

Lecture – St Fin Barre’s Cathedral, Cork – Saturday 3 March 2007

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“Scripture and Sexuality – our commitment to listening and learning”

Few people doubt that the 1998 Lambeth Resolution on Human Sexuality – Lambeth 1¹⁰ as it has come to be known has not 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 – and of course Lambeth 2008 is not that far away.

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 19¹⁻¹⁴ the sin of Sodom, Leviticus 18²² and 20¹³ where male to male sexual intercourse is explicitly forbidden, Romans 1¹⁸⁻³² the condemnation of unnatural sexual practices, I Corinthians 6⁹⁻¹¹ where homosexual lust is condemned and I Timothy 1⁸⁻¹¹ 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 21¹⁷ 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 23¹⁻⁴ 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 worshipping 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 shortlisted in 2004 for the Orange prize for literature. She 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'. She 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. She 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 she says in Nigerian society. A student complained to her that the title of her 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 have 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:

1. 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. ECUSA has apologised for this.
2. 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”.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. Archdeacon John Holdsworth in a lecture at St Michael's College, Llandaff 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.

6. 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.

7. 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".

8. 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.
9. 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 year 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.