

**POSITION PAPER PREPARED FOR THE
COMMISSION ON THE MARRIAGE CANON**

**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA, AND
SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS**

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The Background: Scripture

The essential problem in dealing with same-sex relationships is Scripture, for the book of Leviticus lays out this matter in no uncertain terms: “You shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev 18: 22¹), and “If a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall be put to death; their blood is upon them” (Lev 20: 13). Quite what happened in Sodom is uncertain, though the name of the city has given rise to the words sodomy and sodomite. The story (which many biblical scholars would regard as a myth with a message) leaves us in no doubt that God found the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah – whatever that sin was – to be very grave, and that he intended to destroy both cities. A careful examination of the text seems to indicate that at least one of sins of Sodom was indeed homosexuality, though the crowd was also guilty of cruelty, lack of compassion, and of abusing the laws of hospitality, which were very grave matters indeed. There can be no doubt, however, that homosexual relationships were condemned in the Hebrew Scriptures.

So what of the Greek Scriptures? Once again, St. Paul and the author of the first letter to Timothy (almost certainly not Paul) leave no doubt on the matter. Among those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God are male homosexuals (1 Cor 6: 9: the rare Greek word means literally “those who go to bed with males”), and, in the letter to Timothy, male homosexuals (the same word) are included among the unholy and the profane (1 Tim 1: 10). But, the most important verse to be found in Paul’s letter to the Romans is the one in which he tells us that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of people who by their wickedness suppress the truth.” From the very moment of creation God has revealed his invisible nature, that is to say, his eternal power and deity, and this is evident in what he has made. Although human beings knew God, they did not honour him or thank him, and came to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Therefore God gave them up to impurity and dishonourable passions. “Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in a similar way the men, too, gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with passion for one another, males committing indecent acts with males, and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom 1: 26-27). It is this last verse which has led many moral theologians to suggest that homosexuality is directly contrary to natural law. At the time Paul was writing, some male homosexual relationships – an

¹ All translations are my own.

older man with a youth, for example – met with some degree of social acceptance, though the relationship had to be between the proper individuals and according to accepted rules. On the other hand, there was also disapproval, especially by Romans who regarded it as a Greek vice. Homosexual relationships are not addressed in any of the canonical gospels, nor in the Gnostic gospel of Thomas, though marriage – as we would expect, given the time and the place – is assumed to be between a man and a woman. So can the way in which the Church views and interprets Scripture change with the passage of time, thereby reflecting adaptations of theological thinking?

Scripture and the Anglican Communion

The interpretations and adaptations of Scripture can be changed and have been changed, particularly within the Anglican Communion. According to Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles, “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation.” Holy Scripture may also contain things that are not, perhaps, necessary to salvation, and over the centuries there have been many laws from the Hebrew Scriptures and numerous regulations in the Greek Scriptures that have been tacitly ignored or deliberately rejected. The so-called *lex talionis* – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – had been re-interpreted by the rabbis in the first century, but has no place in the teachings of Jesus. Nor does the Christian Church (for the most part) abide by the Hebrew Scriptures explicit ban on lending money at interest (Ex 22: 25, Dt 23: 19), nor does it follow the prohibition on wearing clothes made of two different materials (Lev 19: 19), nor does it regard someone who is afflicted with leprosy as unclean and cursed by God (Lev 13-14), nor does it allow parents to demand that a rebellious son who is a glutton and a drunkard should be stoned to death (Dt 21: 18-21). And, there are very many more examples.

As for the Greek Scriptures, most, though not all, of the Christian Churches no longer accept the statement in Mark and Luke that whoever divorces his spouse and marries someone else commits adultery (Mk 10; 11-12, Lk 16: 18). And the Anglican Communion certainly does not follow the proscriptions in 1 Corinthians 11: 5-6 that a woman should not pray unless she covers her head, and that if she will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair. Indeed, the attitude to women that we see in some of Paul’s statements and especially in the first letter to Timothy (almost certainly not from Paul’s pen) no longer have any place in the teaching of the Anglican Communion. It is not that the statements are ambiguous. When Paul, for example, says that “women should keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak” (1 Cor 14: 34), that is what he means; and when the author of 1 Timothy says that “I do not permit any woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent” (1 Tim 2: 11), he leaves us in no doubt on the question. Yet the Church (rightly and thankfully) no longer heeds these injunctions. Or, putting it another way, the Church is not of the opinion that Scripture cannot be reinterpreted, while specifically rejecting text-proofing and arguments based on sophistry.

In any case, there are instances when the Scriptures contradict themselves. All one has to do to witness this is to contrast the views of Paul and James (whoever James was) on the matter of faith and works, or the radical disagreements between Paul and Peter on what should be the essential nature of the earliest Christian community. It is also true that not all the books of the Greek Scriptures were written by those by whom they were

supposed to have been written. The letter to the Hebrews, for example, was certainly not written by Paul, nor were the Pastoral Epistles, and the second letter of Peter has nothing to do with Peter, but appears to be a second-century Christian sermon. In other words, the Bible cannot be regarded in the same way as Muslims regard the Qur'an, namely, as God's own direct dictation. Anglicans may claim it to be "the outward and visible sign of a living community's experience of God as the power of salvation over a long period of time,"² but since Anglicans have been guided by prayerful and scholastic consideration into ignoring or rejecting certain of its provisions in the past, there is no essential reason why they should not continue to do so in the future. But, who is to decide on what should be kept and what should be rejected?

It is not a matter for one individual, nor for one parish, nor one diocese, nor for one bishop or archbishop. Since it is a matter of doctrine, it is a matter for the Church. One of the most important documents to come out of the Second Vatican Council, the Constitution on the Church, defines the Church as the "People of God." This is a solidly scriptural term that appears in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures: in Judges 20: 2 and 2 Samuel 14: 13 it describes the Israelites, and in Hebrews 4: 9 and 11: 25. The term is used for the earliest Christians. And what does it mean? It means (says the Constitution) that those who believe in Christ, who are reborn through the word of God and from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people... who in times past were not a people, but are now the People of God" (1 Pet 2: 9-10).³ In other words, to be one of the People of God, one needs only have faith in Christ and be baptized, and this obviously includes more than Roman Catholics. But the Constitution also distinguishes carefully between the common priesthood of the baptized faithful – i.e., the laity – and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of the ordained clergy. So, too, does the Anglican Communion, and the gathered People of God operates with and through the bishops of the Church under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Background: The Early Church, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation

Given the unequivocal statements in the Scriptures, it is only to be expected that among the early Fathers, same-sex relationships of any sort received universal condemnation. There was nothing else they could do, and to list all their fulminations would be tiresome. In the East, St. John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople at the beginning of the fifth century, regarded homosexual acts as worse than murder and so degrading that they were their own punishment. They were contrary to nature, and those who indulged in such satanic practices led lives given over to the devil. For St. Augustine in the West, such acts were also contrary to nature and were always to be detested and punished. They are an offence to the law of God who did not create men to use one another in this way, and they are a polluting perversion of sexual desire. The views of Chrysostom and Augustine are representative, and there is no need to reproduce all those

² Paul Gibson, *Discerning the Word. The Bible and Homosexuality in Anglican Debate* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2000), 75-76.

³ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, §9, on the Vatican website <www.vatican.va>.

patristic statements, eastern and western, which say much the same thing, some with more venom and some with less.

The medieval Penitentials show considerable interest in same-sex relationships, though almost entirely between men and men, not between women and women. These books or compilations, which were produced from about 650 to the early thirteenth century, were lists of sins with appropriate penances, and were intended to be a guide for parish priests in the confessional. Homosexual acts are treated in some detail, and the penances listed depend on a number of variables, such as the age of the males involved (whether they were boys, youths, or men), their rank or station (whether they were clerics, monks, or laity for example), and the actual physical nature of the relationship (anal intercourse, oral sex, mutual masturbation, and so on). In all cases, male-male relationships are treated more severely than female-female relationships. Thus, in the seventh-century Penitential of Theodore, if a man is over twenty and has sexual relations with another man, he shall do penance for fifteen years, but if a woman has sexual relations with a woman, she shall do penance for just three years. Lesbian relations, in fact, do not receive anywhere near the attention devoted to male homosexuality.

The classic denunciation of all forms of male homosexual activity is the very unpleasant *Liber Gomorrhianus*, “Book of Gomorrah”, of St. Peter Damian, written in about 1051. Peter Damian was a ferociously ascetic misogynistic monastic reformer who strongly advocated self-flagellation as the best way to overcome sexual desires, and his Book of Gomorrah is a vicious and hard-hitting denunciation of the sexual vices of the clergy. He deals with a variety of same-sex practices, always between men, and follows Leviticus in maintaining that those who indulge in these are deserving of death. He anticipates the squalid sexual abuse scandals of our present century in being especially condemnatory of priests who have sexual relations with adolescent boys, and in his view, no priest who practices homosexual acts should be ordained, and any such who have already been ordained should be defrocked. There are, of course, many today who would agree with him.

We find the same views in the later Middle Ages and the Reformation. St. Thomas Aquinas, as we might expect, saw homosexuality as being contrary to natural law (the Romans text is key here), and Martin Luther agreed. For the latter, it is a vice of unparalleled enormity which comes directly from the devil. But all these views are simply representative of their time. We would expect nothing else, and although the theologians of the early Church through to the Reformation said some very excellent things, they also said things which, if not nonsensical, were certainly idiosyncratic. St. Augustine, for example, did measureless harm when he associated the act of sexual intercourse with the transmission of Original Sin. Do we then know better than the Fathers? Yes, in very many things we do!

The Background: The Law of the Land

To these interminable condemnations there was no real change for the next four centuries, and the law of the land was often as severe as the attitude of the Church, save that the law of the land had the power to inflict that capital punishment demanded by the book of Leviticus. In England, for example, the “Acte for the punysshement of the vice of Buggerie” was passed in 1533 and remained in force until 1828, though buggery

remained a capital offence in England until 1861. The last man to be executed for the crime was hanged in 1836. Other European countries also imposed the death penalty for certain same-sex relationships, as did some of the colonies in the New World. The first European country to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults was Revolutionary France in 1791. Following this, in 1811 such acts were decriminalized in the Netherlands and Indonesia, and, following that, in a variety of other countries, though progress was slow and uncertain. In Britain the 1957 Wolfenden Report recommended that homosexual acts between consenting adults in private should no longer be considered a criminal offence, but it would take ten more years before these recommendations became law. It was in that year, 1967, that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, then Minister of Justice, famously declared that “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation” and two years later, on 14 May 1969, Bill C-150 decriminalized homosexuality in Canada. At the same time, the act legalized contraception and, under certain conditions, therapeutic abortion. What was the attitude of the Anglican Church to these moves?

Archbishop Michael Ramsey and the Wolfenden Report

When the Wolfenden Report was published in 1957, Michael Ramsey was archbishop of York. Until this time, he had not given any thought to the question of homosexuality, but as soon as the Report became public, he immediately accepted its recommendations. So, too, did Geoffrey Fisher, archbishop of Canterbury, who spoke in support of the Report in October 1957, and so did the Church of England when the Church Assembly met in November of that year. The vote, however, was fairly close – 155 in favour of the Report’s recommendations; 138 against – and the Church of Scotland did not support it at all. Parliament did nothing. The whole issue was just too contentious, and homophobia was widespread and rampant. As far as Ramsey and most of his colleagues were concerned, homosexual behaviour was still a sin (as Scripture maintained), but not a crime, and, like all sins, should be addressed with the proper pastoral care, not by imprisonment. Ramsey and his colleagues also agreed that decriminalization applied to consenting adults; if one of the partners was under the age of consent (twenty-one at the time), then it should still remain a crime. And once again, the discussion was confined entirely to male homosexuality. Lesbianism, as usual, was simply ignored. Since it had never been a crime, it could not be decriminalized.

It took some years before Parliament summoned up the courage to tackle the subject in public and introduce a bill which would make the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report the law of the land, and by that time Ramsey was archbishop of Canterbury. As such, he was not only an *ex officio* member of the House of Lords, but also the moral voice of the English nation. But, when he spoke in favour of the bill in the House of Lords in 1965, he met with formidable opposition, and in 1965 and ’66 he was the subject of vicious attacks, both public and private. He was accused of knowing too much about the subject, of uttering pornography in the House of Lords, of undermining the morals of the nation, of sanctioning sodomy, of putting English youth in imminent danger, and of not knowing his Bible, in particular the book of Leviticus. But, in 1967, the Sexual Offences Act was eventually passed, and it formally decriminalized homosexual acts in private between consenting males aged twenty-one or older. Ramsey never regretted his decision. He saw it as being just, humane, and Christian. On the other

hand, he never said that homosexual acts were not sinful, and he was certainly opposed to same-sex marriages. In 1971, in Minneapolis, Jack Baker and James McConnell were married before a Methodist minister – it was the first same-sex marriage in the United States – and in the same year Ramsey was asked if he thought the Church could bless such a marriage. He did not think so:

I don't see the Christian Church ever giving its blessing to that. Because the Christian Church gives its blessing to the best and perfect use of sex, which is the union of a man and a women in marriage. We confine our blessing to that.⁴

But Ramsey's remarks on the blessing of same-sex unions must be considered in relation to the question of the sacramentality of marriage, and the question of marriage as a sacrament demands that we also say something of marriage itself. What is its purpose?

The Purpose and Sacramentality of Marriage

The traditional view is that the purpose of matrimony is threefold: fidelity on the part of the spouses, the procreation of children, and the loving union of the parties involved. Of the three, the procreation of children was regularly held to be the primary end, and all else was secondary. Thus, the early Fathers of the Church, both Greek and Latin, were unanimous in their condemnation of birth control, for in their eyes, anything that interfered with the procreative process was, by definition, sinful. With but few exceptions, this was the view which prevailed until the twentieth century – it is still, in essence, the view of the Roman Catholic Church (though little heeded by the majority of Roman Catholics). Nowadays, all the Christian Churches recognize that although sex is essential for procreation, it also has a unitive value: that is to say, it unites two people in the closest intimacy and, in theory, promotes a happy, fulfilling, and satisfactory marriage. In the Book of Alternative Services, therefore, the celebrant may or may not ask that the marital union “be blessed in the procreation, care, and upbringing of children.” Or, in other words, one can have a happy, successful, and blessed marriage without babies. Many people do. So, is marriage indeed a sacrament?

Since the twelfth century it has been for the Roman Catholic Church, and since the seventeenth century it has been for the Orthodox Church, which borrowed the formal list of the seven sacraments from Roman Catholicism. Article XXV of the Thirty-Nine Articles, however, states that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two sacraments ordained by Christ, and that Marriage, together with Confirmation, Penance, Orders, and Extreme Unction “are not to be counted for Sacraments”. Yet if a sacrament may be understood as a channel for God's grace, then the marriage ceremony, unlike a civil union, may certainly operate sacramentally, even if it not called a sacrament. Many Anglicans do, of course, refer to marriage as a sacrament, while many others do not. But at the very beginning of the ceremony in the Book of Alternative Services, the presiding celebrant tells the people there gathered – and the people there gathered is what the Church, the *ekklesia*, truly is – that “marriage is a gift of God and a means of his grace”. In Roman Catholic terms, one might call it a sacramental.

⁴ Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey. A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 149.

And what are the essential bases for this flow of grace? A mutual self-giving in love, each to take care of the other in good times and in bad, each to know the other “with delight and tenderness in acts of love.” And as we have just seen, it is not necessary that the sexual act lead to procreation. It may or it may not, but if it does not that is no necessary impediment to the flow of grace. At the moment, the Book of Alternative Services limits this flow of grace to the union of a man and a woman, but it is always dangerous for human beings to place limits on the operations of the Holy Spirit. Even those early and medieval theologians who fervently believed that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* “outside the Church there is no salvation” could not deny that God had bestowed his grace on the centurion Cornelius before he had been converted to Christianity (Acts 10). If, then, two human beings are in a loving, stable, mutually caring and mutually supporting relationship, and if we adopt the philosophy of Personalism, which sees each human being as an existential reality in his or her own right, and in which our unique human differences transcend sexual differences (we shall say more on this later), then it is difficult not to see this as providing the essential bases for sacramental grace. It must also be remembered that the Church does not and cannot bestow grace; it can only acknowledge that grace has been bestowed. Furthermore, that grace may be bestowed through the channel of the Church or it may not: how, when, and where it is bestowed is up to God.

It is also important to bear in mind that in recent times, a clear distinction is made between sexual preference and sexual orientation, which was not the case in Michael Ramsey’s day, but which is of major consequence in any modern discussion of same-sex relationships.

Sexual Preference and Sexual Orientation: the Orthodox View

Things have changed since Ramsey’s time, and the most important change by far is that a homosexual orientation is now seen by many, though not by all, to be either wholly or partly a genetic identity and not an aberration to be remedied, a disease to be cured, or a mental disorder to be corrected. In other words, we are talking about sexual orientation, which is something inherent in one’s being, and not sexual preference, which is a matter of choice. The Religious Right does not see it in this way and the question has still not been answered definitively, but there is certainly sound evidence that biology plays a significant role. It may very well be that one’s sexual orientation is a result of a complex interaction of genetic, physiological, chemical, environmental, and cognitive factors, but what is becoming ever more clear is that not all men and women are born heterosexual. Some are born homosexual. Most of the mainline Churches have reacted to this changing view by no longer condemning homosexuality and homosexuals as such – we are all created in the image of God – but by continuing to regard homosexual activity as a sin. This is certainly the Orthodox view and is well illustrated in the affirmations of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America which met in Miami, Florida, in July 1992. It is also the view of many Anglicans.

The bishops begin by quoting the passages from Romans and Leviticus we have already cited, and continue by saying that homosexuality “is to be approached as a result of humanity’s rebellion against God. It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God’s image and likeness.” We are, however, born in God’s

image and likeness, whether we like it or not, and it, therefore, follows that “men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings.” People with homosexual tendencies, however, are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation (note the word), “and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.” That is to say, homosexual behaviour is still a sin, and homosexuals must struggle against sin just as everybody else must struggle against sin. If they do struggle against it, they may receive the Eucharist with everyone else who struggles, but if they still seek to justify their behaviour, they may not participate in the sacramental mysteries of the Orthodox Church.⁵

On the other hand, the Orthodox Church is unanimous in condemning same-sex marriages and Orthodox priests will not bless such a marriage. Once again, one statement is representative of all. In August 2003 the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), which represents more than five million Orthodox Christians in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, issued a statement in response to the passage of the Marriage Equality Act, legalizing same-sex marriages, by the State of New York on 24 June 2011:

The Orthodox Church cannot and will not bless same-sex unions. Whereas marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred institution ordained by God, homosexual union is not. Like adultery and fornication, homosexual acts are condemned by Scripture (Rom 1: 24-27; 1 Cor 6: 10; 1 Tim 1: 10). This being said, however, we must stress that persons with a homosexual orientation are to be cared for with the same mercy and love that is bestowed by our Lord Jesus Christ upon all of humanity. All persons are called by God to grow spiritually and morally toward holiness.⁶

Similar statements were issued by some other Orthodox jurisdictions, and all say the same thing: homosexual orientation is not in itself sinful, homosexual acts are, and same-sex marriages are contrary to Scripture and may not be blessed by any Orthodox priest. But the basis, once again, is Scripture, and the Orthodox Church is here going to the scriptural supermarket: putting some provisions in its ecclesiastical basket, but happily leaving others on the shelves.

There exists an organization for Orthodox and Uniat LGBT Christians which was founded in Los Angeles in 1980. It is called Axios – Greek for worthy, deserving, or right and proper – and it has chapters in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Contrary to the official Orthodox view, the members of Axios regard all love and loving sexual relationships, whether heterosexual or homosexual, as God-given and healthy, but the

⁵ Orthodox Church in America. Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life, Miami, Florida, July 1992, on the Orthodox Church in America website at <<http://oca.org/holy-synod/statements/holy-synod/synodal-affirmations-on-marriage-family-sexuality-and-the-sanctity-of-life#Homosexuality>>.

⁶ Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA). SCOBA Statement on Moral Crisis in Our Nation, at <<http://www.greeknewsonline.com/?p=16679>> and elsewhere on the Internet.

group has not received official recognition by any canonical Orthodox Church. The view of Axios is that “homosexual sex within a marriage can fulfill one of the divine ends of sex (i.e. the unitive), and that such a marriage also fits within the traditional Christian understanding of the sacrament of marriage – an image of the fidelity and love between God and His Church.”⁷ This accords perfectly with what has been previously said, but the Orthodox Church has yet to acknowledge it.

Sexual Preference and Sexual Orientation: the Roman Catholic View

In more recent years, the Roman Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Church, has taken care to distinguish between homosexuality as a sexual orientation and homosexual acts which, following the scholasticism of the medieval period, are still considered to be contrary to nature and inherently sinful. Homosexual desires are disordered, but not sinful in themselves. According to the most recent (1997) edition of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, the “psychological genesis” of homosexuality remains largely unexplained, but, since Scripture portrays homosexual acts as being acts of “grave depravity,” tradition has always declared such acts to be “intrinsically disordered” and contrary to natural law. People who have these tendencies “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.” Does this mean that such people are free to engage in same-sex sexual activities? It does not, for “homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.”⁸ Christian perfection, in other words, is not possible for practising homosexuals.

Not all Roman Catholics agree with this position, and the official view of the Church does not appear to be the view of the majority of American Catholics. In March 2011 the Public Religion Research Institute, based in Washington, DC, published a report on *Catholic Attitudes on Gay and Lesbian Issues. A Comprehensive Portrait from Recent Research*.⁹ It found, among other things, that almost three-quarters (74%) of American Catholics were in favour of either same-sex marriages (43%) or civil unions (31%). This is a higher percentage than is found among White mainline Protestants, Black Protestants, and White Evangelicals, and higher than in the United States overall.¹⁰ It also found that almost 70% – 69% to be precise – reject the idea that homosexual orientation is a psychological tendency that can be changed, and 56% of those surveyed were of the opinion that same-sex sexual relations are not inherently sinful. And, when it came to the question of how well the Roman Catholic Church was handling the issue of homosexuality, the results were not encouraging. On a five-point scale – A, B, C, D, or F

⁷ *Homosexuality in the Orthodox Church*, ed. Justin R. Cannon ([s.l.; s.d.], 2011), 111.

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997 [2nd ed.]), §§2357-2359, on the Vatican website <www.vatican.va> and elsewhere on the Internet.

⁹ The entire Report (analysis by Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox) is available on the Public Religion Research Institute website at <<http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Catholics-and-LGBT-Issues-Survey-Report.pdf>>.

¹⁰ See p. 6 of the Report.

– 39% gave the Church an A or B, 23% a C, and 32% a D or F. The remaining 6% had no opinion.

Sexual Preference and Sexual Orientation: the Anglican View

The Lambeth Conference of 1978 recommended to the Church a thorough theological study of human sexuality “in such a way as to relate sexual relationships to that wholeness of human life which itself derives from God, who is the source of masculinity and femininity.”¹¹ There is a long tradition of sexual controversies in Anglicanism, in particular the marriage of priests in the sixteenth century (referred to as *haeresis anglicana*—the English heresy) and, at Lambeth, debates about polygamy from 1888 to 1988 (note there is no prohibition against polygamy in the Hebrew Scriptures), artificial contraception from 1908 to 1968, and remarriage of divorced persons from 1888 to 1968.

