

Resolutions of Lambeth Conference -- 1998

Resolution I.10 *Human Sexuality*

This Conference:

- (a) commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality;
- (b) in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- (c) recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. 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;
- (d) 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;
- (e) cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;
- (f) requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;
- (g) notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.

Note: The resolutions referred to in subsection (g) of this resolution are set out in the [appendix](#) to this document.

Appendix to Section I.10 Resolutions

Resolutions of Sections and Regions referred to in Subsection (f) of Resolution I.10 (Human Sexuality)

Resolution IV.26 from Section IV

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

Note: This Resolution was not voted upon, as the Conference agreed to pass to next business.

Resolution V.1 from Central and East Africa Region

This Conference:

(a) believes in the primary authority of the Scriptures, according to their own testimony; as supported by our own historic tradition. The Scriptural revelation of Jesus the Christ must continue to illuminate, challenge and transform cultures, structures, systems and ways of thinking; especially those secular views that predominate our society to day;

(b) consequently, reaffirms the traditional teaching upholding faithfulness between a husband and wife in marriage, and celibacy for those who are single;

(c) noting that the Holy Scriptures are clear in teaching that all sexual promiscuity is a sin, is convinced that this includes homosexual practices, between persons of the same sex, as well as heterosexual relationships outside marriage;

(d) believes that in this regard, as in others, all our ordained Ministers must set a wholesome and credible example. Those persons who practise homosexuality and live in promiscuity, as well as those Bishops who knowingly ordain them or encourage these practices, act contrary to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church. We call upon them to repent;

(e) respects as persons and seeks to strengthen compassion, pastoral care, healing, correction and restoration for all who suffer or err through homosexual or other kind of sexual brokenness.

(f) affirms that it is therefore the responsibility of the Church to lead to repentance all those who deviate from the orthodox teaching of the Scriptures and to assure them of God's forgiveness, hope and dignity.

Note: This Resolution was put to the Conference in the form of an amendment to Resolution I.10 and was defeated.

Resolution V.10 from the Latin American Region

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

Note: This Resolution was put to the Conference in the form of an amendment to Resolution I.10 and was withdrawn by the mover.

Resolution V.35 from the West Africa Region

This Conference:

(a) noting that -

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

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

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

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

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

Note: This Resolution was put to the Conference in the form of an amendment to Resolution I.10 and was defeated.

Resolution III.1

The Bible

This Conference, recognising the need in our Communion for fuller agreement on how to interpret and apply the message of the Bible in a world of rapid change and widespread cultural interaction,

- (a) reaffirms the primary authority of the Scriptures, according to their testimony and supported by our own historic formularies;
- (b) urges that the Biblical text should be handled respectfully, coherently, and consistently, building upon our best traditions and scholarship believing that the Scriptural revelation must continue to illuminate, challenge and transform cultures, structures, and ways of thinking, especially those that predominate today;
- (c) invites our provinces, as we open ourselves afresh to a vision of a Church full of the Word and full of the Spirit, to promote at every level biblical study programmes which can inform and nourish the life of dioceses, congregations, seminaries, communities, and members of all ages.

Resolution III.5

The Authority of Holy Scriptures

This Conference

- (a) affirms that our creator God, transcendent as well as immanent, communicates with us authoritatively through the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; and
- (b) in agreement with the Lambeth Quadrilateral, and in solidarity with the Lambeth Conference of 1888, affirms that these Holy Scriptures contain ‘all things necessary to salvation’ and are for us the ‘rule and ultimate standard’ of faith and practice.

Resolution III.8

The Virginia Report

This Conference

- (a) welcomes the [1997 Report of the Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission](#) (The Virginia Report) as a helpful statement of the characteristics of our Communion;
- (b) recognises that the report, the fruit of ten years of careful work accomplished since the 12th Lambeth Conference, identifies and explores important questions about unity, interdependence and mutual accountability in the Anglican Communion;

(c) commends its discussion of our Trinitarian faith as the basis of our koinonia and interdependence, while recommending the need for further work to be done with respect to the report's discussion of reason in relation to the primacy of Holy Scripture;

(d) affirms that the Churches of our Anglican Communion are joined in the communion of God through Our Lord Jesus Christ by the gracious power of the Holy Spirit, celebrating the fact that our communion together is maintained in the life and truth of Christ by the gift to us of the Holy Scriptures, the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and the historic episcopate, and commending the fundamental importance of these to the consideration of our partners in ecumenical dialogue;

(e) values the instruments of Anglican unity as they are described in the Virginia Report, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the meeting of Primates;

