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Homosexuality and the Construction of “Anglican Orthodoxy”: The Symbolic Politics of the Anglican Communion

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Abstract

The conflict over “homosexuality,” which has embroiled the Anglican Communion over the past 15 years, has not primarily been a conflict about homosexuality, or even about sexuality per se. Rather, we argue that the conflict has been so intense because “homosexuality” has become a salient symbol, to which different Anglican constituencies (Evangelical, Liberal, and Anglo-Catholic) have brought their own agenda. The conflict does not simply reflect a pre-existing division between “liberals” and “conservatives,” but the emerging schism reflects the construction of a new religio-cultural identity of “Anglican Orthodoxy,” which has increasingly polarized the Communion. Drawing on interviews with 70 Anglicans directly affected by the conflict in the UK and North America (including and with particular focus on 18 bishops and archbishops), we explore the symbolic politics of homosexuality and the emergence of new configurations of Anglicanism. We suggest that the symbols of the conflict and the competing parties to the dispute are mutually constitutive constructions, and that attention to the processes of symbolic construction and manipulation is important for understanding the conflict.

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