The 1978 Conference reaffirmed heterosexuality as the scriptural norm, but also recognized “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.”¹² This is wholly commendable, especially the use of the word “dispassionate.” The next year, in accordance with these recommendations, the Board for Social Responsibility of the General Synod of the Church of England appointed a group of twelve scholars to examine the whole question of homosexuality and homosexual relationships and to produce a report. The chairman of the group was John Yates, successively bishop of Whitby, bishop of Gloucester, and bishop of Lambeth. The twelve scholars did as they were asked, and a report was duly published in 1979 as *Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion*, generally referred to as the Gloucester Report, since Yates was bishop of Gloucester at the time it was compiled. It was controversial from the start. Why? Because although, like the Lambeth Conference, it restated the traditional Christian view that heterosexual marriage was the norm and that heterosexual and homosexual relationships could not, therefore, be seen as being equally valid, it nevertheless concluded that in certain situations same-sex partnerships which the two people enter “with the hope of enjoying a companionship and physical expression of sexual love similar to that which is to be found in marriage”¹³ could not only be justified, but were proper and ethical. “Sex may have precisely the same effect in expressing and confirming a loving relationship between persons of the same sex as it does between married couples, and also the same symbolic character.”¹⁴ We should note that the Report is speaking here not of a series of transitory homosexual encounters, which are to be regarded in just the same way as a series of transitory heterosexual encounters, but of “well established and stable homosexual unions.”¹⁵

¹¹ The Lambeth Conference 1978, Resolution 10.1, at the Lambeth Conference Official Website <<http://www.lambethconference.org>>.

¹² *Ibid.*, Resolution 10.3.

¹³ *Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion* (London: Church Information Office [CIO], 1979), 52 §168.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47 §155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53 §169.

The Report begins by examining the question of orientation versus preference and suggests that sexual identity is a complex of many factors, some of which may well be biological or genetic. If this is so, there are no grounds for moral condemnation, and the authors of the Report ask a heterosexual reader the pertinent question as to what extent his or her heterosexuality is a matter of preference or choice. The Report goes on to state that since homosexuality is not an illness, any talk of “curing” it is inappropriate, and suggests that the biblical condemnations of homosexual acts in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures must be seen in their context. Times have changed, as has our understanding of the nature of homosexuality, and these condemnations, therefore, are better seen as condemnations of the misuse of sexuality in general. For the Jewish community, marriage was seen as one of the most vital bonds in sustaining and continuing that community, “and homosexual behaviour was seen as a grave threat to it and its social purpose.”¹⁶ True, heterosexual monogamy is the norm, but “complementarity and companionship are as much a part of the divine pattern for sexual relationships as is procreation.”¹⁷

Overall, the approach of the Report reflects Personalism, that broad twentieth-century philosophical movement which emphasizes the significance and uniqueness of the human person, as well as that person’s relational dimension – that is to say, his or her relationship with others, for outside community a person remains unfulfilled. If each of us is created in the image of the unique God, it follows that each of us is individually unique, but – as in the Trinity – that uniqueness is revealed only in a relational situation. If, then, each of us is uniquely different, it follows that each of us, if we wish to be fulfilled, must be open to these differences. Putting it another way, our unique human differences transcend sexual differences (in Christ there is neither male nor female [Gal 3: 28]), and that intimate, loving, unitive relationship of which, in the Christian tradition, the Trinity is the perfect example, may be witnessed in any true human relationship, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Furthermore, as a unique image of the unique God, every human person has by nature an inherent natural dignity – a dignity which demands unconditional respect – and also an inherent natural freedom, for a person cannot be a person without being free. As the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has said:

The human being, as an existential reality, can be a person only when he lives in freedom. Only in a condition that reflects the whole range of possibility open to us through conscious choice are we able to transform ourselves and our temporal reality into the image of the Divine Kingdom. Our humanity is realized through the free act of relationship with others. Personhood is a free act of communion that makes heterogeneity and uniqueness fundamental aspects of our humanity.¹⁸

Personalist ideas had a major impact on the formation of the documents which came out of the Second Vatican Council, and John Paul II was profoundly influenced by

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 §97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37 §120.

¹⁸ Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, ed. John Chryssavgis, *In The World, Yet Not Of The World. Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 26.

personalism, though some might suggest that his view of the necessity of human freedom – especially freedom of conscience – was somewhat restricted.

What this meant for the bishop of Gloucester was that in any human relationship, heterosexual or homosexual, what is important is the nature, quality, and uniqueness of the relationship, and the freedom with which the unique parties enter into it. A free, loving, and respectful relationship between two persons of the same sex may, therefore, be just as ethical and just as holy as such a relationship between a man and a woman. It must be admitted that some of the arguments in the Report are weak and that some of the statements are vague, but what is remarkable is that the statements are made at all, particularly in 1979. The Report can only be seen as prophetic as the Church did not know what to do with it. Traditionalist reaction was, of course, immediate and predictable, and the Church decided that the best thing to do would be to do nothing at all, let the fuss die down, and quietly sweep the Report under the ecclesiastical carpet. Even with its deficiencies, the Gloucester Report remains a persuasive argument for same-sex marriages – though only for those who are prepared to examine its arguments with care, and not merely dismiss them from a sense of discomfort and fear.

Rowan Williams and the Lambeth Conference of 1998

At the time the Gloucester Report was published, Rowan Williams was twenty-nine and had been a priest for a year. He was deeply influenced by the Report and accepted its conclusions on the nature of homosexuality and homosexual relationships. Provided we accept the Report's view of the biblical condemnations of homosexual behaviour – that they were condemnations of the misuse of sexuality in general, not of homosexual relations in particular – the logic now becomes inexorable. First, if homosexuality is an orientation with at least some genetic basis, and if it is unalterable and, for some, natural, then there are no grounds for discrimination against homosexuals. Second, if homosexual orientation is not intrinsically disordered (the Vatican's term), and if same-sex partnerships with or without sexual relations are not intrinsically immoral, then there is no reason why a person of homosexual orientation in or not in such a relationship should not be ordained to holy orders. It would be assumed, naturally, that such a person was striving to live as moral a life as his or her heterosexual counterpart. Sexual promiscuity, for example, would be grounds for refusing to ordain a person of any orientation. Third, if a practising homosexual can be ordained to the diaconate and the priesthood, it is difficult to make a case as to why they should not be consecrated as a bishop. And fourth, if complementarity and companionship are as much a part of the divine plan as procreation, then there is no reason why two people of the same sex in a loving, caring, monogamous and moral relationship should not marry and have their marriage blessed by the Church, even though heterosexual marriage is the Christian norm. Consider the Canadian case of the Rev. James Ferry who, in 1992, revealed that he was gay and in a relationship with another man. Archbishop Terence Finlay of the Diocese of Toronto inhibited him from functioning as a priest. Ferry then became associated with Metropolitan Community Church, a gay and lesbian founded church. In 2006, Archbishop Finlay married a lesbian couple in a congregation of the United Church of Canada. Archbishop Colin Johnson, Finlay's successor, reinstated Ferry's licence on 26 June 2011 and appointed him an honorary assistant at the Church of the Holy Trinity.

