CHAPTER 7

A Weberian-Troeltschian Examination of the Relationship between Religious/Spiritual Identities and Human Sexuality

The Case of the Proposed Anglican Communion Covenant

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Introduction

The Anglican member churches of the Anglican Communion – like religious entities in other Christian denominations and faith traditions – are currently engaged in intensive discussions: 1) of their divergent understandings of authority in the worldwide Anglican Communion, and 2) in the context of these different understandings, of what constitutes faithful ethical teaching and practice, particularly in the areas of human sexuality. These discussions have resulted in a comprehensive reexamination of longstanding administrative relations between member churches, on a global level, most pointedly through the ongoing consideration of the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant. The Anglican Communion Covenant, sometimes referred to as the Anglican Covenant, has effectively focused attention, throughout all parts of the Anglican Communion, on the question of the intersection of organizational power structures, religious/spiritual identities, and social attitudes and beliefs. Examined through a Weberian-Troeltschian theoretical lens, an Anglican Communion Covenant seems likely, if adopted, to lead to the bureaucratic centralization of authority within the Anglican Communion through a radical restructuring of national/transnational ecclesiastical boundaries and interrelationships, and to theological uniformization1 and a reduction in the diversity of permitted perspectives on human sexuality.

In what follows, I will first briefly outline the political and theological context of the Anglican Communion, in order to situate the current discussions and disagreements about human sexuality. I will then summarize the

1 Throughout this text, the term “uniformization” has been used to indicate a reduction or narrowing of the range of permitted perspectives. It is a preferable term to “fundamentalism” because of the theoretical imprecision and inflammatory character of this latter term.
main recent developments which opened the widespread debate about human sexuality, and which together led to the proposal of an Anglican Communion Covenant, and to an ongoing shifting of the theological lines of religious/spiritual identity. Finally, I will introduce and critically examine pertinent theoretical insights of Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, and Robert Nisbet to delineate the likely centralization of authority and uniformization of theological perspective on human sexuality, to which an Anglican Communion Covenant can be expected to lead.

**Governance and Churchmanship in the Anglican Communion: Symbolic Relation with “Homosexuality”**

Turning, first, to the political and theological context of authority in the Anglican Communion, it has to be acknowledged that the issue of authority is not new, within Anglicanism; indeed, it has always been a core concern, but it has been addressed in diverse and complex ways over the centuries, most critically in the interwoven terms of governance and theological churchmanship.

Politically, in England, the issue of authority arose in terms of the relations between Church and Monarchy, in the *Magna Carta*, while later, in England, the *Magna Carta* came to be reinterpreted in terms of the relations between the Church of England and the Church of Rome (Avis 2007, 19–20). Modern relations between member churches of the Anglican Communion can generally still be described by reference to Resolution 49 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference:

> The Anglican Communion is a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, which have the following characteristics in common:
> a. they uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer as authorized in their several Churches;

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2 The Lambeth Conference is a decennial conference of worldwide Anglican Bishops, which first began meeting in 1867, at Lambeth Palace, the official London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, England. It includes all Anglican bishops worldwide who have been invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury.