

Canterbury: Friday, 24 July 1998

Lambeth Perspective - Sexuality Rows

Sexuality issues have surfaced at Canterbury earlier than expected. On Wednesday unofficial reports emerged that a majority of the 60 bishops in the subsection dealing with human sexuality had fiercely objected on Tuesday evening to the plan to have a presentation made to them on Thursday by a British Christian lesbian and gay group. This presentation was therefore postponed from Thursday and, although it may yet be held somewhere at the conference site, it is unlikely that those who objected to it in the first place will be willing to attend it.

Although no official press release was issued until Friday, it was discussed at Thursday's official press conference. The Bishop of Johannesburg, Duncan Buchanan, head of the section, had clearly been surprised at the ferocity of the opposition expressed to his plan, and to him personally. He said his fellow bishops held such polarised views on the subject that a two-way conversation was virtually impossible. "They were articulate, but I don't think there was much listening." He doubted whether plans for an international commission to discuss the place of homosexuals in the church would be fulfilled. "I believe that for many people that would not be the best way forward ... One of the things we will almost certainly have to do in our report is say we reached no consensus on this. That's an honest statement. We are not trying to say all is well or that we are all at war with each other. ...One of the delegates said they don't even have a word in their vocabulary for homosexuality." But he added: "We have got to live with diversity. If we don't live with diversity, we are not fully human."

Many bishops clearly disagree with him. At Evening Prayer on Thursday, the preacher - from Pakistan - categorically denounced homosexuality, saying that it was something that must be eradicated. Others from Nigeria and Uganda made it clear that they would not tolerate any compromise on traditional standards and they indicated that they would unite to oppose any attempts to set up a commission to study the issue. The Times today quotes the Bishop of Mityana (Uganda), Wilson Mutebi: "The issue of homosexuality is leading the Anglican Church astray.... The Bible clearly states that homosexual practice is wrong. Homosexuality is a sin. Any bishop who says this is not true, we consider to be out of communion with us. We are calling on them to repent." And the Bishop of Kajo Keji (Sudan), Manasseh Binyi told The Tablet that some Africans would rather walk out of the conference than debate any relaxation of sexual morality.

However, Bishop Buchanan also said: "While many people are saying that it is a white man's importation, much of the evidence is that homosexuality - particularly with men - is practised extensively throughout Africa. It's not quite as innocent as you think... homosexuality does not mean paedophilia. Some of the most aggressive paedophiles are heterosexuals". And the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Richard Holloway said: "If the Church is to be true to the all-embracing nature of Christ's love, it will one day have to accept with joy the fact that among God's children are gay and lesbian people. ...We hope that some time will be found to think about the injustice that has been done to generations of gays and lesbians, God's hidden people, misunderstood, maligned, persecuted and killed. It is in our day and in our culture that they have finally said 'enough', and walked out of the shadows to claim their place in God's light."

Based on events so far, it is clear that the 60 bishops in the sexuality section will propose a highly conservative resolution for the conference as a whole to consider during the third week. It looks likely that those who favour more liberal attitudes to homosexuality will issue some kind of minority report, especially if the international commission which the Archbishop of Canterbury has recommended as the way forward, is not what the section recommends.

Canterbury: Wednesday, 5 August 1998
Lambeth Perspective - Spinning Out of Control

Tuesday saw an extraordinary series of events surrounding the resolutions related to Human Sexuality. The Blue Book published on Monday contained one three-clause resolution from the sub-section officially charged with this matter, one from Section IV, and no less than four other resolutions submitted by regional groupings namely: Central and Eastern Africa (six clauses), Latin America (one clause), South East Asia (one clause receiving the Kuala Lumpur statement with gratitude), and West Africa (two clauses).

At the 10.00 Press Conference a completely new six-clause resolution, replacing the three-clause one, was issued and a full hour briefing given on this by four bishops representing the full spectrum of views, and with considerable detailed discussion of the nuances of the wording. Bishop Duncan Buchanan said that the group report had originally included no resolution, but that he had personally drafted the initial three-clause version. The new, longer resolution was presented to the press as the considered work of the section chaired by Bishop Buchanan, and the members of that group were portrayed as fully in support of this work.

We were also told that a meeting on Tuesday afternoon would consider all the other sexuality motions and how best to handle them in the plenary discussion on Wednesday afternoon. The timing of that session was to be brought forward an hour from 15.30 to 14.30 to allow a full two hours for the session. This would of course also make life massively easier for the UK press to meet Thursday publication deadlines.

However, during the afternoon we learned that the Steering Committee had met and had decided that the original three-clause motion was to be the only one put forward formally at that session. Any other wording, including the eight clauses on which we had been so fully briefed, would have to be proposed as amendments.

Then at the opening of the first plenary the Secretary, John Peterson, announced that the time would revert to 14.30 as the change would disrupt the rehearsal schedule of the Spouses pageant 'Crowning Glory' (I am not making this up).

