

Bromley Parish Church

An introduction to **The Windsor Report**

The report of The Lambeth Commission Chaired by The Most Rev. Dr. Robin Eames, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland

Background

In 2003 Canon Gene Robinson, an openly gay man living in a homosexual relationship with another man was elected Bishop of New Hampshire in the United States.

This Ordination took place in a Church which was already deeply divided about homosexuality. It's been the subject of robust and often bitter debate for some years. On the whole those who have a more conservative approach to the Bible believe homosexuality to be sinful because a simple reading of the Bible says so. On the other hand, there are those who take a more positive view of homosexuality, and they say that if someone is gay then that is the way God has made him or her and that God loves him or her just as much and that affirmation of gay people is a matter of justice. They go on to say that therefore what appears to be prohibition in the Bible can't be taken at face value and that God must be revealing something new to us through his Holy Spirit.

Current policy is set out in a document from the House of Bishops (for the Church of England) Heterosexual marriage is the ideal place for sexual relationships and that homosexual relationships fall short of this ideal. The policy differentiates between homosexual orientation, that is to say being homosexual; and homosexual practice, which is engaging in homosexual acts. The policy says that gay people should consider themselves called to celibacy; that people who are homosexual may be Ordained but not if they are active.

The position of the Anglican Communion as a whole was thrashed out at the 1998 Lambeth conference. Homosexual practice was rejected as being incompatible with scripture and the conference advised against blessing same sex unions and Ordaining practising homosexuals.

All policies roundly condemn homophobia.

Against this background, the task of the Lambeth commission was to report on whether there were ways in which the Anglican Communion could hold together in the light of the controversy. They weren't reporting on the whys and wherefores of homosexuality but on how the Anglican Communion could continue to function.

Anglicanism is traditionally very diverse and yet held together by 'bonds of affection'. There is no central authority but Anglicans are not ruled by individual personal conscience either. We are Catholic and Reformed, we have a core of agreement and there are loads of things which are important but which we think are not absolutely central to our faith but about which it's possible for us to differ on. One central question is this "Is homosexuality part of the core on which we must agree or is it part of what the Windsor report calls 'adiaphora' those issues where we can live with diversity, like having women Bishops? Time and further reflection will answer this question

The Report

The commission suggests...

- 1) Strengthening the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop has no authority anywhere else. The commission envisages Anglicans throughout the world accepting that he has a right to get involved in their work and their decisions as a brother and a friend and also that he has a right to speak on behalf of the Anglican Communion.
- 2) Setting up a Council of Advice to support the Archbishop.
- 3) A new Anglican Covenant agreement. At present there is no formal written relationship between all the autonomous provinces. The Anglican Communion has been held together by something which has become known as bonds of affection. The commission says that these bonds of affection have been breached by recent actions so something more formal is needed.
- 4) Bishops need to be acceptable across the whole Church so when a Bishop is elected there needs to be a sense of acceptance by other provinces of the Communion.
- 5) The American Church should be invited to express its regret for the hurt caused. And to declare a moratorium on further Ordinations of practising homosexuals
- 6) The Church in Canada should express regret for the hurt caused by approval of same sex blessing services and sign up to a moratorium on such services.
- 7) In addition to these expressions of regret the Provinces which have Ordained practising homosexuals and conducted same sex blessing services must explain to the rest of the Anglican Communion how such things are consistent with Christian faith in the Bible and in the traditions of the Church.
- 8) That those Bishops who have ministered to Parishes in other Dioceses should express regret for this and declare a moratorium on such cross

boundary ministries. The American Church has itself put in place a mechanism for supporting Parishes who feel alienated from their Bishops and the commission thinks this is a good and sufficient system and that it's unhelpful for Bishops from elsewhere in the world to come between a brother Bishop and one of his Parishes.

In conclusion the commission calls for generosity and charity and for people to spare no effort to seek reconciliation. However it accepts that in the end it might simply not be possible and that Anglicans might have to begin to learn to walk apart.

Some Responses

The Archbishop of Lagos, Peter Akinola has already said that the report doesn't address his concerns at all. He simply wants homosexuality called a sin and he wants all those who have been involved in affirming it to be called to repentance.

The more liberal party on the other hand says that Anglican unity is not the issue. What's important is not whether the Anglican Communion can hang together but whether we are giving justice to gay people. They say that justice should be our first consideration and that unity without justice would itself be a sin. If the warring parties were now to kiss and make up it would be gay people who would be paying the price for that unity. If the Communion has to break over this then so be it, our first call is to justice.

The Archbishop of Canterbury "I hope that everyone with the well-being of our Communion at heart will now take time to study the report, and to pray and reflect upon its proposals....May God help us to move towards that goal in faithfulness and confidence."