

HOMOSEXUALITY DEBATE AND PROSPECTS FOR ANGLICAN- CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

The question of homosexuality has been a thorny issue within Christianity. The official Catholic teachings are against homosexuality, describing it as intrinsically disordered. Oppositions to this official position has not had any significant effect on the church's unity. In the Anglican Communion, however, because the instruments of communion, like the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates Meetings, cannot dictate for any national or provincial church, there is no unified official position on homosexuality, resulting in bitter contestations that have regrettably split the communion. This paper discusses homosexuality from both Catholic and Anglican perspectives demonstrating how it has widened the gap among Christians. It makes a case for a more ecumenical approach to douse tensions. A proposal is made for spiritual ecumenism that focuses more on the spiritual goods shared in common by all Christians irrespective of their denominational affiliations and differences.

Keywords: Catholic, Anglican, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, Homosexuality, Gay, Ecumenism

Introduction

One of the major factors that originally brought to the fore the need for ecumenism among Christians was the realization by Protestant missionaries of the deleterious effect to their missionary work of the scandal of institutional disunity and interdenominational rivalry among Christian missionaries in non-Western societies, especially at the turn of the twentieth century; hence the convocation of the first World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland (Kelly, 1990). Catholic Church was a late comer to this ecumenical endeavour, having got its major impetus from Vatican II that took place over half a century after the Edinburgh conference (1962 to 1965).

Those early years of ecumenism were marked by great enthusiasm and intense desire for healing of wounds, impressive pastoral cooperation among the churches, and more or less, their organic unity. Regrettably, as years went by, mutual suspicion crept in once more, leading to loss of steam. While the mainstream churches, irrespective of their differences, were busy searching for ways of increasing their mutual cooperation, the newly founded fundamental ones became less concerned with opening up to others.

In recent years, arguments surrounding homosexuality have affected ecumenical relations among the churches. Depending on which side of the debate one occupies, he or she stands the chance of being accused of schism, irreligion, or racism by fellow Christians. While the Catholic Church officially maintains a hard stand against homosexuality, positions vary extensively among and within the Protestants. Divergence of opinions within the Anglican Communion has split the church along geographical, theological, and ideological lines, such that there appears to be no hope for convergence any soon. In fact, *The Jerusalem Statement* (2008) states that “Sadly, this crisis has torn the fabric of the Communion in such a way that it cannot simply be patched back together.”

This paper investigates the positions of both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion on homosexuality, especially as it affects their ecumenical relations. It also proposes better ways of promoting more friendly relations and unity, their differences notwithstanding.

Conceptual Clarifications

The following basic concepts used in the paper will be clarified below: sexuality, sex, sexual orientation, and ecumenism.

Sexuality

Sexuality is not an easy concept to articulate, even though it is a very powerful force that provokes strong feelings in us. It is the capacity in humans for communion and oneness with others. Gula (2010) remarks that it is a pervasive reality, covering our general longing for union and interpersonal relations, and entails loving and being loved, connecting and being connected, accepting and being accepted. Therefore, to be human is to be sexual. To deny its reality is tantamount to escaping or denying one's existence as a human being. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994; hereafter CCC) indicates that “Sexuality affects aspects of the human person in the unity of his [or her] body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others” (no. 2332). It is the most stable proof of human existence as embodied, and has deep influence on religious and spiritual experiences of humans.

In the book of Genesis (1:27), everything created by God is described as very good. Sexuality is part of God's creation and as such, is indeed very good, and has love as its intrinsic end (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995). Through it, we enter into communion with God and our fellow human beings. It means that, without our sexuality, we may not even relate well with God, since we need a heart that yearns for connection and love for our prayers to be real and therefore effective.

Sex

According to the European Commission's Directorate for Research and Innovation (2013), sex denotes “biological qualities characteristic of women [females] and men [males] in terms of reproductive organs and functions based on chromosomal complement and physiology. As such, sex is globally understood as the classification of living things as male and female, and

intersexed” (p. 9). Sex is therefore only an aspect of our sexuality. As a matter of fact, it is from it, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1975; hereafter CDF) rightly points out, “that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman, and thereby largely conditions his or her progress towards maturity and insertion into society.”

