



The future...
for our church family.

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Walking in opposite directions

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Walking Away from Jesus

William Philip

Over a year ago, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland took the decisive step of walking away from the historic, orthodox Gospel. These reflections on that decision were written by Dr Philip for the Tron Times of May 2011.



By re-printing them now, alongside the article by Dr Packer, we see clearly that the situation faced by our church family in recent days is shared by many in the world-wide confessing church today. There is great encouragement to know we don't stand alone.

Dear Friends,

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in ...ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ... scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.... It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. (Jude 1:3-4, 18,19)

I write in the immediate aftermath of our General Assembly, where the debate on the issue of same sex relations in the ministry resulted in a resounding defeat for those, like ourselves, committed to the orthodox, historic Christian gospel, to the absolute standard of authority upon which the Church of Scotland was founded, the Bible, and to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland.

A clear 'trajectory'

Let me quote directly from the official News Release from the Church of Scotland on Monday evening (called *Good News from the Church of Scotland* which is an ironic misnomer if ever there was one):

"Commissioners voted by 351 to 294 to adopt deliverance 7B, which means a move towards the acceptance for training, induction and ordination of those in same-sex relationships for the ministry. The Assembly also voted to allow ministers and deacons in same-sex relationships ordained before 2009 to be inducted into pastoral charges (by 393 to 252.)"

[these are very decisive majorities as far as our GA is concerned - often votes are very close]

"A theological commission will be set up to bring recommendations to the 2013 General Assembly, as well as considering whether ministers should have freedom of conscience to bless civil partnerships and possible liturgy for such occasions."

Speaking after the debate, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Right Reverend David Arnott, said.... 'We as the National Church will continue to provide guidance and spiritual leadership for the people of Scotland.'

The last paragraph will be greeted with astonishment by Christian people who must wonder what kind of guidance and spiritual leadership can possibly be given by a denomination that has thus departed so dramatically and decisively from its moorings in the historic, reformed and biblical faith.

The Church of Scotland was established as we know it today when the *Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual* were declared lawful by Parliament in the Church of Scotland Act 1921. The first declaratory Article states clearly

The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.

The Scriptures of both Old and New Testament, our ‘supreme rule of faith and life’, speak with one voice and unequivocally on the issue of same sex union. Sexual sin is not the unpardonable sin, but like all sin, must not be acquiesced in—far less celebrated as holy—but must be repented of, or else one cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, that is, cannot find salvation.

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

When the church faces controversial questions, The Westminster Confession of Faith (which the Second Declaratory Article states as ‘the principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland’) is clear about how these things are to be resolved:

The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. (WCF I.X.)

The Confession realistically acknowledges that people will often try to justify sinful behaviour, and warns us presciently: this is not a secondary matter; to use the language of Christian freedom and love to justify sinful behaviour in fact destroys the gospel itself, because the gospel’s whole purpose and goal is that we are saved from sin for holiness and righteousness:

They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end [goal] of Christian liberty;

which is, that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. (WCF XX.III)

Thus, the decision of the General Assembly this year has set a clear ‘trajectory’ (to use the words of the Special Commission) that leads away from the Christian Scriptures, the Christian gospel, and the love of Christ himself, for Jesus said *‘whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me’* (John 14:21)

It is not that the voice of the truth was not heard; faithful brethren articulated clearly, competently and graciously the truth of God, and warned against the consequences of such a departure. Many interventions were made. But every attempt to amend the deliverances—even those which would have served simply to give more time and discussion—was defeated heavily. In the end, the revisionists won by a large and decisive majority.

Comfort in clarity

If there is some comfort in all this, it is that God has now granted great *clarity* as to the true position and direction of our denomination. Those who have been naively deceiving themselves about the severity of the situation must now see the truth as it really is. We must all face the facts that some have been reluctant to acknowledge hitherto: the so called ‘win-able middle ground’ of the church simply does not exist. There is no middle ground. In so rejecting the Scriptures and the reformed confessions the ‘middle’, the centre of gravity of those who claim to represent The Church of Scotland today, has drifted to the point of now no longer being recognisably Christian in the sense understood by all Christians historically and the majority worldwide Christian Church today.

Nor are these simply impersonal ‘forces’ dividing the church, as if people were caught helplessly in the midst and we can all ‘work together for unity’. No. The rift is being caused by many—the majority, it seems—of people choosing wilfully to *walk away* from the biblical gospel, and *walk*

apart from those who cannot and will not likewise abandon the faith once for all delivered to the saints, the faith of our fathers, the faith of the worldwide Church, and of our Church.

As the debate went on and I watched online (I was not a commissioner this year) it was as if, with Ezekiel, one could see the glory of God departing. One after another, speeches of increasingly blasphemous character seemed to indicate the withdrawal of all divine restraint, the Lord giving this institution over to self-destructive folly, and the inevitability of self-inflicted disaster. In the days of Samuel, when wicked corruption of priesthood and people was left weakly unopposed by good but feeble Eli, in the end the Ark of the Covenant—representing God’s holy presence—was removed from the midst leaving people crying “Ichabod”: *The Glory has departed*.

This week I was reading my father, James Philip’s Bible readings and came upon these words, on 1 John 5:16

There are some sins in believers which bring them to their death. God is more honoured in taking them out of the way than in healing and restoring them.... All human sin is an admixture of ignorance and wilfulness, and one can visualise the possibility of sinful attitudes becoming more and more wilful and deliberate and presumptuous, and less and less partaking of the ignorance that makes sin ‘forgivable’ (see 1 Tim 1:13) until the possibility of forgiveness is past, and the irrevocable step has been taken which puts a man beyond the reach of the grace of God... ‘the sin unto death’ concerning which John says ‘I do not say that one should pray for that’...

He went on to speak of the corporate application of this same principle, citing the example of Jeremiah, where repeatedly the prophet is explicitly told by God *not to pray* for a people confidently proud of their status as “the national church” with their mantra ‘the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’, but whose hearts were far from the God whose temple it was (see Jer 7:16, 11:14 and 14:11).

In the experience of Judah there came a point beyond which God would have no more to do with them. They had by the persistence of their sins passed the point of no return, and nothing then would have availed to turn away the threatened doom. And nothing did; for the people of God were swept away into captivity in the judgment that came upon their 'sin unto death'.

So, it seems, in today's Church of Scotland; his merciful hand of restraint has been lifted. As the apostle Paul describes in Romans chapter 1

Claiming to be wise, they became fools...Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. (Rom. 1:22...28)

Walking away from Jesus

Where, then, does this leave our church fellowship in St George's Tron?

Alas, it seems, greatly at odds with the clearly expressed official will of the denomination to which we are affiliated. But, notwithstanding the deliberations and decisions of even the highest court of our denomination, we are simply not at liberty to *walk away* from Christ and his gospel, or *depart* from the historic foundations of our Church or *separate* from communion with orthodox Christian believers globally. To do so would be sin against God, and sin against our Christian brothers and sisters worldwide, many of whom are facing great persecution for their adherence to the truth. It would be to *choose* fellowship (*koinonia*) with the works of darkness and *break* fellowship with the worldwide believing church. This we cannot do. It is an instance when we must obey God rather than men. Our own Westminster Confession is plain here also:

*God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it **free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary***

to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. (WCF XX.II)

Dear friends, as has become increasingly clear over recent months in the hostility we have already experienced from our presbytery, we are entering days of uncertainty and difficulty as a fellowship when our faith is going to be tested in many ways, some of which we cannot easily anticipate. This should not surprise us. Jesus said “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). He warned that to be faithful would mean being at odds with many in the world and in the religious establishment, and indeed this has been the history of the church throughout the ages, and in our own land also.

