

Sexual Orientation and an Anglican Response - An Asian perspective

A pastoral letter: Advent 2020



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Introduction

If we were to think of one aspect of life that has been of immense scrutiny and discussion in the Church it would be human sexuality. The debates and arguments that have raged across the Church contexts have even threatened unity, doctrines, abandonment of faith and the like. The fact that human sexuality has also been expressed in the light of human freedom and liberation has further complicated matters. For examples sex change surgeries, LGBTQ rights, status of same sex couples, transgender realities, etc have manoeuvred the ongoing debate on sexuality into uncharted waters. In the absence of a collective theological response secularism has infiltrated this issue in such a way that it has left the Church wanting of a view addresses these questions.

The Anglican Communion

In the recent past the Anglican Communion has had many discussions, discourses and debates on human sexuality. It is not just for the fact that the Anglican Communion has been immune or affected in this ongoing discussion but rather we ourselves have faced severing of relationships, theological revolutions and even brought the Communion to the brink of a schism. There have been sharp contrasting viewpoints in the Evangelical and Conservative African context against the Western and the Americanised wing of faith affirmation. Amongst our deliberations but not limited to, have been the nature versus nurture debate on homosexuality, the legal status of same sex unions, adoption and related recognition of same sex couples, ordination of and ministerial viewpoints of openly homosexual persons and a unified front on confronting a secular view with a theological response.

From a Church perspective

Our articulation of a response to this phenomenon must be intricately related to how we look at ourselves. What are the binding facts of the Anglican Communion? We need to revisit and redefine what we as a Church envisage for ourselves and the world. The same fact that we are a moderate and outward looking Congregation needs to be highlighted in this regard. While we are bound with creeds and the instruments of unity we also recognize that we are all belong to diverse affirmations and contexts. While we use the same pillars of tradition, scripture and reason we must also remember that we are an outcome of a revolution but also with a firm resolve of an Anglo –Catholic nature. It emphasizes the fact that we need to be a bridging Church, a Church that needs to tolerate and accept different affirmations. The Anglican Communion with diversity in

geography, culture, languages, contexts, theologies, traditions, etc spell this to us more clearly and challenges the Communion than any other Church. The Marks of the Anglican Mission gives an insight into the very forward looking and integrating mission that we engage in and this calls us to a deeper understanding of human sexuality from Biblical, theological & sociological perspectives.

Biblical, Theological and Sociological Perspectives

The Bible relates to us the goodness of God and continuing human frailty. When we read and mark the Holy Bible we need to have an in-depth idea of the contexts addressed and the culture on which these have been written. For examples we can cite the sexuality of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob and the prophets with a reference to Hosea. What is the understanding of literature such as the Song of Solomon, the letters of St Paul etc? What are the cultural implications of the Israelite understanding of Polygamy, Bigamy etc. which is found in several places of the Bible?

Theologically, we also understand God of the 'many' in the thought of Jesus. How Jesus integrated all people in the mission of God's reign is probably the best theological initiative we have when discussing this issue. Human sexuality has had several exceptions in the Bible and Jesus' overview of these makes these exceptions realistic and present. The best examples of this would be how Jesus treated, accepted and recognized people in the periphery. We need to look at this phenomenon through the eyes of the New Testament but also as how Jesus would have viewed same.

Sociologically we need to understand that differing human sexuality is a reality. While a small proportion may belong to one polar and another proportion to another side all the others remain at differing proportions on the scale of human sexuality. How can we then to promote "diversity in unity" rather than "unity in diversity"? We cannot expect or force everyone to belong to one category. It would seem as strange as asking everyone to colour one's skin one way or the other. The Anglican Communion must excel at bringing together diversity as unity. We cannot be bound by "colonial" uniformity which has been in place for several centuries across many parts of the world. We need to understand and respect each person and for what he or she may stand. We need to respect what he or she has inherited. We need to respect each other with diverse views and principles.

Jesus' spirituality and our mission

We always reiterate the fact that our mission must be the mission of God. It cannot be further away from what God wants us to do. The best lenses we see God's mission is by the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus accepted people as they were. People are born with a variety of sexual orientations. We can attribute this genetically, medically, ethically, secularly or in any other manner. But it remains a reality. We must now think how to accommodate them in the Church and in the human family. How can we make them feel wanted, welcomed, respected and indeed honoured. This cannot be a superficial outlook on forgetting distinctions but having unresolved issues internally. We must be open and widening our horizons in a manner that makes us no longer differentiates between anyone with any sexual orientation. Human sexuality remains just one more matter that can divide humanity adding to a host of which makes us have prejudices and reservations. If we can lift ourselves to look beyond these differences and to have vision of Jesus' we would be able to even lead the world view against discrimination and

marginalization. Our prayer must be that we keep on listening to what God instills in us as humans and we engage in the mission of integrating in the power of the Spirit.

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