

The Listening Process

Welcome to the webpages of the Listening Process within the Anglican Communion.

In these pages you will find Resources aimed to assist your church in the commitment of the Anglican Communion to listen to the experience of gay and lesbian people.

The pages also contain a summary of the work of [Monitoring](#) the response of the Provinces of the Communion to the commitment made by bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference to listen to 'homosexual persons'. These summaries were prepared in 2007.

There is also an introduction to the work of [Mutual Listening](#) requested by ACC-13 and following ACC – 14 being taken forwards in Continuing Indaba.

What is on these pages?

[What is the Listening Process?](#) – This page sets out an understanding of what is meant by a Listening Process in general terms. It encourages you to be involved where you are. You can also refer to Chapters 1 and 2 of The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality.

[Listening to the experience of gay and lesbian people](#) – This page sets out some general principles for listening to the experience of homosexual persons – a commitment made on behalf of the Anglican Communion by the bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. You can also refer to Chapters 2, 6 and 7 of The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality.

[Practical advice](#)– This section offers some practical advice for those seeking to commit themselves to listening to the experience of gay and lesbian people. You can also refer to Chapter 2 of The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality.

[The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality](#) – These pages support the book published by SPCK in 2008, it offers resources and insights from across the Communion. It has been commended by a wide range of people and is a unique resource for listening. The webpages offer the Introduction to the book in full, introductions to each chapter, full bibliographies and additional resources with links to source texts.

[Contributions from around the world](#) – These pages have contributions submitted to the ACO office from around the world. They allow you to hear the voices of a number of perspectives. You can also refer to Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 8 of The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality.

[Reports from the Provinces](#) – These pages present the result of the monitoring process of 2006. Provinces were asked to summarise how they had responded to the commitment of their bishops to listen to the experience of homosexual persons. The agreed summaries were published 2007 and are available on these pages.

[Mutual Listening](#) – ACC – 13 asked the Communion Office to facilitate Mutual Listening. ACC – 14 endorsed the Continuing Indaba project as a practical response to this request. Continuing Indaba is a journey of conversation to strengthen relationships for mission. Continuing Indaba has its own section on the Communion Website.

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Reports from the Provinces

The Facilitator of the Listening Process has collated relevant research studies, statements, resolutions and other material on human sexuality from the various Provinces. [Summaries of the responses](#) are here available for study, discussion and reflection across the Communion. This was called for by ACC 13 and commended by the Primates in their communiqué of their meeting in February 2005.

Background

The 1978 Lambeth Conference recognised “the need for deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality, which would take seriously both the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research.” It also said that “While we reaffirm heterosexuality as the scriptural norm, we recognise The Church, recognising the need for pastoral concern for those who are homosexual, encourages dialogue with them.”

In 1988 the Conference reaffirmed these calls and urged “that such study and reflection to take account of biological, genetic and psychological research being undertaken by other agencies, and the socio-cultural factors that lead to the different attitudes in the provinces of our Communion” and called “each province to reassess, in the light of such study and because of our concern for human rights, its care for and attitude towards persons of homosexual orientation.”

The 1998 Conference recognised “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. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and 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.”

The Process of Monitoring

The monitoring process to discern the fruits of the processes requested by the Lambeth Conferences has taken over a year. Letters have been sent out to each of the Provinces asking for information. In many cases a province has asked someone to liaise with the Facilitator. The responses have been received by the Facilitator. Many of those include official statements of provincial bodies such as statements from a house of Bishops, official reports, resolutions of general synods and similar such items. Also included are press releases and statements of Primates. These are held at the Anglican Communion Office.

In many cases the information contained in the summaries has been passed on orally in conversations between the Facilitator and individual Primates or their appointed representatives.

For each of the Provinces of the Communion the Facilitator has then written a short summary reflecting any studies and seeking to reflect on the commitment to listen to the experience of homosexual people. These summaries have then been presented to each Primate and amended by them. Every summary is thus the work of the Facilitator, but endorsed by the Primate of the Province concerned. They are not reports on, but reports with, each Province.

An Overview of the Summaries

The summaries indicate that some of the churches of the Communion the process of study of homosexuality and dialogue with lesbians and gays has a long history. In the 1950's Archbishop Michael Ramsey committed himself to the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in England. In the 1970's the Anglican Church in Canada and the Episcopal Church in the USA studied homosexuality, entered into dialogue with homosexuals. The Canadian Bishops in 1997 said "We are thankful to see a new sensitivity emerging towards gay and lesbian persons in the Church. No longer can we talk in the abstract. We are experiencing a growing awareness that the persons of whom we speak are among us. They are our sons and daughters. They are our friends and relatives."

The results of the monitoring process shows that the straightforward division of the Communion into "liberal" provinces in the "North" and "conservative" Provinces in the "South" is simplistic.

Churches of the "South" such as the Anglican Church of Southern Africa and the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil have entered into extensive listening. For example: the statement of the 2002 Rio consultation on homosexuality declared: "Any kind of exclusion contains worms of death. Love is inclusion and life in its fullness." A statement which would be more commonly connected with the "North".

In Westernized countries of the so called "North", listening has not been easy. One spokesperson for a diocese in Australia said: "The 'listening process' in his diocese became a time of 'shouting' rather than listening." And the Primate reflects that the Anglican Church in Australia may need to reflect seriously on this situation and consider how it can overcome such insensitivity. Australia is not the only Province of the "North" which has faced the difficulties involved in creating safe places.

Other provinces have been unable to find the words and the space in which to discuss such issues. In cultures as diverse as Korea and West Africa sexuality is not talked about at all in society. Similarly the report from Japan states: "The culture does not allow for talking about sexuality and so there is little awareness in the congregations of the presence or otherwise of lesbian or gay people and no need, or way, of talking about that. In this context it is hard for listening to happen, but the church is continuing to accept and value all people."

In other places the issues facing the church have been so enormous that they have stretched the church to the limit. Wars in Sudan and the Congo and the difficulties

faced in Burundi have meant that talk of the listening process is someone else's external agenda, a luxury which cannot be afforded.

Other Churches have stressed the need to faithfulness to Scripture and tradition. The Church of Uganda says "Concerning homosexual behaviour and relationships in particular, from a plain reading of Scripture, from a careful reading of Scripture and from a critical reading of Scripture, it has no place in God's design of creation, the continuation of the human race through procreation, or His plan of redemption." Such sentiments are echoed in the reports from Provinces such as Nigeria and Kenya.

The Church of Uganda has responded to the commitment to listen to homosexual persons saying: "We believe that God is calling the Church of Uganda to seek continual transformation from the Word of God written, in preaching repentance and faith in Christ and develop ministries of pastoral care that don't ostracize, shun, or reject those tempted by homosexual desire" and developing the growth in numbers of well trained (to masters level) Christian counsellors who live out the Church's mission to offer love for all, including those who are homosexual.

Churches, such as the Church of Wales and the Church of Ireland set out the range of opinions held by their members, each one emerging from a reading of scripture which has integrity of interpretation. For them the period of discernment and careful listening needs to continue.

Some Provinces, such as the Indian Ocean and Melanesia are only now beginning to engage in study and listening. In some places new primates have injected new energy, in others there is a growing awareness of the need to engage in a pressing issue for our mission in the world.

Some Provinces are aware of other pressing concerns in the area of human sexuality. The issue of violence towards women is pressing in the Province of Papua New Guinea and supporting marriage vital for The Church of Hong Kong and Myanmar.

Continuing the Monitoring Process

The Facilitator is committed to continuing to monitor and report developments in all Provinces. He is also keen to support the process of listening in each of the Provinces as they continue to study, to listen to the experience of homosexual people and to listen to one another.

Developing Resources

In preparation for the Lambeth Conference the Facilitator For the Listening Process has been asked by the Primates to prepare materials to enable us to hear the Spirit of God speaking to us through the Scriptures, our tradition and reason. This will be done through careful study of the Bible, and tradition and the sharing of interpretations, stories as well as the study of science and cultures. The aim is to hear God and engage in his mission to all people in evangelism, discipleship, service and striving for justice.

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Reports from the Provinces

[The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand & Polynesia](#)

[The Anglican Church of Australia](#)

[Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil](#)

[The Anglican Church of Burundi](#)

[The Anglican Church of Canada](#)

[The Church of the Province of Central Africa](#)

[Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America](#)

[Province de L'Eglise Anglicane Du Congo](#)

[The Church of England](#)

[Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui](#)

[The Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean](#)

[The Church of Ireland](#)

[The Nippon Sei Ko Kai \(The Anglican Communion in Japan\)](#)

[The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East](#)

[The Anglican Church of Kenya](#)

[The Anglican Church of Korea](#)

[The Church of the Province of Melanesia](#)

[La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico](#)

[The Church of the Province of Myanmar \(Burma\)](#)

[The Church of Nigeria \(Anglican Communion\)](#)

[The Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea](#)

[The Episcopal Church in the Philippines](#)

[L'Eglise Episcopal au Rwanda](#)

[The Scottish Episcopal Church](#)

[Church of the Province of South East Asia](#)

[The Anglican Church of Southern Africa](#)

[Iglesia Anglicana del Cono Sur de America](#)

[The Episcopal Church of the Sudan](#)

[The Anglican Church of Tanzania](#)

[The Church of the Province of Uganda](#)

[The Episcopal Church in the USA](#)

[The Church in Wales](#)

[The Church of the Province of West Africa](#)

[The Church in the Province of the West Indies](#)

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Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

The May 2006 General Synod / te Hinota Whanui of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia considered the renewed call to the Listening Process called for in Lambeth 1998.

They set out the parameters of such a process. The Synod accepted “that Anglican doctrine and traditions teach that all purely human knowledge is incomplete.” They called for Anglicans to, listen carefully to those with different views, acknowledge the integrity of those holding differing views on particular matters and remain in communion with each other despite holding different views.

The Synod went on to note the call of ACC - 13 for a renewal of the Listening process and encouraged each Episcopal unit of the Church to continue or to initiate this process.

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia has very good models for a listening process. One model has been developed from the Public Conversation Model from the Family Institute of Cambridge Mass, USA.

“The underpinning of this model is that people hold different perspectives on an issue, these perspectives arise out of their life experience and the values they hold. It was developed as an alternative to debate because it appears that often debate results in a polarisation and firming of positions already held, that the argument tends to go round familiar routes and become entrenched. This way of working opens up space for people to consider an issue in a different way.”

Bishops convened the meetings, they called people together, but did not make their views known. This was the same for the facilitator who enabled the process to work. The role of the facilitator was to “enable people to speak for themselves and to provide a safe place for those who came to listen and participate as well as those who spoke”.

Invitations were offered to four people to speak. Each had a different position. A gay person and someone who had previously lived a gay lifestyle but whose life had been transformed were invited with two theologians.

The conversations were successful in that they allowed people time and space to listen to real people and not just hear about them and about issues. Some wanted more of a debate with firmer decisions, but others valued the time to listen, to think and to pray.

There is an intention for the listening process to continue and the Standing Committee of the General Synod is considering how best to move forwards.

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Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church of Australia.

The Anglican Church of Australia has responded to Lambeth Conference 1998 Resolution 1.10(f) through research publications prepared by the General Synod doctrine Commission. The first, *Faithfulness in Fellowship: Reflections on Homosexuality and the Church*, published in 2001, offered 10 essays on various aspects of the issue. A study book based on the essays and published in 2003, was designed for parish use. *Lost in Translation? Anglicans, Controversy and the Bible*, a further set of essays reflecting on aspects of biblical interpretation as it impacted the issue, was published in 2004.

Its response to clause (c) of the same resolution, on the commitment to listening to the experience of gay people, has not taken the form of a national process. Nor have diocese-wide processes generally been adopted; where they have been, they have faced some difficulties. Three of the 23 Australian dioceses have undertaken broad based programs, located either within Synod meetings, clergy conferences, or in directed parish programs. In other dioceses, "listening" has been initiated at parish level mainly. In the majority of dioceses, however, the listening initiative has been the diocesan bishop's, with most bishops taking seriously the need to listen carefully to gay people in the church at least, and in some cases, in the wider community as well. Most diocesans have been keen to offer sensitive pastoral care whenever possible, and have encouraged their clergy to do likewise.

In those dioceses where more broadly-based listening processes have been tried, reports suggest it has been difficult to discern the experiences of gay people, either because the processes involved did not enable this kind of listening, or because gay people felt too vulnerable to speak publicly. In some cases, responses to gay people who attempt to communicate their experiences have been insensitive. This has happened in synods and other wider church gatherings, and not just in parishes. Some dioceses have hesitated to introduce broader listening programs because of this. Understandably, bishops are reluctant to expose vulnerable people to insensitivity. The Church, it seems, is not a safe place for gay people. As one diocesan spokesperson has commented, the "listening process" in his diocese 'became a time of "shouting" rather than listening'. Though some bishops of rural dioceses have suggested that insensitivity may be partly a product of a conservative rural environment, the evidence indicates that it is also a factor in large city contexts. The Anglican Church in Australia may need to reflect seriously on this situation and how to overcome such insensitivity.

As part of an investigation carried out on behalf of the General Synod Standing Committee, a group of 20 gay Anglicans – clergy and laity – expressed the view that any process that exposed them to public labelling as homosexual people would not allow them to speak freely and confidently of their experience as gay Christians. Clergy in particular felt vulnerable about "outing" themselves in the present climate, even with sympathetic bishops. They suggested that if the Church was serious about listening to gay Christians, then it needed to adopt a two-stage listening model: (1) Each diocese should establish a "listening" process that invited gay clergy and laity to

speak of their experiences as gay people and Christians in a confident environment, where the only non-gay person present was an independent lay facilitator. The facilitator's written record of their experiences would take particular care to protect their anonymity. (2) This written account could then be offered to the wider Church

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Reports from the Provinces - Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil.

The bishops of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil (IEAB) issued a pastoral letter in 1999 setting out a considered reflection on the Lambeth Conference of 1998.

The Pastoral letter declared sexuality as a great gift of God which could be misused through promiscuity both straight and gay. The bishops were careful to stress that the welcome of the church was for all regardless of race, culture, social class or sexual orientation. The witness of the Word made flesh and the Holy Spirit leads the church especially to welcome the outcasts of society as well as to affirm the holiness of men and women in holy matrimony.

The bishops also saw how sexuality is an integral part of human life and is linked to affection in mutual relationships. This biblical standards as love and justice are integral to a Christian understanding of life in community. The bishops did not see that the Lambeth Conference had eliminated the confusions about human sexuality and recognised that some provinces saw all same sex relationships as sinful while others adopted a more contextualised attitude. They said "Studies of the factors that contribute to different understandings in relation to homosexuality continue, and as bishops we recommend dialogue, common sense, and pastoral concern for persons of homosexual orientation in the community". They understood that the Communion was still pondering the matter of homosexuality.

The Bible was seen as condemning certain homosexual acts but the bishops called for a sophisticated hermeneutic making allowance for cultural assumptions.

The pastoral letter concluded with a call for an educational and pastoral program of study for guidance about human sexuality taking account of Scripture, science and the experience of the Anglican tradition.

This was followed up by two consultations. These were both held in Rio in 2002 and 2004. The group gathered from 5 of the 9 dioceses of Brazil entered into the wide ranging program envisaged by the Bishop's Pastoral letter. They exchanged testimonies as well as entering to study of the scriptures and science. They reflected not only upon the resolution of Lambeth 1998 but also of the two previous Lambeth Conferences. Gay voices were heard within the consultation.

They came to this conclusion:

From the biblical and theological point of view, human sexuality is a gift of God for all people. The liberation of all people is the main theological focus of the process of exodus, and of Jesus' ministry. God loves us unconditionally as we are, with all our differences and imperfections. This love is manifested in Jesus Christ, and it leads us to love and care for all his creation. To love God is to love our neighbour (1 Jo. 4.20-21), therefore, any kind of exclusion contains worms of death. Love is inclusion and life in its fullness (Jo.10.10).

They call for further study in the dioceses and made this observation about the calling of the IEAB:

It is fundamental that the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil exercise its inclusive vocation letting itself embrace with love and entirely those people rejected and aborted by the society. For this reason, we assume the pastoral ethic of grace and blessing of God, while rejecting the principle of exclusion implicit in the ethic of sin and impurity which causes division amongst human beings.

The second consultation involved people of different perspectives, theological postures and pastoral and life experiences. They affirmed that human sexuality is a gift from God and that they were proud to be a church which emphasised the inclusivity of the Kingdom of God. They called for unity. They affirmed: "that any and all public exposure of the sexual orientation of any person as a prerequisite for membership or to serve in ordained or lay ministries is a serious violation of this privacy". And concluded with these words:

In the name of Christ who freed all of us, poor and rich, clergypersons and laypersons, men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, we sign this letter in the hope that it may symbolize new horizons for our Church and make it more human, more in solidarity, and more inclusive and loving.

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Reports from the Provinces - Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi (Province de l'Eglise Anglicane du Burundi).

The Anglican Church of Burundi remains willing to listen to the concerns and challenges of all the Provinces of the Anglican Communion and its ecumenical partners so that we walk together in a way that honours the name of Christ and witnesses to his reconciling love in a hurting and fragmented world.

As a Province, the Anglican Church of Burundi has consistently stated that Scripture should be our guide in matters of doctrine, ethics and decision making. All through the current debate on human sexuality the church has prayerfully encouraged unity, understanding and dialogue within the household of God. The debate challenges our understanding of marriage and family. The Church believes that as Christians we are called to exercise the love of Christ in all our relationships and to pray with love that the Spirit of God will transform our lives. It also states that we should work for a Church characterised by justice and compassion that strives to be a sanctuary of care for all where the truth can be told with love.

In the areas of mission and ministry the Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi has among its major concerns peace and reconciliation, repatriation of refugees and displaced people, community development, literacy and education, and HIV and AIDS, Malaria and TB. It is committed to sharing the Gospel and is concerned to engage in theological education and training for lay and ordained ministry.

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Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church of Canada.

The official process of listening began in 1976 with the bishops commissioning a 'Task Force' to assist their thinking on issues of homosexuality. The report was only for bishops and in 1979 the bishops committed themselves to further study and requested the preparation of study materials which were published in 1985.

The House of Bishops in November 1992 reported on their process of further study which had been based on the Church of England booklet *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*. The study moved beyond this report and the following sentence in their report is illuminating:

A year earlier, we had suggested that bishops should seek opportunities in their own situations to engage in dialogue with members of the homosexual community. From the nature of our discussions, it was clear that many had done so.

The process had moved from "study about" to "dialogue with" homosexual people.

It was clear at the time that a serious engagement with the Scriptures was needed. The study process was also to include 'the experience of gays and lesbians who are committed Christians'.

As a result the 1997 Statement by the Anglican Bishops included the following paragraph:

We are thankful to see a new sensitivity emerging towards gay and lesbian persons in the Church. No longer can we talk in the abstract. We are experiencing a growing awareness that the persons of whom we speak are among us. They are our sons and daughters. They are our friends and relatives.

The process had moved on from "dialogue with" to "discussion among ourselves", consciously and openly including gay and lesbian members. Homosexual voices have been heard at General Synod, including homosexual people who strongly endorse traditional teaching, as well as those who would seek its revision.

The Canadian church has been consistent in its rejection of discrimination of homosexual people in Canadian society because of a belief that all people are made in the image of God.

It is well publicised that the Diocese of New Westminster authorised a service of blessing for same sex couples, but this is not the policy of the Church. The Anglican Church of Canada is divided over the issues of the blessing of same sex relationships and of the ordination of clergy in same sex relationships. It remains the official policy of the church not to accept the blessing of homosexual unions and individual dioceses do not have national sanction to authorise such blessings in their dioceses. However, the

General Synod of 2004 requested that the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee “prepare resources for the church to use in addressing issues relating to human sexuality, including the blessing of same sex unions and the changing definition of marriage in society.”

In response to this request there is a useful resource guide for *Discussions on Human Sexuality* on the official website of the Anglican Church of Canada which is intended to help churches engage in listening processes. The guide includes models of dialogues in dioceses such as Toronto and Nova Scotia and this is an indication of the extent of listening which has gone on. These resources are well presented. In addition the site offers a variety of good resources with the contents of each of them explained in a helpful format with bullet points describing the contents.

There is an awareness that listening processes take their own forms within aboriginal communities and the church is actively seeking to include aboriginal perspectives in the discernment process.

The conclusion of the 1997 Statement of the Anglican Bishops of Canada remains true for the church:

Our discussions over the past few years have taught us much. We do not have a common mind on all things. We see in part and we know in part. Where we disagree we need to continue to read the Scriptures together and to engage in dialogue, that we might listen for what the Spirit is saying to the Church today.

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Reports from the Provinces - The Church of the Province of Central Africa.

The Church of the Province of Central Africa is beginning to consider how it might enter into a listening process, both to the experience of homosexual people and to the experience of Anglican Churches around the world. The Province believes that this is not something to be rushed into and needs careful consideration.

Up to this point the Province has not been involved in any consideration of homosexuality and has therefore not issued any statement from the Provincial Synod or House of Bishops.

In the cultures of Central Africa homosexuality is not something talked about. It is known in the prisons and cases are reported to those in authority. It is also known in the community, but it is often not acknowledged or named and when it is named, it is named negatively.

The communities of Central Africa take time to consider issues and any listening process should not be hurried into and should reflect the customs of listening which lead to consensus rather than quick declarations which could lead to divisions.

There is an awareness that in order to comprehend the thoughts of partners across the Communion there should be a careful consideration of human sexuality. However, it is understood that this will not be easy and it will take time.

The church has taken a positive role in enabling a good response to the tragedy of AIDS/HIV. It has worked hard to end the stigmatisation of those suffering from the virus.

The Archbishop has offered his own reflections. He comments that the response from Africa to the liberals calling for full acceptance of gay and lesbian weddings and the presence of homosexuals in every part of the church has been loud.

He says:

“While we accept being called ‘LOUD voices from Africa’ because we maintain a stand that is different from those that assume have a still and angelic voice on the issue of homosexuality, we totally agree that the listening process is vital not because we want to compromise our position rather hoping that we will reach a point to understand one another for the sake of witnessing a redemptive wrought in the Anglican Communion.”

He continues:

“I strongly believe that gays and lesbians are God’s people so that they deserve as much love and respect as do heterosexuals, and that means listening and

loving before judgement; gay bashing in any word or deed is clearly wrong for anyone who wishes to identify with Jesus. However, one remarkable thing I would like to share is that God and His Son Jesus Christ do not tolerate sin.”

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Reports from the Provinces - Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America.

The Province of Central America is made up of Anglican Churches in five countries. Each one speaks the same language and are in a small region, but the countries have different traditions, customs, politics and secular governments. This is reflected in the churches of those countries. This means that the understandings of sexuality and the processes of listening have been different in each country.

Some of the governments of the region, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, oppose offering freedoms to gay and lesbian people. On the other hand, the media has been influenced by gay and lesbian people and is more liberal. There are significant gay organisations, particularly in El Salvador.

The Churches of the Province are seeking to listen better to one another's perspectives and mission contexts. There is a great deal of experience of ministering to the excluded in the society and offers the Good News of God's love for all people. The Bishops will seek to listen to one another and enable their churches to listen to the experience of homosexual people.

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Reports from the Provinces - The Church of England.

The Church of England has played an important role in the development of the discussion of human sexuality in English society and in the Anglican Communion. In the 1950s the Church of England, while being clear that homosexual acts were not morally right, led the call for the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts. In England all male homosexual acts were a criminal offence until 1967 (there was no mention in law of female homosexuality).

The stance of the Church is summed up in *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*:

“The combination of beliefs that we find in the case of Archbishop Ramsey – a belief that homosexual activity between consenting adults should not result in criminal prosecution combined with a belief that the Church could not rightly bless homosexual relationships – remains the official position of the Church of England.”

In the context of some calls for a loosening of traditional teaching, the 1987 Synod passed a strong motion which affirmed that the only proper context for sexual activity was within a permanent marriage relationship. All Christians were called to be “exemplary in all spheres of morality” and it was stressed that “holiness of life is particularly required of Christian leaders.”

This motion was followed in 1991 by the publication of *Issues in Human Sexuality* – a statement by the House of Bishops, which offered a pastoral application of the 1987 Synod motion. It endorsed the belief that heterosexual marriage is the only proper context for human sexual activity. However, while it was made clear that due to the nature of their calling clergy should not enter into sexually active homosexual relationships, in section 5.6 it also argued for respect to be shown to those lay people who in good conscience believe God is calling them into “a loving and faithful homophile relationship” and that they should find “friendship and understanding.” The section closes thus: “Indeed, if this is not done, any professions on the part of the Church that it is committed to openness and learning about the homophile situation can be no more than empty words.” There is in these words, a clear call to engage with a listening process.

At the 1997 Synod *Issues* was commended for discussion with an acknowledgement that it was “not the last word on the subject.” The publication in 2003 of the substantial report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, which has been widely read and studied around the Anglican Communion, was produced to assist in the process of study and reflection. It neither changed nor sought to change the policy of the Church of England but rather to map out how arguments had developed. It looked at how a debate could be handled in a way that was both theologically rigorous and pastorally sensitive.

In the context of the 2005 legalisation of civil partnerships for same sex couples, the House of Bishops reaffirmed the Church’s traditional teaching on marriage and sexual

relationships. As the new partnerships were not predicated on the intention to engage in a sexual relationship, the House did not preclude clergy from contracting such a partnership provided that they were prepared to give assurances to their bishop as to the nature of the relationship. The House ruled out associated services of blessing for same sex couples. The General Synod of 2007 acknowledged the diversity of views within the Church of England on whether Parliament might better have addressed the injustices affecting persons of the same sex in other ways and noted the intention of the House of Bishops to keep their Pastoral Statement under review.

In the last few years there has been a move from debate about sexuality to processes of listening to people and their experiences. These have happened in dioceses, deaneries and parishes. There has often been little publicity around such encounters as attempts are made to create safe places for all Christians to be heard.

Dioceses have reported a huge variety of approaches and responses. Some dioceses are aware that they need to do more. Others are pleased with how they have moved on the subject. One diocese has developed a listening process with their companion link diocese in Nigeria and has built on this experience.

The Church of England is aware of its unique place within the Anglican Communion, with one of the primates, the Archbishop of Canterbury, being also the Focus of Communion. In this context the General Synod of 2007 commended efforts to ensure that discussion of human sexuality did not lead to disunity in the Church of England or in the Anglican Communion. It recognised that nothing should be done that could be perceived as qualifying the Church of England's commitment to the Lambeth resolutions of 1978, 1988 and 1998 and the opportunities they offered to engage in an open, full and Godly dialogue about human sexuality. The Synod also affirmed that "homosexual orientation in itself is no bar to faithful Christian life or to full participation in lay and ordained ministry in the Church" and acknowledged "the importance of lesbian and gay members of the Church of England participating in the listening process as full members of the Church."

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Reports from the Provinces - Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Hong Kong Anglican Church).

Hong Kong is continuing to follow its successful path within the nation of China, but with a different political, economic and judicial system to the rest of the nation. The church has to give a lot of time to working out its relationship with the Hong Kong SAR government, especially over schools.

The issue of homosexuality in this context is not a pressing one among others. Chinese culture finds it hard to talk about and there is little enthusiasm for open discussion of such a difficult issue.

While the existence of homosexuality has been acknowledged for centuries, Hong Kong has been influenced by Western Culture. Homosexuality was decriminalised about twenty years ago. The age of consent is 21 (it is 18 for heterosexuals). There are calls for no discrimination from human rights groups and there are gay pride activities in Hong Kong.

Gay and lesbian people are welcome in the church. Sexuality is not talked about even in private conversations and so no labels are given or judgements made. Gay and lesbian people are offered pastoral care as would be to any person.

Care for the family is a serious concern to the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui. The church is involved in pre-marriage camps to educate couples and by supporting marriage and family life. The existence of gay couples is not seen as a threat to married life.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Province of the Indian Ocean.

The new Primate for the Indian Ocean (appointed 2006) is concerned to offer pastoral care to all people and to “listen to the experience of homosexual people” within the context of Lambeth Resolution I.10. Plans are in place to begin the process.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Church of Ireland.

The House of Bishops of the Church of Ireland issued a Pastoral Letter in September 2003 which set out the need for and the boundaries of Listening Processes within the Church.

It noted that the sexualisation of almost every area of life had damaged the potential for deep and lasting enrichment that comes from close personal friendships which do not have sexual expression.

The cultural attitudes to homosexuality now range from complete acceptance through indifference to complete rejection. The Christian tradition in Ireland has been associated with harsh condemnation.

"At its worst this has led to the demonising, demeaning and oppression of those who, by inclination or in practice, have found themselves attracted to others of the same sex. "

"As we proclaim that God has created all that is and Jesus Christ has stepped fully into and redeemed all of our broken world, we cannot side-step issues of human sexuality and homosexuality in particular. The bishops also recognised the huge contribution of gay and lesbian clergy and lay people to the life of the church."

The bishops recognise the complexity of the issues and of the range of view points they hold and call for biblical reflection, mature thinking and patient listening on behalf of the Church as a whole. In order to do this the bishops affirmed the centrality and authority of the Scriptures, but recognise that interpretation of Scripture is itself an area of divergence among Christians. The study of Scripture should involve insights from Christian tradition and human reason. The bishops reminded the Church that no one should be solely or even primarily understood in terms of his or her sexuality and they encouraged an attitude of respect for one another.

The bishops identified four main viewpoints:

- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with a view that rejects homosexual practice of any kind, and that marriage between a man and a woman in life-long union remains the only appropriate place for sexual relations. This must remain the standard for Christian behaviour.
- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with a more sympathetic attitude to homosexuality than has been traditional, but this would not at present permit any radical change in the Church's existing stance on the question.
- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with the view that a permanent and committed same-gender relationship which, through its internal mutuality and support brings generosity, creativity and love into the lives of those around, cannot be dismissed by the Church as intrinsically disordered.

- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with the proposition that, in the light of a developing understanding of the nature of humanity and sexuality, the time has arrived for a change in the Church's traditional position on affirming same-gender relationships.

The bishops believed that it was more important to find a temporary accommodation of a disagreement between parties pending a permanent settlement than to assert abstract decrees.

It was recognised these issues engender fears and insecurities and, therefore, discussion "is most effectively undertaken in a safe space, where people are able to let go of their own agendas without betraying their deeply held convictions, where they are prepared to listen sensitively to one another, and where attitudes of condemnation are avoided."

There was felt to be a need to spend time on how to listen and learning to live peacefully with people with very different viewpoints.

Many of the bishops have taken up these themes in Presidential Addresses to their dioceses.

Since 2003 the Church of Ireland has quietly moved forwards with study groups in the North and the South of the Province and have now appointed a study group whose work continues.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - Nippon Sei Ko Kai (The Anglican Communion in Japan).

The culture of Japan regards sexuality as a subject not to be talked about. Homosexuality was taboo and not approved of in any way and homosexual people were discriminated in the work place, but this has changed. While there is some discrimination, the society is more accepting. Same sex unions are not recognised by the law.

Despite this more people are coming out as gay and lesbian in the community.

The House of Bishops has informally discussed their attitude to homosexual people. When approached by lesbian and gay people, they do not refuse baptism. They are accepting of gay and lesbian people. This has come to be known in some parts of the lesbian and gay community.

The culture does not allow for talking about sexuality and so there is little awareness in the congregations of the presence or otherwise of lesbian or gay people and no need, or way of talking about that. In this context it is hard for listening to happen but the Church is continuing to be accepting and to value all people.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

The diverse contexts of the four dioceses require sensitivity in the discussion of issues of human sexuality.

There is agreement that the listening process needs to be widened beyond matters of human sexuality, to include concerns for biblical exegesis and doctrine.

The Provincial Clergy Conference and the Provincial Synod met in February 2007 and committed itself to an ongoing Listening Process.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church of Kenya.

The Anglican Church of Kenya is aware of lesbian and gay people in the nation. They were present prior to the coming of the Church and are still present today. They are not accepted in traditional African culture and the Church does not approve of homosexual practice. Male homosexuality is illegal in Kenya.

The Anglican Church of Kenya is wholly bound to the 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10 which recognises the biblical marriage between a man and a woman in a life long union.

The Anglican Church of Kenya does not condemn those who are practising lesbianism and homosexuality, however there is a desire to give pastoral care. The Church desires to support them to do the right thing in the eyes of God and Society.

The Anglican Church of Kenya opposes the full inclusion of gays and lesbians in the leadership of the Church. It cannot be in fellowship or partnership with churches who ordain practising homosexuals to the diaconate or to the priesthood or that consecrates them as bishops.

The Anglican Church of Kenya takes its stand on the Scriptures and from a desire to obey God.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church of Korea.

Traditionally Confucianism formed the basis of the cultural perspective of Korea. Within this culture it was impossible to talk of things which were hidden. There is a belief that what happens in private is not the concern of anyone else.

In recent years modern South Korea has seen rapid secularisation and this has included moves for human rights. However, homophobia is strong in the nation and there is discrimination against homosexual people in the work place and in general life. This has been seen in the story of a high profile actor who recently declared himself gay and has not been offered acting work since.

Modern secularisation has brought other issues. The breakdown of the family is a concern for the Church. The divorce rate is the second highest in the world and the Church is attempting to counter this with good teaching for couples coming for marriage. This is the priority issue on sexuality for the Church.

The Church began its listening process in 1998 when the bishops invited lesbian and gay groups to talk about the problems they had in society and how the Church could assist.

The membership of the Church is not of one mind on the issue of homosexuality. Some share the attitudes of the nation, others are open to the inclusion of gay and lesbian people and many are not interested and do not want to talk about the issues.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - Church of the Province of Melanesia.

Generally speaking, heterosexual marriage and extended family life are the norm for Melanesia. There are, of course, some homosexual relationships and homosexual persons but, somehow, these tend to get absorbed into family and community life without much comment. It is not generally thought seemly to discuss sex publicly.

However, after the 1998 Lambeth Conference, the Church of Melanesia Council of Bishops authorised one of their number, Terry Brown the Bishop of Malaita - who had written an earlier study paper on the same issue prior to 1998 Lambeth Conference - to write a study paper on the issue. It was entitled "Further Reflections on Homosexuality, Christian Faith and the Church". The paper looked at homosexuality in terms of interpretation of Scripture, Christian doctrine, causes and significance of homosexuality, cultural and cross-cultural issues, and male friendship in Melanesia. In these areas, he also reflected on his experience as "someone with a primarily homosexual orientation".

There was some discussion of the paper in the Council of Bishops but no common agreement on the issue. It was then passed on the Church of Melanesia Commission on Liturgy, Worship and Doctrine for further discussion and recommendations. However, because of other pressing programmes, not much more actually happened.

Because of international publicity on the issue, the following motion was moved at the General Synod of the Church of Melanesia in 2005:

"That this General Synod expresses its opposition to sexual co-habitation by members of the same gender and same-sex marriages."

There was extensive and lively debate, and eventually it was decided that not enough research and listening had been done to pass the motion at that time. The mover and seconder agreed to an alternative wording:

"That this General Synod reaffirms its support for the Church's traditional teaching on marriage but requests the Executive Council to sponsor a workshop or series of workshops on the many issues involved in the general question of homosexuality."

This motion was agreed to without opposition.

In 2006 there was discussion of this workshop in the Commission on Liturgy, Worship and Doctrine but because of episcopal consecrations, other programmes and financial constraints, it was not possible to plan it for 2007. However, a recent meeting of the Commission has authorised the Co-ordinator for Liturgy and Doctrine to plan such a consultation for early 2008, to enable the Church of Melanesia to discuss the issue before the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

The Church of Melanesia hopes it will be able to create safe space so members of the Church or others will be willing to identify themselves as gay or lesbian, but if that fails they are intending to use printed stories from *Other Voices, Other Worlds: the Global Church Speaks out on Homosexuality* to facilitate the Listening Process. This is a book Bishop Terry Brown published which includes gay and lesbian voices from around the Anglican Communion. The book has had some circulation in the Church of Melanesia.

To enable listening there is an urgent need to clarify the legal status of homosexuality in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It is hoped that the Church of Melanesia's two vice chancellors will be helpful in this area. It is expected that all the Bishops and a broad range of clergy and laity will take part in the 2008 consultation.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico.

The Church was founded 150 years ago as a reform movement in the dominant Roman Catholic Church which was welcomed into the Anglican Communion. From the beginning it was associated with liberal politics within a society which was often repressive. The Church continues in the tradition of its fathers and offers the love of God to all, reaching out to those who have been rejected in the society and by the dominant Church.

Until the late 1960s and early 1970s gay and lesbian people were repressed in the society and in the Church. There is still some repression, but there is also a 'live and let live' attitude within the society.

The Church has not had, nor felt the need for, a formal listening process. It is open to all people, including lesbian and gay Christians who are accepted and not labelled within the congregations of the Church. The ministry of lesbian and gay clergy is valued in the Church.

The bishops feel that this is not the right time to consider the blessing of same sex unions and so they have not brought the issue to General Synod.

An ecumenical gay and lesbian group meets regularly at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Mexico City.

The Province of Mexico sees itself as an open, welcoming and inclusive Church which takes its Baptismal Covenant seriously. The Church ministers to gay and lesbian people unconditionally as a natural part of its life and witness.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - Church of the Province of Myanmar.

The Province of Myanmar stresses the context in which it exists. It is a minority church within a primarily Buddhist country. While the communities within which the church exists remain conservative in belief and practice, the effect of the modern media has been felt. Films, magazines, television and the internet have given an impression of a sex-saturated society.

The church passed a report at the meeting of the Province in November 2005 which stated clearly the current situation.

The church stresses the importance of relationships. Teaching on the primacy of relationship will assist those who are in need of education. Because of the reluctance to talk about sex and sexuality in the society there is an increase in AIDS and teenage sex.

The report states: 'God's purpose in creating different sexes is to have intimate relationship between the two people. So there is a deeper meaning on sexuality and that is what we need to interpret at this very present time.'

In response the Mothers' Union is focusing on the Christian marriage and family and the Youth Department is launching a program to teach sex education from a biblical and ethical point of view.

Homosexuality is known within the society but it is looked down upon. Some men dress as women and some women dress as men and they have roles in acting and entertainment.

The communities of the church are generally conservative.

However, within resolution 1.10 of the Lambeth Conference, the Province of Myanmar is ready to listen to the experience of homosexual persons.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion).

The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is a bible-based and spiritually dynamic Church that seeks to epitomise the genuine love of Christ. The Church's attitude to homosexuality is rooted in biblical values and pre-supposed by a high view of Scripture.

The Primate of all Nigeria has said "Our argument is that, if homosexuals see themselves as deviants who have gone astray, the Christian spirit would plead for patience and prayers to make room for their repentance. When scripture says something is wrong and some people say that it is right, such people make God a liar. We argue that it is a blatant lie against Almighty God that homosexuality is their God-given urge and inclination. For us, it is better seen as an acquired aberration."

The Church of Nigeria sees its view as based upon the witness of Scripture. The House of Bishops issued a detailed and clearly argued statement. In it there are discussed four texts from the Old Testament which speak specifically of homosexual acts. These are Genesis 19:5, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 18:27 and Judges 19:22. All these texts show how homosexuality is regarded as an abominable deed. The statement concludes: "Thus it is clear from the passages considered that the Old Testament regards homosexuality as an atrocious and unnatural act. The Mosaic Law is against it and stipulates capital punishment for the offender. It is classified among the most offensive crimes like idolatry involving the sacrifice of children, having intercourse with animals, or marrying a woman and her mother."

The report continues by considering the New Testament. From Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9,10, and 1 Timothy 1:9,10 and concludes:

- First, we find a strong denunciation of homosexual acts as being contrary to nature and against God's revealed will for mankind.
- Next, homosexuality is found in the catalogue of practices regarded as unrighteous and therefore a disqualification for inheritance of the kingdom of God. Although the practice was known in the Semitic world and acknowledged as wide spread in the Hellenistic world, it is portrayed as a classical indication of the final stage of perversion or depravity on which divine wrath rests, with little or no hope of repentance.
- Thirdly, although homosexuality is not singled out as the only grievous sin that attracts God's judgment, whether in the Old or New Testament, homosexual acts are seen appropriately as pagan acts unworthy of a person who has a true knowledge of God, and both fears and worships Him.
- Finally, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New do we have any record, or even mention, trace or hint concerning marriage bond between same sex partners. There were cases of attempted acts of homosexuality and reference to homosexual customs, seen as aberrations and perversions. Though such acts or customs were known among nations outside Israel and were reported as common among former inhabitants of the land of Canaan, there is no hint that

those engaged in the acts ever finally settled down to a lasting union with their same sex partners.

In Nigerian traditional culture homosexuality is seen as taboo. Homosexuals are thought of as threatening the divinely ordained order of the community. The Western idea of human rights is subservient to the service of the common good. The so called 'right' to homosexual orientation threatens the order of society because the continuation of the race is threatened by gay practice. Children are treasured as fruits of marriage and any union, as a gay union, that prevents the propagation of the community's growth is a personal shame to be openly censured.

The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has therefore strongly opposed the developments in the Episcopal Church (USA), the Church of Canada and the Church of England. The Primate has called for the Church of England to be disciplined within the Anglican Communion for its response to the Civil Partnership Act.

In Nigeria the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2006 is passing through the legislature. The House of Bishops has supported it because we understand that it is designed to strengthen traditional marriage and family life and to prevent wholesale importation of currently damaging Western values. It bans same sex unions, all homosexual acts and the formation of any gay groups. The Standing Committee of the Church of Nigeria has twice commended the act in their Message to the Nation.

A statement of the House of Bishops makes it clear that The Church of Nigeria is committed to the pastoral care of homosexual people. It says: "While recognising the sinfulness, from the biblical perspective, of homosexuality, we must continue to keep open the door of restoration for homosexuals through repentance on the one hand, and sensitive pastoral care, on the other." The Church is clear that all people are sinners and need to repent. What it will not do is bless sinful lifestyles.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - Church of the Province of Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea is an independent state where traditions are strong. There are many languages spoken leading to a diversity of indigenous cultures. All communities are centred on family ties and emphasis is placed on caring for families.

However, the influence of modernity has had a significant effect on life in Papua New Guinea.

