

AlbertMohler.com

Bishop Griswold Strikes Out: Biblical Authority Denied

In The Way We Live Now, Anthony Trollope drew an unforgettable portrait of a spineless Anglican bishop. Trollope's Bishop of Elmham is "a man sixty years of age, very healthy and handsome, with hair just becoming gray, clear eyes, a kindly mouth, and something of a double chin." He is well liked and kind to children. As for doctrinal divisions, he never takes a stand, one way or the other, "because he would not put out to sea in either of those boats."

Thursday, October 2, 2003

In *The Way We Live Now*, Anthony Trollope drew an unforgettable portrait of a spineless Anglican bishop. Trollope's Bishop of Elmham is "a man sixty years of age, very healthy and handsome, with hair just becoming gray, clear eyes, a kindly mouth, and something of a double chin." He is well liked and kind to children. As for doctrinal divisions, he never takes a stand, one way or the other, "because he would not put out to sea in either of those boats."

That is not the case with Bishop Frank Griswold, the current Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, USA. Bishop Griswold has put out to sea in favor of homosexuality—and it just might get his church put out of the Anglican Communion.

Bishop Griswold looks the part of a Presiding Bishop. He was formerly Bishop of Chicago and served three Pennsylvania churches as pastor. A graduate of Oxford University, he also holds degrees from Harvard College and General Theological Seminary. He has the perfect resume for the job. All he lacks is commitment to biblical authority.

His support for the election of the Episcopal Church's first openly-homosexual bishop might be sufficient for most persons to draw that conclusion, but Bishop Griswold insists that he loves the Bible. In a letter to his fellow national primates of the Anglican Communion, he offered his defense: "I must say in the strongest possible terms that if I believed in any part of my being that the consent to this election was unfaithful to an authentic way of reading Scripture and contrary to the leading of the Holy Spirit, I could no longer serve as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church."

That is a powerful claim—and the bishop sets a high standard. Furthermore, Bishop Griswold says he believes that "the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and contain all things necessary to salvation." Doesn't that answer the question?

Regrettably, no. He gives himself away in the next paragraph of his letter. The controversy over the election of the homosexual bishop "is not about some of us believing that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and others not believing it is. How we have been shaped and formed as Christians and the context in which we live have a great deal to do with how we interpret various passages in the Bible and the weight we give them in making moral decisions."

Wait—there's more. "While we all accept the authority of Scripture, we interpret various passages in different ways. It is extremely dishonoring of the faith of another to dismiss them as not taking the Bible seriously."

In a recent interview with the Associated Press, Bishop Griswold expanded upon his beliefs. The Bible, he asserted, "didn't know anything about" homosexual orientation. "In the biblical world, the presumption was that everyone was by nature heterosexual and therefore any homosexual behavior was a deliberate choice to depart from one's natural inclinations. ... We're dealing with a reality the Bible didn't know anything about. ... I don't think the Bible pretends to be the rule book, the history book, the container of all factual truth. It's the description of people's encounter with God."

The Bible condemns "discrete acts of homosexuality" because they were driven by lust. Committed same-sex relationships are a different matter altogether, the bishop insists. Too bad the biblical authors didn't know about that.

These statements put to the lie Bishop Griswold's claim to believe the Bible and to revere it as the Word of God. The Bible, he qualifies, is not "the rule book, the history book, the container of all factual truth." So, the Bible can be trusted as the inspired Word of God, except when it has to do with rules, history, or facts. What's left?

Bishop Griswold's words condemn his claim to love the Bible and to accept its authority. In his letter to the primates he based his claim on "an authentic way of reading Scripture." But his way is to deny what the Bible clearly teaches on homosexuality. He sets himself up as the judge of what the Scripture is allowed to say.

Christopher Seitz, Professor of Old Testament and Theological Studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, argues that the Bible's teaching on homosexuality is not unclear and therefore is not in question. "For all the issues that divided the church in the past—over which Anabaptists, Lutherans, the Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, and others might have disagreed—tolerance or the blessing of homosexual acts was never one of them. Apparently, Scripture's plain sense was simply too plain when it came to homosexual behavior."

This is a compelling argument. Various controversies through the centuries have revealed disagreements among Christians over any number of issues, and these disagreements have even lead to the development of separate denominations and Christian bodies. But, as Professor Seitz argues, there has never—at least until now—been any question about the Bible's plain teaching on homosexuality. Every branch of Christianity has affirmed this fact. As he helpfully notes, the Bible's explicit and consistent condemnation of homosexual acts is "simply too plain" to be misunderstood.

Liberal divinity school professors and many of the the bureaucrats in the mainline Protestant denominations have simply joined the homosexual agenda and bought the worldview. They no longer believe that homosexuality must be judged by the Bible. Instead, they will judge the Bible by homosexuality. Then, they add insult to injury by claiming to honor and love the Bible.

Bishop Griswold is an embarrassment to all who respect the Bible as the Word of God—and therefore true when it deals with all matters . . . rules, history, and facts included. This is not just a matter of concern to Episcopalians. All Christians have a stake in this great controversy.

We should remember that the Anglican tradition also includes bishops of great conviction—men like Bishop J. C. Ryle, the first Bishop of Liverpool in England. Speaking to his clergy in 1858, Bishop Ryle addressed them with a challenge: "Let me put to everyone one searching question. Is there any text in God's Word which we seek from expounding? Is there any statement in the Bible which we avoid speaking about to our people, not because we do not understand it, but because it contradicts some pet notion of ours as to what is truth? If this is true, let us ask our consciences whether this is very much like handling the Word of God deceitfully."

The Archbishop of Canterbury has summoned the primates of the Anglican Communion to Lambeth Palace for an emergency October 15-16. The great question is whether the primates will accept the Episcopal Church's revolt against Scripture in electing an openly-homosexual man as bishop. The answer the primates give to that question will come down to whether they follow the example of Bishop Griswold or that of Bishop Ryle. They will have only one chance to get this question right.

