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“Irreconcilable Truth Claims” — Watch for Anglican Developments

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Pressures in the Anglican Communion continue to build as conservative leaders around the globe now call for a postponement of the communion's next great gathering — the Lambeth Conference scheduled for London in 2008.

This is how *The Times* [London] reports the story:

The evangelical Archbishops who head the “Global South” grouping have called on the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, to postpone next year's Lambeth Conference.

Several senior bishops, including the Bishop of Rochester, Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, have already warned they could boycott the conference, the ten-yearly gathering of Anglican Communion bishops from across the globe, because of the row over gays.

Today nine Primates, including Nigeria's Peter Akinola, Uganda's Luke Orombi and South East Asia's John Chew, said the conference should be postponed until all bishops could meet “in a spirit of true collegiality and unity in the faith.”

A conservative boycott of the Lambeth Conference would be, in effect, a statement that the communion is no more. Archbishop Akinola set the issue in its clearest form yet:

“The world needs to understand that the situation that we now confront is not primarily about structure or conferences but about irreconcilable truth claims. It is worth remembering that in the Biblical narratives religious structures have often been the enemy of revealed truth.”

Akinola's insistence that the controversy is about “irreconcilable truth claims” is irreducibly justified and necessary. Liberal forces continually try to define the issues as merely procedural or structural. Akinola knows better — and so do those who oppose him. The issue is truth, not structure. The conservatives cannot ignore the fact that liberals are violating the clear teachings of Scripture.

The Washington Post also reports that no less than four Episcopal dioceses are considering a break with their denomination, the Episcopal Church, USA:

Four Episcopal dioceses are considering switching allegiance to foreign primates in protest against their church's support for gay bishop Gene Robinson, despite threats of disciplinary action from Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori.

“We reject the religion of accommodation and cultural conformity that offers neither transforming power nor eternal hope,” said a statement signed by nine primates from Africa and Asia who also called for a delay in the Lambeth

Conference.

The statement, dated October 30 but only posted on Wednesday on the traditionalist website Global South Anglican, added that primates from developing countries — where traditionalist stands are strongest — should hold their own summit next year.

All this comes just days after the U.S. church's Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, warned Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan that he might be removed from his office if his diocese pressed ahead with a vote to leave the church. The diocese did press ahead, voting overwhelmingly to leave.

Meanwhile, all eyes are now on Chicago, where the diocese is scheduled to elect a new bishop tomorrow. One of the candidates, Rev. Tracey Lind, is a practicing lesbian.

Those two votes will tell us a great deal about the future of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. Increasingly, the church is divided between those who believe that the Bible's teachings about homosexuality are authoritative and valid, and those who see them as repressive and in need of revision or replacement. Underlying all this is the fundamental issue of biblical authority.

Bishop Akinola has it right — the real problem is a conflict over “irreconcilable truth claims.” Those who love the truth cannot deny this reality. Watch these developments closely, for these issues and “irreconcilable truth claims” are not limited to the Anglicans and Episcopalians.

UPDATE: The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago elected Rev. Jeffrey Lee, rector of St. Thomas Church in Medina, Washington, as their next bishop. The lesbian candidate, Rev. Tracey Lind, placed fourth in each of two ballot votes. Here is how *The Chicago Tribune* reported the story:

The election marked the most recent flash point in the conflict over homosexuality in the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion. The 2003 consecration of Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop, began a shift in the church and some thought there would be further divisions if Lind were elected bishop.

When asked about his stance on gays in the church, Lee said he supported full inclusion.

“I believe God is calling us to full inclusion of gays and lesbians in ministry of this church. ... There is a place for everyone in the church, and the church has to catch up with God's vision,” he said.

More:

Chicago's Bishop William Persell said that the choice of Lee should not be seen as a vote against gays and lesbians in the church.

“The majority of the diocese is committed to full inclusion,” he said during a news conference.

Image is a painting of Lambeth Palace, London home to the Archbishop of Canterbury, by Samuel Scott.