At the end of the first plenary, several bishops of varying points of view rose to make points of order complaining about the decision of the Steering Committee to reject the work of the section members. There are clearly very strong feelings about this across the board and threats of more formal protests are being heard. These relate to the lack of notice given of the Steering Committee's action, and the short deadlines applied for the submission of amendments (after all, one has to know what the original motion is in order to submit an amendment). It is so unclear right now what will happen next that I shall omit a detailed analysis of the six-clause version for now, and provide instead the current raw wording of the main competing resolutions. Further amendments of all kinds are likely to be thrown into this pot before tomorrow afternoon. Those covering the conference are all quite amazed at what has happened today.

Here is the current wording of the two "official" drafts. First the three-clause version.

Resolution I.10

This Conference:

- (a) In view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between one man and one woman in lifelong union, and believes that celibacy is right for those who are not called to marriage; nevertheless,
- (b) Calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to others irrespective of their sexual orientation and to condemn homophobia, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex.
- (c) Requests the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us.

Now the six-clause version.

Resolution I.10 Revised resolution of the sub section on Human Sexuality

This Conference:

- a) commends to the Church the sub-section report on human sexuality;
- b) in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that chastity is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- c) recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and ordering of relationships. We wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- d) calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn homophobia, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;
- e) cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing or ordaining of those involved in same gender unions;
- f) requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us.

The Section IV resolution is as follows.

Resolution IV.26

This Conference,

Noting that no province of the Anglican Communion has voted to change the traditional ethical teaching on homosexuality, in order to have and promote credibility with our brothers and sisters in New Churches and Independent Christian Groups, receives and recognises the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality as a contribution of the 'South - South Encounter' to the Anglican Communion.

Among the other resolutions, the South East Asia one reads:

Resolution V.23 On Kuala Lumpur Statement

This Conference receives the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality with gratitude as an authentic expression of Anglican moral norms.

Canterbury: Wednesday, 5 August 1998
Lambeth Perspectives: Slow Motion on Sexuality

The Lambeth Conference today approved the following resolution on sexuality by a vote of 526 in favour and 70 against, with 45 abstentions (italics indicate amendments, see my notes below):

This Conference:

- a) **commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality;**
- b) **in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that *abstinence [A28]* is right for those who are not called to marriage.**
- c) **recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships, *and we commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual people. [A24]* We wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;**
- d) ***while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, [A36]* calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn *irrational fear of homosexuals [A27]*, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;**
- e) **cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of *same-sex unions, nor the ordination of those involved in such unions;***
- f) **requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;**
- g) ***notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23, and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process. [A15]***

Now the explanation. First the original three-clause motion was replaced by the six-clause version. This took quite a while since before that decision was taken, the conference heard from the proposers of all the other main alternatives. Those were in due course either withdrawn or voted down by a voice vote. I will provide further details tomorrow.

The Resolutions Committee amended the wording of clause (e) for reasons of English grammar.

Then the italic words in clause (d) were proposed by the Archbishop of Tanzania. During the debate it was stated by the Archbishop of Kenya that this addition was expected by the Africans as "a welcome token" for them to support the main resolution (their much more conservative alternatives having just been rejected). After several speeches against this change, the amendment was accepted by a vote of 389 to 190.

Then the word "homophobia" was replaced in clause (d) by "irrational fear of homosexuals" at the request of a Kenyan bishop, Samson Muraluda of Taita Taveta. And the word chastity in clause (b) was replaced by "abstinence" (Bishop Sentamu of Stepney, in London, England). Both of these were on a voice vote.

The next change was to add the words "and we commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual people" to clause (c). This was proposed by Michael Bourke (Suffragan of Wolverhampton, England) and supported by Peter Selby, Bishop of Worcester. It passed on a voice vote.

An attempt to remove clause (f) and place all responsibility at provincial level only was made by Moses Tay, Archbishop of Singapore. He said he was worried that he would receive "unhealthy literature which is quite polluting". Michael Scott-Joynt, Bishop of Winchester opposed him, pointing out that the motion allowed Archbishop Tay to send his material to others, too. It was defeated on a voice vote.

An attempt was made by Peter Chiswell of Armidale, Australia, to change "advise" to "approve" in clause (e). This was defeated on a show of hands.

Clause (g) was proposed by Archbishop Michael Peers of Canada, supported by Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford and carried on a voice vote.

At this point the Archbishop of Canterbury intervened in the debate, and made it clear he felt the motion merely restated the current position which he supported.

The final vote was then taken twice due to a confusion about the existence of an option to abstain, and the result was as mentioned above.

More details tomorrow.

Canterbury: Thursday, 6 August 1998
Lambeth Perspective - Sexual alternatives

I have previously reported the full texts of the two draft resolutions that came from the official sub-section dealing with this topic; and the full text of the resolution as passed, explaining the sources of the amendments. To understand the context, you need to know what the alternative amendments were like. So here they are.

The conference was offered the chance to replace the three-clause starting point with several other possibilities, although given the shenanigans the night before, the six-clause version was clearly the favourite before the start, simply on the basis that it had such strong support from this group which encompassed all points of view and had spent a huge amount of time over the life of the conference working on the issue.

