

Two 'conservative' categories on the sexuality spectrum?

Andrew Goddard

While a number of aspects of my recent mapping of the Anglican Communion have been criticised (I've offered a broader response [here](#)), probably the most controversial and contested aspect was the suggestion that we need to move from a simple pro-I.10 and anti-I.10 stance in relation to sexual ethics and distinguish four positions on the spectrum. I wrote

As I've outlined previously in a recent Anvil editorial, I'm not sure how helpful it is to identify simply two camps on homosexuality. While any compartmentalisation is clearly open to challenge given that there is a wide spectrum of views, I think a four-fold distinction may prove helpful. This effectively sub-divides each of the traditional 'conservative' and 'liberal' groupings into a more 'hard' and more 'soft' version. Building on the earlier model it can be seen as moving on a horizontal axis which from left to right ranges from a whole-hearted gospel-based commitment to the full inclusion of same-sex partnered couples at all levels of church life through to an unshakeable conviction that all homosexual practice is sin and suggestions to the contrary must be opposed and rejected.

In words which have proven very true I continued

As always, labels are problematic and likely to annoy as much as elucidate but I think the 'conservative' view has those whose stance is more one of rejection and those whose approach is more one of reassertion. On the 'liberal' side, there are also two broad groupings which mirror these two groups and which I've labelled (the more central and paralleling reassertors) reassessors and reinterpreters.

At the moment the main criticisms have come from the conservatives who dislike my proposal and have offered various critiques. These have helped me clarify some of my thinking and see some of the weaknesses in my account though I wish to maintain the heart of what I said. I think the concerns and questions can be addressed in relation to the following areas:

1. Is it accurate and helpful to distinguish two positions on sexuality among conservatives?
2. Are the names I gave accurate and helpful?
3. Was the quotation I used an unfair slur on the group?
4. Are the distinguishing features I offered accurate and helpful?
5. Does the distinction help understand the current tensions within the Communion?

(1) Distinguishing two conservative positions

It may be helpful to explain some of the background to the categorisation I offer here. Like many I tended for some time to see the key divisions in the Communion simply as between

conservatives and liberals. It then became increasingly clear to me that how conservatives responded to this fundamental fracture line revealed that there were also divisions among conservatives in relation to their ecclesiology in terms of their vision of life together in a global communion. The different reactions to the Windsor Report and subsequent Windsor process (and in particular the different responses both within TEC and in response to its deep divisions from outside) brought this to the fore. That was what led to the initial quadrant analysis and the distinction between 'communion conservatives' and 'federal conservatives'. It has, however, increasingly become clear to me as a 'communion conservative' that not all those conservatives who are reacting differently to me in relation to the Communion's travails were committed 'fed cons'. There were also differences in relation to aspects of our understanding and approach on issues of sexuality and how one relates to diversity of views over this, in particular whether Windsor's demands went far enough in what they asked of TEC in relation to this area.

It was also becoming increasingly clear to me that there were divisions on the 'liberal' side of the spectrum between those who were committed, convinced opponents of biblical and traditional teaching and determined to put their beliefs into practice and those whose stance of opposition to I.10's teaching was more tentative and explorative. This could mean, for example, that some could perhaps be classified as 'pro-I.10' more because they were not happy with the recent actions of TEC than because of any personal conviction about the truth of its statement of teaching on sexual ethics. It seemed then that there may be value in drawing a further distinction on the left of the spectrum between what I refer to as a 'hard' and 'soft' stance. I would still maintain that stance despite Stephen Noll's claim that "In my opinion, the "reassessor" position is a fantasy" although that may reflect (as he notes) his knowledge of the American scene and my location in the Church of England.

