

Splitters United or Patient Pressure?

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Last week two large, historic evangelical [churches](#) in the Washington area began moves to leave The Episcopal Church. They wish to put themselves under the jurisdiction of the Anglican Church of Nigeria (of which the Convocation for Anglicans in North America is part). Although the pressures on evangelicals in the US are great, upsetting the 'Windsor Process' by these new 'trans-communion interventions' is regrettable at this delicate stage in Anglican reshaping.

Under Archbishop Drexel Gomez, the Communion is developing a Covenant into which provinces can opt. Coupled with the concept of 'constituent' members of the Anglican Communion (those who adopt the covenant) and 'associate' status (for those who do not), as outlined in the Archbishop of Canterbury's [statement](#) in June, this is a positive way forward – indeed realistically, ['the only game in town'](#).

Some, however, may argue that evangelical Anglicans in England need to follow the lead of those parishes in America. They do not. The current crisis in The Episcopal Church is not the same as the context of the Church of England. Evangelical Anglicans here should not be considering [secret or panic measures](#). We are set in a different situation and open conversation and cautious consideration of the issues are what is required, not least among evangelicals.

The consecration of a bishop, like Gene Robinson, who admits to a current sexual relationship outside of marriage, is hardly likely to take place in England. Vigilance is still needed, but that really is not our scenario. The Crown nominations process is different from Episcopalian elections; General Synod has backed the 'Windsor Process' by a huge majority; our two Archbishops would clearly not consecrate such a candidate; and the leading dioceses, by tradition, after Canterbury and York - London, Durham and Winchester - all have bishops who are conservative on sexuality.

What is needed now is not [precipitate action, but judicious reflection](#) that leads into considered choice. In other words, response not reaction and urgency not hurry. We should be praying for successors of Richard Hooker who can develop authentic Anglican ecclesiologies for our time, and over a period of time.

In Fulcrum, we aim to renew the evangelical centre. We are, for example, both for women bishops and conservative on issues of sexuality. As our web-site shows, that has, at times, meant not being afraid to give a theological critique of both the 'left' and the 'right' and of the tone of discussions. But it also means taking a stance of patient pressure and working constructively to help develop a creative Anglican ecclesiology, which does not reduce ['Communion' to 'federation'](#). This must be relational in its understanding of communion, global in its scope, and have biblical holistic mission as its centre and driving energy.

There have recently appeared a number of vital resources for this task. Oliver O'Donovan is currently in the middle of a [major series](#) of seven monthly Fulcrum 'web sermons' on the crisis in the Anglican Communion. Philip Turner and Ephraim Radner's recent book, [The Fate of Communion](#), offers a stringent critique of the American church (with lessons we may need to

learn in England) but also, in its vision of a conciliar Anglicanism, positive proposals for an alternative to splits and the unilateral creation of new provinces.

The perspective of evangelical Anglicans in the wider Communion is also vital and is increasingly being recognised as of significance. In Singapore, [Michael Poon](#) is the most prolific ecclesiohistorian on the [Global South Anglican site](#). At Limuru, near Nairobi, Kenya, Joseph Galgalo is on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Panel of Reference and the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) and Esther Mombo is a consultant to Primates' Meetings and also on the IATDC. All three are southern theologians of note who offer refreshing insights into the creative development of Anglican ecclesiologies which are not fissiparous and are shaped by a holistic view of mission.

In their contributions we see the fruit of John Stott's vision for mission and for evangelical Anglicans worldwide. Poon (Patristics, Oxford), and Galgalo (Systematic Theology, Cambridge) were both supported for their PhD's by the Langham Trust, founded and funded by Stott. At the end of a recent [interview](#) published in *Christianity Today* (13 October 2006), Stott concluded with a breathtaking breadth of mission:

My hope is that in the future, evangelical leaders will ensure that their social agenda includes such vital but controversial topics as halting climate change, eradicating poverty, abolishing armories of mass destruction, responding adequately to the AIDS pandemic, and asserting the human rights of women and children in all cultures. I hope our agenda does not remain too narrow.

Those who have ears to hear, in England and the world, let them hear.

Stott has also set the context for our ecclesiology. In an essay published recently in a book edited by Caroline Chartres, [Why I am Still an Anglican](#) (London: Continuum, 2006), he concluded:

So I do believe in the Church of England, in the rightness of belonging to it and of maintaining a faithful evangelical witness within it and to it. For I believe in the power of God's word and Spirit to reform and renew the Church. I also believe in the patience of God. Max Warren wrote that "the history of the Church is the story of the patience of God". He was right. I do not think we have any liberty to be less patient than God has been.

In responding to these missiological and ecclesiological challenges, there is a clear need for [conservative, open and charismatic](#) streams in evangelical Anglicanism (widely seen to be represented by [Reform](#), [Fulcrum](#) and [New Wine](#)) to interweave and interact with each other, learning from Stott's generosity and foresight. We also need to renew and make the most of the institutions he established: not only the Langham Trust, but the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion, and the [Church of England Evangelical Council](#) as a truly representative forum and voice for all evangelical Anglicans within the Church of England.

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