For Rowan Williams, however, it was one thing to entertain such ideas as a young priest; it is quite another to decide what to do about them as archbishop of Canterbury. In 1988, when Williams was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, the Lambeth Conference reaffirmed the resolution of the 1978 Conference which, as we have seen, called for a deep and dispassionate study of homosexuality, and called on the Church “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.”¹⁹ It then called on each Province to reassess its care for and its attitude toward persons of homosexual orientation. Over the next ten years, however, the question became much more contentious. By 1998 Williams was bishop of Monmouth (he would be elected archbishop of Wales the following year) and the Lambeth Conference of 1998 had much more to say on the matter of homosexuality and its consequences.

On the positive side, the Conference acknowledged that there are many people of homosexual orientation who are members of the Church, that the Church must commit itself to listening to their experience, and that they may be assured that “all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.”²⁰ On the negative side, the Conference rejected homosexual practice as “incompatible with Scripture” and could not advise “the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.”²¹ But the Conference admitted that it was not of one mind about the nature and consequences of homosexuality and it pointed to four areas where there was clear and obvious disagreement. They cover the entire spectrum. First, there were those who did not believe it was a genetic identity, but a disorder, and that people can be changed, though not without pain and struggle. Second, there were those who could accept a homosexual relationship, provided it did not include “genital expression.” This, they maintained, was the clear teaching of Scripture and the Church Universal, and any such activity, “if unrepented of, is a barrier to the Kingdom of God.” Third, there were those who thought that committed homosexual relationships fell short of the biblical norm, but that they were preferable to those which were anonymous or transient. And fourth, there were those who believed “that the Church should accept and support or bless monogamous covenant relationships between homosexual people and that they may be ordained.”²² The majority of bishops, however, were opposed both to the blessing of same-sex unions and to the ordaining of active homosexuals and all recognized that “the challenge to our Church is to maintain its unity while we seek, under the guidance of the Holy

¹⁹ The Lambeth Conference 1988, Resolution 64, at the Lambeth Conference Official Website <<http://www.lambethconference.org>>.

²⁰ The Lambeth Conference 1998, Resolution I.10.c, at the Lambeth Conference Official Website <<http://www.lambethconference.org>>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Resolution I.10.d-e. It appears that “sex” and “gender” are here being used as synonyms, but it is customary nowadays to draw a clear distinction between them. Sex refers simply to the biological-physiological differences between men and women; gender refers to a socially constructed identity which comes partly from oneself and is partly imposed upon one by others.

²² *Ibid.*, Resolution I.10.1, Subsection 3.

Spirit, to discern the way of Christ for the world today with respect to human sexuality.”²³ That was the formidable challenge facing Rowan Williams when he was enthroned as archbishop of Canterbury on 27 February 2003.

The United States and Canada

Meanwhile, in 1971 in the United States, William Johnson had become the first openly gay person to be ordained as a minister in any mainline Christian organization, in this case the United Church of Christ, a church in the Protestant Reformed tradition founded in 1957. The next year, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands ruled that gays and lesbians could serve as pastors, thus becoming the first European Church to move in this direction, and over the next decade, more and more Protestant denominations took the same step. In Canada, the United Church was the first to allow the ordination of gay men to the ministry in 1988, but the problem for the Church of England did not surface until 2003 when, in England, Canon Jeffrey John, a gay priest living in a long-term celibate relationship with another Anglican gay priest, was appointed suffragan bishop of Reading, and, in the United States, the Episcopalian diocese of New Hampshire elected an openly gay non-celibate priest, Gene Robinson, as bishop. Both appointments were extremely controversial and neither boded well for the unity of the Church of England and the Episcopalian Church in the United States. A number of conservative Anglican bishops, especially in Africa, threatened to split from the Anglican Communion if John’s consecration went ahead, and in order to prevent such a division Rowan Williams, who had become archbishop of Canterbury less than five months earlier, judged it best to pressure Canon John into withdrawing his acceptance of the nomination for the bishopric. He did withdraw, but whether the archbishop was wise in pressuring him to do so may be debated. Rowan William’s aim, above all, was to retain the unity of the Anglican Communion and prevent schism, but it looked as if he had merely caved into the strong conservative voice. He, himself, had always defended the rights of those with homosexual orientation, and, in a press release issued shortly after John’s withdrawal stated that some of the opposition expressed to the appointment had been “very unsavoury indeed” and that some of the letters he had received “displayed a shocking level of ignorance and hatred towards homosexual people.”²⁴

The election of Gene Robinson added fuel to the fire. Gasoline was thrown onto the blaze when, on 28 May 2003 in Vancouver, Canada, a priest of the diocese of New Westminster blessed a same-sex union according to a rite formally authorized by the diocese the previous year. These two events led Rowan William to convene a meeting of Anglican Primates at Lambeth in October 2003 to discuss the matter. In their statement the bishops said that the two actions “threaten the unity of our own Communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ’s Church.”²⁵ The Primates reaffirmed the

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Rupert Shortt, *Rowan’s Rule. The Biography of the Archbishop* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.), 274.

²⁵ The full text of the statement may be read on the Anglican Communion official website at <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/10/16/ACNS3633>>.

resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference on the question of homosexuality, and deeply regretted the actions taken in Canada and the United States. Both issues, they said, “will tear the fabric of our communion at its deepest level” and they warned of the danger of major schism. They also requested the Archbishop to establish a Commission to provide “urgent and deep theological and legal reflection” and to report back to the Primates in a year.

The Commission was duly established and its findings were published as the Windsor Report on 18 October 2004. The Report did not, in fact, say anything which reflected a deep theological and legal consideration of the nature of homosexuality and homosexual practices; it simply recommended a moratorium on the consecration of bishops living in same-sex unions and the use of public Rites of Blessing of same-sex relationships. Given that the various Provinces of the Anglican Communion are effectively autonomous, the Report did not recommend any disciplinary action against the Canadians or the Americans, but suggested that each Church ratify an “Anglican Covenant,” which would mean, among other things, that the Churches would not act unilaterally when taking such major steps as had been taken in the United States and Canada, but would consult with the wider Anglican Communion.