On the conservative side this also rang true to my own experience. On several occasions I have found myself speaking in support of biblical and traditional teaching and finding voices of "support" from the audience that made me uncomfortable as they took a more hard-line stance than I would and sometimes in language I found unacceptable – I can think of references to 'sodomites' or asking whether it wasn't right for a father to be concerned if they discovered that their schoolboy son's male teacher was a homosexual. More widely, in the Communion I recall one African bishop whose views were solidly 'traditional' telling me some years ago that he was seen by many as a liberal on sexuality in his home province because as a result of his involvement in dialogues and listening he was now quite clear that genuine sincere Christians could experience homosexual attraction and really struggle with this issue and the church needed to recognise and engage with this reality. These are just some of the pieces of evidence that simply treating "conservatives" as a bloc on sexual ethics may be misleading and unhelpful.

While I recognise that distinguishing within the conservative position on sexuality may be disconcerting to some, given the size of this grouping and its cultural variety it should not be surprising to say that at least a two-fold distinction might help in understanding the current situation and dynamics within the Communion. It may in fact be that more than a two-fold distinction is actually needed or that my manner of distinguishing is wrong or unhelpful.

However, I think some honest assessment of the diversity within the 'pro-1.10' or 'traditionalist' or 'conservative' camp may be important and helpful at this stage in the Communion's life and in any attempt to prevent tensions leading to serious fracture among conservatives. Of course distinctions can lead to disagreements and divisions but that is not necessary and, as is often the case, it can be that a recognition of existing disagreements yields a discovery of theological distinctions which can then be addressed and in so doing may prevent disagreements degenerating into further conflict and divisions.

(2) Naming the two groups

As I noted, "labels are problematic and likely to annoy as much as elucidate" and certainly that seems to be the case with my use of 'rejection'. Sarah Hey comments

The "Rejectionist" [ooh . . . cold and mean there!] position is characterized by....The "Reassertion" [much warmer there] position is characterized by....In other words "Rejectionist = Bad," "Reassertion = Good." ; >)

Stephen Noll links the language of "rejection" to possibly rejecting "the good order of the Communion" and "my Lord" and notes, "So let's look at the "rejectionist" camp (probably the most unsympathetic-sounding of the four new labels)?" I have, however, heard of one group who when introduced to the categorisation overwhelmingly and happily identified themselves as "rejectionists" rather than "reasserters" and had no problem with the name!

So why this name? I have to confess that probably the primary reason for going for this name was so that there was a consistency and all four groups began with "re" but I am also intrigued that people view it so negatively. If – as all conservatives do or should do – homosexual activity is classed as sin then "rejection" is surely a commendable stance and a refusal to reject homosexuality a sign either of cowardice or misunderstanding about the phenomenon. The Bible clearly rejects homosexual practice and it is that note which I see as dominant in this group. In fact, looking back at my original account of this schema, I was even more specific and – with reference to the quotation reacting to *Integrity* – spoke of "rejection of groups campaigning on this issue". In other words, this conservative stance is marked by a determined opposition to and rejection of those who seek to commend that which conservatives understand God in Scripture to condemn. Rejection in that context is surely not "mean" or "bad".

My central concern here is that there are conservatives whose stance is primarily one of resistance to (might that be a better "re-" label?) and rejection of homosexuality and of those who wish to either rethink or reject traditional Christian teaching on this subject. In contrast, "reassertion" is marked by a more sympathetic and positive engagement with this phenomenon that does not dismiss it but seeks to dialogue with it, understand it, correct it and even learn from aspects of it. As someone who feels more at home in this part of the conservative spectrum I do not simply dismiss those to my right on the spectrum (and the categorisation was not meant to be evaluative in that sense). On the contrary, they challenge me indirectly (and sometimes directly) as to whether I have lost that strong biblical strand of "rejection" expressed in language of "abomination" and warnings about

exclusion from God's kingdom by locating it (and perhaps neutralising it) in a wider more positive vision of human sexuality that I wish to reassert.

(3) The "rejection" quotation

If the name was one reason my analysis was unwelcome, the quotation I gave was another –

I have your two letters and a copy of your filthy, blasphemous publication. I note in your publication that you quote various people. Do not put my name in your filthy rag. Be advised. In my letter to you of November 11, I intimated that I might be interested in ministering 'effectively' to any members of our Church who might be involved with your group of perverts. My effective ministering to members of this church involved with you would be to excommunicate them immediately

Stephen Noll comments

More than half the space in this section quotes a hateful screed against homosexuals

Sarah Hey in a comment on SF notes in response to another commenter

And I didn't even critique Goddard's side-trail about ugly comments and "homophobia" from rejectionists since I considered it a rather distracting, extraneous, and inflammatory addition that I could only see as a red-herring designed to paint those who hold to traditional views on sexuality—and who are NOT collaborationists—as "homophobic."

In retrospect, the quotation was probably unwise to use as it was extreme (as I acknowledged) and so not likely to help people see the value of this categorisation. However, I think it is important nevertheless. It is strongly worded but it is necessary to set it in context and think about why we react so strongly against it.

The comment appeared in response to Louie Crew's [first edition of Integrity](#) in 1974 – the beginning of the campaign to accept and bless same-sex sexual relationships. How many conservatives (whether in the "rejection" or "reassertion" camp) would not have reacted similarly then and perhaps would like to react in this way now? There are in fact three aspects of it that may lead it to be classed as "hateful" and "ugly".

First, that the publication is described as "filthy" and "blasphemous". Do no conservatives anywhere in the communion think literature promoting homosexual practice should be described in these terms? Having looked at some of what *Integrity* went on to publish I think I would use such language of elements of it. It must not be forgotten that at Lambeth 1998, Archbishop Moses Tay (who soon afterwards consecrated the first AMiA bishops)

wanted to change the monitoring process on an international level to a provincial level, fearing that it would "allow the promotion of unhealthy literature, which can be quite polluting". He was opposed by Bishop Michael Scott-Joynt of England who asserted "We listen to each other and assist each other. Why assume the influence

would be only one way?”. The Tay amendment failed (Solheim, Diversity or Disunity?, p 74).

That exchange perhaps captures at an episcopal level in 1998 some of the distinction I am drawing now between “rejection” and “reassertion”.

Second, it described *Integrity* as a group of “perverts”. Again, not language I wish to use (though of course the technical language of a contrast between “pervert” and “invert” was much more widely used and accepted in the 1970s) but the first issue of *Integrity* includes the following –

Montreat, NC. Evangelist Billy Graham in his regular syndicated column "My Answer" for 10th November fulminated against Gay persons. Graham declared: "It is not surprising that in an age of great sexual freedom, when the emphasis is more on performance than on expression of marital love, that all sorts of sexual perversion would flourish. Homosexuality is being praised these days as a legitimate deviation, but God says it is a perversion. I blame part of this problem on the extensive availability of pornography -- a theory which some research back in 1971 confirmed. If the old cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are any indication, this practice will bring the severe judgment of God upon America."

A use of the search facility on Virtue Online will show that the language of “perverts” is still not uncommon in certain conservative circles. One commentator posts today (2nd December) on Rowan Williams’ presiding at a eucharist for the Clergy Consultation, praising David Virtue’s critique and noting “Sexual perverts applaud with the hope of seducing young minds to their ways in the name of toleration and sexual freedom”.

Third, the unnamed bishop in 1974 wrote “My effective ministering to members of this church involved with you would be to excommunicate them immediately”. Once again this is surely a credible and widespread conservative view – those involved in or advocating involvement in homosexual sex should be excommunicated. Indeed, it is rather ironic to be accused of tarring fellow conservatives as extreme homophobes by citing this example when those who make the accusation also criticise me for being too slow to name homosexuality as a “communion breaking issue” and thus requiring the Communion to excommunicate the whole of TEC.

In citing this example I noted that it was the “most extreme” form of the “rejection” category where it “tips over into “homophobia”” and yet similar attitudes and forms of expression are sadly not as uncommon as those criticising me for my “rejection” categorisation would like us to believe.