(f) values and discerns the Church to be held in koinonia by our liturgical tradition and common patterns of worship, by prayer and the communion of the saints, the witness of the heroes and heroines of our history, the sharing of the stories of our faith, and by our interdependence through exchanges of friendship between our dioceses and by service to others in the name of Christ;

(g) calls upon member Churches and the ACC in the next decade to facilitate the sharing of resources of theological education and training in ministry and to promote exchanges amongst the theological colleges and seminaries of our Communion so as to minister to a deepening unity of heart and mind;

(h) requests the Primates to initiate and monitor a decade of study in each province on the report, and in particular on "whether effective communion, at all levels, does not require appropriate instruments, with due safeguards, not only for legislation, but also for oversight" (para. 5.20) as well as on the issue of a universal ministry in the service of Christian unity (cf. Agros Report, para. 162, and the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* 96);

(i) requests that this study should include consideration of the ecumenical implications involved and that the Primates should make specific recommendations for the development of instruments of communion not later than the 14th Lambeth Conference.

FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF CAPETOWN

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29 April, 1997

My dear colleagues,

As Chair of Section 1 of the Lambeth Conference I send my warm greetings to you in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Vice Chair, the Rt. Rev'd Kenneth Fernando, Bishop of Colombo, and the consultants who assisted us at the St Augustine's Seminar in the drafting of our Section agenda, also join me in this greeting.

You should regard the report which follows as an initial exploration of the themes we were invited to address by the regional conferences held recently around the Communion.

This report comes with our assurance that this should not be held as the final word on any of the topics included in its ambit. We have sought to provide a stimulus to your own reflections and consideration, and your local and regional/Provincial pre-Lambeth discussions.

Please study this report and come to our Conference next year ready to contribute your insights based on your own particular experiences and context.

It is our hope and prayer that our work together might be mutually enriching and encouraging to our Christian witness and episcopal ministry in our respective countries.

With my good wishes and prayers for you in your own ministry and leadership,

Grace and Peace,

Yours in the love of Christ,

The Most Rev'd Njongonkulu Ndungane
Archbishop of Cape Town and
Metropolitan of Southern Africa

Section One -- Called to Full Humanity

Theme 3: HUMAN SEXUALITY

The Situation

48. Of all the themes to be considered at the Lambeth Conference 1998, that of sexuality is one of the most sensitive. Bishops know that there are deep divisions within and between our different cultures on a number of issues divorce, cohabitation, marriage, polygamy, and homosexuality. These have been examined many times at Lambeth Conferences in the past and doubtless will occupy generations to come. Many bishops will also give much time and pastoral attention to the victims of sexual exploitation within society at large and also within the Church. All bishops share the concern that people should be helped to live more faithful lives.
49. Bishops will also be aware of some of the harmful effects of globalisation upon communities around the world. It is particularly in the area of the family and sexual relations that the moral challenge of globalisation is evident. Faced with a rapid decline in two-parent families in many parts of the world, a rise in both teenage pregnancies and abortions, increasing evidence about child abuse and violence against women, and widespread confusion about the legal and social limits of pornography and obscenity, Church leaders are currently facing an enormous challenge to the traditional teaching of the Church.
50. Two physical changes do seem to have prompted these challenges. The first of these is hormonal contraceptives, which have allowed women an unprecedented degree of emancipation. The second is a greatly increased life expectancy. In some areas, most couples who now marry in their late twenties can expect, if they do not divorce, to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary.
51. Yet these two physical changes do not fully explain the radical shift in practice and attitudes that is currently taking place. Undoubtedly, this shift is driven by a combination of social and cultural factors, for example an increasingly globalised media, commercial pressures, political disenchantment, generational shifts. Many church leaders find it increasingly difficult to know how to respond, not least because their own families are caught up in these changing perspectives.
52. As discussed at the Lambeth Conference 1988, the tragic spread of HIV/AIDS adds urgency to this debate. Once perceived as predominantly a product of urban homosexual promiscuity, we now recognise that HIV/AIDS is a disease which also indiscriminately affects women and children who are not themselves promiscuous. In fact, AIDS is already affecting whole populations in Africa and Asia. Most distressing of all, however, may be the fact that AIDS is linked to child prostitution in parts of Asia. This means that young lives are being destroyed by the presence of international sex tourists.
53. Concerns over these varied issues associated with human sexuality were expressed by many regions of the Anglican Communion. The Seychelles identified a complex problem associated with single parent families as a critical ethical issue: "Rapid development in Mauritius and Seychelles has meant that a very large proportion of mothers, if not most, now go to work to sustain their families. In Seychelles, one-parent families are now very prevalent. The family structure and pattern has changed so rapidly. Peer influence often supersedes that of parents. The consequences are far-reaching and negative in many cases." Southern Africa notes that "rapid urbanisation has undermined traditional customs" such as extended family life. West Africa records that "our experience has been that the resolution on polygamy made at Lambeth 1988 has not addressed all the problems involved in particular the status of active Church members who have subsequently contracted polygamous marriages." West Africa also states, "the problem of the rampant sexual abuse of children" is a matter of grave concern.
54. A report from Uganda suggests that "marriage used to be a matter for the whole society, but now it is for the individuals alone. There are no longer the taboos in place to be broken. The legal system used to require a man

who impregnated a woman to get married to her, but that is no longer the case.” The Oceania Region notes “the impact of excessive individualism on community and family life.” The East Asia Region meeting at Singapore realised that “human sexuality was obviously going to be an issue at the next Lambeth”, but were concerned that homosexuality would not “be high on the agenda ... just because it was a matter of Western concern.” Also the South Asia and Middle East Region noted that “in West Asia and the Middle East women and children are particularly vulnerable in relation to marriage customs and practice, child labour, prostitution and child abuse.”

55. Faced with such difficult issues how can bishops provide effective and sensitive leadership?

56. Three different ways of sexual living may be distinguished:

Way 1: Faithful and righteous family life, based on love and mutuality, remains an abiding way for all Christians. The Lambeth Conferences 1978 and 1988 both affirmed “marriage to be sacred, instituted by God and blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is not, of course, the only way to live a faithful human life. The New Testament and Christian history identify singleness, dedicated celibacy and monastic community life as Christ-like ways of living. However, there has been a long-standing recognition in the Churches that family life can be distorted by unfaithfulness or unrighteousness. Churches need to find effective ways of promoting faithful and righteous marriage, as well as affirming a person’s vocation to singleness and celibacy.

Way 2: Some expressions of sexuality, which are sadly present in all societies, are inherently opposed to the Christian way and are sinful. By way of example, such unacceptable expressions of sexuality include promiscuity (both heterosexual and homosexual), adultery, prostitution, child pornography, active paedophilia, bestiality and sadomasochism. From a Christian perspective, these forms of sexual expression remain sinful no matter how much some elements of secular societies seek to justify them. Likewise, where family systems are distorted by unfaithfulness or unrighteousness, family members may be led by example to behaviour that is not in conformity with Christian virtue.

Way 3: Yet there are other forms of behaviour which some Christians claim should not be regarded as inherently sinful but which may be less than complete expressions of the Christian way. These would include some forms of African traditional marriage and faithful cohabitation.

57. Identifying three examples of this Way 3 may help:

a) Luke Pato helps to put Way 3 into context when he gives an African example of couples having children before marriage: “In African communities, marriage and procreation are a unity. This implies that without procreation marriage is incomplete. The chain of humanity is blocked by a childless marriage. And so, just as it is a duty for African men and women to get married, some African societies also consider it a duty for a woman to bear children. To ensure that this obligation is carried out some African communities, especially in East and West Africa, consider it important to have children before marriage. Many couples live together bringing up a child or children before they decide to get married. This practice has to do with a kind of understanding of what being fully human means” [JTSA, March 1997, p.59]. Luke Pato is not, of course, seeking to justify all of this tradition as Christian. Many women today would object to such an understanding of their contribution to marriage. Instead, he is rather asking us to be sensitive to differences of culture. Although the Christian understanding of marriage may regard any practice of having children before marriage as unacceptable, it is clear that the practice that Luke Pato describes may share some Christian virtues.

b) Some would argue that another example of Way 3 is faithful homosexual relationships. This sensitive issue continues to divide Christians. In many places, homosexual behaviour is identified simply with paedophilia and promiscuity, whereas in other places there are now many examples of faithful homosexual relationships in society at large and within the Church. At present, there is a clear division of belief amongst Anglicans on homosexual behaviour and, indeed, medical knowledge is still developing in this area. While almost all would agree that promiscuous homosexuality (like promiscuous heterosexuality) is sinful and belongs to Way 2, Anglican opinion on faithful but active homosexuality is divided. Some believe it is sinful and belongs to Way 2; others believe it is acceptable to

God and belongs to Way 1. Different cultures and different understanding of biblical texts are important elements in how one decides on these issues.

c) A third example of Way 3 which concerns many parts of the Anglican Communion is the remarriage of divorced people. Earlier this century it would have been accepted by most Anglicans that remarriage after divorce is a serious impediment to Christian living, and a complete impediment for the ordained ministry. There are parts of the Anglican Communion where this remains the normative position. For some Anglicans remarriage after divorce does not represent Way 1. Nevertheless in an increasing number of churches, remarriage of some divorced people is recognised and blessed in the Church both for the laity and for those who are ordained. This remains a divisive issue, but there is a growing recognition that remarriage after divorce is not to be identified with Way 2.

58. The suggestion here is that approaching divisive issues of human sexuality from a Way 3 perspective allows for considerable differences among those who believe that they are faithful Christians. This Way 3 approach might also allow Christians to be pastorally sensitive to those with whom they disagree.

Theological Reflection

59. What are these abiding Christian virtues?

60. Two key biblical virtues are particularly important when considering Human Sexuality. An understanding of them might encourage Christians to see that there are abiding Christian virtues in this area. Two sets of abiding virtues are seen as especially present in both Old and New Testaments - lovingkindness/faithfulness on the one hand and righteousness/justice on the other. God's *hesed* or loving-kindness in the Old Testament is seen as continued in the New Testament in the form of *agape* and *charis*.

61. These abiding virtues can be detected despite differing emphases between the Old Testament and the New Testament. A common theme among them is the stress upon God's initiative in dealing with humans. A doctrine of atonement allows us to set these two ways of seeing God's relationship to the world into a context of our relationships to each other as human beings. Just as God has related faithfully and righteously to us, so we should try to relate to each other. Each of us is called to live a faithful and Christ-like life, not least in an area of such vulnerability as our fragile sexuality.

62. Way 1 enshrines both faithfulness and righteousness and Way 2 damages it. However, many would argue that Way 3 does contain some of the features of both faithfulness and righteousness. It has long been recognised in the Anglican Communion that polygamy in parts of Africa, and traditional marriage, do genuinely have features of both faithfulness and righteousness. In addition, there seem to have been many examples of faithfulness and righteousness among those who have remarried after divorce. An increasing number of Anglicans also maintain that faithful homosexuality contains features of both faithfulness and righteousness.

63. Some may identify additional virtues in this area - this could be an important task for the bishops at Lambeth involved in this section - and others still may not be so convinced that these two virtues are always maintained consistently in the Bible. There is much room for dispute here, but these two virtues do at least provide an initial basis for theological reflection.

64. Another important emphasis is upon eschatology: in the Messianic Kingdom we neither marry nor are given in marriage but are finally fulfilled in relationship to God in Christ through the Spirit (Luke 20:27-36). Thus it is not simply our sexuality which finally defines us as full human beings but our relationship to the Triune God who loves and completes us.

Putting into Context

65. The chief merit of this theological framework is that it distinguishes carefully between, on the one hand, abiding Christian/Jewish virtues that are held in tension in the Bible and in subsequent Christian history, and, on the other, contingent contexts and recipients that are for ever changing. By identifying at the outset a set of relevant

theological virtues, it is able then to bring them to the various moral issues surrounding sexuality and changing patterns of family life.

66. Some would identify another abiding element within human sexuality. There has been considerable discussion in recent Roman Catholic theology about how a modified concept of natural law can be relevant to our understanding of sexuality today. From this perspective sexuality is designed by a loving God both for human enjoyment and for responsible reproduction. This offers an important reminder to the secular world that God's gift of sexuality brings with it responsibilities - not least towards the children who are the fruit of this gift. In a context of wide-spread abortion and child neglect, the Christian ideal of marriage remains vital.

67. An abiding pattern is faithful and loving monogamy, which is seen as the Christian way for sexual relationships and for the responsible bringing up of children. Nevertheless, faithful cohabitation and polygamy are seen as less than ideal but not as inherently opposed to this ideal.

Practical Application

68. It should be emphasised once again that the broad presentation offered here does not resolve our difficulties in the area of sexuality. Instead, it allows us to see that we do have convictions in common, especially on Way 1 and Way 2. It also allows us to locate our differences in Way 3. This presentation suggests a number of important tasks for the Lambeth Conference 1998:

>>> Identify the theological virtues which are important in the Christian way of living.

>>> Compare ways across the Communion in which we are seeking to strengthen faithful and righteous Christian marriage in the face of global pressures working against it.

>>> Find ways of living together despite our differences on issues such as divorce, homosexuality and polygamy.

>> Explore in what ways the Anglican Communion as a whole may find consensus on these issues, perhaps setting up an Inter-Anglican Commission on Human Sexuality

Further Reading

Hayes, R. B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1996

Barton, S., (ed), *The Family in Theological Perspective*, (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1996, paper-back).