

AN OPEN LETTER FROM LGCM TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

December 2004

Dear Archbishop Rowan

Your Advent letter to the Primates of the Anglican Communion is indeed accurate when it says that many homosexuals feel there is no good news for them in the Church. As an organisation devoted to bringing Christ to the homosexual community the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement can testify to the profound rejection Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered people continue to experience within the Church.

You are also right to draw attention to the violent and sometimes deadly consequences to homosexual people of Church leaders calling us, for example: "animals"; "lower than dogs" and "subhuman" or suggest that we are mentally defective.

We have not heard, so far, any hint of an apology for our hurt feelings, yet alone any sense of repentance for the torture, suicide and murder that are the consequences of these dehumanising words. But it is not only words that kill, silence can be equally as deadly. Where is the voice of the Archbishop of the West Indies, Most Revd Drexel Gomez when many songs within the popular culture of his Province call for the murder of homosexuals?

Indeed, where are the words of apology and signs of repentance from the whole Church for the bonfires, fed by Christian zeal, which consumed our living bodies for so many centuries? Perhaps Church leaders who quote part of Leviticus 20:13 in their attack on homosexual people still believe in the justice of the punishment called for there: "They shall be put to death".

The diminishing of homosexual people and denial of our human rights is not something practised by others; your own Church in Britain worked hard to see homosexual people denied the equal protection of the law very recently. The Church's intervention was successful and now faith communities may uniquely deny us equal treatment in employment. You must see that such actions too give oxygen to the hate-filled minds of those who would hurt and kill us.

Homosexual people continue to be deeply offended by the actions of many parts of the Communion where our existence is not even acknowledged, where our voices are strangled before we can be heard or seen as part of the family of God brought into being by the Word. It was once the same here, we were forced by law and social convention into invisibility, we ache for the suffering of our brothers and sisters in the world who are still silent and unseen, and even worse, forced by convention to condemn and persecute their own.

This is a burden often too heavy for them to bear, and we know well the reproaches they suffer. We wonder if the present atmosphere of fierce rejection will ever pass so they may learn to speak with confidence, or if they will, even then, find a Church willing to listen.

The rape and murder of Fannyann Eddy, founder of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association and a lesbian rights activist across Africa, in Sierra Leone on 29 September 2004, reminds us of the consequences when different faith communities often compete with each other in their open hatred of homosexual people as a sign of their "political correctness". We also want to avoid the development of competing branches of Christianity based on who "hates fags" most.

You are right to point out that even in countries where there are no legal penalties against homosexuality the problems can be immense, as in the Brazilian province of Bahia where over a three year period some 200 people were murdered in homophobic assassinations.

You appeal for careful consideration and thoughtful prayer in this present crisis which the Windsor Report seeks to address. But why are we here?

For thirty years American Anglicans have made clear their intentions. Lambeth Conferences in 1978, 1988 and 1998 called for dialogue and the willingness to listen to lesbian and gay Christians. It is because of the failure of the Communion to enter into any serious and meaningful discussions that we have arrived at this potential parting of the ways. You have become party to this profoundly flawed process, devised in particular by your predecessor, and the other Primates who have failed the Communion and brought us, thereby, to this perilous place.

Like many Anglicans we have welcomed the facilitative developments arising from our Covenants with our ecumenical partners; we rejoice in the diversity and inclusiveness that these have embraced. Among the Porvoo Churches there are those who see no problem with homosexuality and who are at a loss to understand our current crisis, while some Old Catholic dioceses have authorised liturgies for same-sex blessings.

But the process which has thrown up the idea for a Covenant between Anglican Churches might well appear anything other than facilitative or embracing of difference to many Provinces, and particularly to lesbian and gay Anglicans.

There is reasonable concern that the call for such a Covenant at this time has elements of duress and coercion that do not speak of the 'appropriate commitments which we can freely and honestly make with one another'.

Twenty years ago when your former Province of Wales was considering the moves of some Provinces towards the ordination of women, it sought the advice and aid of the Instruments of Unity. It received a "chilly response" to its suggestions that such changes should be achieved by Communion-wide consensus. We have seen the ordination of women, changes in marriage discipline and changes in the liturgy: all decided within the competency of the local Church without any call for a limit to "autonomy" or threat as to how these might fail in "honouring the gift" of the many links, both formal and informal, that unite us.

It seems to many that the present threat of schism is much to do with what has gone before, and that the Church has decided to "delay justice" for its Lesbian and Gay members in order to preserve a Church that is already straining over the diversity that has developed hitherto. There is a clear implication that we are being asked to "wait a while" as the Anglican Church settles to these earlier changes, with the promise of justice in the future.

There are many amongst us who, in the short or medium term, would gladly relinquish such fripperies as the wearing of a mitre if freedom from tyranny for the majority of LGBT people in our world were the prize, or even for the promise of making that struggle for justice a top priority for the Anglican Communion. But others see justice delayed as no justice at all, and are not convinced that the Communion has any real or lasting concern for the plight of its lesbian and gay members beyond your tenure of office.

Yet while we do not wish to see the sacrifice of the inclusiveness of those Provinces which have embraced fully their baptised lesbian and gay members, and opened all the doors of God's service to them, neither do we wish to be separated from the Provinces where our brothers and sisters in Christ are still forced to silence and deception for survival.

We too, find ourselves between a rock and a hard place.

You say that "staying together as a Communion is bound to be costly for us all" and we see that it has already been costly to you in terms of your conscience and integrity. Your change of heart over the ordination of Jeffrey John to the episcopate must have come at enormous personal pain, as well as the loss of goodwill and support of many who initially welcomed your arrival at Canterbury.

Unity alone would not be a price many LGBT Anglicans would be willing to pay for retreating back into their silent ghetto, no matter how temporary we felt that might be. We have already paid a costly price over the centuries in our service of the Lord, and we are not convinced that the present cost would be born evenly. We look with sadness at the refusal of some Christians to remove their so called "missionary presence" from an illegal intrusion into other legitimately constituted Dioceses, and maintain their unfettered demonising homophobic stance.

Lesbian and Gay Christians feel a deep sense of repentance, not for what has happened to Gene Robinson in New Hampshire, but for their silent and sometimes active complicity in the past, and continuing persecution of their kind by the Church. We will not be party to any plan that denies or delays unduly our full inclusion in Christ's Church. Do not ask us: too much blood has been spilled already.

Yours sincerely,

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Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement