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Foundations of Sand and Shadows of Love (Part I)

This past week we received disturbing news from the Anglican Church of Canada. The Diocese of New Westminster, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, passed a motion in favor of the blessing of same-sex unions. After the vote was taken, the representatives of nine parishes walked out of the Diocesan Convention.

The Bishop of New Westminster, Michael Ingham, supported the measure, and claimed that the Episcopal Church in the United States was already using such blessings. The Primate of Canada, Bishop Michael Peers, has defended the action of New Westminster, saying that it has acted responsibly, having gone through a two-year process whereby their bishop and diocese have come to this decision. Anticipating opposition from more conservative minded churchmen, Peers also reminded the rest of the Anglican Communion that no bishop has a right to interfere in the diocese of another bishop. Bishop Peers expects the conservative parishes of New Westminster to seek alternative Episcopal oversight, for which there is permission and provision.

Almost immediately there were reactions around the church from various bishops. In Canada, at least thirteen bishops, some retired and some active, have protested the action of New Westminster. Closer to home, the Bishop and Suffragan Bishop of South Carolina have written a letter to their Diocese, declaring solidarity with those parishes of New Westminster that have protested the decision. These are only the beginnings of what will be a universal protest. I should think that the reaction from the Anglican Communion worldwide would be severe.

There is a lot to be said about this action of Bishop Ingham and his Diocese. But before I begin what will be a long response, I want to put this in perspective. What I am about to say will not please some of you, but I hope that you will judge it on its own merits, and recognize what is not only thoughtful belief but also respect and compassion.

I am not interested in the persecution of people who practice homosexuality, male or female. What the Scripture and the Christian tradition have always considered sinful behavior is no worse than many sins, and indeed is less heinous than many. Those who have homosexual tendencies, but remain chaste, differ from other sinners only in the specificity and particularity of inordinate desire. The inordinate acts or desires of adulterers and fornicators are equally reprehensible before God. The fact that the Church in Vancouver has

passed its motion for same-sex unions,

resolve. From a more general perspective, one can say that the Diocese of New Westminster has succumbed to the political machinations of a private interest group reflecting the moral error and deception of a segment of our culture in general.

Moreover, I recognize that those who practice homosexuality are themselves different. Some are promiscuous and have many encounters. Others tend to have fewer relationships over a period of time. Of these two groups, the first and promiscuous are driven more by sensual appetite than other needs, and the second, more committed, reflect the desire for companionship and friendship. It is for the sake of the more committed homosexual couple that a liturgical rite of same-sex union has been suggested. I am fully aware that these two categories of homosexual persons as promiscuous and committed apply equally to heterosexuals.

The problem begins to come into focus if we recognize that both of these factors, sensuality and friendship, are at the center of the homosexual dynamic. When the argument is made, as it now is, for the rights of homosexual persons, they mean the right both to sensual satisfaction, which is the right to experience what is given in our natural, bodily, composition as sensuous creatures, and the precious pursuit of friendship. Taken together, these two aspects of homosexual behavior are what really move the homosexual person. Total disregard for the agreed statement of the Canadian House of Bishops (1997), and the position of the worldwide Lambeth Conference of Bishops (1998), only shows its revolutionary.

From the point of view of sheer bodily and sensuous nature, and the spiritual desire of companionship, one can see the inherent goods, which the homosexual wishes to claim as rightfully his own.

The agenda that moves the view of the rights of homosexual persons from the private into the public sphere takes the form of same-sex unions. It is important to homosexual couples that the goodness of their intimacy be acknowledged by society in general, and that these perceived individual rights are made equal to heterosexual persons both in political integrity as well as in every economic provision.

When, therefore, the legal motion of the blessing of same-sex unions appears within the context of a diocesan convention, the reason is so that the perceived rights of homosexuals, the inherent goodness of their sensuality and friendship, be declared sacred in the eyes of God and of His Church.

This is what the Diocese of New Westminster has attempted to do. But their action only increases the problem. First, New Westminster has acted without the theological consensus of the Anglican Communion. Indeed it is fairer to say that they have acted contrary to the explicit position of the Anglican Church of Canada, and of the global Anglican Communion. Theological consensus has not been achieved, nor will it be, because homosexual unions are contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture, and to the received moral tradition of the Church. A mere vote of a politicized convention does not change this fact, no matter

how zealously or passionately its advocates feel about it. In the next article I will say something of why the Church Catholic has opposed homosexual unions by saying first of all what Christian marriage is.

...to be continued

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