Stephen Noll makes a direct challenge

More than half the space in this section quotes a hateful screed against homosexuals as a sentiment that is “sadly still heard.” I have been associating with opponents of the gay rights movement for many years and I have yet to find one leader who would speak this way. I challenge Goddard to google the writings of John

Guernsey, Martyn Minns, Bill Atwood and the files of T19 and Stand Firm and locate such statements (and compare it with the vilification on left-wing blogs).

I have not claimed any of these are “rejectionist” let alone that they are guilty of making such statements but that there are some people who fit my “rejectionist” label (even its more extreme forms) surely cannot be disputed. In addition to the examples already cited from my own experience in England and from other sources one need only note the following examples of conservative stances I would wish to classify in this grouping:

At Lambeth 1998, there was the infamous aggressive “exorcism” of Richard Kirker by Bishop Emmanuel Chukwuma of Enugu which included “You are going to hell. You have made yourself homosexual because of your carnality...You are killing the church. This is the voice of God talking. Yes, I am violent against sin”. This was in the context of an interview in which he drew attention to Leviticus making homosexual acts a capital offence. I may be mistaken and am willing to stand corrected but I notice that a Bishop Emmanuel Chukwuma of Enugu was [appointed to play a leading role when CANA was formed](#) and was [reportedly](#) present at the installation of Martyn Minns. If this is the same bishop then either there is a potentially fascinating testimony for the Listening Process or a leading bishop in Nigeria and involved in oversight of CANA still holds views that are different from that of many other ‘conservatives’ and can I think be fairly distinguished from someone like myself and not unreasonably be described as “rejectionist”.

The sexuality sub-group at Lambeth refused to listen to gay and lesbian Christians from Changing Attitude as part of its proceedings and in the plenary debate at least one bishop implied that the next step was toleration or acceptance of bestiality – ““What if someone comes asking you to bless their relationship with their pets? Will that happen at the next Lambeth?”.

More recently, Miranda K. Hassett’s book *Anglican Communion in Crisis* explores attitudes to homosexuality in Uganda and includes the following account of how her consultants addressed the issue –

The majority expressed opposition to homosexuality, but many didn’t show strong feeling about it. One man told me calmly, “Oh, we don’t accept homosexuals here. We stone them.” Although it was chilling to hear this statement made so coolly, his clam tone probably reflected the fact that my consultant was simply telling me the way things were, not expressing any passionately felt personal position... (p 90).

These examples – and that of the recent Nigerian legislation supported by many Nigerian Anglicans cited by Ephraim Radner in his comment on T19 – could suggest my position is as described by Stephen Noll when he writes

Since I presume the bishops and churches of Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Southern Cone, Southeast Asia and others must fall in the rejectionist group, Goddard is suggesting that their claim to biblical fidelity masks a cultural myopia if not homophobia.

I am, however, not wishing to put all bishops and churches in these countries into the “rejectionist” group. Nor am I dismissing all “rejectionists” as homophobic, a term which I

am always cautious about using especially when looking at comments from other cultures and times. Furthermore, as examples cited above show, similarly strong “rejectionist” sentiments are found among conservatives in North America and in the UK. Not only are they found in posts and comments on Virtue Online but, apparently, they also can appear on Stand Firm. A comment on Thinking Anglicans, for example, recently [reported](#) that in a [thread](#) (subsequently wisely deleted and restarted) on the Clergy Consultation communion the comment was made

Would it shock me if a group of homosexual men took Communion, and then went into the church basement and sodomized each other like rats? Not in the least. And why should it? That is the homosexual lifestyle in all its glory. It’s not picket fences and suburban monogamy. It’s casual sex with whomever happens to be available at the moment - at least until you are too old to find a willing partner. And if promiscuity is not such a bad thing, then why should they (or you) be offended at the suggestion?

