

 THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

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THE GENERAL  
SYNOD

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HOUSE OF CLERGY  
Dr Colin Podmore  
*Secretary*

21 February 2011

Dear Presiding Bishop

Bishop Pierre Whalon has informed me that an article by him, recently published in *Theology*, and my reply to it are to be discussed by the House of Bishops of the General Convention in March. I thought it might be helpful if I explained the background.

In 2007 I wrote, in a personal capacity, an article entitled 'A Tale of Two Churches: The Ecclesiologies of The Episcopal Church and the Church of England Compared'. The article arose out of a lecture that I gave to the Ecclesiastical Law Society here in London and it was published in their journal, the *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, in January 2008.

With my agreement (but not at my suggestion), the article was republished in an edition of the *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, which was guest-edited by the Editor of the *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*. I was not involved in the discussions that led to the Ecclesiastical Law Society's decision to pay for copies of that issue to be distributed at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, nor have I any reason to believe that the fact that my article was included in it (as one of six) was a significant factor in that decision.

The Revd Dr R. William Franklin, now Bishop-elect of Western New York, kindly checked that original article carefully for me before its first publication and gave me a '*nihil obstat*'. As you know, Dr Franklin has a doctorate in church history, formerly taught church history at the General Theological Seminary, and has played a significant part in ecumenical discussions of ecclesiology over many years. I wouldn't have been comfortable with publishing an article of that nature without having it vetted by an Episcopalian of Dr Franklin's standing.

After publication of the article I received very positive comments on its content in correspondence with other American Episcopalian church historians and also, unsolicited, from American priests working in the Church of England and British priests working in the Episcopal Church.

In January 2009 I received an email from Bishop Whalon making criticisms of my article. (Incidentally, his comments in correspondence and in his recent article remain the only adverse comments on my article that I have received.) After initial correspondence, I suggested that it might be more profitable for us to have a conversation during one of

Bishop Whalon's visits to London. A date for a meeting was agreed and I was disappointed that Bishop Whalon later cancelled it and did not seek to re-arrange it.

In June 2009 Bishop Whalon submitted an article replying to mine. The *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, which is an academic journal, rejected it for publication. A shorter version was accepted for publication by *Theology* (a more popular periodical whose readership I think consists predominantly of parish clergy) during 2010.

Unfortunately, it seemed to me that Bishop Whalon's article reflected a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of my article. A response was therefore necessary, especially since most readers of *Theology* would not have read my original article. The two articles appeared in January 2011.

Bishop Whalon has now suggested that any discussion be taken forward face-to-face (rather than in further publication). I welcome that suggestion.

I would like to underline two points. My original article was largely drafted in 2007 before any diocesan convention had voted to withdraw from the Episcopal Church. It was first published in January 2008, before the current debate about the polity of The Episcopal Church, which those withdrawals and the ensuing litigation have prompted, began. Obviously, it was thus not a contribution to that subsequent debate within the USA. Rather, it was intended, as a piece of serious analysis, to illuminate the ecclesiological background to some of the tensions in the Anglican Communion that surfaced during the last decade.

Secondly, although I am a member of staff of the General Synod of the Church of England (and, since the publication of Bishop Whalon's article and my response, have been appointed as Clerk to the Synod, with effect from the end of March 2011), these articles have been written in my own time and on my own account as a church historian. They were produced as works of scholarship, not for any political or polemical purpose.

If my work is discussed by the House of Bishops, I would be grateful if you would kindly make this letter available to the members of the House so that the context is clear.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

COLIN PODMORE

cc     The Rt Revd Pierre Whalon  
          William Fittall  
          Chris Smith