



REPORT

of the

PRIMATE'S
THEOLOGICAL
COMMISSION

of the

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

on the

Blessing of Same-Sex Unions

The St. Michael Report

Printed in June, 2005



The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada

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Preface

THE GENERAL SYNOD of 2004 requested 'that the Primate ask the Primate's Theological Commission to review, consider, and report to the Council of General Synod, by its spring 2006 meeting, whether the blessing of committed same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine'. The Primate, the Most Rev. Andrew Hutchison, made this request of the Theological Commission and stressed the need for timely consideration. Archbishop Hutchison was convinced that in the interests of our church's need to be ready for the General Synod 2007, the Primate's Theological Commission should try to have its report ready by the Fall of 2005. We concurred and eventually committed ourselves to an even earlier timeline of presenting to the Council of General Synod in May, 2005.

The Commission is deeply grateful to the Sisters of the Church as three of our four meetings have been held at their convent, St. Michael's House in Oakville, Ontario. We have greatly appreciated their hospitality and have benefited from joining with them in prayer. It is out of our gratitude that we have named the report 'The St. Michael Report'. The Commissioners come from many different dioceses of the Canadian church. We hold widely different theological positions. We have, however, listened carefully and respectfully to one another and have all grown in understanding as a result. We are especially grateful to the Rev. Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan who staffs the Commission and is of invaluable assistance and support. The Primate chose not to attend the two meetings in which the Commission worked almost exclusively on the Report but we deeply appreciate his prayerful support.

We ask the Council of General Synod to receive and commend the Report to our church for consideration. We believe that we have outlined what needs to be pondered as we seek the way forward together. In particular, we are especially concerned that our church

should commit herself to serious engagement with the whole range of theological issues associated with such blessings. Rather than issuing a general call for more study and discussion, we hope that the Anglican Church of Canada will invite all sides to listen prayerfully and deeply to those who hold different perspectives. In particular, we ask that constituencies refrain from trying to score rhetorical points, or gain influence for the positions they may have already decided are right. We all have much to learn from each other, and in order for that to happen we need to enter into intentional, deep, prayerful listening.

Representing several different theological colleges, universities, parishes, and dioceses, we hope that the Commission will be able to help the church further engage in the much needed theological reflection.

We thank the General Synod and our Primate for entrusting us with this task.

The Rt. Rev. Victoria Matthews, Chair

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A Brief Overview of the Report

1. The Commission has concluded that the blessing of committed same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine.
2. The Commission understands the term ‘committed same-sex unions’ to mean committed, adult, monogamous, intended lifelong, same-sex relationships which include sexual intimacy.
3. The Commission is particularly concerned to call the whole Church to engage in furthering the discussion of this issue in a sustained, prayerful, respectful, and non-polemical manner.
4. The Commission recognizes that there is a range of interpretations given to the term ‘doctrine’, and that doctrines develop and change over time. We agree that the blessing of committed same-sex unions is not a matter of what is often referred to as a ‘core’ doctrine, in the sense of being credal doctrine.
5. The Commission does not believe that this should be a communion-breaking issue.
6. The Commission, recognizes ‘the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation’ (*Book of Alternative Services* p. 645). We acknowledge that the interpretation of Scripture is a central and complex matter and that, at times in the Church’s history, ‘faithful’ readings have led to mutually contradictory understandings, requiring ongoing dialogue and prayer towards discernment of the one voice of the gospel.

7. The doctrine of the Church has always been definitively expressed in its liturgies; such a liturgy of blessing is no exception since in it the Church declares the activity of God towards the object of the blessing.
8. It is the view of the Commission that any proposed blessing of a same-sex relationship would be analogous to a marriage to such a degree as to require the Church to understand it coherently in relation to the doctrine of marriage.
9. Culture is the context in which Christians live out their faith and formulate doctrine. The challenge facing the Church is to see our cultural norms through the eyes of Christ and then, out of allegiance to him, to promote those norms that honour him and renounce those that do not.
10. Several doctrines are integral to the theological consideration of the blessing of committed same-sex unions: salvation, incarnation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, theological anthropology, sanctification, and holy matrimony.
11. We recommend that any doctrinal discussion of the blessing of same-sex unions should seek a broader consensus on the relationship of sexuality to our full humanity in Christ.
12. The pastoral importance of this issue deserves a careful consideration of its doctrinal implications in a manner that is deeply respectful of the dignity and integrity of the gay and lesbian members of our church.

*Report of the Primate's Theological Commission
of the Anglican Church of Canada
on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions
(The St. Michael Report)*

'But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine.'
(Titus 2.1)¹

1. The Commission has concluded that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine.² In reaching this conclusion, the Commission has been conscious of the range of interpretations given to the term 'doctrine', and it has attempted in what follows carefully and prayerfully to understand the complexity of the nature of doctrine and its relationship to this divisive issue. We are particularly concerned to call the whole Church to engage in furthering the discussion of this issue in a sustained, prayerful, respectful and non-polemical manner, in the earnest hope that it will lead to a clearer discernment of 'sound doctrine' and to our goal of wholeness in Christ (Is 55:6; Ps 27:8; Col 1:28; Prov 8:17; Eph 2:10).
2. The blessing of committed same-sex unions is tied to the question of how all sexuality, as a feature of our bodily existence, participates in our redemption – our entering into the life of holiness to which Christ, through his incarnation, his life, death, and resurrection, is always calling us. Every discovery in human learning, scientific research, and socio-cultural development must be understood in the context of the fundamental reality

1 All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

2 The commission has taken the phrase 'same-sex unions' to mean committed, adult, monogamous, intended lifelong, same-sex relationships which include sexual intimacy.

that all we do and are, including our sexuality and sexual acts of intimacy, is a response in faith to the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, insofar as a monogamous, intended lifelong, committed same-sex union will be a relationship that will either enable or impair our participation in the life of God through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is inextricably linked to the core mystery of the triune God, and how we experience God's saving mercy. More categorically, it seems to us that this issue is fundamentally related to the doctrines of salvation (soteriology), incarnation, the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), our creation in the image of God (theological anthropology), sanctification, and holy matrimony.

3. The doctrine of the Church, moreover, has always been defined and expressed through its liturgies. The liturgy of blessing is no exception, since in such a liturgy the Church declares the activity of God towards the object of that blessing. The authorization of a particular form of liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples would infer that the form and content of that liturgy is an expression of Christian doctrine as received and understood by the Anglican Church of Canada. Moreover, we believe that the blessing of same-sex unions is closely analogous to marriage. For these reasons the Commission is convinced that the blessing of same-sex unions should be treated as a matter of doctrinal importance.
4. In its references to Scripture in support of its conclusions, the Commission acknowledges that the interpretation of the Bible is a complex matter, and that at any given point in the Church's history, 'faithful' readings may lead us to mutually contradictory understandings. For example, the understanding of the nature and place of the Law in Jesus' kingdom, and particularly as it applied to Gentiles in the apostolic Church, developed gradually and was the source of controversy and even division (*Acts 15; Galatians*).

5. With regard to the relation between Scripture and doctrine, we note several Anglican themes. The classic formularies (the Solemn Declaration, the Ordination oaths, the Thirty-Nine Articles) state that the Scriptures contain ‘all things necessary for salvation’. This is different from asserting that all things contained in the Scriptures are necessary for salvation. Anglican liturgical patterns, particularly those in the *Book of Common Prayer*, suggest that the normative framework for interpreting the Scriptures is the classic Creeds, and more broadly the themes of doxology, calling, holiness, and liberation, articulated in the repeated use of the canticles and the daily collects. Moreover, the Anglican tradition understands the Scriptures in light of the overall Trinitarian shape of our worship as reflecting a movement from our creaturely acknowledgement of God the Creator, recognition and confession of sin and our own brokenness, proclamation of grace in the salvific work of Christ, and acceptance of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the shaping of lives and communities of wholeness. As we pursue our reading of the Scriptures through the unfolding cycle of the Church Year, this interpretive framework is reinforced.
6. In its own work the Commission has grown in awareness that we all read and interpret the Scriptures through the eyes and understandings of our own cultures. The approaches of various commission members have reminded us that hearing Scripture through our culture can sometimes open us to richer possibilities for faithfulness to the good news of Christ’s Reign, and at other times the Scripture can function to open up and explode our culturally engrained assumptions. This interaction of Scripture, culture, and discipleship is not superficial, or easy and predictable.
7. The question of the blessing of same-sex relationships requires us to explore and balance genuine tensions among biblical strands of teaching about the purpose of human sexuality and

partnership; the radicalness of the prophetic traditions and their challenge to conventionalized religion and social mores; the shape of individual holiness in relation to communal holiness; the relationship between Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels and as reflected in other parts of the New Testament; our understanding of Law and Grace; and the witness to a community of inclusion that is also a reflection of God's transformative holiness.

Doctrine in the Anglican Tradition

8. Doctrine is formed whenever the Church, as the Church, makes a statement about who God is and how God acts, and insofar as the blessing of a same-sex union constitutes such a statement about God and how God is active in relation to that union, it must be considered as a doctrinal matter. It must nevertheless be recognized that the term 'doctrine' is used in a number of different ways in the Anglican tradition. Doctrine is taken to refer generally to that teaching of the Church which is founded on Scripture, interpreted in the context of tradition, with the use of reason. But a finer distinction is recognized between what may be termed 'core doctrines' and what may be termed *adiaphora* (a distinction noted by *The Windsor Report*, §A.36). Core doctrines have been understood (by the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Solemn Declaration, and the Lambeth Quadrilateral) to mean the credal and earliest conciliar explications of Scripture with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity and the person and work of Jesus Christ. *Adiaphora* have been defined as matters 'upon which disagreement can be tolerated without endangering unity' (WR §A.36). It should be noted that while *adiaphora* are distinguished from core doctrines, they are nevertheless doctrines.³

3 *The Windsor Report* in fact refers to the concept of *adiaphora* itself as a 'vital doctrine' (§A.36).

9. Furthermore, many teachings appear to occupy a place on a scale between core doctrines and *adiaphora*. In some parts of the Western church (though less prominently in Anglicanism), some teachings may be called 'confessional', in that they are perceived as being required of the Church by the Spirit in a particular historical context.⁴ Anglican sacramental teaching (on the nature of the Eucharist, for example, or on marriage) may form another classification, having great authority without excluding different interpretations.

10. We are agreed that blessing of same-sex unions is not a matter of core doctrine in the sense of being credal.⁵ The determination of this question will not hinder or impair our common affirmation of the historic creeds. The Commission acknowledges that for some on all sides of the issue it has taken on an urgency that approaches the 'confessional' status, in that they believe that the Church is being called absolutely by the Spirit to take a stand. On the contrary, the Commission does not believe that this should be a Communion-breaking issue. We do believe that this issue has become a matter of such theological significance in the Church that it must be addressed as a matter of doctrine.

4 A truly confessional stance implies a sense of vocation: that the Church is called to affirm a particular doctrine in a particular historical situation. For example, the instance of the doctrine of justification was not chosen by the Reformers, but thrust upon them by their theological context; they truly believed they could 'do no other'. The same could be said of the Confessing Church's rejection of Nazi Christianity; or of the international rejection of the apartheid church in South Africa. Only history, ultimately, can show whether the confession was necessary and Spirit-led (*Dt 18:22*). The endless petty divisions in some branches of Protestantism should warn us against too readily assuming a confessional stance; and for this reason Anglicanism has always been suspicious of this approach.

5 This issue is not addressed directly by any one of the three creeds (*Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian*).

11. The Church aspires to enter into the fullness of truth through her continuing reflection on Scripture and doctrine under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this means that when we seek to be faithful to Scripture and doctrine in changing circumstances, we may find ourselves led by the Spirit to new insights that affirm or contradict our past practices. The Abolition of the British slave trade in the 19th century is a classic example of the church reversing its approval of a practice seen as untouchably sanctioned in Scripture. Those who spearheaded the campaign against the trade were devout, meticulous, Evangelical, Bible-reading Anglicans who regarded slavery and the slave trade as incompatible with the mind and heart of Christ and the Gospel. For them, this was the ultimate justification for seeking to abolish it. They succeeded so well in winning Parliament, the English public, and finally the Church of England to their cause that soon all of those parties were amazed that they had regarded the slave trade as a moral institution for so long.

12. Other shifts in the Church's convictions could be cited. The Church at one time sanctioned segregation and civil rights abuses in the United States and South Africa; and the Anglican Church of Canada at one time implicitly allowed a policy of cultural assimilation in its ministry to aboriginal peoples. Our church today has been challenged to be open to the possibility that the blessing of same-sex unions is consistent with the teaching of Scripture and the development of the Church's tradition. What is required of the Church is to discern the leading of the Spirit in this matter in reasoned and faithful dialogue with Scripture and tradition, and then to respond in love and obedience. It is commonly assumed that doctrinal certainty is required before pastoral actions can be taken, but history also demonstrates that clarity emerges when thought and action occur simultaneously.

Development of Doctrine

13. The history of Christian theology demonstrates that over time doctrines have developed and changed. Some such developments are viewed as true and some as false. Christians know that doctrine can and does change, but the Church also affirms that such development may never contradict the heart of the gospel. When true development occurs, it ultimately has healthy consequences for the life of the Church.

14. For example, in the early centuries of Christianity, baptism was the sacrament of spiritual rebirth into the Body of Christ, but it was also seen to be the primary if not sole means of forgiveness for profound spiritual disobedience and sin. This early understanding in the tradition led to the common practice of adults delaying baptism until their latter years, or even their deathbed, to avoid falling into sin after baptism without having recourse to forgiveness. In time, repentance, confession, and absolution developed as doctrines in the Church in their own right, but only as the Church was led by the Holy Spirit to a progressive refinement of the role of baptism in the Christian life.

15. For those who maintain that right teaching upholds what was always believed everywhere by all Christians, it needs to be said that conservation of the old is not necessarily the best way to preserve the truth. Furthermore, it is wrong to think that there is no place for originality in the consideration of revealed truth. As new situations and human problems arise, creativity in the rearticulation of traditional doctrine can be part of the voice of divine wisdom. It must also be noted that development of doctrine in a divided Church can lead to further fragmentation, as one part of the Body of Christ discerns a legitimate development that another cannot recognize. As our experience of the Reformation reminds us, when the Church wrestles with

a development of doctrine, it can be a painful, lengthy, and even violent process.

16. While much could be and has been written on the ecclesial implications of this issue for the church (e.g., *The Windsor Report*), we would like to offer two questions we see emerging out of the present situation:

- Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible for one member church of the Communion to approve a course of action which it has reason to believe may be destructive of the unity of the Communion?
- Is it theologically and doctrinally responsible to accept unity as the value which transcends all others, and therefore for a member church of the Communion to refrain from making a decision when it believes it has an urgent gospel mandate to proceed?

The cultural context

17. Within the Canadian church and beyond, the question of the blessing of same-sex unions brings us face to face with complex issues of how all of us receive, hear, and interpret the gospel, through our Scriptures and tradition, in the context of different cultures. The Church from its early days has recognized that culture is the context in which Christians live out their faith. In the cosmopolitan setting of Athens, Paul uses the context of the diversity of religions as an aid in proclaiming the gospel (*Acts 17.16f*). In a similar vein he writes to the Corinthians that he is all things to all people, for the sake of the gospel (*1 Cor 9:22*). Indeed, inculturation is essential to evangelism. In the present instance of the debate over the blessing of same-sex unions, the world of the Anglican Communion includes both cultures which accept gay and lesbian couples and recognize them as families as well as cultures which judge the public or

even private expression of homosexuality as criminal. Within Canada, there is currently a lively debate being conducted in civil society and in Parliament, with some arguing for the legalization of same-sex marriage and others arguing for retaining the traditional definition of marriage. Many on each side are committed Christians, and many have no church or religious affiliation.