There is, then, a strand of the “conservative” spectrum on sexuality which takes a very strong and negative stance and which can, I think, be legitimately labelled as one marked primarily by its “rejection” of homosexual relationships and those in the church who advocate for them. Sarah Hey refers to “the made-up and non-existent “rejectionist” group”. While clearly it is “made-up” like all categories of this sort I do not think it fair to describe it as “non-existent”. The next question, however, is how broad this category is, how one recognises it and distinguishes it from what I have called “reasserter” approaches and whether my sketch of features and characteristics is accurate and helpful.

(4) The features of the two groups

It is the failure in this area which is the heart of Sarah Hey’s critique:

But wait. What if most of the “Rejectionist” position and most of the “Reassertion” position is held in one package by the vast majority of the traditionalists in ECUSA?

Let’s look at [drum roll] me, for example, a ComCon who is fervently committed to remaining within ECUSA and the Anglican Communion.

She then proceeds to mark herself as scoring high on both my “reassertion” and “rejectionist” portrayals – implying they are therefore of little value - and offers an alternative distinction between “reappraisers” and “collaborationists” (a label which I have to confess I was not familiar with though clearly one used on Stand Firm and which, if objections are to be made as to labels, certainly carries pretty unpleasant connotations at least in Europe with its implications from life under the Nazis).

My initial sketch of the two groups’ distinguishing features is clearly in need of further work and what follows is a first attempt at further clarification and elaboration in the light of concerns and criticisms raised. It is again important to recall what this is trying to do – to highlight some of the theological pressure points and fault-lines in relation to sexuality that threaten to fracture relationships and divide Anglicans within the current dynamics of Communion life. Once again it has

to be stressed that “traditionalists in ECUSA” are not the sole constituency in this taxonomy and how well it applies there, though important, does not determine whether it is a valid or helpful analysis.

Because we are dealing with a spectrum of views on a complex issue there is no easy way of making sharp distinctions and drawing lines such that people will all comfortably fit on one side or the other and view those on the other side as opponents. It is certainly not trying to find the mid-point which puts half of ‘conservatives’ on one side and half on the other. Nor is it (which my initial descriptions may have falsely implied) simply a matter of strength of feeling and conviction. Nor is it intended to set up dividing walls and judge one side as clearly right and the other as wrong or to say that there are two camps between which there is no agreement and within which there are no serious differences. While some on the far left of the “reasserter” category may feel more sympathy with “reassessors”, most in both these groupings are going to find – whatever their differences – more in common with each other than with any other category. That, however, does not mean there are no serious differences that need to be acknowledged and addressed. Where might these be? Bringing greater clarity (hopefully) to my earlier sketch I’d highlight the following six areas:

First, probably the most important difference between the two groups is the theological and doctrinal significance they place on the sexuality debate. This is regularly expressed in terms of whether homosexuality is a “first order” or “second order” issue and thus whether or not differences over it are “communion-breaking”. Those I class as “rejectionist” are clear that it is indeed “first order” whereas those in the “reasserter” group, though sharing the same view on sexuality in substance, are either more reticent about classifying it a “first order” or clear that it is not. They would tend to think that insisting on it as “first order” leads to some of the problems which were noted at the beginning of the St Andrew’s Day Statement back in 1995 –

Faced with practical questions which arouse strong and conflicting passions, the church has only one recourse: to find in the Gospel a starting-point of common faith from which those who differ can agree to proceed in their discussions. Such a question now before the Church of England is how we should respond to those, including clergy, seeking to live in quasi-marital relations with a partner of the same sex. The purpose of the following statement is to provide some definition of the theological ground upon which the issue should be addressed and from which any fruitful discussion between those who disagree may proceed. By defining its fundamental agreements more clearly, the church may lighten the weight which is at present laid upon a practical question not without importance in its own right but in danger of being over-freighted with symbolic resonances. This in turn may create a context for principled pastoral care which is more responsive to particular individual circumstances and less to political meanings that can be read into them. That the issue should have become so highly dramatised calls for repentance on the part of all members of the church. It suggests that the Gospel has not been directing the acts, words and thoughts of Christians on this subject.