The pressing issue for the nation and the province is violence towards women. This is particularly acute in the urban centres where traditional values are breaking down and because of the increasing use of alcohol and recreational drugs. The Church is aware that the status of women needs to be uplifted and that the Church needs to work ecumenically, with non-government organisations and the government. The Anglican Church represents 3.2% of the population.

The Province of Papua New Guinea has a unique covenant with the Roman Catholic Church with whom it issued in 2006 a joint statement on family life.

The Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea is an influential body, even if it is a small minority church, and is the leading agency for the support of those with HIV/AIDS. Anglicare Stop AIDS offers medical support, counselling, and education as well as the distribution of condoms. The program is assisted in the Anglican Health Service.

In traditional society homosexuality is seen as being wrong and homosexual people might be looked down upon, barred and stigmatised.

The strong sense of community has allowed for single men to be included in the community and there are a small minority of men who never marry. Such people are greatly valued in the community as those who will be ready to assist with families in tasks such as planting and harvesting. They are incorporated into the life of the community.

The Anglican Church has not found a culturally sensitive way in which to talk of homosexuality in the Province. However, the strong family ties and a commitment to communities have enabled good pastoral responses in some situations.

The Province of Papua New Guinea endorses Resolution 1.10 of the Lambeth Conference including the call to listen to the experience of homosexual persons.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Episcopal Church in the Philippines.

Homosexuality is not seen as an issue in the Episcopal Church of the Philippines. There has been no discussion of the issue at provincial or diocesan level.

The gay community is becoming more visible in the society and they are not discriminated against in the society or in the Church. They are understood to be different in their orientation. There are same sex couples living together, but they are not seeking either civil unions or church blessings and they are aware that marriage in the Philippines is between a man and a woman.

The only discrimination has come from the Roman Catholic Church which has seen the presence of gays in the Priesthood and among the seminarians as a problem and have sought to ban gays.

The Episcopal Church in the Philippines has gay priests. They are expected to live to the standards of the Church and society in sex and marriage.

The Church has phased out its own program on AIDS/HIV and is now co-operating with the AIDS/HIV program of the National Council of Churches.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Scottish Episcopal Church.

A Study Guide entitled *Human Sexuality* was published by the Scottish Episcopal Church in December 2001. It is a careful and broad guide covering a range of areas and opinions. The guide has short, readable presentations on morality and ethics, the authority of Scripture and the interpretation of Scripture as well as science, human relationships and sexual relationships. It is a very useful guide.

The General Synod received reports back from those who had used the guide. The College of Bishops set out some significant markers for the listening process. They were convinced that it could only happen within strong bonds of trust and respect and that it was important to build those when discussing areas of disagreement. It was recognised that not everyone understands why the issues are discussed inside and outside the Church. The bishops felt that the issues of sexuality were of second order and should be handled within the life of the Communion and should not fracture it. They believe it was the place of the church to set an example to the world. During the time of listening no proposals to change Canons or Liturgy were proposed.

Reflecting on the Windsor Report the College of Bishops welcomed the diversity of opinion in the Church. They said:

“The Scottish Episcopal Church has never regarded the fact that someone was in a close relationship with a member of the same sex as in itself constituting a bar to the exercise of an ordained ministry.”

They continued by saying that they

“sought to be welcoming and open to persons of homosexual orientation in our congregations, and to listen to their experiences. This has on occasion led to clergy to respond to requests to give a blessing to persons who were struggling with elements in their relationship, and who asked for such prayer.”

They noted that the Windsor Report did not censure informal pastoral responses and was concerned with the authorisation of official liturgies.

The bishops agreed “that the whole area of debate in this matter is of such a fluidity... that it would be premature to move formally to authorise such a liturgy.”

They concluded:

“We are conscious that as a Church we are much indebted in our life both to a significant presence of persons of homosexual (lesbian and gay) orientation, and also to those whose theology and stance would be critical of attitudes to sexuality other than abstinence outside marriage. We rejoice in both.”

As they moved on the debate the bishops called for a consideration of the interpretation and authority of Scripture, and examination of the tradition of faith, the experience of the presence and ministry of people of homosexual orientation and the way understandings of gender and sexuality are developing in the community. "In all this," they conclude "we must seek to be open to learning the truth of God from one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

The official process of listening began with a resolution of the Provincial Synod of 1989. Resolution 39 of the Synod noted the statements of Lambeth 1978 and 1988 which called for study and reflection of Scripture and biological, psychological and sociological studies of human sexuality and secondly for respect for the human rights and pastoral care of those of homosexual orientation. The resolution passed asked the Synod of Bishops to “address this issue and take whatever action they deem necessary in order to enable this Province to deal caringly with the rights, needs, and special concerns of those with this sexual orientation.”

This resolution was further developed in 2002. It acknowledged and gave thanks to God for the role played by gay and lesbian members and encouraged the welcoming and affirmation of all members, regardless of sexual orientation, in all churches of the CPSA. In addition dioceses were asked to designate a group to “resolve practical pastoral issues” and each diocese was asked to pass on their decisions to the Provincial Executive Officer in order to achieve a provincial consensus on policy. Importantly the resolution requested that “gay or lesbian members of the CPSA participate in the proceedings of such Diocesan bodies or task groups.”

Documents have been made available which respect a variety of views, but which give an openness to change as a response to the love of God in Jesus Christ. So, for example, the Provincial Standing Committee of 2003 passed a resolution which states “We believe that, as we seek further understanding, we need to listen to people of all orientations to discover the heart and mind of Jesus in this and all things.”

The need to place the listening process in the context of the wider Church has also been clear. Consultations have been made ecumenically within South Africa and an all-Africa consultation was proposed.

The listening process is not over. At the Provincial Synod of July of last year time was given to listen to the voices of a gay and a lesbian person and the parents of gay/lesbian young adults.

It is clear that the Anglican Church of Southern Africa does not feel Lambeth Resolution 1.10 is the last word on the Anglican understanding of homosexuality and hopes for further development. However, The Anglican Church of Southern African is living within the boundaries of the resolution. This is exemplified in the response to the secular legalisation of same sex marriages in South Africa, where the church has distanced itself. Such “marriages” will not occur in Anglican churches.

Key features of a successful and continuing listening process emerge. The listening process is guided by Synod, is not set in its outcomes, involves gay and lesbian people, allows for a diversity of response, is mindful of the crucial need to keep the conversation going, and sees itself within a wider context. The personal backing of the Primate and his leading by example in listening, has also been important.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Province of the Southern Cone.

The Province of the Southern Cone believes that both homosexual and heterosexual persons must be extended the best of pastoral care and mercy.

The Province is small with few resources and does not have the time to do all things and has needed to set its own priorities and agendas rather than ones that seem to have been manufactured for them.

The Province has “heard the cries of members of the Communion who have been pastorally abused by those who foist a sexual political agenda upon them.”

The Province formulated a position at the request of the Theological Commission in 2001 but this was not addressed at following ACC meetings. The Province feels the response was deliberately side stepped.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Episcopal Church of the Sudan.

The Country of Sudan has just come out of war and the Episcopal Church of the Sudan has more acute issues to deal with than Human Sexuality. These include resettlement of the people into their original villages and towns, trauma healing and building trust among each other.

However, at the 2006 Provincial Synod the issue of Human Sexuality was discussed. Along with reregistering their strong opposition to the innovations in The Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada, they said:

“We reject homosexual practice as contrary to biblical teaching and can accept no place for it within ECS. We believe that human sexuality is God’s gift to human beings which is rightly ordered only when expressed within the life-long commitment of marriage between one man and one woman. We require all those in the ministry of the Church to live according to this standard and cannot accept church leaders whose practice is contrary to this.”

The conclusion of the same resolution of the Provincial Synod committed the Episcopal Church of the Sudan to the process of mutual listening:

“Valuing our belonging to the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church and out of love for our brothers and sisters in these churches, we will continue to call for repentance while listening to all voices within the Anglican Communion”

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Church of Uganda.

The Church of Uganda upholds resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference in saying that "Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture". In 2005 the Church commissioned a group of theologians, male and female, ordained and lay, to produce a Position Paper on issues relating to homosexuality and the communion for ACC - 13. The final section contains these paragraphs:

"We believe that God is calling the Church of Uganda to seek continual transformation from the Word of God written, in preaching repentance and faith in Christ and develop ministries of pastoral care that don't ostracize, shun, or reject those tempted by homosexual desire. We acknowledge that God is calling us to come alongside those who give into the temptation of homosexual desire and show them the power of the Word of God to bring joy, peace, and satisfaction to their life through repentance and obedience to God's Word."

The Church has felt it imperative to respond to the present crisis which has seen the fabric of the Communion torn.

The Position Paper sets out a Biblical understanding of human sexuality. It shows how God's design for sexual relationships, as seen in Genesis, is male female and is the only one to be extolled as normative. However, the fall caused the distortion of desire.

"Concerning homosexual behaviour and relationships in particular, from a plain reading of Scripture, from a careful reading of Scripture and from a critical reading of Scripture, it has no place in God's design of creation, the continuation of the human race through procreation, or His plan of redemption."

In Christ people and their sexual desires are redeemed and restored to God's original intent and marriage itself can be a divine agent of sanctification.

The Position Paper makes it clear that "Contemporary Ugandan society has been transformed through Scripture's teaching." The Paper sets out that from the coming of missionaries and the formation of the Revival, obedience to the Holy Scriptures has marked the Church of Uganda and lead it in truth. It has challenged culture with wonderful results. It has ended the traditions of revenge and enslavement to evil spirits. It has widened the circle of love beyond the immediate family and thus broken strife and mutual exploitation this caused. Inter-ethnic marriage has produced a united society. It has freed women from the bonds of male oppression and challenged polygamy and divorce at will and valued the biblical institution of marriage. It has satisfied the quest for a living God and transformed society especially in the political sphere. It is this obedience to the Holy Scriptures which has enabled the church to counter HIV/AIDS.

The Church of Uganda has a long history of valuing the Ministry of women and has ordained women from the 1980's and is insulted by the connection made by some between the freedom of women and homosexuality.

In Ugandan society there has been an aggressive upturn in homosexual propaganda on the radio and a huge rise in the availability of pornography challenging both biblical and traditional understandings of the glory of human sexuality within marriage. The Church is developing family life networks to counter false teaching and to strengthen young people to remain chaste prior to marriage and faithful in marriage.

The Church has encouraged the growth in numbers of well trained (to masters level) Christian counsellors who live out the Church's mission to offer love for all, including those who are homosexual. The counsellors affirm their commitment to biblical principles.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Episcopal Church (USA).

The process of listening to the voices of gay and lesbian people began for The Episcopal Church (TEC) in the 1960s. The 1976 General Convention (GC) passed a resolution which said that "Homosexual persons are children of God, who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church", valued their contribution to the Church and called for serious study and dialogue in the dioceses and for protection of homosexual persons under the law.

A year later the House of Bishops accepted a report of its Commission on Theology which stated "The Church is right to confine its nuptial blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage. Homosexual unions witness to incompleteness." And further "In the case of an advocating and/or practising homosexual" ordination is inadmissible. Such an ordination, it was argued, would involve the church denying its norms of theology and ethics and the sanctioning of a lifestyle "not only as acceptable but worthy of emulation".

This stand was endorsed at the 1979 GC where orientation was specifically mentioned as not being a bar to ordination, but practice was. However 20 of the 175 bishops identified a discontinuity between the teaching of the Church and the experience of members of the Church, both ordained and lay. A small minority of bishops spoke of the experience of seeing in the relationships of partnered gay and lesbian people a "redeeming quality which in its way and according to its mode is no less a sign to the world of God's love than is the more usual sign of Christian marriage." Their examination of Scripture gave them "no certain basis for a total or absolute condemnation of either homosexual persons or homosexual activities." Such a stand made debate inevitable.

The 1985 GC reinforced the decisions of 1979 and called for a search for effective ways to foster an understanding of homosexual persons. The Commission on Health and Human Affairs in its report to the 1988 GC urged the Church "to create a context in which it could listen to homosexual persons tell their stories and in which they would feel comfortable in doing so". Many Christians quoted "hate the sin and love the sinner", but homosexual Christians reported feelings of being hated rather than loved by their fellow Episcopalians. 52 bishops signed a copy of the 1987 statement of the Church of England General Synod which endorsed marriage as the only place for sexual intercourse, considered homosexual acts as falling short of the ideal to be met by "a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion" and which made it clear that practising homosexuals should not be in Christian leadership.

When the Commission looked at the results of the Listening Process it noted that only 28 of the 99 dioceses had submitted reports. These had reported no strong consensus. The 1991 GC called for a study document to be prepared. *Continuing the Dialogue* was, after some objections particularly from bishops in Province VII (Southwest), recommended by the 1995 GS for use in the dioceses. The methodology of listening was based upon an initial sharing of common ground of communion in faith and the

Baptismal Covenant. It presents a high value for Scripture and carefully examines the significant passages of the Bible. It considers the traditional understandings of marriage and moves on to consider the discontinuities presented by changes in society. It condemns all forms of sexualised violence.

In order to enable Communion-wide listening copies of *Continuing the Dialogue* were sent to every Province of the Anglican Communion. The Primates sent a note of encouragement for ongoing discussion. The 1997 GC called for an end to mandated dialogue while rejecting the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Statement.

The 2000 GC, following on from Lambeth 1998, regretted the failure of provinces to communicate with TEC, and called for safe spaces to enable gay and lesbian people to be listened to around the world. The Convention passed a resolution which, while recognising that there was no consensus in favour of accepting same sex unions, acknowledged that there were members of TEC in such relationships. It resolved that these relationships should be characterised by "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God."

In 2000 a proposal to ask for the preparation of blessing services for same sex unions was dropped." This subject was returned to in 2003 and, while the Theology Committee felt that there were no theological grounds for refusing such blessings, "its recommendations remained on the side of tradition, seeking to avoid confrontation at home and abroad". TEC has no official service of blessings for same sex unions and no such services are in preparation.

The Consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson in 2003 following his election in New Hampshire and the confirmation of the election at 2003 GC, created a feeling in the Communion that the matter of the legitimacy of gay and lesbian partnerships had been settled. The General Convention in 2003 also passed a resolution which recognised that same sex blessings were taking place around the church and acknowledged that such liturgical experimentation was "within the bounds of our common life." The resolution did not authorise any liturgy for such blessing.

The Windsor Report called for TEC to explain from Scripture, tradition and reason how a person living in a same gender union could lead a flock of Christ. TEC responded with the publication of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*.

To Set Our Hope on Christ draws an analogy between Peter in Acts 10 discovering the Holy Spirit in the lives of gentiles and the discovery of some of TEC's members of the holiness and Spirit filled lives of those living in exclusive, life-long, unions of fidelity and care. It shows how theology has always developed and new interpretations of biblical texts have replaced older ones, especially in relationship to attitudes to the First Nation/native American peoples, racism (connected to slavery) and the prohibition of women from leadership. In each case Bible passages have been used in the past to justify actions and attitudes which have been destructive. The response to listening has not been to reject the Bible, but to understand it in a deeper manner. *To Set Our*

Hope on Christ affirms the biblical understanding of sin rooted in idolatry, but does so in the context of the new understanding of what homosexuality is.

The Listening Process is not closed and finished in TEC. There continues to be a spectrum of opinions within the church. Listening has no preconceived outcome other than to hear the voice of God in the present context. It is built on the common ground of commitment to God's mission and our baptismal covenant. It requires safe ground for people to express themselves in their vulnerability in order for the discontinuity between what we proclaim and how we are heard and experienced to be clear. It requires serious engagement with the Bible.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Church in Wales.

The Bishops' Statement on Homosexuality 2005, recognises a wide range of views held by members of the church on the issue of homosexuality. It accepts each of these as honest and legitimate and establishes the need for a prayerful debate characterised by "humility, generosity of spirit, reflection on Biblical witness, mature thought and careful listening."

The centrality of Scripture read in the light of reason and tradition is affirmed. The range of views held within the Church in Wales is set out in five bullet points.

- Some people, reading the Scriptures with integrity, reach the conclusion that the only proper context for sexual activity is marriage between a man and a woman in life-long union. Homosexual practice of any kind is therefore rejected.
- Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, adopt a more sympathetic understanding of homosexuality, but would not at present wish the Church to sanction homosexual practice.
- Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude that orientation and practice are to be distinguished and that the Church can welcome same sex relationships provided they are celibate.
- Others again, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude that the Church cannot dismiss as intrinsically disordered permanent and committed same-sex relationships; they believe that through their internal mutuality and support, these bring creativity, generosity and love into the lives of those within them.
- Others, reading the Scriptures with integrity, conclude, in the light of a developing understanding of the nature of humanity and sexuality, that the time has arrived for the Church to affirm committed homosexual relationships.

The statement concludes with a commitment "to listening to people whose sexual orientation may be different from our own."

Up to this point there has been no formal process of listening to the experience of homosexual persons, but many informal conversations have taken place and an open study day was held last year following the production of a study guide and the discussion was frank and honest.

The study guide is an important document with a range of views expressed.

The Primate is leading the church into a positive attempt to listen while honouring one another, particularly building on his experience of such processes within the WCC. He is listening himself and is committed to encouraging informed debate.

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Church of the Province of West Africa.

The Archbishop, aware that issues of human sexuality were both significant and sensitive, asked a group of theologians to look at the issues and produce a report. The report is entitled "Sexuality".

The report points out that it is not the habit of African societies to talk openly about sexuality. Apologies are given prior to any mention of such subjects and "this makes the discussion of the subject difficult, if not next to impossible." Language is guarded and there is much work to be done in enabling West Africans to value sexuality.

The report looks at gender roles and notes a traditional valuing of men above women. It further notes that women are vital in the role of enabling the continuance of the family and the clan. In the traditional culture "gay practices are a threat to the continuance of the society." "The issue is not just 'my right and my freedom' but the security and continuance of the family and society." In this context celibacy is not encouraged. Homosexual acts are known; they are part of war and known in boarding schools, but are not considered acceptable in settled, integrated communities.

The Church of the Province of West Africa wishes the debate on homosexuality to be within the bounds of a debate between "text and context, Scripture and African identity and wavelength, Apostolic Tradition and African traditions". Care should be used not to allow any racism or colonialism to shape conversation. "By the same token, doing violence to persons of different sexual orientation, whether in word or deed, calling them animals, is not an option and avenue for Christians because the essence of religion, especially Christianity, is what is human."

The discussion of sexuality will have to include social, legal, religious (biblical) and freedom of opinion in a diverse society.

The study finishes its consideration of human sexuality with a quote from the Archbishop of Canterbury:

"it is a question agonisingly difficult for many, as to what kinds of behaviour a church that seeks to be loyal to the Bible can bless, and what kinds of behaviour it must warn against (and what are excluded) – and so it is a question about how we make decisions corporately with other Christians, looking for the mind of Christ as we share the study of the Scriptures".

The Listening Process

Reports from the Provinces - The Province of the West Indies.

Following the 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution I:10 was accepted and adopted at the Provincial Synod and each diocesan Synod. Throughout the Province Lambeth I:10 is accepted as the official teaching of the Church without exception.

An endorsement of Lambeth I:10 has been at the heart of every response from the West Indies to events within the Communion. The Province of the West Indies understands the commitment to marriage as between a man and a woman as being alongside the Church's commitment to "continue the dialogue with and pastoral care of homosexual persons."

The Province of the West Indies has always supported the process which led to, and follows on from, the Windsor Report, including commitments to listen.

Within the eight dioceses of the Province, there is a common cultural position which views homosexuality in a very negative light. The general public would be horrified at the thought of the Church endorsing homosexuality and some have challenged the distinction articulated by the Church between orientation and the participation in homosexual acts.

The Archbishop has identified that in most of the dioceses, a strong homophobic mindset is firmly in place. However, influences are changing and attempts are being made to present the case for the acceptance of homosexuality. In some territories homosexuality is illegal, while in others the law has been liberalised.

In this context it has been hard to develop a Listening Process. In Barbados the bishop has carefully prepared a serious study in two parts for his clergy which supports Lambeth I:10 but treats all with respect. The House of Bishops has now appointed a sub-committee to assist the bishops and the province in this process, and they have extended an invitation to the Bishop of New York to spend an day with them at their next meeting in June 2007. This is to assist them in devising a strategy to meaningfully engage in the Listening Process.

Secular and religious influences from North America have tended to further polarise the debate. The media campaigns of the Gay/Lesbian Movement and the Fundamentalism of North American Protestantism are seen as equally unhelpful. The Province of the West Indies, despite the media influence and impact, intends to align itself with the world-wide Communion as it seeks to uphold the truth contained in Scripture and in the tradition interpreted with reason and the discernment provided by being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The Listening Process

Mutual Listening

“The need has never been greater for real and personal communication, conducted in a Godly and transparent way.”

Archbishop Gomez

True Union in the Body

The Anglican Consultative Council called for a process of mutual listening. We recognise that responses to human sexuality have threatened to split our Communion.

The Anglican Communion is a diverse body which exists and flourishes in a huge variety of cultures. It claims to be both Catholic and Reformed. It is led by bishops, but governed by synods. It is not surprising that there are tensions which emerge and develop.

Of course there are significant differences of opinion within our Provinces as well as between them. Mutual listening is required in these contexts also.

We live in a world where internet and email have brought us together in instant communication, but we are often separated by hasty remarks. The worlds news media is always quick to report on splits and tensions.

The only way we can move forwards together is to listen to one another in love.

'You and I both know that we are right in our thinking of what the church should do regarding all the questions about homosexuality. I wonder if we have the same conviction to admit that we could be wrong. How far are we prepared to risk our understanding of the truth? How open are we to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us? Too few of us are prepared to risk. We think our goal is victory, when it must be the pursuit of truth.'

The process of mutual listening can come through the publication of reports from each of the Provinces of the Communion and through allowing significant leaders to speak to one another.

The process of mutual listening hopes to allow us to see beyond cardboard cut-out figures and meet as fellow followers of Jesus Christ.

Tradition is 'the living mind, the nerve centre of the church'^[1] and while it depends upon the how God has lived with us in the past, it is always open to new horizons. For all of us society has changed and the expression of our tradition will change even as we remain faithful to scripture. The process of mutual listening is about discovering how one another remains faithful to scripture in evolving contexts.

[Click here for an account of mutual listening](#)

[1. Virginia Report *Being Anglican in the Third Millennium* Page 244](#)

The Listening Process

Mutual Listening - Account 1

"Emerging Common Ground": a Toronto experiment by **Chris Ambidge**
originally published in *The Witness* May 1998

It was, I think, Gandhi who said, "those who shout hear only their own voice". Shouting is not, ultimately, an approach which works in trying to convince someone else of your own point of view. Too often, though, that is the approach taken by people on both sides as the vexing questions surrounding lesbians in the church are discussed.

As a gay man who is devoted to the Anglican church, I've been involved in those discussions for a long time; and, quite honestly, I don't have time for the shouting any more. I'm not convinced that repeated assertion by either side of "points where I am right and you are wrong" is getting us anywhere. That shouting is tremendously debilitating, both for the shouters and the shouted at. I consider myself blessed to be part of a dialogue in Toronto that seems to be clearing a different path through the underbrush.

I've been active with **Integrity**, lesbian Anglicans and our friends, since the 1980s. In 1994, a group called **Fidelity** was formed in Toronto. **Fidelity** felt that the church's traditional teachings around homosexuality were not being heard enough. Initially I was not pleased by their formation, selfishly wanting everything to go my own way. On mature reflection, though, I'm glad that they exist. **Fidelity** gives people who do not agree with me a locus for their feelings, where that theology and that viewpoint can be spoken.

Over the past few years, **Integrity** and **Fidelity** have come together in different ways -- ways that I believe are truly advancing the Commonwealth of God.

Terry Finlay, bishop of Toronto, called a group of people together to engage in dialogue around the still-vexing questions. Six people, three from each "side" have been talking with the bishop for nearly three years now. At our first meeting, the bishop asked us "How can we live together in the same church?" Our dialogue has continued with the hope that there is a way. Very early on, we realised that while we have obvious and significant differences, there is a great deal of material on which we agree. That shouldn't be surprising, for the rock on which the church is built is common to all of us.

We spent a lot of time working out a statement of **Emerging Common Ground**, eight points which we could all affirm. We realise that no one individual has all the answers, simply from the limitation of their point of view. This means no-one has a monopoly on truth. We agree, among other things, that scripture is not to be mined for proof-texts to hammer against others; we agree that the Holy Spirit continues to lead the church. We agree that Christian tradition is very important and must be respected, and we agree that it is important to re-examine tradition occasionally, particularly when there is real human pain and anguish. These last two are not new, of course; but they are not often seen in the same document.

The statement was presented to the diocese as a whole at our synod last autumn in the form of a pamphlet available at both the **Integrity** display and the **Fidelity** display. I think it is highly significant that any statement at all could be made which deals directly with gays and lesbians and which could in good conscience be distributed by both these groups. The document has been commented on by several news services, both inside and outside Canada.

The other way that **Integrity** and **Fidelity** have come together is at the eucharistic table. Last September, Paul Feheley, vice-president of **Fidelity**, was the celebrant at **Integrity**'s monthly Eucharist. He preached, we prayed together, and all of us passed the peace of the reconciling Christ. **Fidelity** and **Integrity** members then circled the altar for the liturgy of the Eucharist. "We break this bread to share in the body of Christ / we being many are one body, for we all share in the one bread" we prayed, and then administered the elements one to another around the circle.

The dialogue with our bishop is ongoing, in areas where we may see things differently, and Paul Feheley will preside again at another **Integrity/Fidelity** Eucharist next September. We're continuing to live together in the same church.

I don't want to sound holier-than-thou, but I really think that is why **Integrity** and **Fidelity** appear to be making some progress. Jesus Christ is the rock on whom we all stand. As we look at each other during the discussions, we are looking at our beloved's beloved. The discussion table is also a eucharistic table. We must come to that discussion table believing that everyone is there in good faith.

Accepting the bona fides of the others is not enough, though. I believe we have to get rid of the idea of winners and losers, us and them. It's not easy, for that bifurcation is deeply entrenched in our culture, from sports competitions to the law courts to party politics. I remember watching debates in General Synod 1989. Early on there was a vote on some matter where a decision had to be made. When the motion passed, there was some applause, which was very quickly stopped by Archbishop Hambidge. "I don't want any of that," he said. "Applause like that after a motion means someone has won, and if there are winners, there are losers. I don't want any losers in this Church, so I don't want any applause."

Ann Carlson of **Integrity/Tidewater** put it this way: "When we talk of peace and community, we too often assume that they can be achieved only through victory, defeat or compromise. I think we need to expand our definition of peace. I can't be at peace with an enemy. I am not at peace when God is on my side and I view other faith community members as God's opponents. True peace may involve learning to live without God on 'my side', because God is bigger than that."

Canon Paul put it this way in his sermon to the joint service:
"You and I both know that we are right in our thinking of what the church should do regarding all the questions about homosexuality. I wonder if we have the same conviction to admit that we could be wrong. How far are we prepared to risk our understanding of the truth? How open are we to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit

speaking to us? Too few of us are prepared to risk. We think our goal is victory, when it must be the pursuit of truth."

I would not want to minimise either the very real concerns of or the differences between **Integrity** and **Fidelity** people; but I am advocating moving away from a confrontational "P wins, therefore Q loses" model of debate. Lesbians and gays in the church raise hard questions, and one joint Eucharist and one pamphlet are not going to answer them. But we are continuing to talk, and we continue to pray together.

It isn't easy. There are people on both sides who say we've sold out. I've been called an Uncle Tom for making nice with my oppressors. That's debilitating. One of the things that keeps me going is the notion, pointed out to me by a wise woman, that God will not allow the church to be destroyed by this one issue. Jesus gave his life for us, the church is his body, so something as relatively minor as this isn't going to cause the church to blow up. That does not mean we won't make mistakes as we journey. But the Body of Christ and its many members will survive.

The idea of "us and them" is pernicious, but very deeply ingrained. Think of the Eucharistic prayer "this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many". That prayer has been around for centuries, with implicit distinctions between "you" and "the many", between us and them, but that dichotomy is not found in any one of the Gospel narratives. As we said in *Emerging Common Ground*, "It is not given to any of us to know the whole truth, and so we need to learn from each other." If we all commit to more listening and learning, and less shouting, maybe the still, small voice will make itself heard.

The Listening Process

What is the Listening Process?

A listening process is an open commitment to engage actively in the world and thought of the person or people to whom you are listening and a corresponding commitment on the part of the other person or people to enter into yours. It does not presume agreement or disagreement; it presumes a striving for empathy.

It involves asking such questions as 'What would I feel in that situation?', 'What would I have done?' 'How does that person think, what is her world view?' rather than, 'How can I counter that argument?'

Listening requires respect. Point scoring and name calling can have no place in a listening process. The words we use may cause offence and so they need to be chosen carefully.

The process of listening to lesbian and gay people is a commitment to hear what they have to say, how they feel and how they understand the gospel.

The listening process is not a debate. It is not about persuading someone else that you are right, nor is it about finding a compromise between two positions. One writer has said: "Debate is too often about two opposing opinions, about making points that build up one and demolish the other. It's adversarial ... In my experience, debates rarely build anything or anybody up; rather they entrench us and our opinions."^[1] Listening processes are about how another person sees and understands the world and the gospel and not about you making others agree with you, or others making you agree with them.

A listening process concerned with human sexuality has to include lesbian and gay people and 'straight' people. All have something to share in the process. People who find they are attracted to people of their own gender are present in all our churches and have a range of opinions. Each of their diverse stories is significant.

While the listening process is not aimed at defining theology, some ask about the place experience plays in the Anglican theological method. The way Anglicans do theology is through the Bible, tradition and reason. The Virginia Report defines reason as the 'human being's capacity to symbolise, and so to order, share and communicate experience'.^[2] Taking note of experience is part of our theological method, but it cannot override our commitment to scripture and tradition. Listening to the experience of gay and lesbian people is not primarily about shaping our theology but it may influence our theology and will change the way we proclaim the message of God's love for the world.

Where listening processes have been entered into the life of the church has been enriched and enabled to focus on mission in its local context and in the world.

“All baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.” Lambeth 1.10

[1.](#) A Gay-Straight Christian Dialogue, ‘Michael’ and ‘Chris’ (Grove, 2005)

[2.](#) Rosenthal and Currie *Being Anglican in the Third Millennium* page244

The Listening Process

Listening to the experience of lesbian and gay people

Lambeth 1.10 called for those in the Anglican Communion to listen to the experience of homosexual persons.

Where such listening has taken place the process has been difficult for all concerned.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of every country have experienced attitudes which exclude them from society. Many have felt unable to share something which appears to them to define their being even to their closest friends and family. Being listened to is in itself costly.

Listening itself has seemed to some people to be giving up clear biblical principles and traditional values. The heart of the church seems to be at stake. It is thought that listening might itself involve compromise. Those who articulate traditional teaching have risked being branded as homophobic and unloving. However, listening is itself a Biblical principle and vital for our mission to gay and lesbian people, our mission with gay and lesbian people and mission in a world where more and more societies accept gay and lesbian relationships.

Listening is painful.

Listening is also fruitful. When we listen we can hear of the dedication and service of committed Christians who are attracted to people of the same gender. We discover the realities of the societies in which we serve. When we listen we can also be listened to and present the Good News of Jesus Christ. In Mission and ministry Anglicans are committed to presenting Christ to all people, to offer loving service and to seek to transform unjust structures of society. We can only do this by listening to God and listening to those to whom we offer his love.

Successful listening requires a commitment to creating safe places, to owning common ground and to sharing the sense of vulnerability. It does not require us to commit to changing our theology.

Safe Places

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the primates and all the bishops of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference have condemned the victimisation and diminishment of any person on the grounds of their sexual orientation and have offered the full pastoral care of the church for all people including lesbians and gays.

However, such assertions need to be articulated constantly in action as well as words in order to create safe space where lesbian and gay people can be heard. Safe space may be created by assurances of confidentiality. Even then it will require the forming of relationships of trust. Creating safe space takes work.

The prevalence of homophobia (the irrational fear of gay and lesbian people) has led to those who hold a traditional view of the inappropriateness of sexual activity outside marriage being labelled as homophobic just for holding those views. In consequence they too have felt it unsafe to articulate their views. Safe ground includes space for honesty about conservative attitudes to sexuality.

Listening is sometimes feared as a potential tool for forcing the listener to change their mind. However, the object of listening is not to have one's mind changed, but to hear the joys as well as the struggles of following Christ as a gay or lesbian person. Listening is about hearing the struggles of individuals as they seek to follow Christ and this will change our hearts and how we speak. Listening is about seeking to understand the way the speaker understands the Bible, tradition and reason. Listening is about hearing the experience of parents, children and friends of lesbian and gay people.

It is more difficult to listen to gay and lesbian voices in contexts where homosexuality is illegal. The Church of England worked hard to decriminalise homosexuality in the 1950s and 60s. The Archbishop of Canterbury has stated his opposition to the use of civil law to limit the freedoms of choice for homosexuals.^[1] Conservative scholars such as Robert Gagnon support the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Even in these contexts it is possible to listen to those of homosexual orientation. International links may be used in such contexts.

Common Ground

Common ground is also required for the listening process. The call of Lambeth 1.10 to listen to homosexual persons was to listen to members of the body of Christ. We are united in our baptism and share the same scriptures and traditions.

The facilitator of a dialogue on human sexuality between churches from an English diocese and one from Africa emphasised that the first and most vital step was to 'occupy common ground'. Recalling the process he says:

'It was recognised that the conversation was not going to be easy and that in order to stand together on the uncomfortable ground of difference there needed to be a number of safeguards in place and an appropriate process to build up the necessary respect before stepping out on to this ground.'

- The conversation needed to start at a point where all participants could occupy common ground with confidence while at the same time acknowledging and respecting differences that existed.
- The common ground that the exercise identified needed to be occupied rather than just acknowledged. It also needed to be built on enabling it to move from the personal to the corporate.'

The participants spent the first day sharing their experiences of God and of mission. With no mention of homosexuality, they identified with one another's theology and missiological tasks. 'We did not just 'acknowledge' or 'describe' this common ground we actually occupied it together and dwelt there for some time. This was possible

because we had created a safe place to occupy this ground but the act of occupying this ground together secured the safe place for our further explorations.'

In this context the second day could be given over to hearing different voices over issues which threaten to split the church. This was done in the context of common worship and prayer.

Sharing of Vulnerability

Listening does require vulnerability. The person being listened to opens themselves up to the possibility of criticism. We all have things in our past of which we are ashamed and fearful. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners in need of the love of God. It is in the context of common vulnerability that we can move towards hearing one another as God hears us and knowing one another as God knows us.

The listening should not just be about a gay or lesbian testifying to their experiences, but also the experiences of others shared in the process.

Notes

1. <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2006/06/archbishop-of-canterbury-challenge-and-hope-for-the-anglican-communion.aspx> 'It is possible – indeed, it is imperative – to give the strongest support to the defence of homosexual people against violence, bigotry and **legal disadvantage**, to appreciate the role played in the life of the church by people of homosexual orientation, and still to believe that this doesn't settle the question of whether the Christian Church has the freedom, on the basis of the Bible, and its historic teachings, to bless homosexual partnerships as a clear expression of God's will.' *Bold mine*

The Listening Process

Practical Advice

You might be thinking of engaging in a listening process on human sexuality. The following practical advice is only a guide. There are resources available for all kinds of contexts. Your particular situation will be different from any other, but there are some features common to all good listening processes.

Please learn from the experience of others.

Remember for any genuine listening to happen you have to have a safe place and you have to have common ground to stand upon.

These are some of the common features of good listening processes:

Convening

Successful listening processes require a convenor. This is a significant person in the context of the community who has the personal and spiritual authority to bring people together. In many contexts this is a bishop. In a parish it might be the pastor. It might be the leader of the Mothers' Union.

The convenor needs to set the boundaries of the conversation. They need to decide whether the invitation to participate is open to all or limited to those she or he invites. Both have great value, but they are different and need careful planning.

They need to set the aims, although it is best to do this in consultation with others.

Convening involves sorting the practical issues of where and when to meet. It involves arranging for money to be found and the appointing of a facilitator.

Facilitation

Facilitators should have experience of running a group. They will need to create the safe space and establish the common ground needed in order for conversations to take place. If the group is large and smaller group work is envisaged, a team of facilitators might be needed.

They will need to set the ground rules and ensure they are accepted and honoured.

They will need to ensure that the resources to enable listening are available.

The Rules

The rules need to be clear, simple and agreed by all participants. Here is one set as an example:

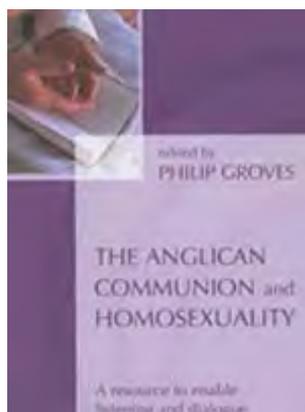
1. We will respect people's integrity as members of this community of faith.
2. We will assume that as people of faith we are all sincere in our beliefs, including our reverence for Holy Scripture.
3. We will assume that lesbian and gay persons are present.
4. We will not use language known to be offensive to others.
5. We will respect the right of people to "name" themselves and their experiences.
6. We will ask no questions that we are not prepared to answer ourselves.
7. We will speak in the first person.
8. We will respect the privacy of others.

Resources

The primary resources for any listening process are the participants themselves. There are a variety of ways in which they can be enabled to speak and to listen.

- Discussion questions might be used.
- Stories read out and discussed.
- Situations may be set out for discussion.
- Speakers can be invited to share their stories and their opinions.

The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality



The Anglican Communion and homosexuality Book Cover

This book seeks to help you and fellow Anglicans around the Communion as we continue to explore together the complex mystery of human sexuality and the shape of faithful Christian discipleship in this area. Its purpose is to offer clear and accurate resources to bishops, clergy and lay people from men and women across the Communion with a wide variety of experience and expertise. The hope is that these resources will help us listen to one another - as individual Christians, within local churches and across the Communion as a whole - and listen to God.

These webpages seek to offer further resources to assist in your exploration of what God is saying to you and to us as a Communion. We were unable to include bibliographies in the book and these appear on this website. In addition we offer submissions which were sent to us.

The Anglican Communion does not recommend or endorse any of the works in the bibliographies or any of the submissions. The resources provided are intended to enable mutual listening and are made available for study, discussion and reflection within each member Church of the Communion as requested by [Resolution 12 of ACC13](#).

Order from SPCK at www.spckonline.com or local bookshops. Great Britain, SPCK, 2007: ISBN 978-0-281-05963-8.

Structure

[Structure](#)

Introduction

[Introduction](#)

Andrew Goddard and Phil Groves

Part 1

[Listening and Mission](#)

Ian T. Douglas and Michael Poon

[Listening and Dialogue](#)

Janet Marshall and Charley Thomas

Part 2

[The Witness of Scripture](#)

Phil Groves, John Holder and Paula Gooder

[The Witness of Tradition](#)

Jaci Maraschin, Samson Fan and Phil Groves

[Homosexualities and Culture](#)

Terry Brown, Victor Atta-Baffoe and Phil Groves

Part 3

[Sexuality and Identity](#)

Janet Trisk and Sue Burns

[Christian Spirituality and Sexuality](#)

Joseph Galgalo and Debbie Royals

Part 4

[The Witness of Science](#)

David de Pomerai and Glynn Harrison

The Writers

Biographical information about the writers can be found [here](#)

Structure and Content

The eight chapters of *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* are presented in four parts. Obviously it is possible to read the book from start to finish, as one would read a novel. However, there is no need to do this and it is expected that most readers will dip into different chapters at different times. The book is therefore designed in such a way that each chapter makes sense when read on its own. It is, however, helpful to understand the structure and rationale of the book as a whole, the connection between its different sections, and the variety of its styles and diversity of its authors.

The book opens with the two related issues which we have already seen provide the common ground and particular focus for the whole book and for the Listening Process of which it is part – mission and listening. In relation to mission, two perspectives are offered – one from Ian Douglas in the US and one from Michael Poon from Singapore. Each author then responds to the other, giving an example of respectful dialogue across differences in cultural and theological perspective. The chapter on listening is quite different from any other in the book. Much more than presenting an argument or a set of viewpoints, it provides you with a hands-on practical ‘how-to’ guide. This is jointly authored by two very experienced facilitators from quite different contexts, one from Canada (Janet Marshall) and one from Zambia (Charley Thomas). To be authentically Anglican, both our mission and our listening need to be directed by the authorities of Scripture, tradition and reason. These three areas therefore provide the structure and focus of the resources in the second section. In many ways these introduce us to the theological heart of the current debates. Those holding the views on sexuality expressed in the Communion’s current teaching need to be able to show how that teaching is authorized by these sources. Those calling for the Church to modify this stance need to explain ‘from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection’¹⁷ how and why they have reached that different understanding. Among these three sources Anglicans have held to the primacy of Scripture and any changes would need to persuade the Communion that they are compatible with Scripture. The Bible is examined therefore first and at greatest length. The editor, Phil Groves, provides an introduction to the subject of the place of Scripture, seeking common ground in the Anglican understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture which is explored through reference to the Thirty-Nine Articles. The book of Jude then guides a reflection on false teaching before two different perspectives on sexuality present their understanding of biblical teaching. The final sections look at some of the challenges faced in interpreting the Bible and how the Bible helps us when we have to consider whether a development in Christian thought and practice is faithful to Scripture. In the light of this overview focused more on method, a West Indian bishop, John Holder, and a lay biblical scholar from England, Paula Gooder, provide extensive resources on biblical texts. They help us engage with the specific teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament in relation to sexuality as a whole and with particular reference to homosexuality.

The chapter on the witness of tradition captures the international and non- Western perspective of the resources more than any other chapter. It brought together Jaci Maraschin from Brazil and Samson Fan from Hong Kong, for both of whom English is

not their first language. They set our current sexuality discussions in a broader historical and theological context by highlighting the distinction between tradition and traditions and helping us think through the relationship of tradition to both Scripture and reason. We are then enabled to consider current debates about the validity of blessing same-sex unions by looking at other areas where Anglicans have embraced and/or resisted changes to our traditions in recent decades.

The fifth chapter introduces one aspect of the work of reason by setting sexuality in the context of wider culture (another aspect of reason, that of science, is the focus in the final chapter). One of the major challenges in the Communion is undoubtedly the quite different cultures which Anglicans serve and the very varied understandings of sexuality and sexual ethics found within these. Our guides here are a bishop from Melanesia (Terry Brown) and a Ghanaian theologian (Victor Atta-Baffoe) with some additional material provided by Griphus Gakuru, a Ugandan priest working in England and John Kevern of the Episcopal Church in the USA. They begin by introducing us to different models of how Christians have understood the relationship of Christ to culture. These models are then made more concrete as we are provided with a taste of cross-cultural experience through introductions to the cultures of Uganda, North American Indigenous Peoples, South Africa and England and also to Anglican responses within them. The insights of anthropology and the different uses to which these have been put in Christian mission are then sketched before this approach is applied more directly to recent controversies. That application takes the form of highlighting some central features of Western culture and how these mould both 'liberal' and 'conservative' Western stances on sexuality. An African perspective on these deeper Western cultural forces and world views is then provided in order to shed light on some of the tensions over sexuality. Finally, the authors introduce the great variety of forms of homosexuality found within and across the cultures represented in the Communion.

Following the more academic contributions of Part Two, the next two chapters comprising Part Three have a different focus and so a different format and tone. The learning resources on Scripture, tradition and reason are provided to facilitate and give theological tools for wise listening and discriminating dialogue. It is such listening and dialogue that are displayed, exemplified and encouraged in chapters six and seven. As noted above, Lambeth 1.10 called on us to 'listen to the experience of homosexual persons'. Some readers will already have done this but many will have no experience and perhaps no opportunity to do so in their context. Sue Burns (from Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia) and Janet Trisk (of Southern Africa) have engaged in that listening task and their contribution enables us to listen in on what they have heard and in particular to deepen our understanding of how questions of identity relate to sexuality. They provide extensive quotations from the wide range of people they listened to and in guiding us as we read they model how we can listen thoughtfully and prayerfully to often challenging and disturbing testimonies. Challenging, disturbing, thoughtful and prayerful dialogue across cultural and theological difference was the experience of Joseph Galgalo, a Kenyan theologian committed to the Communion's teaching on sexuality, and Debbie Royals, an indigenous woman theologian whose partner is also a woman priest in the Episcopal Church. They were brought together to contribute resources on the relationship of sexuality and spirituality. The fruit of their

week together is shared in yet another different style as we are invited to listen in on a dialogue between the two of them covering a wide range of subjects which they had explored in their time together.

The final section contains a single chapter, which is probably the most technical of all the material in the book, that covers areas less familiar to most readers. As noted above, successive Lambeth Conferences have asked for scientific study to assist Christian thinking and the Primates particularly requested these resources. Biologist David de Pomerai and psychiatrist Glynn Harrison each produced very significant accounts of the scientific research and literature. These focus on the fields of biological and genetic factors in relation to homosexuality and possible interventions in the forms of counselling or therapy. For those who would find the scientific detail of their work too complex, they have provided helpful executive summaries of their work.

Introduction

This book seeks to help you and fellow Anglicans around the Communion as we continue to explore together the complex mystery of human sexuality and the shape of faithful Christian discipleship in this area. Its purpose is to offer clear and accurate resources to bishops, clergy and lay people from men and women across the Communion with a wide variety of experience and expertise. The hope is that these resources will help us listen to one another - as individual Christians, within local churches and across the Communion as a whole - and listen to God. This introduction provides an orientation both to the subject of sexuality within the Communion and to this book - its purpose, its theological basis, its process of composition and its structure. It is hoped that it will enable you to get the most from the book whether you read it through from beginning to end or, perhaps more likely and more helpful, focus on specific chapters of interest to you in your context.

Anglicans and Sexuality

The current teaching of the Anglican Communion on sexuality is expressed in the 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution 1.10. This states that the Conference 'in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage' and describes homosexual practice as 'incompatible with Scripture'. This resolution has been regularly reaffirmed by the other Instruments of Communion since 1998 and the full text appears at the end of this introduction. The focus of this book is particularly related to two aspects of that resolution of the bishops:

- 'We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons'.
- This conference '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'.

These commitments to listen and to share statements and resources were made alongside the statement of the teaching of the Communion on sexuality and are important because of:

- the ongoing discussion on this subject in many societies, the Anglican Communion, and the wider Church.
- the diversity of views within and between different Anglican provinces, and
- the need for 'all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation' and to assure homosexual persons 'that they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ'.

The discussions - as this book makes clear - cover a wide range of issues. On all of these there is a spectrum of views within the Communion. Any attempt to summarize the nature and importance of these complex questions is difficult. However, the following description of what is being discussed and why it is important may provide a helpful

sense of the 'big picture' and guide you as you approach the more detailed studies that follow:

There are a number of people who identify themselves with those whom the bishops called 'homosexual persons' at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. They are people of great diversity, but they have in common that they are attracted to people of their own sex. Many of them, in so far as they know themselves, their loves, their sexual desires and their intimate relationships, also believe that they are not fitted for marriage to someone of the opposite sex. Some have embraced marriage or remained single but have known, or still know, same-sex attraction. Others are in some form of same-sex relationship.

In many places, as through much of human history, such matters are still not openly spoken about and those with this experience find it difficult or impossible to speak. However, in Western (and increasingly in non-Western) societies, some of these people now identify themselves publicly as 'gay' or 'lesbian'.

All these people, including those who are Christians, are asking for more understanding and an end to what they experience as exclusion and oppression. Some are asking for pastoral care and friendship as they seek to live in conformity to traditional church teaching. Others conscientiously believe they will flourish best and will grow in love of God and neighbour if they commit themselves to share their life with someone of the same sex in some form of special, loving, covenantal, sexual relationship similar to marriage. Some are asking for such relationships to be blessed by the Church especially in those countries where there is now the possibility of legal recognition for such relationships in civil partnerships or same-sex marriage.

The Church, for the sake of its pastoral ministry and its mission, has to work out a faithful Christian response to this new situation and to the people most affected by it. Those concerned are not only those who are described as homosexual persons but also their families, their friends and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has voiced one of the major questions this raises in the following terms:

This is not and should never be a question about the contribution of gay and lesbian people as such to the Church of God and its ministry, about the dignity and value of gay and lesbian people. Instead it is a question, agonizingly difficult for many, as to what kinds of behaviour a Church that seeks to be loyal to the Bible can bless, and what kinds of behaviour it must warn against - and so it is a question about how we make decisions corporately with other Christians, looking together for the mind of Christ as we share the study of the Scriptures.

These resources aim to help us as Anglicans, together with other churches, make such decisions and seek together the mind of Christ. It is an official book of the Anglican Communion. As explained below, it has been called for and supported by all four Instruments of Communion. It is designed to enable dialogue and discussion as we

move together in mission and ministry. It is not an official statement or authoritative document of the Communion and makes no claim to any such authority. It is, however, set in the context both of decisions already made by the Communion on these matters, notably Lambeth 1998 Resolution 1.10, and of repeated statements on the need for ongoing study and discussion from all the Instruments.

The Lambeth Conference

The initial call for the sort of work you will find in this book came from the 1978 Lambeth Conference. In Resolution 10 the bishops called for 'theological study of sexuality' and specifically for 'deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality, which would take seriously the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research'. This resolution was reaffirmed in Resolution 64 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference when the conference added that it 'urges such study and reflection to take account of biological, genetic and psychological research being undertaken by other agencies, and the socio-cultural factors that lead to the different attitudes in the provinces of our Communion'. A minority of provinces have undertaken such studies but this is the first response on a Communion level.

The bishops present at the 1998 Lambeth Conference not only clearly reaffirmed traditional church teaching but also called for there to be a monitoring process. They asked that the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement be recognized (it is also reproduced at the end of this chapter) and for concerns raised about the authority of Scripture to be included in that process.

The Anglican Consultative Council

The Windsor Report in 2004 urged 'all provinces that are engaged in processes of discernment regarding the blessing of same-sex unions to engage the Communion in continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against such unions' noting that 'this call for continuing study does not imply approval of such proposals' (para 145). It also reminded (para 146), 'all in the Communion that Lambeth Resolution 1.10 calls for an ongoing process of listening and discernment, and that Christians of good will need to be prepared to engage honestly and frankly with each other on issues relating to human sexuality. It is vital that the Communion establish processes and structures to facilitate ongoing discussion'. In 2005, ACC-13 responded in Resolution 12:

In response to the request of the bishops attending the Lambeth Conference in 1998 in Resolution 1.10 to establish 'a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion' and to honour the process of *mutual* listening, including 'listening to the experience of homosexual persons' and the experience of local churches around the world in reflecting on these matters in the light of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, the Anglican Consultative Council encourages such listening in each Province and requests the Secretary General:

- a. to collate relevant research studies, statements, resolutions and other material on these matters from the various Provinces and other interested bodies within those Provinces;
- b. to make such material available for study, discussion and reflection within each member Church of the Communion;
- c. to identify and allocate adequate resources for this work, and to report progress on it to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the next Lambeth Conference and the next meeting of this Council, and to copy such reports to the Provinces.

As a result of this, the post of a facilitator was created to work within the Anglican Communion Office. Following his appointment to that post Canon Phil Groves collected information and saw the need for a book to enable the mutual listening which ACC-13 had envisaged. The Standing Committee of the ACC (which meets jointly with the Standing Committee of the Primates) received the [draft proposal for this book](#) and gave their support. The proposal included a theological basis, as well as an outline of the structure.

The Primates' Meeting

The same proposal was taken to the Primates Meeting a few days later in Dar in February 2007. They discussed it at length and unanimously supported it. The Primates were clear in their charge to Canon Groves. They wanted high-quality materials to enable understanding of 'the experience of homosexual people'. They were especially keen to receive a comprehensive summary of what science was saying about homosexuality. They wanted a reflection on Bible and tradition and a consideration of culture. They also looked forward to some materials on methods of listening so that practical action could be enabled around the Communion. They approved the theological basis of the proposal.

The Archbishop of Canterbury

The Primates made some minor recommendations informally and these were incorporated into a revised proposal which was presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury who endorsed the proposal.

The Book's Purpose

The aim of this book is to enable you to begin or to continue listening to those identified as 'homosexual persons' and to discover and engage with the diversity of responses found among Anglicans. It seeks to give you resources for these tasks. It is hoped these will help you gain a deeper clarity and understanding of your own position, encourage you to speak for yourself, and enable you to understand the opinion of others.

The book is not seeking to be a document around which we can agree a common statement. It does not attempt to 'solve' the theological disagreements over homosexuality or the divisions these have created within the Communion. Although

the book includes a large amount of material it does not make any claim to be complete, final or definitive. All you will find in each chapter is a brief summary of the subject matter.

Each reader will come to the book in a different context. As you read, remember that what you are reading will be being read and used across the globe by fellow Anglicans whose backgrounds, experiences and levels of knowledge about sexuality are quite different from yours. For some, many of the ideas here will be new. For others, much will be familiar. The hope is that you will find:

- your questions being asked and explored;
- your own answers being given accurately and positively;
- the answers you disagree with being explained in a way that deepens and clarifies your understanding so you are better equipped for ongoing dialogue with Christians who hold these views.

The intention is to encourage you in thinking, listening and speaking. Despite the size of the book, much is left unsaid and there will be times when you think it fails to reach its goals. If you find blanks or failings then you can respond in various ways:

- If there are questions you do not find being asked here, then ask them.
- If you believe a point has been made badly, then make it yourself or find someone you know and respect to make it.
- If you don't understand how someone can take a view expressed, try to seek out people who can help you learn more.

This book is neither an end nor a beginning when it comes to fulfilling the commitments we have made as Anglicans to listen, study and learn about sexuality. It is another step on the way which seeks to enable us to learn and work together as we serve the mission of God.

The hope is that you will want to engage further, read more, ask more questions, perhaps write or speak to help others and, above all, continue listening to God and to fellow disciples of Jesus.

The book will be supported with an internet site where you can pose questions, clarify understandings and enter into dialogue. The site will be supported for one year after publication of this book. You can contact the Facilitator for the Listening Process by email

listening@anglicancommunion.org

Further details will be available from the Anglican Communion Website

www.anglicancommunion.org/listening

The Book's Theological Basis

ACC-3 meeting in 1976 spoke about the Communion in these words:

As in the first century, we can expect the Holy Spirit to press us to listen to each other, to state new insights frankly, and to accept implications of the Gospel new to us, whether painful or exhilarating.

Throughout the following 30 years of our Communion we have often found new insights to be both painful and exhilarating. In the 1980s and 1990s the churches in places where Anglican Christianity was comfortably part of their culture were greatly challenged by the dynamic churches of Africa and Asia to move from ministry to mission. At first they often found the call to engage in evangelism hard to hear. It was painful to accept their failure to live out mission. However, when they responded and took mission in their own context seriously, these churches have been rejuvenated. The developments of 'Fresh Expressions of Church' and the desire to break the bonds of extreme poverty have enabled churches in Europe and America to reconnect with the Mission of God. This is exhilarating!

The issue of how to respond to new understandings of human sexuality leads us once again into cross-cultural challenges. The prime task for all of us is to hear and obey what God is saying to us. We can only do this by listening to each other. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has quoted with approval: 'Only the whole Church knows the whole truth.'

The Church of Uganda has asked to be listened to in this manner. In its Position Paper published for ACC-13 they say: 'We also believe the Church of Uganda has a mission to the Anglican Communion to share the treasure of the Scriptures and to call other parts of the Communion to recognize and to submit to the Authority of Scripture as the place of transformation into abundant life. This is an uncomfortable message for some, but a reminder from a Church - which has faced political violence and oppression with love and forgiveness and borne the brunt of AIDS/HIV with loving service - that its witness was founded on living out what it read in the Bible.'

The Episcopal Church of the USA has also called for the kind of uncomfortable listening envisioned at ACC-3. Also at ACC-13 they offered *To Set Our Hope on Christ*. In this report they sought to explain why in good faith and in loving obedience to the saving Word of God, many Christians in the Episcopal Church have come to a new mind about same-sex affection, and of how this has led us to affirm the eligibility for ordination of those in covenanted same-sex unions. They too believe that their insight is 'in loving obedience to the saving Word of God!'. This too is painful for many to hear.

ACC-3 also reflected on partnership in the Church of the New Testament. They said:

Christian partnership did not then mean that the partners, although united in their missionary goals, were always in accord on how they were to carry out this mission - witness the disagreement between Peter and Paul in Galatians 2. Rather they were asked to face each other, and the roots of their disagreement and agreement, so openly that both could go forward in mutual love and respect into further creative activity.

Significant missiological thinkers have argued that this is the biblical way. Andrew Walls has described our time as an 'Ephesian Moment'. We are at a point in time when the Western guardians of 'standard' Christianity have encountered new expressions of Christianity from Africa, Asia, America and beyond. The original 'Ephesian Moment' was a brief time in history when Jewish Christians came together with Gentile Christians under the guidance of Paul who insisted that 'In union with him [Christ] you too are being built together with all the others to a place where God lives through his Spirit (Ephesians 2.22). Walls argues that the Church must be diverse because humanity is diverse; it must be one because Christ is one. The original 'Ephesian Moment' came to an end as the gentile church dominated the Jewish minority which was forced to conform to gentile Christianity or to find its Jewish identity outside the church. In the present age we see the Church as more diverse than it has ever been with not only people of every nation and ethnic group, but also women and the poor taking roles that were previously the preserve of white men with university education.

Francis Bridger, a founding member of the British Evangelical Anglican group Fulcrum echoes this perspective. He reflects on the nature of Trinitarian theology and says:

The theological method of the Evangelical centre is marked by a faithfulness to Scripture and the historic creeds on one hand and an openness to the breadth of Christian traditions on the other. This does not require that we assign equal validity to all theological perspectives (for all, including Evangelicalism, must stand under the scrutiny of Scripture). However, it does demand that we listen with respect to voices other than our own. Fundamental to this is a recognition that theology arises out of communities of faith which possess their own historical trajectories and which have found themselves having to address their own particular problems: it is not a system of ahistorical propositions that stand independent of the contexts which have produced them. Theological truth does not drop out of the sky: it is always and everywhere the outcome of community struggle and reflection.

If the Trinity is central to all theology, then it follows that relationality lies at the heart of a Trinitarian theological method and that this in turn demands a willingness to enter into, and a desire to sustain, relationships with others who name the name of Christ and are seekers after truth *even if we profoundly disagree with them*.

The Evangelical centre, therefore, finds itself committed, as a matter of fundamental principle, to encouraging dialogue even across heated differences. Moreover, it believes that the discernment of truth and the mind of God is more likely to arise out of a process of mutual respect and charitable assumption than out of polarization and demonization. However wrong-headed we may think Christian brothers or sisters, they are not Amalekites to be smitten hip and thigh.

Being biblical is about how we walk and talk together. Sometimes this will mean shocking one another, but we should always be ready to speak and to listen rather than simply defend formulas and structures.

Desmond Tutu has articulated these same concepts under the title of *Ubuntu*:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks to the very essence of being human. When you want to give high praise to someone we say, 'Yu, u Nobuntu'; he or she has Ubuntu. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'a person is a person through other people' (in Xhosa Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu and in Zulu Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye). I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

In a debate which has become intensely polarized the form of the materials we seek to offer will attempt to follow biblical patterns enabling us to listen to one another with love and mutual respect. This is Scriptural, our Anglican tradition and the only reasonable way forwards.

The Book's Composition

The work of Canon Phil Groves as Facilitator for the Listening Process has made clear to him that good process in listening is vitally important. He has identified four practical elements which he brought into the composition of this book: common ground, safe space, the acknowledging of shared vulnerability and good human resources.

1. Common Ground in Mission

The foundation for dialogue is common ground. ACC-3 talked of common ground as being our common mission. This remains the basis for our shared life today and as a Communion is stated in the Five Marks of Mission.

Our mission is to all people. The first four marks are relevant to how our mission is carried out including mission to gay and lesbian people, their families, their friends and those with whom they work. All the Churches of our Communion are agreed on the need to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, to teach, baptize and nurture new believers, to respond to human need by loving service and to seek to transform unjust structures of society.

Our mission is also, and has always been, even when we did not know it, *with* gay and lesbian Christians who are our partners in the gospel. This acknowledgement does not require acceptance of same-sex partnerships or partnered gay clergy. Most of the gay and lesbian people who have served the Church in mission and ministry, both lay and ordained, have not accepted such partnerships for themselves nor seen them as valid

expressions of a holy life for others. The open acceptance of same-sex partnerships as moral in more and more cultures within our Communion demands however that we engage with lesbian and gay people in a new way. Our commitment to listen emphatically does not require that we must end up accepting the position of those to whom we are listening. It does mean that we seek to hear God speaking to us and discover his way. It does require that we respect those with whom we disagree and be open to learning new ways to speak to and about them. It is on this common ground of mission that we begin our conversations.

2. Safe Space - Allowing All to be Heard

Some voices are easy for us to hear. But Jesus valued the voices of the quiet, those considered insignificant in the eyes of the world in which he lived. For him it was women, children, the disabled, the poor and those who were labelled as 'sinful'. The challenge has been to hear those voices, the voices of those who are often not heard. Today this may be due to their ethnicity, their gender, their lack of education or because they are regarded as 'sinful'. That does not mean that we ignore those who are educated, church leaders and men, but it does mean they are not to be heard to the exclusion of others.

The Lambeth Conference made a commitment to 'listen to the experience of homosexual persons'. Such people have a huge range of experiences and many have responded to the Good News of the Kingdom with joy and follow God with commitment. For such people to be heard we need to create safe ground where they will not be open to ridicule, abuse or emotional and even physical violence. Such violence is the experience of gay and lesbian people in every culture and the Instruments of Communion have consistently committed themselves to opposing it.

No voice has been consciously edited out in the process of writing this book. The voices of 'conservatives' from around the world were actively sought, even if it will mean pain for those who are 'liberal' in their outlook. The voices of 'liberals' were actively sought, even if that is likely to cause pain to those who are 'conservative'. Among those identified by Lambeth Conferences as 'homosexual' there are a great variety of identifiers and different views. The most common terms in English are 'gay' and 'lesbian'. 'Gay' can be an identifier for both men and women and where it is used this way within the text we hope it is clear. 'Homosexual persons' would also include bisexual men and women, many of whom live in faithful monogamous relationships, either straight or gay. Transgender people and those who are intersexed are not gay or lesbian but some do recognize themselves as also being identified by the texts of the Communion as 'homosexual persons'. A common shorthand for this group of diverse individuals is LGBT Others find these labels to be a political act and the claiming of an identity which they reject. They often describe themselves simply as experiencing same-sex attraction (SSA). They may speak of being 'ex-gay' or 'post-gay' or refuse all such labels. In compiling this book we have sought out all these voices.

All shades of opinion have therefore been sought. Following Jesus, we have especially sought to hear the voices of those who would otherwise be silenced and not just the loud voices that can sometimes dominate in the media.

3. Vulnerability

The polarized arguments over the issues surrounding human sexuality have made us all feel vulnerable. Some fear the ending of the faith as we know it. Others fear not being accepted. Some fear being split in two with conflicting loyalties. Some fear to ask questions and some fear to answer them. These fears can only be answered by trusting in God to care for our Church and for all who come to him. However, we need to admit our own vulnerability and accept the vulnerability of others. It is important to do this while reading. We ask you not to seek arguments you can defeat but to allow God to inform you so you are strengthened in your walk with him. Again the Bible gives us the ultimate model. Jesus accepted the vulnerability of being human. His fears in Gethsemane were answered by his trust in God who rescued him from despair and death. We need to accept that all are vulnerable and trust God who can bring reconciliation in any context.

4. Human Resources

The process leading to this book was convened by Canon Groves who has been entrusted with the task on behalf of the Instruments of Communion as described earlier. The contributors were chosen in order to present the spectrum of views held in the Communion. Taken together, therefore, the hope is they present the spectrum of opinions. They were not asked to represent particular parties or viewpoints. In many ways the authors are ordinary Christians and it is not claimed that they are the greatest experts in their field in the Communion. What they have brought are the skills to understand and present the expertise of scholars and the experience of real people.

As you will soon discover, each chapter is very different from all the others. This reflects the diversity of the contributors and the range of material being covered. As a group of women and men the authors reflect the geographic diversity of the Communion as well as its theological diversity. There are bishops, clergy and lay people within the group. There is a mix of expertise. For example, some would describe themselves as theologians but several would not. The voices of homosexual people are also present in the text although they may not always be specifically identified as such.

One common thread that runs through the book is that the contributors for each chapter worked in pairs. Given the huge distances between most of them it was a significant logistical task to bring them together. It was, however, accomplished in most cases although writing a unified text was impossible for some who could not physically be brought together and had to communicate electronically. For some writers, joint writing was a joy. For others, there were significant challenges to be overcome in the writing process itself and a cross-cultural struggle is present in the result.

Finally, the Christian literature on human sexuality is huge and growing but we hope we have engaged with the most significant texts in what follows. However, many of the standard books are from a Western point of reference. One of the distinctive contributions of these resources is that reflections from across the Communion have been actively sought out and included. The book also contains submissions in various

forms - more academic texts, personal testimonies, practical guidance for listening processes, dialogue between the contributors - based on the authors' own research and conversations together and their decision about how best to present the fruit of this to the wider Communion.

The Book's Structure and Content

The book's eight chapters are presented in four parts. Obviously it is possible to read the book from start to finish, as one would read a novel. However, there is no need to do this and it is expected that most readers will dip into different chapters at different times. The book is therefore designed in such a way that each chapter makes sense when read on its own. It is, however, helpful to understand the structure and rationale of the book as a whole, the connection between its different sections, and the variety of its styles and diversity of its authors. The book opens with the two related issues which we have already seen provide the common ground and particular focus for the whole book and for the Listening Process of which it is part - mission and listening. In relation to mission, two perspectives are offered - one from Ian Douglas in the US and one from Michael Poon from Singapore. Each author then responds to the other, giving an example of respectful dialogue across differences in cultural and theological perspective. The chapter on listening is quite different from any other in the book. Much more than presenting an argument or a set of viewpoints, it provides you with a hands-on practical 'how-to' guide. This is jointly authored by two very experienced facilitators from quite different contexts, one from Canada (Janet Marshall) and one from Zambia (Charley Thomas).

To be authentically Anglican, both our mission and our listening need to be directed by the authorities of Scripture, tradition and reason. These three areas therefore provide the structure and focus of the resources in the second section. In many ways these introduce us to the theological heart of the current debates. Those holding the views on sexuality expressed in the Communion's current teaching need to be able to show how that teaching is authorized by these sources. Those calling for the Church to modify this stance need to explain 'from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection how and why they have reached that different understanding.

Among these three sources Anglicans have held to the primacy of Scripture and any changes would need to persuade the Communion that they are compatible with Scripture. The Bible is examined therefore first and at greatest length. The editor, Phil Groves, provides an introduction to the subject of the place of Scripture, seeking common ground in the Anglican understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture which is explored through reference to the Thirty-Nine Articles.

The book of Jude then guides a reflection on false teaching before two different perspectives on sexuality present their understanding of biblical teaching. The final sections look at some of the challenges faced in interpreting the Bible and how the Bible helps us when we have to consider whether a development in Christian thought and practice is faithful to Scripture. In the light of this overview focused more on method, a West Indian bishop, John Holder, and a lay biblical scholar from England,

Paula Gooder, provide extensive resources on biblical texts. They help us engage with the specific teaching of the Old Testament and the New Testament in relation to sexuality as a whole and with particular reference to homosexuality.

The chapter on the witness of tradition captures the international and non-Western perspective of the resources more than any other chapter. It brought together Jaci Maraschin from Brazil and Samson Fan from Hong Kong, for both of whom English is not their first language. They set our current sexuality discussions in a broader historical and theological context by highlighting the distinction between tradition and traditions and helping us think through the relationship of tradition to both Scripture and reason. We are then enabled to consider current debates about the validity of blessing same-sex unions by looking at other areas where Anglicans have embraced and/or resisted changes to our traditions in recent decades.

The fifth chapter introduces one aspect of the work of reason by setting sexuality in the context of wider culture (another aspect of reason, that of science, is the focus in the final chapter). One of the major challenges in the Communion is undoubtedly the quite different cultures which Anglicans serve and the very varied understandings of sexuality and sexual ethics found within these. Our guides here are a bishop from Melanesia (Terry Brown) and a Ghanaian theologian (Victor Atta-Baffoe) with some additional material provided by Griphus Gakuru, a Ugandan priest working in England and John Kevern of the Episcopal Church in the USA. They begin by introducing us to different models of how Christians have understood the relationship of Christ to culture. These models are then made more concrete as we are provided with a taste of cross-cultural experience through introductions to the cultures of Uganda, North American Indigenous Peoples, South Africa and England and also to Anglican responses within them. The insights of anthropology and the different uses to which these have been put in Christian mission are then sketched before this approach is applied more directly to recent controversies. That application takes the form of highlighting some central features of Western culture and how these mould both 'liberal' and 'conservative' Western stances on sexuality. An African perspective on these deeper Western cultural forces and world views is then provided in order to shed light on some of the tensions over sexuality. Finally, the authors introduce the great variety of forms of homosexuality found within and across the cultures represented in the Communion.

Following the more academic contributions of Part Two, the next two chapters comprising Part Three have a different focus and so a different format and tone. The learning resources on Scripture, tradition and reason are provided to facilitate and give theological tools for wise listening and discriminating dialogue. It is such listening and dialogue that are displayed, exemplified and encouraged in chapters six and seven. As noted above, Lambeth 1.10 called on us to 'listen to the experience of homosexual persons'. Some readers will already have done this but many will have no experience and perhaps no opportunity to do so in their context. Sue Burns (from Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia) and Janet Trisk (of Southern Africa) have engaged in that listening task and their contribution enables us to listen in on what they have heard and in particular to deepen our understanding of how questions of identity relate to sexuality. They provide extensive quotations from the wide range of people they

listened to and in guiding us as we read they model how we can listen thoughtfully and prayerfully to often challenging and disturbing testimonies.

Challenging, disturbing, thoughtful and prayerful dialogue across cultural and theological difference was the experience of Joseph Galgalo, a Kenyan theologian committed to the Communion's teaching on sexuality, and Debbie Royals, an indigenous woman theologian whose partner is also a woman priest in the Episcopal Church. They were brought together to contribute resources on the relationship of sexuality and spirituality. The fruit of their week together is shared in yet another different style as we are invited to listen in on a dialogue between the two of them covering a wide range of subjects which they had explored in their time together.

The final section contains a single chapter, which is probably the most technical of all the material in the book, that covers areas less familiar to most readers. As noted above, successive Lambeth Conferences have asked for scientific study to assist Christian thinking and the Primates particularly requested these resources. Biologist David de Pomerai and psychiatrist Glynn Harrison each produced very significant accounts of the scientific research and literature. These focus on the fields of biological and genetic factors in relation to homosexuality and possible interventions in the forms of counselling or therapy. For those who would find the scientific detail of their work too complex, they have provided helpful executive summaries of their work.

Conclusion

These resources were neither commissioned as an academic exercise, nor as an attempt to reach a consensus within the Anglican Communion. They are not intended to be the last word in the debate on human sexuality in the Christian tradition. Their aims are both more modest and more far-reaching:

- to give voice to the widest possible range of perspectives, positions and responses;
- to allow deeply dissenting and divided views to dialogue with, and to interrogate one another within a safe space;
- to listen to voices from across the many cultures in the Communion without privileging any specific voice;
- to listen to voices which are often silenced by the narrow rules of Western academic discourse.

The varied formats and styles of the book may prove frustrating to some. This variety is intended to echo our ongoing conversation, in which the variety of responses is not tidied up in the interests of literary or academic excellence. We are committed to listening with respect, however softly spoken or stammering some of the contributions may seem.

In short, this book is not meant to provide readers with ready answers, or with a sense of satisfaction that their perspective has been vindicated. The essays are tools, which aim to give readers a sense of godly dissatisfaction that more needs to be said. The debate cannot end here. Our *koinonia* demands further listening, deeper respect and

the willingness to continue on this journey of exploration and encounter with the *other* to whom we so often choose not to listen.

Resources

Anglican Conversations on Homosexuality

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/resources/conversations_on_human_sexuality.pdf

The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/640>

Primates Meeting Press Briefing 16 February 2007

<http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2007/02/aco-primates-meeting-communique.aspx>

ACC – 3 Trinidad 1976 (Official Report page 55)

Partnership means mutual involvement, sharing, by two or more individuals, often in an activity beyond themselves. It has been an important concept in the Christian Church since the New Testament times when it was called *koinonia*. Christian partnership did not then mean that the partners, although United in their missionary goals, were always in accord on how they were to carry out his mission - witness the disagreement between Peter and Paul in Galatians 2. Rather they were asked to face each other, and the roots of their disagreement and agreement, so openly that both could go forward in mutual love and respect into further creative activity.

This quality of partnership is possible in the Gospel to-day, between individuals, national churches, world-wide denominations. It involves sharing monies and persons and more – the sharing in depth of ideas between the partners, including the nature of their partnership. As in the first century, we can expect the Holy Spirit to press us to listen to each other, to state new insights frankly, and to accept implications of the Gospel new to us, whether painful or exhilarating.

ACC – 13 Resolution 12

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/meetings/acc13/resolutions.cfm#s12>

Church of Uganda Position Paper on Scripture, Authority, and Human Sexuality May 2005

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/world/docs/doc6.cfm>

[Andrew Walls The Ephesian Moment](#)

Frances Bridger - Revisioning the Evangelical Centre

<http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2006/newsletter05.cfm?doc=87>

Listening and Mission

Ian T. Douglas and Michael Poon

Introduction

Mission is the central theme of this book. God's mission of reconciliation and the proclamation of good news to all people is the task of the Church in this and every generation. The passion of the debate over human sexuality is rooted in a common desire for service to God's mission. As the authors of *True Union in the Body?* note at the very beginning of that work:

The call to bless same-sex unions arises because some (mainly in the West) believe this is an appropriate and loving response to people who seek the Church's support, and so should be an important feature of the Church's pastoral practice and a vital part of the Church's contemporary mission. Many, however, see it as a major challenge to the Church's identity, potentially overturning her traditional understanding of scriptural teaching about human sexuality and faithful Christian discipleship. Especially in the non-West there is the added fear that it effectively undermines the Church's mission in their context and denies the gospel.

One of the most telling parts of the 1998 Lambeth sexuality debate was during discussion of the amendment (Resolution V.35) proposed from the West Africa Region which stated 'homosexuality is a sin which could only be adopted by the church if it wanted to commit evangelical suicide'. In response, Bishop Roskam of New York said, 'If affirming homosexuality is evangelical suicide in [Africa], to condemn it is evangelical suicide in my region.'

Given a shared passion for mission and yet such differences over sexuality, it is important to begin by thinking about listening and mission. The two essays that follow set out guiding principles on these themes. The first is by **Ian Douglas**, a missiologist well respected in The Episcopal Church USA. The second is by **Michael Poon**, a leading theologian of the Global South who is the chair of the Global South Theological Formation and Education Task Force. Ian and Michael worked independently and then shared their essays with one another. They have then written a brief response to one another as a way of modelling conversation among fellow Anglicans. These appreciate difference yet seek commonality in service to God's mission together.

Ian Douglas explains recent developments in Christian thinking about mission and explores the Bible's teaching about mission. He shows that both of these lead us to focus on the mission of God (*missio Dei*). At the heart of God's mission, he argues, is reconciliation and restoration of relationships. Today, we find ourselves in more and more relationships because we live in a globalized world and Anglican Communion. Drawing on studies of identity and identity politics he shows that ease of communication and travel can hide from us the complexity of who both we are and who other Anglicans really are. We can also forget the ways we are usually both powerful and powerless in different ways in all our relationships. Often, instead, we

view ourselves and others in simple categories based on theology, colour, sexuality, nationality, gender etc. These single identities can then become the cause of increased conflict based on these differences. Part of the mission of God is therefore to restore these broken relationships. To do this, he argues, we need to learn to share our common experiences and feelings with one another and to listen to one another across our differences. This can help us discover and show the unity we have in Christ who is both human and divine and in whom we are reconciled to God and one another.

Michael Poon draws on the work of a historian and a missionary to help us recover the importance of listening and mission. These dual callings are rooted in the Word become flesh. They therefore should take place in face-to-face loving human encounters in which we connect with people in their lived reality. He is concerned that the revival of the language of *missio Dei* threatens to abstract us from this local, concrete inter-personal activity. It can also give us a sense of privilege as agents of God's mission which can then become part of a centrally imposed ideology and set of policies. He warns that the 'Listening Process' on homosexuality risks falling into similar traps especially if we fail to listen to the past and the different meanings of homosexuality in different cultures (a matter explored more fully in Chapter 5).

These two writers share a conviction that listening and mission belong together and are both to be shaped by the mystery of the Incarnation. They find themselves agreeing that, in the words of Dr Poon: 'listening and mission are ways in which the Christian community engages the world' and that 'listening and mission are ways of being present in the real world in its broken and gifted experience' and 'can only be acts of love'. They offer, however, different understandings of what this means in practice and of the value of focusing on the mission of God (*missio Dei*). Douglas focuses on the impact of globalization and the need - especially when meeting people from different contexts - to understand our varied and complex identities. He believes that through sharing our response to these differences (especially their impact on our personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural power) we may engage in genuine listening and share in God's reconciling mission. Poon calls for us to focus not on abstract categories and processes or on the impact of globalization on these but rather on the concrete. It is here, he believes, that tensions such as those Douglas identifies are resolved. By loving our neighbour through listening to them and being fully present to one another we can discern how our differences become distinctive contributions to the life and mission of the Church.

Ian and Michael thus have disagreements - which two theologians do not! - but there is also significant common ground. This basis of common ground is vital for the rest of the book as we enter into areas where there is deep division which matter so much because we have so much common ground.

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Kevin Ward - Gay [people as missionaries: an interrogation of the silences](#)

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<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/world/docs/doc2.cfm>

Listening and Dialogue

Janet Marshall and Charley Thomas

Introduction

Mission is the central theme of this book, as we noted earlier, and part of the common ground across divisions over sexuality. In addition, in the last chapter Michael Poon and Ian Douglas agreed that listening and mission are acts of love and ‘ways in which the Christian community engages the world . . . ways of being present in the real world in its broken and gifted experience’. As we prepare to approach issues of sexuality, which will be the focus of the following sections, we do so in the light of the commitment of the bishops of the 1998 Lambeth Conference to ‘listen to the experience of homosexual persons’ and of ACC-13’s commendation of mutual listening. In relation to both mission and sexuality, therefore, a central question is: ‘How can we best listen to others and learn to dialogue with them?’ This chapter is a very effective guide to the tasks of listening and dialogue written by two experienced practitioners.

Janet Marshall and **Charley Thomas** come from quite different parts of the Communion - Canada and Zambia respectively. In this chapter they provide guidance for those wanting to engage in listening and dialogue about difficult and controversial subjects. They offer some very useful ways of facilitating listening and dialogue processes. This help and down-to-earth advice comes from their extensive experience of facilitating listening processes, primarily for mission. The principles they offer us come from both a commitment to learning and also from practical experience. They can be applied to all kinds of situations and we hope you will be able to apply them whether you are running a Church Council or a Synod.

Listening and dialogue may seem easy but in reality it is something we often find very hard. Evidence for this is that there are countless training programs and consultants who make their living by helping people listen and speak to each other respectfully, honestly and constructively. It is even more difficult when what we are trying to talk about is a difficult or taboo subject, perceived as causing conflict, and when we speak from a variety of different cultures. Such is the case in our Anglican conversations about the place of gay and lesbian people in the life of the Church. The good news is that the necessary skills can be learnt and implemented even in the most difficult circumstances.

After introducing some biblical and theological reflections on the call to listen, the chapter highlights the challenge of cross-cultural listening. Particularly in relation to an issue like sexuality, we need to learn how to disagree in a loving, Christian manner, and here the example of Paul’s advice to the Philippian church and some Mennonite principles are examined. An important distinction is then drawn between debate, on the one hand, and listening and dialogue on the other. Janet and Charley commend and focus on these last two as ways forward. To help with this they offer concrete, practical guidance on how to listen in a dialogue group in a receptive, encouraging and reflective manner. Such ‘deep listening’ helps us understand others and to speak for ourselves in

the group. It also enables us to be hard on issues but soft on people. Good dialogue also requires good facilitation and so guidance is offered here on the role of the facilitator and the importance of agreed group norms. Tips are given as to how to facilitate well and how to respond to particular challenges that can arise. The final section focuses on how to encourage listening rather than dialogue, using the example of the 'Sharing Circle' from North American indigenous peoples.

This chapter precedes detailed discussion about sexuality because, as Christians, listening to God and to others is a fundamental Christian discipline and a basic expression of our faithfulness and love. It is one of the ways in which we obey the commandments to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22.37-39).

As you read through this chapter and even more as you put its many principles and tips into practice, you may find helpful the following words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the distinguished German theologian writing about life in Christian community at another time of great conflict in the Church:

The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God's Word but also lends us God's ear. We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to 'offer' something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening. But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either; they will always be talking even in the presence of God. The death of the spiritual life starts here, and in the end there is nothing left but empty spiritual chatter and clerical condescension which chokes on pious words. Those who cannot listen long and patiently will always be talking past others, and finally no longer will even notice it. Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and their own words and plans.

For Christians, pastoral care differs essentially from preaching in that here the task of listening is joined to the task of speaking the Word. There is also a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. This impatient, inattentive listening regularly despises the other Christian and finally is only waiting to get a chance to speak and thus to get rid of the other. This sort of listening is no fulfilment of our task. And it is certain that here, too, in our attitude toward other Christians we simply see reflected our own relationship to God. It should be no surprise that we are no longer able to perform the greatest service of listening that God has entrusted to us - hearing the confession of another Christian - if we refuse to

lend our ear to another person on lesser subjects. The pagan world today knows something about persons who often can be helped only by having someone who will seriously listen to them. On this insight it has built its own secular form of pastoral care, which has become popular with many people, including Christians. But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the One who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God.

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David Runcorn '[Some Principles For Meeting with People Whose Beliefs Differ From Mine](#)' [article for resources from around the world - England]

See also

Sue Burns 'A Diocesan Conversation on Homosexuality' <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/world/docs/doc3.cfm>

Stephen Lyon 'Listening with loving attention' <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/world/docs/doc1.cfm>

The Witness of Scripture

Phil Groves, John Holder and Paula Gooder

Introduction

This second section comprises three chapters which turn our attention to the authoritative sources for Anglican theology and ethics: Scripture, tradition and reason. Because of its primacy among these and its centrality in debates about sexuality, the first and longest of the three chapters is focused on Scripture. This falls into three distinct parts. Each of these has its own main author although **Phil Groves, John Holder and Paula Gooder** worked together on the chapter as a whole.

Part 1, by the Listening Process Facilitator, **Phil Groves**, opens the chapter with reflections on what it means to live under the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture is confessed by people across the spectrum of views on sexuality but it is clear that there are also quite different understandings of what this means in practice. This presents a challenge to us because, as the Archbishop of Canterbury explained in his Advent Letter of 2007, a full relationship of communion will mean:

The common acknowledgment that we stand under the authority of Scripture as ‘the rule and ultimate standard of faith’, in the words of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral; as the gift shaped by the Holy Spirit which decisively interprets God to the community of believers and the community of believers to itself and opens our hearts to the living and eternal Word that is Christ. Our obedience to the call of Christ the Word Incarnate is drawn out first and foremost by our listening to the Bible and conforming our lives to what God both offers and requires of us through the words and narratives of the Bible. We recognize each other in one fellowship when we see one another ‘standing under’ the word of Scripture. Because of this recognition, we are able to consult and reflect together on the interpretation of Scripture and to learn in that process. Understanding the Bible is not a private process or something to be undertaken in isolation by one part of the family. Radical change in the way we read cannot be determined by one group or tradition alone.

This chapter therefore begins by seeking common ground as Anglicans across our differences on the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality. This is found by looking at what the 39 Articles teach about Scripture and its authority in the Church. Although the Articles have a varied status across the provinces of our Communion they are an important part of our common Anglican heritage. The guide to their teaching on Scripture which is provided here is based *On the 39 Articles* by Professor Oliver O’Donovan, a study first published in 1986 and reprinted for the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

In our listening and learning about sexuality, many Anglicans are concerned about faithfulness to Scripture, the dangers of false teaching, and how doctrine and ethics develop over time. Having attempted to find common ground in the Articles, the chapter proceeds to look at these issues through a study of Jude. This short letter’s emphasis on standing firm for the ‘faith once delivered to the saints’ has often been

appealed to in the course of recent discussions about sexuality. Then we are asked to consider what the issues were in the early Church that led to Jude writing this letter and to explore what parallels might legitimately be drawn with our discussions of sexuality today.

The scene has now been set by examining how our thinking is shaped by our understanding of the authority of Scripture and what it means to guard the faith. We therefore turn next to explore how those in favour of same-sex relationships and those opposed to them both appeal to the Bible in making their case. A biblical overview of these two views is presented. In the light of these it is asked what we mean when we claim that a view is compatible or incompatible with Scripture.

Underlying different understandings of what is compatible with Scripture are often different ways of interpreting the Bible. The section therefore turns next to the discipline of hermeneutics - how we interpret the Bible. Some key issues are outlined by looking at some of the challenges we face as we seek to understand and apply the Bible today.

Finally, the section returns to the question of faithful development in Christian thinking and practice and concerns about inclusion of outsiders and the role of experience in biblical interpretation. These issues are examined by looking at a key biblical example. The early Church welcomed Gentiles and decided not to apply aspects of the Jewish law to them. This is often appealed to in debates about the sort of welcome to be given to those who identify as gay and lesbian and discussions about what the Church expects of them in terms of holy living. It is central to the account (*To Set Our Hope on Christ*) given by The Episcopal Church (USA) to ACC-13 in response to the Windsor Report. Different understandings of how the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 reached its conclusions are therefore explained in order to help us understand whether and how this might help us in our dialogues today about sexuality.

In **Parts 2 and 3** we move on from a general introduction to consider the wider background and teaching of the Bible in relation to sexuality. Here we are guided by **John Holder** from Barbados (writing on the Old Testament) and **Paul Gooder** a biblical scholar based in England (who writes on the New Testament material). The original plan was for them simply to provide a guide to the main controversial texts. However, after study, prayer and consultation with Phil Groves, they decided to attempt to place the debate about homosexuality in the context of biblical understandings of sexuality more widely. Between them they take us on a journey through the Old and New Testaments.

John Holder combines his gifts as an Old Testament scholar and a bishop who lives the Bible in his context. He shows how sexuality has been the subject of human reflection and discussion, including religious reflection and discussion, for millennia.

He sets the Old Testament in the wider context of Ancient Near Eastern beliefs. Israel's neighbours viewed the gods as sexual beings and related both fertility and sexual experience closely to religious devotion. The creation narratives set the scene

for the development of themes, which emphasize both the blessing and ambivalence of sexuality.

God's people are seen to celebrate sexuality as a good gift of God, particularly linked to procreation. However, the Old Testament also warns against and illustrates the dangers of misusing this gift in various ways. Although sexual imagery is sometimes used for Yahweh and his relationship with Israel, the emphasis is on God transcending sexuality. Against this backdrop, the few negative texts relating to homosexuality are examined and by setting them in their original context some of their complexities are highlighted.

Paula Gooder guides us through the material on sexuality found in the New Testament from the Gospels and Acts, through the Pauline tradition before concluding with a look at other texts. What she describes reveals a continuation but also a development of the Old Testament's engagement with sexuality. One of the most important innovations is the prominence given to celibacy.

In the Gospels, God's transcendence over sexuality is again emphasized in the accounts of Jesus' virgin birth. Jesus' strong teaching on adultery, divorce and remarriage is explored, as is his discussion of marriage in heaven. This teaching needs, however, to be put alongside his attitude to those, particularly women, who are seen as sexual sinners. Finally, both Jesus and the early Church in Acts (notably again in Acts 15) warned about sexual immorality (*porneia*), and the scope and significance of this prohibition are examined. Paul, too, warns against any acceptance of *porneia* in the Christian community, particularly in his most concentrated discussion of sexuality in 1 Corinthians 5–7. Here, there is not only further teaching on divorce (1 Corinthians 7) but also a vice list which includes words traditionally understood to refer to homosexuality. The debates over the meanings of these terms and the different interpretations of the fuller discussion of homosexuality in Romans 1 are carefully explained to help you understand these texts and some of the disagreements that exist between scholars on how to interpret them. The chapter concludes with brief discussion of some texts in the Pastoral Epistles (another vice list which includes a reference to homosexuality and advice for the conduct of church leaders), 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation.

Although a lot of ground is covered in what follows, neither John nor Paula expects what they have written to be the final word. Once again it must be stressed that their work is simply a resource, not an authoritative statement. It is offered in the hope it will send you back to read your Bible with a fuller and wider understanding, and send you out to dialogue about this and study the Bible with fellow Christians.

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Deirdre Good '[Jesus' Family Values](#)'

Edward Mills [the Bible and Homosexuality](#)

Modern Churchpeople's Union – [The Bible and Homosexuality](#)

The Witness of Tradition

Jaci Maraschin, Samson Fan and Phil Groves

Introduction

As the previous chapter explained, Anglicans have always combined their belief in the authority of Scripture with a respect for tradition. They have, however, also always understood themselves as both Catholic and Reformed and so accepted the need for even well-established traditions to be open to challenge and development. Our discussions on sexuality need therefore to be set in the context of both honouring the church's tradition and recognizing the possibility that this tradition may be in error in some ways. What does this mean in relation to our thinking about sexuality? Professor Oliver O'Donovan, explaining the claim in the St Andrew's Day Statement that the Church 'assists all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness, recognizing two forms or vocations in which that life can be lived: marriage and singleness (Genesis 2.24; Matthew 19.4-6; 1 Corinthians 7 passim)', writes (*italics added*):

As it stands, the claim that there are two and only two such forms, though well supported, as the authors think, from Scripture, is not directly a biblical one but claims the authority of unbroken church tradition. If that tradition were shown to be essentially defective (i.e. without the supposed support of Scripture) or (less implausibly) to be more accommodating than has been thought (e.g. including homosexual unions as a valid variant of marriage), then, of course, there would be no general difficulty. But that supposes a radical development in the church's understanding of the tradition. The Statement does not rule such a development out a priori; in principle, *no Anglican who believed, as Anglicans are supposed to believe, in the corrigibility of tradition could rule it out a priori.*

The chapter that follows aims to provide tools to help you think about the nature of tradition and how we should evaluate proposed changes to our traditions. Because this is its aim, little of what follows is directly on the issue of homosexuality or the generally negative understanding of homosexuality found in Christian tradition.

The work is a joint contribution from **Jaci Maraschin** (who brings a wealth of experience as a Brazilian liturgist who has contributed to the Anglican Communion over many years especially as part of the Anglican team on the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission) and **Samson Fan** (a young Chinese scholar who brought both enthusiasm and order to the thinking). Their work was facilitated by Phil Groves, as much by asking the questions and editing the responses. The fact that English was not the first language of either Samson or Jaci presented new ways of looking at things.

After a brief context-setting Jaci and Samson introduce the crucial distinction between tradition (the transmission through time of the apostolic faith) and traditions (usages

or habits giving expression to tradition and open to change). Drawing on Hooker and other theologians, they then help us think through the relationship between tradition and both Scripture (picking up some of the themes in the first section of chapter three) and reason. Contemporary gay consciousness is then described as a new challenge facing the church which has led some Christians to call for the blessing of same-sex unions. This call to change our traditions needs to be tested not only to see whether it is compatible with Scripture but also how it relates to the tradition of the Church. To help in that testing more detailed analysis is then offered of four areas where there have been recent calls to change our traditions in the Communion - in relation to marriage, polygamy, divorce and remarriage and the ordination of women. The developments in these areas are sketched and it is seen that calls to change have been heeded but also resisted and rejected in the recent past. In each area, questions are suggested to help you consider what can be learned from these issues and how they might help us as we consider calls to change certain traditions in relation to homosexuality. The final section reminds us that as Anglicans we are simply part of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church and introduces thinking about tradition and authority that has arisen out of work between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on ARCIC.

In the rich diversity of human life, encounter with the living Tradition produces a variety of expressions of the Gospel. Where diverse expressions are faithful to the Word revealed in Jesus Christ and transmitted by the apostolic community, the churches in which they are found are truly in communion. Indeed, this diversity of traditions is the practical manifestation of catholicity and confirms rather than contradicts the vigour of Tradition. As God has created diversity among humans, so the Church's fidelity and identity require not uniformity of expression and formulation at all levels in all situations, but rather catholic diversity within the unity of communion. (ARCIC, *The Gift of Authority*, Paragraph 27)

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Homosexualities and Culture

Terry Brown, Victor Atta-Baffoe and Phil Groves Additional material from Griphus Gakuru and John Kevern

Introduction

This is a key chapter in the book. It concludes section two by examining culture as an aspect of the third traditional component of the Anglican way - reason. It also acts as a transition from this section's more conceptual and theological material to the focus on listening and dialogue in the following third section where we encounter more directly human beings in their cultural settings. The Virginia Report presented to Lambeth 1998 spoke of 'reason' as 'simply the human being's capacity to symbolize, and so to order, share and communicate experience' or 'what can be called "the mind of a particular culture", with its characteristic ways of seeing things, asking about them, and explaining them'. It then said, 'If tradition is the mind that Christians share as believers and members of the Church, reason is the mind they share as participants in a particular culture'. The interplay with Scripture and tradition was then described in the following terms:

Anglicanism sees reason in the sense of the 'mind' of the culture in which the Church lives and the Gospel is proclaimed, as a legitimate and necessary instrument for the interpretation of God's message in the Scriptures. Sometimes Scriptures affirm the new insights of a particular age or culture, sometimes they challenge or contradict those insights. The Word of God is addressed to the Church as it is part of this world. The Gospel borne by the Scriptures must be heard and interpreted in the language that bears the 'mind' and distils the experience of the world. Tradition and reason are therefore in the Anglican way two distinct contexts in which Scriptures speak and out of which they are inter-pretred.

What the Virginia Report goes on to say has particular bearing on our discussions on sexuality: how we understand ourselves as sexual beings, and the fact that the relationship between sexuality and society varies enormously across cultures. It is therefore vital that in considering sexuality we recall that:

The experience of the Church as it is lived in different places has something to contribute to the discernment of the mind of Christ for the Church. No one culture, no one period of history has a monopoly of insight into the truth of the Gospel. It is essential for the fullest apprehension of truth that context is in dialogue with context. Sometimes the lived experience of a particular community enables Christian truth to be perceived afresh for the whole community. At other times a desire for change or restatement of the faith in one place provokes a crisis within the whole Church.

We hope in the few brief pages of this chapter to enable you to think more clearly about your own culture, others' cultures and the relationship of Christ and mission to those cultures. In order to try to understand how Christians have sought to relate their

faith to their culture the chapter begins with H. Richard Niebuhr's five types of relationship: Christ against culture; Christ transforming culture; Christ above culture; Christ and culture in paradox; and Christ of culture. Four case studies from across the Communion then illustrate how reality is much more complex than these ideal types, and seek to help you consider your own attitudes. An alternative type, called Culture in Christ, is explored by a Ugandan contributor from his experience of biblical Christianity and martyrdom.

After noting that the Bible is also a culturally located document, a brief introduction is offered as to how insights about our various cultures today - and the culture of the Bible - can be gained from the discipline of anthropology. The final two sections begin to relate this more directly to the areas of current disagreement and tension in our Communion life. In order to encourage and enable mutual listening brief and limited examinations are offered of both European and African cultural assumptions. You are encouraged to use these to think about your own cultural assumptions and understand better those who come from a different culture. The last section warns against simply thinking about 'homosexuality'. It argues that it is necessary to realise that the diversity of cultures leads to a diversity of homosexualities in and across those cultures. This raises the question of whether we need to take more care to explore fully our different experiences and understandings of the phenomenon to which we are seeking to develop a biblical, pastoral Christian response. Here again, the real work is left to you the reader, as you are encouraged to engage with your own preconceptions as we proclaim that Christ is one, the Lord and saviour of all, in the diversity of human cultures.

The writing of this chapter has involved many people both mentioned and unnamed within the text in order to draw on the diverse cultures of the Communion. We value the advice they have all given. The main authors are **Terry Brown**, a bishop from Melanesia, and **Victor Atta-Baffoe**, a theologian from Ghana, each of whom brings a wealth of intercultural experience; but many people have contributed to this chapter.

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Andrew Walls, [‘The Ephesian Moment’](#)

See also

Chigor Chike - [Beyond the Homosexuality Debate](#)

Caroline Hall - [Cultural Influences on American Episcopalians](#)

Donald Whipple Fox - [A Dakota Reflection on ‘Individuality’ within ‘Commonality’](#)

Sexuality and Identity

Janet Trisk and Sue Burns

Introduction

Among the most important questions we ask about ourselves and others are, 'Who am I? Who are you?' Central to all listening is learning to understand someone in their own terms rather than simply assuming we know who they are. That is particularly important because for some people the questions about sexuality currently being discussed in the Communion are far from purely abstract or academic. They are questions which they feel touch on their personal identity at a deep level.

The bishops at Lambeth recognized this and spoke about sexuality and Christian identity in the sub-group report on Human Sexuality which Resolution 1.10 commends. That report quoted the following words from the St Andrew's Day Statement:

There can be no description of human reality, in general or in particular, outside the reality in Christ. We must be on guard, therefore, against constructing any other ground for our identities than the redeemed humanity given us in him. Those who understand themselves as homosexuals, no more and no less than those who do not, are liable to false understandings based on personal or family histories, emotional dispositions, social settings, and solidarities formed by common experiences or ambitions. Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than can our class, race or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as 'a' homosexual or 'a' heterosexual; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation.

Although this chapter includes further theological reflection upon identity - especially on how we understand our identity in Adam and in Christ - this is not the focus here. What follows is focused instead on 'listening to the experience of homosexual persons' as they consider with us issues of sexuality and identity. It is therefore an invitation to deepen our understanding and no particular views on the relationship between sexuality and identity are specifically endorsed.

Our guides here are **Sue Burns** from Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia and **Janet Trisk** from Southern Africa. In contrast to all the other chapters, however, it is not their voices which predominate. Sue and Janet spent many hours meeting with Christians in order to hear their testimonies. They met people who consider themselves identified by the bishops of the 1998 Lambeth Conference by the term 'homosexual persons'. As noted in the introduction, this includes a wide range of people who self-identify under various names - gay, lesbian, ex-gay, bisexual, transgender and post-gay. Each person's story is unique and there are therefore a variety of perspectives to be found in what follows. Sue and Janet found that most of those they spoke with did not relate to the St

Andrew's Day Statement on identity. They therefore concluded that, rather than focusing on that statement here, they would offer us a record of what they heard, with some additional commentary in order to allow each reader to consider the testimony with them.

Sue and Janet engaged in a program of listening to enable these voices to be heard both by their own personal listening and by engaging with emailed testimonies from around the world.

As they introduce the testimonies they also encourage us to stop and to reflect and to pray. They also ask questions of us as readers about our own stories and about how we are reacting to what we read. This chapter is, therefore, quite different in style from the three previous more academic chapters. For many it may make difficult and uncomfortable reading. We are asked to listen deeply and to wrestle with deep personal questions such as 'Who am I?', 'Why is naming their identity so difficult for some people?', 'Who are we in Christ?', 'What are gay and lesbian people telling us about ourselves as a church?'. The hope is that it will encourage you, if it is possible in your own context, to get to know other Christians whose personal experience gives them particular insights into questions of sexuality and identity.

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Submissions

Michael Bourke - [Identity and Redemption](#)

Clergy Families & [Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(USA\)](#) Submission

Zacchaeus Fellowship - Telling our Stories

<http://www.zacchaeus.ca/OurStories.html>

Courage - Testimonies

<http://www.courage.org.uk/articles/articles.asp?CID=2>

Mario Bergner – [Pastoral Considerations for Homosexuality](#)

[Five Testimonies from members of Changing Attitude Nigeria](#)

Names have been changed as homosexuality is illegal in Nigeria and those concerned may be vulnerable to victimisation and diminishment because their affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex. Such victimisation and diminishment was denounced as anathema by the Primates at their meeting in Dromantine in 2003.

See Also

Oliver O'Donovan – Sermons on the Subjects of the Day

<http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=130>

Christian Spirituality and Sexuality

Joseph Galgalo and Debbie Royals

Introduction

One way of describing what we are engaged in as a Communion and in using the resources of this book is the task of spiritual discernment. Among the claims being made by some Anglicans is that they have experienced the Spirit of God at work in the lives and relationships of people in same-sex unions. The Episcopal Church, when asked in the Windsor Report to explain 'how a person living in a same-gender union may be considered eligible to lead a flock of Christ', claimed that 'Christian congregations have sought to celebrate and bless same-sex unions because these exclusive, life-long, unions of fidelity and care for each other have been experienced as holy. This chapter seeks to explore claims such as these by considering questions relating to spirituality and sexuality.

More than with any other chapter in the book this chapter consciously brought together two people whose understanding and experience of same-sex relationships was quite different and asked them to get to know and listen to each other. **Debbie Royals** wholeheartedly owns the statement quoted above from *To Set Our Hope On Christ*. Her spirituality is informed by living a life of commitment to Christ as an indigenous person who is in a covenanted relationship with her female partner. **Joseph Galgalo**, in contrast, finds it difficult to comprehend as Christian any claim that a same-sex union can be holy. He brings to this conversation a depth of spirituality which emerges from his evangelical heritage in the Church of Kenya and from his understanding of the Christian heritage through his insightful academic study of the Church Fathers. What they have in common is a desire to hear each other and the clarity, personal relationship with Christ and academic ability that enables them to respond to each other.

Joseph and **Debbie** came together for a week to listen to one another, work together, travel together, read the Scripture together and pray with and for one another. This was one of the most uncertain of all the partnerships established in the creation of these resources. There was no guarantee that they would find any common ground. They were specifically asked not to seek a compromise. In contrast to most of the other chapters no joint statement was expected. The goal was to clarify both the differences between them and those things they hold in common. During the week they met with members of the Iona Community - a dispersed Christian ecumenical community working for peace and social justice, rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship - who were able to talk about their experiences of the spiritual life as lesbian and gay people within their inclusive community of prayer and action. **Joseph** and **Debbie** asked hard questions of those they met and of one another. They did so, however, in a spirit of mutual respect and without trying to diminish or victimize the other.

This chapter is written in the form of a conversation which follows the flow of the dialogue of the final day. It covers a wide range of crucial questions - their

understandings of spirituality and sexuality and the relationship between them, the nature of gender identity (Debbie identifies as a Two Spirit person) and how sexuality and spirituality relate to personhood, various expressions of spirituality and sexuality in different relationship patterns and in different cultures, and finally how these themes relate to such important theological concerns as creation, holiness, the example of Jesus and covenant. As with the earlier chapters, this can only provide an introduction to these major themes. For that conversation both Phil Groves and Adrian Chatfield were privileged to be present. They heard the conversation and occasionally asked questions but the conversation was between **Debbie** and **Joseph**. Common ground was found, but differences are not papered over or hidden. In what follows **Joseph** and **Debbie** speak for themselves. But this conversation is not over. No resolution was reached but both trust in Jesus Christ who is to reconcile all things (Colossians 1.19-20).

As you read, listen carefully to what they are saying to each other and consider how you would have joined in the conversation if you were present. Then see if you can find ways in which you can enter similar conversations and dialogue with other Christians who view things quite differently from you. Both **Debbie** and **Joseph** learnt more about their own spiritual journey from the encounter. We hope that as you share in some of that encounter and pray as you read their conversation and the Scriptures to which they refer that your own relationship with Christ will also be enriched and enlivened.

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The Witness of Science

David de Pomerai and Glynn Harrison

Introduction

The earlier sections of this book have set the scene in terms of mission and listening, introduced the resources found in the authorities of Scripture, tradition and reason, and introduced the voices of homosexual persons reflecting on identity and a dialogue on spirituality and sexuality between two Anglicans of quite different views. This final section returns to a much more technical and academic style. It does so by looking to the work of two Anglican scientists which helps us understand what biology - particularly genetics - and psychology can tell us about homosexuality.

This book is likely to be read by people with a theological background and may be challenging for those who do not have an understanding of science. You may also want to read the contents with a Christian you know who is a scientist, perhaps a doctor or a science teacher.

Both **David de Pomerai** and **Glynn Harrison** are working scientists in British universities. They bring their skills to enable us to consider the research which has taken place over recent years in their own fields. As noted in the introduction, Lambeth Conferences and other Instruments have repeatedly requested study of scientific evidence but this has rarely been done in Anglican documents on sexuality. As a result scientific claims are sometimes made by advocates of different theological positions that are difficult to assess. To help in this task, this chapter reviews the literature and its bearing on Christian discussion. **David** focuses on the possible biological causes of homosexuality in the hope that the scientific research may help answer such questions as to whether or not homosexuality is biologically fixed. **Glynn** examines the question of whether those who do not wish to experience same sex attraction can experience significant change in their sexual feelings and desires, as claimed by some Christians. Although they are experts in their respective fields - David is a biologist, specifically a geneticist, while Glynn is a professor of psychiatry, specializing in schizophrenia - neither of them were personally involved in any of the research they report here.

What follows is often highly technical and quite complex. However, as all truth is God's truth, it is vital that Christians thinking about sexuality be as well informed as they can be about the findings of different scientific studies. It is important to acknowledge, nevertheless, that both David and Glynn are clear that the science they present is not conclusive. Furthermore, even if it were conclusive science, as faithful Anglicans, they do not believe it is for science to have the last and determinative word on how we should then live as Christians or order ourselves as churches. That fact is why this is only one of eight chapters in this book and it is important that its findings are related to the other chapters, particularly those in section two of the book exploring Scripture, tradition and reason.

One of the features of scientific investigation - in contrast to the immediately preceding chapters - is that it seeks to be dispassionate, neutral, objective and impersonal. Some of the language in this chapter may therefore seem to you to be clinical and even dehumanizing. Glynn and David recognize this and it is another of the reasons they believe that, although science has a place, its place is limited and needs to be put alongside the more personal stories found elsewhere in this book.

While some readers will have a good knowledge of science, many will not. The book is designed for those who are more competent in theology than science. David and Glynn therefore begin their sections with an overview of their papers, summarising their main sections and findings. If you do not have a scientific background you may wish simply to read these and then follow up in more detail any sections that particularly interest you. As in all the chapters, the conclusions they reach are their own but we believe their work represents a major contribution to this often neglected aspect of the discussion among Christians and hope it will help you deepen your understanding of the mystery of human sexuality.

With new material being published Dr de Pomerai has updated the material in chapter 8 Part 1.

Biological mechanisms in homosexuality; an update (2007-8)

Part 1 - Biological Mechanisms in Homosexuality - A Critical Review

Due to limited space the book carries abbreviated references - here they are set out in full. They are arranged in alphabetical order and correspond to the numbering in the book.

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Part 2 - Unwanted Same-Sex Attractions: Can Pastoral and counselling Interventions Help People to Change?

Due to limited space the book carries abbreviated references - here they are set out in full. They are arranged in the order they appear in the book and correspond to the numbering in the book.

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Submissions

The Anglican Communion does not recommend or endorse any of the submissions. The resources provided are intended to enable mutual listening and are made available for

study, discussion and reflection within each member Church of the Communion as requested by Resolution 12 of ACC – 13.

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/meetings/acc13/resolutions.cfm#s12>

Mario Bergner – [Pastoral Considerations for Homosexuality](#)

A Submission from a Special Interest Group in the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#) (UK)

Jack Drescher - [Sexual Conversion Therapies](#)

Wayne Bessen – [The ‘Ex-gay’ Myth](#)

Michelle Wolkomir - [Gay and Ex-Gay Paths to Resolving the Dilemma of Homosexuality in Christianity](#)

Gillian Cooke and Alan Sheard - [Created by God, Christianity and homosexuality in the 21st Century](#)

Dawn McDonald - [Concerning Pastoral Care to the Same-sex Attracted](#)

Writers

The Very Revd Dr Victor Atta-Baffoe (West Africa)

Victor Atta-Baffoe had his theological education at St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana (LTh); Trinity College, University of Toronto, Canada (STL); Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts USA (MA); Yale University Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, USA (STM), King's College London, University of London (PhD). He is the Dean of St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana. He is a member of the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal and Theological Commission, Chairman of the African Network of Institutions of Theological Education Preparing Anglicans for Ministry (ANITEPAM), served on the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, and is a member of the Anglican Covenant Design Group. He is married to Dorcas and has three children.

The Rt Revd Terry Brown (Melanesia)

Bishop Terry has been Bishop of Malaita, Solomon Islands, South Pacific in the Church of the Province of Melanesia for the past 11 years. He was born in the USA but he had his theological training in Canada, from which he first went as a missionary to the Church of Melanesia in 1975. For six years he taught at the provincial theological college, Bishop Patteson Theological College. He then returned to Canada to do his doctorate in church history. For 11 years he was Asia/Pacific Mission Coordinator of the Anglican Church of Canada, based in Toronto, and travelled extensively throughout the Asia/Pacific region and beyond. Finally, in 1996 he was elected Bishop of Malaita, returning not as a missionary but under local conditions of service with his fellow bishops. He is now Senior Bishop of the Province. Bishop Terry's interest in the area of the Church and homosexuality is general, covering areas of scripture, theology, history, science, ethics and culture, and is rooted in his own personal life, his interest in history and anthropology and his experience of mission and ministry in many cross-cultural situations – the proclamation of the Gospel and living it faithfully but also sensitively in terms of those who have very different views from one's own.

The Revd Sue Burns (Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia)

Sue is the Director of the Anglican Studies Programme at the College of St John the Evangelist, Auckland. In her previous role as Ministry Educator for the Diocese of Waikato, she was responsible for planning and facilitating respectful conversations on sexuality and homosexuality across the dioceses of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. She regards it as a privilege to have met with the participants in each setting of these conversations. Before emigrating to Aotearoa/New Zealand she completed ministry training at Trinity College, Bristol, having graduated with an honours degree in Biblical Studies from the University of Sheffield. It was through the study of biblical hermeneutics in Sheffield that she responded consciously to God and also began a lifetime of interest in language and interpretation. She delights in conversation and holds a Masters in Counselling and professional membership as a counsellor. She is currently enrolled in a PhD which includes theological reflection with the narratives and identities of people who are migrating.

The Revd Canon Dr Adrian Chatfield (England)

(Adrian has acted as a consultant to the editor, edited Chapter 6 and facilitated the conversation recorded in Chapter 7.)

Adrian Chatfield is currently Director of the Simeon Centre for Prayer and the Spiritual Life at Ridley Hall in Cambridge, and involved with the development of new forms of training ordinands for a range of pioneer ministries. A Trinidadian by birth and upbringing, he has exercised his priestly ministry in the Dioceses of Trinidad and Tobago, Exeter, Southwell and Nottingham, and Christ the King in South Africa. His book and study course on global Anglicanism, *Something in Common*, was commissioned by SPCK and the Centre for Anglican Communion Studies to address the breadth and variety of perspectives in the Communion, and aims to portray Anglicanism from a non-Eurocentric point of view.

The Revd Dr David de Pomerai (England)

David de Pomerai is currently Associate Professor in the School of Biology at the University of Nottingham, where he has been lecturing in genetics and animal development for almost 30 years. He has published two books and some 80 scientific papers on a variety of research topics, most recently dealing with nematode indicator genes that respond to environmental stress. He was recently the recipient of a UK-IERI Major Award to promote research co-operation between the UK and India. He was ordained in 1993 after studying part-time on the East Midlands Ministry Training Course (EMMTC), where he obtained a distinction. His interests in faith and science are combined in a long-running taught course on bioethics, which examines the ethical and social implications of several recent developments in the biological sciences (cloning, genetic engineering, etc.). He is also a longstanding member of the Society of Ordained Scientists. He is currently serving as an Associate Minister in the parish of Walton-on-Trent, Croxall, Rosliston and Linton with Castle Gresley, and also acts as Science Adviser in the Diocese of Derby, England.

The Revd Dr Canon Ian Douglas (USA)

Angus Dun Professor of Mission and World Christianity at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ian is a member of the Design Group for the 2008 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, a Consultant for Theological Education in the Anglican Communion (TEAC), a past member the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Mission and Evangelism, and a former missionary in Haiti. He serves on the International Editorial Board for the *Journal of Anglican Studies* and is a founding organizer of the Anglican Contextual Theologians Network. Ian is a member of the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church, and was recently elected as The Episcopal Church's clergy member of the Anglican Consultative Council. In addition he is Convener of the Episcopal Seminary Consultation on Mission and a founder of Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation. He publishes and speaks widely on mission, world Christianity and contemporary Anglicanism. Ian is married to Kristin Harris and they are the parents of three, almost grown, children.

The Revd Samson Fan (Hong Kong)

Samson was ordained to be a deacon in 2001 and priest the following year. He is now the vicar of St Thomas' Church in the Diocese of West Kowloon, Hong Kong. He has been involved in theological education in Ming Hua Theological College. He has published books for young people about myths and Western culture, ways of thinking and an introduction to ten important contemporary thinkers. He is now studying for a Masters degree at the Chinese University of Hong Kong; his Masters thesis is on Bishop Gore and the Anglican Incarnational Theology. He is particularly interested in the history of Christian thought, especially the development of Anglican theology.

The Revd Dr Griphus Gakuru (England)

Dr Griphus Gakuru is currently vicar of All Saints' Church, Stechford, in the Diocese of Birmingham. Originally a science teacher by profession, he was ordained deacon in the Anglican Church of Uganda in 1988. After serving as curate-in-charge of a parish and part-time visiting tutor at Bishop Tucker Theological College, Uganda (now Uganda Christian University), he studied at Cambridge University, where he graduated with an MPhil and then a PhD in Old Testament Studies, and at University College London where he obtained an MA in Philosophy and Religion. Dr Gakuru was Visiting Lecturer in Old Testament at the Universities of Birmingham and Liverpool Hope in 1987/8 and 2000/1 respectively. He is married with three children.

The Revd Dr Professor Joseph Galgalo (Kenya)

Joseph is the Associate Professor in Systematic and Contextual Theologies at St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya. He is also a priest of the Anglican Church of Kenya and involved in theological education and ecumenical formation at various levels. Joseph serves as a member of the Inter-Anglican theological and Doctrinal Commission, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Panel of Reference, and the Education and Ecumenical Formation Commission of the WCC.

The Revd Dr Andrew Goddard (England)

(Andrew has written the introduction and short introductions to each of the chapters.)

Andrew studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford before completing a theology doctorate on the life and work of Jacques Ellul. He is a member of the Theology Faculty at Oxford University where he taught Christian ethics at Wycliffe Hall. In recent years he has played a significant role in the Anglican Communion debates on homosexuality and the nature of communion. He is the author of several Grove booklets on issues of human sexuality including *God, Gentiles and Gay Christians* and co-authored *True Union in the Body?* with Peter Walker. He is the editor of *Anvil*, the Anglican evangelical theology journal, and is a Fellow of the Anglican Communion Institute. He is on the Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England, the leadership team of Fulcrum and active in the Evangelical Alliance. Andrew and his wife Elisabeth have two children.

Dr Paula Gooder (England)

Paula Gooder studied theology as an undergraduate and graduate student at Oxford University. After gaining her doctorate on 2 Corinthians 12.1–10 she taught at Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford and then at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham. Her research areas include the writings of St Paul (with a particular emphasis on 2 Corinthians), biblical interpretation and the development of ministry in the early Church. Paula is Canon Theologian of Birmingham Cathedral and an Honorary Lecturer at the University of Birmingham. She is a Reader in the Church of England and a member of the General Synod of the Church of England. She has published on a wide range of topics including *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12.1–10 and the Heavenly Ascent Tradition* (Continuum, 2006); *Exploring New Testament Greek: A Way in* (SCM, 2004) and *Hosea-Micah* (BRF, 2004). She is currently working on a book for SPCK called *Searching for Meaning: A Practical Guide to New Testament Interpretation*. Paula's experience comes from many years of reading and exploring methods of biblical interpretation, particularly of interpreting the Pauline Epistles and of wrestling with questions of how they can be best applied and used within the churches today.

Revd Canon Phil Groves (Anglican Communion Office)

Phil Groves is the Facilitator of the Listening Process on human sexuality in the Anglican Communion. His role includes monitoring the work being undertaken on the subject of human sexuality in the Anglican Communion and developing the process of mutual listening, including 'listening to the experience of homosexual persons' and the experience of local churches around the world. Phil was previously a vicar in the Church of England. Prior to that he was for seven years a lecturer at a Provincial Theological College in Tanzania where he was installed as an honorary canon of All Saints Cathedral Mpwapwa. He developed and taught a course on Anglicanism for the Church of Tanzania and is currently researching a biblical model of international partnership. He has published a Grove Booklet entitled *Global Partnerships for Local Mission*. Phil is on the Council of St John's Nottingham and is a Trustee of the Church Mission Society.

Professor Glynn Harrison (England)

Glynn Harrison is Norah Cooke Hurle Professor of Mental Health in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Bristol. He is a consultant psychiatrist interested in early interventions for young adults and the evaluation of interventions to enhance evidence-based practice. He researches the epidemiology of mental disorders, and is interested in the relative contributions of biological and social/environmental risk factors. He has acted as an Adviser to the World Health Organization and the UK Health Department and he is currently President of the International Federation of Psychiatric Epidemiology. He is a Diocesan Lay Minister and a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.

The Rt Revd Dr John Holder (West Indies)

Bishop John Holder trained for the ordained ministry at Codrington College, Barbados and continued his studies at the University of the South, USA. He completed a PhD at King's College London in 1984. His specialities are in Old Testament hermeneutics and the writings of Second Temple Judaism. In the 1980s and 1990s he held a number of academic posts in the West Indies and was a visiting Professor in Seminaries in the United States. During this time he was also active in parish ministry in several parishes in the Diocese of Barbados. He was consecrated Bishop of Barbados in 2000. Bishop John's academic publications have focused on the Old Testament, but have reflected his concern for Christian ministry in the Caribbean. He has also published biblical reflections and is a contributor to *Light for Our Path*. His biblical reflections are based on his academic scholarship but aim to be accessible for those who do not have an academic training. In his role as Bishop he is involved in the life of Barbados and chairs the Religious Advisory Committee on National Affairs, a body which offers advice to the Barbadian Government. He is also a member of the Privy Council. He is the Chair of the Barbados Christian Council and of the Inter-faith HIV/AIDS Commission. In 2004 he published a study guide to enable his pastors to engage with critical areas of pastoral concern entitled *The Bible in the Anglican Tradition: The Bible and Human Sexuality*. He has served the global Anglican Communion, and from 2001 to 2006 he was a member of the Advisory Group to the Anglican Observer to the United Nations. In 2006 he attended the St Augustine's Seminar which met to plan the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

The Very Revd Dr John Kevern (USA)

Dr Kevern is the Dean (Principal) of Bexley Hall Episcopal Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, USA and also an Associate Professor of Historical Theology. Fr Kevern read French as an undergraduate and theology at the General Seminary in New York, culminating at a doctorate at the University of Chicago with a thesis on Hans Urs von Balthasar. He has had many years of parish experience, both in Chicago and in country towns in upstate New York. He has also been a member of parishes in the Diocese of Gibraltar (Church of England in Europe) and the Anglican Church of Canada, having lived in Paris, Berne, Montreal and London. For these reasons, he has a high interest in intra-Anglican affairs and the Communion generally. Fr Kevern was previously the head of Affirming Catholicism in the USA, serving at the request of Bishop Griswold. He also served for ten years as the secretary to the American Lutheran-Episcopal dialogue, which produced the covenant leading to full communion. This experience of 'covenant making' also contributes to a desire for intra-Anglican covenant making. Dean Kevern very much enjoys teaching church history and liturgy at his theological college, and finds the formation of future Anglican priests to be one of the most gratifying careers one could possibly have.

The Revd Professor Jaci Maraschin (Brazil)

Born in Brazil, Jaci is a retired priest of the Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil and professor of the Anglican Institute of Theological Studies in São Paulo. He has published articles and books in the area of Liturgy and Culture and lectured at the

Trinity Institute and Union Theological Seminary in New York. At the last two Lambeth Conferences he acted as theological consultant. He was a member of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission and of the second phase of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Dialogue (ARCIC II). As a musician and hymnwriter he has published song books and CDs. Jaci holds academic degrees in music, philosophy, theology and sciences of religion. He has a doctorate from the University of Strasbourg, France, and undertook post-doctoral work at Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University in New York. For many years he was member of the Faith and Order Standing Commission of the WCC and worked in the Music and Liturgical Team for the World Assembly of the WCC in Canberra, Australia, 1991. Jaci is married to Ana Dulce and has two daughters.

Ms Janet Marshall (Canada)

Janet Marshall is a congregational development consultant and adult educator who works extensively with churches and judicatories to help create healthy communities of faith. Janet is co-founder of Potentials, an ecumenical centre for the development of ministry and congregations. Her work includes developing resources, and the design and facilitation of processes for listening and learning, visioning and planning, conflict mediation, leadership development, amalgamations, organizational renewal, and making difficult decisions. She is co-author of *Hearing Diverse Voices: Seeking Common Ground*, a programme of study on homosexuality for the Anglican Church of Canada, and *God, Kids and Us: The Growing Edge of Ministry with Children and the People Who Care for Them*, and author of *A Journey Just Begun*, a parish visioning resource. She is currently working on *Amalgamations and Mergers: Last Gasp or New Ministry?*

The Revd Canon Dr Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (South East Asia)

Michael is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia and lecturer in church history at Trinity Theological College, Singapore. He is an honorary canon in the Diocese of Singapore, and chairs the Global South Anglican Theological Formation and Education Task Force. Michael was deaconed in 1986 and priested in 1987 in Hong Kong. He was the General Secretary of the Missionary Area of Macao before moving to Singapore in 2004. Michael grew up in a Methodist family. He is married to Kwai Fan. They have three children.

The Revd Debbie Royals (USA)

Debbie was born in Tucson, Arizona. She is from the Pascua Yaqui Tribe on her mother's side and part Cherokee on her father's side. She is the mother of two sons and a grandmother. She attended the University of Arizona studying nursing and worked as a nurse and health-care administrator for 25 years prior to attending seminary. She attended seminary at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and completed a Master of Divinity in 2005 and a Master of Arts in Religion and Society at the Graduate Theological Union in 2006. Her thesis, 'Bridge-maker: Developing/Imagining a Native American Narrative Theology for Ministry' offers an objective view of the systems that inform the development of Native ministry. Debbie's ministry in the Church includes

Native American ministry development, writing curriculum for Native Ministry and the Church, spiritual direction, and the development of an appreciative focus on diversity training. She has published several articles in the First People's Theology Journal relating to the spirituality of indigenous people. She believes that the 'listening process' offers the hope for reconciliation and witness of the Anglican Communion to the world. As an indigenous woman theologian she understands that our relationship with our God and Creator seeks to bring into balance our whole selves; therefore, connecting sexuality and spirituality are essential. Her partner, the Revd Kay Sylvester, serves as priest in the Diocese of Los Angeles.

The Revd Canon Charley Thomas (Central Africa)

Charley is the son of the late Very Revd Canon K. T. Thomas, an Indian missionary to East Africa and Zambia for 40 years. His wife is Dr Rachel C. Thomas and their children's names are Molly, Tony and Jolly. Even though he was born in Kerala, India, he was educated in Tanzania, India, Zambia and the United Kingdom. He is a graduate in Theology, Mission Studies, Anglican Communion Studies and has attended numerous workshops and conferences in Globalization, WCC-Focus on Africa, Contextual Theology, Evangelism and Development, Canterbury Summer School, ALPHA, Inter-Faith Exposure, All Africa Conference of Churches, General Assembly, Peace and Conflict Resolution, etc. He was ordained to the diaconate in Central Zambia and to the priesthood in Bath and Wells. He was on secondment as Director of Ecumenical Theological Education by Extension in Zambia (1992–2001); and as Director of Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (2001–2007) and is Dean Designate of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Lusaka, Zambia (October 2007). As an Indian resident in Africa for over 40 years and having trained in three continents, and with family in Africa, America, Europe and Asia, he believes he has been called to a ministry of cross-cultural reconciliation. As an Anglican priest and the son of one, he has grown up in the Anglican Anglo-Catholic, evangelical, charismatic and modernist traditions. Fifteen years of ecumenical ministry have had an impact on his life, preparing him to listen to views and voices that are not necessarily his, but have played an important role in his formation. He believes he can make a contribution to the 'listening process' and the healing process of the Anglican Communion.

The Revd Janet Trisk (Southern Africa)

Janet is a South African and a lecturer in Systematic Theology and Spirituality at the College of the Transfiguration, Grahamstown, South Africa. She is ordained and served for five years in parish ministry. She represented the ACSA at the ACC meeting in 2005. Before training for the ministry, Janet was a lawyer. Her academic interests include women's theologies, the construction of identity and Christian anthropology. She holds a Masters degree from the University of Cape Town. Her doctoral studies keep getting postponed by activities such as this study process!

The Listening Process

Contributions from around the World

The aim of these pages is to share reflections on listening processes from around the world to enable both mutual listening and listening to gay and lesbian people.

The items listed reflect the views of the authors and are published with their permission. They are broadly in line with the aims of the listening process. They are sourced from provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Communion or by interested parties.

They focus on the theology and practice of listening.

The Bible and Homosexuality

A lecture by the Revd. Dr. Brett Cane, Essentials Canada. Rector, St. Aidan's Anglican Church, Winnipeg.

- [Download as a PDF Document \(106K\)](#)

Being Biblical - Slavery, Sexuality and the Inclusive Community

A lecture by the Revd. Dr Richard Burridge, Dean of King's College London.

- [Download as a PDF Document \(86K\)](#)

[The Church of Uganda](#)

The Position Paper of the Church of Uganda was drawn up in 2005 by a group of theologians and church leaders, both men and women, prior to ACC 13 in Nottingham [...More](#)

[The Episcopal Church \(USA\)](#)

Paragraph 135 of the Windsor Report said:

We particularly request a contribution from the Episcopal Church (USA) which explains, from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, how a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ.

The response of the Episcopal Church was a booklet entitled 'To Set Our Hope on Christ' you can download the booklet from this site:

http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHope_eng.pdf

[Listening with loving attention - Stephen Lyon - Partnership Secretary of The Church of England's Partnership for World Mission](#)

In his Presidential address at the July 2005 General Synod, held just the day after the horrific London bombings, Archbishop Rowan suggested that 'routine friendship and co-operation remains the best hope we have in any conflict of finding ways forward [...More](#)

[Hospitality That Listens](#)

A lecture given by Bishop James Tengatenga the Bishop of Southern Malawi to the Partnership for World Mission conference 2006. The theme of the Conference was *Hospitality - A Way Into Mission*. [...More](#)

[A program of listening from New Zealand](#)

This was an adaptation of the Public Conversation Model from the Family Institute of Cambridge Mass. USA. [...More](#)

[Listening to Learn. Learning to Listen](#)

The following is a reflection the listening process from Andrew Goddard published as a newsletter on the Fulcrum Website. It is published here to assist thinking about what the listening process is and might be [...More](#)

[Scripture and Sexuality - our commitment to listening and learning](#)

The following is a lecture in Memory of Canon Norman Autton 2005 by the Archbishop of Wales The Most Revd Barry Morgan [...More](#)

*The Bible and Homosexuality*¹

The Rev. Dr. Brett Cane
St. Aidan's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Introduction

Many people know and accept that the orthodox Christian position is against homosexual practice, however some are not exactly sure why. This is not surprising as there are many voices offering “alternative” views on what the Bible says and we need to have a clear picture that is consistent throughout the whole of Scripture. This booklet is an attempt to address that need for clarity.

In Part 1, I look at the Biblical witness itself to see what the text says and in Part 2, I look at the arguments people have raised to discount the biblical evidence. I want to acknowledge a great debt to

¹ The material here was originally given in two sermons preached at St. Aidan's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, on March 6 and 13, 2005.

Robert Gagnon's exhaustive book on the subject, "The Bible and Homosexual Practice"² from which much of my material has been gleaned.

Before going any further, I must again affirm that in speaking against homosexual practice, as I believe the Bible does, we are not isolating it as the sin God is more concerned about than any other. Gossip, for example, is part of Paul's catalogue of "every kind of wickedness" listed alongside homosexual practice in Romans 1 (verse 29). It is not that we should "come down hard" only on sexual sin and "go easy" on other kinds of sin; it is just that no one is arguing for gossip as a good thing, but many are doing just that for homosexual unions. This issue is a focal point, the tip of the iceberg, of the far deeper issues of authority and cultural accommodation that are facing the Church in our generation. This is why we must address it.

I also want to affirm that persons who find themselves sexually attracted to the same gender or who are involved in homosexual practice are deeply loved by God – Jesus was criticized for being compassionate to the sexually broken (e.g. Luke 7:36-50). However, his love for them also meant that he called them away from their sinful practices (e.g. John 8:11). There are many who can attest to the power of God for help in their sexual struggles. However the foundation upon which to base all our struggles against temptation – sexual and otherwise – is the Scriptures.

Part 1: What the Bible Says³

The Biblical View of Sexuality

We begin, not by looking at Bible passages related to homosexuality but at those which give the Bible's view on sexuality in general. If you ask someone what a forest looks like and they go up to a tree and examine a twig, they could say, "A forest consists of thin stems, horizontal to the ground." You would come away with a misunderstanding of trees and forests because you chose to examine an aspect in isolation. It is exactly the same with regards to homosexuality. Until you are able to stand back and see the overall Biblical perspective on God's gift of sexuality, you will not be able to place individual elements or passages in the right context.

Therefore we begin at the beginning – Genesis 1 and 2. Here we are given two different perspectives of creation, probably stemming from different sources, but carefully arranged side by side under the inspiration of God. Genesis 1 looks at creation at the cosmic level, Genesis 2 at the human level. Both speak about sexuality and its purposes. In Genesis 1:27-28, it says,

God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

Here, we see that humanity's separate genders are a reflection of God's image. Animals share this differentiation, but human sexuality appears here to be connected with or flow from, their special status of being made in God's image. This implies that the union of the two genders gives the fuller reflection of God's image. That is not saying that an individual man or woman is of any less value, but that when masculinity and femininity come together in marriage or community, together they reflect the "fullness" of God more completely.

This is affirmed in the next chapter when a human as an individual is alone and it is not good:

² Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice; Texts and Hermeneutics*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

³ Lessons read in connection with this section were: Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 1:18-32; Matthew 19:1-8.

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air...But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Genesis 2:18-24).

It is not another being of like gender that God creates as a partner, but one which complements the other – both anatomically and emotionally. Here, the emphasis is not on procreation, as in chapter 1 (this is only mentioned later in the same story in 3:16), but on “the relational (including physical/sexual) complementarity of male and female, that is, on the companionship and support provided by heterosexual marriage.”⁴

In this passage, “‘Adam,’ the human creation from the ground (‘adama’) is literally dismembered. His side is split open in order to provide for him the companionship of a complementary being. Marriage between a man and a woman reunites these representatives of the two genders into ‘one flesh’ and is not simply the union of two individuals. The missing part of man is found in woman and vice-versa.”⁵ The sexual union of man and woman in marriage, of two complementary beings, makes possible a single, composite human being restoring humanity's original wholeness. This union is so crucial that “the marital bond between man and woman takes precedence even over the bond with the parents that physically produced them.”⁶ “Sexual intercourse or marriage between members of the same sex does not restore the disunion because it does not reconnect complementary beings.”⁷

As the Bible unfolds, not a single hero of the faith engages in homosexual conduct;⁸ every regulation affirming the sexual bond is that of a man and a woman without exception; all Old Testament laws and proverbs and New Testament passages regulating and establishing proper boundaries for relationships are for heterosexual ones, none for homosexual. To this we add the heterosexual imagery in both Testaments of our relationship to God: God and Israel as wife; Christ and the Church as bride.⁹

This complementariness of male and female, emotionally, anatomically, sexually, and procreatively, is the setting for sexuality throughout the Bible, and is the background for the critiques of same-sex intercourse as contrary to nature that we find in both Testaments and Jewish thought.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid., pg. 61.

⁵ Ibid., pg. 194.

⁶ Ibid., pg. 61.

⁷ Ibid., pg. 194.

⁸ Some have seen homosexual overtones in the relationship between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18:1-4; however, the actions described can be readily understood in light of the political conventions of the day, not the sexual. No words with sexual overtones (e.g. “lie” or “know”) are used and David’s unmistakable heterosexual activities (and sin) are clearly spoken of in the rest of Scripture. See Gagnon, *ibid.*, pgs. 146-154.

⁹ E.g. Isaiah 62:5, Revelation 21:2. Further affirmation of the universal biblical negation of homosexual practice is seen in the fact that it is found in all the literary strands people have detected in the first six books of the Bible: J, P, and the Holiness Code, along with the Deuteronomic prohibitions against cult prostitution and cross dressing (Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 22:5).

¹⁰ Gagnon sees direct or indirect references to homosexual practice in the following texts: Texts: Genesis 9:20-27; 19:4-11; Judges 19:22-25; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Ezekiel. 16:50 (possibly too 18:12 and 33:26); Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; probably also Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:7. To these can be added references to

Old Testament Passages

In the Old Testament, we will look at two key groups of texts, from Genesis and Leviticus.

1. Genesis 19:4-11 – Sodom and Gomorrah: One of the most infamous references to homosexuality is in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 and 19. Two of three angels who have just visited Abraham and Sarah with the promise of the birth of Isaac arrive in the wicked city of Sodom to warn Abraham's nephew Lot to flee the impending disaster. The men of the city gather around Lot's door demanding him to give up his guests so they can gang-rape them (verses 4-5). Lot protests, even offering his daughters as a substitute (!), saying that what they want to do is wicked (verse 7) and against the laws of hospitality – “But don't do anything to these men for they have come under the protection of my roof” (verse 8).

In the past, although this story has been seen primarily as one of sexual perversion (thus the word “sodomy”, which means unnatural sexual intercourse), many contemporary authors point out that we are not talking about loving homosexual relationships but gang rape and most of all, a breach of hospitality.¹¹ Here it must be acknowledged that the major sin of Sodom as seen in other Old Testament texts¹² is inhospitability and social injustice. Therefore, it is unwise to base opposition to homosexual practice primarily on stories such as this one. However, Sodom's real sin of pride and haughtiness as stressed by Ezekiel, (Ezekiel 16:49-50) does imply a flagrant disregard of God's priorities which include his purposes in creation for sexuality. The key passages of Genesis (1-3), Leviticus (18:22 and 20:13), and Romans 1 (26-27) all suggest that same-sex intercourse was rejected on the grounds that it violated God's design – only males and females compliment each other anatomically and procreatively. When we abandon God's design for sexuality in favour of our own, that is an example of pride.¹³

2. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 – The Holiness Code:

We now turn to the main passages in the Old Testament prohibiting same-sex intercourse which are found in two chapters in Leviticus dealing primarily with unlawful sexual relations. They form part of the section of the book known as “The Holiness Code” (chapters 17-26). The verses dealing with homosexuality state:

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable...If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13)

“Lying with a man as with a woman” is the best indication we have that the primary concern was a man behaving as if he were a woman - the object of male sexual desires. It is called “detestable” or an “abomination.” This word is restricted in Leviticus to sexual acts which are regarded by God as utterly abhorrent, carried with them the death penalty, and endangered the whole nation's blessing by God. It is used in these chapters as a summary of all prohibited sexual relationships and specifically of homosexual activity. In chapter 18, all the other forms of activity prohibited here such as incest (6-18), adultery (20), child sacrifice (21) and bestiality (23) are still universally viewed as abhorrent. The only exception is having sexual intercourse with a woman “in her menstrual uncleanness” (19).¹⁴

Why is homosexual activity viewed as specifically “detestable”? Because it transgresses the gender boundaries set at creation which go beyond any cultural considerations. First, it entails a confusion of

homosexual cult prostitution: Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14; Revelation 21:8; 22:15. Ibid., pg. 432.

¹¹ E.g. D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955; reprint, Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press, 1975)

¹² Isaiah 1:10 ff., Jeremiah 23:14, Ezekiel 16:49ff.

¹³ See Gagnon, *ibid.*, pg. 86.

¹⁴ See page 9, n. 32.

genders through violation of the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female. A male penis and a female vagina are made for one another. Secondly it rejects the pattern laid down in Genesis 1-3 for gender complementarity between male and female, as we saw in the (Genesis) depiction of woman's creation out of man's "rib" (or side.)"¹⁵ Thirdly, it serves to destabilize the integrity of the family and the ordered survival of the species. This is why the penalty for this and some other sexually-prohibited activities is extreme: death (20:13) – (although we must remember that Jesus did away with the death penalty as seen in the case of the woman caught in adultery - but that did not mean he approved of adultery!).

Therefore, these prohibitions are still in force today and not just for those under the Law of Moses. We will see that Jesus implicitly and Paul explicitly endorsed these prohibitions against homosexual intercourse as we now turn to the New Testament passages dealing with sexuality and same-sex unions.

New Testament Passages

First we look at the words and attitudes of Jesus and then those of Paul.

1. Views of Jesus:

What were Jesus' views on sexuality and homosexuality in particular? Did he say anything specifically about homosexuality? No he did not. Does Jesus' silence indicate tacit approval? Not at all! He also doesn't mention bestiality and incest, two other "abominations" in the Holiness Code, and no one assumes he was in favour of those.

When Jesus does speak about sexuality, it is always in the context of an exclusively heterosexual model of monogamous marriage. In his discussion of divorce in Matthew 19:1-8 he hearkens back to both passages we looked at from Genesis 1 and 2. He didn't overturn any of the prohibitions against immoral sexual behaviour in Leviticus or anywhere else in the Mosaic law – in fact, he took a stricter view than the official interpretation of the law as we can see in the repeated phrase used in the Sermon on the Mount "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." (Matthew 5:27, etc.). Plus, far from being less rigorous on sexual issues than the surrounding culture, he was more! In terms of marital faithfulness, he called people to a higher standard than that practiced in his society - easy divorce. The fact that Jesus took sexual sin very seriously is shown by his saying that lust after a woman is adultery in your heart and following it up with admonitions to cast away offending bodily members, eye or hand - i.e. sight or touch. (Matthew 5:27-32).

Given all this and the universal opposition to homosexual practice in the Jewish culture of his day¹⁶ it is unlikely Jesus would have held some sort of secret acceptance of homosexuality. In fact, when Jesus said "for it is from...the human heart that evil intentions come: sexual immoralities (*porneiai*)...adulteries...licentiousness...all these things come from within and defile a person" (Mark 7:21-23) he would have included same-sex intercourse as immorality. Gagnon attests: "No first century Jew could have spoken of *porneiai* (plural) without having in mind the list of forbidden sexual offences in Leviticus 18 and 20 (incest, adultery, same-sex intercourse, bestiality)."¹⁷

Why didn't Jesus speak specifically about homosexuality? He probably didn't encounter any openly gay people, and therefore didn't have opportunity to call them to repentance. However, he did act with

¹⁵ Ibid., pg. 139.

¹⁶ See Gagnon, pgs. 159-183 for details.

¹⁷ Ibid., pg. 191.

compassion on the morally fallen - visiting their homes, mixing with them, communicating the good news and inviting them to repent and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. Paul: Romans 1:24-27

We now move on to Paul and the most explicit passage on the issue in the New Testament (and whole Bible), from Romans 1. Not only is it very clear, it also includes lesbianism, which is not specifically dealt with elsewhere. In addition, it is from a writer for whom we have a large body of writings and so we can set his comments in a wider context.

Paul begins his review of human depravity with our initial rebellion against God:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:21-23)

Our rebellion resulted in an exchange of the true God for false gods, idols of our own making, which we can control, or are more to our liking. Exchanging the glory of the Creator for idolatrous images of the created order is foolish and against nature so you end up by living out your world-view; our lives become a perversion of what is right and true. When we suppress the truth about God (verses 18-20) and our relationship to him (vertical), which is the natural order of things, we end up by developing unnaturally in our relationships with others (horizontal):

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Romans 1:26-27)

I had always wondered by Paul jumps from idolatry to sexual perversion in this passage, so I found helpful the following analysis given through Leanne Payne's Pastoral Care Ministries Seminar: when you put away the Creator you are left with creation; at the centre of creation is *procreation*; thus it is this focus which becomes most distorted when God is not given his true glory, his rightful place at the centre of our lives. This is why Paul goes from idolatry directly to sexual perversion. This is why nature religions such as the Baal and Ashteroth worship of the Canaanites centred on fertility rites and cult prostitution. Gagnon concludes, "An absurd exchange of God for idols leads us to an absurd exchange of heterosexual intercourse for homosexual intercourse. A dishonouring of God leads to a mutual dishonouring of selves."¹⁸ This is the natural consequence of our folly - the "giving up" by God (verses 24, 26); in a sense, God "steps back" and lets our natural inclinations take their toll, allowing our sinful passions to take us over - to warn us and alert us to the ultimate end of our actions in order that we might repent and avert the dreadful eternal fate that awaits us because we have exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

In this passage, Paul's phrase "unnatural"/"contrary to nature" (verses 26-27) refers, like his contemporary Jewish commentators and Leviticus, to the anatomical and procreative complementarity of male and female. It is something which is "plain to them" (*phaneron*) (verse 19). The language of this passage underlines this as it reflects that of the creation account in Genesis 1; e.g. "ever since the creation of the world," (verse 20); "the Creator," (verse 25). (In verses 26-27, Paul's use of the Greek words for "males and females" rather than "men and women" echoes the exact words in the Greek version (LXX) of Genesis 1:27 "male and female he made them."¹⁹ Thus Paul has the Genesis account of the creation of

¹⁸ Gagnon, pg. 253.

¹⁹ See Gagnon, pg. 290f. for evidence of the strong intertextual connection between Romans 1:23 and the wording (LXX) of Gen 1:26.

male and female humans in view. Homosexual activity is against God's design. This "nature argument" is simple yet convincing. "Same-sex activity denies clear anatomical gender differences and functions."²⁰

3. Paul: 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10

Finally, there are two more passages in Paul that refer to homosexual activity that are found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor *male prostitutes* nor *homosexual offenders* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and *perverts*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers...(1 Timothy 1:9-10)

The translations "male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, and pervers" represent two key words found in both passages: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. The former means the passive partner in homosexual union; the latter the active partner. Recent attempts have been made to define the former solely in terms of "effeminate call boys" or the latter as those who exploit others homosexually to show that these terms can not be applied as prohibitions against loving, committed same-sex relationships today.

However, attempts at restricting the definitions of these words to mean just prostitution or pederasty rather than homosexual behaviour in general do what liberals often accuse conservatives of doing - proof-texting. These attempts at narrow definitions fail when set in the wider context of the Scriptures we have examined²¹ and the usage of the words in other Jewish writings of the period.²² For example, it can be shown that *arsenokoites*, a word coined by Greek-speaking Jews, was from a conflation of two words from the Greek version of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: *arsen* (male) and *koites* (bed/lying).²³ Gagnon concludes: "It is self-evident, then, that the combination of terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, are correctly understood in our contemporary context when they are applied to every conceivable type of same-sex intercourse."²⁴ Thus, Paul consistently affirms all same-gender sexual activity as contrary to God's design for us.

In 1 Corinthians 6:11, after Paul lists all those who will not inherit the kingdom of God – which include a whole lot of categories, not just homosexual offenders - he continues:

And that is what some of you *were*. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

All of us are called to account before God for our sexual conduct not because God hates us but because God loves us and wants the best for us. Sexuality is part of his design for us and when we transgress the boundaries he has set before us, it is to our detriment – both as individuals and as a society. He wants to lead us into wholeness and the fullness of salvation he has won for us in Christ.

In Christ there is hope for all of us.

²⁰ Ibid., pg. 264.

²¹ Genesis 1-2, Romans 1, Leviticus 18, 20

²² E.g. Philo and Josephus.

²³ See Gagnon, *ibid.*, pages 306-336.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 330

Part 2: What the Bible Means²⁵

Given that the clear teaching of the Bible appears to set same-sex unions in a negative light, many say however, that we can now interpret the Bible differently given new ways of looking at sexuality and Biblical interpretation. What follows addresses whether we have read the Bible correctly. In its discussion on same-sex activity, what does the Bible mean?

1. We have changed our minds on what the Bible says before, why not on this issue?

“Oh,” people in favour of same-sex unions say, “What about remarriage after divorce, women’s ordination and slavery. Didn’t we change our positions on what the Bible said? Can’t we now do the same over the blessing of monogamous same-sex unions?” These issues are all fundamentally different from the current one: regarding divorce, it is allowed in Scripture under certain conditions; regarding the ordination of women, the Lambeth Conference of 1978 overwhelmingly accepted that it was permissible and can be shown to be congruent with Scriptural principles and practice; regarding slavery, provisions in both the Old and New Testaments suggest a trajectory of opposition to slavery and nowhere in the New Testament is it affirmed as an institution.

In all these areas, we can see what William Webb has called “Redemptive Movement.”²⁶ He points out that when you compare the Bible to its contemporary society in its treatment of women and slaves, there is a distinct move forward. The provisions regarding women and slaves in the Old Testament are a marked improvement on those of surrounding cultures. For example, Hebrew slavery is more a system of “indentured service” with liberation every seventh year. However, foreign slaves are still permitted although there are provisions for their care. In the New Testament there is a marked step forward – the abolition of slavery is not espoused, but the ground work is firmly laid in the ministry of Jesus and writings of Paul. Examples of this are Paul’s treatment of the runaway slave Onesimus in the book of Philemon and his statements such as, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Thus the foundation is laid for the later abolition of slavery. There is “Redemptive Movement” and Biblical sanction for positive change.

However, in the case of homosexuality, the situation is quite different. In the surrounding cultures, there was acceptance or at least toleration of some form of homosexual intercourse²⁷ whereas the position of the Old Testament is categorically against it²⁸ and this is not changed in the New.²⁹ Unlike slavery and the place of women, there is no “redemptive movement” for approval of homosexual practice in the Bible.

²⁵ Lessons read in connection with this section were: Genesis 2:18-24, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; John 8:2-11

²⁶ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

²⁷ “The Middle Assyrian Laws do not criminalize consensual homosexual intercourse, and some forms of ancient Near Eastern texts suggest acceptance of or at least tolerance of some forms of homosexual intercourse (such as sex with social inferiors, foreigners, or homosexual cult prostitutes).” Gagnon, *ibid.*, n. 219, pg. 139.

²⁸ “The level at which the Levitical laws stigmatize and criminalize all homosexual Intercourse, while not discontinuous with some trends elsewhere, goes far beyond anything else currently known in the ancient Near East.” *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

²⁹ “It is a prohibition carried over into the New Testament. The position adopted by Paul in the New Testament is not an aberration but is consistent with the heritage present in his Scriptures. The two covenants are in agreement.” *Ibid.*, pg. 117.

2. What about Biblical prohibitions we no longer take notice of – isn't homosexuality like those?

This is a follow-through from the previous argument. Some people say, “But what about individual passages regarding homosexuality, can't they be discounted – after all we don't worry any more about menstrual uncleanness, kosher food, and the twisting together of two types of thread!” In answering this, we must first address how we approach scripture. Negative proof-texting is as bad as positive proof-texting! Isolating verses out of context is not helpful. As we saw last week, any individual passages relating to same-sex practice are to be set in the over-all Biblical view of sexuality. The conservative would point first of all to the setting in which the Bible universally locates God's design for sexual-activity – monogamous heterosexual union. Faithfulness in heterosexual marriage and sexual abstinence in singleness are part of the deep and visible structure of the Bible. The complementarity of male and female physically and emotionally is integral to the doctrine of humanity. We saw that Jesus affirmed this in his discussion on sexuality, when he said that “At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6). Likewise, Paul's argument against same-sex behaviour in Romans 1 is also very clearly set in the context of creation and thus can not be dismissed as cultural or time-conditioned.

Secondly, the material found in Leviticus 18-20 (part of the “Holiness Code”) can be seen as an “expanded commentary” of the Ten Commandments.³⁰ Alongside regulations about ritual purity are major moral prohibitions dealing with adultery and incest, stealing and lying, and honouring one's parents. It is here that we find the great admonition “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). So yes, condemnation of homoerotic activity is listed alongside cultic practices Christ later allowed us to dispense with (Mark 7:1-23), however, it is also alongside prohibitions against adultery and incest; therefore, the ban cannot be dismissed as facilely as some do.

Thirdly, the difference in gravity between homosexual practice and purity laws is seen in the penalties proscribed.³¹ The penalties for breaking purity laws range from the unspecified to forfeiting your crops. However, the penalty for child sacrifice, adultery, bestiality, some forms of incest and homosexual activity is extreme: death (20:13) or being “cut off from their people” (18:29). Now, we know that Jesus did away with death penalty as in the case of woman in adultery, but that did not mean he sanctioned adultery! The fact that the penalty for homosexual practice is the same as that for other major sexual transgressions we still regard as sinful shows it cannot be dismissed as with purity laws.³² Therefore, homosexual practice is to be set in the larger context of God's created order and moral law and not in the same category as laws about ritual purity.

³⁰See Gagnon, *ibid.*, pg. 121.

³¹ The mixing of two different kinds of animals or seed or cloth in Leviticus 19:19 has to do with a transgressing of boundaries. Leviticus 18:23, 20:12 also speak of incest and bestiality in the same way; however, the punishment is for these aberrations is death, showing the greater severity of these actions, whereas the “sowing one's vineyard with a second kind of seed merely leads to forfeiting the whole yield; the sower is not killed (Deuteronomy 22:9).” Gagnon, *ibid.*, n. 214, pg. 136.

³² The only apparent exception to this is having sexual intercourse with a woman “in her menstrual uncleanness” (Leviticus 18:19; 20:18). As this is no longer regarded as a major transgression could it not be said that same-sex unions are the same? To this we could argue that the context of all the laws on sexual relations in Leviticus “legislate against forms of sexual behaviour that disrupt the created order set into motion by the God of Israel. Each of the laws has its intent the channelling of male sexual impulses into a particular pattern of behaviour, a pattern conducive to the healthy functioning of a people set apart to serve God's holy purposes.” (Gagnon, *ibid.*, pg. 136.) In this way, it can be seen that the law against having intercourse with a menstruating woman was to give her “Sabbath rest” from sex and included concern for her privacy and pain; it was “for men to exercise self-restraint and wait for divinely created purposes to run their course.” (Gagnon, *ibid.*, pg. 138.)

3. The Bible condemns only certain forms of homosexuality

This argument says that the homosexual practice the Bible speaks out against is not a loving, committed adult relationship but same-sex activity that exploits others, including the young. However, In Leviticus, the sin is not qualified at all; any man who lies with another male in the manner that men lie with women (i.e. engaging in sexual intercourse) has committed an abomination. There are no exceptions regarding age or whether one of the partners was exploiting the other. Both parties receive the same penalty of death. “The prohibitions against homosexual intercourse are as absolute as the injunctions against incest and adultery. It simply does not matter how well homosexual conduct is done; what matters is that it is done at all. Arguing that non-exploitative forms of homosexuality might have been accepted is like contending that the Holiness Code was only opposed to exploitative forms of incest.”³³

Now, some people say that what was being spoken against was homosexual practice as carried on in the pagan religious rituals of the surrounding Canaanites. People who argue for this say that the mention of child-sacrifice at the beginning and end of the two chapters in Leviticus (18:1-5, 24-30, 20:22-26) show this was the context for the ban on homosexual practice as well. However just because the Bible is against the cultic sacrifice of children doesn't mean that it approves of child-sacrifice in other contexts! What's more, if cult homosexual prostitution was in mind, why not say so?

Others argue that Leviticus was against homosexual unions because they are a procreative dead end – they can't produce children and that's what the provision for male/female unions in Genesis 1 and 2 is all about. Because we now have enough children, it is argued, therefore it is all right to have same-sex activity. However, incest and adultery could result in procreation but are still banned; plus, there is no ban on sex during pregnancy when there is no possibility of procreation.

Still others say that the only homosexuality the Bible is speaking against was that which demeans others by requiring one party to be penetrated such as in the youth/adult male exploitative unions of the classical world. Under this thinking it was all right for a man to penetrate a male of a “lesser” rank such as a younger person, a slave, an enemy, etc. Paul in Romans 1:26-27, they say, was speaking out against this form of same-sex union as “unnatural,” not loving, consenting adult relationships. However, Paul speaks of men “being consumed with passion for one another” (verse 27) indicating the shame was not in the act of one against another but a mutual degradation. Moreover, by including lesbianism in verse 26, which in the ancient Mediterranean world was predominantly mutually consenting women of roughly the same age, Paul shows that he is not speaking about only abusive male, pederastic relationships, but homosexual behaviour in general.

Finally, with respect to Romans 1, Paul's' position that same-sex activity is “contrary to nature” is often countered by the argument that for some, homosexual inclinations are “natural” for them, so why not indulge. However, this is not the sense of the word “natural” to Paul; he is speaking of God's initial design for humanity. After all, there are many other “natural” inclinations we have, such as anger, lust, jealousy, covetousness, etc., which run counter to God's intended design for us and can not be pronounced good simply because they are felt. Many would claim that they are not naturally monogamous and so should have a right to multiple partners but that doesn't mean it should be so! The Biblical condemnation of same-sex activity is not restricted to only certain kinds homosexual behaviour but to all.

³³ Ibid, pg. 347f.

4. Homosexuality has a genetic component that the writers of the Bible did not realize

This argument says, “Haven’t we discovered that homosexual attraction is genetic - inherited and unavoidable?” In other words, if Paul and the ancient writers had known that people are “born gay” they would have looked at the subject differently. First, we should note that just because a condition is genetically inborn, doesn’t mean that it is good and to be followed. I heard recently of a family of many brothers where each had a genetic psychotic predisposition and all are now in jail as a result of their criminal activity. Secondly, while most people with same-sex orientation do not choose this voluntarily, the evidence for genetic origins is very weak indeed, as stated by both pro-and anti-gay practice advocates.³⁴ For example, in the 1991 study of “homosexual brains” by Simon Levay to see if there were any differences between them and “heterosexual brains”, the results were inconclusive because the sample was very small and the methodology flawed. In addition, any differences that were found could be attributable, not to prenatal brain development, but to the effect of subsequent life events such as early childhood trauma or patterns of sexual behaviour much as when those who become blind and take up Braille increase the size of the area of the brain controlled by the reading finger.

Claims for the discovery of a “homosexual gene” have likewise been inconclusive. In studies of identical twins, initial findings showed that in twin sets with at *least* one member of homosexual orientation, both were in only 50% of them. However, later and more accurate studies by the same people have now reduced that figure by half. “If genetics alone accounted for homosexual orientation, then one would never find an instance where identical twins had different sexual orientations. As it is, in most cases where one identical twin has a homosexual orientation the other does not.”³⁵ Additional findings with non-identical twins and siblings point to more significant causes such emotional and other factors in the family environment.

A further argument against a major genetic component is the evidence that sexual orientation of adults can change. NARTH (National Association for research and therapy of Homosexuality) has documented this and the most significant recent findings are by Dr. Jeffrey Spitzer, the psychologist who, in 1973, led the way in getting the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. His studies have now shown him that homosexuality is not a fixed condition and that change is possible.³⁶ All this is to say that the charge that Biblical writers would have changed their views on homosexual conduct if they had known the genetic component are false. In fact the Scriptures support the notion of change as when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such *were* some of you.”

The clearest and most obvious causes of homosexual orientation lie not in genetics, but in other factors, including emotional upbringing, childhood trauma, cultural norms, and especially relationships with parents of both genders. The overwhelming evidence points to early developmental deprivations in the relationship with the parent of the same gender coupled with certain personality characteristics. The most succinct writing on this I have seen is an article by psychologist Dr. Jeffery Satinover entitled, “How Might Homosexuality Develop?”³⁷

³⁴ See website for National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH): www.narth.com. For Gagnon’s detailed listing, see *ibid.*, pgs. 396-432.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 461.

³⁶ *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 32, No. 5, October 2003, pp. 403-417, as reported by Roy Waller and Linda A. Nicolosi, “Spitzer Study Just Published: Evidence Found for Effectiveness of Reorientation Therapy”, NARTH website: <http://www.narth.com/docs/evidencefound.html>

³⁷ Available on the NARTH website: www.narth.com.

5. We should be loving and accepting of all people regardless of sexual preference

Those advocating the sanction of same-sex unions argue that Jesus was loving and accepting of outsiders, compared to the religious bigots of his day and therefore would be reaching out to gay and lesbian people today. I agree. However, it does not mean that he approved of same-sex unions. The fact that he was compassionate to the woman caught in adultery and fraternized with tax-collectors and prostitutes does not mean he sanctioned adultery, economic extortion or prostitution! Unlike the religious leaders who condemned the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11) he accepted her (“Neither do I condemn you”) but still viewed the act as sinful (“Go and sin no more”). The visit to the home of the extortionist tax collector Zaccheus resulted in repentance, with him restoring what he had taken illegally; he amended his ways.

If we followed this argument of not challenging homosexual practice as a sin to its logical conclusion, then we would never take a stand against any sin and evil. We would wink our eyes (as we used to) at child-abuse, sexual harassment, violence against women, racism and so on. In the Church at Corinth, many there thought they had an “enlightened view” and were willing to “tolerate” the man who had committed incest by sleeping with his father’s wife. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5, takes a firm stand, mourning this conduct (verse 2), calling for temporary expulsion of the offender (verses 2b, 5) because his ultimate salvation and that of the church is at stake (verses 5-6). In 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, he shows equal concern to welcome back the now penitent offender.

Far from love and acceptance tolerating sin, love and acceptance require an intolerance of sin. Jesus wants the best for everyone and that means acknowledging that sin is soul-destroying and to be shunned. As Paul says, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus...Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life” (Romans 6:11, 13). This is the loving way of exhortation to wholeness.

Conclusion

We conclude with a final argument we hear a lot today: “I feel like doing it, therefore I should do it - it will fulfill me.” When Jesus interacted with the rich young ruler, he focussed in on this very moral young man’s key issue: “One thing you lack...Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor” (Mark 10:21). The young man saw his primary identity in the things he possessed. Who he was was bound up in his wealth and status. Jesus was saying to this young man, “Your primary identity is to be as a child of God; you are to receive your primary affirmation through your relationship with him – not your money and possessions.” “A believer’s identity does not consist of the satisfaction of human urges”³⁸ – be they sexual or otherwise. We work out that identity as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ and having him formed in us. This is not a painless process – so we as individuals and a church must support one another in the struggle of being liberated from bondage to sin.

I end with a quote from Robert Gagnon: “It is not a kindness for a parent to allow a child to play with a scorpion or touch a hot radiator; nor is it a kindness for the church to give its blessing to forms of sexual expression that, as Paul notes, degrades the body created by God...The church must affirm a third option: to love the homosexual by humbly providing the needed support, comfort, and guidance to encourage the homosexual not to surrender to homosexual passions.”³⁹ This is the Bible’s loving stand.



³⁸ Gagnon, *ibid.*, pg. 451.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 485.

Further Reading

One of the best books on the possibility of change:

Mario Bergner: *Setting Love in Order: Hope and healing for the Homosexual*, 1995

Other helpful reading on the subject:

Andy Comisky: *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness*, 1989

Joe Dallas: *Desires in Conflict: Answering the Struggle for Sexual Identity*, 1991

Leanne Payne: *The Broken Image: Restoring Personal Wholeness Through Healing Prayer*, 1981

Leanne Payne: *Crisis in Masculinity*, 1985

Jeffrey Satinover: *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, 1996

**St. Aidan's Church,
274 Campbell Street,
Winnipeg, MB R3N 1B4
(204) 489-3390
staidans@mts.net**

The 22nd Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture 2007

BEING BIBLICAL?

Slavery, Sexuality, and the Inclusive Community

The Revd Dr Richard A. Burrige - Dean, King's College, London

Although I never had the privilege of knowing personally my great predecessor, Eric Abbott, I have come to know him through being Dean of King's College London, and through these annual lectures. He was the great post-war Dean, who opened up ordination training to wider groups, started evening classes, educated women for ministry - one of whom has been regular attendee of these lectures throughout my time as Dean. In previous lectures, we have also heard about his work as a spiritual director - and of course, of his work here in Westminster Abbey. He is buried here with his epitaph, *'Friend and Counsellor of many, he loved the Church of England, striving to make this House of Kings a place of pilgrimage and prayer for all peoples'*. Despite this inclusive stress on 'all peoples', I have sometimes thought I heard the sound of spinning from his grave in some previous lectures! Last year I passed his service record of twelve years as Dean of King's- so it is perhaps appropriate to be asked by the other Trustees, including his great friends, John Robson and Eric James, to give this 22nd annual lecture at this important and particular time.

Why is it an important and particular time? It is of course 200 years since the abolition of the slave trade - something which caused great consternation in the Church of England and the Anglican family in the colonies at that time. Equally today we face another period of great consternation here and in the world-wide Communion: so tonight I want to see if there is any connection between these two debates - about slavery and about sexuality - to see if one can help us with the other. It also allows me to draw upon my academic research over the last decade or more. Of course, slavery and sexuality are two huge topics, as is my own research - so I hope you will forgive a more broad-brush approach tonight.

The Crisis in the Anglican Communion

The current argument in the Anglican church over sexuality is only a recent example of debates about the use of the Bible over internal church order and polity, or in external application to war and peace, conquest and colonization. Significantly, often both or all sides of such debates claim to be 'biblical' and accuse their opponents of being hidebound by the tradition or betraying it to the spirit of the age, employing terms such as 'conservative' or 'liberal'. The claim to be 'scriptural' is linked to a desire to be holy, to preserve the community from error, heresy or sin, and so those who want to be 'biblical' can be, or appear to be, 'exclusive' in their attitude towards those with whom they disagree. Thus Anglican Mainstream's website defines it as 'a community within the Anglican Communion committed to promote, teach and maintain the Scriptural truths on which the Anglican Church was founded. . . Faithfulness to Scripture as God's Word is essential for sharing the love and purpose of God in Jesus Christ.' [1](#)

On the other hand, there is the Inclusive Church network, whose website states: 'We have a vision of a liberal, open church which is inclusive of all, regardless of race, gender or sexuality.' Yet it also goes on to claim, 'We firmly believe that this vision can and must be rooted in the scriptures.'[2](#) However, frequently, those who want to be 'inclusive' are accused of abandoning scripture to suit contemporary culture. Thus Philip Turner, former Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, criticizes recent decisions in the Episcopal Church of the USA: 'in place of the complex God revealed in Christ Jesus, a God of both judgment and mercy, a God whose law is meant to govern human life, we now have a God who is love and inclusion without remainder. The projected God of the liberal tradition is, in the end, no more than an affirmer of preferences'.[3](#)

So this debate rages between traditional groups and those who want to be inclusive. The former assume that they are 'biblical', while the latter sometimes also claim this. This is why tonight's lecture is entitled 'Being Biblical?' - with a question mark - in an attempt to answer the question. The problem with such debates is that it is often hard to hear each other. All sides have a position, with a pressure group, with websites and mailing lists, and people of similar views meet to plan strategy, motions for Synod, speakers to invite and so forth. There is little opportunity for differing views to come together - and even less for a meeting of minds in the midst of tough debate, dare one even say, in the heat of battle? Yet all of these are Christians, and we are talking about how we read the Bible, how we understand and receive God's revelation and how we try to interpret God's will for his church and the world. There has to be a better way to seek the divine intention.

Slavery

We need to step back from the current intense debate, where everybody thinks they already know what everybody else is trying to say, so that actually nobody is listening to anybody. Instead, can we look at other debates which were equally intense in the past - but which are settled now, to see if we can learn anything. This brings me back to the issue of slavery. This is the 200th anniversary of the British abolition of its Atlantic slave trade, but, please note, not the abolition of slavery itself, which continued to be legal for many years both sides of the Atlantic⁴ - and unfortunately is still very much with us even today. Today the debate of two centuries ago is often portrayed as the slavers' political and commercial power against the brave abolitionist Christians, especially the evangelicals of Clapham sect, who wanted to be biblical. Thus the Anglican Mainstream website claims that 'Those who cited the Bible to justify their views on supporting slavery based their views actually on economic theory, not on the Bible.'⁵ This impression is reinforced by the film, *Amazing Grace*, which features Ioan Gruffudd as William Wilberforce singing Newton's hymn to other MPs concerned for trade in ports like Liverpool - using the tune we know today, which was not actually set to those words for another 60 odd years over in America.

But sadly, the caricature that the slavers were just selfish capitalists and the abolitionists were the only biblical Christians around is just not true. If anything, it was the other way around. Slavery was viewed as a 'biblical' doctrine, supported by the laws of God and human law, while the abolitionists were seen as dangerous liberals, preaching sedition and revolution. This was the time of the American and French Revolutions, the Declaration of Independence and Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*. Even in the film, Wilberforce has to warn Thomas Clarkson about how dangerous the abolitionist cause could seem. Yet, Thomas Paine only applies the word 'slavery' to French citizens during the revolutionary period - not to Africans or the Atlantic trade. Meanwhile, Jefferson and the Founding Fathers of the Declaration of Independence may have believed 'these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' - but they were all slave-owners, who did not apply these truths to their slaves. In fact, some origins of abolition began as a tactic by the British forces in the revolutionary war of independence to get American slaves to defect. It was extremely successful with tens of thousands running away to British side. Clarkson's brother John, against great opposition from authorities in London, eventually led them back across the Atlantic to found Freetown and Sierra Leone.⁶

The 'biblical' case for slavery is clear: early in Genesis, Noah decrees that, as punishment for seeing him naked, Ham's descendants will be slaves for Shem and Japheth (Gen. 9.22-27); Abraham is blessed by God with 'male and female slaves' as a wealthy slaveowner (Gen. 24.35; for Abraham's slaves, see also Gen. 12.5; 14.14; 20.14). Slaves were part of his estate, property he passed on to his son Isaac (Gen. 26.12-14). There is provision in the Mosaic legislation for

Israelites to buy and sell slaves, and how to treat them (see for example, Exodus 21 and Leviticus 25). Slavery was equally accepted in the New Testament, where slaves are told to 'obey their masters . . . with enthusiasm' as though obeying Christ (Eph. 6.5-9; Col.3.22-25; Titus 2.9-10; 1 Peter 2.18-19). Paul returns the runaway slave Onesimus to his master Philemon, and tells slaves who hear his epistles to 'remain in the condition in which you were called' (Phm. 12; 1 Cor. 7.20-24).⁷ Particular attention was drawn to 1 Tim 6.1-6, where Paul's instructions, 'let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour' are given the additional dominical authority as 'the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ'. All of these texts were common in the biblical justification for slavery in the early nineteenth-century.⁸

It was all undergirded by Romans 13.1-7 with its appeal to proper law and order. Wayne Meeks and Willard Swartley have both demonstrated how leading Bible interpreters in universities and churches alike provided 'biblical' support for the 'scriptural' doctrine of slavery.⁹ While today's historical criticism can help, Meeks concludes that 'it appears to provide no knock-down argument against such uses of scripture as the apologists for slavery made'.¹⁰ Even after the British abolition of the slave trade, slavery continued in the southern American states properly supported by biblical arguments from many theologians, all with DD's. ¹¹ As Swartley concludes, the 'appeal to the Bible does not in itself guarantee correctness of position. . . Both sides in the slavery debate used the Bible to support their positions.'¹² The majority, however, were clear that slavery was biblical and their attitude to abolitionists was bitter, seeing them as dangerous liberals, undermining the very law of God. As Albert Taylor Bledsoe, LLD thundered, 'The history of interpretation furnishes no examples of more willful and violent perversions of the sacred text than are to be found in the writings of the abolitionists. They seem to consider themselves above the scriptures: and when they put themselves above the law of God, it is not wonderful that they should disregard the laws of men.'¹³

So here is a parallel between the abolition controversy two hundred years ago and our current crisis in the Anglican communion between those who want to be biblical in upholding the tradition versus those who are accused of being liberal in their desire to be inclusive. Yet looking back now, we are all clear that those who claimed to be biblical were wrong - and the dangerous inclusive liberals are now seen as inspired by the Bible to bring freedom.

Apartheid

The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade from West Africa to the West Indies and America affected other British colonies. In South Africa, the British authorities in the Cape moved towards the abolition of slavery there over the next few years. However, the Boers, from Dutch stock, saw this as further British oppression of their way of life, which relied upon the labour of the native peoples. In order to escape abolition, they started the Great Trek, moving up from the Cape into the interior. This reached its climax at the battle of Blood River on December 16th 1838, where 500 Afrikaners defeated 20,000 Zulus. Such an apparently miraculous victory set the tracks for the Boer supremacy which led eventually to the apartheid regime of South Africa, which kept the anniversary of Blood River as a day of thanksgiving to God. Apartheid is thus a direct descendant of the controversy about the abolition of slavery.

However, apartheid is also the most recent example of this debate between being biblical and being inclusive. Today, we are all clear that apartheid was a terrible doctrine, unchristian, evil and repressive. We praise people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu who wanted to include blacks in society as those who properly read their Bibles. When Tutu was told to keep out of politics because it did not fit with the Bible, he wondered which Bible his opponents were reading! Again, we have the same debate. Hard though it may be to understand today, apartheid was a scriptural doctrine, taught by a reformed, Bible-reading church. Those who wanted blacks included were dismissed as dangerous liberals, radicals, or even Communists. They were accused of defending atheism and violence, and were subject to the whole rigours of the 'total

strategy' of an oppressive police state. Even Archbishop Desmond Tutu as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches had to undergo detailed legal scrutiny by the Eloff Commission in 1982.[14](#)

Now it is hard to credit that prayerful, faithful Christians believed that this evil system was 'biblical'. However, the fact is that it relied upon biblical passages, similar to those used for slavery, some of which we shall examine shortly. It was all undergirded once again by an appeal to Romans 13.1-7 and Paul's insistence on a proper obedience for the laws of God and human beings, with the state as the agent of God. This has formed a focus for my own research over the last decade on how the New Testament is used in ethics. Being from a politically active family involved with anti-apartheid beliefs, I used to think that Afrikaners were all neo-Nazis, and not 'real Christians' at all. I assumed that they were hypocrites pretending to 'be biblical' as a fig leaf to cover their exploitation of the black community for their own advantage.

However, having spent the last decade working on this in South Africa, I have realised that, even if it was true of some people, this is an unfair picture over all. The Dutch Reformed Church was, and is, a reformed Protestant church, priding itself on being biblical. There has always been a concern for the centrality of scripture, backed up by excellent faculties of biblical studies and theology in major universities such as Pretoria or Stellenbosch. The theological basis for apartheid, or 'separate development' as it is best translated, is a report of the Dutch Reformed Church, significantly entitled *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*, and formally approved by the General Synod of the DRC as recently as October 1974.[15](#) Now this is a problem: it is easy to dismiss the DRC and the Afrikaners as hypocrites hiding behind a biblical justification. It is much more difficult to face the fact that a biblically centred church, full of prayerful people, guided by the Spirit, could have come up with a biblical doctrine that we, only a few years later, find so abhorrent. Furthermore, it is as challenging as it is uncomfortable: how can we be so sure that we are right when we claim to be biblical? Or will future generations think that we, or parts of our church today, are as misguided in what we think is biblical now as were those who supported slavery or apartheid?

Accordingly, I set out to analyse how the Bible was used both to support apartheid by the Dutch Reformed Church, and also the part it played in the struggle for liberation as a test case for how the New Testament is applied to ethics today. The result will finally be published later this year as *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*.[16](#) My approach draws heavily upon my previous work on literary genre as the key to interpret the New Testament, beginning with my doctoral work on comparing the gospels to Graeco-Roman biography.[17](#) In this new book, I analyse the use of the New Testament under apartheid through the four main literary genres or types of ethical material, namely rules, principles, paradigms or examples and overall world-view.[18](#) It's a large study, but let me try briefly to summarize the results.

Rules

This treats the New Testament as moral handbook and looks for material in prescriptive form or the genre of commands: the idea is 'for best results, follow the maker's instructions'. Such a rule-based reading of the Bible fits into a deontological approach to ethics, to do with moral duty, as Kant, Bonhoeffer or Barth. It works well with direct instructions like the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount but runs into difficulties when deciding which commands are still binding today, particularly when contemporary moral dilemmas do not appear in the Bible. The DRC's Report on *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* interpreted God's command to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1.28) to include the separate diversity of peoples, confirmed in Deut. 32.8-9 and Acts 17.26-27 with 'the boundaries of their territories'.[19](#) Similarly, commands forbidding the marriage of Israelites with other peoples were used to prohibit mixed marriages in South Africa under article 16 of the Immorality Act.[20](#)

These instructions and other passages came together to form what Loubser calls 'the Apartheid Bible'.[21](#)

The Report's approaches to biblical commands were critiqued by Willem Vorster, Professor of New Testament at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, who argued that 'the Bible simply becomes an 'oracle book' of 'proof texts' or 'a book of norms'; furthermore 'both apartheid and anti-apartheid theologians in the NGK [= DRC in Afrikaans] undoubtedly operate with exactly the same view of Scripture. The main difference is the (political) grid through which the Bible is read. . . In essence there is no difference in the use and appeal to the Bible between apartheid and anti-apartheid theologians.'[22](#)

Principles

Secondly, we step back from specific commands to look for the principle underlying the texts, such as the love-principle in Situation Ethics, or the liberation principle in South America. The problems are which principle to apply and whether the principle really arises from the text or actually is imposed upon it by the interpreter. In Gen. 1.28, differing exegeses of the same creation stories could lead to the contrasting 'principles' of either 'separate development' (God made us all different), as argued by the DRC Report, [23](#) or, on the other hand the principle of 'unity' (God made us one in our diversity), as argued by Archbishop Tutu and the liberationists. Equally, the Report handling of the story of Pentecost in Acts 2.6-11 produced the principle of everyone hearing 'God's great deeds in our own language' - and so they justified separate racial churches, according to language groups, an Afrikaans church, an English church, Xhosa, Zulu and so forth. On the other hand, Douglas Bax criticised the DRC Report's exegesis and produced the opposite principle of the Spirit at Pentecost 'breaking down the barriers that separate humanity'.[24](#) Thus we have the same hermeneutical, interpretative method of looking for a principle being applied to the same texts (Creation and Pentecost) - and yet producing two completely contrasting principles for the pro-apartheid government and for the liberation struggle. All of which poses the obvious question, which one is really 'being biblical'?

Paradigms/examples

Bible narratives are the classic stand-by of the Thought for the Day speaker, or a Sunday morning preacher, recounting a scriptural story about travelling patriarchs and then saying, 'isn't that just like you and me'? The immediate problem is the vast culture gap between the biblical world and our own day - but this did not stop it being used in South Africa. When the persecuted Huguenots like the de Villiers, or du Plessis, or all the other French South African surnames escaped through Holland onto leaky boats which finally made it round the coast of Africa to the rich and fertile fields of the Frenchoek valley near Stellenbosch in the Cape, 'flowing with milk and honey', it is no wonder that they opened their Bibles to the Israelites coming into the Promised Land, and thought 'that's us! Thanks be to God!' However, this also led them to view the locals like the natives of Canaan as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water', and to apply the material in Joshua and Judges to the Bantu; from such biblical narratives, they derived prohibitions against mixed marriages, and justified the oppression and slavery of the native peoples.[25](#) When the British authorities moved towards the abolition of slavery, then they were seen like the Egyptians, oppressing the chosen ones of God; so the Boers moved inland to defeat the Zulus at Blood River and make their Covenant with God, ceremonially enacted every year on December 16th at the Vortrekker monument in Pretoria, modelled on that of the ancient Israelites.[26](#)

This Exodus paradigm of God's people escaping from oppression to the Promised Land also of course influenced European settlers in north America, where it led to the decimation of the so-called 'red Indians'; arguably it continues to fuel much of the rhetoric and self-belief of the Republican Right today. The irony, however, is that exactly the same Exodus paradigm lies at

the heart of much liberation theology, in South Africa as in South America - and it led to the black theology which influenced Archbishop Tutu and Allan Boesak. Once again, we have the awkward situation that the same biblical story is being used with the same method of interpretation and application by both sides, with the Afrikaners as the victims in their own reading, but seen as the oppressors by the black churches. As a member of the 'colonial remnant', Snyman links the hermeneutics of the Afrikaans churches with that of Liberation Theology: 'For the one, God is a God of deliverance. For the other, he is a conquering god. Same texts, two views, two experiences.'[27](#)

World view

Lastly, we draw even further back to the overall world-view of the Bible as whole, leading to a biblical theology, like the Barthian approach of ethicists like Oliver O'Donovan and Michael Banner. However, the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of many genres and languages and cultures over many centuries. Fusing it all into a single vision is difficult - and the Dutch Reformed Church viewed their understanding of 'human relations in the light of scripture' as biblical, based upon the whole scheme of creation-fall-incarnation-redemption, while the liberationists argued exactly the same for their understanding.

Thus this brief study of the Bible in South Africa leads to a very disturbing conclusion. We must properly recognize that both sides believed in the Bible, based their view upon it and often used the same method of biblical interpretation (whether rules, principles, examples or world-view) upon the same biblical passages - yet they came to startlingly different conclusions. It is all very worrying for current claims of 'being biblical'. We can only remember the often-quoted letter of Oliver Cromwell to the General Assembly of the Kirk: 'Is it, therefore, infallibly agreeable to the Word of God, all that you say? I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken.' However, when we recall that this was the summer of 1650, and Scotland was supporting Charles II with troops lined up between Cromwell and Edinburgh, as Anglicans based upon Charles' 1662 Book of Common Prayer, we have to ask the same question: who was 'being biblical' and who was mistaken?

A biographical approach to the New Testament ethics

To move towards an answer, I return to my biographical approach to the gospels. In my doctoral study, *What are the Gospels?*, I argued that classical literary theory and a comparison with Graeco-Roman biography leads to the conclusion that the gospels are the same genre as other lives of famous men in the ancient world.[28](#) Therefore, in order to be biblical, we have to interpret the gospels according to this genre, in the same way as other ancient lives were read. Graeco-Roman biography is very different from modern examples, with the post-Freudian concern for personality and contemporary interest in 'celebrity'. The ancients wanted to depict the subject's character with a portrait of them through a combination of their deeds and words, through anecdotes and stories as much as their sayings or speeches. Furthermore, both the deeds and the words lead up to the person's death, dealt with in some extended detail in ancient lives, as in the gospels; often it will also reveal something further about the person's life, or bring the author's major themes to a climax.

So to be truly biblical and find the heart of Jesus' ethic, we need to consider both his ethical teaching *and* his actual practice. As Luke puts it, 'In the first book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach' (Acts 1.1). Therefore, we have to look at Jesus' sayings and sermons, but also at his actions, in healing, miracles, and the events narrated, in order to grasp the evangelists' portraits if we are properly to understand how Jesus' ethics fit into this. Often those who claim to be biblical appeal to his words, like the Sermon on the Mount, which are indeed very demanding and rigorous. But to do that alone is to ignore the biographical genre of the gospels and treat them as just a collection of ethical teachings. Meanwhile, on the other side, the

desire to be inclusive can appeal to his deeds, to the narrative about his relationships with people - but again that is only half the story; it needs not to neglect his teachings. To be properly biblical requires a biographical approach to the gospels' portraits of Jesus through his deeds and words, his teachings and his ministry, and to follow this on through Paul's letters and the rest of the New Testament. This is what I have been engaged upon for the last decade. While the example of the use of the Bible under apartheid forms the test case for my new book, *Imitating Jesus*, most of it is taken up with a biographical study of New Testament ethics through deeds and words, which I would now like to outline to see if it helps us with being biblical today.

Jesus' teaching

If you ask most people about Jesus of Nazareth, we find what Goldsmith terms the 'common assumption that Jesus was primarily, or most importantly, a teacher of morality.'²⁹ Yet, amazingly, the gospels do not portray Jesus as just a teacher of morality. Furthermore, to read them as ethical treatises or for moral guidance is to make a genre mistake, for that is not what they are. They are biographical portraits of Jesus which do include some examples of his teaching. However, Jesus' ethical teaching is not a separate and discrete set of moral maxims, but part of his main proclamation of the kingdom of God as God's reign and sovereignty are recognized in the here and now. Such preaching is primarily intended to elicit a whole-hearted response from his hearers to live as disciples within the community of others who also respond and follow, more than to provide moral instructions to be obeyed. When he touched upon the major human moral experiences, such as money, sex, power, violence, and so forth, Jesus intensified the demands of the Law with his rigorous ethic of renunciation and self-denial. However, at the same time his central stress on love and forgiveness opened the community to the very people who had moral difficulties in these areas. Therefore, as befits a biographical narrative, we must now turn from Jesus' teaching to confront this paradox in his activity and behaviour.

Jesus' example

Jesus' demanding ethical teaching on things like money, sex and power should require very high standards from those around him, with the result that ordinary fallible human beings would find him uncomfortable. However, when we turn from his words to the biographical narrative of his activity, the converse is true. It is religious leaders and guardians of morality who found him uncomfortable, while he keeps company with all sorts of sinners - precisely the people who are not keeping his demanding ethic. He is criticized as 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Matt. 11.19 // Luke 7.34). He accepts people just as they are and proclaims that they are forgiven without the need to go to the temple or offer sacrifice. His healing ministry is directed towards such people and the eucharistic words at the Last Supper suggest that he saw his forthcoming death as being 'for' them. A biographical approach means that it is not enough simply to look at Jesus' words and moral teachings; to be properly biblical involves facing the paradox that he delivers his ethical teaching in the company of sinners whom he accepts, loves and heals. Furthermore, a major purpose of ancient biography was *mimesis*, the practice of imitation, of following the subject's virtues. This is reinforced by the Jewish habit of *ma'aseh*, precedence, where the disciple is expected to observe and imitate his master as a way of imitating Torah and ultimately becoming holy as God is holy. Therefore, to imitate Jesus, it is not enough simply to extract his ethical teaching from the Sermon on the Mount; we must also imitate his loving acceptance of others, especially the marginalized, within an open and inclusive community.

Paul

The Pauline letters occupy about a quarter of the New Testament, and contain a wide range of ethical material, dealing with many moral issues. Yet we can still discern the same basic outline

as with Jesus. It is still supremely an ethic of response, even though Jesus' preaching of the kingdom has become proclaiming Jesus as king, so that Christology is central for Paul's theology and ethics. Paul's demand for a response to what God is doing is the same, with the same centrality of the love command, seen as fulfilling the law, to be lived out within a community of other disciples in corporate solidarity as the body of Christ. The particular ethical issues handled cover similar topics such as the state, sex, marriage and divorce, money, property and poverty, and the various forms of human relationships. In all of these, Paul makes rigorous ethical demands, yet also refers to the mixed nature of his early communities. Throughout, he constantly appeals to his readers to 'be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor. 11.1; see also Gal. 4.12; 1 Thess. 1.6). Exactly what they are to imitate is made explicit in Rom. 15.1-7, where he tells his early Christians to 'bear with the failings of the weak' and not to please themselves 'as Christ did not please himself'. He appeals to them to welcome others 'just as Christ has welcomed you'.

Paul is often seen as uncomfortable reading for those wanting open debate in an inclusive community today. Yet our biographical approach suggests that this is precisely how we should read Paul - as following the creative complementarity of Jesus' rigorous and demanding ethics together with his acceptance of sinners within his community. As the biographical genre of the gospels means that we should take Jesus' deeds and example into account as much as his words, so the epistolary genre of Paul's letters directs us to set his ethical teaching within the contingent context of his early Christian communities. As Jesus' pastoral acceptance of 'sinners' means that his demanding teaching cannot be applied in an exclusive manner, so too Paul's ethical teaching must always be balanced by his appeal to the imitation of Christ - and this entails accepting others as we have been accepted.

The four gospels

Space and time do not permit us to go through each of the gospels and the rest of the New Testament tonight. However, this same combination of words and deeds can be found here also. Each evangelist has a particular ethical slant in his account of Jesus. Thus Mark stresses the ethic of discipleship in the context of eschatological suffering; Matthew demonstrates how Jesus is the truly righteous interpreter of the law; Luke depicts his universal concern especially for the marginalized, while John portrays Jesus as the divine love who brings truth into our world. These different emphases all reflect how Christology is central in their four portraits, but each of them also combines words and deeds, as Jesus' moral teaching takes place in the narrative context of his acceptance of people within an open and inclusive community. All of this is then set forth in their biographical narrative for us to emulate and imitate the example of Jesus' ethical concern and loving acceptance.

How did the debate about slavery change?

Given this rapid tour of how the New Testament ethical material must be set within the context of an inclusive community to interpret the Bible, let us now go back to discover how the slavery debate changed. Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, the Clarkson brothers and the Clapham sect used an information campaign to get the British people and the members of Parliament to understand the reality of the slave trade, rather than the myths which abounded. Central was a concern to see the slave as a fellow human being: thus they issued medallions designed by Josiah Wedgwood inscribed with the slogan over a picture of a slave, saying, 'Am I not a man and a brother?'³⁰ Olaudah Equiano, the freed, educated former slave from Ghana, had his story printed and distributed in 1789 (rapidly becoming a best-seller), so that people could read about his experience. Although John Newton was converted on May 12th 1748 and experienced further spiritual awakening a year later, he still continued to work in the slave trade for several more years until 1754. However, his decisive contribution came 33 years later when he wrote down his experiences as *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* (1787). Thus, if there was biblical study

driving the abolitionists, it was a result of reading and re-reading their Bibles in the light of that listening to the experience of former slaves and slave-traders. In other words, they imitated Jesus' example of doing biblical ethics within the context of an inclusive community - and the crucial change came as a result of having admitted the excluded group into the discussion.

How did the understanding of apartheid as 'biblical' change?

Biblical interpretation is never a private matter but needs to be validated by the community of believers. The problem is that the pro-apartheid account of 'human relations in the light of scripture' came out of a bible-reading prayerful Christian community, the Dutch Reformed Church, supported by the best biblical scholars in their land. When I asked a professor at Stellenbosch University how the DRC got it so wrong, he explained that it was because the authorities would not listen to the voices of 'outsiders' such as other world reformed churches, and also that they stifled the protests 'inside' the church, including whites such as Beyers Naude and the pleas of the blacks. That same professor set up the *Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics* at Stellenbosch in 1991 and it was as biblical interpretation was related to its political and social context that things began to change. Subsequently, a very important development has been the work of Professor Gerald West with his *Institute for the Study of the Bible* at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg. Here he has pioneered a method of enabling the voices of what he terms 'ordinary readers' to be heard alongside those of biblical scholars and church authorities. Once again, therefore, we see the effect of admitting the excluded group, the ordinary black readers in their social context, into the community of those interpreting the Bible and how this led to change. It is very exciting that Archbishop Rowan has invited Professor West to coordinate all the biblical aspects for next year's Lambeth Conference, both the preparatory material and the actual Bible studies next July.

It is also significant that after the first elections, President Mandela invited Archbishop Tutu to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Here too, there was an opportunity to listen to the experiences of all involved, from all sides, blacks, whites and coloured, oppressors and oppressed, victims and torturers alike, so that a full understanding could take place. The testimony of the representatives of various churches about their use of the Bible is interesting. Thus Dominee Freek Swanepoel from the Dutch Reformed Church admitted that 'the church had erred seriously with the Biblical foundation of the forced segregation of people. . . . We have indeed taught our people wrongly with regard to apartheid as a Biblical instruction.'

[31](#) This is just one powerful example of many places where church representatives confessed that their previous claim to be biblical was wrong. Again this all followed from admitting the excluded group to the discussion about what the Bible really says.

How might the current debate over sexuality change?

Finally therefore, let us return to where we started to see whether this study of slavery and its recent manifestation in apartheid can help the controversy in the church over sexuality. Currently one side claims that their view is biblical in all their rhetoric, while the other stresses the need to be an inclusive church. While some of the scriptural passages to which reference is made are about 'order' in a similar manner to those in the debates about slavery and apartheid, the situation is not exactly the same, which means that some attempts to relate these two topics of sexuality and slavery do not work. Thus during the anniversary period, some suggested that as the church overcame biblical claims about slavery two hundred years ago, it just needs to do the same now about sexuality. Such arguments are too simplistic. Equally, others view the debate in the same terms as apartheid, namely that the biblical claim for apartheid was a cover for racial prejudice and that we must resist prejudice about sexual orientation similarly. In fact, I have demonstrated that the biblical argument to support apartheid was actually much more than mere prejudice and it needed careful consideration in an inclusive community of interpretation. Similarly, the

scriptural material to do with human sexuality is also very complex, and easy claims by either side to be biblical should not be accepted at face value.

There is some negative material about homosexuality in the Old Testament, especially within the legislation of Leviticus. Thus it is forbidden in Lev. 18.22, but then so is heterosexual intercourse during menstruation in 18.19; similarly the death penalty is prescribed for homosexuality in Lev. 20.13, but it is also required for dishonouring or speaking badly about parents a few verses earlier in 20.9. Such material requires careful analysis to explain why this one issue of sexuality is to be singled out today but not the others. Similarly, homosexuality appears in various vice-lists in Paul's letters, such as 1 Cor. 6.9-10, but the words used are unusual and still debated among biblical scholars; meanwhile, once again many other sins are also listed, yet they do not seem to be the focus of great international campaigns. Equally, the often quoted verses about homosexuality in Romans 1.24-27 also lead into another vice-list in 1.28-32, in which many people including 'gossips, slanderers, the insolent . . . and those who are rebellious towards parents . . . deserve to die' - yet no one is campaigning for the death penalty for these. There is nothing about homosexuality in Jesus' teaching, beyond his stress on one flesh in his answer forbidding divorce (Mark 10.1-12); it is rather curious for interpreters in a church which permits divorce to use such passages to forbid homosexuality. Therefore, neither the claim by one side that the biblical teaching is conclusively negative, nor the suggestion by the other that it is simple prejudice on a level with apartheid should be accepted at face value. Much further and careful study of the scriptures is needed as it was about slavery and about apartheid - but such study needs to be undertaken in an inclusive community where the voices of those who have been marginalized need to be heard.

Earlier I stressed the importance of combining words and deeds, holding scriptural teaching together with the example given in the rest of the narrative. The biblical teaching about the ethics of sexuality may not be immediately conclusive - but Jesus' example of his acceptance of those who were marginalized and excluded is clear. Equally, I argued that despite his strong moral demands in his letters, Paul also stressed the importance of maintaining an inclusive community with particular regard for weaker brothers and sisters who are to be accepted as we have been accepted. Paul's call to imitate Jesus is also reinforced by the biographical genre of the gospels with their concern for *mimesis*, or imitation of the example of their subject. This all means that those who want to be biblical must maintain an inclusive community of interpretation to discover God's will together through detailed study of what it means to be biblical.

Those who claim to be biblical often quote the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution 1.10 because it affirms that 'homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture'. However, other important parts of that same resolution commit the church 'to listen to the experience of homosexual persons' who 'regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ'. Thus the Archbishop has asked Canon Phil Groves to facilitate the 'listening process' around the Communion, some of which has been recently published. This is also why the Private Member debates in General Synod in February were important. Contrasting attempts by both sides to force a decision as each wanted were forestalled by amendments from the House of Bishops. Yet these replacements were themselves significantly amended to 'acknowledge the importance of lesbian and gay members of the Church of England participating in the listening process as full members of the Church' in an 'open, full and Godly dialogue about human sexuality'. Such listening processes and godly dialogue are what is needed if we are to imitate the example of Jesus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that to be truly biblical, we have to imitate Jesus' teaching and his example, his deeds as well as his words. Jesus' demanding ethical teaching cannot be appreciated separately from his behaviour and activity. Both the biographical genre of the gospels on the one

hand, and the ancient idea of imitation and Jewish rabbinic precedent on the other, suggest that Jesus' teaching must be earthed in his practical example, both of calling people to repentance and discipleship - but also his open acceptance of sinners, with whom he spent his life and for whom he died. Unfortunately, all too often those who do New Testament Ethics today end up doing one or the other: that is, teaching a rigorist ethic with extreme demands which seems condemnatory and alienates people - or having an open acceptance and being accused of having no ethics at all! Seeking to follow Jesus in becoming both 'perfect' and 'merciful' as God is perfect and merciful (compare Matt. 5.48 with Luke 6.36) is not an easy balance to maintain, but one which is vital if we are to be properly biblical.

To study the scriptures requires the context of an open and inclusive community of interpretation. The movement for the abolition of the slave trade could only discuss what the Bible really said about slavery once slaves and former slave traders were present and their experiences were heard. Similarly, change in South Africa about apartheid as 'human relations in the light of scripture' needed the 'voices of protest', with blacks present in the Bible studies and their experiences being recounted. Equally, over recent years, we have struggled to read and re-read the Bible about the place of women in church leadership, as deacons, priests and now as bishops, with women participating in the debate and their experience being heard - and we still have some way to go here. The same has been true for debates about human sexuality: in the middle of the last century, divorce was not permissible and remarriage in church was not allowed - on biblical grounds. But through the debates and reports of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the experience of marital breakdown was heard and listened to - and then our understanding of a biblical approach for compassion and care changed how church treated divorcees.

Only such an open and inclusive community which includes homosexuals and listens to their experience can really grapple with what the biblical teaching is. This is how my biographical approach to Jesus and the gospels, indeed to the whole New Testament, applies to ethical debates. It requires attention to imitating Jesus' words and deeds, to hear the biblical teachings within the context of an open and inclusive community - and this applies to sexuality as much as to slavery and to apartheid. Such a debate would be a fitting tribute to the memory of Dean Eric Abbott and his own attempts to be inclusive as a 'friend of many', concerned 'for all peoples'. Such a debate within an inclusive community is the only way forward for us today if we truly want to maintain a claim to 'being biblical'.

1 anglican-mainstream.net

2 www.inclusivechurch.net/inclusivebible/

3 Philip Turner, 'The Episcopal Preference', *First Things* 137 (November 2003), pp. 28-33.

4 It is interesting how the major full discussions of the abolition of the trade all seem to ignore the question of the biblical debate; see, for example, Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade 1783-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988); C. Duncan Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the ending of the slave trade* (London: Longman, 1975); David Eltis and James Walvin (eds.), *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa, and the Americas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

5 <http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/?p=1446>

6 See Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005) for a full account.

7 For interesting discussion of Paul's approach to slavery, see Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1990) and

Richard A. Horsley, 'Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings' in *Slavery in Text and Interpretation*, (eds.) Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley and Abraham Smith, *Semeia* 83/84 (Society of Biblical Literature, 1988), pp. 153-200; the rest of this volume of *Semeia* contains a number of other relevant articles.

8 See especially Iveson L. Brookes, *A Defence of the South Against the Reproaches and Incroachments of the North: In Which Slavery is Shown to be an Institution of God Intended to Form the Basis of the Best Social State and the Only Safeguard to the Permanence of a Republican Government* (Hamburg SC: at the Republican Office, 1850), p. 28.

9 Wayne A. Meeks, 'The "Haustafeln" and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge' in E. H. Lovering and J. L. Sumney, *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1996), pp. 232-53; Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 31-64.

10 Wayne A. Meeks, 'The "Haustafeln" and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge', p. 245.

11 *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright on This Important Subject*, (ed.) E. N. Elliot (1860 original; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), containing 'The Argument from the Scriptures' by Albert Taylor Bledsoe, LLD; 'The Bible Argument: or, Slavery in the Light of Divine Revelation', by Thornton Stringfellow, DD, pp. 457-521; 'The Bible Argument on Slavery' by Charles B. Hodge, DD, pp. 841-77; similarly George D. Armstrong, DD, *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery* (1857 original; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) 'devotes its 148 pages almost exclusively to the exposition of pertinent New Testament texts'; see Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, pp. 31-37, 278-9.

12 Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, pp. 58-59.

13 Bledsoe's original is all in capital letters in his 'The Argument from the Scriptures', in *Cotton is King*, pp. 379-80; see Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*, pp. 49 and 285.

14 Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: South Africa's victory over apartheid*, (ed.) John Allen (London: Bantam, 1995), see pp. 53-78 for the full text of his submission to the Commission; also John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorised Biography of Desmond Tutu* (London: Rider, 2006), pp. 197-8 has further discussion of this investigation.

15 *Human relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*, Dutch Reformed Church, Cape Town-Pretoria, 1976. Afrikaans report entitled, *Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge indie lig van die Skrif*, approved and accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in October 1974.

16 Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, due Nov 2007).

17 Richard A. Burrige, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* SNTS MS 70 (Cambridge University Press 1992, 1995); revised second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

18 For such a four-fold approach to ethical material, see, for example, James M. Gustafson, 'The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study', *Interpretation* 24 (1970) 430-455, esp. pp 439-44; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (HarperSanFrancisco/ Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 209.

19 *Human relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*; see pp. 14-15 on Gen. 1.28.

20 *Human relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*, pp. 93-99.

21 J. A. Loubser, *The Apartheid Bible: A Critical Review of Racial Theology in South Africa* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987), pp. ix-x.

22 Willem S. Vorster, 'The use of Scripture and the NG Kerk: a shift of paradigm or of values?' in *New Faces of Africa: Essays in honour of Ben (Barend Jacobus) Marais*, (eds.) J. W. Hofmeyr and W. S. Vorster (Pretoria: UNISA, 1984), pp. 204-219, quotations from pp. 210 and 212; see also the discussion by D J Smit, 'The Ethics of Interpretation - and South Africa' *Scriptura* 33 (1990) pp. 29-43.

23 *Human relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture*, pp. 14-15.

24 Bax, 'The Bible and apartheid 2', chapter 9 in *Apartheid is a heresy*, eds. J de Gruchy and C Villa Vicencio (Cape Town: David Philip / Guildford: Lutterworth, 1983), pp. 112-43; see pp. 128-130.

25 See for example, John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), pp. 171-4, and Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1997), pp. 31-2.

26 See Zolile Mbali, *The Churches and Racism: A Black South African Perspective* (London: SCM, 1987), pp. 191-93; on a research visit to the University of Pretoria, I was moved by the way Prof. Jan van der Watt of its Theology Faculty was able to tell me the story of Blood River twice, once from the Afrikaner perspective, and again from the Zulus' - both viewpoints equally persuasive.

27 Gerrie Snyman, 'Social Identity and South African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Struggle Against Prejudice?' *JTSA* 121 (March 2005), pp. 34-55; quotation from p. 39.

28 Richard A. Burrige, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*; see chapter 10.

29 Dale Goldsmith, *New Testament Ethics: An Introduction* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1988), Appendix 1, 'Jesus the Teacher', pp. 177-180; quotation from p. 177; see also, 'Jesus Christ was the world's greatest teacher of righteousness', C. W. Carter and R. D. Thompson, *The Biblical Ethic of Love*, American University Studies Series 7: Theology and Religion 79 (Lang, 1990), p. 128.

30 Pictured, for example in Schama, *Rough Crossings*, plate 9, pp. 192-93, or Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, pp. 139-40.

31 Taken from the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa (RICSA) transcripts of the TRC hearings in East London, Nov. 17-19, 1997, pp. 246-65; see also, *Facing the Truth: South African Faith Communities and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission*, James Cochrane, John de Gruchy and Stephen Martin (eds.), (Cape Town; David Philip, 1998), which contains details of the written submissions, oral testimony and witnesses, as well as a number of reflective essays; and Denise M. Ackermann, 'Faith Communities Face the Truth', *JTSA* 103 (March 1999), pp. 88-93.

The Listening Process

Church of Uganda Position Paper on Scripture, Authority, and Human Sexuality May 2005

Executive Summary

The occasion of this Position Paper is the current crisis in the Anglican Communion in which the “fabric of our communion” has been torn at its deepest level because of recent actions and decisions in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA) on matters relating to human sexuality. At the same time, we rejoice in the opportunity to reflect more deeply on these matters as they relate in our Ugandan context.

The perspective of the Church of Uganda to the current crisis in the Anglican Communion is that it is fundamentally a crisis of authority, both legislative and biblical. There appears to be no authority within the Communion at all four levels of its *Instruments of Unity* – The Archbishop of Canterbury, The Lambeth Conference of Bishops, The Primates Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council. If all four Instruments of Unity can advise against a particular innovation or even heresy, and a province still proceeds and no disciplinary action is taken against that province, then there is a crisis of authority in the Communion. This apparent lack of resolve manifests a deeper crisis: on the place of “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith”.

This current crisis of authority, however, is an opportunity for reformation of the Anglican Communion as a whole. We believe that if the term ‘communion’ means the deepest relationship between believers with God in the fellowship of the church, the Communion must base its identity on bonds of truth as well as bonds of affection. The Communion must recognize that false teachers will arise within the church (Acts 20.29-30) and that heresy may divide the church and scandalise her before the world. This truth will include not only the four planks of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, but other essentials of doctrine, discipline, morality and mission.

We in the Church of Uganda are convinced that the Authority of Scripture must be reasserted as the central authority in the Anglican Communion. From our point of view, the basis of our commitment to the Anglican Communion is that it provides a wider forum for holding each other accountable to the Scriptures, which are the seed of faith and the foundation of the Church in Uganda. The Church of Uganda, therefore, upholds Resolution 1.10 of Lambeth 1998 that says, “Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture,” and calls upon all in the Communion in general and the ACC meeting in Nottingham in particular to likewise affirm it.

The Church of Uganda recognizes that the schismatic and heretical actions of ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada maintains its stand of ‘broken communion’ with them, and challenges those provinces that subscribe to the authority of scripture to do likewise, for the sake of Gospel and God’s Church. The Church of Uganda is committed

to maintaining fellowship, support and communion with clergy and parishes in these provinces who seek to uphold biblical orthodoxy and 'the faith once delivered to the saints'.

We concur with the observation of The Windsor Report 2004 (Section C paragraph 97): "... the views of the *Instruments of Unity* have been ignored or sidelined by sections of the Communion".

It is our considered view that *The Windsor Report* recommendations on the Instruments of Unity (Section C paragraphs 105 – 107; with additional suggestions as outlined in Appendix One) be critically examined as a matter of urgency with a view to make the member provinces of the Anglican Communion accountable to the said Instruments of Unity and the entire Communion.

We acknowledge that the Windsor Report has made a start in this direction with its proposal of an Anglican Communion covenant, but the covenant needs to be given more substance, including reference to the 39 Articles of Religion. We strongly recommend that a ACC considers and proposes to the Primates a process for the enacting of a covenant to be ratified at the 2008 Lambeth conference.

The crisis – its nature and character

It is important for us at this point to remind ourselves of significant events, meetings and statements from various Instruments of Unity within the Anglican Communion in the period leading to the current crisis in order to understand the nature and character of the crisis.

- In 1998 the Lambeth Conference of Bishops passed a resolution that rejected "homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture," and did not advise the "legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions."
- In June 2002 the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada voted to authorise the blessing of same-sex unions in their diocese and Bishop Michael Ingham gave his permission for such blessings to proceed.
- In August 2003 the General Convention (the equivalent of our Provincial Assembly) of ECUSA – the Episcopal Church USA – voted to confirm the election as bishop of a divorced father of two children who had been living in a same-sex relationship with another man for fourteen years. In many respects, this was the culmination of years of theological and moral innovation on the part of ECUSA.
- In October 2003 the Archbishop of Canterbury convened an emergency meeting of all the Primates to discuss the crisis the New Westminster decision and the ECUSA election had caused in the Anglican Communion. The Primates requested that the Archbishop of Canterbury appoint a commission to report a year later on how best to maintain communion "within and between provinces when grave difficulties arise." They also stated that if ECUSA proceeded with the consecration of this man, called Gene Robinson, it would "tear the fabric of

our communion at its deepest level.” The unanimous consensus of the communiqué was that ECUSA should not proceed with the consecration.

- Yet, two weeks later, ECUSA’s Presiding Bishop, Frank Griswold, presided at Gene Robinson’s consecration.
- In June 2004 – after the emergency meeting of the Primates – the Anglican Church of Canada’s General Synod (their equivalent of our Provincial Assembly) passed a resolution affirming the “integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships.” In other words, while not actually approving the blessing of same-sex relationships, they resolved that same-sex relationships are “holy.”
- In February 2005, the Primates met to receive and make recommendations from the Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion, commissioned in October 2003. The unanimous request was that the “Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada [would] voluntarily withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council for the period leading up to the next Lambeth Conference.”
- In April 2005 the Executive Council of ECUSA (equivalent to our Provincial Assembly Standing Committee) resolved to “voluntarily withdraw our members from official participation in the ACC as it meets in Nottingham.... [However,] we are asking our members to be present at the meeting to listen to reports on the life and ministry we share across the Communion and to be available for conversation and consultation.”
- In May 2005 the Council of General Synod (equivalent to our Provincial Assembly Standing Committee) of the Anglican Church of Canada affirmed “the membership of the Anglican Church of Canada in the Anglican Consultative Council with the expectation that the duly elected members attend but not participate in the June 2005 meeting of the Council.”

This simple recital of recent events reveals the depth of the crisis of authority in the Anglican Communion. The inability of the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Primates to exercise discipline on erring provinces demonstrates the crisis of legislative and ecclesiastical authority. And, the lack of respect by ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada for the guidance of the Communion’s leadership reflects a crisis of relational authority. The sum total of all this leaves us inevitably with fundamental questions about the nature and character of communion in the Anglican Communion.

The deeper crisis however in the Communion is the place of scripture in defining the nature and character of communion. The sanctioning, promoting and celebrating of unbiblical sexual practices demonstrates a departure from the ethical norms and standards enunciated in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Human Sexuality in Biblical perspective

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments teach that God’s design for sexual relationships is male-female. The biblical examples of meaningful same-gender relationships are never depicted in sexualised ways (cf. Ruth and Naomi or married men like David and Jonathan). The creation mandate of Genesis chapters one and two, that establishes the basis of natural law, shows that God’s design and intention is for

humanity to be expressed in the male-female relationship. From companionship to procreation, the male-female relationship is the only relationship that is extolled as normative sexually.

In Genesis 3, when sin and rebellion entered God's good creation, distortion and tension entered the male-female relationship, including the distortion of sexual desire and all their manifestations. These distortions have impacted on all people and the created order. Homosexuality, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, fornication, adultery, polygamy / polygyny and polyandry are all manifestation of perverted sexual desire.

Concerning homosexual behaviour and relationships in particular, from a plain reading of Scripture, from a careful reading of Scripture, and from a critical reading of Scripture, it has no place in God's design of creation, the continuation of the human race through procreation, or His plan of redemption. Even natural law reveals that the very act of sexual intercourse is an experience of embracing the sexual "other".

In Christ, however, people and their sexual desires are redeemed, and restored to God's original intent. Through repentance and faith, relationships are restored to their original creation design. From Genesis to Revelation, in the sphere of human relationships to the redemptive plan of God, Scripture is clear that God's plan is man and woman becoming united in one flesh, what the church and Scripture has called marriage. Indeed, marriage can even be seen as a divine agent of sanctification. When sin separated man and woman at the fall, God begins to reunite through marriage. Redeemed marriage is an image of the union between Christ and his Church. Ephesians 5.20ff as well as being a teaching on marriage, is also an exposition of the union of Christ and his Bride, the Church, based on an analogy of union that is assumed to take place in marriage.

The heritage of Holy Scriptures in the Church of Uganda

The story of the Church of Uganda is one of obedience to the preaching and teaching of the gospel, according to the Bible. When the early missionaries announced the gospel of Jesus Christ to our fore fathers and mothers, they responded to the word of salvation. They acknowledged that Jesus is Lord and Saviour and for that reason gladly obeyed His word in Scripture. The transforming effect of the Bible on Ugandans generated so much conviction and confidence that even ordinary believers were martyred in the defense of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ that it brought. The adherents of the East African Revival, that broke out in the late 1920s and early 1930s (a movement that has shaped the ethos of our Church), were simple people who learned to take God at His Word. For the Church in Uganda, to compromise God's call of obedience to the Scriptures would be the undoing of more than 125 years of Christianity through which African customs, belief, life, and society have been transformed for the better. For instance:

- Most traditional African societies were solely based on oral culture, which limited its ability to share ideas beyond the clan or ethnic group. For many centuries most of the African languages were un-written. The Bible was the

first book in African vernacular. Thus African languages have been enriched and recorded.

- For many of our tribes, revenge was an esteemed virtue. If a family had been violated, the first instinct was to gather the clan or ethnic group, arm them, and seek revenge on the family, clan, or ethnic group of the offender. As the Bible came with the authority of Christ, it revealed a God that is greater than the evil spirits and the kingdom of darkness that controlled so many people's lives. In this realm of relationships, the Bible has had a profoundly transforming effect with the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness.
- Traditional Ugandan society was driven by family loyalties with little basis for loving those beyond your blood ties. Strife and mutual exploitation were rampant. The Bible brought the teaching of Jesus to love your neighbour and even your enemy. And, while there are remains of this old culture, the Bible gives a moral and spiritual basis for transforming culture. At the same time, the Bible affirms certain esteemed values of our culture like community life and hospitality – we have found our home in Scripture.
- Some traditional African societies believed, for example, that if women ate chicken they would grow a beard. So, women were often denied access to nutritious food and other social benefits on the basis of superstitions. When the Bible came alive during the East African Revival, the Holy Spirit convicted men of sins of oppression and began the progressive empowerment of women that is continuing today.
- Perhaps the most degrading form of gender inequality was the African tradition of polygamy and divorce at will, which left many women neglected or even destitute. The biblical teaching of marriage between one man and one woman in a loving, lifelong relationship liberated not only women, but also the institution of marriage and family.
- Traditional African objects of worship, which were limited to families and clans, had established a system where no central beliefs could be held or shared beyond the ethnic setting. Ancestral spirits, natural phenomena like earthquakes, lakes, and mountains, could not satisfy the African's quest for the living God. The Bible's revelation of Father as Creator of all things, the Son as redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as the life-giving Spirit of God brought hope for deliverance from the fatalism that resulted from worshipping created things rather than the Creator.
- The Bible has also been a transforming agent in modern / contemporary Africa societies. The growth of the Church in Africa is a contemporary phenomenon. Most African societies are more cosmopolitan in nature and relate a lot more. The churches have been at the forefront of transforming society. The Bible message, through church leaders, has significantly contributed to the ongoing transformation of politics. Even Archbishop Janani Luwum was martyred for calling our political leaders to Biblical accountability.
- It is the Church's commitment to the Authority of Scripture and the Biblical values of abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within marriage that enabled the Church in Uganda to provide leadership in formulating a national response to the HIV/AIDS that has finally brought down the infection rates making Uganda the success story it has become in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

- Contemporary Ugandan society has been transformed through Scripture's teaching and we no longer live only in our ethnic enclaves and there are inter-marriages. The gospel has caused us to form a new tribe from every language, nation, tribe, and tongue.

