

NEW ORLEANS, MUNICH, NEHEMIAH and LENCIONI

by David Holloway

The following may be of help as an *aide-mémoire* by providing the statements relevant to the meeting of the US Bishops in New Orleans and their Response of 25 September 2007 to the Primates' Communiqué of 19 February 2007. I have added some comments (DRJH).

The Communiqué of the Primates' Meeting in Dar es Salaam 19 February 2007 speaks of ambiguity and a lack of clarity as needing to be addressed in any response from TEC.

Section 21 of the Communiqué said,

“It is the ambiguous stance of the Episcopal Church which causes concern among us.”

In the appendix or “*The Key Recommendations of the Primates*” and in the “*On Clarifying the Response to Windsor*” section, the Primates said:

“they deeply regret a lack of clarity about certain of those [the 75th General Convention's] responses.

In particular, the Primates request, through the Presiding Bishop, that the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church

1. make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorise any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses or through General Convention (cf TWR, §143,144); and
2. confirm that the passing of Resolution B033 of the 75th General Convention means that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent (cf TWR, §134);

unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion (cf TWR, §134).

The Primates request that the answer of the House of Bishops is conveyed to the Primates by the Presiding Bishop by 30th September 2007.

If the reassurances requested of the House of Bishops cannot in good conscience be given, the relationship between The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as a whole remains damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion.”

That provided part of the agenda set before the House of Bishops of TEC; and the last paragraph contained not only a requirement but also a warning, namely that a failure to give the reassurances required would “at best” continue the status quo of damage and this “*has* (not will have) consequences”.

At their meeting in New Orleans (September 2007) the American Bishops in their *Summary* responded to (1) above as follows:

“We pledge as a body not to authorize public rites for the blessing of same-sex unions.”

They summarized their response to (2) as:

“We reconfirm that resolution B033 of General Convention 2006 (The Election of Bishops) calls upon bishops with jurisdiction and Standing Committees "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 small print then followed in the *Discussion* as follows:

Resolution B033 of the 2006 General Convention

“The House of Bishops concurs with Resolution EC011 of the Executive Council. This Resolution commends the Report of the Communion Sub-Group of the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates of the Anglican Communion as an accurate evaluation of Resolution B033 of the 2006 General Convention, calling upon bishops with jurisdiction and Standing Committees ‘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 House acknowledges that non-celibate gay and lesbian persons are included among those to whom B033 pertains.”

Comment – but this has not confirmed, as required by the Primates, “that a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent.”

Rather the House of Bishops of TEC has simply confirmed that they will not consent to the consecration of those “whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion” and this *includes* “non-celibate gay and lesbian persons”.

The bishops, however, have not confirmed that so called persons in “faithful and stable” same-sex unions will *always* be included in this group.

As it stands the statement is compatible with a bishop refusing to consent to the consecration of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons because they are in promiscuous relationships while consenting to the consecration of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons in a so called “faithful and stable” same sex union.

Nor do they make it clear what would count as leading to “further strains of the communion”. As the strains would always be in the future, all would depend on these bishops’ judgment. But their judgment has been, and is, the problem.

Then came the following:

Blessing of Same-Sex Union

“We, the members of the House of Bishops, pledge not to authorize for use in our dioceses any public rites of blessing of same-sex unions until a broader consensus emerges in the Communion, or until General Convention takes further action. In the near future we hope to be able to draw upon the benefits of the Communion-wide listening process. In the meantime, it is important to note that no rite of blessing for persons living in same-sex unions has been adopted or approved by our General Convention. In addition to not having authorized liturgies the majority of bishops do not make allowance for the blessing of same-sex unions. We do note that in May 2003 the Primates said we have a pastoral duty ‘to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations.’ They further stated, ‘...[I]t is necessary to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care.’”

Comment – but this is *not* “an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorise any Rite of Blessing for same-sex unions in their dioceses or through General Convention” as required by the Primates. Rather the House of Bishops of TEC have added to the exception of the Primates “*or until General Convention takes further action*” – at which point a Bishop would be freed from this pledge.

The time, surely, has come for action.

This “Response” is dated 25 September 2007.

29 September 2007 is the 68th anniversary of the signing of the *Munich Agreement*, also called the *Munich Betrayal*. This agreement allowed Hitler to continue rearming until the Nazis had sufficient strength to wage the Second World War and, at the start, on Hitler’s terms. Had the Munich Agreement not been signed and Chamberlain not given his “peace in our time” speech, but had Churchill then been in power with his resolution and firmness and with what he called “martial vigour”, millions of lives might have been saved. Certainly the result could hardly have been worse.

The following is from the web:

“Winston Churchill denounced the Agreement in the House of Commons:

‘We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat...you will find that in a period of time which may be measured by years, but may be measured by months, Czechoslovakia will be engulfed in the Nazi régime. We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude...we have sustained a defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel far with us along our road...we have passed an awful milestone in our history, when the whole equilibrium of Europe has been deranged, and that the terrible words have for the time being been pronounced against the Western democracies: "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting". And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.’

Hitler now regarded Chamberlain with utter contempt ... Hitler had been heard saying: ‘If ever that silly old man comes interfering here again with his umbrella, I’ll kick him downstairs and jump on his stomach in front of the photographers’.”

Do we want a “Munich” attitude in the Church when the gospel is at stake?

On Sunday, 30 September, by coincidence (or providence) I am to be preaching on Nehemiah 6 and Nehemiah’s refusal to talk with Sanballat and Tabiah and Geshem the Arab – in the plain of Ono (6.1-2). Nehemiah refused to talk four times. Then Sanballat tried another trick to get Nehemiah to “confer” (6.7). Nehemiah was resolute. He would have nothing to do with Sanballat whom Nehemiah already had seen as corrupt and an enemy frustrating the work of God. Nehemiah had been called to do.

The pro-gay leadership in the Western Churches, especially in TEC, is doing untold damage to the cause of Christ world-wide and frustrating the work God has called us to do. So surely the talking must now stop and action must be taken as a consequence of the current reality. To repeat, the Primates have said that a failure to give the reassurances required would “at best” continue the existing damage and this “*has* [not will have] consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion”. Communion *is* broken. Does it not, therefore, mean that it is quite inappropriate for TEC Bishops to be represented at the Lambeth Conference 2008 or on other Anglican bodies? As soon as there is an *unambiguous* change of heart and mind, immediately, representation could again take place.

What happens now to some extent will be a test of our current leadership. It will be a test of the credibility of the Primates now evaluating this American response.

Hooker said that the church is “a society and a society supernatural”. Since it is a human “society”, the requirements for good leadership need to be met in the church as well as in the wider society.

Perhaps the bestseller *The Five Temptations of a CEO* by Patrick Lencioni says something that is relevant not only for business leadership but at this time for the Church’s leadership.

Lencioni’s “Temptation 3” is “choosing certainty over clarity”:

“Many CEOs, especially highly analytical ones, want to ensure that their decisions are correct, which is impossible in a world of imperfect information and uncertainty. Still, executives with a need for precision and correctness often postpone decisions and fail to make their people’s deliverables clear. They provide vague and hesitant direction ...

Simple advice for CEOs: make clarity more important than accuracy. Remember that your people will learn more if you take decisive action than if you always wait for more information. And if the decisions you make in the spirit of creating clarity turn out to be wrong when more information becomes available, change plans and explain why. It is your job to risk being wrong. The only real cost to you of being wrong is loss of pride. The cost to your company of not taking the risk of being wrong is paralysis.”

David Holloway
Vicar of Jesmond