It is important that this distinction is emphasised as it shows that “rejectionists” are not simply unthinking homophobes and that in claiming “the rejectionist group is described in terms of attitude rather than principle” Stephen Noll failed to do justice to this point in my original sketch of the view.

Second, it follows from this that the “rejection” view is in practice marked particularly (as noted above) by its clear and strong opposition (hence one of the reasons for my label) to what it sees as “heresy” whereas the “reasserter” position is not as focussed on this aspect of the debate. This plays itself out in various ways – rejectionists tend to focus more on the clear negative teaching of the classic texts as conclusive whereas reasserters seek to articulate the case more in terms of broader theological concerns; rejectionists see the issue as crucial for people’s eternal destinies, reasserters tend to downplay or even deny that it is so ultimate. These differences are also evident in relation to eucharistic fellowship with a “rejection” view being at best cautious and often opposed to sharing communion with those known to be practising homosexuals (or in some cases those church leaders who would support homosexual relationships) whereas “reasserters” would on the whole not always take such a stance. A similar difference is seen in relation to accepting or rejecting the authority of church leaders who take “reinterpreter” or “reassessor” views.

Third, this therefore also has an impact on how one relates to the Listening Process. The “rejectionist” view on listening is often hostile to this and the form of listening it supports is perhaps best captured by the Anglican Mainstream statement that “the reason we have to listen to them [is?] so that they can be transformed not continue in relationships which are unscriptural”. While “reasserters” would obviously hope for such an outcome they would also not reduce the rationale and goal of the listening process to that alone. Sarah Hey shifts this aspect into discussion of listening to “political activists” (a group she is unwilling to listen to or dialogue with although she will listen to non-activists) which again perhaps reflects the American scene though I am unclear what she means – were the Changing Attitude group denied an opportunity to speak at Lambeth 1998 in that category? Is Giles Goddard (Chair of Inclusive Church) with whom I’m in a public correspondence? These are areas where perhaps further comments may clarify both the validity and utility of the “rejectionist”-“reasserter” distinction and different conservative attitudes to the Listening Process.

Fourth, there are differences (some noted already) in how the two groups respond to the two “liberal groups”. “Reasserters” generally have no serious problem with maintaining fellowship with Christians holding “reassessor” views (even when they are in authoritative leadership) and some would not see communion as broken even with “reinterpreters” as long as they did not seek to act against the practical limits laid down in I.10. In contrast, those conservatives I would class as “rejectionist” tend to believe that holding or certainly publicly advocating “reinterpreter” or even “reassessor” views is incompatible with authorised leadership in the church and must lead to impairment of communion until calls for repentance are heeded and false understandings repudiated.

Fifth, I described “rejectionist” views as interpreting the current conflict in terms of “culture wars”. This was intended to touch on two areas: the tendency to describe these disagreements in the militaristic language of warfare and to relate the battle in the church to wider social conflicts over sexuality. This is most obvious I think in parts of the US but also in the frequent reference that is made to homosexuality being “unAfrican”. So, the official website of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) includes an [article](#) by Bishop David Onuhoa, Bishop of Okigwe who writes

Recently a group of social deviants claiming to be gays in Nigeria came together in order to attract recognition. There is no doubt that they were misguided and influenced into taking the action they took because asking for recognition to same sex relationships is clearly alien to our culture.

Those who have been affected by this religious virus should endeavour to channel their thoughts aright to things that are profitable and mutually edifying. Of a truth, both the apostles and disciples of this movement of those who have passion and lust for same sex union are perverts. Perversion is a psychological disorder that can be corrected.

He concludes

Our conclusion therefore is that same sex union in whatever guise it may manifest – homosexuality, lesbianism, sodomy, bisexuality, gay, civil partnership – is unnatural, unbiblical, unreasonable, unethical, ungodly and unAfrican.