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to a person's primary or persistent pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction, either to a person of opposite sex, the same sex, or both (American Psychology Association, 2021). Some documents prefer to use inclination to orientation, even though the two refer basically to the same reality. When the attraction is to the opposite sex, it is called heterosexuality; to the same sex, homosexuality; while to both sexes, bisexuality. Some authors, like Broto (2010) and Bogaert (2015), include the fourth orientation, asexuality, referring to those who are not sexually attracted to others. For many, however, asexual persons are without sexual orientation.

Heterosexually active males and females are generally regarded as straights. Homosexually active females are referred to as lesbians, while their male counterparts are referred to as gays.

Ecumenism

Ecumenism usually refers to the official effort by Christians to make concrete in their lives the prayer of Jesus that they be one (Jn 17:21), by forming a united front in witnessing to their faith in Jesus and their common mission. It is designed to confront the apparent contradictions in the lives of Christians as seen in the scandal of divisions, rivalries, and undercutting of one another by different Christian denominations; actions which, according to Vatican II (1964), clearly oppose “the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature” (*Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 1).

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is an age-old phenomenon. The writings of great Greek thinkers of classical antiquity, like Herodotus, Plato, Xenophon, and Athenaeus show that it was practised during the period, the most common form of which was pederasty – from the Greek word “paiderastia” meaning “boy love.” Pederasty is a form of sexual relation between adult men and adolescent boys. According to Hubbard (2003), there are some suggestions that pederasty was primarily associated with the upper-class in the Greek society, since only they could afford the time, the leisure, and the resources to maintain such relationships with boys.

Even though Plato, in his earlier works, does not condemn homosexuality, the practice was generally seen as abnormal in the society. Plato's condemnation of it came later where he describes it as reproachable, absolutely unholy and abhorrent to the gods. He asserts that it must be treated with the same seriousness as incest. Plato believes that it was unnatural and must be viewed as the ugliest of all human acts (Davidson, 2007).

The Old Testament records how men of Sodom and Gomorrah requested Lot to release to them

the angels that visited him so that they may have sexual relations with them: “And they called unto Lot, and said unto him: 'Where are the men that came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them’” (Gen 19:5). The texts of Lev 18:22 and Lev 20:13 condemn homosexual acts. New Testament texts also speak against homosexuality. Writing to the Romans, St. Paul expresses his disapproval of homosexuality in these words: “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom 1:26-27). Among those that will not inherit the Kingdom of God, as enunciated by St. Paul in I Cor 6:10, are “Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers” (See also I Tim 1:10). In no place in the Scripture is homosexuality explicitly justified.

In today's society, opinions are varied concerning the admissibility or otherwise of homosexuality. Most of the nations in the West and some churches have legalized it and are accusing those opposed to it of being homophobic, discriminatory, and oppressive. In their turn, those opposed to it accuse its supporters of thwarting the natural course of things, God's plan and purpose for creation, and of promoting a society devoid of proper religious and dignified foundations. Interpretations given to it and people's standpoints depend on the dominant interests pursued by them, their level of involvement, interpretation and understanding of religious texts, and claim to objectivity in moral issues.

From ecumenical point of view, the stands of the different churches have brought about more tensions than cordiality. Within some denominations, there are discordant voices evoking the necessity of what some scholars describe as internal ecumenism that would serve as prelude to, and preparatory ground for, meaningful interdenominational ecumenism

Catholic Church and homosexual orientation

The Catholic Church believes that homosexual orientation could be innate, learned, or developed as one matures through life. CDF (1975) differentiates temporary or curable orientations from innate or incurable ones. Temporary or curable orientations may be traced to wrong education, derailed sexual development, habit or bad example. Whatever the case, the church requires that pastors of souls treat people with such orientations with love and care, and not with condemnation. This will help them to seek ways to overcome their difficulties.

The church sees homosexual orientation as an “objective moral disorder” ordained towards “an intrinsic moral evil;” and as harbouring a tendency that is so strong to lead one away from God (CDF, 1986). To be disordered means that homosexuality does not follow the normal, natural order of things, and is opposed to the end to which normal, natural order of sexual relations lead – unity of man and woman in marriage and procreation. It is therefore not homosexually-inclined person that is described as being objectively disordered, but his or her sexual inclination or orientation.

