

TRUE UNION *in the* BODY?

**A contribution to the discussion
within the Anglican Communion
concerning the public blessing of same-sex unions**

A Paper commissioned by the Most Revd Drexel Wellington Gomez
Archbishop of the West Indies



Seeking the mind of Christ for the Body of Christ

Preface

At the end of June 2002, there was a major consultation in Oxford on The Future of Anglicanism. This drew together Anglican theologians and bishops from every continent with South East Asia and Africa strongly represented. The topics discussed were numerous as we looked together at dynamic orthodoxy focused around the themes of our gospel, identity and mission. However, one topic regrettably proved especially urgent. Shortly prior to the meeting, the Diocesan Synod of New Westminster in the Province of Canada had voted for the third time to authorize a rite for the blessing of same-sex unions and the diocesan bishop, Michael Ingham, assented to this request. This event, which has since caused widespread disquiet across the Anglican Communion, led a dozen parishes to depart from the Synod, and also gave rise at this consultation to its significant ‘Oxford Declaration’ which had the unanimous support of consultants (see Appendix 1).¹

Although such rites are unofficially used by some clergy in other parts of the Anglican Communion, New Westminster is the first diocese within the Anglican Communion to authorize such a rite. Its unilateral decision clearly disregards the considered opinion of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. This overwhelmingly passed a resolution (1.10) stating that ‘in view of the teaching of Scripture’ the Conference ‘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’ and so ‘cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions’ (see Appendix 2).

The seriousness of this decision was then highlighted by the Archbishop of Canterbury-elect in a letter to his fellow Primates on the day of his appointment. In that letter Rowan Williams, although he did not himself vote for the Lambeth resolution, acknowledged that: ‘The Lambeth resolution of 1998 declares clearly what is the mind of the overwhelming majority in the Communion, and what the Communion will and will not approve or authorize. I accept that any individual diocese or even province that officially overturns or repudiates this resolution poses a substantial problem for the sacramental unity of the Communion.’²

The Lambeth Conference also resolved, however, that there should be continued reflection on these matters. So the Archbishop urged that there should be a ‘mutually respectful climate for such reflection, in the sort of shared prayerful listening to Scripture envisaged by Lambeth’. The following briefing paper, which I commissioned at July’s consultation, is written, I trust, in just such a spirit. It seeks to contribute positively, respectfully and prayerfully to this important discussion. Written jointly by a New Testament scholar and a moral theologian, it has grown out of extended conversations between those present in the consultation. The hope is that the scholars and pastors gathered on that occasion, many of whom have been reflecting on this issue for many years, might be able to give to the wider Church a more substantial defence of Lambeth Resolution 1.10.

In the light of the continuing debates about homosexuality in a number of Anglican provinces (not least ECUSA, but also Canada and UK), this paper is offered in a constructive spirit to explain and defend the reasons for this clear consensus against such rites within the Communion. It also responds to some of the problems raised by those who continue to press for change in the Church’s official teaching and practice in the area of human sexuality. It is hoped that it will be recognized as a scholarly piece dealing with the issues at the level of debate which is now necessary, responding charitably to those who disagree, and making significant proposals in a time of urgent need within our global Anglican family.

I am very grateful to the Oxford consultants who have given time to thinking through this matter in such detail and also to those who have made it possible to be published. I am commending it for discussion amongst my fellow Primates and hope that many others within the Anglican Communion will be given the opportunity to note and comment upon its contents. My prayer is that this will be an important resource as together we seek the mind of Christ on this important pastoral issue during the coming months.

The Most Revd Drexel Wellington Gomez, BA, CMG
Archbishop of the West Indies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Learning the Mind of Christ: Opening Questions	2
Mission, Identity and Gospel (1.2-4)	2
Overriding Concerns: Love and People, Identity and Truth (1.5-10)	3
Key Questions to be addressed (1.11)	5
Our Central Argument and Motivation (1.12-14)	6
2. Interpreting the Times: The Context of this Debate	8
‘Western’ but ‘global’: mutual questioning in the Body of Christ (2.2-6)	8
Revisionist proposals: novel and pluriform (2.7-13)	9
3. Exploring the Issues: Biblical and Theological Perspectives	
on Marriage, Singleness & Same-sex unions	11
A. Marriage and Singleness in the Scriptures (3.1-4)	11
B. Clarifying terms: Chastity, celibacy, abstinence and homosexual orientation (3.5-16)	12
Homosexual orientation (3.8-14)	13
Conclusion and Challenge (3.15-16)	15
C. Homosexuality & Singleness (3.17-18)	16
D. Homosexuality & Marriage (3.19)	17
E. Homosexuality & Same-sex unions (3.20-25)	17
F. Conclusion (3.26-30)	19
4. Listening to Scripture and Tradition: Homosexual Practice in Biblical Theology	21
A. The Teaching of Scripture (4.1-20)	21
Act 1: Creation (4.5)	22
Act 2: The Fall (4.6-9)	22
Act 3: The Life of Israel (4.10)	23
Act 4: The Ministry of Christ (4.11-13)	23
Act 5: The Era of the Church (4.14-17)	24
Act 6: The ultimate New Creation (4.18-19)	26
Summary of Scriptural teaching (4.20)	26
B. The Church’s Tradition (4.21-27)	27
The Tradition critiqued (4.23-27)	27
C. Conclusion (4.28-32)	29
5. Embodying True Grace: The Pastoral Response of the Church	32
Forgiving Grace (5.7-9)	33
Welcoming Grace (5.10-11)	34
Transforming Grace (5.12-14)	35
Costly Grace (5.15-19)	35
Conclusion (5.20-22)	37
6. Being Together the Body of Christ: Political Issues facing the Church	39
The Challenges of the Present (6.2-6)	39
Wisdom from the Past: a way forward? (6.7-12)	40
Conventions, Conferences and Canterbury (6.13-17)	42
A moratorium? (6.18-20)	44
Final conclusions (6.21-24)	45
7. Summary	47
Appendix 1 – The Oxford Declaration on Faith and Order	50
Appendix 2 - 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10	52
Endnotes	53
Works Cited	57

1. LEARNING THE MIND OF CHRIST:

Opening Questions

1.1 To bless or not to bless? That is the question. The call to bless same-sex unions raises major issues for the Anglican Communion—not only for our pastoral care and our theology, but also for our mission and the way we conduct our ecclesial politics. As an issue which exposes the core of our sexual beings and challenges our identities, it can evoke passion and emotion, denial and anger. It lays bare our personal and theological foundations. Truly here we need the grace of the gospel to reach deeply into our thoughts and our actions, into our hearts, minds and bodies, into our principles and our pastoral care, into the very Body-life of the Church. We need to learn the ‘mind of Christ’ (1 Cor. 2:16).

Mission, Identity and Gospel

1.2 The call to bless same-sex unions arises because some (mainly in the West) believe this is an appropriate and loving response to people who seek the Church’s support, and so should be an important feature of the Church’s pastoral practice and a vital part of the Church’s contemporary mission. Many, however, see it as a major challenge to the Church’s identity, potentially overturning her traditional understanding of scriptural teaching about human sexuality and faithful Christian discipleship. Especially in the non-West there is the added fear that it effectively undermines the Church’s mission in their context and denies the gospel.

1.3 How is the Anglican Communion to respond? The claim is being made that the Church’s mission has uncovered new issues which the Church must address. In such a situation the Church must return to God’s self-revelation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, she cannot let one interpretation of the Church’s missionary and pastoral context pragmatically reshape her identity and understanding of the gospel. On the other hand, neither can she naively assume that her identity is already perfectly shaped by the gospel and that new issues discovered through engagement in mission are unable to shed new light on the calling of the Church. The urgent question of mission throws us back to the issue of Christian identity, which in turns throws us back to the gospel. A fresh perspective on the gospel must characterise and determine both our identity and our mission.

1.4 New proposals, occasioned by the Church’s encounter with wider culture, have of course arisen before. In the fourth century, for example, the Church was engaged for several generations with the questions posed by Arius relating to the identity of Christ. On several occasions major fragmentation seemed imminent. Although the debate concerning the identity of Jesus was necessarily a matter of a higher order than the one under discussion here, there are some intriguing parallels between that century and ours:

❖ Then, as now, there was an urgent need for increased communication (between East and West or, now, North and South) to clarify the issues at stake.

❖ Structures and councils had to be put in place so that the Church could go forward as one body, reaching a common mind which could then be accepted by the Church (with dissenting voices breaking away to form other bodies). In short, the urgent question of mission precipitated questions about Christian identity and the gospel such that the Scriptures had to be listened to even more attentively in order to answer the new questions being posed. In this way the Church’s tradition genuinely developed, not in a way that went beyond or contrary to Scripture, but rather as a true and faithful elucidation of that Scripture.

❖ Finally, this process took time! Although the Church is inevitably a political body, its decision-making process cannot be dictated by urgent political campaigns but rather must take due time for considering matters which are vital to its life and mission in the world. The dawning of internet communication has caused the global communion to shrink and, unlike the fourth century, church debates are now conducted under the eye of the media often eager for polarisation and soundbite slogans. As a result, the need has never been greater for real and personal communication, conducted in a godly and transparent way.

Overriding Concerns: Love and People, Identity and Truth

1.5 The following paper approaches this important pastoral subject by identifying central issues and asking some key questions which flow out of this overall concern with the Church’s Gospel, Identity and Mission. Before highlighting some of the specific and focused issues examined in detail in the following sections, four more fundamental concerns must be noted:

1.6 *First*, this is a question about *God’s love*. How is it discerned? And how can we, his creatures, express it faithfully—both in our corporate life as Christ’s Body and in our individual relationships? Some relationships truly fulfil humanity’s call to give and receive love. Others may be sufficiently twisted by our fallen human nature as to fail to bring wholeness and hope. Which is which? There is no dispute over the need for all people to hear the good news of God’s love for them and the call to receive and give love. The decisive, albeit divisive, question is the nature of this love whose ultimate source is God *and therefore which forms of loving relationships can be blessed by Him*. The desire to bless same-sex unions often arises from a serious and sincere pastoral concern for the well-being of members of Christ’s Body. Yet those who reject the blessing of same-sex unions can be motivated by a pastoral concern which is equally serious and sincere.

1.7 *Secondly*, this is a question about *people*. This is, first and foremost, an urgent pastoral issue. The root questions are neither: how can we defend our visions of the truth against those who threaten to disrupt our Anglican ‘family’? Nor: how can we be as inclusive as possible to all who wish to be part of that family? But rather: how do we respond pastorally in a way which manifests the pastoral power of the gospel?

Any debates about truth will be important precisely because this is a debate about people and we believe Jesus' words that the truth, *his* truth, 'will set people free' (John 8:32). What frameworks, then, are necessary for the Church's life so that it may publicly promote, and not undermine, the liberating power of God's grace and truth? How do we give to people, who are seeking affirmation from the Church and therefore from God, an affirmation which is healing and helpful because it is authentic and *true*?

1.8 *Thirdly*, this is a question about *identity* — both our personal identities as bodily and sexual beings, and our corporate identity as Christ's Body on earth. These two identities will prove to be linked in an uncanny way. As Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians, the Body of Christ is materially affected by what we do with our bodies. For the individual there are questions about how one relates to others and about the significance of being created male or female in the image of God. For the Church there are questions about how the unity and identity given her in the gospel are displayed within the world.

1.9 *Finally*, but undergirding all of these, this is a question about *truth*. How does the Church, as the 'Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15), respond to this situation truly? Is there a truth here (within the Scriptures and the tradition) which can and must be spoken? In contrast to other organizations, guided by various philosophies, the Church (*ek-klesia*) is the community 'called out' by God's grace and commissioned to live faithfully and obediently within God's truth. Inspired by Jesus and the story of God's dealing with his people in the Scriptures, we are given a distinctive calling and responsibility—to embody authentic, redeemed humanness and, as Jesus' disciples, to be 'salt and light' in the world (Matt. 5:13-16). As a result, for those who proclaim and confess the creeds, the primary questions are those which come to us, not from our surrounding cultures, but from the great truths of Revelation, of Redemption and Resurrection, and of Relationship with God as Trinity:

- ❖ We are called to proclaim the reality of God's *revelation*, for we only know God because of his prior initiative in His grace and love. We are called to live within the story of the Scriptures, inspired by its examples and constrained by its precepts. But how are those Scriptures to be truly interpreted today and embodied in our individual and corporate lives in a way that is *faithful* to that revelation?
- ❖ Conformed to the Cross of Christ (the place of God's incarnate identification with sinful humanity), we are called to identify with the world in its pain and confusion. But God's purposes are not limited to identification. They also point to his power to confront sin and to *redeem* (indeed to *resurrection* and transformation by the healing presence of his Spirit). How then should Christ's people live out the new possibilities of Jesus' risen and transforming life and proclaim the '*hope* of glory'?
- ❖ Finally, as those brought into *relationship* with God and who proclaim the 'for-

givenness of sins', we are called to embody both God's awesome holiness and his lavish grace. But how evident to others is this holy grace, and how does it govern our relationships with each other within the Church? We are called to worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whose 'image' we are made. But how are our lives and *loves* as his creatures, both male and female, to reflect this in the ordering of our relationships and especially of our sexual desires?

1.10 So Christians, who are marked by their trinitarian confession and rooted in the catholic creeds, should be marked by faith, hope and love. This is the matrix within which we must respond to this pastoral issue. How can our teaching and liturgy be rooted in Scripture, marked by the Cross and indwelt by the Spirit, so that the Church is a faithful witness to the good news of God's grace?

Key Questions to be addressed

1.11 This paper is set within this broader theological approach, and in sections 2-6 addresses the following key questions:

Section 2:

- ❖ Why must the Church as a whole now address this issue?
- ❖ What questions are provoked by our different missionary and pastoral contexts?
- ❖ How do we understand the rise of the homosexual identity and community in certain cultures?
- ❖ Is there a coherent proposal on offer from those seeking to revise the Church's teaching?

Section 3:

It will become clear that there is still no clear theological consensus amongst revisionists as to the precise shape of what is being proposed. Are these proposed unions to be viewed as *marriages*, as *quasi-marriages* (analogous to but differentiated from traditional heterosexual marriage), or as something *non-marital*? In this ambiguous situation, our attention deliberately focuses upon the first two groups who take the 'high ground' and wish to extend the disciplines of marriage to couples in a same-sex relationship. They argue for conferring legitimacy on such structures of relationship through public rites of blessing which would commend them as patterns of faithful Christian discipleship.³ So,

- ❖ Why has the Church traditionally only commended heterosexual marriage and abstinent singleness for faithful Christian disciples?
- ❖ Are there new circumstances (in particular, a new understanding of homosexual 'orientation' or 'identity') which render this response unloving or untruthful?
- ❖ Do humans have a basic right to sexual expression?
- ❖ What does the traditional position say to those who experience same-sex attraction?
- ❖ What would be implied in legitimating same-sex unions?

Section 4:

Only within this broader theological context can we properly address the subject of homosexual *practice* and its portrayal within the Scriptures:

- ❖ Does Scripture speak against *all* homosexual activity, even within homosexual relationships that are faithful and loving?
- ❖ Has the traditional reading not now been discredited as naïve and fundamentalist?
- ❖ Are there not additional grounds for revising traditional Christian teaching (especially with the acceptance of non-procreative sex)?

Section 5:

A theological defence of traditional Christian teaching on human sexuality is, however, insufficient. Sadly, adherents of a traditional stance can fail to let the gospel shape their response to those who experience homosexual feelings or who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. Important questions are raised as to the adequacy of the Church's pastoral response:

- ❖ Is the traditional position incapable of showing love and embodying the gospel of grace in its pastoral practice?
- ❖ If the Church were to reject the call to bless same-sex unions, what should characterize her response to this new pastoral and missionary challenge?

Section 6:

Finally, any official decision by any part of the Anglican Communion to sanction the blessing of same-sex unions represents a public alteration of traditional Christian teaching, raising issues for the identity and unity of Christ's Body. It is therefore sadly necessary to close by examining some expressly 'political' questions:

- ❖ How should such a proposal be weighed and tested by the Church?
- ❖ What problems are raised at present within the Anglican Communion by pressures for such innovation?
- ❖ How do the Communion's structures need to be reformed?
- ❖ What might be the consequences of authorizing such blessings and what alternative ways forward might be found?

Our Central Argument and Motivation

1.12 The 1995 St. Andrew's Day Statement (hereafter '*STANDS*') provided 'An Examination of the Theological Principles Affecting the Homosexuality Debate'. It included the following paragraph, which this paper seeks to explain and defend:

The primary pastoral task of the Church in relation to all its members, whatever their self-understanding and mode of life, is to re-affirm the good news of salvation in Christ, forgiveness of sins, transformation of life and incorporation into the holy fellowship of the Church. In addressing those who understand themselves as homosexual, the Church does not cease to speak as the bearer of this good news. It assists all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness, recognizing two forms or vocations in which that life can be lived: marriage and singleness (Gen. 2.24; Matt. 19. 4-6; 1 Cor. 7 passim). *There is no place for the Church to confer legitimacy upon alternatives to these (italics added).*⁴

This last statement may sound to different people negative, harsh or restrictive. Yet those in sympathy with it may reply that it is motivated by true love and by a desire to promote and preserve the pastoral power of the gospel, expressing God's liberating truth and grace. The aim of this paper is simply to provide a positive account of this biblical teaching and the traditional Christian vision of faithful patterns of discipleship in constructive dialogue with those Christians whose pastoral or missionary endeavours have led them recently to question this teaching and vision.

1.13 The statement quoted from *STANDS* is identifiable as the orthodox and accepted teaching of the Anglican Communion—and indeed of the historic Christian Church. This teaching was upheld by an overwhelming majority at the 1998 Lambeth Conference in Resolution I.10 (see Appendix 2). Our intention is to articulate in greater detail what lay behind the Lambeth resolution, revealing its biblical and theological depths, whilst dealing with some of the intricate and valid questions that have been raised in response to this traditional understanding. It is hoped that this will prove genuinely helpful to both 'traditionalists' and 'revisionists' within this particular debate, so that the true nature of the points at issue can be more easily discerned. Given the pastoral sensitivity of this issue and the way it touches us at our points of greatest vulnerability, it is vital that our debates within the Christian family help to generate less 'heat' and more 'light', and are conducted with courtesy. It is also vital to accept the new challenges of mutual accountability that are being posed to us by the shrinking nature of our global village: 'no one is an island' and it is vital to go forward together, if possible, with a faith which is truly 'catholic' (that is, recognizably similar 'through the whole world').

1.14 Our motive, then, is not the defence of our truth but a contribution to the present conversation in the Anglican Communion and the promotion of Christ's love. We are well aware that truth claims can be a cloak for power-games, and that worldviews can be imposed on others in ways that are abusive and oppressive or which marginalize the voiceless. In this situation we must listen out all the harder, not to those who shout loudest, but to the voice of the living Christ who defines the character and limits of his Body as its founder and present head. Christians in the highly sexualized culture of the West need to listen especially carefully—but so too do Christians in other parts of the world where issues of human sexuality, even if slightly different in their manifestations, are equally urgent and in need of address. All of us need to be conscious, not of the 'speck in our brother's eye' but rather of the 'plank' in our own (Matt. 7:4). Thus the whole Church needs to open herself to God's judgment in the confidence that God's word, if it judges us all, also brings us all life. In these confusions (concerning both our sexual unions and our union as the Body of Christ) we need urgently someone who can tell us the truth of who we are. For truly, the truth is not in us. So, in this decisive hour for the Anglican Communion, as we seek true union in the Body of Christ, there is a call to turn afresh to Christ, the Lord of his Church, that he might speak with us his people and direct our steps into the paths of peace. 'To whom shall we go?' Peter asked: 'You have the words of eternal life' (John 6:68).

2. INTERPRETING THE TIMES: The Context of this Debate

2.1 Those who question the provision of rites to recognize same-sex unions must understand what is being proposed. They must also recognize that advocates of these unions are often driven by a commitment to both the pastoral and missionary tasks given by Christ to his Church.

‘Western’ but ‘global’: mutual questioning in the Body of Christ

2.2 In recent decades, often linked to wider movements for sexual liberation, there has arisen in Western society a distinct gay identity and sub-culture. It continues to press for liberalization of laws experienced as discriminatory and oppressive.

2.3 Christian re-thinking on this issue, however, is not merely a capitulation to secular culture. There are now a significant number of disciples of Christ who are open to some degree about their own experience of same-sex attraction. It is important to recognize that this is a very diverse grouping. Within it some Christians identify themselves as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ while others reject such a designation. While many Christians who experience same-sex attraction are strongly committed to following the Church’s traditional understanding of homosexuality and sexual ethics, some reject it and enter gay relationships. Others, of course, come to faith understanding themselves to be gay or lesbian and perhaps in a sexual relationship: what does conversion entail for their relationships, sexual attractions, and identity? Given that many in this situation find the Church opposed to them and their ideals, the phenomenon of ‘gay Christians’ is surprising. Advocates of same-sex blessings wish to encourage such Christians and to give signs of repentance to wider society for the Church’s mistreatment of gay people.

2.4 Just as the larger and more serious problem of heterosexual promiscuity is a major issue for churches around the world, so it would be quite wrong to imagine or pretend that homosexual attraction and practice is unknown outside the Western world. In other cultures, however, the phenomenon of ‘gay Christians’ has not yet become a significant issue. As a result many Church leaders in the ‘non-West’ find it difficult to understand and sympathize with advocates of same-sex blessings. Yet in the global Anglican Communion this is an issue that simply cannot now be ignored. There is a need ‘to interpret the times guided by the Spirit of God’. This involves a new task for Christian theology and ethics.⁵

2.5 This discernment is inevitably required of those in the West who minister amongst gay people. Yet it cannot be undertaken without reference to the wider Christian Church. A worldwide Communion cannot ‘act locally’ without ‘thinking globally’. Those outside the Western context must learn from those involved in ministry to gay people, listening to and struggling with the difficult questions raised by such a pastoral and missionary context; but the latter too must be open to critique. In

particular, concerned voices are raised from the global South where leaders, theologically well-trained, sense a deep challenge to gospel ethics and the identity of the Church. They also face the missionary challenge of upholding a credible witness in the face of opposition (often from Islam).

2.6 This global perspective casts a fresh light on one of the key texts in this debate—Romans 1. Paul’s words are primarily an analysis *not* of individuals and personal psychology, but rather of cultural and societal disintegration.⁶ To those living in poorer parts of the globe, this makes perfect sense. Is it a coincidence that the gay movement has arisen in a Western culture that is post-Christian, highly sexualized and, to them, politically and economically imperialist? There is here an uncomfortable correlation between what Paul saw in the ancient Roman Empire and what they sense in the modern West—oppression and exploitation on the frontiers, but moral innovation at the centre. From such a perspective, some ‘Western’ responses to those experiencing same-sex attraction seem, however sincere, to be driven by a consumerist mentality providing ‘whatever sells best’. Those of us living within Western culture need to hear such uncomfortable questions raised from outside.⁷

Revisionist proposals: novel and pluriform

2.7 Major theological concerns would therefore be raised if the Church were to confer legitimacy on alternatives to heterosexual marriage and singleness—even more so if this move was made by a diocese (or a province) acting unilaterally. Can a way of life and of ordering one’s sexual desires be blessed, when the wider Church across space and time has consistently refused to accept this as a legitimate form of discipleship? The proposals now go beyond welcoming and tolerating those Christians who dissent from the Church’s teaching. A new way of life is being *publicly* set before the Church and the world as a path of holiness, commended by the Church of Christ.

2.8 There are, however, many areas of confusion amongst those pressing for revision. What is actually being proposed? What is the theological understanding of this way of life? What moral disciplines would be required of people in such unions? Amongst advocates for these blessings there is, as yet, no agreement on these vital questions. At least three distinct options are being proposed by advocates of change:

2.9 *First*, there is an advocacy of *non-marital* same-sex relationships. For some this is related to ‘liberation’ understood individualistically with little regard for mutual moral accountability. People with this view may support structures to ‘legitimise’ homosexual conduct, but their wider sexual ethic does not require these. Thus the UK Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) simply affirms in its *Statement of Conviction* that ‘it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex but also to express that love fully in a personal, sexual relationship’. Lest there be any doubt about what this entails, the movement’s history notes that the main point of discussion in the debate which led to the publication of this *Statement* ‘revolved around the point at which it was proper to leap into bed with one’s friend’.⁸ Others who also distance themselves from the ‘marriage’ model

have provided a structure and rationale for such relationships by developing a model of same-sex ‘friendship’ which can include sexual expression. Some are attracted to this precisely because it is radical and opposed to more ‘traditional’ models. For others this simply represents a frank recognition that erotic relationships between people of the same sex are by their very nature different from those between men and women; they therefore cannot have a traditional heterosexual model imposed upon them without honest recognition of the different reality of these relationships.⁹

2.10 Amongst advocates of these essentially ‘experimental’ approaches to same-sex relationships there are those who wish for some form of public rite of blessing on same-sex couples. Inevitably, however, the structure of such rites is indeterminate as the rites and the relationships they bless amount to a ‘do-it-yourself’ creation of a new pattern of life.

2.11 *Second*, some revisionists wish same-sex unions to be understood as *marital* unions. They will refer to ‘same-sex marriage’ and this understanding does not require a new rite or recognition of a new institution. Instead it calls on the Church to *extend* the language of marriage so as to embrace within it couples of the same sex.¹⁰

2.12 *Third*, many advocates for the blessing of same-sex unions view them in a *quasi-marital* form. They would refrain from calling such unions ‘marriage’ because of the important differences arising from the single-sex nature of the relationship. Instead, an alternative way of life (alongside marriage and singleness), usually taking the form of a ‘covenantal union’, is offered to those who seek a relationship with someone of the same sex. This union involves obligations and disciplines, although there is some debate as to how similar the covenantal commitments between same-sex couples should be to the traditional features of marriage, especially whether they must be life-long and exclusive in character.¹¹

2.13 Although most of this paper relates to the full spectrum of ‘revisionist’ thinking, it engages primarily with the second and third categories. Unlike the first category, these seek to imitate the traditional Christian understanding about the proper disciplines for any sexual relationship. This gives them a greater appearance of legitimacy to many Christians and also provides a structure of relationship which could arguably be blessed and approved by the Church. Our argument in what follows is, however, that the blessing of same-sex unions in *any* form is a theological error, seriously departing from both Scripture and Tradition. We also wonder whether it is wise to consider significant departure from Christian practice when there is no agreed alternative proposal nor indeed any coherent theological rationale for an alternative.

3. EXPLORING THE ISSUES: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Marriage, Singleness & Same-sex unions

A. Marriage and Singleness in the Scriptures

3.1 Christian theology understands the creation of human beings as ‘male and female’ to be part of God’s good order. For some this bi-polar relational nature of humanity is close to the heart of what it means for humans to be made ‘in the image’ of the triune God.¹² In Genesis 2, a text cited frequently in the New Testament and appealed to by Jesus in his teaching on marriage, this sexual differentiation is understood in two ways: as a fitting divine response to the poverty of the solitary human (‘it is not good for man to be alone’) and as a divine act which is ordered towards the goal of a re-uniting of male and female within the created institution of marriage (‘for this reason...’).

3.2 The importance of marriage is evident throughout Scripture. God endorses marriage, making this part of his creation to be a sign of his own covenantal faithful love for his chosen people (e.g. in Hosea)—a love fulfilled in Christ’s love for his Church, which in turn stands as the model for Christian marriage (Eph. 5:21ff). Jesus himself uses the imagery of marriage and the marriage feast to teach about the Kingdom (e.g. Matt. 25) and about his own calling (Luke 14), and is himself identified as the Bridegroom (Matt. 9:15f, John 3:29ff). Correlated with this, human conduct which destroys marriage is frequently subject to severe condemnation (Lev. 20:10; Matt. 5:27-30, Gal. 5:19f). Marriage is to be ‘honoured by all’ (Heb. 13:4) and sexual immorality stands as a vivid image of Israel’s unfaithfulness towards God and a metaphor for her idolatry and wider law-breaking (Jer. 3:6-9; Ezek. 23; Hosea, Rev. 18).

3.3 Christ’s coming and the inbreaking of God’s kingdom opens up a new way of life which, without denying the goodness of marriage, forgoes marriage for the sake of the kingdom (Matt. 19:11-12; 1 Cor. 7). Marriage is thus no longer a necessity but rather a ‘vocation’. One of the striking novelties of the early Christian Church (in contrast to Israel’s pattern of life) is its exaltation of the single state and the vowed commitment to abstain from sexual relationships as a witness to the eschatological hope of a ‘new creation’, where there is no ‘giving and taking in marriage’ (Matt. 22:30).¹³ This enthusiasm for the life of sexual abstinence is unusual to most Anglican Christians today (and was subjected to much criticism at the time of the Reformation); yet it remains a necessary and important element of any Christian account of human sexuality.

3.4 Marriage and singleness are the two patterns of life upon which the Church has historically conferred legitimacy, blessing them because they are blessed by God. The Church has commended them to disciples of Christ through the institution of public rites of commitment. Clearly not everyone enters one of these two ways of life

through public vows or within the life of the Christian community. In the Western world, for example, an increasing number of people are in a state of involuntary singleness. This is a major challenge facing the Christian Church, which must form the wider context for its discussion of homosexuality (see 5.17).

B. Clarifying terms: Chastity, celibacy, abstinence and homosexual orientation

3.5 There is unfortunately much confusion concerning terminology in contemporary debates. This relates both to some key terms in relation to proper sexual conduct and terms used in relation to homosexual experience, especially ‘orientation’. All these are often misunderstood and misused both in popular discussion and in more serious theological argument.

3.6 There is especially a pressing need for clarification of the terms ‘chastity’, ‘celibacy’ and ‘abstinence’:

Christian moral theology has until recently had a more subtle way of speaking of godly sexual behaviour. ‘Celibacy’ was a term reserved for those who considered that they had a life-long *vocation* to a single life from which sexual relations were excluded. For those who did not have such a call, the term for godly sexual behaviour on the part of single people was ‘abstinence’. Finally, according to this more traditional terminology, all Christian people, be they single or married, were called to be ‘chaste’ — that is, whether married or single, all Christian people were called upon to seek the sort of purity of heart and action that did not corrupt God’s gift of human sexual powers.¹⁴

This traditional terminology must be recovered if the current discussion about same-sex unions is to be engaged properly. *All* of us are called to chastity and so to ‘flee sexual immorality’ (1 Cor. 6:18). The Church recognizes two forms within which this way of life can be lived—within marriage and within singleness. *It understands sexual activity not as a basic human right but as a good tied by God to his good gift of marriage.* The Church itself confers legitimacy on marriage in its marriage liturgies, and on singleness in its provision of vows of celibacy and the establishment of celibate orders. The disciplines of marriage are expected even of those not married in a Church ceremony. Similarly, the disciplines of chastity in singleness (in particular, abstinence from sexual relationships which, whenever outside marriage, are fornication) are expected even of those who do not voluntarily make their single state a permanent one through vows of celibacy. The challenge facing all Christian churches is to be communities that nurture chastity and assist all Christians in abstaining from fornication. The church must do this both by supporting marriages and also by encouraging the growing number of single people (including those attracted to people of the same sex) to live lives of abstinence.

3.7 This may appear as unreasonably tough, and inevitably any community with such ‘norms’ will have to deal sensitively and with grace towards all those who fall short in this regard. Many single people, including some vowed celibates, fail to live in chastity and holiness and instead enter into sexual relationships; there are also many marriages which are ‘unchaste’ because unfaithful or vicious. But the principle

is not vitiated by this, or by the fact that illicit experiences may at times contain some positive features. It is not true that sexual relationships outside marriage *only* have the nature of sin. The question is rather whether the Church can legitimately bless any non-marital sexual relationship.

Homosexual ‘orientation’: meaning and causation

3.8 This moral language concerning sexual conduct must now be related to the (also often imprecise) language concerning ‘sexuality’. The question the Church is being asked to address is what chastity means for the ‘homosexual’ person. In order to answer this it is necessary to respond to the call for a greater understanding of ‘homosexuality’. A central argument of revisionists is that traditional Christian understandings of the homosexual condition are in error. Once this ignorance is dispelled, it is argued, the Church should revise her traditional teaching and practice: only so can the Church speak truthfully to ‘homosexual’ people and provide them with a path of chastity and holiness.

3.9 In particular, reference is often made to ‘homosexual orientation’. The nature of such an appeal needs to be clarified. It assumes a sure knowledge of the experience of same-sex attraction. This is not an insight gained either from divine revelation or from the Church’s Tradition. Rather it is based on a particular (but widely contested) interpretation within current Western society.¹⁵ *STANDS* spoke much more carefully of ‘sexual *affections*’ and reminded us that ‘the interpretation of homosexual emotion and behaviour is a Christian task still inadequately addressed’. In order to explore this further, there are two areas, often confused, where terminology and analysis need to be distinguished: the language of ‘*orientation*’ itself and the language of *causation*.

3.10 Any reference to ‘homosexual orientation’ must be set within a wider category of ‘sexual orientation’ rather than simply understood as the opposite of the ‘norm’ of ‘heterosexual orientation’. ‘Sexual orientation’ then needs to be further defined in terms of a person’s sexual desires and dispositions. It is then necessary to be much more cautious in categorizations of sexual orientation. A simple bi-polar division of humanity into those with *homo*-sexual and those with *hetero*-sexual orientations is increasingly understood to be inadequate. Human beings exhibit a more varied and fluid spectrum of sexual desires and dispositions. Over-simplification here must be avoided, so that fundamental errors are not built into Christian debates.

3.11 Once the meaning of ‘sexual orientation’ is understood in these terms, the relation of sexual orientation to personal *identity* needs to be explored. Here there is a long-standing debate between ‘essentialists’ and ‘constructionists’. A major study of the phenomenon of sexual orientation initially defines these groups as follows:

Are sexual orientations merely arbitrary groupings, or do they refer to something ‘deep’ about human nature? ...Essentialism is the view that sexual orientations are deep categories of human nature, while constructionism is the view that they are not.¹⁶

A constructionist acknowledges of course that sexual attraction and sexual practice between people of the same sex occurs across time and space in different cultures. She denies, however, that ‘the homosexual’ is a trans-cultural universal category applicable to some human beings in all societies. Instead she reminds us that the constructs of ‘sexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’ are very recent arrivals in human thought: there is enormous variety between cultures concerning the way same-sex erotic love is understood, concerning the categories used in relation to it, and even the experiences themselves. This variety must be acknowledged and all such constructions of the phenomenon of same-sex love critically evaluated in the light of Scripture.

3.12 There will not be a fruitful theological discussion of the homosexual phenomenon unless and until this debate among essentialists and constructionists is properly understood and engaged. A greater clarity must be achieved as to the theological significance to be given to the category of ‘sexual orientation’ in a Christian account of humanity made in God’s image.¹⁷ Paradoxically, much of the current ecclesial argument for revising the Church’s teaching presupposes an *essentialist* understanding, whereas many theologians, pastors and secular writers are persuaded that a *constructionist* understanding is preferable.¹⁸ The apparently foundational rock on which much ‘revisionist’ argument builds – the existence within human kind of a group of ‘gay people’ for whom the Church must therefore institute liturgical rites – may turn out to be nothing but sand. A better theological account would hold, with *STANDS*, that

At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as ‘a’ homosexual or ‘a’ heterosexual; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation.¹⁹

This is an incredibly important insight, questioning the validity of the much vaunted claim to an innate homosexual identity. From this perspective the lack of clarity about the homosexual experience is perhaps only to be expected. This should cause us to have severe misgivings about revising the Church’s teaching on the basis of what amounts to but *one* interpretation of that experience. Should the Church be giving its support to one particular contemporary social construction of the phenomenon of same-sex attraction?

3.13 As for the *causation* of ‘orientation’, the ‘nature’ versus ‘nurture’ debate continues within both the Church and wider society. Some are persuaded that biological causation is the primary, if not sole, explanatory factor (*e.g.* hormonal, genetic or neurological).²⁰ Others emphasize psychological and sociological factors (*e.g.* deficiencies in relationship with the same-sex parent or childhood socialization in the opposite gender role which leads to the same sex appearing exotic and later erotic).²¹ Many are persuaded that a *multi-factorial* account has to be given in order to do justice to the diversity of ‘sexual orientations’ and individual life-stories.²²

3.14 The Church can claim no special insight here. Instead the Church must draw with discernment on the available scientific research while taking care to avoid letting its actions and teaching be shaped by as yet tentative findings on the origins and nature of ‘sexual orientation’.²³ Even when greater clarity is reached through further scientific enquiry, however, the Church must avoid drawing false conclusions from science. Although certain findings may lead to greater understanding and different pastoral responses, scientific findings in and of themselves cannot determine the Church’s moral teaching or public liturgies. Were greater understanding of same-sex attraction to point to biological causes, that in itself would not provide sufficient justification for formal recognition of same-sex unions.²⁴

Conclusion and Challenge

3.15 In summary, any argument for revising traditional teaching and endorsing same-sex unions is insufficient when based on our claim *to understand better* the experience of those who identify themselves as homosexual. There are as yet too many unanswered questions to justify a revision of the Church’s traditional stance *on this basis alone*. Although many revisionists claim that our knowledge of homosexuality requires a reshaping of the Christian tradition, in fact, ‘many competing interpretations of the phenomena can be found in contemporary discussion, none of them with an unchallengeable basis in scientific data’.²⁵ There is still much more to learn. Every account of ‘homosexual orientation’, its nature and its causes, must be carefully scrutinized not only for its scientific credibility but also because the Church, faced with any new theory, must ‘put the question whether it is adequate to the understanding of human nature and its redemption that the gospel proclaims’.²⁶

3.16 In the light of these clarifications, the heart of the moral debate can now be discerned. Those upholding traditional teaching must explain how this teaching, with its two callings of abstinent singleness and heterosexual marriage, relates to those who experience same-sex attraction and perhaps therefore understand themselves as homosexual (3.17-19). Those challenging traditional teaching need to show why the tradition needs to be revised and be clearer as to how any proposed alternative relates to that tradition and is a faithful development of it. As we have seen, one solution is a strictly *non-marital* structuring of homosexual relationships, based either on allowing great freedom in how to structure sexual partnerships or on ‘friendship’ (cf. 2.9). Perhaps the most favoured and cogent alternative, however, is one which advocates same-sex unions by relating them in some way to traditional marriage. Within this category two approaches can be distinguished:

- ❖ *either* the strictly *marital* option (cf. 2.11), which seeks to show how monogamous same-sex unions can be understood as a ‘chaste’ pattern of life *within* the traditional ‘vocation’ of marriage (such that ‘marriage’ does not require partners of the opposite sex and ‘marriage’ as a term is simply *extended* so as to include same-sex couples);

- ❖ *or* the *quasi-marital* option (cf. 2.12), which develops a theological rationale for, and gives moral shape to, a *third* calling (in addition to singleness and het-

erosexual marriage) within which Christians can live a holy life of faithful witness; this usually involves some form of ‘covenantal’ union and some disciplines parallel to those found in heterosexual marriage.

It will be important to keep these distinctions in mind as we now trace the way homosexuality relates to the two traditional callings of singleness and heterosexual marriage and ask what would be involved in the innovation of recognizing either a marital or a quasi-marital same-sex union.

C. Homosexuality & Singleness

3.17 The Church, it is often claimed, must now revise its previous understanding. If it does not, then effectively it is claiming that *a person with a homosexual orientation is automatically pointed to celibacy*. In much contemporary western culture such a claim is not without rhetorical power. Yet, in the light of the preceding discussion, it contains two errors: it assumes a sure understanding of homosexual ‘orientation’ as something ontological and fixed which should be embraced as part of a person’s identity; secondly in its use of ‘celibacy’ it forgets that the Church’s traditional teaching requires ‘abstinence’ on the part of *all* who are single. Strictly, ‘celibacy’ is a sub-set within this – the chosen path of commitment to non-marriage. Perhaps, then, ‘homosexual orientation’ is a pointer to abstinent *singleness*?

3.18 Although the call to marriage cannot be wholly excluded, most who identify as ‘homosexual’ may conclude that it is wisest not to marry, viewing their ‘homosexual orientation’ as a sign that they are not called to heterosexual marriage. Yet this in itself does not represent a new and unique experience that requires a change in the Church’s teaching and practice. Some people attracted to the opposite sex also submit to the disciplines of singleness throughout their life. Many of these do so reluctantly and with no personal sense of divine call, although initial resentment may, by God’s grace, be transformed over time into a greater acceptance or welcoming of their single state as indeed a divine *charisma*. A whole range of personal characteristics and/or circumstances (some nothing to do with homosexuality) may signal to a person that they are not called (and likely never shall be) to marriage. Yet the discovery of such situations does not require the Church to confer legitimacy on an ‘alternative’ form of supposed ‘chastity’ adapted to their situation. At some point in their lives most people have to struggle to follow the demands of chastity within the single life and many struggle within the married life. In many congregations there will be a large number of unmarried people—not only those who experience same-sex attraction. Faced with many (including those who identify as homosexual) who are not married but who wish to find a pattern of life which is not solitary or devoid of intimacy and love, the Church must listen, guide, support and be a means of grace to them as they seek to live in chastity and holiness as single people within the community of the Body of Christ.

D. Homosexuality & Marriage

3.19 The greatest caution must be exercised before recommending marriage to those whose predominant sexual affections are currently for the same sex. Serious damage can be caused by not recognising that those who experience strong same-sex attraction are usually best encouraged to follow a life of abstinent singleness (even when there is no personal commitment to ‘celibacy’ strictly defined). Nevertheless, singleness is not the only calling. There remains heterosexual marriage.²⁷ Despite reference by some Christians to ‘those who know themselves to be irreversibly homosexual’, the peculiar form of self-knowledge claimed here needs much greater foundation and substantiation. Certainly the Church cannot conclude from such a claim that it must alter its traditional teaching about humanity and the right ordering of sexual desires. In particular, this claimed truth about the homosexual experience must be related to the wider essentialist/constructionist debate (3.10-12) and discussion about the causation of same-sex attraction (3.13-14). It is a simple fact that some people both within and outside the Christian Church have experienced homosexual attraction at some point in their lives and yet are able to live faithfully within heterosexual marriage. Presumably most ‘revisionists’ would expect a married Christian who becomes attracted to someone of the same sex to continue to keep their marriage vows rather than view themselves as thereby exempt from the discipline of marital faithfulness because they are homosexual. There is therefore not necessarily an absolute incompatibility and impossible conflict between being married and the experience of same-sex attractions.

E. Homosexuality & Same-sex unions

3.20 A major argument advanced by those dissatisfied with this traditionalist response to homosexual people is that the Church’s Tradition and the reality of same-sex unions are much better fitted to each other than many believe. It is claimed that same-sex unions can be described in such a way as to enable them to be consonant with a traditional understanding of marriage and its disciplines. Some will follow the *marital* option and call this ‘same-sex marriage’; others will dislike the language of ‘marriage’ and so see this as a new, third way of life in the form of some *quasi-marital* covenantal relationship (cf. 3.16).

3.21 The fundamental claim here is that what is significant within the Christian understanding of a chaste sexual relationship is defined not by its structure as ‘opposite-sex’ but rather by the moral qualities and disciplines exemplified within the relationship.²⁸

3.22 In relation to same-sex unions, this argument faces an initial (possibly rectifiable) practical challenge. The limited evidence that exists suggests that many (perhaps most) quasi-marital same-sex relationships (certainly among men) are *not* committed to being exclusive and permanent in the manner of Christian heterosexual marriage.²⁹ This is precisely why some revisionists have argued against imposing the traditional disciplines of marriage on gay couples: it is simply untrue to the reality of

their relationships and so a non-marital structure is to be preferred (cf. 2.9).

3.23 There are also more fundamental theological challenges. Whether by redefining marriage or creating a third quasi-marital calling alongside it, this argument effectively sidelines two key elements within the traditional Christian understanding of marriage and declares these to be inessential for the right ordering of our sexual relationships. First, it denies that such relationships should be the bringing together of male and female as created by God to be his image in his world. The marital imagery of Scripture (3.2) is inextricably tied to the *otherness* God has established within his creation covenant by creating us in community as male and female.

The primal form of all co-human community is the (not only ‘nuptial’, but the whole natural) counterparts of man and woman.³⁰

The coming together of one man and one woman in marriage is therefore of great theological significance as it witnesses to God’s creation purpose in making us male and female and symbolises the Creator’s covenant with his creation that is other than him. The joining of one man and one woman in marriage (highlighted by Jesus in his own teaching) provides the most concrete and material sign that we grow in self-knowledge through relationships in which we experience that which is distinctly other than ourselves rather than through that which is fundamentally the same as us. In a fallen world, the reconciliation of opposites is both a gift and a task given by God through his redemption of us in Christ and this is symbolised in the union of male and female within lifelong faithful marriage.³¹ To redefine ‘marriage’ so that this is not part of the calling or to bless another form of sexual relationship alongside marriage is to destroy or undermine the Church’s witness to the gospel in this realm.

3.24 Secondly, the revisionist view denies that the sexual relationship blessed by God is to be a relationship of love which in God’s creation purpose is open to the gift of new life (see further 4.23-25 below). Whatever goods may be present in a union of two men or two women, such a relationship is unable to embody and witness to these two theological truths. This may partly explain the correlation that Scripture draws between same-sex sexual behaviour and idolatry.

3.25 The Christian tradition’s emphasis, therefore, on the bringing together of two people of the *opposite* sex in marriage is not based on a narrow and non-scriptural theory about natural complementarity which only relates to physical differentiation without regard to psychological structures. On the contrary, the psychological structures that might lead a person to view themselves as inherently ‘homosexual’ are themselves much less firmly founded than the physical differentiation of male and female that is basic to creation order and essential to Christian marriage (cf. 3.13-15). The physical differentiation between male and female within marriage represents a recognition that the otherness of being male and female is inscribed in the goodness of our created bodies. In contrast, the psychological ‘knowledge’ that one is homosexual or heterosexual represents some form of inner *gnosis* unable to be subjected to public scrutiny and verification.

F. Conclusion

3.26 Any decision by the Church to confer legitimacy on same-sex unions cannot be viewed *solely* in terms of pragmatic, pastoral responses to our cultural and missionary context or embraced as simply the practical outworking of the inclusiveness of divine love. No, such a decision has significant *theological* and pastoral implications. This is equally true whether it is accomplished by creating some *third quasi-marital* way of holy living (in addition to marriage and singleness) or by *reconfiguring the understanding of marriage* so as to embrace couples of the same sex. The former *undermines* the institution of marriage by presenting an alternative form of sexual relationship as legitimate for humans made in the image of God; while the latter strictly *destroys* marriage by removing from its definition the bringing together of male and female. As yet, revisionists are not agreed as to which of these they are proposing. Significantly, neither path has authorization from within Scripture or the Christian Tradition. Instead arguments are based on an appeal to experience—despite the fact there is no consensus (even among revisionists) about how that experience is to be explained (whether scientifically, psychologically or culturally).

3.27 Moreover, even if questions about ‘homosexual orientation’ were consistently to provide the ‘desired’ answers for revisionists, this would not entail such unions being given ecclesial recognition. At most, this would give some weight to those who would allow a more permissive and understanding stance by the Church towards those who entered such unions (believing them to be the best way of ordering their sexual desires, despite the Church’s teaching).³² Any decision by the Church to establish a rite of blessing on a way of life cannot be authorized by scientific findings. Intimate human sexual relationships are called to symbolize the reconciliation and redemption accomplished in Christ and must be authorized by the scriptural witness to that gospel.

3.28 If the Church is being asked simply to bless same-sex unions which have no clear theological rationale or moral disciplines, then these explicitly *non-marital* relationships would represent a totally new way of life. This alternative lifestyle will have been structured by the choices and agreements of autonomous individuals. As a result, these relationships will be open to wide variation and negotiation—as is all too clear from some of those liturgies which have been devised and which are now being used by some Christians. This is a route to incoherence and meaninglessness—developing a rite that has no agreed meaning beyond that which the two persons choose to give it at any one time. This is ‘do-it-yourself’ religion.³³

3.29 If instead the Church is asked *either* to create new additional rites that are quasi-marital in form (transferring the Christian understanding of marriage to same-sex couples) *or* to redefine ‘marriage’ so that it can be entered by couples of the same sex, then there are still some imposing difficulties. In particular:

- ❖ In instituting such a new rite the Church would no longer be affirming that chastity is to be found only in abstinent singleness or sexual faithfulness to one

person of the opposite sex. It would thereby deny its historic and biblical teaching that all sex outside heterosexual marriage is a form of fornication and sexual immorality.

❖ The Church would be giving people who enter a sexual relationship the opportunity to *choose for themselves* whether the disciplines of Christian discipleship are best undertaken in their particular case with someone of the *same* sex or the *opposite* sex. In short, the Church would find herself presenting people with a personal *choice* (between different structures for sexual relationship) rather than addressing all people as sexual beings with a divine *promise* and *command*.

❖ The Church would no longer be proclaiming the normative sexual ordering of male and female as given in creation and reaffirmed by Christ himself (Matt. 19:4-6).

❖ The Church would instead be establishing a supposedly more ‘normative’ distinction within humanity than that given in our creation as male and female—a distinction based on the unsubstantiated and highly contested concept of sexual ‘orientation’.

3.30 Such a scenario is clearly one that cannot be undertaken lightly. Although consonant with certain aspects of Western liberalism and individualism, it represents a fundamental reconfiguration within Christian theology and anthropology which many would consider amounted to apostasy. Therefore, even if the revisionist stance taken is the more conservative one of appealing to the tradition’s teaching about marriage and applying the disciplines of marriage in some form to same-sex unions, there is still a radical revision of our understanding of what it means to be human, of the Christian sexual ethic, and an undermining of marriage as a divinely ordained created institution.

4. LISTENING TO SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION: Homosexual practice in Biblical Theology

A. The Teaching of Scripture

4.1 From the issue of marriage and singleness we turn more directly to the biblical teaching concerning homosexual practice. Does the Bible give us any clear guidance here? We affirm that it does—not because of a few proof texts isolated from their real context, but because such texts cohere with the deeper issues of marriage and sexuality outlined above. These are two sides of the same coin. For many Anglicans any official blessing of same-sex unions not only raises major theological issues relating to humanity and marriage, it is also viewed as in direct opposition to explicit biblical teaching. This should be quite sufficient for loyal Anglicans to express their misgivings. For the historic understanding of authority in our Church, which defines our self-identity, is quite plain:

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to *ordain any thing that is contrary to God’s Word written*, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another (Article 20).

4.2 If one asks the question whether the biblical writers disapprove of those same-sex activities *to which they refer*, then ‘the answer is a straightforward and uncontroversial “Yes”’.³⁴ The only debate here is whether the biblical writers were referring to the precise kind of homosexual practice which is now being advocated. That they speak against any homosexual practice they mention, however, is beyond dispute.

4.3 Some advocates of same-sex unions are quite open about the departure from Scripture that they are proposing. They concur with the words of the Lambeth resolution that homosexual practice is ‘incompatible with Scripture’.³⁵ Other advocates are more nuanced in their approach to Scripture: perhaps the activities condemned in the Bible do not include those in loving quasi-marital relationships? Or perhaps the biblical writers are only speaking of heterosexuals who indulge in homosexual acts contrary to *their own nature* and sexual ‘orientation’? Among both types of revisionist, however, there is often heard the argument that those who reject all blessing of intimate same-sex relations on the basis of an appeal to Scripture must be basing their arguments on a fundamentalist appeal to a small number of unclear texts. Is this really so? Are the biblical texts really ‘ambiguous’? Does Scripture as a whole lack a consistent witness?

4.4 Whichever ‘revisionist’ approach to the Bible is taken, any ecclesial actions conferring legitimacy on same-sex unions would certainly go *beyond* the plain sense of Scripture—perhaps even *against* it.³⁶ The literature on the traditional biblical texts is now vast and cannot be summarised or critiqued here.³⁷ What follows is a theological reading of the relevant biblical material (according to the six main ‘acts’ or

‘epochs’ within biblical theology). It outlines the biblical material in such a way as to explain the rationale for the traditional view upheld at Lambeth 1998, whilst also responding to some revisionist critiques.

Act 1: Creation

4.5 The narrative in Genesis 2 portrays the creation of male and female as of central significance to humanity. As already argued above in some detail (in section 3), this is fundamental to a Christian understanding of marriage. The delight of the man in the woman who is ‘other’ presents a pattern of relationship which is more than merely descriptive; it is normative. This belief probably lies behind the Levitical prohibitions which condemn a man who ‘lies with a man as with a woman’ (Lev: 18.22; 20.13). The creation narrative certainly forms the rationale for Paul’s theological critique of homosexual conduct in Romans 1. There is here a limit which the Christian Church must respect and a norm to which its liturgies must bear witness:

If it is asked to adopt some alternative myth of creation-order to replace that in which Adam acclaims Eve as ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’, it can only refuse.³⁹

Act 2: The Fall

4.6 Paul’s account in Romans 1 provides the fullest biblical theological understanding of homosexuality. Paul views it as a sign of God’s wrath upon rebellious and fallen humanity. Paul here is saying that ‘all sexual desire is profoundly corrupted by the false worship that has marred our nature’. Also, as even some revisionists acknowledge, ‘his subsequent reference to homosexual desires and acts places them within the *general disorder of human desire* that is our fallen condition’.⁴⁰

4.7 As noted above (2.6) this passage speaks pertinently to what many outside the West see as the wider idolatries of Western society. It is *not* to be read and applied in terms of individual biography. As *STANDS* says:

For the biblical writers the phenomena of homosexual behaviour are not addressed solely as wilfully perverse acts but in generalised terms, and are located within the broader context of human idolatry.⁴¹

4.8 Nevertheless, a theology of sin and the Fall stands as a corrective to many arguments put forward by advocates of same-sex unions. There is, for example, a tendency to downplay the seriousness of sin and its corruption of the human heart and will. ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?’ (Jer. 17:9). In these circumstances we cannot straightforwardly trust the affection of our hearts, nor assume that ‘what comes naturally’ to us is right. It may be that there has been a corruption or weakening of our wills, making it seem impossible to will that which we should (cf. Rom. 7:14-25; John 8:34). This means we need great care in speaking about what is ‘natural’. It is often argued that, if homosexual relationships are ‘natural’ for certain people, then the Church must confer legitimacy upon them. But is this a truly Christian account, allowing sufficiently for our *fallen* natures? ‘Who I am’ is itself a category that is open to judgement and questions: it can never be an impregnable fortress above challenge and scrutiny.

Far more work would have to be done ...to establish the conclusion that ‘God made me this way’; for this does not follow from the premises that ‘God made me’ and that ‘I am a homosexual’. Interestingly this is true regardless of whether homosexual orientation is seen to be the result of nature, nurture or choice. Even if it were the result of nature, it would not thereby be demonstrably the will of God, for nature is fallen...Opponents of homosexual practice, on the other hand, should realise that their case does not depend upon denying the strong sense of some homosexuals that their sexual orientation is part of their constitution. The debate would proceed on surer and more constructive grounds if it were recognised that those who seek to argue back from the *status quo* to the creational intentions of God, thereby bypassing the fall, find their way blocked by the cherubim and flaming sword.⁴³

4.9 Interpreted biblically, the human experience of same-sex desire reminds us that in all our lives, including all our sexual lives, ‘sin arises from something far deeper than wrong decisions. Sinful acts originate from a state of deep disorder within human nature’.⁴⁴ Thus we all constantly find a power within us which ‘frustrates our relationships and encourages us to pursue empty goals that cannot satisfy the soul’. So ‘homosexuals should not be singled out as especially heinous, nor should others refuse to see their own equally deep internal disorder’. Rather Christian homosexuals can ‘help keep the Church honest about human nature’.⁴⁵ Such a biblically based theological understanding would be undermined if ever the Church were to bless same-sex unions and so give credibility to the theologically flawed presumption that in our fallen world ‘what comes naturally’ must be right.

Act 3: The Life of Israel

4.10 Good same-sex covenantal *friendships* existed within Israel (*e.g.* David and Jonathan; see 1 Sam. 18:1ff; 2 Sam. 1:26). These instances illustrate how biblical culture and society had quite different understandings of ‘love’ to those found in Western culture today (whether ‘gay’ or ‘straight’). Indeed it may have been able to speak so positively about same-sex friendship precisely because it was so strict concerning the impropriety of homosexual practice—a *greater freedom because bound within a clearer framework*. For indeed, in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern cultures, homosexual practice was not tolerated; nor was it given significance in Israel’s cult or in its wider society.⁴⁶ Why was this? The answer must be that it did not reflect God’s creational purposes—nor indeed his pattern for his redeemed people living within the fallen world. The strength of both language and penalty in Leviticus demonstrates a strong opposition to homosexual practices. And the narrative of the visitors to Sodom, although rightly now understood to have little *direct* bearing on most current debates (as it focuses on abusive and violent behaviour), has also been read by many Jews and Christians down through the centuries as an important text in relation to same-sex sexual activity.

Act 4: The Ministry of Christ

4.11 The example of Christ’s faithful, abstinent life of singleness is of vital importance in shaping the Christian vision of sexual behaviour (3.3). The man who was free from sin was yet bound by personal discipline. His teaching on sexual matters only strengthens Israel’s traditional understandings—for example, in relation to adultery ‘in the heart’ and divorce (Matt. 5:27ff, Mark 10:1-12). Although Jesus appears to have had a special affection for the ‘beloved disciple’ (probably John) there is no hint

that this love was expressed sexually. Instead, Jesus here offers a breath-taking vision for true and fulfilled humanness expressed powerfully in self-giving love which abstained from sexual relationships.

4.12 Even so, Jesus welcomes sexual and other outcasts (e.g. Luke 7:36ff; John 4). He rejects the call for society to implement Israel's strict penal code against offenders, and offers a gracious acceptance, forgiveness and transformation of sexual and other sinners without thereby accepting or condoning their sin (e.g. John 8:1-11). Yes, Jesus speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah, but he does so in order to warn against rejection of God's messengers and makes no explicit reference to the attempted homosexual assault (Matt. 10:15).

4.13 There is thus no explicit reference to homosexuality in Jesus' teaching according to the Gospels. This warns us against over-emphasizing this particular sin. Yet this silence does not suggest that Jesus therefore disagreed with Israel's traditional understanding. On the contrary, as with the issue of idolatry (another key topic not expressly recorded in Jesus' teaching), it is wisest to assume that Jesus fully embraced his biblical heritage at this point. After all, when convinced that the biblical tradition was in danger of being misinterpreted, he was not afraid to speak out. Moreover, given the weight of the biblical tradition within which he ministered, his references to *porneia* (Matt. 5:32; 15:19; 19:9) almost certainly would have been heard to include a reference to *any* sexual activity outside heterosexual marriage. Jesus was clearly willing to challenge many traditional boundary-markers (especially those that continued to mark off Israel from the Gentiles in a way which would not pertain in the new kingdom of God); but this issue did not fall in that category. Instead he explicitly reaffirmed the God-given goodness of the marital union between a man and a woman, thereby endorsing its significance in his kingdom. His kingdom was inclusive in its intention and welcome, but not without shape or moral boundaries. For Anglicans who confess him as the eternal Son of God, Jesus' own teaching and his example in relation to God's self-revelation through Scripture is not unimportant.⁴⁸ 'The person who loves me will obey my commands' (John 14:21); or, as John, his 'beloved disciple', would put it, 'whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did' (1 John 2:6). The Incarnation does not give an indiscriminate affirmation to *all* human potentialities.

Act 5: The Era of the Church

4.14 As the gospel spread into the Gentile world, the Church was faced almost immediately with the question of whether homosexual practices were acceptable.⁴⁹ There were some areas where the early Church relaxed Jewish norms: thus Paul had a 'permissive' approach to certain issues (e.g. food offered to idols, circumcision, food laws). Yet he only used this more relaxed approach when overturning customs that built up the 'dividing-wall of hostility' between Jew and Gentile. When it came to matters of sexual conduct, however, there was no compromise. For these were understood to be based on God's purpose for humanity in creation and not on his temporal election of Israel as a distinct people among the nations. Pagan converts were therefore to see homosexual conduct as part of the category of sexual immorality

which *all* disciples of Christ were called to avoid—even though this would mark them out from wider culture (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:3ff; Eph. 5:5ff; Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 6:9ff).⁵⁰ In this respect the Christian Church was a genuinely new 'third race' (*tertium genus*). Following the example of Jesus, the New Testament Church welcomed all, relativizing the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, whilst at the same time preserving a distinctive ethical challenge.

4.15 There are undoubtedly legitimate questions about particular texts: What is the meaning of the key, and quite unusual, Greek terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*?⁵¹ To what extent were these prohibitions focused primarily on temple prostitution or perhaps on pederastic relationships between older men and youths?⁵² How much did a 'hierarchical' understanding of male and female relationships shape the rejection of sexual acts in which males were passive partners?⁵³ As a result it is important that the Church respects (and engages in serious dialogue with) individual Christians who see loving and committed same-sex relationships in our culture as lying outside the scope of these passages' condemnation. Nevertheless, the cumulative case against a restrictive reading of these texts is extremely strong. The early Church was, almost certainly, fully capable of making such distinctions if it so desired. It did not do so because of a more deep-rooted and theologically grounded objection to all homosexual practice, however loving or consensual. There is much evidence in this direction: for example, the apparent correlation between the list in 1 Timothy 1:10 and the Decalogue; the coining of the term used there and in 1 Corinthians 6:9 from the Levitical prohibitions; and the underlying rationale of the list in 1 Corinthians 6:9ff as 'a general *grasping beyond ordained boundaries* in the face of what God assigns as the self's due'.⁵⁴ Given the severe warning to those engaged in these acts (that 'they shall not enter the kingdom of God') and the designation of their appearance in society as a sign of God's wrath on human rebellion (Rom. 1), it is surely impossible for the Church positively to commend to its members and the world any relationship which includes homosexual conduct.

4.16 The primary New Testament text, Rom. 1:18ff, has already been noted (2.6, 4.6-8). It must again be emphasized that Paul is not here talking about individual life-stories. He is offering a critique of Gentile culture as a whole and as representative of fallen and unredeemed humanity within a disordered creation. Nor is Paul working with a concept of each individual having a personal (perhaps God-given) sexual nature which must shape any sexual expression on their part, as if homosexual acts are condemned here only when performed by 'heterosexuals'. The ancient world was well aware that some people were strongly attracted to the same sex;⁵⁵ but 'sexual orientation' and an individualized understanding of 'nature' are modern concepts which should not be read back into Paul's biblically-shaped understanding of humans as sexual beings. Attempts to do so have been convincingly refuted.⁵⁶ To suggest that, if the New Testament writers had known our categories, then they would have approved of homosexual relationships within these categories, is an unlikely argument from silence. Far more probably they knew of such homosexual relationships but refused to give them this special rationale and endorsement, continuing to see them as symptomatic of human sinfulness.

4.17 A further indicator as to the significance of Romans 1 is its inclusion of female same-sex activity in its portrayal (v. 26).⁵⁷ This is the only biblical reference to what we would term ‘lesbianism’. As such it provides strong evidence that Paul was not simply critiquing homosexual acts which were oppressive, pederastic or cultic. His critique operates at a more fundamental level. It is derived from a deeper understanding, both Jewish and biblical, of what it means to be created ‘male and female’ in the ‘image of God’. The apostolic witness concerning the expectations of the Early Church is, therefore, consistent and clear in its opposition to homosexual practice and all other non-marital sexual conduct.

Act 6: The ultimate New Creation

4.18 The eschatological vision held forth in the Gospels is one in which, although there is a resurrection body, ‘there is no giving and taking in marriage’ (Luke 20:34ff). This vision of the ‘kingdom of God’ evidently shaped the early Christian exaltation of celibacy (noted above 3.3), but what might this mean today? Here we must note the recent contribution of self-styled ‘queer theology’. For those within this movement this eschatological vision has been used in a novel way. In the Early Church the vision encouraged the establishment of a bodily and gendered life beyond sexual relationships in abstinent singleness and vowed celibacy. Now, however, it is being used to legitimate the development of non-marital forms of sexual relationships within the Church.⁵⁸

4.19 In response to ‘queer theology’ we can acknowledge that Scripture’s eschatological vision warns us against an idolatrous vision of marriage.⁵⁹ However, the use of this vision to deconstruct the traditional Christian vision of a life of chastity and holiness (thereby promoting alternative forms of permitted sexual relationships) is flawed. The apostolic teaching clearly was not so eschatological that it believed our identity as male and female was stripped away through our baptism into Christ. Indeed, it may be a false belief, similar to this, that led to some of the errors in Corinth which Paul (especially in 1 Cor. 5-7) seeks to rectify. It is clear that the apostles continued to address and counsel believers as men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers; and, as we have seen (above 3.2), nuptial imagery remains of great importance in New Testament Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Attempts, therefore, to justify same-sex and other non-marital sexual relationships on the basis of a transcending of gender difference in Christ must be reckoned illegitimate: we remain in our bodies. Such views are also very paradoxical for, although the claim is made that gender difference has been eliminated, sexual desire and relationships all too evidently still remain.

Summary of Scriptural teaching

4.20 This overview of the biblical material makes it clear that the traditional interpretation, which has included all homosexual practice as one of a number of sins against chastity, is not based on naïve proof-texting. On the contrary, it is an intelligent, cogent and coherent reading of the biblical witness. Its roots go deep into a biblically shaped vision of God’s purposes for humans as sexual beings. Those who wish to overturn that vision by establishing rites to bless same-sex unions can claim no

biblical authorization for their stance. Such advocates are not flowing with the biblical stream, but against it.

B. The Church’s Tradition

4.21 The interpretation of homosexuality in the light of Scripture proposed above is, of course, not a new one. It stands in continuity with the Church’s reading of Scripture throughout the centuries. Yes, some modern authors have attempted to moderate or reinterpret the Christian Tradition’s attitude to same-sex unions;⁶⁰ others have criticized its understanding of the phenomenon of same-sex love.⁶¹ Yet it remains beyond serious dispute that ‘whenever the Church was confronted with sexual practices involving persons of the same-sex, Christian teachers spoke out against such behaviours...[They] never expressed moral approval of, or even indifference to, same-sex activity’.⁶²

4.22 In principle, of course, the Christian Tradition might be in need of correction and development in this area (as in others such as usury, slavery and the role of women). However, it does not follow from the fact that significant adaptation has taken place in these areas that it must also take place in the area of homosexuality. Instead there is a significant contrast between homosexuality and these other issues. With these other issues there is arguably a diversity of approaches within the Bible itself and often a trajectory heading in a certain direction. Not so with homosexuality: the witness of Scripture is consistently and strongly negative in relation to homosexual conduct; it views it as a sign of human fallenness.⁶³ If same-sex behaviour is to be given legitimacy within the Church a much more substantial critique of the Tradition and its reading of Scripture must therefore be provided than has hitherto been advanced.

The Tradition critiqued

4.23 The most frequent critique of the Tradition lies in questions relating to contraception and non-reproductive sexual activity. In the last 50 years the traditional Christian sexual ethic has been modified within Protestantism through acceptance of contraception and the consequent recognition of the legitimacy of *intentionally non-procreative* sexual acts. The point can validly be made that:

If we are looking for a sexual ethic that can be seriously informed by our Bible, there is a good deal to steer us away from assuming that reproductive sex is a solitary norm, however important and theologically significant it may be.⁶⁴

4.24 It is, however, wrong to imply that, because the Church now accepts the legitimacy of contraception, the Tradition’s absolute condemnation of same-sex relations of intimacy no longer has any force or credibility. It is a very long and difficult journey from the Anglican Church’s judgment that married couples are not forbidden the use of contraception in certain contexts to the view that the Church should therefore also confer legitimacy on same-sex unions. The most that can be said is that, once Christians accept that there may be legitimate forms of sexual expression which are

not open to procreation, then further thinking is required as to the purpose and meaning of sexual acts. In particular, the long tradition of Christian language of ‘unnatural’ sexual acts was focused too narrowly on their closure to the gift of life. If, therefore, the language of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ is to retain a place in Christian discourse about sexual conduct (and Romans 1 provides it with some biblical warrant) then the meaning of such terms needs to be examined further.⁶⁵ It is, however, quite possible to adapt the tradition by using ‘unnatural’ not for every non-procreative sexual act viewed in isolation but rather for decisions intentionally to make anti-procreative choices by channeling one’s sexual powers into an inherently non-procreative sexual relationship.

4.25 The argument above (4.1-20) makes clear, however, that homosexual practices are rejected by Scripture not because they lack procreative potential but for much deeper reasons. The Tradition is therefore rooted in a much broader biblical picture and is established within a foundational creation order of humanity as male and female. Nevertheless, in a contraceptive age where the relational and unitive goods of sexual intercourse are given great emphasis, the procreative power of sex within God’s purposes for human beings should not be treated as wholly irrelevant to this discussion. The fact that every same-sex union is inherently non-procreative means that there remains a significant difference between all such forms of sexual relationship and heterosexual marriage (even if within the latter the couple accept a place for contracepted sexual intercourse as part of family planning).

4.26 Insights which focus the meaning of sex on the reality of sexual joy are certainly to be highly valued. The mutual exploration of the grace found in an experience of knowing both loving delight for another and being in turn desired by them must not be discounted or minimized. Yet, if the meaning and purpose of intimate sexual expression is *limited* to these things and sexual activity is granted legitimacy (or not) *on this criterion alone*, then there is a real danger of us imbibing a novel view of sex whose reductionist and unbiblical perspective mirrors that which some (wrongly) find in the Tradition’s emphasis on procreation.

4.27 Having said this, it must be acknowledged that important ‘goods’ can be discerned in same-sex relationships (as indeed in some illicit forms of heterosexual relationships). Something is wrong when the Church refuses to acknowledge that two people in a same-sex relationship may well find they ‘grow steadily in fidelity and in mutual caring, understanding and support...and achieve great, even heroic sacrifice and devotion’.⁶⁶ The fact that certain human practices are not wholly devoid of good is, however, not in itself sufficient warrant for the Church to confer legitimacy upon them or commend the practice itself (just as the existence of ‘honour among thieves’ does not legitimate the practice of theft). If the Church refuses to confer legitimacy, this is not to deny that such ‘relationships may have moral integrity in varying degrees without the Church’s formal authorization’.⁶⁷ The act of blessing same-sex unions, however, would be tantamount to saying that these good qualities are displayed in homosexual relations *as homosexual relations*. But this we cannot do. If the Church were to say this, then it would be failing to speak the truth in love according to Scripture and the Christian Tradition.

C. Conclusion

4.28 So there are powerful biblical and theological arguments to justify the historic Christian understanding, reaffirmed clearly at Lambeth, that sexually active homosexual relationships do not represent a faithful witness in chastity and holiness for disciples of Christ. These are not based simply on a matter of a few proof-texts. Those texts carry the weight they do because they represent the *uniform* testimony of Scripture and are part of a *wider* theologically formed understanding of homosexuality. As a result, the Church is fully warranted in reaffirming ‘the judgment, so strongly supported by Scripture, that in the sexual act performed between persons of the same-sex we confront a manifestation of the fallen and sinful character of our humanity’.⁶⁸

4.29 Those convinced that God speaks through Scripture against *all* forms of homosexual practice can therefore only view the choice facing the Church in relation to same-sex blessings as one of whether to obey God or to disobey Him. Yes, the Church must listen respectfully to the experience of all people, acknowledging that she still has much to learn about the broader homosexual experience. In particular she must hear from those who experience same-sex attraction, but who seek faithfully to follow the often difficult path of Christian discipleship in obedience to Scripture and the Church’s teaching. Above all, however, she must continue in faithful listening to the voice of Scripture and, because the Body of Christ is ruled by the Word of Christ, the Church cannot bless that which God in Scripture has declared wrong. From this perspective, no part of the Anglican Communion could bless same-sex unions without thereby acting *against Scripture* and rejecting its authority by ordaining something ‘contrary to God’s Word written’ (Article 20).

4.30 It must, however, be acknowledged that there is a small minority in the Church who hear God through Scripture speaking only against *some* forms of homosexual practice. They conclude that the biblical texts regularly cited in debate do not explicitly address all homosexual practice as we know it today. As a result the Church is held to be free to make a more positive assessment of same-sex unions. Those who sincerely believe this must nevertheless acknowledge there is no positive scriptural commendation of same-sex relationships; as a result the blessing of such relationships, even if not strictly against Scripture, would clearly *go beyond Scripture*. To justify such action therefore requires more than convincing people that Scripture, despite appearances, is actually silent on this issue. Those who seek to revise the tradition must articulate a clear account of precisely in what contexts homosexual practice may be acceptable. They must also explain how such a reading of Scripture does not undermine or destroy traditional teaching about marriage and singleness (cf. section 3). Finally, they must convince the wider Church of the rightness of this proposal before acting on it (cf. section 6). For how can there be true union in the Body of Christ if one part of the Church declares a blessing on that which many other parts see as contrary to God’s will? This brings the public rites of the Church into disrepute and internal contradiction.

4.31 In particular, revisionists must do more than caricature the traditional rejection of same-sex unions as based simply on a narrow interpretation of a few texts. No, this rejection arises from within a biblically-rooted and theologically rich account of humanity. It is because they are guided by and living within this biblical story-line that traditionalists believe they must oppose the blessing of same-sex unions as against Scripture. The theological reading of biblical teaching on homosexual practice offered in this section potentially raises some substantive concerns about the unarticulated theological presuppositions and implications of revisionist proposals. These relate to some of the central themes of biblical truth noted in our opening section (1.9) and need to be addressed in the Church's ongoing discussion of this subject. For example:

❖ Scripture's witness to human sinfulness and fallenness not only forbids any of us to set ourselves up as others' judges, it warns us that our fallen human minds stand urgently in need of divine *Revelation*. In the biblical analysis of human personality we discover that we are easily misled concerning the truth about ourselves, and our 'natural' self-knowledge must be open to God's judgment. We therefore urgently need God's wisdom and guidance to tell us the truth about ourselves as sexual beings and how to live in freedom and truth in our sexual conduct. Is it plausible to remove from our current thinking all the biblical texts that appear to speak to aspects of the homosexual experience simply because they relate this to human sin? If we leave Scripture silent in this area, how does God reveal His will to His Church concerning that which is good?

❖ Our God is a God of *Redemption* who in Christ enters the human stage to deal with that in his world which he names as evil and to rescue us from our sin. The Incarnation is, of course, in one sense a divine affirmation of humanity—but not in a *carte blanche* manner, for it leads to the cross. On the cross God goes to the fullest depths of human sin, in loving identification but also in solemn judgment. He does not 'dress the wound of his people as though it were not serious' (Jer. 8:11), but offers radical surgery going to the roots of our dis-ease in order that we may be redeemed and re-made in Christ. How does a call to bless same-sex unions avoid the danger of failing to take seriously the power of sin and the power of God's grace in human lives? Does it appear to offer life and healing while sanctioning a path that has not adequately passed through the 'fire' of the cross?

❖ If the cross calls us to die to ourselves, then the good news of the *Resurrection* assures us that this is the way to true life, putting on the 'new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator' (Col. 3:10). There is certainly a foretaste of this resurrection life through experiencing the acceptance of the Christian community, but at its heart there is a saving *relationship* with God Himself with implications for eternity. Moreover, although the gospel is inclusive (in that all of us are welcomed and accepted as disordered sinners by God's grace), that same gospel is given that it might also transform us. It therefore cannot welcome and accept patterns of life that fail to reflect God's good ordering of his world. God, in His grace, accepts us where we are but, through entering into relationship with us, His grace never leaves us where we are. How do revisionist pro-

posals and the understanding of 'inclusiveness' they often embody, enable the Church to bear witness in its teaching and liturgies to this two-fold work of grace?

4.32 These major themes, drawn from the very 'warp and woof' of Scripture's story, must be taken into account by those who seek to revise the Church's teaching. It is not enough to focus simply on the passages that explicitly relate to homosexual practice. This issue interconnects with a wide range of biblical concerns. To pluck away in a supposedly small corner may in fact be to unravel the whole. Given that a revisionist understanding of homosexual practice is held only by a small minority even in the contemporary church (and certainly within the universal church), it is imperative to listen to the concerns of the majority who see this as a matter on which Scripture is in fact *not* silent but speaks clearly in a negative direction. The cumulative case presented here in sections 3 and 4 warns the Church strongly of the dangers of going *beyond Scripture* by permitting ecclesial conferral of legitimacy upon same-sex unions as an alternative to (heterosexual) marriage and (abstinent) singleness. Indeed, because of the complexities of sexuality and our total need of God's grace in this area where we are prone to confusion, to go *beyond* what Scripture teaches is, we suggest, tantamount to going *against* it.

5. EMBODYING TRUE GRACE: The pastoral response of the Church

5.1 In the midst of these debates about scripture, theology and the Church, it is sadly too easy to lose sight of the key point. This discussion (as emphasised at the outset: 1:7) is about people. It is also about love. It is not about defending principles for their own sake, nor about preserving the Church's traditions and identity in patterns which we happen to find amenable to our personal taste. No, it is about our responding appropriately to the 'God of all grace' and bringing that undeserved grace to bear on all our lives in ways which are authentic and true. If it is about the gospel, it is because we believe that in the gospel there is a maximisation of goodness which God longs to be given over to us his creatures. Our desire is only to conserve and thereby to promote the pastoral brilliance of the gospel of Christ, 'holding out the word of life' (Phil. 2:16). Constrained by the love of Christ we understand human flourishing to be organically linked to the way we identify with the will of him in whose image we are made. We thus see God's truth in Christ as conveying his intended blessing to all people and that which alone helps us to be 'free indeed' (John 8:36).

5.2 The Church's traditional response is often charged with being pastorally disastrous. It may be very theologically correct and proper, but it fails to connect with where people really are. In the name of love it can bring exclusion or loneliness; in the name of truth it can bring guilt; in the name of hope it can bring despair and disillusionment. These are serious charges and their force is felt. Is this not why the Church needs to relax its stance? Is it really worth holding out for some supposedly higher vision of human destiny when it leaves so many out in the cold?

5.3 It is time, then, to outline the pastoral implications of the Church's traditional response. What is the Church called to be and do if this is the calling we have received? What themes are to dominate our thoughts as we counsel and guide those for whom this is a personal issue?

5.4 The predominant theme, we suggest, is that we are called, both individually and corporately, to embody God's grace. For the Church is not just the recipient of revelation. Yes, we have argued that in Scripture there is indeed a disclosure of God's revealed will, which gives us a mandate we are called to respond to with integrity. But the Church is also, as *STANDS* says, the 'bearer of Good News'. This is because in the gospel we are presented with a living and active God who not only reveals but also redeems: he speaks but he also saves; if he commands, he can 'give what he commands'; the precepts of God are never divorced from the power of God and his gracious, active presence. For the God of Revelation, as we have noted, is mercifully also the God of Redemption, of Resurrection and Relationship. As made known through his Son, God is full, not only of *truth*, but also of *grace* (John 1:17).

5.5 The good news of God's 'amazing' grace in the gospel therefore challenges the

Church to be the community of grace. Yet 'grace' can be misunderstood or falsely portrayed. Yes, grace may be 'boundless' (in its depth) but it is not entirely shapeless, for then it would lack meaning. This is why the New Testament speaks of believers receiving God's 'grace in all its truth' (Col. 1:6). This is why our pastoral practice must first be rooted in theology and principle. Precisely because the Christian religion is essentially grace (that is, divine initiative in revelation and redemption evoking human response) the Church can only act pastorally when she has listened. The Church must order her life according to the gospel, according to God. Then, when as the Body of Christ she has truly heard the Word of Christ, she can be raised to new life and offer and express the love of Christ to the world. And what will be both her theme and her style? Simply—grace. This, we suggest, is the Body's true grace. The Church as the Body of Christ must manifest truth with grace.

5.6 All too evidently the Church often fails in this area and needs continually to be listening to those who come within her care. Nevertheless it is possible to discern four chief ways in which this grace can be embodied, enabling the Church both to act and to 'speak the truth with love' (Eph. 4:15). We can only draw out general principles here: each would need to be 'fleshed out' or embodied in different ways in different contexts. Yet, building on the words of *STANDS* (see 1.12), we can note that God's grace (as lived out by the Church and by individuals) should be identifiable through four characteristics: it is forgiving, welcoming, transforming and costly.

Forgiving Grace: The Church must 'reaffirm the good news of salvation in Christ'

5.7 Close to the gospel's heart (and central within our creeds) is the good news of forgiveness of sins granted by the God who distinguishes right from wrong and in whose sight sin is serious. This is of vital importance for all Christians, who may sometimes fall into sexual sin. The good news of salvation also needs to be heard by those who experience homosexual attraction and are often rejected, even feeling hated, if they speak of their sexual affections or identify openly as gay Christians.

5.8 Lambeth I.10 clearly affirmed that 'homosexual persons' in the Church must be assured that 'they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ'. Sadly, our continued public arguments often drown out this gospel emphasis. Moreover, some of those upholding the Church's traditional stance are, because of their actions, not heard as heralds of *good* news. There is a challenge here for the Church to be known as the place of true grace, where forgiveness is real and tangible, where Jesus' ability to restore those who have fallen is seen and known.

5.9 Those who may identify themselves as homosexual can bear witness to the wider Church of the true nature of grace, reminding us that simply knowing what is right does not mean we can do it in our own power. Grace 'is not knowledge of the right but God's power to make us right'.⁶⁹ Moreover, as they themselves testify, they often need to hear this good news of God's grace in special measure, receiving the gracious affirmation of the divine Father in Jesus Christ:

There is significant agreement that gay people need to begin any thinking about their way of life by gaining a sense of their inherent value as human beings and by entering into relationships based on

unconditional acceptance...Although the way in which this is articulated varies considerably, the agreement on what a Christian would call the principle of grace is as impressive as it is generally unrecognized.⁷⁰

Welcoming Grace: The Church must ‘give constant encouragement in following Christ not only to those who conform to one of these two vocations [marriage and singleness], but to all who seriously intend discipleship in fellowship with the body of the Church.’

5.10 Many of those who uphold the Church’s traditional stance find themselves unable to provide the necessary pastoral care for Christians who experience homosexual attraction—especially those who enter some form of special relationship with someone of the same sex. However, strong opposition to the public conferral of legitimacy on same-sex unions does not necessarily entail exclusion of all Christians who enter such unions in the sincere belief that they are an acceptable pattern of Christian discipleship. Here there is room for a generous inclusivity in the name of Christ. This is spelt out by one of the authors of *STANDS* responding to the 1991 statement *Issues in Human Sexuality* by the Church of England House of Bishops:

The Statement speaks of ‘respecting the integrity’ of members of the Church who ‘conscientiously dissent’ (*i.e.* reflectively and with careful thought) from the Church’s teaching. That is to say, the Church can recognize the seriousness of the stance these members are taking, want to engage equally seriously with them, acknowledge that such an engagement may have the long-term effect of developing the tradition of Church-understanding (though nobody is in a position to say how and to what extent), all without thinking that its advocacy of the traditional view is, as such, mistaken.⁷¹

5.11 As Jesus’ own ministry demonstrates, this offer of welcoming grace is a difficult tightrope to walk. It is often misunderstood and may scandalise some. Paradoxically, if the public and official stance of the Church is clear and uncompromised, this would enable a greater flexibility at the local level. Clear public principles can be married to pastoral sensitivity. So, as helpfully noted in a recent report from the UK, there is a call here to:

welcome and accept sexually active homosexual people, but to do so in the expectation that they will come in due course to see the need to change their lifestyle in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox Church teaching.⁷²

The Body of Christ is the place in which all of us as sinners *learn together* from God what constitutes faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ and are empowered by His Spirit to keep in step with the Spirit and be conformed to the image of God’s Son. All who confess Christ as Lord need the encouragement and guidance of his people to discern and walk that path in penitence and faith, keeping God’s commandments and living in love. This is not easily done on one’s own: fellowship and friendship is a vital God-given resource that we remove from people at great cost. So, if the Church is called to be the place of generous welcome, this is precisely in order that she may offer people an ongoing and life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ, who is alive today and still welcomes people into his fellowship—what might be called his distinctive community of ‘transforming inclusivity’.

Transforming Grace: The Church must re-affirm the good news of ‘transformation of life.’

5.12 To speak to those in same-sex partnerships only of ‘the need to change their lifestyle’ risks placing an impossible burden on the fallen human will. It can seem to drown out the gospel of grace by implying some form of salvation by good works. It is vital therefore that pastoral care is also shaped by the active and transforming power of God’s gracious activity in our lives. Encounter with Christ can indeed still be transforming.

5.13 It would be wrong to prescribe in advance the exact nature of this transformation for any individual, especially as it relates to matters of sexual affections. Here we have no explicit biblical teaching. However, Paul’s comment (‘such were some of you’: 1 Cor. 6:11) at the very least expresses his pastoral intention that believers should leave behind certain activities associated with their previous non-Christian practice. Rather than being dogmatic we must rely on the wisdom of experience in developing good pastoral practice,⁷³ acknowledging a great diversity of experience and perspectives. On the one hand, many are wary of offering or claiming supposed changes of ‘orientation’ and cite evidence that some pastoral practice in this area has resulted in significant damage to people, however well-intentioned its goal. On the other hand, there are Christians who can testify to a radical transformation in their sexual desires, moving away from homosexual attraction. This may come about through various means: the discipline of repentance; the assistance of godly ministry, counsel and encouragement; the relativisation or rejection of a homosexual identity in the light of our new identity as men and women ‘in Christ’.⁷⁴

5.14 The ‘healing’ ministry of the church, though recently brought to the fore through the charismatic movement and Christian interaction with modern psychology, is rooted in the gospel and has always been a treasured part of the Church’s sacramental and spiritual life. Radical transformation of life, including sexual desires, must, therefore, never be ruled out. The gracious God we worship is not just an academic idea but a living God, covenantally involved with the life of His people with the purpose of bringing us into ‘conformity with his Son’ Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). In this present age we must affirm the active presence of God’s Spirit, yet at the same time we ‘groan inwardly’ and await the ‘redemption of our bodies’ (Rom. 8:23).⁷⁵ Because of this eschatological tension, it may be wisest pastoral practice to focus ‘transformation of life’ on controlling homosexual desire and living a life of sexual abstinence—but only so long as due allowance is also given for God’s active grace to bring other transformations in whatever ways He sees fit. Biblical ‘hope’ is realistic but, because God is a God of grace, it must not be fatally deterministic.

Costly Grace: The church must ‘assist all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness’.

5.15 As Bonhoeffer said of this costly grace:

Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true

life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner... Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light'.⁷⁶

Here we sense the sharp challenge of grace, as Jesus calls each of us to deny ourselves—the paradoxical route to finding our true selves. Pastoral care that is shaped by this costly grace will resist actions to legitimate same-sex unions and seek to show that, because they are in theological error, such actions by the Church do not contain within them the promised seed of freedom. Such innovations also represent a serious pastoral crisis for the wider Church, suggesting to those who experience homosexual attraction that there may be a valid alternative when the overwhelming majority of the Church denies this alternative as a way of 'chastity and holiness'.

5.16 Thus the decision to bless same-sex unions, rather than assisting a life of faithful witness and being good pastoral practice, sends out contradictory messages concerning the Christian life. It undermines faithful witness by leading Christian believers into areas of real temptation and indeed sin. Faced with a confusing array of voices from the prevailing culture, many Christian people (especially young people) struggle in the formation of their self-understanding as sexual beings and in their desire to be faithful to the call of Christ. It is therefore imperative that the Church be seen to uphold clearly the divinely given norms to which true humanity aspires.

5.17 This challenge of 'costly grace' is addressed not just to individuals but also to the Church as a community. For those who uphold the traditional view must not simply expend their energies in opposing advocates of change and emphasizing the cost of discipleship. There is a real challenge here for the worldwide Church:

The call to abstinence and chastity, rather than being a notion that is destined to pass away, is at the moment (as it was at the time of the formation of the New Testament Canon) a central point at which God is testing the fidelity of the churches. If the churches are to respond to this test in fidelity rather than disobedience they will have to alter radically the nature of their common life and discipline. [In addition to teaching about the practice of abstinence there must be] a quality of common life that both upholds this practice and offers support to individuals as they struggle with the forces both of natural desire and cultural expectation.⁷⁷

This faithful life of abstinent singleness is one which wider Western culture does little or nothing to encourage. In fact, its media and celebrity figures often actively undermine this way of life. Because it is not good for us to be alone, singleness can only be a path of human flourishing when set within the context of loving community. In a mass society where we are encouraged to understand ourselves as autonomous individuals with a right to sexual relationships, the costly grace required in the community of the Church is to deny these powerful myths. In their place the Church must affirm and live the truth by supporting single Christians and displaying the positive attractiveness of the life of abstinent singleness.

5.18 Much of the Church in the West has geared itself in its practical ministry to those currently connected to the institution of marriage or within a 'nuclear' family.

As a result it has often failed to provide support to single people and those who experience same-sex attraction. This latter group has the added burden that even to talk openly about their sexual affections sadly entails the risk of being misunderstood, alienated and ostracized in many parts of the Christian Church. Unless such an environment is altered, the Church will continue to fail to assist such people in a life of faithful witness. The gospel calls us not only to live in radical discipleship but also to be communities that reflect the true and transforming inclusivity of its gracious welcome. The Church must respond in various ways, showing and offering its members and the wider world, patterns of love and structures of intimate relationship which do not involve sexual expression, for example by highlighting the significance of friendship:

Both vocations [marriage and singleness] in their different ways give equal expression to the blessing of human friendship, which is sanctified by Christ who calls us his friends (John 15:13-15; cf. Isa. 41:8) and elevated in him to become the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:14).⁷⁸

5.19 The Church can also rediscover a more biblical concept of itself as the true 'family'.⁷⁹ Jesus significantly taught that those who obeyed God's word belonged as true members of his new family—his 'mother, brother, and sister' (Mark 3:34); and the New Testament writers portrayed the Church as like an extended 'household' (1 Tim. 3:15). Only a few members of such households, of course, would be legitimately enjoying sexual relationships with one another, but all belonged. So the Church today, gathering together the children of the same heavenly Father, can be a place for true brotherhood and sisterhood (cf. e.g. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Indeed as the place where the expressions of physical sexuality are kept within divinely ordained bounds, the Church has the potential for being a true haven for a new depth of friendship and belonging, uncluttered by the complications of sexual pressure. 'Agape' and 'philia' can flourish where 'eros' is restrained. What is shared in the Body of Christ is the love of Christ — himself in his incarnate life an embodiment of human life lived to the full without sexual activity.

Conclusion

5.20 So, in standing firm in allegiance to traditional teaching, the Church must:

- ❖ acknowledge and repent of her widespread failings, both past and present, in her pastoral care of those experiencing homosexual attraction;
- ❖ much more seriously commit herself to 'listen to the experiences of homosexual persons' (Lambeth I.10);⁸⁰
- ❖ offer alternative patterns of pastoral support to those who experience homosexual attraction, while resisting the error of calling for formal recognition of same-sex unions.

5.21 The Early Church was called to be a new 'third race' between a restrictive Judaism and a libertine paganism. Called to share in God's mission within our global village, the Church today also has a distinctive call. She must have a public identity in contrast to Islam on the one side and liberal secularism or post-modern polytheism on the other. She must be the place which embodies the joining together of true authority and true liberty, held together in creative tension. Such an identity can

only be conserved if the Church is continually being reshaped by the gospel of God's true grace. In all her pastoral practice, therefore, she must manifest both truth and grace by being the unlikely meeting-point for divine command and divine mercy—themselves brought together supremely in the life and death of Jesus our Lord.

5.22 This, we suggest, is an authentically Christian and truly pastoral response to our situation. Those who propose an alternative response may assert that it is merely 'traditional' and outdated, that it is often poorly executed by the Church, or is simply inadequate. But in what precise ways is it inadequate as an account of the Church's calling and vocation? For the test of an adequately *Christian* response is not only its capacity to offer short-term peace and comfort. It is also fundamentally a matter of whether the response coheres with the gospel, which itself is the truth and the true source of all comfort—both for this life and the next. And we discover at the heart of this gospel a Jesus who is not simply one who extends welcome, but is also the one who dies, is raised and breathes his Spirit on us. Paul in Romans can expound the gospel of God's grace in terms which are similar to those outlined above: it is simultaneously forgiving (Rom. 3-5), costly (Rom. 6-7), transforming (Rom. 8) and welcoming (Rom. 15). This is the pastoral shape of the gospel.

6. BEING TOGETHER THE BODY OF CHRIST: Political Issues facing the Church

6.1 Sadly, the Church's difficult struggle to fulfill her pastoral responsibilities and embody the true grace of God in the gospel, currently takes place within continued political dispute about the public teaching, witness and life of the Church. As a result, individual pastoral decisions by clergy and bishops often have political meanings read into them (especially when they are thought to show pastoral misjudgment or insensitivity) even if such meanings were not intended. If proper pastoral care is to be offered in the context of learning the mind of Christ, serious engagement with the political issues that currently threaten the unity of the Anglican Communion is urgently required.

The Challenges of the Present

6.2 As in its pastoral care, so in its deliberation about its common life and witness, the Church must develop an ecclesial politics shaped by the gospel and not by the world's political processes. In the Anglican Communion we must heed Paul's warning to the Galatians: 'If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other' (Gal. 5:15). The Body of Christ in all its life, especially when facing disagreement and conflict, needs to be shaped by the call of God in the gospel. The Church must show herself to be comprised of those who have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (including sexual immorality but also discord, selfish ambition, dissensions and factions) by keeping 'in step with the Spirit' and revealing the 'fruit of the Spirit' in her corporate life. As a worldwide communion it is essential that there are structures in place to encourage and assist us in this task as we 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3).

6.3 The issue of homosexuality and the blessing of same-sex unions currently threatens to divide the Anglican Communion at every level and in every direction: individual believers depart from congregations because of their unhappiness with the Church's perceived stance; conservative parishes reject their bishops as 'false teachers'; meanwhile revisionist clergy offer unauthorized services of same-sex blessing, revisionist dioceses act unilaterally to institute such blessings, and provinces disregard the mind of the Church as expressed at Lambeth. Given Anglicanism's relative lack of respected structures for consultation, for collective action and corporate discipline, the threat of serious fragmentation is alarmingly real—especially as we approach ECUSA's 2003 General Convention. The possibility of rupture is imminent.

6.4 Although the focus here is on Anglicanism, as we seek to maintain the sacramental unity of our Communion it is vital not to lose sight of the sad history of division within Christ's Body. As Anglican dioceses and provinces consider following 'local options', the effects of this action on ecumenical work to overcome past divisions must not be forgotten. The views of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches (as well as most Protestant denominations) explain why Archbishop Carey was right to describe the New Westminster decision to bless same-sex unions as 'ecumenically embarrassing'.⁸¹

6.5 At all levels there has also developed a political, campaigning spirit in many Christians. On all sides of the debate, ‘a practical question not without importance in its own right’ is ‘in danger of being over-freighted with symbolic resonances’. There is a danger that sex (and our response to it) has become an idol, drawing us away from worshipping the triune God and making him known through the gospel of Jesus Christ and ‘him crucified’. In the words of *STANDS*: ‘That the issue should have become so highly dramatized calls for repentance on the part of all members of the Church; it suggests that the gospel has not been directing the acts, words and thoughts of Christians on this subject’.

6.6 At the international level of the Anglican Communion, this problem is exaggerated by the current lack or weakness of recognized structures of authority and instruments of unity. There is an urgent need to agree processes and recognize bodies which can develop and declare a common mind when the unity of the communion is threatened. The 1998 Lambeth Conference noted ‘the need to strengthen mutual accountability and interdependence among the Provinces of the Anglican Communion’. It therefore reaffirmed a 1988 Lambeth resolution which encouraged ‘a more collegial role for the Primates’ Meeting under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, so that the Primates’ Meeting is able to exercise an enhanced responsibility in offering guidance on doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters’. This was supplemented by a request for the Primates’ Meeting to include in its responsibilities ‘intervention in cases of exceptional emergency’ and the ‘giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies’ (Resolution III.6).

Wisdom from the Past: a way forward?

6.7 The preceding analysis has explained why the overwhelming majority of the Anglican Communion believes the institution of same-sex unions cannot be considered a matter of indifference. Instead they would see the institution of these ceremonies as theologically erroneous and ‘contrary to God’s Word written’ (Article 20). They see the Church as living under the authority of this Word and fear there can only be confusions and fractures if some in the Church seek to alter or remove this foundational tenet at the root of Anglican identity and mission. In seeking to discern how to proceed in such a situation, therefore, we must return to Anglican tradition and to Reformation principles in order to understand how the catholic church which confesses itself to be *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* must move forward when further reform is being urged upon it by some of its members.

6.8 With quite remarkable relevance, Article 34 (‘Of the Traditions of the Church’) in the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion addresses the situation when innovation is being considered. Although elements are clearly rooted in its historical context, it contains much wisdom for our current situation in relation to the proposed ceremonies for the blessing of same-sex unions (especially where appeal is often made to the possibility of ‘local options’):

It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word. Whosoever through his private judgment, willing and purposely, doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly (that others may fear to do the like), as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren.

6.9 The current traditions and ceremonies of the Church (in relation to the right ordering of our sexual desires and relationships) have been subjected to various critiques but they certainly have not been shown to be ‘repugnant to the Word of God’. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of Anglicans believe that it is the proposal to bless same-sex unions which would be ordaining something against God’s Word. Following this Article, therefore, there is a need for some system of ‘open rebuke’ to be established within the Anglican Communion in order to address a situation where Church traditions and ceremonies are being openly broken by some within the Church.

6.10 Advocates of same-sex unions, however, will insist that ‘the Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies’ (Article 20). Granted—but if they do so, then they must also give due respect to the Anglican understanding of *how this should be done*. This is authoritatively expressed at the end of Article 34:

Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.

Here there are three political challenges to those churches in communion with the see of Canterbury:

- ❖ **A.** The *locus of authority* to ordain or change ceremonies: this is said to lie with ‘particular or *national*’ churches. Although there is room for debate as to what the contemporary geographical equivalent of this shared common life would be, a strong case can be made that it should be represented by the Anglican Communion as a whole. Certainly, any decision at a diocesan level (such as in New Westminster or Kansas) amounts to a break in historic Anglican polity.
- ❖ **B.** The *limits to the rites* which the Church has authority to change: these are specified as those ‘ordained only by man’s authority’. The universal witness of Scripture and Christian tradition, however, is that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained by *divine* authority in creation and revelation. The majority of the Communion views any rites to bless same-sex unions as effectively undermining this divinely ordained institution (see 3.23) and thus see same-sex unions as ‘ordained against God’s Word’.
- ❖ **C.** The *purpose of changing rites*: any change must be done (echoing Paul’s counsel in 1 Cor. 12-14) ‘to edifying’. In the current situation the proposed changes are evidently not building up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. On the contrary, we have argued that they pose a significant challenge to the gospel, identity and mission of the Church: they threaten to divide the

Anglican Communion in its witness, they damage moves towards greater unity with other Christians, and seriously handicap and compromise the church's mission in many parts of the world.

6.11 In the light of this traditional procedure for changing or ordaining ceremonies within Anglican polity, Point 'A' demands that any decision to bless same-sex unions at a diocesan level must be subject to some form of rebuke and disciplinary action. Where the province refuses to take such action against a diocese, it is understandable (even if highly regrettable) that parishes may look to other Primates elsewhere, with whom they are in communion, to provide them with episcopal oversight. In an age of rapid communication and transportation the failure of national churches to adhere to the Anglican Tradition when there is innovation can only lead to the erosion or even destruction of the idea of territorial sovereignty within the Church.

6.12 Should a national church determine that it wished to ordain a rite of blessing for same-sex unions it would have authority to do so under Article 34 *only*

a) if it had shown this not to be 'against God's Word' and

b) it had shown this *to the satisfaction of the other representative members of the Anglican Communion.*

This latter point is vital: any decision as to whether the innovation was 'biblical' should have the consent of others. Thus any national church proposing change would need to respond to the many biblical and theological issues raised above in relation to marriage, singleness and homosexuality. It would need to do so in a way which adequately convinced the other national churches within the Communion that the proposal was not against God's Word.⁸² Mere appeals to the need for pastoral inclusivity would be quite insufficient. The Anglican Church owes her life to God and so must live out her life, being rooted in and driven by *theo-logia*, not by fashion or cultural conformity. Moreover, if it sought to respect traditional Anglican formularies and polity, any national church would also need to demonstrate that its actions were in keeping with the strictures of Article 34 noted in Points 'B' and 'C' above: in other words, that it did not undermine marriage as a divine ordinance and was being done in a way that truly edified the global Church. Can this honestly be done?

Conventions, Conferences and Canterbury

6.13 In reaching such decisions, national churches (including ECUSA) are often bound explicitly by their own constitutions to recognise that they are members of the Anglican Communion and that they have no power to make decisions contrary to the mind of the wider Communion.⁸³ This legally requires them to recognize the conciliar structures of that Communion before introducing disputed innovation in doctrine, discipline or worship. Their own constitutions therefore place a brake on their freedom to develop local options. At present it is the Lambeth Conference that has the moral (if not strictly legislative) authority within the Communion. It is this authority that must be recognised in national decisions and which must be the final arbiter of whether what is being proposed by a national church is in keeping with or contrary to God's Word. In relation to the question of blessing of same-sex unions this is focused on Resolution I.10 at Lambeth 1998 which clearly rejects such innovation. It

is not as though the wider Communion has not yet been consulted or has been unable to reach a considered opinion on the issue. No, it has expressed its mind—and not by a marginal majority. A decision and a choice has already been made. Lambeth has also repeatedly called for the strengthening of mutual accountability and interdependence and has proposed the Primates' Meeting as the instrument for this. The authority of this meeting therefore also needs to be recognized by the national churches.

