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“For the Sake of God” — Must We Surrender Sexual Morality?

Ruth Gledhill calls upon Anglicans to just drop the issue of homosexuality “for the sake of God, themselves, and the common good.”

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The ordination of Mary Glasspool as a bishop of the Episcopal Church on Sunday drives yet another wedge into the already fracturing Anglican Communion — and raises some of the most fundamental questions about the church and sexual morality.

Bishop Glasspool, ordained as an auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles along with another woman, becomes the second openly-homosexual priest to be elected as an Episcopal bishop, and the first lesbian. As the Associated Press reported, “Seven years after the Episcopal Church caused an uproar by consecrating its first openly gay bishop, it has done the same thing again — only this time with a woman.”

In 2003, the Episcopal Church set off an explosion in the Anglican Communion by consecrating V. Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. Robinson became the first openly-homosexual bishop serving anywhere in the Anglican Communion, the world-wide fellowship of churches related to the Church of England. In response, the Anglican Communion sternly asked the American church to refrain from any further ordinations of homosexual bishops and from offering an official blessing to same-sex unions. This past summer, the Episcopal Church announced its decision to defy that request. Bishop Glasspool’s ordination is the concrete demonstration of that defiance.

The stage is now set for an all-out conflict within the Anglican Communion. This conflict will pit the conservative Anglican churches of the “Global South” against the far more liberal churches of North America, and potentially against the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. The conservative churches, concentrated in Africa and South America, are resolutely against the normalization of homosexuality. Furthermore, they vastly outnumber the more liberal churches in terms of membership. As Philip Jenkins has noted, the average Anglican worshiper is not a businesswoman in England, but a mother of multiple children in Africa.

Now, one key question is whether the strategy undertaken by the Archbishop of Canterbury will work. Having made statements favoring the normalization of homosexuality prior to his elevation as archbishop, Dr. Rowan Williams has attempted to hold the two warring factions of his communion together. As Giles Whittell of *The Times* [London] explains:

Hoping to retain the allegiance of conservatives still furious over the ordination of Gene Robinson, the first gay Anglican bishop, in 2003, Dr. Williams has said that Canon Glasspool’s ordination “raises very serious questions not just for the Episcopalian Church and its place in the Anglican Communion, but for the Communion as a whole”. He declined to comment on the ordination.

One problem faced by the communion is the habitual hesitation and tepid leadership of its leaders, starting with the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop has continually spoken of his concern and fears for the unity of Anglicans worldwide, and he has even spoken of his disappointment and frustration with the American church. What is missing from Canterbury is a clear demand that the Episcopal Church correct its unbiblical practices, repent, and submit to the faithful consensus of the global Anglican family.



But now, a most interesting and provocative argument has come from a very different quarter. Columnist Ruth Gledhill of *The Times*, one of the most seasoned observers of the Anglican scene, now calls for Christians to just stop arguing over homosexuality and get on with whatever the churches are supposed to be doing. Liberals and conservatives, she argues, must now “put their differences behind them, for the sake of God, themselves and the common good.”

That is quite a startling argument, but is also an argument that is certain to gain traction in the liberal landscape of Europe and North America. Ruth Gledhill’s argument bears a closer look.

She begins by telling of a conversation she had years ago with a source “close to the Archbishop of Canterbury,” who told her that “a person’s view on homosexuality is now what defined them on the Christian spectrum.” Gledhill was startled by this assertion, as is made clear by this argument:

In other words, the infighting over homosexuality means that for the 77 million Anglicans worldwide, more important than the Resurrection, the Crucifixion, the Virgin Birth and the Trinity is what one person does in bed with another. The lines of Christian belief, in the Anglican world at least, have been redrawn around a battle over gay rights that, in the secular world, ended years ago.

In other words, get on with life. The secular argument over homosexuality “ended years ago,” but the church (and the Anglican Communion, in particular) is still fighting that battle. As she sees it, this costs the church dearly. Young people who were baptized as Anglicans as infants but have no identification with the church, now cannot remember a time when the culture believed homosexuality to be wrong or criminal. “These are the people that church leaders should be trying to attract,” she insists.

Furthermore, she adds, “Sexuality figures nowhere in the creeds. It is not mentioned in the church’s liturgies.”

There are several aspects of Ruth Gledhill’s argument that demand response. In the first place, it is shocking that she asserts with such breathtaking ease that the conservatives in the Anglican Communion — those who stand on clear teachings of the Bible, must give way to the liberals. There is no acknowledgment that this means the growing churches of the Anglican Communion would be surrendering to the agenda of the dying churches.

Second, the argument that an insistence on the importance of biblical sexuality means that these teachings are held to be more important than “the Resurrection, the Crucifixion, the Virgin Birth, and the Trinity” is nothing less than ludicrous. The issue of homosexuality may now function to place persons “on the Christian spectrum,” but this is only because the liberal churches have forced the issue. Conservative Anglicans from Africa and South American did not raise the issue of sexuality — the Episcopal Church did.

One other aspect of this particular issue cries out for acknowledgment. One additional reason that the issue of homosexuality (and biblical authority) now functions so decisively is precisely because the liberal churches have already allowed liberal denials of everything mentioned by Gledhill on her list. It so happens that the churches that hold fast to those theological essentials are, almost without exception, the same churches that maintain biblical teachings on human sexuality. No real surprise there.

Third, the argument that the historic creeds and confessions and liturgies of the church do not mention homosexuality is obvious and simple — they did not need to. No one was questioning God’s authority to define human sexuality in the Bible. Such a question would have been unthinkable. The creeds and confessions tell us what issues were contested and in play, and the Bible’s teachings on sexuality have been under sustained attack only in very recent times.

The opposing sides in the Anglican Communion cannot simply “put their differences behind them” and agree to move on. Those who argue that such a strategy will gain credibility for the church in a secular age are selling fool’s gold. What the church would lose is its soul.

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Do God a favor by abandoning his design for human sexuality and by surrendering the authority of his Word?

Note this argument carefully and be warned — this advice will not be offered only to the Anglicans.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

Ruth Gledhill, "[For the Sake of God, Anglican Church Must Put Aside its Differences](#)," *The Times* [London], Monday, May 17, 2010.

"[Episcopal Church Ordains Second Openly Gay Bishop](#)," The Associated Press, *The Washington Times*, Saturday, May 15, 2010.

Giles, Whittell, "[Anglican Rift Deepens over Episcopalian Ordination of Lesbian Bishop](#)," *The Times* [London], Monday, May 17, 2010.

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