

## **Why stay within an Anglican Church of Canada that permits ‘same-sex blessings’?**

### **A biblical case for Evangelicals not to walk away.**

#### **The Reverend Canon Christopher King**

The liveliest debate in the North American Anglican church is the debate over the blessing of same sex unions, when two people of the same gender commit themselves to a permanent, faithful and monogamous life and sexual relationship together. However, my thinking and praying has been led to the next stage, after the debate, when the Anglican Church chooses its course. What then do we do, those who have ‘lost’ the debate? I hesitate to predict the outcome of future Synods but it is certain that they will debate the issue and will vote on the question, as has the Diocese of New Westminster. Bishops will be called upon to ratify or reject a Synod’s vote. These events will not change many minds, nor end the debate.

At this stage I should declare my position on the question. It seems to me that one has to put the biblical texts through extraordinary contortions to make them begin to hint at even the possibility that God thinks sexual activity outside the lifelong monogamous commitment of heterosexual marriage is good. I am convinced by the interpretation of context given by the majority of biblical scholars around the world.<sup>1</sup> The bible’s references to homosexual activity (these are exclusively negative<sup>2</sup>) are not limited to pederasty, rape or non-consensual sexual intercourse, as some assert. God’s gracious gift of sex is only pronounced as good when between a man and a woman in the context of ‘marriage’<sup>3</sup>. Every other sexual relationship is emphatically rejected by God.

Jesus moves the thinking of the people of God forward in many ways. Often quoted are Jesus’ impact on the way the Christian Church began to think new thoughts on the status of women and the status of slaves. In the New Testament Church, slaves are listed as equals<sup>4</sup> as are women, who Paul recognises as being in leadership roles.<sup>5</sup> Noticing that thinking about slaves and women could change so quickly leads us to expect that thinking about human sexuality would also begin to turn around in the New Testament. However we can find no indication of any deviation from the earlier biblical teaching, we find no change in the attitude toward sex in the New Testament.

This is very difficult to hear in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada where sexual fulfillment is regarded as a right and where obstacles to that are regarded as problems to be removed. Conservative Christians have often underestimated the increasing power of the ‘sex is a right’ thinking in the minds of Canadians. It contributes to adultery, divorce and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. It drives the movement in the church that wants to grant homosexual men and women the opportunity to be in a sexual relationship that is similar to marriage. The bible’s teaching is especially difficult for gay men and lesbian women because it offers no hope that God will ever give them a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex and therefore it offers the likelihood of no sex at all. In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada this feels like an insensitive and inhumane deprivation.

Christians, however, are called to read and interpret themselves and their culture through the lens of Scripture. I and my conservative and evangelical friends around the world understand this to mean that Holy Scripture, as we have received it, takes precedence over our own thinking and desires. We must strive to understand and be eager to empathise with our homosexual brothers and sisters without compromising our commitment to the word of God we have received in the Scriptures. We must be careful not to be dismissive of the deprivation felt by our homosexual brothers and sisters as they obey

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<sup>1</sup> A thorough treatment of the question is found in ‘The Bible and Homosexual Practice’ by Robert A.J.Gagnon, Abingdon Press, 2001

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1, verses 26-27. 1 Corinthians 6 verses 9 & 10. 1 Timothy 1; 9&10

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:18-25

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>5</sup> Romans 16:3

God's word. We must be determined to ensure that we surround them with love and friendship that respects them as equals and embraces both the holiness and the sinfulness that are components of all our lives. This is not an option; this is God's call to us.

It is also important to understand and appreciate the motives of those who are calling for the blessing of same sex unions. Motives are complex and difficult to read; all I can speak of is my own experience. Talking with people who are in favour of same sex blessings I find myself talking to those who have a great desire to communicate the love of God to people. However they do not begin thinking about what that love means with the assumption that the bible, as we have received it, is God's definitive and final authoritative word to us. Without that assumption they find it reasonable to say, "This relationship is good and therefore God must want to bless it." to a same-sex couple whose relationship has brought them peace, joy and fulfillment, whose life of prayer and service is commendable and who earnestly desire to please God and love their "neighbours". However, thinking with the assumption about the bible that I have stated means that all I can say is this, "This seems to be making people happy, it is healthier than many other sexual lifestyles, but God has said that it is not good. It is declared to be not good by the only one who has the authority to say what is good and what is not. I want to be a friend and a brother but as such I cannot deceive these people by telling them untrue things about God."