6.14 If any province or national church rejects the moral authority of Lambeth 1998 and establishes the blessing of same-sex unions, other Anglican provinces would be acting faithfully within the Tradition if they declared such an action as 'schismatic'. This would be even more justified if innovation occurred without clearly providing the necessary theological justification (6.10-12) or appropriate discussion with the on-going instruments of unity (6.13). Other provinces would then have the right both to withhold communion and to ask whether indeed the church in that province should be entitled to label itself as 'Anglican'. Is this not an act which effectively establishes a new church, with some liturgical affinities to historic and worldwide Anglicanism but essentially and theologically at odds with it? Regrettably for the revisionists, the Anglican Church through its missionary endeavour has become a global Church. That wider Church now has the moral justification for questioning the orthodoxy of its 'mother provinces' and refusing to allow the treasured currency of 'Anglicanism' to be debased in this way. With the rise of Internet technology and jet travel 'global' Anglicanism is no longer a theory but a practical reality that needs coherence to survive.

6.15 At that point a knife-edge decision would also face the Archbishop of Canterbury. He would need to state whether or not such a province could remain in communion with him and hence be part of the Anglican Communion. In making such a decision due weight would have to be given to the mind of the Communion as a whole (which has been clearly stated in Lambeth I.10 and which is opposed to such blessings). It would not be an easy choice. On the one hand, to withhold communion would place the innovating province for a season outside the Anglican fold: but what would that mean in practice—a refusal to invite its bishops to future Lambeth conferences if they have flagrantly disregarded its past resolutions? On the other hand, to accept and affirm the innovation would be an 'executive action' contradicting Lambeth and would place dissenting 'traditional' bishops and parishes in a twilight zone, somehow out of communion with Canterbury (and so almost certainly seeking alternative episcopal or primatial oversight elsewhere within the Communion). A third option would be for Canterbury somehow to remain in communion with *both* the innovating province and the dissenting 'traditionalists' (though these two groups would not be in communion with one another). In both the second and third options the inevitable result is that Anglicanism would shift from being an integrated Communion to being a fragmented 'federation' with various members of the family being out of communion with each other. Sociologically we would move from being 'brothers and sisters' to being 'cousins'. This 'decentralized' model might be attractive to some (permitting perhaps, for example, various 'continuing Anglican' churches to rejoin the Anglican fold as long-lost cousins), but the ramifications 'on the

ground' would be confusing in the extreme—with geographical boundaries broken down and with dioceses and parishes opting in to 'rival' Anglicanisms (held together by a notional link to Canterbury, itself the meeting point for unreconciled opposites).

6.16 In the face of these bewildering scenarios, we can more readily understand why the previous Archbishop of Canterbury warned that this issue could bring the Communion to 'breaking point'. Similarly, the new Archbishop of Canterbury recognised that 'any individual diocese or even province that officially overturns or repudiates this resolution [Resolution I.10] poses a substantial problem for the sacramental unity of the Communion'.⁸⁴ For that precious unity is what is now in jeopardy. It may be that the treasured catholicity of the Church is indeed here being stretched to breaking-point. Is the Church being confronted here with a boundary beyond which she cannot go without engendering internal incoherence and leading to her eventual self-disintegration?

6.17 Faced with such impossible choices, a request for wider consultation is very likely. It would be wrong for such a decision to be left solely to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet at present the recognized and authoritative mechanisms whereby Canterbury can consult with the wider Communion are weak or non-existent. The proposals of *To Mend the Net* (commended to the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission working on Communion by Archbishop Carey) provide some promising means of strengthening those mechanisms already in place. They offer a way forward (based on Lambeth III.6) with a number of specific and concrete proposals (for example, that the Primate of any innovating province would no longer be invited to the Primates' Meeting).⁸⁵ Yet these proposals also highlight the current institutional weakness at the heart of the Communion and demonstrate the need for a clear and agreed institutional framework to deal with the situation that would arise if a province should decide to bless same-sex unions.

A moratorium?

6.18 In these circumstances, given both the lack of agreed procedures at the Communion level and the need for a period of stability under a new Archbishop of Canterbury, it would be preferable if within the Communion as a whole a moratorium could be placed on actions in this area which seek to alter the traditional public teaching and practice of the Christian Church. That traditional teaching must be upheld, even if at the same time some room is allowed for the protection of private conscience and the use of pastoral discretion which does not create public scandal.⁸⁶

6.19 This commitment to the Lambeth 1998 decision and a moratorium on actions opposed to it should remain in force at least until there are agreed procedures by which the Communion can respond to innovation in this area. These procedures would likely require a future Lambeth Conference (or some similarly representative body) to conclude that such actions are not 'against God's Word', thereby giving permission to provinces to proceed as they believe right in their own setting. If instead unilateral action is taken in this area before the Communion as a whole gives its consent, then almost inevitably this will rupture the overall unity of the Anglican

Communion. This will have serious consequences, because this unity is 'essential to the overall effectiveness of the Church's mission to bring the gospel of Christ to all people' (Lambeth 1998, III.2). Is it right to threaten that mission?

6.20 A greater clarity concerning Anglican institutional decision-making might prevent anarchy and division. Nevertheless, in relation to the substantive issue, any structures which are truly representative of global Anglicanism, are most unlikely to act in a way favourable to revisionists. All the evidence is that the overwhelming majority of Anglicans will continue to see the blessing of homosexual practice as 'incompatible with Scripture' and refuse to condone any public recognition of same-sex unions by the Church. Even were there to be a continued war of attrition between competing views, it is highly unlikely that Lambeth 2008 will significantly alter the considered and overwhelming judgment of Lambeth 1998 on this issue. Instead, these significant words of Wolfhart Pannenberg would appear to sum up powerfully the clear and continuing consensus of Anglicans worldwide:

Here lies the boundary of a Christian Church that knows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.⁸⁷

Final conclusions

6.21 In these circumstances, in which the question is now seriously raised as to whether the Anglican Communion can hold together, it is right to stress (as several have done) that we will only hold together if we rediscover a deeper commitment to Christ and also a new joy in being part of his Body. Those new energies of fresh commitment will only be released among us, however, if the Body has the will to acknowledge that God has set boundaries beyond which it cannot go if it is to remain faithful. The Communion must demonstrate that there is a distinctive identity in being 'Anglican', which is not simply synonymous with charitable inclusivity—an identity defined by core beliefs, rooted in the gospel, to which we adhere with both conviction and grace as we engage in mission.

6.22 Currently, the Body's life and health is challenged by having so much of her energy being consumed in engaging with this ever-present question—raised not by the gospel but by our sexualized culture. What new possibilities for the Church's mission might emerge if our identity, rooted positively in the gospel, could be more securely established? People are attracted to Jesus Christ for a whole variety of reasons – not only his compassion but also his courage and character. Amongst those currently outside the fellowship of the Church, for every person who might be attracted to the Church were it to pursue a revisionist agenda, there may be many more who are instinctively disillusioned by such an approach and who ask if this is really the Church of Jesus Christ? It is therefore unwise for any part of the Anglican Church to be so driven by its perception of its context that it prioritizes its pastoral call over its

commitment to the worldwide Church and its missionary calling, appearing to surrender theological principle to pastoral expediency. Individual needs are vitally important but the Church has a corporate dimension which must be preserved and also a calling to be ‘salt and light’ by bearing faithful witness to Jesus within society.

6.23 In conclusion, we note that much of our discussion has revolved around the issues of boundaries. By nature none of us like boundaries: from within they seem inhibiting and restrictive, from outside they may seem cruelly exclusive. But, in stark contrast to its neighbours, the Judaeo-Christian tradition confesses faith in the transcendent God who in creation established order, limits and boundaries out of chaos and whose work of redemption now brings form out of the chaos produced by our sin. God’s grace is boundless in its depth and welcomes all; but the work of grace in creation and recreation also ordains boundaries which we must recognise and respect. ‘For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all. It teaches us to say “No”’(Titus 2:11-12). The Church, inspired by God’s grace and itself shaped by God’s Word, has always known that matter needs form and definition, that power needs restraining, that freedom needs frameworks. In our current social context, she need not be embarrassed to proclaim that individuals require corporate constraints, that human flourishing flows not from selfish autonomy but from relational commitment, and in particular that our sexual powers and energies need channelling and mastery. To ‘grasp beyond ordained boundaries’ may initially speak of freedom but in the end destroys that freedom. No, we need boundaries, both as individual persons and also in our corporate life. As embodied persons we need identities that free us to give ourselves to those who are ‘other’. As the Body of Christ, both as a spiritual body and as a body politic, we need to embrace our God-given identity (the ‘new humanity being renewed in the image of its Creator’: Col. 3:10). This identity, though embracing diversity within it and being open and welcoming to all, also has boundaries. These positively define us and enable us to influence the world and to be identified within it, being truly ‘in the world but not of it’.

6.24 For many the issue of officially blessing same-sex unions is precisely a boundary issue. Confusion here massively affects our identities both as sexual beings and as a public body. For, as Paul so insightfully grasped right at the outset, what we do with our bodies is not immaterial but truly affects the Body of Christ. The union of physical bodies can affect the union of the ecclesial Body. Something which seems so small and immaterial can evidently have an explosive effect. Policy about sexual behaviour is not just a private matter. The Christian community has an interest in what Christians decide about sex and all believers have responsibility to the whole Body. Our prayer, therefore, is that the Body of Christ, listening to the voice of Christ, may rise up with new strength and purpose to show forth the light of Christ in all its grace and truth.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen

7. SUMMARY

7.1 The issue of the Church’s response to homosexuality, and in particular whether it may recognise and bless same-sex unions, threatens to divide Anglican churches in the West and fracture the whole Anglican Communion. The overwhelming majority of the Communion stands opposed to changes in the Church’s traditional teaching and practice. This was reaffirmed at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, where it was agreed that: ‘in view of the teaching of Scripture’ the church ‘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’. The bishops therefore clearly stated that they ‘cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions’.

7.2 This paper explains and defends this classic Christian understanding through dialogue with some of those who wish to revise the Church’s teaching. In the light of its conclusions it explores their pastoral implications (section 5) and the political issues (section 6) raised by challenges to the Church’s teaching in parts of the Anglican Communion. Too often the Anglican debate has been reduced either to political slogans about rights and inclusivity or to naïve quoting of selective biblical texts. This paper seeks instead to focus on the truth about God and human beings which we learn through God’s self-revelation to us in Jesus Christ and the biblical witness to him.

7.3 It therefore presents a theological case, rooted in Scripture and the gospel of God’s grace, which draws both on the wisdom of the Christian tradition and also on the best of human insight into sexuality and our contemporary cultural context. It aims to strengthen the advocates of traditional teaching while enabling them better to understand some of the cultural context and pastoral rationale of those pressing for change.

7.4 It is also hoped that those unconvinced by the traditional teaching may see some of the depth of wisdom contained within that teaching. In particular, this paper highlights that there are significant extra issues raised (both theological and ecclesiological) when part of the Church does not just permit conscientious dissent by some of her members but publicly alters her teaching by conferring legitimacy on same-sex unions as a chaste and holy vocation in addition to marriage and singleness.

7.5 As a result it is to be hoped that it will strengthen the Church’s unity through facilitating charitable dialogue and mutual listening within a Communion firmly committed to upholding orthodox, biblical sexual morality in its public teaching and ceremonies and its pastoral practice.

7.6 Summary of Section 2:

Although the phenomenon of same-sex erotic love and homosexual practice is found across the whole Communion, the desire to recognise same-sex unions arises in the Western context. This desire often reflects a strong and genuine commitment to the pastoral and missionary task of the Church. Those calling for change, however, can-

not be driven purely by pragmatism but must be much clearer as to their proposed alternative and its theological basis. They also need to hear the critique and questions of many fellow Christians around the world: what are the implications of these changes for their own faithful witness? And, is there here a corruption of the Church's biblical teaching by an imperialist, consumerist and highly sexualised culture?

7.7 Summary of Section 3:

Opposition to the legitimisation of same-sex unions is rooted deeply within Scripture and Christian theology. It derives from a biblical understanding of the goodness of two things: the fact that human beings are created in the image of God as male and female and the created institution of marriage between a man and a woman (which bears witness to the covenantal love and faithfulness of God).

7.8 In guiding fallen human beings to their fulfilment in Christ, the Church calls all people to a right ordering of their sexual desires in a chaste pattern of life. This may take the discipline of life-long faithful marriage between one man and one woman, or of a life of abstinence from sexual relationships. Were the Church to bless same-sex unions, it would undermine this understanding and vision of human flourishing by offering people a choice as to the forms of life within which holy and chaste sexual activity could take place. There is no scriptural warrant for any such revision in the Church's public witness and teaching.

7.9 Those advocating change base their views primarily on what they believe to be new and fuller understandings of human sexuality, especially 'homosexual orientation'. This remains, however, an area of much uncertainty and debate both within the Church and wider society. Major disagreements are evident in relation to the meaning and significance of 'sexual orientation', the sociological, biological and psychological causes of our sexual affections, and the relationship of 'sexual orientation' to personal identity. Even were our understanding in this complex area to become clearer in the future and confirm some revisionist claims, this in itself could not legitimate revising the Church's moral teaching.

7.10 The Church's teaching and practice must instead be shaped by the gospel's account of human nature—as created, fallen and redeemed in Christ. As a result, the revisionist case cannot merely appeal to personal experience and tentative scientific knowledge of the homosexual condition. Instead it must offer a strong and expressly theological critique of this tradition. Rather than rushing to bless same-sex unions, the Church must carefully weigh and critique (on the basis of Scripture, tradition and reason) the novel arguments put forward either for the development of new chaste patterns of life or for the extension of 'marriage' to embrace within it same-sex couples. More positively, the Church's call either to marriage or abstinent singleness must be shown to be both intellectually and emotionally appealing and practically applicable to all people.

7.10 Summary of Section 4:

The disapproval within the Bible of all same-sex activities to which it refers is a further reason why the Church remains committed to its traditional teaching about human sexuality. To confer legitimacy on same-sex unions is indisputably to go beyond Scripture. Although some have argued that the Bible does not have in view the loving homosexual relationships that are now being advocated, a very strong case can be made that a theological reading of Scripture clearly opposes all homosexual conduct. Texts in both the Old and New Testament consistently condemn homosexual practice and warn God's people against it. In Scripture's vision of humans as sexual creatures, the phenomenon of same-sex erotic love is viewed not as an aspect of God's good creation, nor as a foretaste of his new creation, but rather as one of the many signs of our common fallen human condition. This in turn results in the clear witness of subsequent Christian tradition against homosexual conduct. This tradition cannot simply be overturned either by new knowledge or the acceptance of some forms of non-procreative sexual behaviour.

7.11 Summary of Section 5:

In the light of this understanding and its basis in God's revelation through the scriptures, the Church's ongoing ministry to those who understand themselves as homosexual must (like all its ministry) be one which repents of past failures and seeks to be reshaped by the gospel of God's grace. It must offer and embody the *forgiving* grace of God as it reaffirms the good news of salvation in Christ; it must demonstrate God's *welcoming* grace to all, encouraging those who seek to follow Christ within his Body. It must re-affirm and witness to the *transforming* power of God's grace in human lives; yet it must not deny the *costly* character of grace which calls all in the Church to live lives of faithful witness in chastity and holiness.

7.12 Summary of Section 6:

A minority within the Anglican Communion wish to follow a different path and to legitimate same-sex unions, even though most Christians view this as incompatible with Scripture. Even if a persuasive biblical and theological case could be made for this viewpoint, implementation would further require respect for traditional Anglican formularies and polity before altering rites and ceremonies with an appeal to alleged rights of 'local option'. In the light of the clear position of the Lambeth Conference and Article 34 of the Thirty-Nine Articles (requiring, amongst other conditions, only changes that are in accordance with scripture and that build up the Church) any such changes are of highly questionable validity. Many would suggest they therefore amount to a schismatic act, lacking due respect for Anglican doctrine, ethics, and polity.

APPENDIX 1

THE OXFORD DECLARATION ON FAITH AND ORDER

By the Consultation on the Future of Anglicanism, July 2002

We, the participants in this consultation, representing Anglicans in Africa, Australasia, Latin America, the Caribbean, North America and Europe, greet you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Among us are primates, bishops, clergy and lay leaders from all sections of our Communion.

It has been our privilege to meet from 29th June to 5th July 2002 to consider a wide range of subjects relating to the Anglican Communion. We have heard inspiring accounts of God's work among us. We affirm the spirit of international co-operation and accountability that has been manifest here and which we believe must characterise our global Communion. We have received much encouragement, especially from the growth of the Church in the Global South through faithful evangelism. We have been made sharply aware, however, of troubles affecting a number of Episcopal and Anglican dioceses in North America. In one Canadian diocese and others in the United States, there have been recent decisions involving substantial departures from the Biblical understanding of our human sexuality as created by God and confusion about our identity as male and female as understood in Christian tradition. These represent a serious breach of Anglican order, and resulted in a widening circle of scandal and distress.

On 14th June 2002 the diocesan synod of New Westminster, Canada, voted in favour of a proposal by its bishop to authorise the creation of a rite for the blessing of same-sex relationships, while offering a conscience clause unacceptable to faithful parishes and clergy who dissent from this innovation. Some days later the bishop of the Diocese of Kansas, U.S.A., gave his permission for blessing the union of heterosexual couples not committed to marriage. Before both of these developments the Bishop of the Diocese of Delaware approved the blessing of same-sex relationships. In many more dioceses, same-sex blessings already take place with varying degrees of episcopal support.

These actions are unconstitutional in that they violate the commitments to the historic faith and order of Anglican Christianity entrenched in the foundational documents of the churches involved. They are unfaithful to 2000 years of Christian teaching and, as such, are schismatic and prejudicial to pastoral order and the mission of the church. They specifically contradict the resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference and the subsequent advice of the Primates' Meetings. In some instances they are also linked with abrupt and unjustified actions against faithful parishes and clergy. In New Westminster eleven clergy are currently threatened with the withdrawal of their licences. In the Diocese of Pennsylvania a loyal and faithful priest faces deposition in September. More widely in the Episcopal Church in the United States there is costly litigation and the threat of seizure of church properties. Biblically ordered Episcopalians commonly find no access to the ordination process or, if ordained already, are on occasion, refused appointment. Much of this constitutes a clear abuse of ecclesiastical power and a grievous failure of Christian charity.

Although the presenting issue in most of these anomalies and disturbances is human sexuality and standards of sexual behaviour that the gospel requires, the underlying causes relate to deeper and wider theological and ethical questions. Their effects upon the mission, unity and pastoral competence of the Church are also correspondingly more serious. We find our-

selves at a critical moment when Anglican witness to Biblical teaching on Christian marriage and sexual ethics is seriously compromised and pastoral care of the sexually broken is obstructed.

A coherent church cannot pursue contradictory approaches to such a critical area of pastoral ministry. Present examples show the long-term danger of increasing numbers of faithful clergy and lay people feeling obliged to leave our Anglican family. Since this situation in one part of our Communion affects the whole body, we undertake for ourselves and commend to fellow Anglicans, and specifically to the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) and the International Anglican Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations (IASCER), the following:

- ❖ To recognise humbly and penitently before God our own confusion and failures in Christian witness.
- ❖ To repudiate firmly the actions of bishops who have failed to guard essential aspects of Biblical and Anglican tradition, and have instead promoted and even imposed contrary alternatives.
- ❖ To renew our commitment to the historic Apostolic Faith, so that we will believe and live by its tenets amidst the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary world.
- ❖ To nurture Christian marriage, and affirm and support the single life according to the gospel.
- ❖ To develop a compassionate and competent ministry that will help all of us in our sexual confusion and brokenness and lead people to repentance, restoration, and healing through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

We applaud the recent action of our Primates in defining the essence of Anglican belief in the authority of Scripture, the nature of God and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. We also appreciate Archbishop George Carey's stated commitment to an Anglican Communion characterised not by a spirit of individual autonomy and wilful independence but by the Biblical emphasis on mutual accountability and interdependence. We strongly welcome the comments of the Archbishop of Canterbury in his meeting with us in which he characterised the actions of the Synod of the diocese of New Westminster as "schismatic", as "undermining marriage" and as "ecumenically embarrassing".

We now ask the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primates to authorise such emergency measures as will enable threatened parishes and clergy to continue their life and ministry with a quiet conscience within their dioceses and member churches.

We affirm the position taken by the orthodox clergy and people under threat in the diocese of New Westminster; they are our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. We undertake to maintain communion and shared pastoral ministry with them, as well as with others in similar situations within our Communion.

We further commend the early adoption of the proposals contained in *To Mend the Net* to provide a more permanent way of ordering the shared life of our Communion. In this way we look for an appropriate method of international decision-making, genuine mutual accountability among provinces, and a decisive lead in addressing a problem that may otherwise divide our worldwide family.

We are grateful for our fellowship in our Lord Jesus Christ and remain fully confident in our Lord's loving purposes for his Church and his world.

APPENDIX 2

1998 LAMBETH RESOLUTION I.10

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.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Other reports from the consultation can be found at <http://www.wycliffe.ox.ac.uk/lifelong/ang2002>
- ² Letter of Archbishop Rowan Williams to Primates, 23rd July 2002.
- ³ Although different theological accounts may be given of 'blessing' the fundamental objection raised here is to the formal authorization and public commendation of same-sex unions by the Church that is represented by revisionist proposals. As noted later (e.g. 6.18) this is different from pragmatic pastoral discretion in private and informal prayer as Christians minister to people and move them by God's grace towards a form of life and witness in conformity with the Church's public teaching.
- ⁴ The St Andrew's Day Statement was commissioned by the Church of England Evangelical Council and is on the web linked from <http://www.apcb01.dsl.pipex.com/ceec>. It was followed by an excellent book (Bradshaw 1997b), with different responses to the statement.
- ⁵ On this passage from *STANDS* O'Donovan has written, 'It implies learning things we did not know, not randomly substituting new and untried for old and tried wisdom, but by an ordered and coherent growth of Christian testimony, as the gospel sheds illumination on the needs of a new period of history. Our first and last duty in this sphere is to discern the light which the gospel sheds on the gay movement of our time' (O'Donovan 1997, p24).
- ⁶ This is argued especially by Richard Hays in Hays 1986 and Hays 1997, pp383ff. See also O'Donovan 1998. Few individual gay Christians find this *locus classicus* on the theological interpretation of homosexuality to be an accurate account of their own situation, creating significant hermeneutical problems for many, (as highlighted by Williams 1997, pp17-8).
- ⁷ See for example Moberly 2000, p253 (point 3.2).
- ⁸ Gill 1998, pp12-3.
- ⁹ This argument is advanced most fully by Christian writers in Vasey 1995 and Stuart 1995. For discussion of this see O'Donovan 1997, pp33-5, Stuart 2001 & 2002 and discussion of 'queer theology' in 4.18-19 below. See critique in John 2000, pp31-8.
- ¹⁰ Rogers 1999.
- ¹¹ John 2000
- ¹² The best known defender of this is Karl Barth (especially in *Church Dogmatics* III/4). See also Banner 1999, chs 8 & 9.
- ¹³ On the early church's views, see Brown 1988.
- ¹⁴ Turner 2002, an as yet unpublished paper.
- ¹⁵ For a sympathetic theological discussion of this form of self-knowledge and its relationship to the debate about homosexuality, see Hinkle 2001.
- ¹⁶ Stein 1999, p71.
- ¹⁷ Van Leeuwen 1997.
- ¹⁸ Among secular writers see especially Greenberg 1988 and discussions in Stein 1999.
- ¹⁹ In one of the earliest Christian gay liberation writings, (Macourt 1976, p34) there is an interesting discussion of this which already notes that 'almost the only theologians who operate from within this third starting position are extreme evangelicals – who are joined, as strange bedfellows, by many gay liberationists'.
- ²⁰ Burr 1996 discusses the work of people such as Hamer & Le Vay.
- ²¹ Moberly 1983 remains an important text here for the first view while Bem is the main proponent of the second. For recent discussion see Stein 1999, ch. 8.
- ²² Schmidt 1995, ch. 7.
- ²³ A helpful non-Christian study is Stein 1999 while from a Christian perspective Jones & Yarhouse 2000a&b are helpful surveys.
- ²⁴ "Good science should inform ethical analysis. Ethical and theological analysis should proceed in the context of the best understandings of the subject matter under consideration, and science can provide us with valuable insights and understandings. While science can and should inform our ethical analysis, it will not determine the outcome of that analysis...Science will not solve the ethical debate about homosexual behaviour for the Church..." (Jones & Yarhouse 2000b, pp118, 119). We need here, as elsewhere, to avoid the common modern error that 'to the extent that actions are explicable, they are excusable' (Holmes 2003, p87).

²⁵ St. Andrew's Day Statement.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ An argument in favour of marriage for at least some with homosexual feelings is advanced by Mills 1997, helpfully reviewed by Meilaender at www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9805/opinion/meilaender.html.

²⁸ Such arguments can be found in Williams 1998, pp18-9; John 2000; Rogers 1999; Matzko 1997.

²⁹ Yip 1997, though challenging traditionalist views, provides evidence for the non-monogamous nature of many, even Christian, gay partnerships.

³⁰ The words of Karl Barth in his more tempered later remarks on human sexuality and the homosexual question: 'Freedom for Community' in Rogers 2001, pp114-5. For Barth's earlier discussion, see CD III/4, pp165-6 on homosexuality.

³¹ The appeal of Rogers to Evdokimov is especially strange given Evdokimov's emphasis elsewhere on the difference between male and female. For critique of Rogers see Wannenwetsch 2001.

³² Such a toleration of homosexuality as a 'second best' was first advanced in evangelical circles in Thielicke 1964.

³³ See Turner 1991 for discussion of this issue in relation to Christian sexual ethics.

³⁴ Moberly 2000, p251 (2.1).

³⁵ 'Efforts to twist the text to mean what it clearly does not say are deplorable. Simply put, the Bible is negative toward same-sex behaviour, and there is no getting around it. The issue is precisely what weight that judgment should have in the ethics of Christian life' (Walter Wink in his recent heated exchange in *Christian Century* with Robert Gagnon (<http://www.pts.edu/gagnon6.html>)).

³⁶ On 'plain sense' in relation to homosexuality see Balch 2000 especially Seitz 2000.

³⁷ A most helpful survey of the material is found in Larson 2001.

³⁸ See Hays 1997, pp386ff.

³⁹ O'Donovan 1997, p30.

⁴⁰ Vasey 1995, p130 (*italics added*). Vasey's own careful argument sees the modern gay movement as 'the adjustment that certain individuals make to the emotionally hostile environment created by society's idolatry of the competitive market and the bourgeois family' (p132).

⁴¹ Although much work still needs to be done here and the focus on a cultural level will mean many gay Christians cannot identify themselves personally in its broad-brush analysis, it remains true that 'if we could explore the relation between worship and patterns of sexual behaviour to which St Paul points us, we could...achieve a more effective grip on the problems before us' (O'Donovan 1997, p28).

⁴² This argument has gained popularity in relation to Rom. 1 through Boswell 1980. Not only is there the theological problem noted below but also serious difficulties with this as a reading of Rom. 1 (see 4.16 below).

⁴³ Lloyd, pp4-5.

⁴⁴ Null 1991, p12. Hays comments, 'we like to think of ourselves as free moral agents, choosing rationally among possible actions, but Scripture unmasks that cheerful illusion and teaches us that we are deeply infected by the tendency to self-deception...the very nature of sin is that it is not freely chosen...We are in bondage to sin but still accountable to God's righteous judgment of our actions' (Hays 1997, p390).

⁴⁵ Null 1991, p12.

⁴⁶ On Old Testament materials see Nissinen 1998 & Gagnon 2001.

⁴⁷ Jesus' willingness to challenge mis-readings of Scripture is clear in relation to a range of issues, not least the Sabbath. His hermeneutics is guided by loyalty to Scripture combined with his sense of the in-breaking of the Kingdom.

⁴⁸ If it were to be held that Jesus himself held a traditional view and rejected all homosexual conduct but that this is not binding on the church then major concerns would have to be raised about authority in the Church and/or an implicit Nestorian Christology.

⁴⁹ For evidence on ancient homosexuality, see Smith 1996 & Brooten 1996.

⁵⁰ Avoiding sexual immorality is one of the conditions laid upon Gentile converts in Acts 15, a text recently used by some (Johnson 1996 & Siker 1994) in relation to homosexuality on which see Goddard 2001. Countryman 1989 argues that the Jewish understanding of purity underlies Paul's writing on homosexuality and so it does not apply to Gentile Christians. He fails to give due weight to the rooting of Paul's teaching in God's ordering of creation and so its universal, moral nature.

⁵¹ On *arsenekoitai* see Wright 1984 and overview in Gagnon 2001, pp303-39.

⁵² Smith 1996 here offers a persuasive rebuttal of the limitation of the biblical prohibitions in Scroggs 1983.

⁵³ This view is particularly advanced by Brooten 1996 & Nissinen 1998.

⁵⁴ Thiselton 1997, p168 (*italics added*).

⁵⁵ E.g. Aristophanes' myth told in Plato's *Symposium*; see Stein 1999.

⁵⁶ This is most fully argued in Hays 1986 who critiques Boswell 1980. See also comments in Sanders 1991, pp110-3.

⁵⁷ Although some deny a reference here to female same-sex activity, see Brooten 1996 for full defence of this view.

⁵⁸ The best introductions here are Stuart 2001 & 2002.

⁵⁹ See Bradshaw 1997a.

⁶⁰ The main work here is that of John Boswell – Boswell 1980 & 1994.

⁶¹ Jordan 1997 & 2002.

⁶² Grenz 1998, p80, 'On the contrary, explicit moral references to such behaviour in the Christian tradition were consistently negative...Christian ethicists from the 2nd century to the 20th forge an unbroken chain. Their teaching, which condemned a variety of behaviours, occurring as they did in differing social contexts, nevertheless connects all such actions together...In each era, Christian moralists rejected the same-sex practices of their day...The call to godly holiness entails vigilance on many fronts...such vigilance demands that believers avoid illicit sexual practices, among which are fornication, adultery, and – the tradition would add – same-sex behaviour.'

⁶³ Some of the hermeneutical issues raised here are helpfully discussed in France 2000 & Webb 2001.

⁶⁴ Williams 1989, p319.

⁶⁵ This paper has therefore not elaborated on the 'natural law' arguments widely used in current debates. It is not that these have no value but that they should not be the primary focus of a Christian account. When they are developed by appeal to sometimes disputable 'scientific' evidence about the 'natural' consequences of some male homosexual practices (whose relevance to blessing faithful same-sex unions is often tenuous) traditionalist arguments can sometimes be weakened rather than strengthened. Nevertheless, if the God of revelation is identical with the God of creation then we should not be surprised if the teaching of Scripture is confirmed by evidence from created reality and social experience. Our aim has been to develop a more biblically based and hence more positive vision.

⁶⁶ House of Bishops, Church of England 1991, p33 (*para* 4.6).

⁶⁷ O'Donovan 1998.

⁶⁸ O'Donovan 1997, p.32.

⁶⁹ Null 1991, p12.

⁷⁰ Vasey 1995, p220.

⁷¹ O'Donovan 1998. See also the comments of another *STANDS* author in Wright 1998, pp28-9.

⁷² Report of the Evangelical Alliance - ACUTE 1998, p33.

⁷³ Thiselton 1997, p172, 'Those who insist on emphasizing healing of 'orientation' must recall that 'among his pastoral advice Paul nowhere advocates a need for 'healing' persons of gay orientation, as if to imply that a gay person could not be fully 'human' without heterosexual intimacy'.

⁷⁴ This area remains a much contested one with limited scientific evidence for widespread radical change but much anecdotal evidence in some Christian ministries. Jones & Yarhouse 2000, in a survey not unsympathetic to those Christians who work for healing of homosexuality, are clear that 'we do not share the optimistic and seemingly universal generalization of some conservative Christians who seem to imply that anyone with any motivation can change...' (p148). They warn that 'it appears to us that profound change of orientation occurs infrequently' (p182) and estimate that the average positive outcome across the rather dated studies they examine is 33% (p133).

⁷⁵ Hays 1991 & 1997 uses the story of Gary. See also moving anonymous testimony ('No Easy Victory') in *Christianity Today*, March 11th, 2002.

⁷⁶ Bonhoeffer 1959, pp36-7.

⁷⁷ Turner 2002.

⁷⁸ *STANDS*. The theme of friendship is central in many of the best writings by gay Christians, e.g. Vasey 1995 and Sullivan 1998.

⁷⁹ For a helpful discussion of this see Clapp 1993.

⁸⁰ See Harries 1998 after Lambeth 1998 and Fowl 1998, pp121-2: 'It should not, then, be the responsibility of homosexual Christians to provide "narratives of homosexual holiness"...The onus is on other Christians who may enter (or have already entered) into friendships with homosexual Christians out of which they might offer testimony of their friends' holiness. Alternatively, it may be the case that such friendships generate calls to repentance from one friend to another... Christians have no reason to think they understand how the Holy Spirit weighs in on the issue of homosexuality until they welcome homosexuals into their homes and sit down to eat with them'.

⁸¹ These were the concerns expressed by Archbishop Carey speaking to the Oxford Consultation in July 2002 about New Westminster.

⁸² ECUSA recognised this in Resolution B020 passed by both houses of the 1991 General Convention: "Resolved, That this Church receive the report of the Standing Committee on Human Affairs as clear evidence of no strong consensus in this Church on the human sexuality issues considered or the resolutions proposed; and be it further Resolved, That the Office of the Presiding Bishop now be directed to propose to all provinces of the Anglican Communion and all churches with whom we are in ecumenical dialogue that a broad process of consultation be initiated on an official pan-Anglican and ecumenical level as a bold step forward in the consideration of these potentially divisive issues *which should not be resolved by the Episcopal Church on its own.*" (italics added).

⁸³ This has recently been powerfully argued in 'The Authority of General Convention' available at http://www.seadinternational.com/authority_of_general_convention.htm

⁸⁴ Letter of Archbishop Rowan Williams to Anglican Primates, 23rd July 2002.

⁸⁵ See Gomez & Sinclair 2001.

⁸⁶ This revives a proposal in July 1996 to the 1997 ECUSA General Convention by Radner & Sumner, details of which can be found on web at <http://www.seadinternational.com/harvest/harvestjuly96.html#Appeal>

⁸⁷ Article in *Christianity Today*, Nov 11th 1996.

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