These statements I would take as representative of a “rejectionist” stance and to be distinguished from “reasserter” views which, while not disinterested in wider cultural trends and the need for Christian witness as salt and light, do not focus as much on this or the “un-natural” character of homosexuality that may be claimed as a basis for resisting toleration of homosexuality or, as in Nigeria, supporting the use of the criminal law against homosexual conduct or advocacy.

Sixth, the language of “psychological disorder that can be corrected” highlights the final area I suggested could distinguish “rejectionist” and “reasserter” conservatives. Here I must apologise in light of Stephen Noll’s comment fact that I had “ ‘healing’ in inverted quotes”. I think God can and does bring a change in sexual desires for some people and that part of Christian ministry can be to mediate that. My concern is that the language of “healing” feeds into a medicalisation of homosexuality which can be linked as above to an understanding of it as “a psychological disorder” and that this is neither a biblically authorised conceptualisation nor one I think that is helpful in terms of analysis of same-sex sexual desire. I am therefore in the habit of placing inverted quotes around the word. However, in my account of the views I was trying to voice the views in ways those sympathetic to them would recognise . That meant that there were no inverted quotes around ‘gospel’ in the account of the reinterpreters and so there should have been none round healing. There was also no intention – as some commenters seemed to think – that in describing the “reasserter” position as offering “a pastoral response...not so focussed on re-orientation” to suggest that responses which did focus on re-orientation were inherently non-pastoral. Although this feature is less inherently part of the “rejectionist” viewpoint there does appear to be a strong correlation between the characteristics outlined above as “rejectionist” and a belief that homosexuality can be healed whereas “reasserters” tend to focus more on faithful abstinence and some even talk positively of aspects of homosexuality as a gift to be received rather than an evil force or temptation to be wholly rejected.

It may be that my attempt to draw these distinctions depends more on my location within evangelicalism in the Church of England than on a wider phenomenon but, whether or not the names or even the two categories under other names are fully accepted, I do believe the six points

above highlight important issues among “conservatives” all of whose theology of sexuality is fully “orthodox” and in agreement with Lambeth I.10. I also believe that some of these differences help explain some of the different reactions to TEC and wider Communion politics, to which my final section briefly turns.

(5) Does the distinction help?

Interestingly, very few of the critics focussed on the way I used these distinctions in section 6 to explore current assessments and agendas and yet that was much of the point of making them. I think this is also where the limits of the distinctions become clear.

For all their differences, both groups are committed to upholding the teaching of Lambeth I.10 as the teaching of the Communion and resisting all attempts to alter or undermine it. The fact that, in a number of places in 6.2.2, I described reactions to our current situation with phrases such as “rejectionists but also many reasserters” shows that I do not see a simple division between the responses of the two groups. Once again it is necessary to recognise the lack of sharp dividing lines and thankfully the (current?) refusal to develop fixed party lines and make people choose their allegiance. In most places of current political tension, however, the distinction does I believe shed some light on the different conservative strategies.

The more significant value of the distinction is that it highlights important issues of theological substance that need to be addressed among conservatives. It shows that these are not just on matters of ecclesiology in terms of visions of communion– the old fed con/comm con distinction – but relate to matters of substance as regards sexual ethics (and, I suspect, though this is not discussed here, ecclesiology in terms of issues of discipline and purity within the church and how one views the church as a mixed body) . This means, for example, that differences are not reducible to matters of one’s political positioning (whether “establishment”-minded people wary of rocking the boat – which is how I understand the “collaborationists” category to function – or, as some have portrayed those conservatives supporting realignment, frustrated and disappointed people eager to create structures where they will have more power and authority). Unless those theological issues are addressed there is the danger that some of the confusion and incoherence that has marked so much of the wider debate will begin to appear among conservatives and we will find themselves disagreeing with each other but not necessarily knowing why or finding a common language to evaluate those differences.

I look forward to seeing whether such constructive intra-conservative dialogue might follow this attempt to clarify and refine my initial foray into this minefield.