

## The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans: Should Conservative Anglicans Sign Up?

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*Keywords:* Anglicanism, Anglican Communion, Anglican realignment, Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, GAFCON, Jerusalem Declaration, gospel, homosexuality, same-sex union, J.I. Packer

*Abstract:* The Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA), whose leaders govern well over half of the 80 million Anglicans worldwide, have put forward ‘a contemporary rule,’ called *The Jerusalem Declaration*, to guide the Anglican realignment movement. The FCA and its affiliates, e.g. the newly-formed Anglican Church in North America, require assent to the Declaration. To date, there has been little serious appraisal of the Declaration and the status accorded to it. I aim to correct that omission. Unlike appraisals in the social media, however, mine grants the FCA’s conservative stand on same-sex unions and homosexual practice. Nevertheless, I argue, the Declaration mischaracterizes the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, binds Anglicans to falsehoods and dubieties in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and adds to the gospel. Two things follow. First, no one—especially no Anglican who identifies herself as conservative, traditional, orthodox, evangelical, Anglo-catholic or simply concerned with the truth—should assent to the Jerusalem Declaration. Second, since the FCA and its affiliates know that these defects exist in the Declaration, they should fess up to these shortcomings and retract the Declaration’s status as ‘a contemporary rule’ and they should stop requiring assent to it. Anything less constitutes intellectual dishonesty of a most egregious sort.

I know that the GAFCON leaders would want us to express the various questions that naturally come to mind as we contemplate what they have said to us. Just as they wouldn’t want anyone to swallow uncritically the latest pronouncement from Canterbury or New York, so clearly they wouldn’t want us merely to glance at their document, see that it’s “all about the gospel,” and then conclude that we must sign up without thinking through what’s being said and why. It is in that spirit that I raise certain questions....

--N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham, June 30, 2008, ‘After GAFCON’

*GAFCON* is an acronym for the *Global Anglican Future Conference* that was held in Jerusalem in June of 2008. It was there that over 1100 Anglican clergy and laypeople—including nearly 300 bishops representing well over half of the 80-million members of the Anglican Communion—instituted a new society, the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA), called for a council of primates to govern it, and encouraged the formation of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), a would-be province of the Anglican Communion intended as an orthodox alternative to The Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada. Since GAFCON, the Primates’ Council has been formed, the FCA

launched, and the ACNA inaugurated.<sup>1</sup> At the conclusion of the conference, a statement was issued, initially called *The Final Statement*, but renamed *The Complete Jerusalem Statement*, which explains what precipitated GAFCON and what its leaders intended to do about it. Central to what they intended was ‘a contemporary rule,’ called *The Jerusalem Declaration*, assent to which is required by every individual, parish, congregation, diocese, province, or other organization for membership in the FCA and its affiliates, including the ACNA.<sup>2</sup>

To date, there has been little serious appraisal of the content of the Statement or the status accorded to the Declaration by the FCA.<sup>3</sup> I aim to correct that omission. Unlike appraisals in the social media, mine grants the FCA’s conservative stand on same-sex unions and homosexual practice. Nevertheless, I argue, no one—especially no Anglican who identifies herself as conservative, traditional, orthodox, evangelical, Anglo-catholic or simply concerned with the truth—should assent to the Jerusalem Declaration. For it mischaracterize the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, binds Anglicans to falsehoods and dubieties in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and adds to the gospel.

### **1. The Jerusalem Declaration misrepresents the traditional Christian teaching on marriage**

The Declaration’s ‘tenet’ on marriage reads, in part, as follows: ‘8. We acknowledge...the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family....’ That is, Christian marriage between one man and one woman is the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family and this standard is unchangeable. This is not the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, however. For if Christian marriage between one man and one woman is the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family, non-Christian marriage is not, in which case Jewish marriage, among others, is an improper place for sexual intimacy and not a basis of the family. But it is neither of these things.

Perhaps the FCA meant to say that the unchangeable standard in question is that Christian marriage between one man and one woman is the *most* proper place for sexual intimacy and the *most* fitting

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<sup>1</sup> On GAFCON, see <http://www.gafcon.org/>. On the FCA, see <http://fca.net/>. On the ACNA, see <http://www.anglicanchurch-na.org/>. In what follows, I assume familiarity with the Anglican realignment movement, a summary of which is at Wikipedia, and the Statement and Declaration: [http://fca.net/resources/the\\_jerusalem\\_declaration1/](http://fca.net/resources/the_jerusalem_declaration1/). See also the item at note 3.

