

## Many of today's beloved Christmas folkways have pre-Christian origins

Continued from page 8B

Nicholas, the fourth-century bishop of Myra (in present-day Turkey), who was known for bestowing gifts upon poor children and became the model for the modern Santa Claus.

About those stockings. St. Nick supposedly put his gifts in socks that urchins hung out to dry because they had only one pair, needing nightly washing.

**"The Nutcracker."**

Nuts were an ancient win-

tertime treat but this modern ballet by Tchaikovsky became a holiday classic only with George Balanchine's brilliant 1954 choreography.

The holiday tale of the magic gift nutcracker is totally secular. But Collins

says it "brings family and friends together to share in the wonder, joy and magic of the season."

And children are central to the drama, just as one holy child was 2,000 years ago.

## Episcopal Church faces change and potential chaos over the gay bishop

By Richard N. Ostling  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — In the month since becoming the first Christian denomination to consecrate an openly gay bishop, the Episcopal Church has been gripped by unprecedented tumult.

Episcopal parishioners are pitted against each other. Conservative parishes and priests are at odds with their liberal bishops — and vice versa. And, at the national level, conservative bishops are arguing with fellow prelates in the liberal majority.

Internationally, church leaders who represent tens of millions of Anglicans have announced they are prepared to cut ties with the Episcopal Church, which is the U.S. branch of the Anglican Communion.

Anglican relations with Eastern Orthodoxy are severely strained. And the Vatican announced Tuesday that ongoing talks with the Anglicans are on hold, even though the head of the Episcopal Church, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, resigned as Anglican co-chairman to placate Roman Catholic officialdom.

David Kalvelage of The Living Church, an independent weekly that opposed V. Gene Robinson's consecration as New Hampshire bishop, says the aftermath of that Nov. 2 ceremony is "probably the largest and most far-reaching" crisis since the denomination formed in 1789.

In one signal of a seemingly irreparable split within the hierarchy, Bishop John

Howe of Orlando, Florida, called on Griswold to resign because he "betrayed" a sacred trust by leading Robinson's consecration service.

Further, Howe quit all offices in the national House of Bishops, charging that the majority of his colleagues "abandoned any recognizable commitment" to the Bible's authority.

As denunciations fly, the Washington-based American Anglican Council is organizing a conservative "network" to perpetuate traditional Episcopalianism with backing from overseas. The emerging entity could be a messy "church within a church" rather than a formally separated denomination.

The core of the budding network will presumably come from 16 dioceses whose bishops issued a formal protest at Robinson's consecration. But individuals and conservative congregations in liberal dioceses are also part of the movement.

And it isn't all about who leaves the church and who stays. If troubled parishioners stick with the Episcopal Church but stop making financial contributions, that could also be devastating.

If anything, the international situation is even worse, with the global Anglican Communion and its 77 million faithful in danger of splitting in two over the U.S. controversy and a fight over same-sex blessings in the Anglican Church of Canada.

While 59 percent of U.S. bishops confirmed Robinson's election, they are in the

minority by a wide margin in world Anglicanism. A 1998 meeting of all Anglican bishops cited biblical teaching against homosexual acts as 82 percent of the leaders voted against gay clergy and church approval of same-sex couples.

The heads (called primates) of many world Anglican branches have jointly declared "impaired communion" with the official Episcopal Church and solidarity with American conservatives. The churches of Nigeria and Uganda — representing 26 million Anglicans alone — went further, severing Episcopal ties. So did the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Anglican split will worsen next year if the Episcopal Church doesn't repent, under an accord reached at a caucus of primates who lead nearly half the world's Anglicans. But there's virtually no chance liberals will seek forgiveness.

The caucus agreed that liberal U.S. bishops should be reduced to observer status at Anglican meetings, minus "voice and vote." More radically, U.S. bishops and dioceses that uphold Anglican tradition would gain new recognition as the "reorganized" Episcopal Church that continues in "full communion" with world Anglicanism.

