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## Sermon for Trinity VIII (Part II)

The actuality of heresy.

By affirming the practice of homosexuality, the General Convention has rejected the clear teaching of Scripture which is the singular authority of the Christian religion and so of the Episcopal Church. Article XX of the Thirty-nine articles states that " it is unlawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written..."

The Bible is consistent in its teaching on human sexuality. The complementarity of male and female is the created design for marital union, a union for joy and comfort, for the procreation of human beings, and for the foundation of human society. Jesus is quite clear that this is the originative idea and will of God himself. Indeed, by grace, marriage is so wonderful and mysterious that it becomes an image of the union between Christ and his Church.

The Bible is also consistent in its condemnation of sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage, whether fornication, adultery, homosexual practice, or other improper sexual activity. There is the one moral voice of the Old Testament and the New, and it is found in the creative will of God, revealed in the words of the prophet Moses, of St. Paul, and most importantly in the teaching of our Lord Christ Jesus.

By consenting both to the consecration of a practicing homosexual as Bishop and to the status quo of the blessing of same-sex unions, the General Convention has voted to contradict Scripture. They have instead moved to confirm, to consecrate, and to bless the sins of the flesh. Such a repudiation of moral truth, revealed in Scripture, and received by the Church, is heresy.

Furthermore, the General Convention has not only rejected the singular authority of the Bible, it has repudiated the long tradition of Moral Theology in the Church. In Christian Ethics, homosexual practice has always been viewed as sin, a species of the capital vice of lust, a particular manifestation of a sin deadly to the soul. One of the saddest portrayals of this fact is found in the greatest of moral theologians, the poet Dante. Dante includes his dear old counselor, Brunetto Latini, in the flames of the Inferno. Latini runs about the circle occupied by what Dante calls the "Violent against Nature." It is no accident that Dante, who gathers up so accurately the Christian tradition of the West and the East in all its brilliance and nobility, places this particular sin in the Inferno. It is not in the very pit of Hell. That is reserved for the

betrayal of friendship, especially divine friendship. But homosexual activity remains in the Inferno nonetheless.

In their action of confirming homosexual practice both for the Bishop-elect and for same-sex unions, the General Convention has contradicted the Moral Theology of the Church. And for what? The Church's mission is to lead us into what is good for the soul, to bring us into the light, to free us from the chains of our passions, to speak comfortable words of forgiveness and renewal. The General Convention has done the opposite. It has anointed wicked behavior. It has fashioned idols with the names of "respect," "civility," and "tolerance." But it knows none of these truly. Love that is true can neither respect, nor treat as civil, nor tolerate what is destructive of the human person. Heresy is cruel. But the heresy of the General Convention is not their only sin. They have embraced schism as well.

The actuality of schism.

With their action, the institution of the Episcopal Church had repudiated the Anglican Communion. At the last meeting of the Bishops from all over the world at Lambeth, the bishops said definitively that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Scripture. In a more recent meeting the Primates confirmed this. By their unilateral action, the General Convention of our church has insisted that they do not care about the rest of the Anglican Communion. They do not care about the blessed company of all faithful people. They would rather implement the political machinations of their sensuous will, than humbly embrace Christian wisdom and charity around the world.

And in doing so the General Convention has violated its own Constitution. In our Constitution, which is the definitive statement of the mind of our church, and which constitutes the organized body of the Episcopal Church, we state that our church is "a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." But by their action, the General Convention repudiated the fellowship of the Anglican Communion. Their willfulness has been a sin against charity and therefore unity. The General Convention has legislated schism. Anglican Churches around the Anglican Communion have already begun declarations of excommunication. Heresy and schism are a present actuality.

Our response.

And so, we need to ask this question. What shall we do?

First we must pray, and deliberate, and then we must act. Prayer is participation in the Spirit; it is the first act of communion. We must seek the will of our Father through His Spirit, through studying the Word of God written, and listening to the wisdom of our tradition. Prayer is our first relation to God in communion.

Next we must deliberate. We must think together patiently and carefully about the whole spectrum of options, what we might do and might not do. This will require work, but most of all it will require courage tempered with prudence and justice. This is a time for the exercise of virtue. So make your views known to the Wardens and members of the Vestry, to me and to Fr. Dunbar. We will keep you

informed of what we are doing every step of the way.

We must pray, and we must deliberate, and then we must act. Not to act would be to neglect our sacred duty. And it would mean sure and certain spiritual death. But we must act in charity and in truth: in charity, especially, toward those who practice homosexuality, and toward those who support them. Every person is created in the image of God. And the blood of Christ is sufficient for us all. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Never forget that the Lord did not come for the righteous, but to call the unrighteous to repentance. Charity is always the first offering of the Christian.

But then we must be devoted to the truth and the defense of the Gospel. We cannot codify sin. Next to hearing the word of God is obeying his word. Next to hearing the will of our Father is doing it. Our vocation is to live as Christians, to continue in the essence of the Anglican way, in what it truly means to be an Episcopalian, which is our part in the blessed company of all faithful people. The religion of the Episcopal Church is your inheritance to pass on.

I believe it all comes down to this. What will we leave our children? Will it be the comfortable words of Christ? Will we leave our children and our grandchildren the Gospel, entire and unblemished? Will they know the authority of Scripture? Will they experience the nobility and dignity of the Prayer Book and Anglican Hymnody? Will they know the sanctity and mystery of Christian Marriage? Will they know the Communion of Saints? Or will they be set adrift on the sea of moral relativism, with no authority, no faith, only the chaos of the subjective sensuous will?

Whether you are older or younger, whether you have done your time in the service of the church, or whether that time of service is just beginning, whether you have raised your children in the church, or you are just beginning to bring up your children in the fear and nurture of the Lord, your church needs you now—to pray, to deliberate, and to act.

And then, finally, a word of comfort; fear not. The angel Gabriel uttered those words to a young virgin two thousand years ago. The prospect of her vocation, so strange and mysterious, would not be easy by any means. But her calling would be the way of new life to enter our world, an Incarnation that would live and die and rise again that we might live with him forever. Jesus lives to be our Friend, our Savior and our Lord. We have no need to fear what may come, for the Lord reigns in history and beyond. He shall rule in truth and in charity and in peace. Always remember this one fact. The City of God only grows in praise and glory; it never diminishes. We have no need to fear anything at all except being faithless and worthless to our Lord. So then, beloved, be of good courage and good cheer and fear not, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you His Kingdom.

**The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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