The church insists that whoever notices that he or she is so oriented, but does not get involved

in homosexual acts, does everything within his or her capacity and by the help of grace to rise above it has not sinned. Part of his or her efforts should be to seek for an appropriate therapy (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995).

Catholic Church and homosexual acts

Unlike homosexual orientation, the Catholic Church sees homosexual acts or practice as gravely sinful. CDF (1975) condemns the attitude of those who excuse some homosexual acts on the ground that, being innate, homosexual orientation allows the people so oriented no option to act otherwise. It insists that on no account would such acts be justified because, according to the objective moral order, they are essentially disordered and do not lead to the proper end to which sexual acts are naturally ordered. Besides, they are condemned by the Sacred Scripture. The CCC (1992) also echoes the same thought when it states:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstance can they be approved. (no. 2357)

It is, therefore, clear that the Catholic Church condemns homosexual acts on four grounds. First, they go against the natural law according to which sexual act is ordained to happen between a man and a woman. Natural law, we know, is a body of unchanging moral principles that the church regards as inherent in the human nature and serves as the basis for all human conduct. Second, homosexuality contravenes the teaching of the Sacred Scripture, which condemns homosexual act in its entirety.

Third, it is against one of the ends to which sexual acts are ordained, which is procreation. Sexual acts are generally directed to two ends – the unitive and the procreative ends. The unitive purpose deepens the bond of affection between a man and a woman in marriage. This serves the good of the spouses and the children that may result from the union. The procreative end is served by the conjugal union of a man and a woman. Homosexual act is therefore morally wrong, according to the church, because it distorts the conjugal nature of the sexual act and cannot lead to the procreation and proper education of children.

Fourth, homosexual act is against the sexual complementarity between man and woman. Man and woman are not only physically, morally, or spiritually different by reason of their sexes, but also complement each other by reason of their difference. The “*difference and complementarity*,” CCC (1992) notes, “are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out” (no. 2333).

Catholic seminary formation and priestly ordination

As regards accepting homosexuals for ordination, the position of the Congregation for the

Catholic Education (2005) is very clear. Having reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the church on homosexuality, it maintains that on no account should people be admitted to the seminary for training for the priesthood “who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'” (no. 2). It further avers that the situation of such persons makes it impossible for them to engage in correct relationship with men and women. If, however, the tendency is not yet deep-seated and is transitory, it says, efforts should be made to correct it, such that the person is certified as having fully overcome it three years before his diaconate ordination.

Acknowledging the specific role of the bishop and the major superiors in the process of discernment of candidates to the priesthood, the Congregation highlights the work of spiritual directors and confessors. Spiritual directors, it maintains, have the obligation to dissuade in conscience someone who practises homosexuality and has deep-seated homosexual tendency from continuing in the seminary formation. Noting the candidate's primary responsibility towards his formation, it points out that

It would be gravely dishonest for a candidate to hide his own homosexuality in order to proceed, despite everything, towards ordination. Such a deceitful attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty, and openness that must characterize the personality of him who believes he is called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood. (no. 3)

In other words, any seminarian who notices the trait in him should honourably bow out of formation in order to search for God in other vocations in life.

Dissenting voices among the Catholic hierarchy

The official stand of the Catholic Church on homosexuality, as has been presented above, does not detract from the fact that some top members of the church's hierarchy are gradually becoming uncomfortable with the church's position and are recently becoming outspoken. Recently, Catholic News Agency (23 February 2021) reported about a call from some German Catholic bishops, prominent among whom was the president of the German Bishops Conference, Bishop Georg Bätzing, for a change in the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on homosexuality. Some German and Austrian bishops even supported publication of books of blessings for homosexual couples. Against this move, CDF (2021) issued a *responsum* reaffirming the church's stance against homosexual acts. In the document, CDF acknowledges the existence of some moves in certain ecclesiastical circles to bless homosexual unions and insists that such blessings are illicit and that God “cannot bless sin”. Hence, the church lacks the power to approve it.

Homosexuality in the Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion has no such thing as centralized stance on homosexuality. This is in line with the very nature and structure of Anglican ecclesiology. Unlike the Catholic Church that has the Pope as its visible head whom they look up to for direction and guidance, especially on moral issues, each of the provinces of the Anglican Communion is more or less independent. Even though the Archbishop of Canterbury is the head of the mother church of

England as well as the nominal head of the church round the globe, he cannot dictate for any national or provincial church regarding faith and morals. Even so are the other instruments of communion, like the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates Meetings.