<sup>2</sup> <http://fca.net/member/register>: ‘Members of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans are required to assent to the Jerusalem Declaration, formed at the Global Anglican Future Conference in 2008, and also the goals of the FCA’. No diocese can be a member of the ACNA unless ‘the Vestry of each congregation has subscribed to the Constitution and Canons of the [ACNA],’ which includes affirmation of the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration in its Preamble. See [http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Constitution\\_and\\_Canons\\_June\\_2012.pdf](http://www.anglicanchurch.net/media/Constitution_and_Canons_June_2012.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> For a sociological analysis of GAFCON itself, see Joanna Sadgrove, *et al*, ‘Constructing the boundaries of Anglican orthodoxy: An analysis of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON),’ *Religion* 40 (2010): 193-206.

basis of the family, which is compatible with there being other less proper places for sexual intimacy and less fitting bases of the family, like Jewish marriage. Or maybe, the idea is that ‘the Christian standard is the most complete norm of marriage, the best place for sexual intimacy and family life’.<sup>4</sup>

These replies do not hold water, for two reasons. First, the Declaration makes no comparative claim. It clearly states that the unchangeable standard is that Christian marriage between one man and one woman is *the* proper place for sexual intimacy and *the* basis of the family. Second, even as alternatives to what the Declaration in fact says there is little to recommend them. For, according to the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, Jewish marriage, among others, is no less a proper place for sexual intimacy and no less a fitting basis for the family than Christian marriage.

I’ve heard more than once that the Declaration addresses Christians, not non-Christians, and so its claim about marriage has no implications for non-Christian marriages. It’s not about them.<sup>5</sup> By way of reply, I agree with the premise but reject the inference. Whether or not the claim has implications for non-Christian marriages depends on the content of the claim itself, not just on to whom it is addressed. And the content of the claim clearly has implications for non-Christian marriages. To suppose otherwise is like supposing that since St. Paul was addressing Christians when he claimed that ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,’ his claim has no implications for non-Christians.

I suspect that the FCA intended to say something else. Perhaps they intended to speak of marriage *per se*:

- A. We acknowledge...the unchangeable Christian standard for marriage: that marriage is to be between one man and one woman, that it is the proper place for sexual intimacy, and that it is the basis of the family....

Or perhaps they did not mean to speak of marriage *per se* but only marriage for Christians:

- B. We acknowledge...the unchangeable standard of marriage for Christians: that marriage for Christians is to be between one man and one woman, that it is the proper place for sexual intimacy, and that it is the basis of the family....

(A) prohibits same-sex partners and polygamy generally and (B) prohibits them within Christian marriage. Neither (A) nor (B) have the unacceptable implications of the actual statement in the Declaration. Two scholars involved in the pre-GAFCON meeting in Jordan as well as GAFCON itself, with whom I communicated, disagreed over which was intended, (A) or (B), but both conceded that the actual ten-

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<sup>4</sup> Both of these replies were put to me by co-authors of the Statement and Declaration.

<sup>5</sup> This was put to me by a bishop who was influential in the authorship of the Statement and Declaration.

etwas worded poorly, at best, and simply false, at worst. The fact is, however, that the Declaration says neither (A) nor (B). Therefore, it would be unwise to assent to it.

### **3. The Jerusalem Declaration ‘binds’ Anglicans to falsehoods and dubieties in the 39 Articles**

The Theological Resource Group of GAFCON—twenty-plus Anglican bishops and theologians, including those on the Primates’ Council—released ‘a theological introduction and definition’ for its participants prior to the conference.<sup>6</sup> There they call for a return to a required confession of the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1572 and they recommend that Anglicans ‘bind’ themselves to them; they even say that their acceptance should be regarded as ‘a test of faith’ (24; 91). After all, the Articles are ‘faithful expressions of the teaching of Scripture’ and should be accepted as such (16; 86). This theme finds its way into the Jerusalem Declaration: ‘4. We uphold the Thirty-Nine Articles as containing the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word and as authoritative for Anglicans today’. Now, as an Anglican, I’m willing to grant that most of the Thirty-Nine Articles contain ‘the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word’. The problem is that several articles clearly do not; in fact several are false or at least dubious, and they fail to be ‘faithful expressions of the teaching of Scripture’.