It's unclear whether Anglican rejection would have any effect on the standing of Griswold's denomination under secular U.S. law — and on potential court battles over the billions of dollars in Episcopal assets.

Traditionally, recognition isn't the job of primates but

Anglicanism's leader, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who named a commission to sort out solutions to the U.S. and Canadian tangles by next Sept. 30.

The Rev. Kendall Harmon, theologian for the conservative South Carolina Diocese, says "there's no question" (Williams) has to choose "eventually between the two U.S. sides."

If Williams allies with Griswold's forces, Harmon contends, "he is in serious danger of losing the communion" and "he's increasingly aware of that." The threat: A large chunk of the world flock could switch from Williams' leadership to someone like Nigeria's Archbishop Peter Akinola.

Griswold's allies are confident the Episcopal Church will ride out the storm. The Rev. Susan Russell, president of the denomination's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender caucus, notes there was ample shouting but few dropouts over the 1976 decision to allow women priests. Whatever happens, Harmon sees sweeping implications for U.S. religion.

If other Protestant denominations adopt the Episcopalians' "new sexual theology," he says, the result would be "a dramatic bifurcation in American Christianity."

If so, "people will look back and say this was the pivot point."

On the Net:

Episcopal headquarters:

[www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org)

Conservatives' "network":

[www.americananglican.org](http://www.americananglican.org)

## N.C. 1 of 3 states subsidizing religious education

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Louisiana, North Carolina and Maine are apparently the only three states in the country that allow spending public money on private religious education.

The issue of taxpayers' subsidy of college training for religious work is the subject of a potentially influential church-state case now at the U.S. Supreme Court.

The three states have laws and constitutions that allow students to use Tuition Opportunity Program for Students money to prepare for careers in the ministry, according to the Institute for Justice, a libertarian advocacy center in Washington D.C.

Students are free to use TOPS to pay for religious education in a way that most other states deny, according to the Institute for Justice.

The U.S. Supreme Court case involves the question of whether states can withhold public money from college students who want to pursue religious careers. Lawyers told the court that Joshua Davey qualified for aid under Washington state's Promise Scholarship Program, but the state withdrew its tuition aid when it learned he wanted to pursue a major in pastoral ministries at Northwest College, which is affiliated with the Assemblies of God.

Washington is one of 47

states with constitutions or legislation saying taxpayers cannot be compelled to support a church or religious ministry.

Davey argued that because he otherwise qualified for the grant, he was being discriminated against solely on the basis of his religiously oriented course of study. The question before the Supreme Court was whether, in some instances, taxpayers must finance religious education.

Supporters see it as a matter of evenhandedness; opponents regard it as a forbidden promotion of religion.

Louisiana taxpayers already subsidize religious higher education, including career training in the min-

istry, said George Eldredge, general counsel for the Office of Student Financial Assistance. The TOPS program, which pays qualifying students' tuition at Louisiana public universities, as well as a share of tuition at Louisiana private colleges, makes no distinctions on the basis of course of study, Eldredge said.

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We are glad to greet you again in the Name of our crucified, buried, and risen Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ is my only Hope in a world of violence and bloodshed, worldwide. This is the last month of the year, and the multitudes of you are not in Christ. You do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Saviour. Well, if you know Him, why can't I find fellowship in Christ with you? If you know Him, why are you backward in talking about Him? Will you face reality squarely and fairly? I ask you the eternal question; "Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Saviour?" Not that you joined the church, but do you know Christ? There is no such thing as knowing Christ and rejecting His Word. "HEAR ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. (Jeremiah 10:1-5) The Lord spoke these Words to His people when they were in Babylonian Captivity through His prophet, Jeremiah. What is our Lord telling His people here? He is telling them to not have anything to do with the heathen customs! The Xmas tree! Isn't that very clear to you, my friends? What could be any clearer?

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