



# The Lambeth Witness

*Proclaiming God's Justice, Living God's Love*

Issue 7 Supplement (Tue 29 July 08)

## How do we get from here to there?

*Part three of the Preliminary Observations of the Windsor Continuation Group* begins by asking "How do we get from here to there?" the "there" being a restoration of trust, fellowship and communion "on which we thrive."

And its answer is, we get there by sacrificing the lives, relationships and ministries of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Anglicans. We get there by silencing the LGBT leadership of the church. We get there by honoring the hypocrisy and dishonesty of those churches which are covertly blessing same sex unions and quietly consecrating gay bishops.

The report asks bishops to consider "what personal sacrifices might it involve for each of us?" The answer is, none at all, because not one of the bishops at the Lambeth Conference is an out gay bishop in a relationship. And obviously they are not priests who will be asked to sacrifice a call to the episcopacy. Nor are any of them going to be asked to give up a dream of having the church bless their relationship.

If there is to be reconciliation within the Anglican Communion it will not be achieved by silencing the LGBT members of the church. If fully enacted, the moratorium on consecrating those living in openly gay relationships will have the effect of permanently silencing those whose voice Lambeth 98 Resolution 1.10 purports to raise up. It will preclude faithful LGBT Anglicans from ever having a voice in the Lambeth Conference and the Primates Meeting. There have been gay people in the church for generations who have lived in silent agony. There are gay people in the church today who dare not speak their truth. These suggested moratoria attempt to achieve unity by suppression of truth.

The Windsor Continuation Group assumes that the cause of Anglican dissension is the full inclusion of LGBT people and therefore the basis for reunification is their (re)exclusion. However, it is clear from the recent statements of the GAFCON meeting that there are theological and ecclesiological issues far beyond the blessing and inclusion in all orders of those Anglicans who are also LGBT. Their suggestion that the Archbishop of Canterbury is no longer the instrument of unity raises issues which will not be solved by once again sacrificing LGBT people.

Bishops are called to be pastors. Blessing the faithful relationships of gay and lesbian people is a pastoral act. Turning them away will compromise mission in many of our provinces, not just those on the North American continent. The church is called to minister within the cultures in which it finds itself and in many of our cultural contexts institutionalized homophobia is a major impediment to mission, not just to those who are themselves LGBT but also to their families and friends. To enact the requested moratoria would have the effect of concretizing homophobia and closing our doors to many who long to know God.

*(Continued on page 2)*

### **A flawed process, a flawed result**

Different way of trying to solve the problem maybe, but *Preliminary Observations Part Three* continues to misdescribe what the Communion's problem is, and therefore gets us no nearer to a solution.

The basic assumption was the same in the Windsor Report, the Nassau Draft and the St. Andrews Draft. They all describe the threats to the Communion as being the blessings of same-sex unions, the consecration of openly gay bishops and to a lesser extent cross-border interventions.

To call for a moratorium on all three, as though they all caused disunity, is to fly in the face of reality. Cross-border interventions undermine institutional unity by creating competing jurisdictions. New Westminster's same sex blessings and New Hampshire's consecration of a gay bishop do not.

The ethics of homosexuality is cause for disagreement, not disunity. All churches contain diversity of belief among their members. Until now Anglicanism has accepted diversity of belief and open debate within the Church (notably, for example, in the debates about slavery, contraception, divorce and capital punishment). This requires that different points of view

*(Continued on page 2)*



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*(Continued from page 1)*

To balance a moratorium on boundary crossings with moratoria on same-sex blessings and the consecration of gays and lesbians in faithful relationship is an utterly inappropriate comparison. It requires a deep self-sacrifice from LGBT Anglicans and only the ecclesial inconvenience of the others. LGBT Anglicans cannot be asked to give up their place in the church for an indefinite period, while those provinces unable to contemplate inclusion are not required to fully and actively participate in creating safe spaces for a true listening process with LGBT people and to work actively for their civil rights within their own societies.

The so-called 'Pastoral Forum' far from being pastoral seems to be coercive and punitive, designed as an ecclesiastical police force that will fly in to adjudicate 'emerging threats' to the 'life' of the Communion. Pastoral responses to faithful LGBT Anglicans do not threaten the life of the Communion. The real threat comes from the bullying tactics of those who think they have sole possession of the Truth.

Among the bishops gathered here in Canterbury 'there is a strong view that the way forward lies chiefly through deepening person to person relationships, diocesan partnerships and a sense of belonging and mutual affection.' It is ironic that on a day dedicated to listening to those of different faiths, we should receive these two documents ('Reflections upon the Lambeth Conference 2008 First Draft', and 'Windsor Continuation Group Preliminary Observations Part Three') – one which talks of deepening relationship and one which seeks to silence and exclude. §

*Integrity Canada*

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*TransEpiscopal*

*Sybils*

*Chicago Consultation*

*(Continued from page 1)*

can be publicly expressed, even by bishops and clergy, without fear of discrimination.

Anglican diversity contrasts with those Protestant churches which are committed to uniformity of belief and therefore expect assent to all their doctrines. The Windsor Report and draft Covenants, while in some places acknowledging the value of the more open Anglican tradition, are in their main recommendations all too heavily influenced by an intolerant demand for uniformity. The implication is that because Lambeth 1998 described homosexuality as 'contrary to Scripture' all Anglicans ought to consider it immoral.

Such a naive notion is contrary to the Anglican tradition. Neither Lambeth 1998 nor the sparse remarks on the matter in the Bible establish an Anglican consensus on the ethics of homosexuality.

Instead of continuing to pretend that there is one, and generating one proposal after another for policing it, what is needed is to face the fact that Anglicans disagree about it. Instead of threatening pro-gay provinces with expulsion we should insist that differences of opinion are normal. When other Anglicans do things we consider unchristian the proper response is not to threaten schism but to engage in debate with them, arguing our case and listening to their case for as long as it takes to reach consensus.

We do not think the proposed Pastoral Forum can achieve this aim. We note that its members are to be appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, not democratically elected. At the very least we believe that when matters of homosexuality are discussed homosexuals should be well represented.

The same applies to the membership of the Windsor Continuation Group. With its predominance of bishops and males, the lack of any democratic procedures and a membership that is uniformly opposed to blessing same gender relationships, the Windsor Continuation Group cannot claim to be either representative of the Communion's diversity or able to serve as an honest broker of this dispute.


With a more open, democratic and representative process, we would be in a better position to recognize what the problem is – and that would be a first step towards solving it. §

*(Page 2 of 2)*

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