For example, according to Article 1 of the Thirty-Nine Articles, ‘There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions...’ There are at least six doctrines lumped together here, one of which is that God is without parts, known as *the doctrine of simplicity*, and another of which is that God is without passions, known as the *doctrine of impassibility*. (There’s also the doctrine of everlastingness, which will raise eyebrows among atemporalists; but let it pass.) Given the context of Article 1, to say that God is ‘without parts’ is not to say that God is without *bodily* parts since that is already implied by saying that God is ‘without body’. To say that God is ‘without parts’ goes further; it is to say that God is without parts *simpliciter*, which in the theology of the English Reformers meant that there are no distinctions in God at all. As for the idea that God is ‘without passions,’ that is to say that God is unable to feel emotions. So in God there are no distinctions and no felt emotions.

However, neither of these doctrines is a ‘true doctrine of the Church’ since both are false and neither is a doctrine of the Church. Moreover, both are inconsistent with statement 2 of the Declaration, according to which the Scripture is to be read and taught in ‘its plain sense’. I have space for only a brief word about each point.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Way, the Truth, and the Life*, now published in *Being Faithful: The Shape of Historic Anglicanism Today* (The Latimer Trust: London, 2009), 71-151, online at [http://www.gafcon.org/resources/the\\_way\\_the\\_truth\\_and\\_the\\_life\\_-\\_official\\_gafcon\\_study\\_document/](http://www.gafcon.org/resources/the_way_the_truth_and_the_life_-_official_gafcon_study_document/),

First, neither simplicity nor impassability is a ‘doctrine of the Church’. Granted, under the influence of neo-Platonism, some of the early Church Fathers endorsed them, as did theological greats such as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. Nevertheless, they are foreign to the other sources of authority countenanced by the FCA: the four ecumenical councils, the three historic creeds, and the biblical text. Second, in so far as the Scripture should be read in ‘its plain sense’—a hermeneutic the FCA insists upon—the message is clear: God is capable of compassion, longing, and delight as well as distress, anger, and heartbreak, among other emotions, and he has distinct properties. Third, the doctrine of simplicity is false since it implies at least one of four falsehoods: (i) there is no distinction between God’s properties, e.g., God’s power and love, (ii) there is no distinction between God and God’s properties, (iii) there is no distinction between God’s nature and God’s existence, or (iv) there is no distinction between the persons of the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of impassability is false since it implies that God is not perfect in love. For nothing perfect in love is incapable of feeling emotions.

Another example of an unfaithful expression of the teaching of Scripture can be found in Article 5, according to which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and* the Son. As everyone knows, the double procession is not found in Scripture; nor is it endorsed by the four councils or the only ecumenical creed whose authority is affirmed by the Declaration. True, it is found in the so-called Athanasian Creed, which we now know the Reformers *mistakenly* thought was authored by Athanasius.<sup>7</sup> Whence then the claim that it is a ‘faithful expression of the teaching of Scripture,’ a ‘true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word’?

Things only get worse when we turn to Article 8, which states that the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles’ Creed ‘may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture’. One thing is ‘proved by most certain warrants’ by another only if the latter logically entails the former; that’s the only relation that admits of ‘most certain warrant’. However, as is common knowledge, Scripture entails neither the double procession nor the Nicene doctrine that the Son is *homoousia* with the Father nor the Athanasian claim that ‘the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods but one God’. Therefore, contrary to Article 8, these doctrines are not ‘proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture’. The English Reformers mischaracterized the relation between Scripture and these doctrines. By insisting on assent to the Articles, the FCA perpetuates this mischaracterization; indeed, it goes further, elevating it to the status of ‘the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word’. At least the Reformers did not go that far!

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<sup>7</sup> J.N.D Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

As for Articles 21 and 37, they constitute something of a post-colonial joke. They presuppose the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings and, more specifically, that monarchs and their kin not only have authority over the civil realm but the ecclesiastical realm as well. Does the FCA—centered in the Global South—really think that ‘General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of Princes’? That ‘the King’s Majesty’ has ‘the chief power’ to rule all institutions, ‘whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil,’ and that such authority has been ‘given always to all godly Princes in holy Scriptures by God himself’? Of course not. Nevertheless, they insist that Anglicans must bind themselves to them as ‘a basis of fellowship’.