The Bishop of Indianapolis (USA), Catherine Waynick, proposed, but in fact withdrew before a vote could be taken, the following, numbered as A.13:

This Conference:

- (a) receives the report of Section 1 Subsection 3 on Human Sexuality;
- (b) commends the report for consideration and prayerful study by the Churches of the Communion;
- (c) requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the study and work done on human sexuality in the Communion and to share resources and information with member Churches;
- (d) notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement and the concerns expressed in Resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 and the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality, and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring and sharing process.

The Central and East Africa Region Chairman, from Uganda, proposed the following alternative, numbered as A.31, but identical to V.1 mentioned above:

This Conference

- (a) believes in the primacy authority of the Scriptures, according to their own testimony, as supported by our own historic tradition. The Scriptural revelation of Jesus the Christ must continue to illuminate, challenge, and transform cultures, structures, systems and ways of thinking; especially those secular views that predominate our society today;
- (b) consequently, reaffirms the traditional teaching upholding faithfulness between a husband and wife in marriage, and celibacy for those who are single;
- (c) noting that the Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is a sin, is convinced that this includes homosexual practices, between persons of the same sex, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage;
- (d) believes that in this regard, as in others, all our ordained Ministers must set a wholesome and credible example. Those persons who practice homosexuality and live in promiscuity, as well as those Bishops who knowingly ordain them or encourage these practices, act contrary to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church. We call upon them to repent;
- (e) respects as persons and seeks to strengthen compassion, pastoral care, healing, correction and restoration for all who suffer or err through homosexual or other kinds of sexual brokenness;
- (f) reaffirms that it is therefore the responsibility of the Church to lead to repentance all those who deviate from the orthodox teaching of the Scriptures and to assure them of God's forgiveness, hope and dignity.

The Chairman of the Latin America Region, Archbishop Maurice Sinclair, withdrew before a vote could be taken, the following incredibly short alternative, numbered A.33, identical to V.10:

This Conference recognises the importance of strengthening Christian family values and thereby reaffirms traditional Anglican sexual ethics.

The Chair of the West Africa Group, from Nigeria, proposed the following numbered A.34 but identical to V.35 (the V numbers refer to Regional resolutions):

This Conference:

(a) noting that-

(i) The Word of God has established the fact that God created man and woman and blessed their marriage;

(ii) many parts of the Bible condemn homosexuality as a sin;

(iii) homosexuality is one of many sins that Scripture has condemned;

(iv) some African Christians in Uganda were martyred in the 19th century for refusing to have homosexual relations with the king because of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their commitment to stand by the Word of God as expressed in the Bible on the subject;

(b) stands on the Biblical authority and accepts that homosexuality is a sin which could only be adopted by the Church if it wanted to commit evangelical suicide.

Following the debate, an official press conference, chaired by Lesley Perry, the Archbishop of Canterbury's press officer at Lambeth Palace, was asked what practical effect this action of the bishops would have. The answers given seemed to be: not a lot. Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh, who had chaired the two and a half hour debate, compared the situation now to the situation ten years ago relating to women bishops and the process that had occurred with the Eames Commission, and he also referred to the Virginia report and its remarks on the theory of reception. He also said that the Primates would be meeting on Sunday, after the end of the Conference itself, and might well address the issue further at that time. It was also noted at this press conference by Duncan Buchanan, Bishop of Johannesburg, that ten years ago the then Bishop of New York had been hounded off the floor of the conference when he tried to raise the issue of homosexuality, whereas today the subject had been a major discussion topic. He also noted that at the start of this conference, his sub-section had refused to listen to the voice of homosexual people whereas today the conference had passed a resolution which required such listening. He considered this to be progress.

The debate was noticeable for the absence of American speakers. The only ECUSA bishops who spoke were the Bishop of Maryland, Robert Ihloff, and Suffragan Bishop of New York, Catherine Roskam, both of whom spoke against the amendment to clause (d) from the Archbishop of Tanzania. Bishop Roskam said that to adopt this amendment would be "evangelical suicide" in New York and San Francisco, leading to a pyrrhic victory and a divided church. Bishop Russell of Grahamstown, South Africa was the only other bishop that spoke against the amendment although twice as many people opposed the amendment as voted against or abstained on the overall motion.

Press coverage here in England this morning is substantial. This was a foregone conclusion an hour before the debate even started when a Nigerian bishop, Emmanuel Chukwuma, Bishop of Enugu, engaged in a shouting match with a British Anglican lesbian activist in front of the TV cameras. This story, which I witnessed personally, ran on early evening TV news, while the bishops were still in session, and the participants were featured in a studio discussion on the BBC-TV current affairs programme Newsnight. Pictures of the incident appear in all the morning papers, often in full colour and on the front page. This unscripted and wholly unexpected event outside the meeting hall has tripled the amount of media space given to the Lambeth Conference on this topic, far exceeding that given to World Debt and other issues. These headlines from the conference are, of course, something that the Church of England and the other British Anglican provinces will have to live with long after everyone else has gone home.

And this is not the end of it. The Resolutions Committee is still considering whether further action is needed on the two resolutions relating to the Kuala Lumpur Statement, the texts of which I reported in full in a previous despatch. These may yet come to the floor of the conference for a vote....

The unsolved mystery of yesterday is why 100 or so bishops attending the Conference apparently did not vote at all.