Further than this we need not go. In the years following the publication of the Windsor Report other reports have been prepared, some of them (like the St. Michael Report and the Galilee Report from the Anglican Church of Canada) are careful examinations of the theological bases and problems involved in questions of human sexuality and indicate a willingness on the part of many to consider the changes and developments in our understanding of human sexuality and human relationships. Some of the responses, alas, point all too clearly to obvious and wide-ranging homophobia. At the moment, the Anglican Communion does not know what to do, but is sufficiently honest to give the matter proper and unbiased consideration and, if necessary, to change. It is at least looking at the questions of the nature of homosexual orientation and a homosexual lifestyle, of love and responsibility, of the nature of marriage and commitment in times which are changing with frightening speed. The same may be said of some of the Protestant denominations. It cannot really be said of the Orthodox Church, which tends to take refuge in saying “we don’t because we don’t”, or the Roman Catholic Church, which tends to say “you won’t because you can’t.”

Same-Sex Relationships, the Question of Ecumenism, and the Way Forward

There is no doubt, of course, that the questions of the ordination of people of homosexual orientation, of the blessing of same-sex unions, and the ordination of women, gay or straight, are significant obstacles in achieving any sort of meaningful dialogue with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. At the Lambeth Conference of 2008 one of the ecumenical observers was Bishop (now Metropolitan) Kallistos of Diokleia, one of the most acute of contemporary Orthodox theologians. In an interview with Fr. George Westhaver the bishop recognized that the questions of the ordination of women and the understanding of homosexuality have made dialogue between Orthodox and Anglicans more difficult, but that he believed it should continue. It will not lead to “organic unity” in the immediate future, that is clear, “but we need to talk to one another. We have everything to gain through learning more about one another’s understanding,

everything to gain through listening.”²⁶ We cannot but be reminded of the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras when, as a young man, he was an archdeacon in Monastir, which is now Bitola in the Republic of Macedonia. It was a time of uncertainty and war, and local villagers – a dozen or so each day – would come to Athenagoras with their protests, complaints, arguments, and requests, and, said the archdeacon:

When I asked them why they came to see me, they replied in their simple language, “So that we can look at each other.” From this *looking at each other* I developed a practical philosophy: to love communication with men as I love men, as individuals, because in man I see God, and behind the miracle of human existence is God Himself. . . . There is nothing more fulfilling than to be able to communicate with another human being. Conversely, the inability to communicate is one of the greatest human tragedies. If the world is divided today, this is largely due to the fact that people are unable to communicate and exchange views.²⁷

The questions of the ordination of women to the priesthood and consecration to the episcopate and the understanding of homosexuality, said Bishop Kallistos, threaten the Anglican Communion with schism. This is obviously not something anyone wishes to see, but, he continued, there is another side to the question: “Unity, yes, but not unity at any price. Unity has to go with truth. Sometimes people have to break communion in the name of truth.”²⁸ The bishop did not think things had necessarily come to that, but that was in 2008. The major problem, he thought, was that the Anglican Church had acted unilaterally in the matter of the ordination and consecration of women to the priesthood and the episcopate and on the question of same-sex marriages. “Surely that must involve a consensus of the total Body. The Anglican Communion cannot settle this without bearing in mind its bonds with the wider communion of the Church – the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics.” Michael Ramsey would have agreed, but the hope of achieving such a consensus is, at the moment, no more than a pipe-dream. Until the election of Pope Francis, the Roman Catholic Church was becoming ever more entrenched in the *magisterium*, and the Orthodox Church has become ever more dependent on Tradition. There are few Orthodox theologians as learned or as open to movement as the metropolitan of Diokleia.

But although consensus is the ideal, is there not also (continued Bishop Kallistos) “the possibility for prophetic action?”

Will you ever have change unless some people are willing to stand up and say, this is what we ought to be doing? And even if their testimony is highly controversial, who will nonetheless stand by their position. It could be argued

²⁶ George Westhaver, Lambeth: Interview with the Most Rev. Kallistos Ware, at <<http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=8803#.T2hxLxzoK68>> , and elsewhere on the Internet.

²⁷ Demetrios Tsakonas, *A Man Sent By God. The Life of Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1977), 13-14.

²⁸ See n. 25 above.

that perhaps the Anglican Communion was guided by the Holy Spirit to lead other Christians into new paths ... Christ did not tell us that nothing should ever be done for the first time. The whole witness of the early Church points in a different direction.²⁹

Exactly how one is to balance the need for catholic consensus against the need for freedom in the grace of the Holy Spirit remains to be seen, but more bishops of the stature of Bishop Kallistos would certainly be of considerable help.

It may be objected that in its concern with women's ordination, gay and lesbian identity, and same-sex unions, the Anglican Communion is ignoring far more important matters such as the environment, world hunger and world poverty, the AIDS pandemic, international terrorism, and so on. The 2005 Canadian Report on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions, commonly known as the St. Michael Report (after the Ontario convent of the Community of the Sisters of the Church where the Report was prepared) recognized this, stating in its conclusions that:

It is often lamented that the Church should become preoccupied in debates on sexual ethics when there are so many more urgent issues that could be ameliorated if only we would redirect our zeal. But the depth of feeling that exists in the Communion on this matter indicates how important it has become. It addresses our identity as sexual beings in community in an intimate and profound way. It also relates to the question of how the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all human beings, irrespective of our sexual identities.³⁰

This is true. Furthermore, given the importance of the questions and the questioning, it is not sufficient simply to tell gays and lesbians that they are loved by God and (in theory) by their Churches and that they are full members of the Body of Christ. The questions of ordinations, consecrations, same-sex unions, blessings, and so on cannot be merely ignored or condemned by ecclesiastical censure. Human beings exist in human relationships, the human person must be recognized as being humanly free, and, as Bishop Kallistos said, "Christ did not tell us that nothing should ever be done for the first time." Turmoil and opposition are inevitable, and if the Holy Spirit has any enemies, fear and a closed mind are two of the worst.