Having lived for generations in days of peace we have forgotten that those who have stood for the biblical faith in Scotland have often been persecuted; just visit the graveyards of the Covenanters in Ayrshire for a reminder of the terrible ‘killing times’ of the 17th Century when many of our forebears gave their lives for the faith we proclaim today. The original Wynd Church, the antecedent of our present-day congregation, was itself formed in 1687 in dark days, by a determined group of believers who would not bow the knee to the imposition of high church episcopacy by the establishment, and courageously stood for their evangelical biblical faith against the odds. We thank God that we are unlikely to face the extremity of violence of those times. But violent opposition we may well have to endure, and we shall need great grace, courage, and unity if we too are not to be found unfaithful in facing the challenges the Lord is allowing us to meet in coming days.

Walking with Christ's church

We are not alone, of course. There are other churches in Scotland who feel as we do, grieving deeply over the decisions of the General Assembly and mourning together with us over such defiance of his Word. Grieving

together, but also standing together, and acting together. I am sure that Dick Lucas is absolutely right in the words of encouragement he sent to us this week

*I see one thing in your favour ... a clear cut and final **decision**, even if it is to embrace depravity. This at least means for you that **no biblically minded Minister or congregation, can temporize over the matter.***

We commit to praying and supporting all such, as many congregations now enter days of uncertainty and great difficulty and the rupture of communion becomes evident. We must pray for ourselves and for all with whom we unite in solidarity that we shall have courage to make whatever stand our Lord calls us to, however difficult and misunderstood it may be by some. May we all, as Faber's hymn says, 'learn to scorn the praise of men, and learn to lose with God', that being found faithful in word and deed, the name of Christ may be honoured in us and through us.

Much prayer is needed. But not prayer alone. Having cited two of my chief mentors in life and ministry, let me quote from the third, William Still. Both he and my father, though greatly loyal to the Church of Scotland ministry, spoke to me often of a day when faithfulness to Christ and loyalty to the denomination could (and very probably would) come into such conflict that one would have to give way to the other. Neither was in any doubt where their loyalties would lie. They also saw clearly how it is that real cleansing and change is effected in a corrupted church. Writing in his Congregational Record as long ago as 1970, Mr Still's words could hardly be more apt today:

*"I am amazed at the ineptitude not only of individuals, but of whole schools of thought, and even denominations, in respect of evils which beset and bedevil their work. ... **What the Christian church needs in so many situations is great rows! The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles is not afraid of disturbance. Sometimes it is necessary. ... Major evils, radical departures from biblical orthodoxy, deep corruption, bitter feuds, and adamant worldliness **may not be dealt with by prayer without** action. ... If anyone ever used the Word of God as a hammer to***

break the rock in pieces, or as wildfire to set the straw, or as we say in Scotland, the heather on fire, it was Jesus."

This week, indeed, the touch-paper of such a fire of disturbance has been lit. Let us pray that through it what William Still called the *real Church* of Jesus Christ in Scotland would grow and be strengthened even as a result of all that has happened, and that these things, which seem calamitous, would 'really serve to advance the gospel' as Paul's own trials and imprisonment certainly did (Phil 1:12).

Finally, beloved in the Lord, in all that lies ahead, in all we may be required to do, and in all we may have to face, let us remember and cherish the command of the apostle we were considering together the very week of the General Assembly:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.... Do not overcome evil by evil, but overcome evil with good' (Rom 12:21)

and also the comforting words of our Lord Jesus himself:

'In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world!' (John 16:33)

Yours, in the truth that is in Jesus Christ, who alone is the Divine King and Head of this Church,

William J U Philip
28th May 2011

Why I Walked

J. I. Packer



In June 2002, the synod of the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster authorised its bishop to produce a service for blessing same-sex unions, to be used in any parish of the diocese that requests it.