This is as good a place as any to note that Article 37 endorses capital punishment and rejects pacifism. Are these ‘faithful expressions of Scripture’? Does the FCA mean to tell opponents of capital punishment and pacifists that they are unwelcome?

The authors of the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration have responded to my concern with these words:

Some of the Articles are intended as expressions of central biblical teaching,... Articles dealing with the nature of God, for example, and with the authority of Scripture and the way of salvation, come into this category. Other Articles, however, are specific to the established English church and must be expressed differently in other contexts.<sup>8</sup>

The suggestion is clear enough: we must distinguish articles that express ‘central biblical teaching’ from articles that are ‘specific to the established English church’; and, since Articles 21 and 37 belong to the second category, they must be expressed differently in contexts other than the English church.

Unfortunately, it does not help. For, first of all, no one, not even the leaders of the FCA, thinks that ‘the King’s Majesty’ has ‘the chief power’ to rule all institutions, ‘whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil,’ *even in the context of the established English church*. The British monarchy’s authority is purely titular. Second, most of the doctrines in the Articles that are false or dubious are not ‘specific to the established English church,’ e.g. the doctrines of simplicity and impassibility, the doctrine that the three creeds ‘may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture,’ the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings and capital punishment, and the denial of pacifism. In fact, none of these doctrines even belongs to the first category since none is an ‘expression of central biblical teaching’.

Third, as for the suggestion that the FCA does not dissent from Articles 21 and 37 but rather assents to a ‘different expression’ of them, I say look again. There is no ‘different expression’ *of them*. To

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<sup>8</sup> *Being Faithful*, 37.

suppose otherwise is to engage in the all-too-familiar double-speak applied to lines of the Nicene Creed by the liberal wing of the Church—‘I don’t dissent from them, I assent to a different expression of them’. Finally, to take this line with respect to Articles 21 and 37 contradicts the hermeneutical standard insisted upon by the FCA: that the creeds be read and affirmed in their ‘plain sense’.<sup>9</sup>

The Jerusalem Declaration states that the Thirty-Nine Articles contain ‘the true doctrine of the Church agreeing with God’s Word’ and, according to the FCA, they are ‘faithful expressions of the teaching of Scripture’. Neither of these things is true; moreover, they are known to be untrue by the FCA. Nevertheless, it requires assent. The Thirty-Nine Articles served an important purpose in the sixteenth century, and they can serve an important purpose today. Assent to them as ‘a basis for fellowship’ and Anglican realignment is not that purpose.

#### **4. The Jerusalem Declaration adds to the gospel**

We are told in the Complete Jerusalem Statement that GAFCON

emerged in response to a crisis within the Anglican Communion, a crisis involving three undeniable facts concerning world Anglicanism.

*The first fact is the acceptance and promotion within the provinces of the Anglican Communion of a different “gospel” (cf. Galatians 1:6-8) which is contrary to the apostolic gospel.* This false gospel undermines the authority of God’s Word written and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the author of salvation from sin, death and judgement. Many of its proponents claim that all religions offer equal access to God and that Jesus is only a way, not the way, the truth and the life. It promotes a variety of sexual preferences and immoral behaviour as a universal human right. It claims God’s blessing for same-sex unions over against the biblical teaching on holy matrimony. In 2003 this false gospel led to the consecration of a bishop living in a homosexual relationship.

*The second fact is the declaration by provincial bodies in the Global South that they are out of communion with bishops and churches that promote this false gospel.* These declarations have resulted in a realignment whereby faithful Anglican Christians have left existing territorial parishes, dioceses and provinces in certain Western churches and become members of other dioceses and provinces, all within the Anglican Communion. These actions have also led to the ap-

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<sup>9</sup> The authors hold up the standard of reading the Articles in their ‘plain sense’ when they bemoan the fact that the Church of England is ‘no longer ruled by the plain sense of Scripture and its classic formularies’. See *Being Faithful*, 97.

pointment of new Anglican bishops set over geographic areas already occupied by other Anglican bishops. A major realignment has occurred and will continue to unfold.

*The third fact is the manifest failure of the Communion Instruments to exercise discipline in the face of overt heterodoxy.* The Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada, in proclaiming this false gospel, have consistently defied the 1998 Lambeth statement of biblical moral principle (Resolution 1.10).<sup>10</sup> Despite numerous meetings and reports to and from the “Instruments of Unity,” no effective action has been taken, and the bishops of these unrepentant churches are welcomed to Lambeth 2008. To make matters worse, there has been a failure to honour promises of discipline, the authority of the Primates’ Meeting has been undermined and the Lambeth Conference [2008] has been structured so as to avoid any hard decisions. We can only come to the devastating conclusion that “we are a global Communion with a colonial structure”.<sup>11</sup>

The thrust is clear: there is a ‘false gospel’ that runs ‘contrary to the apostolic gospel,’ it is ‘accepted,’ ‘proclaimed,’ and ‘promoted’ by The Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada, and its acceptance, proclamation, and promotion, along with the failure of the Instruments of Unity, has resulted in a ‘major realignment’ of ecclesiastical relationships within the Communion.

I have two questions. First, according to the Jerusalem Statement and Declaration, what is the content of this ‘false gospel’? And, second, what is the content of the true ‘apostolic gospel’?

As for the first question, according to the passage just quoted, the false gospel includes those propositions that The Episcopal Church USA and the Anglican Church of Canada have ‘proclaimed’ and which constitute the basis of their consistent defiance of Resolution 1.10; it includes those propositions the ‘acceptance’ of which has resulted in the leadership of those provinces promoting a variety of sexual preferences and immoral behavior as a universal human right, claiming God’s blessing for same-sex unions over against the biblical teaching on holy matrimony, and consecrating a bishop living in a homosexual relationship. Well, what are those propositions? Two of them are *same-sex unions are not a sin* and *homosexual practice is not a sin*. (The passage indicates other propositions included in this ‘false gospel’ but they are not my focus here.) As for the second question, the authors tell us that the false gospel runs ‘contrary to the apostolic gospel,’ which implies that the apostolic gospel includes the proposition that *same-sex unions are sinful* and *homosexual practice is sinful*. Of course, this inclusion need not

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<sup>10</sup> For Resolution 1.10, see <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/appendix/p3.6.cfm>.

<sup>11</sup> [http://fca.net/resources/the\\_jerusalem\\_declaration/](http://fca.net/resources/the_jerusalem_declaration/) Italics in the original.



be explicit; it might be implicit, that is, what's explicitly in the gospel might entail them. This claim will be my focus: *the apostolic gospel includes the proscription on same-sex marriage and homosexual practice, at least implicitly*. Two preliminary observations are in order.

First, by my lights—and here I speak as a Christian—if the apostolic gospel includes the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice, then it is game, set, and match. Christians are not free to deny the gospel. However, if the gospel does not include the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice but the FCA leaders insist that it does, then they are innovators and add a stumbling block for those who might otherwise put their trust in the gospel. No doubt, Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher would remind them that they have no authority to innovate. That's beyond their pay grade. And a more notable figure would remind them that they would be better advised to jump in the sea with a millstone tied round their necks than to add a stumbling block to the gospel.

Second, even conservative biblical scholars say that there is room for disagreement over the content of the apostolic gospel. In no small part this is due to the fact that different things are called 'the gospel' by different apostles, New Testament authors, and Jesus. Perhaps, then, we should say that the apostolic gospel is the *intersection* of those things. But the intersection is much too thin to underwrite the claim that it includes the proscription. To illustrate: suppose that, as N.T. Wright states, according to St. Paul, '[t]he gospel itself refers to the proclamation that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is the one, true and only Lord of the world'.<sup>12</sup> In that case, the intersection can have no more content than this statement, which obviously does not entail the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice. Perhaps we should say instead that the apostolic gospel is the *union* of the different things called 'the gospel'. But the union doesn't *explicitly* include the proscription either; nor do the creeds of the early church, the rules of faith of the early Church Fathers, the creeds of the ecumenical councils, or the formularies of the Catholic Church, the Church of England, or the Anglican Communion. One might hope that the FCA's 'What is the Gospel?' would shed light on the matter. It leads with these words:

*The gospel is the life-transforming message of salvation from sin and all its consequences through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is both a declaration and a summons: announcing what has been done for us in Christ and calling us to repentance, faith and submission to his lordship. 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, was buried and was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures'.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> N.T. Wright, 'Paul in Different Perspectives: Lecture 1,' [http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Auburn\\_Paul.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Auburn_Paul.htm).

<sup>13</sup> <http://gafcon.org/resources/what-is-the-gospel/>.

To this I say, yea and amen! But where's the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice in any of it? Clearly, it's not there on the face of it; nor is it in the body of the article. So if it really is included in the gospel, then it must be implicit.

In light of the gravity of adding to the gospel, a pressing question arises: what reasons are there to conclude that the proscription is *implicit* in the apostolic gospel? Unfortunately, there is no publicly available official answer to this question from the FCA. Nevertheless, a little research and conversation has revealed some arguments that it may well have in mind.

The first argument is this: the proscription is the Bible's teaching, specifically the teaching of Jesus and the apostles; that makes it part of the apostolic gospel. Since I learned this line of thought from a bishop in the FCA, I'll call it *The Bishop's Argument*. We can put it explicitly like this:

1. If something is a teaching of Jesus and the apostles, then it is included in the apostolic gospel.
2. The proscription on same-sex marriage and homosexual practice is a teaching of Jesus and the apostles.
3. So, the proscription is included in the apostolic gospel. (1 and 2)

What should we make of the Bishop's Argument?

It is formally valid and I grant that premise (2) is true; premise (1), however, is false, *obviously* false. Ever so many teachings of Jesus and the apostles are not included in the apostolic gospel, not even implicitly. To suppose otherwise is to interpret 'the gospel' much too broadly. It is to interpret the word in a way that does not respect the way in which it was in fact used by Jesus, the apostles, the New Testament authors, and the tradition of the Church. There is no broad use of 'the gospel' that would make premise (2) true.

The second argument—or family of arguments—comes from J.I. Packer. How is he relevant? Packer is the most influential theologian in the Anglican realignment movement and he has *explicitly* argued that the gospel implicitly includes the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice.

In his 'Response to the St. Michael Report,' Packer replies to the contention on the part of the Report that the blessing of same-sex unions is not a violation of 'core doctrine' since it denies nothing in the Creeds and Anglican foundation documents.<sup>14</sup> Packer begins by observing that this conception of what constitutes a 'core doctrine,' while good as far as it goes, doesn't go far enough. Why? Because, he

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<sup>14</sup> For the St Michael Report, see <http://www.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/>. For Packer, 'A Personal Response to the St. Michael Report,' see [http://www.anglicanfederation.ca/st\\_michael\\_response\\_jip.htm](http://www.anglicanfederation.ca/st_michael_response_jip.htm)

says, the Creeds and Anglican foundation documents omit ‘the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ, understood as the divinely revealed truth that shows our sinful race the way of salvation from sin and sin's consequences’. Now, I suspect that the Reformers would be puzzled by Packer’s claim. Did they really fail to mention the gospel, so understood? What about Articles IX-XVIII? Is the gospel, so understood, absent there? Clearly not. But let Packer’s slip pass. For Packer’s main point is not that the gospel, so understood, is *omitted* from the Creeds and Anglican foundation documents, but rather that the gospel, so understood, *entails* the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice, in which case the proscription is ‘core doctrine’ after all. Here’s the relevant passage:

Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 lists behavioral habits that, if not repented of and forsaken, keep people out of God's kingdom, and male homosexuality is explicitly included in the list (vss. 9-11). Paul goes on to celebrate the power of the Holy Spirit sanctifying persons at Corinth who had previously lived in the ways he has mentioned. It seems undeniable that he would have viewed blessing same-sex unions as sanctifying sin, and thus as a denial of an essential ingredient in the gospel, namely repentance of all one's sins and forsaking of them. And the gospel as such is surely the church's core doctrine.

A similar line of thought can be found in a recent online interview.<sup>15</sup> The interviewer asks Packer why the issue of same-sex unions is so important. Here’s Packer’s response:

Because it involves a denial of something integral to the Christian gospel. That is, whereas the Bible says same-sex unions are off limits, as far as God is concerned, and that the gospel requires any who’ve been involved in them to repent of that involvement, and to abandon it, this point of view against which we are standing treats...them as a form of holiness, and encourages, affirms, and blesses them rather than say, as we believe the gospel requires us to say, that this is the wrong track, you are required to abandon it.... We are obliged by the gospel to say that because the Apostle Paul proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians says explicitly in the sixth chapter of his first letter to them that they mustn’t be deceived (he says that), those who live—and then he gives a series of life patterns of which living in homosexual relationship is one—he says, they won’t inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, they don’t qualify for Christ’s salvation in terms of the gospel that God has revealed.