Concerning homosexuality, there are serious conflict of opinions within and between national churches or provinces. This has threatened seriously the communion that has for long held together their divergences, pluriformity, and fluidity (Bates, 2005). For some, like Hasselt (2007), the divisions may eventually precipitate to possible schisms within the Anglican Communion.

A document titled *Issues in Human Sexuality*, compiled by a committee set up by the Church of England in 1991, made it clear that the church could under certain circumstances accept same-sex marriages, but was clearly against same-sex relations for her ordained ministers. Some members of the church adopted this document as a guide for their approach to same-sex relations (Bates, 2005). It was at the Lambeth Conference of 1998, which comprised all the bishops of the communion, and has been held every ten years or so since 1867, that the issue was centrally debated for the first time on the international stage.

Lambeth Conference and beyond

The Lambeth Conference of 1998 exposed the level of polarization within the Anglican Communion on homosexuality. While western bishops sought to be more accommodating, by trying to marry the traditional teaching on human sexuality with the changing cultural situations and issues of human rights, the African and Asian bishops were deep in the traditional and biblical stance against homosexuality, upholding it as eternal and unchanging (Nnadi, 2019). The strongest appeal for ordination of gay ministers came from North American bishops, while its strongest opposition came from Africa and Asia. The latter appeared to have organized well before the conference and were able to vote out proposals made in favour of ordaining gays in the church (Nnadi). The divide in opinions between the western and the southern bishops made some people interpret the debate as more geographical than theological. For many others, it was simply a debate between conservatives and liberals.

The Lambeth Conference, in its article 1.10, while proclaiming God's love for homosexuals, their full membership of the church, and the need for pastoral care for them, and having condemned all forms of homophobia, states that homosexuality is contrary to the Scripture. It also maintains its stance against blessing homosexual unions or ordaining them as clergy. Even though this resolution was not taken as binding on all member churches, those whose position it favoured continued to use it as a beacon of support for their arguments.

Shortly after the conference, over 100 bishops, the vast majority of whom came from the West, jointly issued a pastoral statement apologizing to gay and lesbian communities for any rejection implied in the resolution and pledged to continue to assist, listen, and reflect on the issue (Nnadi, 2019). Following the conference, in 2002, the synod of the Diocese of New Westminster in western Canada favoured public rites for the blessing of same sex unions. Further, the Episcopalian Church USA (ECUSA), in the Diocese of New Hampshire, despite

oppositions, was determined to have Gene Robinson, an openly gay pastor who was living with his male partner, Mart Andrew, consecrated a bishop.

In the midst of all these, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 2003, set up The Lambeth Commission on Communion, which has as part of its mandate:

To examine and report to him by 30th September 2004 on the legal and theological implication flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal Church (USA) to appoint a priest in a committed same sex relationship as one of its bishops, and of the Diocese of Westminster to authorise services for use in connection with same sex union. (The Lambeth Commission, 2004, p. 8)

As noted by the commission, before it could finish its work, ECUSA consecrated Gene Robinson a bishop in 2003, and declared that such actions were not against the common life of the church. The episcopal consecration of Gene Robinson was indeed the first of its kind in the history of Anglican Communion. His first marriage to Isabella McDonald in 1972 ended in divorce in 1986. He began to associate with Mart Andrew in 1998 and it again ended in divorce in 2004, a year after his consecration.

The consecration of Gene Robinson was one of the major factors that immediately led to the pulling away of the Nigerian and the Ugandan churches from ECUSA. They complained of being oppressed and of their views being side-lined. Some conservative Episcopalians in the USA abandoned the church too and formed the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). Even before the consecration of Gene Robinson, the churches in the South had worked out intervention plans for conservative Anglicans in the USA and they founded Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) in 2000 (Nnadi, 2019). Archbishops Kolini, the Primate of the Church of Rwanda, and Archbishop Tay of South East Asia consecrated Chuck Murphy and John Rogers bishops on 29 January 2000, at St. Andrew's Cathedral Singapore, to function as conservative bishops to cater for the pastoral needs of conservative Anglicans in America. Today AMiA operates in USA and Canada, and has founded so many churches for the conservative Anglicans (Nnadi). Another pastoral intervention was the founding of the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE), which was formally launched on 24 June 2011 (Nnadi).