For us in the Church of Uganda, the Bible is the cherished source of authority that is central to the faith, practice, and mission of our Christians. It is an absolute treasure that no one can take away. For ministers, the Bible is the basis for ministry: preaching, teaching, Christian nurture pastoral care and counseling. If you take away the Bible from our bishops and clergy, they have nothing to offer the world. For all God's people, obedience to this Bible is the source of confidence, abundant life, and joy.

As a Church we are committed to the contextual issues relating to our mission which include (without being limited to) widespread dehumanising poverty, HIV / AIDS, malaria, conflicts, Islam and secularism. We strongly believe that the proclamation of the Good News of the gospel of the risen Lord and Saviour (Jesus Christ) is an answer to these issues confronting us as a Church in Mission today.

We also believe the Church of Uganda has a mission to the Anglican Communion to share the treasure of the Scriptures and to call other parts of the Communion to recognize and to submit to the Authority of Scripture as the place of transformation into abundant life.

Accordingly, we believe that the Anglican Communion would then have a gift to offer the world. Repentance and obedience to Scripture is not judgment; rather, it is the gateway to the redemption of marriage and family and the transformation of society.

The Church of Uganda's position on Homosexuality and a torn Communion

We believe that God is calling the Church of Uganda to seek continual transformation from the Word of God written, in preaching repentance and faith in Christ and develop ministries of pastoral care that don't ostracize, shun, or reject those tempted by homosexual desire. We acknowledge that God is calling us to come alongside those who give into the temptation of homosexual desire and show them the power of the Word of God to bring joy, peace, and satisfaction to their life through repentance and obedience to God's Word.

On the matter of equating the ordination of practicing homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions with the ordination of women, we are insulted by the comparison. In our African context, there has always been a place for women's involvement with spiritual activities. It was the patriarchal approach of the Western missionaries that clouded this aspect of our African heritage.

When the East African Revival swept through our communities, it called for the equality of women and men, and began the process of restoring women to traditional roles as spiritual leaders in their communities. The Revival movement was a strong contextualising force. In the 1950's and 1960's when African Christians took over leadership, we find a number of women seeking theological training and even aspiring

for ordination. And, all of this was happening before women's ordination was approved in the West.

Women's ordination in Uganda was a movement of the Holy Spirit independent of the West's promotion of women into ordained ministry. Therefore, to say that homosexual unions and ordination is an extension of a so-called biblical principle of liberation is insulting to us. It belittles women and their ministry, and equates a perversion with God's movement toward women's ordination in Uganda.

As a Church we are determined to uphold and encourage the biblical teaching on marriage and promote the ethical demands thereof while providing the necessary pastoral care and counseling for those with difficulties in this regard. In obedience to Jesus' teaching, the Church of Uganda frowns on divorce. Divorce is part of a broader context of brokenness. Problems of divorce do come up, but we don't compromise the high ethical demands on believers. We look upon brokenness with grace and truth. On the one hand, we affirm what scripture affirm; we don't approve. On the other hand, we find ways to minister in His grace to these people, with pastoral care and counseling in the love of Christ.

The Church of Uganda, therefore, upholds Resolution 1.10 of Lambeth 1998 that says, "Homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture," and calls upon all in the Communion in general and the ACC meeting in Nottingham in particular to likewise affirm it.

The Church of Uganda recognizes that the schismatic and heretical actions of ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada maintains its stand of 'broken communion' with them, and challenges those provinces that subscribe to the authority of scripture to do likewise, for the sake of Gospel and God's Church. The Church of Uganda is committed to maintaining fellowship, support and communion with clergy and parishes in these provinces who seek to uphold biblical orthodoxy and 'the faith once delivered to the saints'.

Proposed Resolutions

- Recommend enhancing the existing instruments of unity through functional approaches.
 - The Primates commend doctrine and church order to all provinces of the Anglican Communion and serve as a Council of Advice to the Archbishop of Canterbury;
 - The Anglican Consultative Council becomes a forum for sharing best practices of mission and ministry with other provinces;
 - The Lambeth Conference of Bishops is the plenary gathering of bishops with the Primates as the core;
 - The Archbishop of Canterbury is a presiding bishop among the primates.

- Recommend suspending all ACC activities until a covenant is written and at least four provinces have 'opted in.' ACC activities resume at that point and new members are added as they 'opt in.'
- Request the primates to appoint a covenant drafting group to present a draft covenant to the Lambeth 2008 meeting for approval. Please include some sections of the historic 39 Articles in the content of the covenant. Need to make recommendations on the content of the covenant vis-a-vis what the Windsor Report says. A covenant which includes these essential elements:
 - Essentials as contained in the 39 Articles;
 - Nature of leadership which we hold to certain ethical standards and a process of discipline for those who breach them;
 - Mission – being obedient to the Great Invitation of our Lord to follow him, and the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations;
 - Church discipline
- We call upon the Anglican Consultative Council to affirm that homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture and cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.
- We commend the Primates for exercising their God-given episcopal ministry to guard the faith of the church and pledge to them our ongoing support and call upon other provinces and the Anglican Consultative Council to do likewise.
 - We commend provinces for the development and implementation of abstinence and faithfulness programmes for reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and encourage the sharing of best practices among provinces.

The Listening Process

Listening with loving attention - Stephen Lyon - Partnership Secretary of The Church of England's Partnership for World Mission

In his Presidential address at the July 2005 General Synod, held just the day after the horrific London bombings, Archbishop Rowan suggested that “routine friendship and co-operation remains the best hope we have in any conflict of finding ways forward; nothing really can substitute for face to face encounter, when even the sharpest differences of conviction ... can be held with respect”. He went on to describe such respect as giving “loving attention” to the other and suggested this should characterise the listening process that the ACC called for in relation to the present conflict within the Communion around issues of human sexuality.

What, in practice, might it mean to listen with “loving attention” ? In 2005 representatives from the dioceses of Akure (Nigeria) and Liverpool (England) met to reflect on the Windsor Report and the implications for these dioceses and the wider Anglican Communion. I was privileged to be asked to help facilitate this 24 hour gathering and out of that experience the following reflections might offer some light on the necessary ingredients that could enable such listening:

Motivation – the conversation had a purpose that was greater than the presenting issue of sexuality. It was based on the understanding that the Akure/Liverpool link that had been carefully established and built up over many years was in danger of being undermined if the differences of opinion were not explored honestly. It was also undertaken on the assumption that if this Companion relationship was to mean anything it had to be able to confront difference as well as embrace what was held in common with equal commitment.

Preparation and Setting – the visit of those from Akure to Liverpool was focussed on this 24-hour consultation. Its purpose was transparent. The conversation took place at a Roman Catholic retreat house offering prayerful support and a ‘safe environment’ where the prayer, reflection and sharing could happen without interruption. The retreat house offered a place where the participants could genuinely talk to one another without the pressure of immediately explaining themselves to a wider audience beyond the conversation.

Participants were carefully chosen to ensure a meeting of counter-parts – both Bishops, Cathedral Deans, diocesan MU Presidents, chairs of the respective Link Committees etc. This enabled a conversation of ‘equals’ who could talk both *for themselves and on behalf of others* to one another.

Process – it was recognised that the conversation was not going to be easy and that in order to stand together on the uncomfortable ground of difference there needed to be a number of safeguards in place and an appropriate process to build up the necessary respect before stepping out on to this ground.

- The conversation needed to start at a point where all participants could occupy common ground with confidence while at the same time acknowledging and respecting differences that existed.
- The common ground that the exercise identified needed to be occupied rather than just acknowledged. It also needed to be built on enabling it to move from the personal to the corporate. The interviews exploring the diocesan understandings of mission achieved this and underlined common themes.
- What was being heard needed to be regularly checked against what was actually being said. Differences in culture and use of language (especially where for one set of participants English was their second [at least] language) coupled with pre-conceptions of what participants *thought they* would hear meant that the possibilities for misunderstanding were huge. As we moved into the discussions on Day 2 we regularly stopped to check out the accuracy of the listening by all participants.

Expectations – conversations of this nature can be undermined before they even start by either over optimistic or pessimistic expectations. Nether the thought that any differences can be reconciled by ‘simple, honest sharing’ nor that certain differences are so extreme that talking, however honestly, will be of no help are “listening with loving attention”. Expectations needed to be more subtle, have a longer time-scale than most of us would want and be based on a motive that is larger than simply coming to a common mind on one issue. What emerged from the Akure/Liverpool conversation was an impressive list of new insights and learning that both dioceses acquired by means of the conversation.

The statement signed by both diocesan bishops does not offer a panacea but does highlight the nature of communion as a common commitment to partnership in mission that can handle differences with respect.

Stephen Lyon
September 2005

Appendix - Consultation process

Common experiences of God

The first session as we gathered was an exercise that sought to offer both space and a process to enable all participants to share – in their own words, at their own level and in their own way – something of their experience of God. They did this in pairs – a person from Liverpool working with someone from Akure. Each person took it in turns to speak while the other simply listened before reversing the process. This sharing and listening came out of reflecting on three different subjects:

- **A picture** – why did the particular image chosen from a number displayed on a table attract your attention ?
- **A Bible story** that was important to each participant.

- **A moment when God was real** to each participant.

With each of these subjects each person shared what the picture, the story and the moment meant for them. The other person simply listened honouring and affirming what they were hearing.

Then we tried to hold all three subjects together and ask if God was saying something through them all together. This led to everyone trying to capture what that might be in a short phrase or sentence. As these were shared in the whole group it built a picture of a God who was affirming us in relationship with Him.

Common Mission with God

The second session consisted of two interviews with three participants from Liverpool and then from Akure. The interviews sought to explore what the priorities for mission were in each of these areas. Not surprisingly they differed in priorities because the contexts were different. Having said that there was a shared language of God at work in each location and of the kind of activities this God is calling us to co-operate in.

Common Ground to occupy

At the end of the first day we had said nothing about the *Windsor Report* or homosexuality but had discovered that in our obvious diversity we occupied much common ground of Christian experience and involvement in God's Mission. But we did not just 'acknowledge' or 'describe' this common ground we actually occupied it together and dwelt there for sometime. This was possible because we had created a safe place to occupy this ground but the act of occupying this ground together secured the safe place for our further explorations.

Different view-points

Sessions during the second day took us into the heart of the reason for the consultation. We used the time in the morning to address two questions:

- Given the affirmation in the bible of love between two people of the same gender such as David and Jonathan, what is the nature of such friendship and the appropriate expression of such relationships ?
- Given the emphasis in the New Testament, on sexual intercourse as a gift for monogamous marriage, how do Christians apply this ethic in societies with different sexual mores such as a polygamous culture or a gay culture, and does the one inform the other ?

We did this in three groups of 4-5 people. Two of mixed Akurean and Liverpoolian participants matching similar office holders in the same group e.g. both the bishops together, both the Mothers' Union presidents together etc. The third group was made up of the Methodist participants and sought to explore their views as leaders drawn into a conversation that, for this purpose, was an Anglican one.

At a couple of points in the discussions we paused and asked group members to reflect back what they thought they had heard each participant saying. This was to check out that as well as explaining we were also understanding.

Points of learning

The outcomes from this conversation were in one sense modest in another remarkable. The final session sought to identify points of learning. We did this was forming two groups of those from Akure and those from Liverpool. The question put to them was, "What have you learned about your partners from these discussions that you did not know before?" We listed these points of learning and spent some time checking them out with each group. "Is this learning what you thought you had conveyed in discussion or have you been misrepresented?" We had to delete certain points because we discovered they were not points of learning but projections of prejudice. We had to change certain words because they carried assumptions and meanings beyond the discussions that had taken place. Eventually, the list of points of learning was agreed and the consultation concluded.

Held in a framework of worship

As we consulted together we moved in and out of more formal acts of worship. Evening prayer, night prayers a Eucharist but as part of the process of consultation offering a framework for all we did as holding all that was said within the larger worshipping life of the Church.

The exercise used in the Akure/Liverpool conversation is outlined in the appendix. Its value was that it enabled all participants to talk about a common experience – how they encountered God – from their differing vantage points engendering a respect that came from the authentic witness.

The Listening Process

Hospitality That Listens

A lecture given by Bishop James Tengatenga the Bishop of Southern Malawi to the Partnership for World Mission conference 2006. The theme of the Conference was *Hospitality – A Way Into Mission*.

Introduction

I find it fascinating that a conference to do with mission is concerned about hospitality. I suppose I am less surprised that it is concerned with listening. Am I not surprised because listening is a buzz word in the Anglican Communion today or is it so because it is a Gospel word? Mission is primarily God's mission and is carried out by and effected by God. It begins and ends with God. It is this same God who hears, who listens! It is this very God who when he listens and hears, acts. It is also this very God who hosts us in his world, in his mercy and in his love. Yes "in him we live and move and have our being". St Augustine even said that our souls are restless until they find their rest in Him. One of Jesus' pictures of salvation and the consummation of all things is of a grand banquet hosted by the Lord Himself. "Go to the streets and byways and bring them all in!" said the Lord. Talking about banquets, the aim of going to the ends of the earth to proclaim the Gospel is to bring people to the Lord's banquet.

We know about "the going" and we know about the gifts of the spirit as spelt out in Isaiah and I Corinthians. However, more often than not the one gift that does not get talked about much from the Corinthian table is that of Hospitality^[1]. When God gives a gift it has to be used or exercised! What I am suggesting here is that it is a gospel imperative to offer hospitality and as such there is no choice but to do it. In Acts 28:7, Romans 12:13, 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:10, Titus 1:8, Heb 13:2 and 1 Peter 4:9 it is given as an exhortation to all, a requirement for leadership, an expression of Christian values and thus a living out of the Gospel. As such it is an expected characteristic of the Christian community.

It has also been said that this choice of theme has been necessitated by the fact that the Church in England will be hosting the Lambeth Conference two summers from now. As such it was felt that there is need to prepare the ground somehow. But there have always been Lambeth Conferences hosted in England! What is so special about this one? It may have to do with the situation in the communion which requires that we go back to some basics of God's mission in the world. Hospitality is not an easy thing in times of tension but hospitable we are called to be. With red herrings flying all over the face of the communion is it possible to really hear each other or rather is it possible to listen to each other?

In this scenario, then, hospitality is fraught with many tensions. To be hospitable may be interpreted as to curry favour or to seduce another to one side or the other. To receive hospitality from some quarters may be construed as selling out? To listen would suggest that one has not already heard that which is already being shouted from the roof tops! Hospitality and listening have become suspect. What a mess! Yes, the

death of innocence! Does this suggest that there is no hope? What of the divine imperative, for which a charism has already been given? Bishop Paul Burrough (former bishop of Mashonaland in Zimbabwe), ends his rather curious but insightful book with the following words:

In some distant relationship, untroubled by political ideologies, angels *must* be entertained and enjoyed for themselves in *a new kind of undemanding hospitality*. (*Angels Unawares*, p 134 [my emphasis])

Those who have ears to hear let them hear!

Hospitality

The Gen 18 story of Abraham and Sarah hosting the three beings is very fascinating because it mentions the two elements together. It talks about hospitality and also about listening. Abraham and Sarah offer hospitality and they listen to their guests (Sarah does it behind the curtain!). There seems, here, to be some expectation that the guests bring some kind of news or information. Otherwise I cannot make sense of Sarah eavesdropping. She seems to me to be too virtuous for such clandestine listening! Both felt that they had to listen. They may be entertaining angels unawares and would not like to have missed a word from the Lord. As we say in Malawi, “*Mlendo amabwera ndi kalumo kakutwa*” (literary translated means, “A stranger brings a sharper knife” which really is idiomatic for do not underestimate the strangers solutions, abilities, etc he more often than not saves the day). In this case, then, the words of a stranger are listened to very carefully and savoured. As such listening is very important in the exercise of hospitality. Of course in this story Sarah made light of the words of the guests. Because we know the end of the story we also know what a mistake that was.

The stranger is seen as a stranger. There is no rush or need to make them one of us. If they are one of us we may take lightly their words. We may ignore their sharper knife. If they happen to be younger or inferior in any way there is a danger that they may be treated as such and their gifts lost to the occasion. “Anything and everything you do to these little ones, do as you would do for me”, says the Lord. One of our problems both in the West and in my part of the world today is that we want to ignore difference and the strangeness of the other. It seems to me that we have treated strangeness and difference as an evil and a hindrance to relationship. We should acknowledge it and so benefit from it. It is not an evil. In fact it can become a better good than we can even imagine or think. As Pohl says “...welcome does not violate the stranger’s identity and integrity. (Pohl 153) True hospitality sees a stranger as a gift and an opportunity to exercise the charism. It would not seek to quickly graduate the stranger to being part of the family. Doing so may suggest that we do not want to host and in so doing quench the Spirit. As mentioned before, hospitality is a charism. Like all charismata it is demanding. If one adds the burden of listening it becomes even more so. I am in no way suggesting that after some time the stranger cannot graduate to being one of us. That happens in time. What I am against is short circuiting the process. If indeed we rejoiced in the charism we would wish all our guests to remain guests for us to exercise this gift of the Spirit even more!

What is more in this connecting hospitality with listening is that the same Holy Spirit *eavesdrops* on our prayers and in fact it is his character to complement them with sighs and groans too deep for words! (Rom.8)! The Romans to which Paul wrote were looking for more ways to make grace abound and they were saying “Why don’t we sin more so that grace may abound” (Rom 6). I would say let’s have more guests so that grace may abound! In Malawi we say “*Mudzi wa bwino umadziwika ndi a lendo*” or “*Mudzi umakoma ndi a lendo*”! (A good home is known for its hosting guests (hospitality) or A home is better when it has guests! {A home’s image is enhanced by the frequency of guests or guests make the home!})

“Jean Vanier writes that ‘Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share’ He also offers an important warning: ‘A community which refuses to welcome – whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors – is dying spiritually.’” (Pohl p.160)

Listening

So how does hospitable listening happen? Like every virtue that a Christian lives or expresses we do it because God did it first. Thus we listen because God listens. I would like to imagine that even at the beginning of creation God listened and because he did not like what he heard he decided to bring order out of that chaos! Imagine the serenity of a big white swan floating over the waters as the Spirit hovered over the waters in the calming of that chaos at creation. So much about my hallucinations over the creation story in Genesis 1!

One more hallucination! There is also guilty listening - Listening for the footsteps of the wronged one. I imagine this was the kind of listening that Adam and Eve did when they were hiding behind those shrubs. They had no “truth and peace to share” as Jean Vanier (quoted above) reminded us of. Isn’t this similar to some of the anxiety that some of us have when we are going to receive guests we do not know or ones we are not comfortable with. What will they say about us? Will they not see what we really are and say something about it which in turn will make us very uncomfortable? “I hear that they have no inhibitions. Beware what you say in their presence,” may be what some of us feel in those times. Will they say something we do not want to hear? We may not be the only ones listening. What will our neighbours say when they hear what they say? What will our neighbours say when they hear Arabic, African or other exotic accents? Will we be defensive about our guests? I am reminded of a Queen Latifa and Steve Martin movie (*Bringing the House Down*) where Steve Martin’s character’s neighbour asks about the accent and language she heard. His response was “There is no Negro spoken here!”

Listen. You may not like what you hear. Your neighbours may not like what they hear but all of you have a duty to listen for “*Mlendo amabwera ndikalumo kakutwa*”! It may also be the case of Psalm 95:7-9, “Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah, in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did”

Listening should be liberative even as it can be confrontive. This is the experience of Sarah as she eavesdropped on her husband and their guests. She heard the Lord's promise which sounded "out of this world" as young people say. She laughed. But the truth was shared in what she heard. The guests listened too. They heard her cynical chuckle over what she heard and they confronted her with it. In this we see listening of different kinds – physical and metaphysical. I say so because I do not believe that the guests heard her in a physical sense as I imagine that it was a discrete chuckle from the future-mother-of-nations. We have an eavesdropping God. He even takes notes! This is what we hear in Malachi 3:16, "Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name." He does not only eavesdrop he also intentionally listens to us. When we pray he hears our prayers (e.g. Hannah prays and God hears 1Sam 1). He listens and hears the cries of his people (Exod.3). Because he listens so should we, since we are imitators of Christ.

Imagine what would have happened had our African fore-bearers not accorded a listening ear to the first missionaries. Some of us would not have heard the Gospel. They listened. Had the missionaries not taken time to listen to our languages they would not have understood our languages. In that mutual listening the gospel was proclaimed. Accents were not barriers but challenges to be overcome. Most westerners have problems understanding some of us from exotic lands. Many a time (in the UK and the USA) I have heard people come out of a service complaining that they heard nothing for the accent! I may sound bigoted in my next statement but I do not intend to be. My intention is for you to hear us in the way we hear you. Imagine if we were as lazy as some of you are in that respect. Our African children would not pass their examinations as they hear all sorts of British, American, Japanese and even European accents in their volunteer and missionary teachers. If only one applies oneself to listening one hears and benefits. That our accents are a barrier speaks more than most of you in the West are prepared to hear. If we are to be hosts that are worth the name we have to learn to listen. Especially when your guests are making a very serious effort to speak your language and you have never even tried theirs. (This may be very embarrassing to those dioceses that have linked with some of us from exotic lands but its own people have not learnt their link diocese's language!) The least a host can do is make an effort to hear their own language spoken strangely. It is hard. No wonder hospitality is a charism. The challenge is that both parties will be self-conscious about it and that may impede openness. My observation has been that where both parties have liberated the other in their listening they overcome the accents and many moments of laughter and mutual learning do occur. Even mutual correction ceases to be embarrassing (and a power play) for either party. I have had such experiences. Only last year I was visiting in the USA. I mixed up some idiom about being "on the run" when I meant "on the road" and was corrected by my American colleague very nicely. When there is no mutuality there is always the fear that one may be understood to be patronising or not appreciating the fact that there is a difficulty due to some deficiency or other.

Come to think of it. Mutual listening gave birth to Pidgin English or as we call it in Southern Africa, *Chilapalapa*! Neither English nor Afrikaans nor any African language but containing elements of all! It took a lot of listening to create it. In that environment

of the gold mines in South Africa they spoke the same language and some form of mutuality (at least on the level of language) prevailed. All felt at home, South African Blacks, immigrant workers from the rest of the continent and the Afrikaner and English *baas*. I suppose this is why one of the charismata is speaking in tongues and the groans of the Holy Spirit too deep for words. I suppose that this was so that no one has proprietary rights and thus superiority over another in prayer! Oh the tricks and the creativity of our auditory sense!

The other side of this problem is when there is overcorrection. It may actually be more helpful to ignore some mistakes unless they would be very embarrassing. It frees the speaker to share even more. Yet another side is condescending listening. By this I mean listening as though you are listening to a child or someone with a speech disability. This usually shows in the expression of the listener and is off putting for the speaker. There are times when Africans have been made to feel like children when they are speaking. It is not good hospitality to do so.

There are also some times when discussion is affected by people demeaning the argument style of the other. Logic is not always the same everywhere. Accepting that there may be differences in our logic or debating style may go a long way in helping the hosts and the guests to get the best out of the visit. We are past the age where difference was suggestive of inferiority. However, a lot of guests to these shores have felt that because they understood things differently from their hosts their points of view were ignored or condescendingly acknowledged. We would learn a lot from each other and appreciate each other's world views more if we listened to each others' wisdom as equal albeit different. I would like to illustrate some of this with an example from my time at the Selly Oak Colleges (That than which none was finer in mission experience and teaching!).

I remember a remark (in one of the mission classes) from one of the lecturers when a student made a comment on his analysis of some African Custom. The lecturer, who was European, claimed superior understanding of the custom than the native who understood it differently. He claimed that his six years' experience of African life gave him more understanding of that culture than the one who embodied and lived that culture. What audacity! I call that arrogant listening and condescension at its worst. The class was the poorer as it was denied more valuable input in the discussion. Discourse was negatively affected. If only the lecturer was willing to listen to the "inferior" his wisdom would have increased and so of the class!

There is also red herring listening. This is when one listens to the other and picks out the buzz words and takes offence at them. In that situation what the speaker was saying is lost to the listener. All of us have stereo-types of the other. In these times of tension in the Communion some people listen to the other in this way. They will boycott a talk because they heard that the speaker was African from a particular part of the continent. If they go they will refrain from participating in the discussion. There is a tendency to imagine that we have heard it all. Being African, they are going to say this and that, and they will say it this way. Even if that were to be the case, would it make you less of who you are to hear it again? Who knows, second time round you may hear it differently! But more importantly you have acknowledged the other's presence

and also their humanity. Recognition of the other's humanity is very important for us. It goes beyond curiosity at the exotic.

In Malawi, a greeting is more than just an exchange of pleasantries. In this (Western) culture one waits to be introduced before they can greet someone in the company of their friend. In Malawi you greet everyone in the round. You do not wait to be introduced. Introductions come later and after that another greeting! When you visit someone's home, you are greeted outside the house with a handshake and will be greeted again when you are seated inside the house (or even outside). The first greeting acknowledges your humanity. The second one is a welcome and enquires about your wellbeing. After the second greeting, if there is a stranger, the stranger will be introduced and will be greeted a third time as a sign of welcome with the gained knowledge. You can never have enough of the good thing!

Greeting, apart from enquiring about the other's wellbeing and wishing them well also denotes recognition of mutual humanity, respect and peace. My enemy will not greet me or greet me back. When people pass each other on the road, they greet, "Wawa!" (if they are Ngoni like me) and the other will respond "Wawa!". If they do not respond, they have signalled that they are neither friendly nor human (and humane). They are a "chirombo": a dangerous beast and they mean no peace.

Conclusion

St. Paul (Rom .10) says, "How can they hear if it has not been told them? How can they tell if they have not been sent? Faith comes by hearing: hearing the Word of God." I would suggest, for our purposes, "How can one hear and listen if one has not offered hospitality? How can they tell if they have not been invited in?"

Karen Mains observes:

What a sin it is that many Christians know so little about this broken world. They have isolated themselves from the starvation of nations, turned their backs on battered and abandoned babies. Little do they care that children grow without a gentle touch, that old men haunt park benches dying from loneliness rather than age. This world to many believers is one large, silent scream. We refuse to hear the agony – of children too hungry to cry, of mothers with breasts gone dry, without energy to moan, of impoverished peoples numbed with outrage, of Indian youths suicided by despair. (*Open Heart – Open Home* p.140)

Taking off from this, I would like to conclude with another Malawian hospitality and listening illustration between a missionary and locals. In Malawi one shows that one is welcoming when one invites people into one's home when they come. It does not matter whether it is a very short visit or a long one. Being let into one's home demonstrates hospitality. Speaking to someone standing at one's door suggests no welcome. In many cases when one is spoken to only at the door and not invited in, the person would not say what they had come to say. They go back with their message or problem unresolved (if that is what brought them there).

One of our lecturers in theological college (over twenty years ago) was wondering why some of us were very cold to him and why some of us stopped visiting him. What he did not realise was that his speaking to students at the door and not letting them in was interpreted by them as non-welcome. The students would not intend to stay for long and he understood that. However, his cultural sensitivities had not yet matured to the extent of being able to catch on to what he was doing wrong. Because the students felt unwelcome they stopped visiting him. They stopped confiding in him. Offering hospitality by letting them through the door and sitting down with them (and even offering a drink of water) would have accorded him an opportunity to hear, listen and help, and so make friends with consequent development of mutuality. He learnt his lesson and all ended well.

I have said a mouthful on Hospitality and Listening. The question then, is “To what end?” The answer to that question I leave to the next speaker, to my second talk and to the discussions we are going to have in this time together. Suffice it to say that the hint given here is that when hospitality has opened doors for listening we all get a chance to hear the other’s story as it is. We hear it not as the news media tell it. We hear it from those who live the news. It is through this hospitable listening that our mission takes direction and responds to the challenges and opportunities expressed therein as we participate in God’s mission.

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[1] This is not mentioned directly but it is inferred by most commentators as part of the different administration and services in 1 Cor. 12:5 and 6

The Listening Process

A Diocesan Conversation on Homosexuality

Introduction and Planning Outline

This was an adaptation of the Public Conversation Model from the Family Institute of Cambridge Mass. USA.

This site has full information about the approach, its theoretical underpinning and numerous applications. Under Resources there are many articles about how the ideas work in the conversations.

This is a description of my preparation with the forms of my letters of invitation and my notes for the evenings.

The underpinning of this model is that people hold different perspectives on an issue, these perspectives arise out of their life experience and the values they hold.

It was developed as an alternative to debate because it appears that often debate results in a polarisation and firming of positions already held, that the argument tends to go round familiar routes and become entrenched. This way of working opens up space for people to consider an issue in a different way.

This model depends on a willingness to listen with respect be willing to speak honestly about our own ideas and where these are difficult for us.

My intention was to enable people to speak for themselves and to provide a safe place for those who came to listen and participate as well as those who spoke.

I decided that there would be no recording made and any written material should be passed through the Bishop's offices before publication afterwards.

From the advertising people noticed that it was not to be a debate and their expectations were formed accordingly . Afterwards the majority of comments were positive with mention made of safety and carefulness and the value of hearing from people rather than about people. Adverse comments focussed around the lack of 'debate', and request that this should follow.

People in each setting need to decide who can be invited as speakers in their own setting.

The Bishops were hosts so that they introduced the evening and closed with prayer. If there had been a "What do the Bishops think about this' question I would have referred back to the terms of reference that opening understanding and not pinning the Bishops down was the intention of the evening.

Preparation:

Invitations were offered to four people from different positions on this issue.

After discussion with the Bishops we decided to invite theologians who were known to us and a gay person and someone who had lived an active homosexual lifestyle and whose life had been 'transformed' (their description).

1. Phone conversations to introduce the proposal, and myself and to describe the format and emphasise the concern to safety and respect in the event and how I was working towards that.
2. Letter to document the phone call and give more information (attached First letter) This includes the questions to be addressed. These are the questions used in the Public Conversation Project material.
3. Advertising in Diocese : 2 months ahead
4. Copies of advertising sent to participants and they returned personal descriptions
5. Advertising posters with participants descriptions as written by them (5 weeks before event)
6. Second letter to participants with greater detail of timing
7. Phone/ email contact with participants re travel and arrangements and answering questions

The Events

Venue

Venue is open an hour before the conversation. Advertising made clear that people to bring their own refreshments, we provide drinks. I provided refreshments for the speakers.

Care with set up of venue regarding audibility and visibility and the order of speakers

We worked with a single microphone which was passed between speakers.

The Listening Process

Listening to Learn, Learning to Listen

The following is a reflection the listening process from Andrew Goddard published as a newsletter on the Fulcrum Website. It is published here to assist thinking about what the listening process is and might be. The opinions are of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Anglican Communion Office. They are felt to be helpful in understanding the process of listening.

The Communion's listening process on sexuality has recently been given much greater impetus by the appointment of Canon Phil Groves as Facilitator of the Listening Process based at the Anglican Communion Office. It is, sadly, an enterprise in which evangelicals have not always been to the fore and some have shown a level of skepticism that borders on antipathy. One of the major difficulties in the whole process is determining what we mean by 'listening'. This Newsletter explores that theme by studying and rejecting two understandings and offering a third perspective on the task we have to undertake. It is written out of a commitment to Fulcrum's stance on issues of sexuality which is clearly stated in our explanation of the evangelical centre:

In the much-contested area of sexual ethics this means that the proper context for sexual expression is the union of a man and a woman in marriage. We will participate in debates on issues in sexual ethics arising today in the life of the Church and we identify as key references the CofE document Issues in Human Sexuality and Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference and True Union (a document shared with the Anglican Primates' Meeting, Brazil 2003).

A conservative evangelical approach critiqued

On Sunday 28th May, during events surrounding the reported difficulties of Bishop John Gladwin in Kenya, Anglican Mainstream posted a brief anonymous piece entitled 'What is meant by listening?'. Responding to a claim by the chaplain to the Bishop of Chelmsford that African countries were not so far advanced as Western countries in the process of listening to the experiences of homosexuals, this sought to explain what Anglican Mainstream thought was meant by 'listening' and to do so by reference to the Lambeth 1998 resolution. It asserted that, in the context of the resolution as a whole,

it is clear that the comment on 'listening' [is understood?] as subservient to the fact that such relationships are wrong in Scripture and therefore those living in them are expected to seek the pastoral care and moral direction of the church and the transforming power of God

It therefore concluded that 'the reason we have to listen to them [is?] so that they can be transformed not continue in relationships which are unscriptural'. It then rejected as 'patronising' the claim that African countries are not so far advanced in this "listening process"

Although this interpretation of the Lambeth resolution and 'listening' is one held among some supporters of Anglican Mainstream it is certainly not the only one. It is, I believe, seriously flawed at a number of levels. It is, therefore, important to return to the Lambeth resolution, *True Union in the Body?* and other views already expressed by those committed to I.10 in order to develop an alternative account of 'what is meant by listening'.

Lambeth 1998

First, it is important to recognize that resolution I.10 from 1998 is not the only relevant Lambeth resolution. In the first main discussion of the subject of homosexuality at a Lambeth Conference (in 1978) it was agreed that 'The Church, recognising the need for pastoral concern for those who are homosexual, encourages dialogue with them' (Resolution 10). This resolution was reaffirmed in 1988 (Resolution 64). Anglican Mainstream's interpretation has some support here, certainly compared to readings of 'listening' which view it primarily in terms of the means by which we learn the errors of our ways and receive new revelation. 'Dialogue' is clearly set in the context of a statement of the traditional view ('we reaffirm heterosexuality as the scriptural norm') and 'the need for pastoral concern'. However, the strong and exclusive claim that 'we have to listen to them' so they can be transformed does not do justice to the nature of 'dialogue'.

Second, in relation to the 1998 Lambeth resolution itself, there must be great caution in offering a definitive interpretation of the resolution as a whole given the complexities surrounding (some might say self-contradictions within) its final form. Perhaps no two people who voted for the lengthy final resolution interpreted it or its significance in precisely the same way. Nowhere is this more the case than in relation to the clause on listening. This clause was not in the original proposed motion from the section working on sexuality which had itself refused to listen to representatives from Changing Attitude as part of its work. It was proposed in the plenary debate by Michael Bourke, Suffragan Bishop of Wolverhampton in the Diocese of Lichfield. His own understanding is clear from his speech as reported at the time. He warned that the Bible can be used both as source as faith and as a way to oppress people. Referring to witch-burning and racism he argued that we should use humility in interpreting texts and should rely on Spirit of Jesus. He then went on to say,

Lambeth is not going to say homosexuality is all right, but we need to listen to homosexual people. Listening to their stories is especially important if you think homosexuality is sinful - listening is the only way to overcome homophobic societies all around the world.

Clearly the understanding of listening from the amendment's proposer is quite different from that now offered by Anglican Mainstream.

Later in the debate, Peter Selby, Bishop of Worcester drew attention to the fact that the proposed amendment calling for listening to gay and lesbian people had not been taken and it was agreed to consider it with Peter Selby the main speaker in its favour. He made clear his view that 'the resolution won't have authority if it doesn't respond

to the people affected. We must listen.' The amendment was overwhelmingly approved and incorporated into the final text.

It is quite clear therefore that the intention of those moving the amendment - both the bishops concerned (like the Bishop of Chelmsford) serve as patrons of Changing Attitude - was clearly expressed in the debate and was quite different from that being argued for now by Anglican Mainstream. Indeed I know of no interpretation of the 'listening' aspect of the resolution being given during the debate at Lambeth that fits with that being offered now.

True Union in the Body?

True Union In the Body? (of which I was one of the authors) is a contribution to the Communion's debate on the public blessing of same-sex unions cited by Fulcrum as a key reference in debates on sexual ethics. It sought to explain and commend the official teaching of the Communion as expressed in I.10. It is important to realise, therefore, the stance that it took in relation to 'listening' and responding to those who are not convinced by that teaching and who even live contrary to it.

It opens with a clear awareness of the need for us all to listen to the voice of Christ:

Our motive, then, is not the defence of our truth but a contribution to the present conversation in the Anglican Communion and the promotion of Christ's love. We are well aware that truth claims can be a cloak for power-games, and that worldviews can be imposed on others in ways that are abusive and oppressive or which marginalize the voiceless. In this situation we must listen out all the harder, not to those who shout loudest, but to the voice of the living Christ who defines the character and limits of his Body as its founder and present head. Christians in the highly sexualized culture of the West need to listen especially carefully-but so too do Christians in other parts of the world where issues of human sexuality, even if slightly different in their manifestations, are equally urgent and in need of address. All of us need to be conscious, not of the 'speck in our brother's eye' but rather of the 'plank' in our own (Matthew 7:4). Thus the whole Church needs to open herself to God's judgment in the confidence that God's word, if it judges us all, also brings us all life (1.14).

The paper proceeds to acknowledge that 'Christian re-thinking on this issue...is not merely a capitulation to secular culture' (2.3). Furthermore, 'it would be quite wrong to imagine or pretend that homosexual attraction and practice is unknown outside the Western world' (2.4), something now helpfully acknowledged by CAPA in their 'Road to Lambeth' statement. Although 'many Church leaders in the 'non-West' find it difficult to understand and sympathize with advocates of same-sex blessings', in 'the global Anglican Communion this is an issue that simply cannot now be ignored by anyone. There is a need 'to interpret the times guided by the Spirit of God'. This involves 'a new task for Christian theology and ethics' (2.4). Such discernment 'is inevitably required of those in the West who minister amongst gay people' and 'those outside the Western context must learn from those involved in ministry to gay people, listening to and struggling with the difficult questions raised by such a pastoral and missionary context' (2.5). The relevance of that to the Communion as a whole and in particular parts is clear.

True Union? later acknowledges that those convinced that God in Scripture condemns all forms of homosexual practice will view the choice facing the Church as one of whether to obey God or to disobey Him. However, it also recognizes that 'the Church must listen respectfully to the experience of all people, acknowledging that she still has much to learn about the broader homosexual experience' (4.29). Among those who need to be heard it highlighted 'those who experience same-sex attraction, but who seek faithfully to follow the often difficult path of Christian discipleship in obedience to Scripture and the Church's teaching' (4.29). However, it clearly did not limit listening so that listening was only to such people or only if its stated purpose was to result in such conclusions.

Finally, in the conclusion of its chapter on the church's pastoral response it made clear (5.20) that 'in standing firm in allegiance to traditional teaching, the Church must acknowledge and repent of her widespread failings, both past and present, in her pastoral care of those experiencing homosexual attraction and much more seriously commit herself to 'listen to the experiences of homosexual persons' (Lambeth I.10)'.

The rationale for such ongoing listening and discernment was also clearly stated. In relation to understanding biblical texts, 'it is important that the Church respects (and engages in serious dialogue with) individual Christians who see loving and committed same-sex relationships in our culture as lying outside the scope of these passages' condemnation' (4.18). Listening must also be undertaken because 'in principle, of course, the Christian Tradition might be in need of correction and development in this area (as in others such as usury, slavery and the role of women)' (4.22). In thinking about how to respond to those gay Christians who did not accept I.10 it quoted the St Andrew's Day Statement to argue that

strong opposition to the public conferral of legitimacy on same-sex unions does not necessarily entail exclusion of all Christians who enter such unions in the sincere belief that they are an acceptable pattern of Christian discipleship. Here there is room for a generous inclusivity in the name of Christ (5.20).

'Listening' within that clear and committed frame of reference is clearly much more open, humble and fluid than the rather precise, controlling and limiting definition offered by Anglican Mainstream and explored above.

The Windsor Report and Repair the Tear

The Windsor Report did not focus on either the teaching on sexuality in I.10 or on the listening process. However, it did include the following in paragraph 146:

We remind all in the Communion that Lambeth Resolution I.10 calls for an ongoing process of listening and discernment, and that Christians of good will need to be prepared to engage honestly and frankly with each other on issues relating to human sexuality. It is vital that the Communion establish processes and structures to facilitate ongoing discussion. One of the deepest realities that the Communion faces is continuing difference on the presenting issue of ministry by and to persons who openly engage in sexually active homosexual relationships. Whilst this report criticises those

who have propagated change without sufficient regard to the common life of the Communion, it has to be recognised that debate on this issue cannot be closed whilst sincerely but radically different positions continue to be held across the Communion. The later sections of Lambeth Resolution I.10 cannot be ignored any more than the first section, as the primates have noted.

In their response to the report – *Repair the Tear*- Anglican Mainstream (and CEEC) noted the addition here of the word 'discernment' alongside 'listening'. As a result it warned (para 13) of dangers as to where this addition might lead the Communion:

TWR's few discussions and references to the actual content of the Lambeth resolution...highlight only its important call for pastoral care and listening. Indeed, in a potentially misleading and strictly inaccurate statement, it refers to the resolution calling for 'an ongoing process of listening *and discernment*' (§146, italics added). The actual resolution only called for "listening" as one would listen to any group of people. This has understandably raised concerns that TWR may be giving the substantive content of the resolution a much more tentative status than that declared by the Lambeth Conference and the Primates...While listening to those most directly affected by the resolution and engaging in respectful dialogue with those who reject its reaffirmation of traditional and biblical Christian teaching, it is important that the Communion does not let the authoritative status of Lambeth I.10 be gradually eroded - all the more since there has been no substantive case made within the Communion against its theological rationale. Further, listening must be firmly linked not primarily to the theological sphere, but to the pastoral sphere. What is seriously needed is a deeper effort by all to engage in the pastoral support and care of those who struggle to understand and live in the light of orthodox moral teaching. This "family discussion" that is envisaged must be directed into such greater pastoral engagement.