The Anglican Church in North America is in a headlong rush towards the widespread blessing of same-sex unions. Evangelical Anglicans are working to slow down and reverse what we see to be a rush into disobedience and therefore a journey towards God's painful judgment. In the context of a number of failures, orthodox Anglicans should be searching for the answer to the question, "In the face of these failures and the Anglican Church's persistent rebellion, what does God call us to do?" This question has become focused into a much narrower question, "Does God call us to walk away from these persistently erroneous Anglicans, in order to highlight their error and create faithful communities of orthodox Anglicans?" A number of voices have answered this second question with a "Yes" and have offered several rationales for their decision, which I have summarized and critiqued under the headings, 'Different Gods', 'Koinonia and its breach', 'Time to go?', 'Authority and Unity' and '1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order matters'.

### **Different Gods?**

I have heard and read that some think that theological liberals who are in favour of same sex blessings might be worshipping a different God than the one revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This begs the question for me, "When has anyone been able to say sincerely that they have a fully accurate sense of God in their minds and hearts?" Intentional idolatry is frequently evident in the Old Testament and already beginning to appear in the New Testament. There may be some intentional idolatry in the Anglican Church of Canada but not in the hearts and minds of the liberals I have spoken with and listened to. I think that they have a deficient appreciation for the capacity of God to be both gracious and commanding at the same time. I think that they are blind to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. If they are idolaters it is by mistake and not by intent and they need the loving persuasion and grace of God in order to have their eyes opened. They need the presence of evangelicals in their midst. Their congregations especially need to have the chance of receiving orthodox ministry, as God calls.

Applying the 'different Gods' test to ourselves might leave us feeling painfully exposed. We are not good Sabbath keepers, we do not share all that we have with those in need, we covet and are greedy; sadly we do not take some of Jesus' most clear commands seriously. We serve the image of a God who we choose to believe indulges us in what we like to think of as minor issues. We are fooling ourselves, for the God of the Scriptures is a different God than the one of our imaginations. The God of the Scriptures cares deeply about these matters and his anger at their breach is as great as his anger at sexual disobedience.

### **Koinonia and its breach**

There are those who take the use of the Greek word *koinonia* in the New Testament as conveying the New Testament teaching that best determines the action we should take in the face of corrupted belief. Here are some of the references used:

- **1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*
- **1 Cor. 5:9-11** *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— [10] not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. [11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*
- **2 Thess. 3:6** *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.*
- **2 John 1:9-11** *Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, 11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*

There are much more dominant images of church than ‘koinonia’ in the New Testament, like ‘Body of Christ’<sup>6</sup> or ‘Living Temple’<sup>7</sup>, that include the notion of difference but not division. However, following the trail of the word koinonia and the ideas it conveys is an enlightening exercise. Let me list what I believe we find on this trail.

1. Koinonia or fellowship is a state of relationship purchased by Christ on the cross, made available to all who believe in him and shared by the same. God decides who is in fellowship.
2. Unbelievers are therefore unable to be in this special relationship with us, although they have the opportunity to believe and thus enter.
3. If, you are in a position of authority fellowship may be at least temporarily denied to believers who stop believing or who indicate as much by their life choices.

Point #3 is the one used to support the idea of orthodox believers separating themselves from the unorthodox. Written as simply as that, it makes the decision of Anglicans who hold the traditional orthodox views on human sexual relationships very straightforward: if other Anglicans hold and teach unorthodox dogma the orthodox must separate from the unorthodox until the unorthodox repent and return to the beliefs they have abandoned. Walk out of Synod, remove yourself from the authority of a heretical bishop, realign with orthodox Anglicans alone.

The problems with such an interpretation of the word *koinonia* and its New Testament idea are several.

1. The first is the type of language Paul and John use when their words suggest such action. They are not making statements of a policy kind. Their statements come in the form of warnings to fragile communities of Christians.
  - 1.1. Sometimes Paul is advocating a church order policy to be exercised by the church leadership acting decisively to protect the church by excluding dangerous elements.
  - 1.2. Most are protective warnings not policy statements. I might say to a nineteen year old at University, “Stay away from bars.” However, at another time, I am likely to give my blessing to an evening in a bar with a group of trustworthy friends. Paul and John tell their readers to stay away from people who have the potential to lead them astray.<sup>8</sup> Do not permit them to teach you,

<sup>6</sup> Romans 12; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 2

<sup>8</sup> If connection to an unorthodox denomination seriously hampered evangelism in the surrounding culture, it would also be wise to take the ‘local option’ of separating from the ‘unorthodox’. Such is the case for many dioceses operating in an aggressively restrictive Islamic culture.

do not allow them to influence you, have nothing to do with them. I would say the same to a vulnerable orthodox believer in an unorthodox church, unless God had made them strong to be a witness there. Run to safety so that you can remain faithful and a useful witness.