Further, the Lambeth Conference of 2008, which was boycotted by many bishops, especially those against the blessing of same-sex unions and consecration of gay clergy, favoured homosexuals, even though the gay bishop, Gene Robinson, was not invited. Some of the traditionalists in the ECUSA, dissatisfied with the way the church was going about the issue, joined forces with the churches in the south, particularly in Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Southeast Asia, Kenya, and the Southern cone of South America, who now send missionaries to them (Valentine et al., 2013).

All this precipitated into the formation of Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) of conservative Anglican bishops in 2008, which held its inaugural conference in Jerusalem the same year. This conference marked the emergence of the Global South as a dominant force to reckon with in the Anglican Communion. As noted by GAFCON (2008) in the official

document following the conference, *The Complete Jerusalem Statement*, the conference became a necessity on three grounds: The first was what the document referred to as the preaching of a false gospel contrary to the Bible by some Anglican clergy that led to the blessings of same-sex unions, and the consecration of a gay bishop in 2003. The second was the declaration of autonomy from the promoters of the false gospel by provinces in the south and its aftermath. The third was the failure of the instruments of communion within the church to discipline those who were derailing, especially the ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada. The conference therefore insisted that the Anglican identity cannot be premised on recognition by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The disagreement and counter accusations is still an ongoing affair. The foregoing account shows how diverse the opinions of Anglicans are with regard to the issue of homosexuality.

Conservative and liberal lines of arguments

It is easier and more appropriate to see the conflict of opinions regarding homosexuality in the Anglican Communion as one between liberal and conservative elements in the church than between the West and the South. It is true that the southern Anglican bishops easily unite to pressure the church to take a stand against homosexual practice, they do not do so simply because they are from the south, but because they seem to agree perfectly on their understanding of the issue. Besides, even though the majority of those against it come from the south and the majority of those in support from the west, each stance could be seen in both geographical divides. While the conservatives argue that the Anglican Communion has been taken over by radical heretics who are under a stranglehold of liberalism, the liberals in their turn accuse the conservative-minded ones of being under the yoke of homophobia, intolerance, and bigotry that have made them regrettably tied to the past without any creative future.

The conservative Anglicans hinge their arguments on the authority of the Scripture, especially the creation narrative in the Book of Genesis that reveals the creation of human beings, male and female, in the image of God (Gen 1:27). They also seek to justify their position by insisting on the significance of the family founded on male and female as the bedrock of the society. Many of them object to the claim that homosexuality is natural or God-given. For them, it is a question of choice not nature. This, they believe, is the orthodox teaching that the church should embrace to counter the erosion of moral values in secular society (Valentine et al., 2013).

For Bishop Chukwuma of Enugu Diocese, Nigeria, and possibly for the vast majority of Nigerian Anglicans, homosexuals need exorcism, because their body has been possessed by an alien spirit. Bishop Chukwuma's outburst during the 1998 Lambeth Conference stating that homosexuality needed to be "cast out" from the body of Richard Keller, the General Secretary of the Lesbian Gay Christian Movement (LGCM), expresses this understanding (Nnadi, 2019). As a matter of fact, the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion now dismisses any of her clergy found guilty of homosexual acts. The Daily Post (28 February 2021) reported how disappointed the Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Archbishop Henry Ndukuba, was with the Anglican Communion of North America (ACNA) on their recent,

seemingly official endorsement of same-sex union, and how he called for serious sanctions on the bishops concerned. According to the Archbishop, just as we could not have a Christian murderer, a Christian adulterer, or a Christian terrorist, so also could we not have such a thing as a Christian gay.

On the other hand, the liberals or the progressives argue that people should be allowed to express their sexual identity; that it is part of the freedom of the children of God, the scriptural injunction to love and care for others, especially the marginalized. They also argue that neither homosexuality nor heterosexuality are condemned by the Scripture, but their misuse. For them, Anglicanism has never displayed in its entire history such an attitude of intolerance to divergent positions. Besides, it has not been a tradition of common doctrine, but one that allows for freedom and adaptation to prevailing circumstances and contexts.

Homosexuality and the question of ecumenism

Before the Vatican II, the Catholics saw the Anglicans as heretics who should find their way back to the true teachings, the legitimate leadership, and fidelity to the true faith that the Catholic Church believed it represented. Because of the pride of place that the Anglicans and other Protestants gave to conscience, Catholics accused them of being behind the modern drive towards individualism and moral relativism. In their turn, the Anglicans and other Protestants accused Catholics of superstition with the added burden of hierarchicalism and authority, which impeded liberty and progress.

With Vatican II, however, a dramatic turn was noticed among Catholics, such that they started to refer to the Protestants as “separated brethren” and “true ecclesial bodies” that contain in themselves means of salvation, which however subsists in the Catholic Church (Vatican II, 1964). The Protestants also started to see Catholics in positive lights, as collaborators in the mission of Christ. Both sides saw the work of actualizing the ecumenical mandate as a joint venture, so as to bring into effect the prayer of Jesus that they be one as he and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). Thus, the ecumenical spirit that existed among the Protestants prior to Vatican II witnessed a huge surge in the post Vatican II era because of the entrance of the Catholic Church; but this did not last, especially as more conservative churches began to spring up.

In ecumenical circles, whereas there could easily be agreement among the churches on doctrinal issues, like the understanding of the Trinity, significance of Baptism and the Eucharist, and apostolicity, once it touches more practical (moral) issues, like human sexuality (homosexuality), disagreements and disunity set in. The disagreement and disunity are as much among the churches as they are within some of them.

Catholic-Anglican ecumenical dialogue: Efforts so far and way forward

It is clear from the discussions above that there is considerable level of bitterness within the Anglican Communion occasioned by differences in their understanding of homosexuality and its place in the church. Therefore, for there to be any meaningful ecumenical engagement between Anglican Communion and Catholic Church, the internal ramblings within the Anglican Communion must be addressed first. The two warring sides must begin to see each other as collaborators in the mission of Christ within the communion before they could engage

an outsider. Little wonder Sedgwick (2010) assert that ecumenism must begin from within denominations and work itself outward.

The divergence of opinions within the Anglican Communion could be explained by its understanding of how to be church, which gives much room for internal freedom. Anglican synodality and the consequent lay involvement in decision-making are also remarkable. Hence, they generally consider it legitimate resisting any act of jurisdiction they deem erroneous (Sykes, as cited in Sedgwick, 2019). The Primates express this view in their 1981 Meeting in Washington, DC when they stated:

In the continuing process of defining the *consensus fidelium*, Anglicans regard criticism and response as an essential element by which authority is exercised and experienced and as playing a vital part in the work of the Holy Spirit in maintaining the Church in fidelity to the Apostolic Gospel.

In practical terms, one can hardly see any organ that could speak as an instrument of unity for all Anglicans, leading to steady polarization and divisions. **The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates Meetings, which serve as instruments of communion** lack the moral authority and the will to enforce any of their resolutions, more so on sexual matters. And it seems no other issue has so challenged their communion as the debate on sexual ethics.

Solution to the ensuing conflict cannot be found in jettisoning the debate, because it cannot easily go away. The practical implications of such issues are so prevalent and profound that they cannot be wished away nor ignored. A more positive and frank engagement could be a way forward. To subdue internal freedom of expression and self-criticism that are part of Anglicanism may be seen by many as more injurious to its nature than the present debate would.

Unlike the Anglican ecclesiology, the Catholic ecclesiology is more centripetally structured with single authority figure – the pope, who is seen as visible continuation of the petrine office (Kelly, 1990). That is why the communion advocated for by Vatican II is basically a hierarchical one. It is therefore easier for Catholics to have a common teaching on moral matters without allowing members considerable freedom for dissent. Censorship of theological opinions, threats of sanctions and ex-communications for dissenting voices are therefore ripe within Catholicism. But if this is not moderated, it could as well scuttle genuine freedom of expression and creativity needed in the church.