Here again it should be noted that listening is 'important' and there needs to be 'respectful dialogue' with those who reject I.10's stance. Though focusing this listening 'primarily' on the pastoral sphere it is not limited to this nor is the pastoral goal sharply defined. In fact it is recognized that there is a need for 'theological' engagement and indeed the lack of such an approach from those who disagree with I.10 is bemoaned, implicitly therefore encouraging the development and articulation of such theological arguments so that people can listen to them.

It is therefore not strictly true that, as Colin Coward claimed, *Repair the Tear* stated 'there is no room in which to discuss the theology of human sexuality in the church. It limits engagement with lesbian and gay people to those who struggle and live in the light of orthodox moral teaching...Conversation can only be held within the already agreed doctrinal and structural arrangements of the Anglican Communion.' Colin Coward's claims do, however, appear more accurate in relation to the statement earlier this year from Anglican Mainstream. However, as we have seen, that AM statement offers an interpretation of I.10 which

- is hard to justify given the framing of that resolution
- contradicts views expressed in *True Union in the Body?*
- goes beyond the cautionary comments in *Repair the Tear*.

So, is there an alternative evangelical understanding of listening which fits with I.10 as a whole and with a way of providing orthodox support for its teaching on sexuality?

Listening to learn...

One fundamental problem with the latest Mainstream statement is its claim that 'the reason we have to listen to them [is?] so that they can be transformed.' While it is undoubtedly the case that people are sometimes transformed through talking and simply being listened to, it is not generally possible to define the nature of that transformation in advance. The usual expectation in human relationships would be that it is at least as likely to be those who do the listening who are transformed. And that, of course, is perhaps part of the problem for some people on all 'sides' in the current situation: they want to talk and be listened to in order to persuade others to be transformed rather than to listen in order to learn and perhaps be transformed themselves. So for some, again on all sides, if people are not clearly changing their mind and being persuaded by what they are being told by those who disagree with them then they cannot really be listening. I recall being told by someone after speaking to the local Changing Attitude group that I could not really be serious about listening because I'd been engaged in debates and discussion for several years and still held much the same views - in terms of homosexual practice being a sin - that I did before I started!

Learning from experience: theologically flawed views

One of the underlying issues here is undoubtedly quite different understandings of the role of 'listening to experience' in the development of Christian theology, including moral theology. All of us listen with theological presuppositions, especially in relation to sources of authority and divine revelation. These presuppositions may of course themselves be challenged and reshaped through dialogue and listening but they certainly cannot be ignored or dismissed. Some of these presuppositions are very important in the dynamics of the listening process and need to be subjected to analysis.

One presupposition - which appears to drive much of the enthusiasm for the 'listening process', especially in North America - requires more serious theological critique than is possible here. Its prominence, however, is undoubtedly a factor in pushing some more conservative Christians into a rather hostile stance towards 'listening'. There are those who appear to hold that 'experience' is a specially privileged locus of divine revelation that is to be placed alongside Scripture, tradition and reason as an authority for Christian theology and life. This is often expressed in terms of the belief that it is through our learning from 'experience' - viewed as a constantly developing dynamic process (often presumed to be 'progress') through history - that the Spirit fulfils Christ's promise to lead us into all truth. This understanding of how we come to know truth is then often tied to a commitment to 'inclusiveness' through the belief that it is only through listening to, including and accepting the experience of groups currently outside and on the margins of the church that we can hope to discern the fullness of God's truth.

Among many criticisms that can and must be made of this method, only two can be noted here. First, those who hold this view often manage to combine a remarkably naïve hermeneutic in relation to experience (especially when the interpretation of their own experience offered by those who present as marginalised or victims is granted an almost sacred quality which puts it beyond critique) while emphasising the complexities of interpreting biblical texts and employing a hermeneutic of suspicion in relation to them. It would appear that present experience is somehow sufficiently perspicuous for those who have ears to listen and hear while what has been the near-universal understanding for 2,000 years of the Spirit's voice heard through the plain sense of Scripture is either questioned or outright rejected.

Second, and similarly, great play is made of the complexity and diversity of biblical materials but the similar problems in relation to human experience are conveniently ignored. The true situation is closer to that described by Oliver O'Donovan in words that perhaps partly explain our current crisis and certainly warn against looking to 'listening to experience' as the means of resolving our difficulties:

There is, of course, no one single experience. Even within the compass of a single person's life, the experience of emotion and of sexuality is very varied; and when the experiences of different people are put in play, they often challenge and contest one another. The only possible outcome, then, of a discourse founded wholly on experience is unresolved conflict.

Learning from experience: Is there an alternative?

Faced with views of listening that give human experience too much authority, the temptation of some is either to dismiss listening or to define it very narrowly as in the piece from Anglican Mainstream. Neither approach is, however, necessary. Of course, evangelicals will have a firm conviction that, whatever else may result, listening to experience should never lead a faithful Christian to the conclusion that the Bible is wrong and an unreliable guide to God's will for us. That is not to deny the importance of listening to experience but rather to insist that all experience is ultimately weighed, tested and interpreted in the light of Scripture. Evangelicals - especially those influenced by the pietist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal and charismatic traditions within evangelicalism - cannot seriously claim that there is nothing to be learned from experience or from listening to the experience of others. There are many other fruits of listening to experience that can result even if one believes experience cannot 'trump' the teaching of the Bible.

Evangelicals may, for example, conclude, in the light of listening to and learning from the experience of other Christians, that they must go back and study their Bibles afresh. They may then conclude, through further prayerful biblical study and reflection on Scripture and experience, that they previously misheard, misunderstood or misinterpreted God's Word. That, for example, is what many evangelicals did during the 1970s and 1980s in relation to the restrictions traditionally placed on women's ministry. Some may ask whether it is really the Bible or experience that is acting as supreme authority in such situations and that must be a constant question as we wrestle with difficult issues. However, almost all of us who have changed our

understanding of what Scripture teaches on some issue (and if we have never done that we must seriously ask whether Scripture is in any sense authoritative in our lives) have done so, in part, as a result of particular experiences that have opened up new questions and helped us shed what we believe is new light on God's Word. Here, of course, the experience of Peter with Cornelius and the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) concerning the inclusion of Gentile converts presents an important biblical model (I've discussed this in my Grove Ethics booklet, (God, Gentiles and Gay Christians?).

In addition, through listening to gay and lesbian people, Christians may learn much about areas in relation to sexuality where the Bible does not directly speak. This in turn will frame both how we teach and how we pastor in relation to the subject. This learning from listening is already evident from such realities as the widespread acceptance by most 'conservatives' now that

- there is a valid distinction between 'orientation' and 'practice'
- 'homosexuality' is very rarely if ever a clear 'choice',
- however we understand homosexual desire it is not simply a sign of a person's rejection of heterosexual desire or evidence of their uncontrolled sexual rapaciousness.

These - and other examples - should make clear that in addition to 'listening so we can show them how they are wrong and put them right' - there are many other quite acceptable ways of understanding listening that lead to new learning and insight and do not undermine the authority of Scripture or privilege experience as a separate means of authoritative special revelation.

Listening to experience in the Communion

The form of listening described above is clearly in line with the official position of the Anglican Communion. In relation to listening within the Communion, the Instruments of Communion have clearly affirmed traditional Christian teaching as set out in Lambeth I.10. This includes a statement as to what is 'contrary to Scripture' and what ecclesial actions are incompatible with that teaching. It is quite right for those committed to that teaching to be vigilant that, while it stands, it is not effectively ignored by the equal commitment to listen. However, it cannot be denied that such listening may eventually lead to some change in the teaching and in what actions are acceptable within the church.

The Communion is currently having to respond to provinces which, though strongly supporting the 'listening' process, have explicitly rejected that teaching in their practice. Its response - in *The Windsor Report*, the Primates' Dromantine communiqué and the ACC resolution - calls on them to regret such actions and commit themselves (by means of moratoria) to desist from them until 'a new consensus emerges' within the Communion. The failure of General Convention to do this now presents further major problems for the Communion and for the listening process within it.

However, the Communion has at no point declared that the teaching of I.10 is infallible or incapable of being corrected in the future. It would be rash to do so given the track record of past Lambeth conferences on a number of similar issues (eg over contraception and divorce and remarriage). Even more seriously, it would be incompatible with the Anglican conviction that councils 'when they be gathered together, (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God,) they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God' (Article 20).

Given the context in which the 'listening' part of the resolution was framed there can be little doubt that, in the minds of its proposers, it represented an attempt to establish a means by which, through listening to those on whom the resolution had most direct impact, the church could learn *not only* how best to provide pastoral care in line with its teaching *but also* whether it had indeed erred in parts of the resolution. It is perfectly acceptable - and wise - for those who do not believe that the resolution has erred humbly to accept this dual aspect. Confident in the power of God's Word and Spirit, we are surely able to engage seriously in the listening process without putting further restrictions upon it but instead being open to learning where we are wrong.

Learning to listen: the question of control

The simple fact is that in a genuine commitment to listen we are unable - if it is true listening - to control the outcome of the process. This works both ways. Some, as a result of listening, may conclude that I.10 is wrong and/or too heavy a yoke for gay and lesbian Christians to bear. Others, as a result of listening, may be confirmed in their belief that homosexual practice is contrary to Scripture and learn, through hearing the attempts of some to justify their actions, something more of the depths of human sin and self-deception. To insist, however, that listening must take place with a particular and precise end in view and is only successful (or indeed has only really taken place) if that end is achieved is to fail to understand what it means to listen. Rather, in listening we open ourselves to hear from other Christians in the belief that in so doing we may better hear the voice of Christ.

A similar point in relation to refusing control over listening is that we must not be so selective in our listening that we filter out unwelcome voices. In relation to I.10 there are a whole range of voices that must be heard - gay and lesbian Christians in various forms of relationship or who would like to be in a relationship, homosexual Christians committed to a life of celibacy who see themselves as in a struggle against temptation, Christians who testify to God's healing and transformation of what they experienced as disordered and fallen homosexual desires. Once again the temptation we all face is to seek to control and determine the outcome of 'listening' by giving undue weight to those whose voices are most comfortable to our own pre-conceived ideas. If, however, we are serious about listening then the full range of Christian homosexual experience must be allowed to speak and must be treated with respect even when one judges some testimony to be more genuinely Christ-like than others.

Listening to learn and learning to listen

So what is involved in listening? It is an openness to learn something new and - by its very nature - we cannot determine exactly what it is that we will learn. It is important that listening is something we do in order to learn and not in order to teach and transform others. We listen to learn. We also though must learn to listen. In part that means that as we learn more we should be eager to listen more and get better at listening, aware as we learn of how much more there is to know, how far we have still to travel in our understanding of the truth. More seriously it means we have to learn the discipline of listening. This is one of the most important disciplines of the Christian life but sadly one that Christians, including evangelicals, are not always renowned for or gifted in even when it does not touch on such a difficult subject as sexuality.

I conclude with perhaps one of the best discussions of what we commit ourselves to when we commit ourselves to listening - and how we sin when we fail to listen properly. It is that offered by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a passage which, perhaps symbolically, first really struck me when I found it quoted in a book - Jeffrey Heskings' *Face to Face* (SCM, 2005) - which seeks to give voice to 'gay and lesbian clergy on holiness and life together'. Bonhoeffer wrote -

The *first* service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God's Word but also lends us God's ear. We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them. So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to "offer" something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening. But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either; they will always be talking even in the presence of God. The death of the spiritual life starts here, and in the end there is nothing left but empty spiritual chatter and clerical condescension which chokes on pious words. Those who cannot listen long and patiently will always be talking past others, and finally no longer will even notice it. Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and their own words and plans.

For Christians, pastoral care differs essentially from preaching in that here the task of listening is joined to the task of speaking the Word. There is also a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. This impatient, inattentive listening regularly despises the other Christian and finally is only waiting to get a chance to speak and thus to get rid of the other. This sort of listening is no fulfilment of our task. And it is certain that here, too, in our attitude toward other Christians we simply see reflected our own relationship to God. It should be no surprise that we are no longer able to perform the greatest service of listening that God has entrusted to us - hearing the confession of another Christian - if we refuse to lend our ear to another person on lesser subjects. The pagan world today knows something about persons who often can be helped only by having someone who will seriously listen to them. On this insight it has built its own secular form of pastoral care, which has become popular with many people, including Christians. But Christians

have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been entrusted to them by the One who is indeed the great listener and in whose work they are to participate. We should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God (Life Together, pp98-9).

Yours in Christ,
Andrew Goddard

The Listening Process

Lecture in Memory of Canon Norman Autton 2005

“Scripture and Sexuality – our commitment to listening and learning”

By the Archbishop of Wales The Most Revd Barry Morgan

Few people doubt that the 1998 Lambeth Resolution on Human Sexuality – Lambeth 110 as it has come to be known has had a profound effect on the Anglican Communion. In fact you could be pardoned for thinking that the Anglican Communion since then has not been interested in any other topic, since it has dominated the Agendas of Provinces, meetings of Primates and of the Anglican Consultative Council. The ordination of a practising homosexual as a Bishop in the USA and the blessing of same sex relationships in Canada might not have had the repercussions they have had, if the Lambeth Conference in 1998 had not had such an acrimonious debate about sexuality. What I would like to do in this lecture is to look at Lambeth 110 and ask why this resolution rather than any other has caused such problems, for after all there were 63 pages of resolutions at the 1998 Lambeth Conference.

Before doing that it's worth bearing in mind that the Lambeth bishops were asked to choose from four major topics during the conference. The headings were - Called to Full Humanity; Called to Live and Proclaim the Good News; Called to be a Faithful Church in a Plural World; and Called to be One. In other words the four main topics dealt with were human affairs, mission, interfaith and unity issues. Human Sexuality was one subject area, within the human affairs topic, which also examined themes such as human rights, human dignity, the environment, questions about modern technology, euthanasia, international debt and economic justice. Sexuality then was one topic among many others, but I suspect that by now no one remembers that. 110 seems to be the only resolution that counts. People have also forgotten that the resolution ought not to be seen in isolation from the discussion that those Bishops who studied the theme of Human Sexual Relations had for the three weeks of the conference. This is summarised in the Conference Report and puts the resolution in context. Different Bishops reported on the four main topics and the sub topics within them and brought forward resolutions to the plenary session of bishops. The resolutions on human sexuality however were the only ones that were altered on the floor during the plenary discussion, which illustrates how high feelings were running. What then does Lambeth 110 say? It is worth quoting:

1. “It commends to the Church the sub-section report on human sexuality;
2. In view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
3. 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. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and 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;
4. While rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;
 5. Cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;
 6. 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;

In fact of course little attention has been paid to the above six points even in the 110 resolution. Whereas the report commends faithfulness in marriage in lifelong union and abstinence as the right choice for the unmarried, the wider church has not sought to make an issue out of these. Some of the provinces of Great Britain allow re-marriage in church after divorce and the majority of people who come to be married in church in Britain have cohabited. What has been highlighted since 1998 is (d) “the rejection of homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture and (e) “Cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions or ordaining those involved in same gender unions”. In other words the Anglican Communion has concentrated on two subsections of a subsection of one of the four major topics that were discussed and this has given the impression that nothing else of importance took place or matters a great deal.

Now 1998 was not the first time for a Lambeth Conference to deal with the topic of human sexuality. In 1908, reaffirming an 1888 resolution, it forbade divorce except in the case of adultery and refused to sanction re-marriage during the lifetime of an existing partner. It reaffirmed this in 1920, 1930 and 1968. These resolutions spoke in terms of the indissolubility of marriage and refused to countenance either re-marriage in church or even services of blessing by the church, urging people (in 1968) to remain in unhappy marriages rather than divorce. In 1998 however, the resolution says nothing about divorce and re-marriage only that “it upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union”. In other words, it makes a positive rather than a negative statement.

In the same way Lambeth resolutions were more accommodating to contraception in 1958 and 1968 than in 1920. Whereas in 1920 warning was given against “the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of contraception” by 1958 and 1968 the resolutions accepted that family planning was natural and that this was a matter to be left to the individual conscience. Open disagreement was expressed with *Humanae Vitae*. As far as homosexuality is concerned it passed resolutions on this topic in 1978 and 1988 as well as 1998. In 1978 it asked for “a deep and dispassionate study of homosexuality to include both the teaching of scripture and the results of scientific and medical research”. It reiterated this even more fully in 1988 when it asked for an account to be taken of “biological, genetic and psychological research undertaken by other agencies as well as the socio-cultural factors that lead to the different attitudes in the provinces of our communion”. It also spoke about the need to listen to the

stories of gay and lesbian people in the church. If one looks at the 1998 resolution against this background it is obvious that it is a much harsher resolution than those passed in 1978 and 1988, for it says nothing about taking into account scientific and social factors. Whereas the contraception resolutions have become more permissive with time and resolutions on marriage have been expressed positively and not negatively, the opposite has been the case with resolutions on homosexuality.

Why has this topic caused such consternation? What are the main issues at stake? Obviously it raises the question of the authority of scripture and the tradition of the church but it also brings to the fore the different cultures in which provinces of the Anglican Communion exist. What I would like to do is to examine what both sides have to say about the authority of scripture and then to look at some of the differing cultural contexts of the Communion.

Scriptural Interpretation

The view of one side as far as scripture is concerned is clear – homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture since all the references to homosexuality in scripture (and there aren't all that many) are negative. Therefore to be involved in these practices is to reject the authority of scripture and its teaching and to be involved in heresy. The relevant texts are Genesis 19:1-14 the sin of Sodom, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 where male to male sexual intercourse is explicitly forbidden, Romans 1:18-32 the condemnation of unnatural sexual practices, I Corinthians 6:9-11 where homosexual lust is condemned and I Timothy 1:10 which talks about sexual perverts.

For those who take these texts literally the scriptures are therefore quite plain. "God creates male and female together as being the full representation of humanity; marriage alone is the place for sexual intimacy – this is God's decree; homosexual activity of any kind is proscribed since it rejects the natural order and practice and is an example of the rejection of God's revealed truth", (Church of Nigeria paper to ACC 2005).

Those who hold to a different view argue, that all Christians wish to take Holy Scripture seriously, but stress that there are very few texts dealing with homosexuality. They would say that a continuing debate about what it is that Scripture says about homosexuality is still needed:

- a. Despite what the Resolution says the teaching of Scripture on homosexuality is not unambiguous or settled beyond question, but the subject of a continuing scholarly debate, for example over the precise meaning of texts or their relevance to the debate.
- b. The debate must be conducted on sound exegetical principles, particularly in that references must be interpreted consistently with their immediate context.
- c. The Bible has no concept of homosexuality in terms of the possibility of a loving relationship between two people of the same sex.

All that however is to argue about the interpretation of texts. The argument needs to be broadened as far as scripture is concerned in several ways:

1. Even if one were to accept the literal reading of all the texts regarding homosexuality and accept their negativity, one has to ask the question about the nature of Biblical texts. There is no doubt that for all Christians the Scriptures are central and authoritative. Anglicans swear allegiance to their supremacy. That however is different from regarding them as being inerrant and infallible. The books of the Bible were written at different times, and in different places and we no longer accept what they have to say about eating shellfish, or strictures in Exodus 21:17 that those who curse their parents should be punished by death nor do we take literally the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage. In other words, we are all of us selective about the parts of scripture we use. The thirty-nine articles of religion see scripture as containing all things necessary for salvation, which is not the same thing as regarding everything in scripture as being necessary for salvation.
2. All this raises the question about the nature of biblical authority. Some have a tendency to regard the biblical texts, as God's own words dictated by Him to human authors. In fact the books of the Bible are the inspired response to revelation, but the response is a human response and cannot be regarded as being identical with that revelation. One has therefore to ask the question not what the Bible says but what it means. Moreover Anglicans believe that we worship not a book but a person, the "living word of God, Jesus Christ to whom the written word bears witness". (Windsor Report p.54).
3. One also has to examine the logic and direction of the Bible as a whole and not pluck texts from it and use them legalistically. For example, the Old Testament has a great deal to say about dealing with strangers as brothers or sisters or neighbours whom one should not oppress. Justice and mercy are at the heart of the Holiness Code of Leviticus.

In the New Testament the teaching of Jesus as a whole is about caring for the outcast as a test of righteousness and in his own ministry he dealt with those on the margins. There is a bias in the New Testament to inclusivity and those who have been excluded by others because of their sex, race, health or religion. Jesus' inclusive community consisted of women, children and those outside the cultic regulations - Gentiles. His ministry was one of hospitality and generosity to all whom he met. It could be argued that gay and lesbian people are the marginalized people of our age, because according to the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement many refuse to attend any place of worship because they feel they are not accepted and welcomed. Ecusa's report to the Anglican Consultative Council at Nottingham in 2005 spoke of gay people being portrayed as perverted, promiscuous, sinful and untouchable by many Christians. Gay people have been personally rejected, socially ostracised, subjected to intense discrimination, violence and even death. They have seen the rejection of their sexuality as a rejection of them as persons. (American Report 'To Set our Hope on Christ' p28).

4. The great cry of those who are against same sex relationships is that it is against Biblical morality and that Biblical morality is upheld if gayness is condemned. The question needs to be raised about the content of Biblical morality. C.S. Lewis argues in his books that the sins of the flesh are the least bad sins. He writes that the New Testament condemns spiritual sins such as "putting others

in the wrong, patronising, backbiting, the pleasures of power and hatred far more harshly". "The cold self-righteous prig goes to church regularly and he may be nearer hell than the prostitute". Moreover the New Testament has far more to say about issues such as arrogance, greed, violence, sharing goods, loving enemies, worshiping together, justice for the poor, orphans and the oppressed than about sexual matters.

5. Holy Scripture contains not just ethical injunctions but stories, and stories also convey truth. Peter on the road from Joppa to Caesarea on his way to visit Cornelius the Roman centurion has a vision and is told to eat all kinds of animals regarded by Jews as unclean as laid down in the Purity Code. Having refused three times to disobey God's law in such a way, he was told in this vision "what God has cleansed you must not call profane". Peter goes to Cornelius' house with this odd vision at the back of his mind and is asked to tell the story of Jesus to this Gentile household. Its members become so convinced by the story about Jesus that Peter baptises them. The story of salvation for Jews only, becomes a story of salvation for all humanity and Peter realises that Gentiles do not have to become Jews first before they become Christian. In other words a seismic shift has happened in Peter's thinking and in associating with Gentiles and in baptising them he directly disobeys the Biblical prohibition in Leviticus to have nothing to do with people of other races – the same part of the Bible that has the most clear prohibition of same sex activities. The teaching that Gentiles, regarded as impure and second-class as compared to Jews according to the Holiness Code, is put aside in favour of the view of a God who accepts impure people. In other words the ritual and purity laws of the Old Testament are seen as purely temporary and cultural and are set aside. Christianity becomes an inclusive community welcoming those not normally welcomed into the household of faith.

In his closing sermon to the Anglican Communion at Nottingham Archbishop Rowan put it like this, "The relationships between Jews and Gentiles in Acts is not simply that of one racial group to another. It's a story about what faith really is and what salvation is. Be circumcised, keep the law and you will know you have the signs that make you acceptable to God. To which Paul and Barnabas and the Church replied, there is no sign by which you can tell in and of yourself that you are acceptable to God. There is nothing about you that guarantees love, salvation, healing. But there is everything about God in Jesus Christ that assures you and so if you want to know where your certainty lies, look to God, not to yourself"

This has direct relevance to gay and lesbian people condemned by the cultic rules and purity codes of Leviticus. It can be argued that since the cultic rules and purity codes were put aside in accepting Gentiles so now Christians can put aside those codes which deal with sexuality. As Ian Duffield puts it "to exclude homosexuals on the basis of the same kind of purity laws constitutes a reversion to a form of religion which Jesus encourages us to leave behind". (Expository Times Volume 115, No 4, January 2004). A simple appeal to scripture turns the Bible back into a law book and it is St Paul who argues against using the Old Testament in this way. It would be ironic therefore if his letters were to be used

for a purpose he condemned.

Cornelius' story is not an isolated one. Philip baptises an Ethiopian Eunuch in Chapter 8 of the Book of Acts. He takes a foreigner, a man regarded as impure who does not belong to an ethnic or tribal group and baptises him. By so doing Philip values the eunuch as a person in his own right and gives a place of honour to those whom his society marginalised. By so doing he also overturns the direct teaching of Leviticus.

Yet this is not just another case of the New Testament superseding the Old Testament. The Old Testament itself is not static or uniform in its views. In Deuteronomy 23:1-4 it is stated that no Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. Later in the Old Testament comes the story of Ruth, a Moabite, and in her marriage to Boaz she becomes an ancestor of David. The story of Ruth, is at direct variance with what is advocated in Deuteronomy. In the latter Moabites are to be excluded from the congregation. They now become present through Ruth as an ancestor of David. In Isaiah 56 eunuchs are invited into the worshiping community in spite of the Deuteronomic prohibition on such a practice. Therefore even within the Old Testament itself there is a dynamic re-writing of earlier traditions in response to new experiences and scripture itself includes those who according to previous parts of scripture have been involved in abominable acts and excluded from the congregation. (Carolyn Sharp "Beyond Proof-texting" in "Gays and the Future of Anglicanism" edited by Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker).

All of this shows that there has never been a monochrome way of using and interpreting scripture. It is too simplistic therefore to argue that there is a traditional interpretation and a modern revised interpretation of scripture. Scripture itself is diverse. There is greater diversity in scripture than one realises. The experiences of the people of Israel have had a part to play in reshaping theological judgements. And as far as the New Testament is concerned the early church's experience of the Spirit prompted it to overturn its avoidance of particular people or particular food. Peter and Paul explain their experiences of the Spirit to the rest of the church and are endorsed by the Council of Jerusalem. As Marilyn McCord Adams puts it "Christians had no intention of addressing Gentiles but when eavesdropping Gentiles heard and believed, the Holy Spirit unmistakably fell upon them, worked signs and wonders through them. When the apostles investigating this confirmed how the Spirit of God dared to violate Jewish taboos, the Jerusalem Council who had experience against tradition, agreed with the Spirit to count Gentiles in". (Wrestling for Blessing p.138).

Cultural Factors

How does one define homosexuality? As one Roman Catholic bishop puts it, "it could refer to anyone who once had a fleeting same-sex attraction; to someone else it could be restricted to someone who is sexually active and openly part of a 'gay pride'

movement. Most people would exclude those extremes, but where is the line drawn in between?”. Or as another writer puts it “What is homosexual practice? Is it to have sex or could it be just to delight in the company of another? What is the significance of expressing affection, or nurturing a relationship? Practice could be defined as any relationship which gives expression to an orientation and any act which fosters such a relationship”. If homosexual orientation of itself is not regarded as sinful, then should any expression of that orientation in a relationship of itself be regarded as sinful? In other words what precisely is the definition of practice?

If scripture re-interprets the tradition even within its own pages, that leaves the possibility open for the church to reinterpret its tradition as it has done on other issues e.g. the re-marriage of divorced people, its attitude to slavery, the ordination of women, and usury. At the Council of Vienne 1274 usurers were to be refused confession, absolution, and Christian burial. Few Churches follow that line today.

It is also a fact that we all read scripture from our own cultural perspective. As Dr Edward Morris put it his 2003 Norman Autton Lecture “Do you regard theology as primarily substantive, quantitative, and static – a body of knowledge exclusively from the past? In other words as the discipline that lectures the world or as an approach which whilst respecting the theological insights of our faith and community, does not view these in static terms but is open to re-definition, reformulation and reapplication?”. Or as the Caribbean theologian Kortright Davies puts it “There is no universal theology; theological norms arise out of the context in which one is called to live out one’s faith; theology is not culture free. Although the Gospel remains the same from place to place, the means by which the Gospel is understood and articulated will differ considerably”.

Bishop Colenso, who was the cause of the calling of the first Lambeth Conference, was so partly because of his view that eternal punishment in hell was untenable. Few people would now want to disagree with him or see this as a communion breaking matter. In other words all theology reflects its context. Doctrine is formed as the result of a conversation between the church and the world and Christian thinking has always adapted itself to its surrounding culture. St Paul in his dealings with the Athenians used the context of the diversity of religions as an aid to proclaiming the gospel, which is why in I Corinthians he says he is all things to all men.

For many people not living in the western world the consecration of a gay person and the blessing of same sex unions is a sell out to the agenda of the age – a church that has given in to the culture of liberalism and a church without morals or discipline, divided and in disarray and a church that has departed from Biblical teaching. As the Archbishop of Canterbury put it in his address to the ACC at Nottingham 2005 “One view is that the churches of the north are tired and confused and are losing evangelistic energy. They have been trying to reclaim their credibility by accepting and seeking to domesticate the modern values of their culture even though this is a culture that is practically defined by the rejection of the Living God. But another story is that the Churches of the North have been made aware of how much their life and work has been sustained in the past by insensitive and oppressive social patterns, with the Bible being used to justify great evils. In recent decades there has been a huge change in the

general understanding of sexual activity. Can the Gospel be heard in such a world if it seems to cling to ways of understanding sexuality but has no correspondence to what the most apparently responsible people in our culture believe?”. The condemnation of the Church of England by some provinces for allowing clergy to enter into civil partnership agreements allowed by law also shows the divergent backgrounds of provinces within the Communion. In Great Britain the Church cannot prohibit what the law allows even though it might not necessarily accord with its own ethical teaching. This is obviously not understood in other parts of the world who see it as a *laissez-faire* attitude by the church.

Different provinces come from totally different cultural contexts and this was highlighted for me in a recent Guardian article by Chimamanda Adichie recently shortlisted for the Orange prize for literature. He says that in Nigeria literature is not regarded highly or read but Christian self help books are such as ‘God’s plan for you’, or ‘The Richest Man in Babylon’. He argues that a new brand of Christianity came to the fore in the 1990’s with a dictatorial government in Nigeria that seemed to focus on materialism and that saw riches as a direct reward from God. Books were valued in terms of what immediate benefit people would get from them and there was little room for subtlety or for works of literature. He writes, “because we are not literary, we are too literal. Because our religiosity is individualistic we have neglected social consciousness”. (Guardian 19.02.05). There is no sense of nuance he says in Nigerian society. A student complained to him that the title of his book ‘Purple Hibiscus’ was confusing as it was not about flowers. That may give an insight into the way in which some African Bishops have regarded the resolutions on Lambeth. The resolutions do not advise the legitimising of same sex blessings. The Church of Kenya writing to the Anglican Consultative Council interprets this as, “the provinces of Canada and Ecusa have taken official actions contrary to Lambeth and by their actions have chosen a different path from the rest of the Communion and should be considered by the rest of the Communion as having broken fellowship. They need to re-consider their official standing in the spirit of repentance, reconciliation and willingness to re-affirm their commitment to the Communion and restoration should only take place after repentance and healing”. That is just one example of some provinces viewing Lambeth resolutions as infallible and non-negotiable statements of truth for all time. They have failed to recognise that those resolutions are precisely resolutions and only have the force of moral authority. They are not meant to be prescriptive in terms of binding provinces. That particular Lambeth resolution was also heavily nuanced. It says that it “cannot advise the legitimising of same sex unions”, but it has been interpreted as meaning that no provinces will do so and if they do they will be called to account and may be regarded as being out of Communion with other Anglican provinces. Some want to go even further and argue that gay practices are incompatible with any form of Christian discipleship and that such people should be barred from the sacraments as well. In this context it is interesting to note that the strongest resolution that has ever emanated from Lambeth Conferences has been on war. It has been reiterated again and again that as a method of settling international disputes it is incompatible with the teaching of Jesus. Yet it is a resolution that is totally disregarded by most provinces. It is also interesting to note that when the first Lambeth Conference was called in 1867 by Archbishop Longley it was for “Brotherly Counsel and encouragement”, not to pass

prescriptive pronouncements and Longley refused to exclude or condemn Colenso for his views and Lambeth took no disciplinary action against him.

To understand the Anglican Communion one therefore needs to understand the background and the culture of the different provinces. All of us have been shaped by our own geography, culture and religious contexts. In South East Asia for example where Muslims and Buddhists are in the majority and are very conservative on this issue, Christianity has been subjected to embarrassment and ridicule. Anglicans have been discredited by the Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean Governments on this issue and their churches seen as being tarred by the same brush as Ecusa and Canada. In Indonesia and Pakistan the persecution of Christians has increased because of what is seen as the endorsement of immoral behaviour. Many provinces say that evangelisation and mission has suffered because the Anglican Communion as a whole is on trial. The Anglican Church in the Southern Cone says that the Anglican Communion has been dragged through the mud publicly and ecumenical relationships have been affected. "Our credibility has been severely questioned and our capacity to respond in mission gravely impaired". (ACC submission).

In certain provinces of Africa those pregnant out of wedlock are barred from the sacraments, as are unmarried people living together and baptism is refused to their offspring. In Burma sexual matters are not discussed in public. Many British colonies have savage penal codes against homosexuality still on the statute books. Earlier this year a man in Northern Nigeria was sentenced to death by stoning after admitting to homosexual sex. Many provinces have also complained that whereas the first Christian Missionaries came with clarity about ethical matters, traditional teaching once introduced by the West has now been abandoned by the very churches, which introduced it.

There is a clash of cultures in another way as well. The church in some parts of the world is seen as being mutually accountable to other branches and does not therefore perform actions which harm a sister province. That explains why many provinces in the global south and Africa have found the actions of Canada and Ecusa inexcusable. The West has a tendency to believe in the right of people and institutions to make decisions about their own destinies and lifestyles and Western philosophy seems to be that every taste and preference can be catered for. On the other hand the North American churches argue that they have been studying and discussing human sexual ethics for many decades and that they live in a society where homosexual people are treated without discrimination and that what has happened in their society and church has not occurred precipitately or suddenly.

There is also no doubt that the church in the Southern Hemisphere, for so long dependent on the church in the West, is beginning to flex its muscles. It is numerically strong and is beginning to refuse the dominance of the Western church in theological matters and is calling it to account. The churches of the Global South also feel patronised by the West and identify the church in North America with the same characteristics as American foreign policy, where America does what it believes is right whatever the consequences for the rest of the world – a kind of Colossus striding the world.

Nor can one underestimate that what is being played out on the world stage is the internal struggles of the American Church where unhappy episcopalians, disapproving of events in their own church, oppose it in part through the protests of others. It is shocking to observe people from part of the traditional wing of the American church quite blatantly influencing the more conservative primates of provinces at every Primatial and ACC meeting, making an inflammatory situation potentially explosive. And in case you think I am exaggerating, I quote from a recent website set up by the American Anglican Council and their Bishops' Committee on Adequate Episcopal Oversight - a website that is meant to be limited to supporters alone. "Our ultimate goal is a realignment of Anglicanism on American soil committed to biblical faith and values, driven by Gospel Mission. We believe this should be a replacement jurisdiction with confessional standards emerging from the disastrous recent actions of General Convention. The leadership of ECUSA has rejected the Christian faith. We seek to retain ownership of our property as we move into realignment".

What then can be done if the Anglican Communion is not to tear itself apart in the coming years? There is no doubt that the Communion is in crisis. Primates have briefed against one another and some primates have refused to receive communion from the same altar as other primates arguing that, "unity of doctrine precedes unity of worship". There is no one solution that will fix everything but there has to be an attempt at understanding the situations and cultures of others and a refusal to assume that other provinces take actions for the worst of motives. So then:

- There has to be a realisation by all provinces that actions taken by them on various issues have repercussions across the whole Communion. Both Canada and ECUSA have acknowledged that they had not quite taken on board how their actions would affect other provinces. There is need for great sensitivity.>
- Provinces have to realise that Lambeth resolutions have no constitutional or canonical authority and primates have to realise that they have no constitutional power to bind the whole Communion by their statements. The first Lambeth Conference of 1867 made it clear that it was not a general synod of churches in communion with the Church of England, and it did not enact canons. As Stephen Sykes and John Booty put it in 'The Study of Anglicanism, "the Lambeth Conference has remained a deliberating body convened solely at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Whatever the respect accorded to its deliberations, it has no canonical or constitutional status". Primates have only met regularly since 1979 and that meeting defined its role as "not being a higher synod but a clearing house for ideas and experience through free expression, the fruits of which the Primates might convey to their churches". Some primates have not fully grasped either of these points and as the chairman of the ACC pointed out at its last meeting the Primates overstepped their authority in asking the representatives of ECUSA and Canada to withdraw from membership of that body. As he put it "a body which exists by means of a constitution agreed to by all the member churches of the Anglican Communion, and that is required by that constitution to be consultative cannot consult fully or properly if all its members are not sitting at the same table. It is surely not for one instrument of unity to disempower another".

- There has to be a far deeper understanding of the nature of Anglicanism. It is about diversity in unity. Max Warren, the General Secretary of CMS, in the mid c20 once said that “it takes the whole world to know the whole gospel” – in other words, no one person, or church or province alone knows what God has done in Jesus. We need one another’s insights with all our diversities and differences.

Anglicanism at its best is the realisation that none of us possesses the truth and will never do so and that we have to listen to one another and bear with one another because that is how Anglicanism has evolved and no one possesses the whole truth. On this moral issue as well as on others there has been no one right and definitive answer but a number of possible answers and this ought not to be a communion breaking issue since the argument is not about a core doctrine or a credal statement. Moreover it is not the only issue on which the Communion is divided – the place of war, marriage and divorce and the ordination of women are all issues on which provinces differ.

- It follows from this that we have to respect and acknowledge the different cultures that exist within the Communion. Not only do we have to respect one another’s geographical integrity but also one another’s moral and theological integrity. And perhaps paradoxically the churches of North America can give us a lead since among their delegations to the ACC at Nottingham were people who did not agree with blessing same sex partnerships or the consecration of gay bishops but who nevertheless wanted to remain as members of those churches, arguing their corner from within and trying to ensure that their respective churches did not split up. If people within the same province can have such mutual respect, surely the same can be expected of provinces in the Communion
- Archdeacon John Holdsworth in a lecture in this College last year said that in the end what changes attitudes is people’s experience. The most hard-line people on divorce and remarriage begin to change their mind when they have experience of it from inside their own families. Some anti women priests begin a conversion process when they experience the ministry of women. The same may prove to be true on this issue also.
- In his most recent book “The transformative Imagination: Re-thinking intercultural theology”, George Newlands argues that the most powerful forces available to the church are not its doctrines or dogmas but the Christian virtues of love, gentleness and forgiveness. The reviewer of his book says, “the mistake of so much neo-conservatism is to think that Christianity is best served by hardliners and ideologues who will staunchly defend orthodox belief and practice. In fact, this merely turns the church into a purity cult, paranoid about the corruption of its sacred ideas and rituals”. He goes on to say that, “unconditional love is at the centre of human flourishing and that Christianity is not a theory about God, nor a system of ideas but a living response to the God of Love and this is a transformative love that thrives on its engagement with the world and all its cultures”. God’s love in other words is about drawing in not casting out. By not grasping that point our mission to God’s world is severely restricted because why should the world believe the central Gospel message of reconciliation when churches within the same Communion refuse to be

reconciled to one another. Some of the emails sent out by Christians on this issue are some of the most virulent documents I have come across. They fail to realise that they are actually writing about fellow human beings made in God's image.

- We need patience with one another. It has to be realised that homosexuality only ceased to be a crime in Great Britain in 1968 – up until then even consenting adults could be punished. The same was true of Canada until 1969. It was only in 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed its diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental illness. Even in so-called liberal western societies then, tolerance is a fairly recent phenomenon.

It is worth also remembering that it was only in 1978 that the Canadian church affirmed gay and lesbian people as not being “needy objects of pastoral care but partners with heterosexuals celebrating the dignity of every human being”. And only in 1979 the American church said, “it was not appropriate to ordain a practising homosexual”. In other words these North American provinces about twenty years ago were where other provinces are now and even in 2003 ECUSA's Episcopal Theological Committee said it was still undecided on the issue. “We are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical and scientific questions raised by the Lambeth 98 Report on Human Sexuality”.

- Mutual responsibility and interdependence has many aspects. It does mean allowing Churches to find the most appropriate ways to minister to their local contexts since responsibility for mission belongs to the church in that place and it is a fact that Anglican churches grow where their spirituality and worship are rooted in local cultures.
- One of the Lambeth resolutions asked for the ACC to monitor the work done on this subject throughout the Communion and to share statements and resources. That has yet to be done. The WCC asked its member churches to do the same and appointed a reference group to look at the various reports and resolutions produced on human sexuality. Its summary of insights I have outlined in a presidential speech to the Governing Body and we as Anglicans could learn much from the approach of the WCC.

It also has to be remembered that the Communion has been in this kind of situation before. During the last World war the Bishop of Hong Kong ordained a woman to minister to Chinese Anglicans during the Japanese occupation. The Lambeth Conference had rejected the ordination of women in 1920 and in 1958 and even in 1968 all it could say was, “the theological arguments for and against the ordination of women are inconclusive”. The rest of the Communion was only consulted after the decision had been made. Provinces lived together with other member churches even though they disagreed about such a fundamental issue as the ordination of women. The Virginia Report page 34 sums it up, “at best the Anglican way is characterised by generosity and tolerance to those of different views. It also entails a willingness to contain differences and deal with tension, even conflict, as the church seeks a common line on controversial issues”.

Robert Runcie sums it all up for me when he characterised Anglican polity as a matter of “passionate coolness”. He wrote, “It is often the case that in Anglican disputes about doctrine, order or faith, it is the means that matter more than the ends – politeness, integrity, restraint, diplomacy, patience, a willingness to listen, and above all, not to be ill-mannered – these are the things that enable the Anglican Communion to cohere”. And lest one think that these are simply characteristics of what it is to be an English gentleman, these are in fact New Testament virtues.

I want to end with a question posed by Archbishop Rowan to the Porvoo Primates meeting last week at Trondheim in Norway about the nature of the Church. “Do we” he said, “give priority to God’s act and invitation or to the coherence of our response?” Speaking personally I believe that the answer provinces give to that question will ultimately determine the future of this Communion.