- 1.3. The problem with applying this teaching in a general or universal way is that the teaching is not applied in a general way in the New Testament.
2. Let us start with Jesus. If ‘separate from the unorthodox’ were to be the normative reaction for his followers to adopt surely we would see it in the gospels, where we find Jesus face to face with erroneous and deceptive teaching in the form of scribes, Pharisees and priests. Does Jesus avoid such teachers? Does Jesus hurry his flock of disciples away from them when they appear? Does Jesus avoid the Temple? No. Jesus is religious in his participation in the life of the temple and Synagogue even while he is refuting the teaching and practice that they promulgate.
3. Now, let us look at the beginning of the church. Do we find the post-resurrection disciples of Jesus avoiding contact with their fellow Jews and their gatherings? No. Peter, John, Paul and the others attend temple and synagogue until forced to leave. They seem to have had no instruction from Jesus to pull out of that error ridden faith community.
  - 3.1. Nor do the followers of Jesus try to establish a separatist pure faith community such as at Qumran.
4. Thirdly, we turn to the error of Peter and the Jerusalem church. The issue is whether anything other than the death of Jesus Christ is essential to membership in the kingdom of God. Remembering that this is still a mostly Jewish church, Peter has allowed himself to be convinced that circumcision is also necessary for entry into full membership of the church and the Kingdom. Listen to how Paul describes the problem and his reaction to it by reading *Galatians 2:4-5* I want to point out several features of this incident:
  - 4.1. Paul says that this was an issue that had direct bearing on the gospel.
  - 4.2. Paul confronts the error and confronts Peter, a pillar of the church and the rock on which Christ said his church was to be built.
  - 4.3. However Paul does NOT say to Peter what he says to the weak and foolish Corinthians. Paul does not recommend Peter to keep away from the “circumcision party”. Paul does not recommend a purifying split in the church at Jerusalem even though strategically, during the infancy of the Church, such a radical surgery might have seemed wise.
5. Let us think again of Paul and the Corinthian church. Here is a church dabbling with both the world of idolatry and sexual disobedience. Here is a church that has failed to follow Paul’s teaching or respond to Paul’s correction. Yet in his second letter to them he tells them that he is coming back <sup>9</sup> Paul sees no need to separate himself from these unrepentant promoters of un-Christian thought and behaviours. Nor does Paul hint that he will be coming to extract the faithful ones and start a new church in Corinth, a more orthodox church.
6. Finally, we look at the messages to the 7 churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Focusing on Jesus’ words to the church in Thyatira <sup>10</sup> we find sexual immorality and participation in idol worship there. We find a church that has tolerated, even indulged a powerful yet heretical teacher. We also find “[24] ...the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching...” and to these faithful ones the command of the Lord is to “[25] Only hold fast what you have until I come.” Not here in the message to Thyatira, nor in any of the messages to the churches do we hear God calling the faithful to separate

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor 16:5-7; 2 Cor. 13:1-10

<sup>10</sup> Rev. 2:18-29

themselves from the corrupted church. They are to hold fast to the truth and wait until the Lord comes to deal with the problem.

7. When driving a car it is always wise to check the mirror frequently. It is also wise for the church to check the Old Testament as well as the New. When we do, we find that the community of God's chosen people rebel again and again against the very first of God's commandments and right down the list. God says, *"You shall have no other gods beside me."* Exodus 20:3 However the people worship God but also sacrifice at the "high places" and to the Canaanite Gods. A pattern quickly emerges...
  - 7.1. The people rebel against God's commandments. God sends messengers (prophets) to tell them that they are rebelling and to warn of God's judgment if they persist in their rebellion. The people ignore God's messengers. God sends judgment on people and messengers together.
  - 7.2. What does not appear is a scenario in which God tells his messengers to call together the faithful ones and take them away from the disobedient ones.
  - 7.3. Instead the patience of God with his people is manifested by God putting into the community the ones who will, often posthumously through their writings, show the people the way back to God.