A number of synod members walked out to protest the decision. They declared themselves out of communion with the bishop and the synod, and they appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and other Anglican primates and bishops for help.

J. I. Packer, an executive editor of Christianity Today and Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, was one of those who walked out. Many people have asked him why. Though one part of his answer applies specifically to Anglicans, his larger argument should give guidance to any Christians troubled by developments in their church or denomination.

Why did I walk out with the others? Because this decision, taken in its context, falsifies the gospel of Christ, abandons the authority of Scripture, jeopardises the salvation of fellow human beings, and betrays the church in its God-appointed role as the bastion and bulwark of divine truth.

My primary authority is a Bible writer named Paul. For many decades now, I have asked myself at every turn of my theological road: Would Paul be with me in this? What would he say if he were in my shoes? I have never dared to offer a view on anything that I did not have good reason to think he would endorse.

In I Corinthians we find the following, addressed it seems to exponents of some kind of antinomian spirituality:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

To make sure we grasp what Paul is saying here, I pose some questions.

First: What is Paul talking about in this vice list? **Answer:** Lifestyles, regular behaviour patterns, habits of mind and action. He has in view not single lapses followed by repentance, forgiveness, and greater watchfulness (with God's help) against recurrence, but ways of life in which some of his readers were set, believing that for Christians there was no harm in them.

Second: What is Paul saying about these habits? **Answer:** They are ways of sin that, if not repented of and forsaken, will keep people out of God's kingdom of salvation. Clearly, self-indulgence and self-service, free from self-discipline and self-denial, is the attitude they express, and a lack of moral discernment lies at their heart.

Third: What is Paul saying about homosexuality? **Answer:** Those who claim to be Christ's should avoid the practice of same-sex physical connection for orgasm, on the model of heterosexual intercourse. Paul's phrase, "men who practice homosexuality," covers two Greek words for the parties involved in these acts. The first, *arsenokoitai*, means literally "male-bedders," which seems clear enough. The second, *malakoi*, is used in many connections to mean "unmanly," "womanish," and "effeminate," and here refers to males matching the woman's part in physical sex.

In this context, in which Paul has used two terms for sexual misbehaviour, there is really no room for doubt regarding what he has in mind. He must have known, as Christians today know, that some men are sexually drawn to men rather than women, but he is not speaking of

inclinations, only of behaviour, what has more recently been called acting out. His point is that Christians need to resist these urges, since acting them out cannot please God and will reveal lethal impenitence. Romans 1:26 shows that Paul would have spoken similarly about lesbian acting out if he had had reason to mention it here.

Fourth: What is Paul saying about the gospel? Answer: Those who, as lost sinners, cast themselves in genuine faith on Christ and so receive the Holy Spirit, as all Christians do (see Galatians 3:2), find transformation through the transaction. They gain cleansing of conscience (the washing of forgiveness), acceptance with God (justification), and strength to resist and not act out the particular temptations they experience (sanctification). As a preacher friend declared to his congregation, "I want you to know that I am a non-practicing adulterer." Thus he testified to receiving strength from God.

With some of the Corinthian Christians, Paul was celebrating the moral empowering of the Holy Spirit in heterosexual terms; with others of the Corinthians, today's homosexuals are called to prove, live out, and celebrate the moral empowering of the Holy Spirit in homosexual terms. Another friend, well known to me for 30 years, has lived with homosexual desires all his adult life, but remains a faithful husband and father, sexually chaste, through the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the gospel. He is a model in every way. We are all sexually tempted, one way or another, yet we may all tread the path of chastity through the Spirit's enablement, and thereby please God.

Missing Paul's point

As one who assumes the full seriousness and sincerity of all who take part in today's debates among Christians regarding homosexuality, both in New Westminster and elsewhere, I now must ask: how can anyone miss the force of what Paul says here? There are, I think, two ways in which this happens.