And later:

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<sup>15</sup> <http://whatihadtoleaveout.blogspot.com/2008/03/j-i-packer-anglicanism-and.html>.

The Scripture teaching that is being denied is an element of the gospel itself, that is, God's message about how we sinners can be saved. If you refuse to repent at some point where the gospel requires you to repent, well, you are not walking according to the gospel. And what Paul says is that your soul is in danger... It's apostolic teaching, it's the word of God.

A little reflection on these words reveals some arguments for the conclusion that the gospel entails the proscription on same-sex unions and homosexual practice. In what follows, I assess three that focus on the proscription on homosexual practice.

The first argument, spelled out in detail, goes like this:

*Packer's Argument*

1. Paul viewed homosexual practice as a sin and something that we should repent of.
2. If Paul viewed homosexual practice in that way, then Paul would have viewed the denial of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the denial of the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as a denial of the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins*.
3. So, Paul would have viewed the denial of those two propositions as a denial of the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins*. (from 1 and 2)
4. Paul viewed the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins* is an essential ingredient of the gospel.
5. So, Paul would have viewed the denial of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the denial of the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as a denial of an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 3 and 4)
6. So, Paul would have viewed the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* as an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 5)
7. So, the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* is an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 6)

What should we make of Packer's Argument?

Note that premise (2) is ambiguous. The word 'denial' can be used in two ways: to denote a certain sort of speech act, denying something, and to denote a certain type of truth-functional operator, negation. These are not the same thing.

If we read 'denial' in (2) as denoting the speech act of denying, then (2) more accurately reads:

2s. If Paul viewed homosexual practice as a sin and something that we should repent of, then Paul would have viewed someone's performing the speech act of denying the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and denying the proposition that *we should repent of it* as their performing the speech act of denying the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins*.

But if premise (2) means (2s), premise (2) is false. For Paul would have understood how someone might think that homosexual practice is not a sin and so not something we should repent of, in which case, Paul would have understood how someone might perform the speech acts of denying that homosexual practice is a sin and denying that we should repent of it without thereby performing the speech act of denying that we should repent of our sins.

If we read 'denial' in premise (2) as denoting negation, then it more accurately reads:

2n. If Paul viewed homosexual practice as a sin and something that we should repent of, then Paul would have viewed the negation of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the negation of the proposition that *we should repent of it* as entailing the negation of the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins*.

If premise (2) means (2n), then it is true. Paul knew elementary logic. But if we read (2) as (2n), then, to avoid further ambiguity, we must amend premises (3) and (5). Thus, we have:

*Packer's Revised Argument*

1. Paul viewed homosexual practice as a sin and something that we should repent of.
- 2n. If Paul viewed homosexual practice in that way, then Paul would have viewed the negation of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the negation of the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as entailing the negation of the proposition that *we should repent of our sins*.
- 3n. So, Paul would have viewed the negation of each of those two propositions as entailing the negation of the proposition that *we should repent of our sins*. (from 1 and 2n)
4. Paul viewed the proposition that *we should repent of all our sins* is an essential ingredient of the gospel.
- 5n. So, Paul would have viewed the negation of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the negation of the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as entailing the negation of an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 3n and 4)

6. So, Paul would have viewed the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 5n)
7. So, the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* is an essential ingredient of the gospel. (from 6)

What should we make of this argument?

The first two inferences are formally valid, and the inference from 6 to 7 expresses a widely held Christian conviction, as do premises 1 and 4. Let's grant them. That leaves the move from 5n to 6.

Unfortunately, it is obviously invalid. To see why, consider a formal analogy. Suppose you think that Obama is the President and that Obama is the Commander in Chief. Moreover suppose you think that the proposition that *every President is the Commander in Chief* is an essential ingredient of the US Constitution. In that case, you would view the negation of the proposition that *Obama is the President* and the negation of the proposition that *Obama is the Commander in Chief* as entailing the negation of an essential ingredient of the US Constitution—namely, the proposition that *every President is the Commander in Chief*. But you certainly would not conclude that the proposition that *Obama is the President* and the proposition that *Obama is the Commander in Chief* are essential ingredients of the US Constitution.