Summary

While there can, at the moment, be no definitive answer to the questions of same-sex marriages and the blessing of same-sex relationships, a number of points may be adduced which tend in their favour. There are seven of these:

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions. The St. Michael Report, §44, on the Anglican Church of Canada official website at <<http://www.anglican.ca/Primate/ptc/smr>>.

1. The text of Scripture as we have it now is not regarded by the Anglican Communion as God's direct dictation. Putting it another way, the Anglican Communion does not subscribe to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. This is especially true of the Hebrew Scriptures. According to rabbinic tradition, the Torah contains 613 commandments, but the vast majority of these are largely ignored by the Christian Churches. Some, such as the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth or the prohibition of usury, are positively rejected. Similarly, there are passages in the Greek Scriptures – some in the Gospels, some in the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline epistles – that most of the Christian Churches also reject. The most obvious of these pertain to divorce and the position of women, but there are also others – such as the requirement that a bishop should marry only once (1 Tim 3: 2) – that have also been rejected. In other words, Christians are not bound solely by the words of Scripture, but are also influenced by tradition and interpretation based on reason.
2. To reinterpret the provisions of Scripture is not, however, a matter for individual decision, nor for the decision of an individual parish nor diocese, nor for an individual bishop. It is a matter for the Church which may be defined, as it was defined at the Second Vatican Council, as the People of God. This is the *ekklesia*, the gathered community, acting with and through its bishops, and guided, one trusts, by the Holy Spirit.
3. The views of the theologians from the early Church to the Reformation are the views of fallible men and women – mostly men – who were products of their own time and place. Some of what they said remains of great value; some of what they said may be and should be dismissed. This is especially true of the Augustinian view of the inherent sinfulness of the sexual act, a view which, in any case, was based on dubious logic. If we are not irredeemably bound by the specific words of Scripture, how much less are we bound by the opinions of the Church Fathers?
4. In the past, the primary purpose of marriage was held to be the procreation of children. Within most of the Anglican Communion, that is no longer the case. Sex is now recognised as having a unitive value apart from making babies which may unite two people in the closest intimacy and promote a happy and fulfilling marriage. There is, therefore, no longer any prohibition of birth-control within the Anglican Communion. Such a happy and fulfilling marriage, characterised by mutual love (in accordance with Christ's own words in John 13: 34), mutual caring, and mutual support may be regarded as a sacrament (whether it be called a sacrament or not) inasmuch as it may act as a channel for the grace of God. The essential features here are the mutual love, mutual support, and so on of the parties concerned, not whether they are male or female.
5. Sexual preference is not the same as sexual orientation. Recent research appears to demonstrate that one's sexual orientation is the result of a number of factors, some of them genetic or biological. If this is so, then homosexual orientation cannot be regarded either as "abnormal" or "sinful" though a number of Churches – basing themselves on Scripture – still go on to say that while homosexuality is not in itself sinful, homosexual acts are sinful. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church speaks of such acts as "intrinsically disordered" and contrary to natural law. There is a lack of logic here. If heterosexual orientation is not intrinsically sinful, and if

- actions that are a natural consequence of that orientation are not intrinsically sinful, then why should actions that are a natural consequence of a homosexual orientation, which is not intrinsically sinful, be regarded as sinful? The answer, of course, is because those Churches that maintain this all fall back on Leviticus, Romans, and 1 Timothy, despite the fact that the authors of those books could not possibly have known of the distinction between preference and orientation, and were arguing from different premises, namely, the principle that all homosexuality was a disoriented preference and wholly against nature.
6. One of the most important Anglican documents to support the case for same-sex marriages is the so-called Gloucester Report of 1979. While not all the arguments are equally compelling, it remains a contribution of fundamental importance. Its Personalist approach transcends sexual differences and concentrates on the significance and uniqueness of the human person, as well as that person's relational dimension – that is to say, his or her relationship with others, since outside community a person remains unfulfilled. With this approach, our unique human differences transcend sexual differences, and that intimate, loving, unitive relationship of which, in the Christian tradition, the Trinity is the perfect example, may be witnessed in any true human relationship, whether homosexual or heterosexual. Thus, a free, loving, and respectful relationship between two persons of the same sex may therefore be just as ethical and just as holy as such a relationship between a man and a woman. This is the logical result of approaching homosexual orientation as orientation and not as “sinful” preference which, as we have said, was naturally the attitude of the authors of Leviticus, Romans, and 1 Timothy.
 7. If same-sex marriages come to be permitted within the Anglican Communion, this must inevitably have consequences for ecumenism. In this matter, honest communication and a free and unbiased exchange of ideas – what Ecumenical Patriarch Athenegoras called “looking at each other” – is essential. There is no point in discussing the matter with a member of the Religious Right who regards the Bible as God's own dictated word, ever fixed, immutable, and unalterable. As Bishop Kallistos said, it might be that the Anglican Communion is being guided by the Holy Spirit to lead the members of other Christian Churches into new paths, for “Christ did not tell us that nothing should ever be done for the first time.” To do this will certainly take courage, but courage is being afraid and going on, and someone has to pave the way.

In summary, a sound theological case can be made for the blessing of same-sex relationships and for the marriage of same-sex couples: it remains to be seen whether the Anglican Church of Canada will act on this principle. That it will be taking a risk is not in doubt, but let us quote the great ninth-century Muslim mystic Muhammad ibn ‘Abdi’l-Jabbar al-Niffari: “In taking a risk there is part of salvation.”³¹

Gracious Father, I humbly beseech Thee for Thy Holy Catholic Church. Fill

³¹ *The Mawaqif and Mukhatabat of Muhammad ibn ‘Abdi’l-Jabbar al-Niffari*, ed./trans. Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1935; repr. 1978), p. 7 of the Arabic text.

it with all truth, in all truth, with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purge it. Where it is in error, direct it. Where it is superstitious rectify it. Where anything is amiss reform it. Where it is right, strengthen and confirm it. Where it is in want, furnish it. Where it is divided and rent asunder, make up the breaches of it, O Thou Holy One of Israel.³²

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³² William Laud (1573-1645), Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted in *Anglicanism: The Thought and Practice of the Church of England*, ed. Paul E. More and Frank L. Cross (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 638. (no. 299).