

This is a very important week for the Anglican communion

Although if this week's primates meeting leads to a looser union, it may at least offer more time for preaching the Gospel



This week, the Anglican Communion may fall apart. The stated reason is disagreement about homosexuality. Liberal whites, especially in North America, support gay sex acts and same-sex marriage. African Anglicans oppose them because they go against what the Bible and Christian tradition say. This is a serious issue in its own right, but it does not fully explain the animus within the Communion.

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The Anglican Communion exists because the Church of England spread through the British Empire. So it is, in the post-imperial world, the church equivalent of the Commonwealth. Like the Commonwealth, the Anglican Communion wants to retain former colonial links but does not take kindly to white people telling black ones what is good for them. Modern liberal sexual morality has been invented and propagated almost exclusively by white people. So while we in the West might regard it as a liberation, many in Africa and Asia see it as an imperialist attack on their indigenous culture.

Modern African Christians look with horror on Bishop Gene Robinson, the American bishop who is a gay alcoholic and is now married to a man (having divorced a woman), rather as our missionary ancestors were shocked by tribal chiefs who had lots of wives and a regrettable tendency to eat their enemies. They do not believe they can be in communion with the Church which lets him continue in his ministry. To them, Bishop Gene is a symbol of imperial oppression.

Again because of history, it is the Archbishop of Canterbury who presides over this tricky situation. Poor Justin Welby has travelled the world meeting all 38 Anglican primates in the hope of sorting this out. One must sympathise with his weary conclusion that perhaps a looser association is the answer. Then there might be more time available to concentrate on preaching the Gospel.

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