The Protestants fundamentally envision the scandal of division not only between them and Catholics but also among themselves as a moral problem that betrays the mission of the Church as the bearer of unity and peace among peoples. They give theological issues a secondary place. On the contrary, Catholics see the problem as more theological than moral. For traditional Catholics, ecumenical questions border primarily on unity of doctrines, and they believe that once there is oneness in this area, the coast is cleared for visible organic unity. Protestants do not see things primarily this way. Their belief in the primacy of conscience over doctrine makes them consider legitimate and radical protest, which may at times lead to

formation of new churches, a necessity to achieve God's will for his people. For Catholics who pride themselves as the custodians of the core Christian beliefs and teachings, such a division is certainly against God's will (Kelly, 1969).

The establishment of Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in 1967 after the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, has provided a veritable context for ecumenical interchange between the two churches. The commission is now in its third phase since 2011. Since inception, it has dwelt mainly on the themes of authority and ecclesiology of communion. It is yet to issue any document on moral issues, even though it is part of the assignment given to the commission in the Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowland Williams in 2016.

The most recent document of the commission, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be Church – Local, Regional, Universal* (2018), was written with the principles of receptive ecumenism, which seems to dominate many ecumenical discussions in recent times. Receptive ecumenism refers to the situation where each of the churches appreciates, accepts, or adopts a spiritual good or tradition of the other and applies it to its own life. It operates with the basic assumption that spiritual goods can be shared between the churches. As Murray (2008) asserts, the primary concern of receptive ecumenism is the overly modest self-interrogation, “What, in any given situation, can one's own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?” and, moreover, to ask this question without insisting, although certainly hoping, that these other traditions are also asking themselves the same question” (p.12).

One of the results of receptive ecumenism is recovery by Catholics of the place of bible study among the laity and the Protestant increasing appreciation of the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist (Fries and Rahner, 1985). The concept of reception helps to approach ecumenism with the principle of gradualism and patience, knowing that things need not be forced.

In *Walking together on the way*, ARCIC articulates some understandings and applications of authority and power in each of the churches that are either appreciated or not by the other. The commission, for instance, noted that the Anglicans appreciate the commitment shown by Catholics to unity and exercise of episcopal authority. They therefore seek that their (Anglican) church be so marked by a worldwide identity and commitment as Catholics (ARCIC, 2018). Nevertheless, some Anglican critics are uncomfortable with limitations of the role of the laity in decision-making within Catholicism, inadequate reflection of local concerns and diversity in its policies, thus depriving it of genuine universality (ARCIC).

Envisioning the homosexual debate within the principles of spiritual ecumenism

Christians must note that their mission is primarily a spiritual one and should not be sought in vain glory. By praying to his Father for unity of his followers (Jn 17:21), Jesus shows the centrality of prayer in any ecumenical endeavour. If Christians fail to put prayer first and allow arguments to take the centre stage, they expose their ecumenical relations to the whims of

human limitations and weaknesses. Spiritual ecumenism should therefore be the soul of all ecumenical undertakings. It starts from accepting our weaknesses and how it has contributed to the present scenario and asking for the grace of God to forge ahead.

Vatican II (1964) clearly states that ecumenism was born by the grace of the Holy Spirit; it should therefore be sustained by it. Hence, the aptness of Kasper's (2007) assertion that ecumenism is nothing but "a spiritual process, carried out in faithful obedience to the Father following the will of Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (p. 12). For him, prayer for Christian unity is "the royal door of ecumenism" (p. 11), that leads Christians to see the whole issue differently, such that it deepens the communion they share and offers them the courage to face realities as they are. Kasper is of the view that it is only through spiritual ecumenism that Christians could realize adequately the extent of the damage caused the body of Christ by human pride, selfishness, polemics, condemnations, and derision of one another, feel the pains of division in their hearts and souls, be remorseful for it, experience conversion, and seek for reconciliation and unity.

As Christians pray together, it is important that they note that the bond of unity they share is much greater than the things that separate them (John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, no. 20). There is no ground to see **the differences in their understanding of homosexuality as a threat to ecumenism. An Anglican Bishop, Spong (1992), for instance, mentioned the Catholic hard stand on homosexuality, which he described as that of denial and unreality, as one of disagreements that has continued to widen the gap between the Catholics and Anglicans, and hindering effective ecumenical unity. This needs not to be so in the world of today. The differences should not constitute a hindrance, but inspire the churches to deeper and sincerer dialogue, collaboration, and cooperation. Unity is not a function of uniformity. Recognition of the significance of difference and diversity is rather a condition for real unity. Indeed, the contemporary pluralism and liberty in religious matters seem to work against any perfunctory search for organic unity.**

