion accept women as bishops.

Fact: A chart provided by the Anglican Communion Secretariat in 2003 lists three autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion (The Episcopal Church and the Churches in New Zealand and Canada) as having chosen and consecrated women as bishops. However, Brazil, Central America, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, Scotland, Southern African, and the Sudan ordain women as priests and have no canonical bars to women bishops. The Church of England is in the process of amending its canons to allow women to become bishops, and Australia very narrowly defeated a similar measure at its last Synod.

Claim: That the Episcopal Church has authorized same sex-blessings.

Fact: General Convention 2006 did not pass any new resolutions or canons concerning this. A 2003 resolution states that the church is divided on this issue, commits the Church to a standard of faithful monogamy, and states that local areas "are operating within the bounds of our common life" if they explore liturgies for such blessings. The church as a whole has not come to a conclusion or authorized any liturgy. In other words, it continues to support local option for pastoral responses.

Claim: That Presiding Bishop-elect, Katharine Jefferts Schori, introduced radical feminist theology by referring to "Mother Jesus" in her homily at General Convention.

Fact: The image of "Mother Jesus" was used widely among patristic and Medieval theologians and Christian mystics including: Julian of Norwich, Adam of Perseigne, Aelred, Albert the Great, Anselm, Aquinas, Augustine, Bernard of Cluny, Bonaventure, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Clement of Alexandria, Dante, William Flete, Gilbert of Hoyland, Guerric of Igny, Guigo II the Carthusian, Helinand of Froidmont, Isaac of Stella, Margery Kempe, Peter Lombard, Ludolph of Saxony, Marguerite of Oingt, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Richard Rolle, and William of St. Thierry, as well as in the Ancren Riwle and the *Stimulus Amoris*. These church heavyweights got their inspiration from the Bible, which itself uses such imagery. See, for example, Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 46:3–4; Hosea 13:8; and Mathew 23:37.

Claim: That Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori has defied the Windsor Report by making her diocese a center for blessings of same-sex unions.

Fact: The Diocese of Nevada did approve a resolution at its December 2003 convention allowing blessings of same-sex unions, subject to approval of each case by the bishop. Bishop Jefferts Schori has required that parishes wishing to do such blessings have a fully developed policy on the matter. In two-and-a-half years since the resolution was passed, there have been two such blessings.

Claim: That the experience of Missouri provides a precedent for withdrawing from a province of the Episcopal Church.

Fact: Article VII of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church does require that a diocese agree to its placement in a particular province. Pittsburgh did agree to being in Province III. The canons of The Episcopal Church specify the assignment of each diocese to a province. There is no provision for withdrawing from a province, only for transferring to another existing province. Missouri was originally in Province VII, which includes most of the Southwest. In the 1960s, Missouri decided that it had little in common with dioceses in that geographical area and would fit better in a more Midwestern region. It stopped participating but did not try to withdraw formally from Province VII. This situation helped encourage General Convention to pass a canonical change specifying a means by which a diocese could transfer to

another province. Missouri then followed the specified procedure to transfer to Province V, which includes much of the Midwest.

Claim: That General Convention 2006 did not respond to the Windsor report.

Fact: General Convention did pass resolutions expressing regret for causing pain to others in the Anglican Communion, expressing a desire to remain in the Communion, committing to continue a process of providing alternative oversight, committing to being involved in the ongoing dialogues of the "Windsor Process" and "Listening Process," designating specific representatives to follow and report on the development of an Anglican covenant, and calling upon "Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion." The General Convention made no statement on liturgies for blessing same-sex relationships, but the church had not authorized such a liturgy.

Claim: General Convention proved its lack of orthodoxy by defeating a resolution that declared an "unchanging commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the only name by which any person may be saved" and "the solemn responsibility placed upon us to share Christ with all persons when we hear His words, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Fact: The discussion about this resolution pointed out that the church had already committed to these concepts when it approved the Book of Common Prayer and Catechism, and, more importantly, raised objections to another section of the resolution that insisted on a specific (substitutionary) interpretation of the Atonement, noting that it was not in the Anglican tradition to insist on a single interpretation of basic doctrines. The resolution was discharged as handled at a previous convention. (See http://gc2006.org/legislation/view_leg_detail.aspx?id=322&type=ORIGINAL.)

Claim: That the Archbishop of Canterbury has issued a statement supporting a two-tiered version of the Anglican Communion that would result in the Episcopal Church's being reduced to associate status.

Fact: The Archbishop has encouraged open discussion for moving toward an Anglican Covenant. He also suggested that the Communion would find a way to maintain a relationship with both those churches that adopted the covenant and those that did not (*i.e.*, a *potential* two-tiered system), and he suggested that any covenant adopted would have to follow the traditional Anglican *via media* and be broad enough to encompass many interpretations of doctrine. It is not clear which churches would have what status should the Communion develop in this manner. (See

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/41/50/acns4161.cfm.)

Claim: That the Archbishop of Canterbury (or his Panel of Reference) has the power to intervene in matters within The Episcopal Church (such as granting alternative primatial oversight).

Fact: The Archbishop of Canterbury's June 2006 theological paper on the Communion controversy included this disclaimer: "All that I have said above should make it clear that the idea of an Archbishop of Canterbury resolving any of this by decree is misplaced, however tempting for many. The Archbishop of Canterbury presides and convenes in the Communion, and may do what this document attempts to do, which is to outline the theological framework in which a problem should be addressed; but he must always act collegially, with the bishops of his own local Church and with the primates and the other instruments of communion." Likewise, in a May 2006 "Communiqué," the Panel of Reference (to whom Canterbury will refer petitions from dioceses and parishes) stated, "It was clear from this that the Panel is not a tribunal or court which can intervene formally to adjudicate in the affairs of the autonomous Provinces of the Anglican Communion" and went on to note that all it could do was to recommend action. (See

http://www.anglican communion.org/acns/articles/41/25/acns4144.cfm.)

Documentation for the statements made above is available on request.

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