

## It started as a split over gay clergy. But now the Anglican Communion is dead

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**While yet another evangelical rebellion over gay clergy was gaining zero publicity, a more significant schism has occurred - - Andrew Brown writes in The Guardian**

What, you gave a schism and nobody came? When six people hold a press briefing and three journalists attend, you know the story is over, and on Tuesday morning that is what happened when the evangelical wing of the Church of England announced – yet again – its plans to rebel against any open accommodation with gay people .

There were two retired bishops. There were three vicars and one of their wives. They talked to three journalists for an hour about their experiences at a conference of

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conservative Anglicans, called Gafcon, which met in Nairobi last week.

This was set up as a protest against the reluctance of the official Anglican

Communion to expel the Americans (who pay for it) as a punishment for their enthusiasm for openly gay clergy.

Once upon a time, this would have been a

story. We heard threats to withhold money from the central bodies of the Church of England, threats to ignore the authority of other bishops, threats of defections to their grouping from the mainstream of opinion here. All these things will no doubt happen, as they have been happening in a small way for the past 20 years. What's new is

that no one any longer cares. The split has happened, and it turns out not to matter at all. This is in part because the movement of public opinion on sexuality has completely

***Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby during his brief visit Kenya – but he was not officially present for Gafcon.***



overwhelmed that of church politicians. Congregations by and large have moved on, too. They are part of the public, too. But until very recently the conservative evangelicals in the Church of England lived in a bubble of self-importance, whose boundaries were respected by Rowan Williams.

And from within the bubble, the outside world could not be clearly seen. Only, the fight about gay marriage made it apparent to the main body of the church – and to Justin Welby – that their attitudes were repulsive and immoral to the majority of people in this country.

The conservatives still don't really see this. To them, anyone who disagrees with them is wrong about God. They dress up their lack of influence here in wonderful titles from abroad – the two retired bishops were respectively "an adviser to the Primates' Council" and the other – I love this – was representing "The Anglican Mission in England", which is an organisation founded in Rwanda.

They feel they are part of the global, "orthodox" mainstream of Christianity. But almost the only decisive act of Rowan Williams' time in office was the rejection, by a clear majority of committed churchgoers, of his "covenant" – a plan to bind the Church of England into the structures of the rest of the Anglican Communion. No one here wants to be told what to do by the Church of Nigeria, however many Anglicans there are there and however sincerely they seem to hate gay people.

Welby understands this very well, though I think it came as a shock to him. He turned up before the Gafcon meeting in Nairobi and praised the courage of the Christians there. But he did not tell them they were right, and he was not officially present for the gathering. Instead, he went to Iceland, to talk about credit unions.

So what we learned yesterday, which was news, was that the Anglican Communion is now quite dead. There will not be another Lambeth Conference. The next act of the schism will be played out in this country, but we still don't know whether anyone will care.

## GAFCON to be 'an Anglican province' in all but name

**The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) will effectively provide for Anglican traditionalists the fellowship and support that provinces give to dioceses, Dr Peter Jensen, a former Archbishop of Sydney, Australia, told the *Church Times* at the close of the GAFCON conference in Nairobi last week ([News, 25 October](#)).**

George Conger in Nairobi - The conference adopted by acclamation the Nairobi Commitment, pledging primatial support for an umbrella group for British traditionalists: the Anglican Mission in England. GAFCON would not legally be a province, Dr Jensen said, but "effectively, yes".

In light of the impending release of the Pilling report, and of the expected endorsement by the Church of England's General Synod of a Measure allowing women bishops, but offering no safeguards to those opposed to this, GAFCON decided to shift its energies from the US to the UK.

The Pilling report will not be released until later this year, but the view of many of those present at GAFCON was that, based on statements released so far, and the theological views of the Pilling panel, it would opt for rites for the pastoral blessings of gay civil partnerships.

The internal strength of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), and its acceptance by most provinces of the Anglican Communion, gave GAFCON the

opportunity to redeploy its energies to the UK.

The Vicar of St Martin de Gouray, Jersey, Canon Gavin Ashenden, said steps had to be taken now to prevent conservative Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics from fragmenting into half a dozen groups, should the crisis occur. A "non-geographic" province would be an ecclesial Velcro, gathering the diaspora, he said.

Adopted on the closing day of the conference with little public dissent, the conference statement received strong support from participants. The Bishop of the Gulf

Atlantic diocese of ACNA, the Rt Revd Neil Lebharr, welcomed the statement, calling it a "unity" document that would gather other Anglicans into the GAFCON fold.

The Vicar of St Matthew's, Elburton, and chairman of Reform, Prebendary Rod Thomas, said: "It sets a clear gospel priority for GAFCON. It is designed to carry forward the work of encouragement and faithfulness. . . I'm delighted."

A multi-national committee composed of delegates from Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, the Southern Cone, the US/Canada, and England produced the document from reports submitted by the nine "mini-conferences" that convened during the meeting. The committee chairman, the Bishop of the Mid-Atlantic diocese of ACNA, the Rt Revd John Guernsey, told delegates that the statement had not been pre-written, but was a product of the conference.



***Statements: Canon John Senyonyi, Vice-Chancellor of Uganda Christian University, reads the Communiqué and Commitment on the final day of the conference***

The conference received a draft copy of the statement last Friday, and was directed to break into national groups to offer substantive criticisms for review by the writing team. Over the course of the evening, eight revisions were produced, and the final document was presented for approval the next day.

Not all the delegates were pleased with it. The Bishop of Fort Worth, the Rt Revd Jack Iker, said that it showed the strength of the "Sydney contingent" at the meeting. He was "concerned" about the deletion of points that were important to Anglo-Catholics, and noted that GAFCON treated Anglo-Catholics as poor relations to the conservative Evangelical majority.

Within the English section, a debate over the degree of thanks to be given to the Archbishop of Canterbury arose. While some praised the Archbishop for his seeming endorsement of GAFCON, others were concerned about what they perceived as his indecisiveness.

The director of Christian Concern, Andrea Minichiello Williams, read to the group a part of Archbishop Welby's address in the Lords on the Government's Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, arguing that his words had all but conceded the argument to those who supported gay marriage.

In the final document, words of commendation for the Archbishop became: "We appreciated that the Archbishop of Canterbury sent personal greetings via video, and gave us the assurance of his prayers, and we likewise pray for him."