

Why Not Leave? A Followup

“Why Not Leave?” was one of the first blog posts I did, and the most popular. It received over 14,000 views. A lot of the people who viewed it at the time misread it as an apology to stay in the Episcopal Church, but that was a misreading. If you read to the end I make clear that I believed there would be a separation of the ways between orthodox Anglicans and TEC, and I believed at the time it would happen sooner rather than later.

There were a couple of things that I did not anticipate when I wrote this. First was that the Archbishop of Canterbury would subvert the process of disciplining the Episcopal Church by (1) disregarding the deadline set by the Primates at Dar Es Salaam; (2) guaranteeing that the Lambeth Conference would exercise no discipline by inviting all the TEC bishops who had participated in Robinson’s ordination, and (3) by turning the Conference into a series of Indaba groups where no substantive conversation could take place, and no decisions made.

I really did believe that discipline would take place, and that it would be exercised by the Communion as a whole. with Rowan Williams leading the way.

The second thing I did not anticipate was that there would be two very different responses by the orthodox to the failure of Communion discipline—the distinction that has now come to be made between so-called Federal Conservatives and Communion Conservatives, also known as the “Outside Approach” and the “Inside Approach.”

I had presumed that if Plan A failed (failure of Communion discipline) that the orthodox would naturally go with some kind of Plan B—which to me meant turning to the Global South rather than Canterbury. So I was quite surprised to discover that not only were there many who would simply refuse Plan B,

but who would insist that there had never been a real Plan A, or, at least that there was not now. I was also quite surprised at the virulent reaction of Communion Conservatives against the so-called Federal Conservatives when they began pursuing Plan B after Plan A failed.

While I admire a willingness to suffer and be a witness, that was never my original understanding in writing this post. I certainly anticipated that orthodox Anglicanism might fade away. I wrote in "Why Not Leave?" that a disappearance of Anglicanism would be a tragedy—like the disappearance of the Celtic Church or the churches in North Africa that were obliterated by the Muslim conquerors.

But I was not embracing such a future. The hope that I expressed in the post was for a "renewed orthodoxy" that might well consist of Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and free church Evangelicals. I anticipated that we might well be meeting in storefronts, and sharing each other's buildings, and that there might be a rapprochement between these "remnant Reformation Churches" with Rome and Orthodoxy. And that is largely what has been happening, both in dioceses like my former Diocese of CT—the orthodox remnant of my old CT6 church meets in a gymnasium—and here in Pittsburgh, where we are not yet in the storefronts, but we are certainly being sued by the stayers, including those who claim to be "orthodox"—and we might well end up in the storefronts.

So the bottom line was, when I originally wrote "Why Not Leave?" that I was anticipating something like GAFCON should Communion discipline fail. And I am happy that my bishop will be the Archbishop for the new Anglican Province of North America.

I am sad, of course, that the orthodox have not made a united choice together. I was wrong about that.