### **Time to go?**

*Jeremiah 51:6*

*"Flee from the midst of Babylon;  
let every one save his life!  
Be not cut off in her punishment,  
for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance,  
the repayment he is rendering her.*

*Jeremiah 51:45*

*"Go out of the midst of her, my people!  
Let every one save his life  
from the fierce anger of the Lord!*

*Rev. 18:4-5 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,*

*"Come out of her, my people,  
lest you take part in her sins,  
lest you share in her plagues; [5]  
for her sins are heaped high as heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.*

Some have heard these verses applied as a word from God, calling us out of the Anglican Church of Canada that has rejected God's word on human sexual activity. However, in these texts the reference is to Babylon, not the community of faith. In Jeremiah it is the city of Babylon; in Revelation the label may be applied to the great city of Rome or more generally to the domain of Satan, but most certainly not the community of faith, not even one such as Thyatira. The call is to separate from cities or nations, not Jewish or Christian communities. It was not heard then and cannot be heard now as an encouragement to separate from a damaged faith community such as the Anglican Church of Canada.

### **Authority and unity**

There are those who argue that if we find ourselves under the authority of a church leader whose beliefs and practices are contrary to Holy Scripture we must depart from that authority and find an orthodox authority to submit to. This sounds reasonable until we try to find a biblical example of God asking people to do that. Does Paul ask Jerusalem Christians to start looking around for a better authority when Peter goes off the rails with the 'circumcision party'? No. Does Jesus set up an authority structure in Israel as an alternative to that of the temple authorities? No. Do the prophets ever tell the people that they must leave their deeply corrupted religious leaders? No. Instead we hear Jesus saying to Pontius Pilate,

"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin." *John 19:11* We read Paul telling the Roman Christians, *Romans 13:1-2* 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.' Professor C.E.B. Cranfield, in his commentary on the Letter to the Romans, helpfully explains that the language Paul uses for 'be subject to' is different than if Paul was saying, "Obey every order you are given." The command, "be subject to..." gives us no freedom to seek independence from the authorities God has placed over us but neither does it tell us to obey their orders if those orders are in conflict with God's command. Although Paul and Jesus are referring to secular authorities there is no biblical evidence in biblical teaching or narrative to suggest a different response to religious authorities; surely they are at least equally likely to be appointed by God as the motley bunch of secular leaders we read about in the Bible.

I have also heard it argued that the unity Jesus speaks of in John's Gospel is not an organizational unity but a spiritual unity. *John 17:11-12* *And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [12] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* In the first place it is extraordinary to suggest that Jesus has a dualistic sense of the world, splitting the reality of the world from the spiritual reality. Secondly it is odd to suggest that Jesus did not know that organization would soon come to his Church or that error would come into the organised Church. Jesus is aiming high in his prayer, for a single unity that is both spiritual and organizational. By praying thus, Jesus commits us to do all that we can within the limits of freedom Scripture gives us, to maintain unity of every kind. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, *Ephes. 4:1-6* *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

### **1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order matters**

There are those who argue that the matter of blessing same sex unions is a first order matter, an issue that is so closely linked to the core of the gospel that when the bible's teaching on this subject is abandoned so is the gospel - the baby goes out with the bath water and orthodox Anglicans must go with the baby.

Every sinful human action, thought or decision is closely linked to the core of the gospel. The gospel is about salvation from the judgment warranted by our sin and for the new life that the crucified and risen Christ offers us. When we call that which is sin, "not sin", we diminish our need for salvation and the importance of Christ's death on the cross. To do so is a serious matter. But is it a first order, a church breaking matter? St. Paul tells us, helpfully, what is of first importance... *1 Cor. 15:3-11* *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...* We hear Paul telling the Corinthians that Christ's death and resurrection are of "first importance". This gospel message, if abandoned, would indicate that the church is in a terrible state of apostasy, heresy and judgment readiness. Paul also links this to "our sins" – it is of the first importance that we understand why Christ had to die; it was because of our sins. But to call that which is sin, "not sin" is therefore to only approach the core of the gospel not to reach it, for the heart of the gospel is God's freely offered forgiveness. Similarly, examining the created order leads us to the creation and the Creator, but the created order is not the creation or the Creator. The sin question leads us to the matter of first importance, Christ's death and resurrection. The question that faces us is this, "Is the encouragement and promotion of sexual sin a church breaking matter?"