And the same goes for Paul. Even if he would have viewed the negation of the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* and the negation of the proposition that *it is something we should repent of* as entailing the negation of an essential ingredient of the gospel—namely, *we should repent of our sins*—he would not have concluded that the proposition that *homosexual practice is a sin* or *it is something we should repent of* as an essential ingredient of the gospel. Paul was smarter than that.

Perhaps Packer meant something simpler, something that didn't explicitly appeal to what Paul thought or would have thought. For example, perhaps Packer simply meant to argue as follows:

*Packer's Second Argument*

1. The truth that *if something is a sin, we should repent of it* is an element of the gospel.
2. Homosexual practice is a sin.
3. So, the truth that *we should repent of homosexual practice* is an element of the gospel. (from 1 and 2)

Or perhaps he meant this:

*Packer's Third Argument*

1. An element of the gospel is that we should repent of all our sin.
2. Homosexual practice is a sin.
3. So, an element of the gospel is that we should repent of homosexual practice. (from 1 and 2)

And from here, Packer might infer that an element of the gospel is the proscription on homosexual practice.

Unfortunately, even if the premises of each argument are true, the inference is invalid, as can be seen by counterexample:

1. The truth that *if someone is the President, then he is the Commander in Chief* is an element of the US Constitution.
2. Obama is the President.
3. So, the truth that *Obama is the Commander in Chief* is an element of the US Constitution. (from 1 and 2)

And:

1. An element of the US Constitution is that the President is the Commander in Chief.
2. Obama is the President.
3. So, an element of the US Constitution is that Obama is the Commander in Chief. (from 1 and 2)

The apostolic gospel does not include the proscription on homosexual practice and same-sex unions. By stating otherwise in the Complete Jerusalem Statement, the FCA adds to the gospel. Since the referent of “the gospel” in the Jerusalem Declaration is fixed by the context in which it is set, and that context is the Statement, to assent to the Declaration—notably, it’s first ‘tenet,’ in which the gospel, so understood, is explicitly affirmed—is to assent to something that is *not* the gospel but the *gospel-plus*.

One last observation. In the interview quoted above, both Packer and the interviewer slide back and forth between the locutions ‘what Scripture teaches,’ what ‘the Bible says,’ ‘what Paul says,’ what ‘is apostolic teaching,’ and what is ‘the word of God,’ on the one hand, and the locutions what is ‘integral to the Christian gospel,’ what is ‘at the heart of the gospel,’ and ‘what the gospel itself requires,’ on the other hand—as though the denotation of the two groups of locutions were identical. Something similar happens in Packer’s recent speech, ‘The Church and Schism,’ at Oak Hill School of Theology. In that speech, he recommends separation from those given to ‘affirmation of gay behaviour’ as ‘separation for

the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the truth'.<sup>16</sup> This identification of the gospel and the truth is a mistake. Just because a proposition is 'what Scripture teaches,' what 'the Bible says,' 'what Paul says,' what 'is apostolic teaching,' what is 'the word of God', or what is 'the truth,' *it does not follow* that it is 'integral to the Christian gospel,' what is 'at the heart of the gospel', 'what the gospel itself requires,' or 'an ingredient of the gospel', much less 'an essential ingredient of the gospel'. I suspect that this mistaken identification is what lies at the root of Packer's confusion, as well as the FCA's.

## 5. Conclusion

I conclude that the Jerusalem Declaration misrepresents the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, binds Anglicans to falsehoods and dubieties in the Thirty-Nine Articles, and adds to the apostolic gospel. Two things follow. First, conservative Anglicans, whether individuals, parishes, congregations, dioceses, provinces, or other organizations, should *not* affirm the Jerusalem Declaration—even if they approve of the Anglican realignment movement. Second, since the FCA and its affiliates know that these defects exist in the Statement and the Declaration, they should publicly fess up to these shortcomings and retract the Declaration's status as 'a contemporary rule' and they should stop requiring assent to it for membership. Anything less constitutes intellectual dishonesty of a most egregious sort.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/downloads/video/packer/media/jim\\_packer\\_oak\\_hill.pdf](http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/downloads/video/packer/media/jim_packer_oak_hill.pdf), especially pages 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Acknowledgements....