One way, the easier one to deal with, is the way of special exegesis: I mean interpretations that, however possible, are artificial and not natural,

but that allow one to say, "What Paul is condemning is not my sort of same-sex union." Whether a line of interpretation is artificial, so constituting misinterpretation, is, I grant, a matter of personal judgment. I do not, however, know how any reasonable person could read Robert A. J. Gagnon's 500-page book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Abingdon, 2001), and not conclude that any exegesis evading the clear meaning of Paul is evasive indeed. Nor from now on can I regard anyone as qualified to debate homosexuality who has not come to terms with Gagnon's encyclopaedic examination of all the relevant passages and all the exegetical hypotheses concerning them. I have not always agreed with James Barr, but when on the dust jacket he describes Gagnon's treatise as "indispensable even for those who disagree with the author," I think he is absolutely right.

The second way, which is harder to engage, is to let experience judge the Bible. Some moderns, backed by propaganda from campaigners for homosexual equality, and with hearts possessed by the pseudo-Freudian myth that you can hardly be a healthy human without active sexual expression, feel entitled to say: "Our experience is—in other words, we feel—that gay unions are good, so the Bible's prohibitions of gay behaviour must be wrong." The natural response is that the Bible is meant to judge our experience rather than the other way around, and that feelings of sexual arousal and attraction, generating a sense of huge significance and need for release in action as they do, cannot be trusted as either a path to wise living or a guide to biblical interpretation. Rhyming the point to make what in my youth was called a grook: the sweet bright fire / of sexual desire / is a dreadful liar. But more must be said than that.

Two views of the Bible

At issue here is a Grand Canyon-wide difference about the nature of the Bible and the way it conveys God's message to modern readers. Two positions challenge each other.

One is the historic Christian belief that through the prophets, the incarnate Son, the apostles, and the writers of canonical Scripture as a

body, God has used human language to tell us definitively and transculturally about his ways, his works, his will, and his worship. Furthermore, this revealed truth is grasped by letting the Bible interpret itself to us from within, in the knowledge that the way into God's mind is through that of the writers. Through them, the Holy Spirit who inspired them teaches the church. Finally, one mark of sound biblical insights is that they do not run counter to anything else in the canon.

This is the position of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and of evangelicals and other conservative Protestants. There are differences on the place of the church in the interpretive process, but all agree that the process itself is essentially as described. I call this the *objectivist* position.

The second view applies to Christianity the Enlightenment's trust in human reason, along with the fashionable evolutionary assumption that the present is wiser than the past. It concludes that the world has the wisdom, and the church must play intellectual catch-up in each generation in order to survive. From this standpoint, everything in the Bible becomes relative to the church's evolving insights, which themselves are relative to society's continuing development (nothing stands still), and the Holy Spirit's teaching ministry is to help the faithful see where Bible doctrine shows the cultural limitations of the ancient world and needs adjustment in light of latter-day experience (encounters, interactions, perplexities, states of mind and emotion, and so on). Same-sex unions are one example. This view is scarcely 50 years old, though its antecedents go back much further. I call it the *subjectivist* position.

In the New Westminster debate, subjectivists say that what is at issue is not the authority of Scripture, but its interpretation. I do not question the sincerity of those who say this, but I have my doubts about their clear-headedness. The subjectivist way of affirming the authority of Scripture, as the source of the teaching that now needs to be adjusted, is precisely a denying of Scripture's authority from the objectivist point of view, and clarity requires us to say so. The relative authority of ancient religious expertise, now to be revamped in our post-Christian, multifaith, evolving Western world, is one view. The absolute authority of God's

unchanging utterances, set before us to be learned, believed, and obeyed as the mainstream church has always done, never mind what the world thinks, is the other.

What are represented as different "interpretations" are in fact reflections of what is definitive: in the one view, the doctrinal and moral teaching of Scripture is always final for Christian people; in the other view, it never is. What is definitive for the exponents of that view is not what the Bible says, as such, but what their own minds come up with as they seek to make Bible teaching match the wisdom of the world.

Each view of biblical authority sees the other as false and disastrous, and is sure that the long-term welfare of Christianity requires that the other view be given up and left behind as quickly as possible. The continuing conflict between them, which breaks surface in the disagreement about same-sex unions, is a fight to the death, in which both sides are sure that they have the church's best interests at heart. It is most misleading, indeed crass, to call this disagreement simply a difference about interpretation, of the kind for which Anglican comprehensiveness has always sought to make room.

Spiritual dangers

In addition, major spiritual issues are involved. To bless same-sex unions liturgically is to ask God to bless them and to enrich those who join in them, as is done in marriage ceremonies. This assumes that the relationship, of which the physical bond is an integral part, is intrinsically good and thus, if I may coin a word, *blessable*, as procreative sexual intercourse within heterosexual marriage is. About this assumption there are three things to say.

First, it entails *deviation* from the biblical gospel and the historic Christian creed. It distorts the doctrines of creation and sin, claiming that homosexual orientation is good since gay people are made that way, and rejecting the idea that homosexual inclinations are a spiritual disorder, one more sign and fruit of original sin in some people's moral system. It distorts the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification, calling same-sex

union a Christian relationship and so affirming what the Bible would call salvation in sin rather than from it.

Second, it threatens *destruction* to my neighbour. The official proposal said that ministers who, like me, are unwilling to give this blessing should refer gay couples to a minister willing to give it. Would that be pastoral care? Should I not try to help gay people change their behaviour, rather than to anchor them in it? Should I not try to help them to the practice of chastity, just as I try to help restless singles and divorcees to the practice of chastity? Do I not want to see them all in the kingdom of God?

Third, it involves the *delusion* of looking to God—actually asking him—to sanctify sin by blessing what he condemns. This is irresponsible, irreverent, indeed blasphemous, and utterly unacceptable as church policy. How could I do it?

Changing a historical tradition

Finally, a major change in Anglicanism is involved: Writing into a diocesan constitution something that Scripture, canonically interpreted, clearly and unambiguously rejects as sin. This has never been done before, and ought not to be done now.

All the written standards of post-Reformation Anglicanism have been intentionally biblical and catholic. They have been biblical in terms of the historic view of the nature and authority of Scripture. They have been catholic in terms of the historic consensus of the mainstream church.

Many individual eccentricities and variations may have been tolerated in practice. The relatively recent controversial permissions to remarry the divorced and make women presbyters arguably had biblical warrant, though minorities disputed this. In biblical and catholic terms, however, the New Westminster decision writes legitimization of sin into the diocese's constitutional standards.

It categorises the tolerated abstainers as the awkward squad of eccentrics rather than the mainstream Anglicans that they were before. It

is thus a decision that can only be justified in terms of biblical relativism, the novel notion of biblical authority that to my mind is a cuckoo in the Anglican nest and a heresy in its own right. It is a watershed decision for world Anglicanism, for it changes the nature of Anglicanism itself. It has to be reversed.

Luther's response at Worms when he was asked to recant all his writings echoes in my memory, as it has done for more than 50 years.

Unless you prove to me by Scripture and plain reason that I am wrong, I cannot and will not recant. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe [it endangers the soul]. Here I stand. There is nothing else I can do. God help me. Amen.

Conscience is that power of the mind over which we have no power, which binds us to believe what we see to be true and do what we see to be right. Captivity of conscience to the Word of God, that is, to the absolutes of God's authoritative teaching in the Bible, is integral to authentic Christianity.

More words from Luther come to mind.

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point that the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages is where the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Was the protest in order? Was "no" the right way to vote? Did faithfulness to Christ, and faithful confession of Christ, require it? It seems so. And if so, then our task is to stand fast, watch, pray, and fight for better things: for the true authority of the Bible, for the "true truth" of the gospel, and for the salvation of gay people for whom we care.

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