The shared elements between the churches and among Anglicans should be more stressed and utilised as points of contact and communion. Differences of opinions on moral issues, like homosexuality, should not be allowed to tear the churches apart. Among others, there is a common belief in God the Father, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as in the power of prayer, the role of Baptism and reverence of the Holy Scripture to which both the supporters and opponents of homosexuality refer to in one way or another to buttress their stands. With spiritual ecumenisms, it is possible to accept diversity and legitimate pluralism even in matters of biblical hermeneutics as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit who at Pentecost was able to unite the different cultures and languages into one, such that those gathered asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our native language?" (Act 2:7-8).

Jesus suffered and died for all and not for a particular group of people. His death broke down the walls of hostility keeping people apart (Eph 2:14-16), Jews and Gentile, slave and freeborn, males and females, thus making us one in him (Gal 3:28). Jesus did not promote exclusion in his earthly life; rather, he tried to include and call into discipleship those excluded

and marginalized by the Jewish society – the needy, the poor, the sinners. He taught us not to judge others (Mtt 7:1-5), to forgive as often as we are offended, and to love not only our friends, but also our enemies (Mtt 5:43-48). In the Lord's Prayer, he taught us to call God our Father. Being our Father, we are his children, who, though different from one another, should always be united as brothers and sisters under him with love that ensues from the heart.

Debates on homosexuality could continue to set the two churches wider apart from each other unless they learn to respect each other's peculiarity irrespective of the disparity of their stands on the issue. To respect the other does not necessarily mean endorsing or supporting the other's stand. It rather means allowing the other freedom to express itself, while they walk together for clearer understanding, mutual cooperation, sustained by sincere and hearty dialogue.

Furthermore, given the divide that is sometimes witnessed along geographical or cultural lines, any ecumenical enthusiasm of this era must contend with the issues of social identity. Categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, region or nationality, and class must be given adequate attention. In as much as they should not be markers of belongingness and/or exclusion, they should not be allowed to undetectably impinge on theological, ideological, and ecclesiological positions of different religious communities, simply because they have not been given appropriate attention, or are simply ignored or neglected.

Conclusion

Human sexuality touches every aspect of human personality. We cannot escape its powerful influence on us as humans. It defines us and helps us to achieve our purpose in life both temporal and spiritual. Homosexuality is just one form of sexual orientations involving a man and another man or a woman and another woman. Distinction is often made between homosexual orientation/inclination and homosexual acts. The official teachings of the Catholic Church describe homosexual orientation as an “objective moral disorder,” strongly tending towards “moral evil”. Even though the church does not regard it as sinful in itself, once the person does not act it out, he or she is believed to indulge in a gravely sinful act that is “intrinsically disordered.” The Catholic Church insists that those involved in this should not be admitted to the Catholic priesthood, just as those with deep-seated homosexual tendency. There are however minority oppositions among the high-ranking members of the church against what they describe as hard stance of the church against homosexuals, but this has not made the church change its position.

The Anglican Communion, on the other hand, does not have a common position with regard to homosexuality. This has resulted in divisions within the communion, making some members of the communion threaten a complete break. Majority of the Anglicans from the global south are against homosexual acts and ordaining homosexuals priests, and have opposed it vehemently, while majority from the north favour allowing them function within the church, because they do not consider it sinful; a stand supported by the Lambeth Conference. This fight for and against homosexuality within the communion has been so fierce that it has seriously affected their relations with one another and the bond holding them together, breeding mutual suspicion.

In ecumenical terms, the Anglican Communion should do an ad-intra soul searching as regards their relationship with one another in order to facilitate their ecumenical relations with the Catholic Church. For the two churches to forge ahead in ecumenical relations, they need to understand that unity does not necessarily entail uniformity. In spite of the differences in their stance, they could still forge ahead to nurture brotherly love, collaboration, and cooperation since their mission is principally a spiritual one that should be geared towards uniting all Christians under Christ as the head. They should strive for spiritual ecumenism that will fortify the sharing of their spiritual goods together, common prayers, and mutual respect of their differences. Unless this is done, their mission will be nothing but a betrayal of the mind of Christ who prayed that they be one as he and the Father are.

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