For our answer we must again turn to the scriptures. We can once again look at the scriptures I have referred to under the “Koinonia” section of my article. To call that which is sin, “not sin”, is very common in bible times. God frequently sends messengers to confront the distortion of his Word, the people rarely listen to the messengers and the Lord sends or threatens judgment on the whole community - the disobedient, the obedient and the messengers all together. But God does not call the faithful messengers to separate from those who are calling sin, “not sin”. It seems strange to us but God leaves the faithful in the midst of the unfaithful ones.

### **Staying with the weeds**

Evangelical Anglicans must allow the Holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to shape our opinions. We must persist in searching the Scriptures and applying them to our own lives and the life of the Church. But orthodox Anglicans must also find themselves **in** the Scriptures to be informed how to shape their actions in accordance with those Scriptures. So, with what kind of biblical person can we identify ourselves, based on our calling to proclaim and hold fast to the word of God? In the Old Testament we can choose from Kings, Judges, Priests, and Prophets... In the New Testament we have Apostles, Evangelists, Teachers and Pastors... Our distinctive mark is the passion God has given us to hold fast to and proclaim God’s word, presented in the Holy Scriptures. Which of the biblical roles listed above is closest to that call? In the Old Testament surely we find our calling closest to that of the prophets. In the New Testament, we might identify closely with Paul. These types are noted for their proclamation of God’s word in season and out. They are noted for their persistence and patience with God’s people who are unreceptive and stubborn in their rebellion against God’s word. How much does that feel like the Anglican Church of Canada today? It is a frustrating community of God’s people but if we are to be like the prophets of the Old Testament and like Paul with the Corinthians we must stay around and fulfill our calling.

We have seen the world invade our church. The world’s agenda has increasingly become the agenda of the church. Jesus tells a parable that I believe speaks to what we are now experiencing in the Anglican Church of Canada. *Matthew 13:24-30 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, [25] but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. [26] So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. [27] And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' [28] He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' [29] But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'*

Jesus thus commits the faithful to live and worship alongside the ‘weeds’ in the church and the world, until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, until the Day of Judgment.

However, we are not to be idle. Here is a suggested framework for our action at this time:

1. We must see this present time as a struggle for the spreading of the gospel to the nation and within the Anglican Church. We must understand that our enemy is not fellow Anglicans but Satan himself, the great deceiver.<sup>11</sup> We must understand and accept that this struggle will require prayer and fasting and great sacrifice of time and energy.
2. We must know and tell people about the Lord and his word. We must work hard at understanding and learning the mind of God from the pages of Scripture. We must stay close to God in prayer and reflect deeply on his challenges to our own lifestyle. We must find ways of refreshing, equipping and supporting clergy so that they can do the same for the people in parishes all across the country.

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<sup>11</sup> Revelation 12:9

3. We must plan carefully our involvement in our dioceses, praying for opportunities to be involved in leadership, supporting orthodox leaders and preparing others to take the baton when they step down. We must plan for the short, medium and long term.
4. We must invest in a teaching program that educates our people about the biblical basis of the Christian faith and Anglicanism.
5. We must be engaged in debate with our fellow Anglicans, whether we win or lose the votes. Winning or losing is up to God, faithful commitment is up to us.
6. We must pray constantly and rejoice frequently in the grace of God.

### **Warning**

Unfortunately there are other places in Holy Scripture where orthodox Anglicans can find themselves. These biblical people are a sign to us of the great temptation that Satan presents to those who are commissioned to guard and proclaim the word of God. This is the temptation to see and focus on selected details of holiness and thereby to be distracted from the great saving purposes of God, to be like many Pharisees and Scribes. We must fight the temptation to be like them by always calling to mind the gospel accounts of Jesus' attitude to God's commandments; living by the Spirit of the whole bible as much as by particular words. Following the example of Jesus as he resolutely set his face towards the cross so must we be single-mindedly focused on the Great Commission he has given us. We are called to focus our energies on the Spirit empowered process of turning unbelievers to belief and turning believers into disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. The latter is a task that has no end until the Lord returns, and from which our Lord gives us no reason to quit. Be they new believers or Bishops, whoever God has put into our lives, we have a job to do. We must not give up because the progress seems slow; the patience of God is our example.

The patience of God is repeatedly revealed in surprising ways in the Scriptures. God usually waits much longer than we would before executing judgment. Bishops come and go, but let's listen to one of the first, St Peter, as he reminds us that the outcome of our struggle for orthodox faith is not in doubt.

*1 Peter 1:22-25 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.*

*The grass withers,*

*and the flower falls, [25]*

*but the word of the Lord remains forever."*

*And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

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