18. Furthermore, when the debate speaks of the scriptural view of marriage, it must be recognized that the biblical depictions of marriage are not uniform, and that some of the biblical examples of marriage fall far short of the ideal of Christ's self-giving love articulated in the New Testament (*Eph* 5:25f). Marriage in which the equality of the two persons is recognized is a relatively recent concept in society. Scripture upholds the equality of the two parties (*I Cor* 7:3-6), and both recognises and challenges the differentiation of roles (e.g., motherhood and fatherhood) (*Jn* 4; *Prov* 31). It is clear that, while Christianity has historically upheld the sanctity of the single state, regardless of whether or not it is lived out in the context of a vow of celibacy, there have been and are now many cultures that expect each person to be part of a couple or family, and are suspicious and judgmental of any expression of the single life, including celibate clergy.

19. In some northern and more isolated communities in Canada, the prospect of same-sex unions is deemed a threat because of questions of the viability of the culture and the community. In some countries where Christians are a minority, the very discussion of the blessing of same-sex unions is so inflammatory as to lead to violence against the Christian population. In some parts of the Communion the request for the blessing of same-sex unions has arisen in part from those who have left their country of origin because gays and lesbians have been subject to imprisonment, and private and public violence. For these the

discussion is about justice, both politically and theologically. As has been recognised by successive Lambeth Conferences and recent Primates' meetings, the challenge facing the church is to see our cultural norms through the eyes of Christ and then, out of allegiance to him, to promote those norms that honour him and renounce those that do not.

Doctrines integral to the theological consideration of same-sex unions

20. We turn now to a brief consideration of some of the doctrines which must be addressed in a full theological reflection of the blessing of same-sex unions: salvation, incarnation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, theological anthropology, sanctification, and holy matrimony. Our comments here are necessarily brief, and are intended to identify some of the areas that must be explored by the whole church, rather than to provide answers.

21. The Commission urges that this necessary theological discussion in the church move beyond attempts to justify one side or another of this specific question, and seek a broader consensus on the relationship of sexuality to our full humanity in Christ. This discussion should be carried out with respect for our fellow Anglicans throughout the Communion, and for our ecumenical partners. It could serve as an important missional resource to a society confused about sexuality.

Salvation

22. The beginning place of God's saving work in and for the world is love (Jn 3:16). From the place of God's great love for humanity, God moves toward us through the incarnation. With arms of love outstretched, God reaches across the chasm of our alienation, inviting all creation into the reconciling Word of God's

redemption through Jesus the Christ (*Lk* 15). Jesus as Word incarnate enfleshes the meaning of God's redemption and reconciling work. For Christians, Jesus becomes the pathway for our movement into the embrace of God's deliverance. However, despite this self-offering of God, the world persists in its pursuit of death in many forms. The idolizing of human appetites or of certain unexamined cultural norms is ultimately destructive of our relationships with God and with one another. And yet, still the Word of God invites us to move beyond the fragmentation of our personal and collective brokenness to enter the re-making work of God's deliverance which is the reconciliation of us and all creation in the person of Christ (*Col* 1:15-20).

23. Some Anglicans believe that the blessing of same-sex unions strikes at the root of the Church's being and gospel message because they interpret these relationships as contradicting the teaching of Scripture, and thus putting the salvation of people in such relationships in jeopardy (e.g., *Rom* 1:18-32; *I Cor* 6:9). On the other hand, other Anglicans maintain that a faithful biblical theology calls for same-sex blessings (i.e., that the biblical passages usually cited as prohibiting same-sex relationships do not contemplate the contemporary ideal of lifelong committed same-sex unions). They would argue that we fail the Gospel mandate when we uphold social taboos and systems that serve to keep people who seek such from fellowship with God (*Rom* 3:21-25; *II Cor* 5:16-21). We therefore believe that there is an urgent necessity for a dialogue where participants agree to pay full, careful, and transparent attention to the authority of the whole witness of Holy Scripture and its claim upon the Church.

The Incarnation

24. At the heart of Christian life and teaching lies the mystery of the incarnation. In the life of Jesus, the Word became flesh, and our understanding of both who God is and who we are was re-made. Despite the inclination in certain periods of the history of Christianity at times to embrace a crude dualism which denies the salvation of the body, the unique wisdom of Christianity is rooted in the union of Word and flesh (*Jn* 1:14; *I Cor* 15:12-58). The union of divine and human in Jesus the Christ⁶ re-makes our apprehension of the *imago dei* (image of God) in which all human beings are created (*Rom* 5:12-6:14; *II Cor* 5:17). The incarnation is a radical affirmation of the possibility of the sanctification of the flesh. By extension then, human sexuality is cradled within the *imago dei* which we all bear. When we make choices for and with our bodies – what we will eat, what we will wear, and how we will bodily express ourselves in work and pleasure – we are called to make those choices with full awareness that our body and our spirit are one, and together express the ongoing incarnation of the Word made flesh in Jesus (*Rom* 8:1-30). Not all choices express the meaning of love intended in the incarnation. However, all choices are held accountable to that ethic of love which the Word made flesh implies (*I Jn* 4; *I Cor* 6:9-20; *Mt* 25:31-46; *Mt* 5:43-48; *Jn* 8:1-11; *Eph* 2:11-22).

6 The union of the divine and human natures in the Person of Jesus Christ was carefully defined by the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 as follows: “as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before all ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion; without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person ...”

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

25. The Holy Spirit acts in the hearts and minds of Christ's followers both to open us to God and to reveal God to us (Jn 16.12-14; 14.26). Inasmuch as the Spirit mediates the being of a holy and just God, our encounters with the Spirit will bring to light human waywardness in all its forms (Ps 50; Is 1; Jn 3.20; 16.8). At the same time, as the Spirit mediates the gracious love of God we find ourselves being transformed into Christ's likeness as individuals (Prov 8; II Cor 3.18; Gal 5.16–25) and into the Body of Christ as God's own people (I Cor 12.12–13; Gal 3.14, 26–29; Eph 2.1–10; 4.3–16; Jude 20–21). The question of our sexual behaviour is thus related to what we understand to be the nature of sin and the Christ-like life lived out in the life of the Church. As an agent of creation, inspiration, and sanctification, we expect that God's Spirit will lead us to the will of God in this matter in a way that honours the truth of who we are in Christ as revealed in Scripture, and will empower us to exhibit the spiritual fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal 5.22-23; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2).

Theological Anthropology

26. Theological anthropology, the doctrine of the meaning and purpose of humankind created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1.26-27), within the entire spectrum of creation, redemption, and sanctification, became a focus of Christian theology in the second century. Theological anthropology responds to the question of the nature and purpose of human life, the nature of the image and likeness of God that we bear, and the ways in which this image is both corrupted and restored. The rise of Gnosticism in the 2nd century, with its view that salvation could only occur when the spiritual nature was freed of the physical, drew fire from such different theologians as Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. While various early Christian thinkers addressed these questions in different ways, it became

clear that the Christian Church held to the common belief that our physical existence is always important to the fullness of human life. Furthermore, while human sinfulness has destructive consequences, it does not destroy a human being's identity as a creature of God, made in God's image (*Hos* 11:1-9; *Jn* 3:16-17; *Luke* 15:11-32; *Rev.* 18-19).

27. The absolutely fundamental fact of our existence as human beings is, quite simply, the fact of our having been created by God. Of all things in creation, the existence of human beings is a unique kind of existence, for we are brought into being specifically in order to reflect the 'image' and share the 'likeness' of God (*Gen* 1.26; *Ps* 8). It has been revealed in the event of the incarnation that this sharing in the 'likeness' of God means a sharing in the divine life – God's very self (*II Pet* 1:4). We are therefore, from the beginning of our existence, creatures who stand always already in relation to God as our origin and intended end, whether or not we accept this relation as the basic nature of our existence. We have been created by God, for God, and to acknowledge and affirm this fact is to acknowledge and affirm it with all that we are and all that we do (*Rom* 12:1-2; *I Pet* 1:15-16).
28. Our repeated failure to affirm this reality has had ongoing consequences for the life of the world (*Rom* 5:12; *Rom* 8). Yet God has not abandoned us to the consequences of our separation from God, but has reached out to us in love, and has come to be with us in our brokenness. In the saving mystery of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, whose Spirit dwells within us, God has forevermore united our humanity to God's self, taking on our life, our sufferings, and even our death – all that we are – so that all that God is may be ours as well (*II Cor* 5:21). This means that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of what God has intended for us as God's creatures (*Jn* 10:10*b*). The life which reflects the 'image' of God and shares

in God's 'likeness' – in the divine life itself – is the life which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is conformed to the image and likeness of the crucified and risen One (*Gal 2:19-21*; *Phil 2:1-13*). The life lived 'in Christ' is a life which participates in and is transformed by the reality of God's saving mystery (*Rom 12:2a*; *II Cor 5:17*). Faithfulness to Christ, then, demands precisely that the human life in its every aspect is subject to this redemptive, re-creative transformation. This, in fact, is what it means to be fully human, as God created us to be.

29. To be drawn into the risen life of Christ extends beyond our individual salvation and transformation. God's desire is that in Jesus Christ, the second Adam, all humanity is to be drawn ultimately into the life and work of God, and all of creation is to be reconciled to God. We are not saved alone, but in company with each other, and for this reason the Church is called out as a sign and precursor of God's loving purpose for all creation (*Rom 5:12*; *Col 1*; *Mt 28:19-20*).

Human Relationships and Sanctification

30. Another fact of our existence as human beings is our having been created male or female (*Gen 1:27*). That is, in creating us, God has chosen and willed for us this reality of being male and female, which we hold in common with many other forms of created life. While men and women, having been created in the image of God, share a perfect equality as human persons, they also participate in the genetic difference of their maleness and femaleness. Historically, many have understood this to be a relationship of complementarity, in which men and women, in being created by God, were created male and female precisely for one another (*Gen 2:18-24*). In their equal dignity as persons, as well as in their difference as male and female, a man and woman may form 'one flesh' in marriage, and thereby make possible the continuation of human life, as ordained and

commanded by God (*Gen* 2:24; 1:28). This is understood to be the foundation of the institution of marriage (*Mt* 19:4; *Mk* 10:6). In creating human beings male and female, then, God created them with the potential not only to 'be united' in a relationship of love and creative complementarity, but to 'be fruitful' in that union. Without either male or female, without both man and woman, the perpetuation of human life in the created order would not be possible. The longing for partnership that manifests itself in the human relationship of a marriage comes to be seen in the Church as a sign of God's restoration of all humanity in the new creation (*Rev* 21-22; *Eph* 5:29-32). Whether or not we are called to enter the state of marriage, we are created, and we go on, male and female, as God created us. Our longing for community in a partner complementary to us, as a fundamental aspect of our humanity, continues to be a pathway to our participation in the fullness of life to which God calls us in Christ.

31. Questions have been raised about whether this complementarity of male and female is necessary for every godly human sexual relationship. Each person, whether male or female, is made in God's own image. Some, we know, are sexually attracted to persons of their own gender. While same gender couples cannot procreate naturally, they are able to contribute to the community in which they live, and it is possible for them either to adopt children, or, for some, to use artificial insemination or *in vitro* fertilization. While in earlier ages the greatest evidence of God's blessing was deemed to be the gift of children, procreation is no longer portrayed as the primary end of marriage in our Anglican liturgies of holy matrimony (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 170; *Book of Alternative Services* p. 528). Healthy, heterosexual Anglican couples may, and some do, decide not to have children. Such relationships bear fruit in community service, Christian ministries, and the pursuit of holiness. Does the lack of gender complementarity in homosexual Anglican couples hinder them

from making the same commitment to one another in the eyes of God and in the view of the Christian community? Such same-sex relationships, founded upon mutual dedication and love, seek God's blessing upon their life together, to the exclusion of all others, until parted by death. Thus the Commission understands the blessing that they seek to be analogous to that received in Christian matrimony, rather than, for example, the blessing of a house or home. The question that remains is whether the lack of complementarity of gender in same-sex unions can prevent such a couple from being a means of grace, experiencing spiritual growth, and participating in the life of God.

32. The creation accounts indicate that human beings were meant to live in community: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man⁷ should be alone.'" (*Gen 2:18a*). The longing for relationship ("This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (*Gen 2:23a*)) compels the person to leave the family of origin and to cleave to another, where a new community is established (*Gen 2:24*).
33. Understandings of family are strongly culturally defined and conditioned, and we note that several models of the family exist in Scripture (*Gen 3*; *Gen 16*; *Song of Solomon*; *Ruth*; *I Sam 1-3*; *Hos 1-3*; *Mk 3:31-35*). Yet the Bible invites critique of family structures found in all cultures. Because they are such a powerful force in human life, and because of the strength of family systems, they are one of the places that sin can be most forcefully encountered (*Gen 3:1-4:16*; *II Sam 11-19*; *Gen 27*). Equally, the family is often the place where, even in the midst of brokenness, great grace is

7 'adam'; literally 'earth creature'

found (*Gen 27; Gen 37-50; I Sam 1-3; II Kings 4; Ps 133; Hos 1-3; Luke 1-2; Mt 1; I Cor 7:12-17*).

34. The family lies at the centre of the Abrahamic covenant, as God promises to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed (*Gen 12:3*). The promise that from Abraham's faithful family a faithful nation will spring is seen by Paul as the foreshadowing of the new community formed around Christ (*Rom 9-11; Gal 3:6-9*). Relationships in the context of families are locations in which grace acts to refine and orient us towards Jesus, as in relationships we are confronted with our limitations most intensely. These relationships are often abused in our attempt to exercise power over one another (*Gen 3-4; Num 5; Judg 14-16; Judg 19-20; Col 3:18-19*). This is in direct confrontation with our call to be with and for one another in relationship, as Christ is with and for us (*Song of Solomon; Eccles. 4:9-12; Eph 5:21-6:2*).

35. Throughout the Scriptures, those whose lives are marked by breaches in the conventional familial and social structures – the barren, the widowed, the orphaned, the exiled – are identified as the particular recipients of God's care, mercy, and presence (*Ex 22:31-34; Is 54; Is 56; Ps 68; Ps 113; Acts 8:26-40*). .

36. Belonging to God's covenant people – by birth in the Old Testament (signified for males by circumcision) and by adoption in the New Testament (signified by baptism) – a person is related to the covenant community of Israel and the Church. By faith and obedience to the will of God, we continue to demonstrate our membership, by grace, in the household of God (*Mt 25:40; I Pet 2:17*); and in the communal meal of the eucharist the bonds of our relationship are strengthened as we look forward to the last days when the restored creation, the entire family of God in

heaven and in earth, will be gathered around the table (Is 2:2-4; Is 25:6-8; I Cor 11:17-26; Eph 3:7-21).

37. In the New Testament, the Christian community has replaced family, tribe, and nation as the primary community of relationship, and whether married or single it is the Body of Christ that lays first claim on us (Mk 3:31-35; Mt 10:35-39). Paul's endorsement of celibacy (I Cor. 7:25-40), and the tradition of the first millennium, should lead the present church to value, celebrate, and support those called to a single life. There are many who live single lives, either because they feel so called or because personal circumstances dictate (Mt 19:12). In a social and cultural context that has tended to set marriage and family as the norm, it is particularly important for the church to support those whose experience of single or married life is one of loneliness or isolation. It is of the very nature of the Body of Christ that all are to be given a place.

Holy Matrimony

38. In the Anglican Church of Canada, marriage is understood to be a matter of doctrine, both in the Preface to the Marriage Canon and in specific references within the Canon (*section iv.27.f*). Although Article XXV is unwilling to enshrine matrimony as a 'sacrament ordained of Christ', it does acknowledge that it is a state of life 'allowed in the Scriptures', and the Prayer Book liturgy goes so far as to see it as an institution 'signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church' (see also BAS, p.534; cf. Eph 5:31f). The 'sacrament of marriage' (BAS, p. 535) is understood in the Christian tradition as a good gift of God that is a means of grace (BAS, p. 534). As a human institution, Scripture indicates that in the scope of eternity it is a temporary one (Mk 12:25; Mt 22:30; Lk 20:35), but it has an eternal significance as a description of the occasion of the heavenly banquet and the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9).

39. It is the view of the Commission that any proposed blessing of a same-sex relationship would be analogous to a marriage to such a degree as to require the church to understand it coherently in relation to the doctrine of marriage. The Commission noted that the change in civil law in Canada to permit the civil marriage of same-sex couples requires a clarification of the validity and sustainability of the distinction between blessings and marriages in the Canadian context.
40. Also in our church, a civilly married husband and wife who have committed to lifelong fidelity may seek the blessing of their marriage by our church. This is significant because the Marriage Canon (*Canon XXI*) of the General Synod recognizes that ‘not all marriages in human society conform, or are intended to conform, to the standard here described’ (*Preface*). The blessing thus recognizes the civil marriage as Christian marriage or holy matrimony. Moreover the blessing recognizes that the couple have the intention, and the church the expectation, of the godly behaviour outlined in the Preface to Canon XXI (*see Appendix A*).
41. It is clear therefore that such blessings, offered by the church, are extremely important. In addition to the grace conferred, they recognize a Christian commitment in the marriage that is not assumed by civil marriage.

Conclusion

42. It is the determination of the Primate’s Theological Commission that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine. In reaching this conclusion, the Commission recognizes the range of interpretations given to the term ‘doctrine’. We do agree that the blessing of committed same-sex unions is not a matter of what is often referred to as core doctrine in the sense of being credal. It is a matter of doctrine that does not hinder or impair our common affirmation of the three historic creeds. We have

indicated what we believe to be the primary lines of connection to the doctrines of salvation, incarnation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, theological anthropology, sanctification, and holy matrimony.

43. In our conviction that the blessing of same-sex unions is doctrinal, we are mindful of the burning pastoral issues involved. Doctrinal and pastoral concerns are not mutually exclusive, but profoundly connected. It is precisely the pastoral importance of this issue that demands the dignity and integrity of a careful consideration of its doctrinal implications. The pastoral importance of this issue deserves a careful consideration of its doctrinal implications in a manner that is deeply respectful of the dignity and integrity of the gay and lesbian members of our church.

44. It is often lamented that the Church should become preoccupied in debates on sexual ethics when there are so many more urgent issues that could be ameliorated if only we would redirect our zeal. But the depth of feeling that exists in the Communion on this matter indicates how important it has become. It addresses our identity as sexual beings in community in an intimate and profound way. It also relates to the question of how the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all human beings, irrespective of our sexual identities. It is now for the church to decide whether or not the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine.

Appendix A

Preface to the General Synod Canon XXI On Marriage in the Church

1. The Anglican Church of Canada affirms, according to our Lord's teaching as found in Holy Scripture and expressed in the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer, that marriage is a lifelong union in faithful love, and that marriage vows are a commitment to this union, for better or for worse, to the exclusion of all others on either side. This union is established by God's grace when two duly qualified persons enter into a covenant of marriage in which they declare their intention of fulfilling its purposes and exchange vows to be faithful to one another until they are separated by death. The purposes of marriage are mutual fellowship, support, and comfort, and the procreation (if it may be) and nurture of children, and the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfilment in a community of faithful love. This covenant is made in the sight of God and in the presence of witnesses and of an authorized minister.
2. The Church affirms in like manner the goodness of the union of man and woman in marriage, this being of God's creation.¹ Marriage also is exalted as a sign² of the redeeming purpose of God to unite all things in Christ,³ the purpose made known in the reunion of divided humanity in the Church.⁴

1. Cf. *Gen.* 1:27–31

2. *Eph.* 5:31f.

3. *Eph.* 1:9f.

4. *Eph.* 2:11–16.

3. The Church throughout its history has recognized that not all marriages in human society conform, or are intended to conform, to the standard here described. For this reason, in the exercise of pastoral care as evidenced in the earliest documents of the New Testament, the Church has from the beginning made regulations for the support of family life especially among its own members.

4. Aspects of the regulation of marriage in the apostolic Church are recorded in the New Testament. A new standard of reciprocal love between husband and wife was introduced leading towards an understanding of their equality.¹ In preparation for marriage Christians were directed to seek partners from among their fellow believers.² In Christ's name separated spouses were encouraged to seek reconciliation.³ In his name also divorce was forbidden though not without exception.⁴ In certain circumstances a believer already married to an unbeliever might be declared free from such a marriage bond;⁵ in others, and here in the name of Christ, remarriage during the lifetime of a former spouse was described, with one exception, as an adulterous union.⁶
 1. 1 Cor. 7:3f, 11:11f, Eph. 5:21–33, cf. Gal. 3:28
 2. 1 Cor. 7:39, 2 Cor. 6:14, cf. 1 Thess. 4:2–8 (RSV)
 3. 1 Cor. 7:10f
 4. Matt. 5:31f, Mark 10:2–9, cf. Mal. 2:13–16
 5. 1 Cor. 7:12–16
 6. Matt. 19:9, Mark 10:11f, Luke 16:18, cf. Ro. 7:3

5. From these principles and precedents the Church, living in many cultures and in contact with many different systems of law, has sought in its rites and canons to uphold and maintain the Christian standard of marriage in the societies in which believers dwell. This standard and these rites and canons pertain to the selection of marriage partners, preparation for marriage, the formation of a true marriage bond, the solemnization of marriage,

the duties of family life, the reconciliation of alienated spouses, and to the dissolution of marriage and its consequences.

6. All members of this Church, in fulfilling the obligations of the People of God, share according to their circumstances in the obligation to uphold Christian standards of marriage in human society especially by care for their own families and by neighbourly care for the families of others. Special obligations rest upon certain members of the Church as set forth below.
7. The particular duties of the clergy, described in part elsewhere in this Canon, include the provision of education for marriage and family life, the solemnization of marriage, the pastoral care of families, the encouragement of reconciliation of estranged spouses, and the pastoral care of those whose family ties have been broken or interrupted by death, sickness, poverty, enforced absence, human weakness, or by wilful act.
8. The duties of the laity, according to their several circumstances, are to share with the clergy the responsibility for upholding family life, in particular:
 - a) by their presence with friends and neighbours at weddings to bear witness to their support of those who marry;
 - b) to safeguard the legality of marriages by readiness to allege promptly any cause or just impediment which might make a proposed marriage unlawful;
 - c) to promote and encourage the use of the professional skills that serve family life;
 - d) as spouses, to be faithful to their own marriage vows;
 - e) as parents, guardians, god-parents, teachers, or other fully qualified persons, to guide children and young persons in preparation for family life;

- f) as neighbours, mutually to promote the welfare of families, and to seek the reconciliation of any whose family life is impaired or broken;
- g) as communicants, to uphold the Church's discipline, and to seek the restoration to communion of any who have become alienated or are excommunicate; and
- h) as citizens, to work for the maintenance of just laws for the welfare of family life.

Appendix B

Terms of Reference

For the Primate's Theological Commission

1. The Primate's Theological Commission shall consist of 12 members, appointed by the Primate.
2. The Commission shall
 - a. encourage and promote theological discussion in the Church by producing statements and study materials on central theological questions;
 - b. set its own agenda, in consultation with the Primate, concentrating on key theological issues;
 - c. discuss the foundational theological questions underlying matters referred to the Commission by the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee and/or the House of Bishops and/or the Council of General Synod; and
 - d. reflect and respect the diversity of theological opinion in the Church.
3. Members shall be Anglicans with appropriate expertise and representative of the diversity of theological opinion in the Church.
4. At least one member shall be a member of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples. At least one member shall be a member of the Committee on Faith, Worship and Ministry of the General Synod.
5. The Commission shall invite an ecumenical reflector to participate in its meetings, and may invite Anglicans and/or members of other churches to participate in its projects.

6. The Commission is subject to Sections 43 and 44 of the Constitution.
7. Notwithstanding section 43(e) of the Constitution, members shall serve for a period of 6 years, whereupon a review of the Commission's work and membership shall be undertaken by the Primate.

Appendix C

Resolution of General Synod 2004 on the Blessing of Same Sex Unions (A134)

Be it resolved that this General Synod:

- 1) Affirm that, even in the face of deeply held convictions about whether the blessing of committed same sex unions is contrary to the doctrine and teaching of the Anglican Church of Canada, we recognize that through our baptism we are members one of another in Christ Jesus, and we commit ourselves to strive for that communion into which Christ continually calls us;
- 2) Affirm the crucial value of continued respectful dialogue and study of biblical, theological, liturgical, pastoral, scientific, psychological and social aspects of human sexuality; and call upon all bishops, clergy and lay leaders to be instrumental in seeing that dialogue and study continue, intentionally involving gay and lesbian persons;
- 3) Affirm the principle of respect for the way in which the dialogue and study may be taking place, or might take place, in indigenous and various other communities within our church in a manner consistent with their cultures and traditions;
- 4) Affirm that the Anglican Church is a church for all the baptized and is committed to taking such actions as are necessary to maintain and serve our fellowship and unity in Christ, and request the House of Bishops to continue its work on the provision of adequate episcopal oversight and pastoral care for all, regardless of the perspective from which they view the blessing of committed same sex relationships; and

- 5) Affirm the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same sex relationships.

CARRIED

MOTION TO DEFER

The original resolution brought to General Synod contained a section 2 which read “That this General Synod affirm the authority and jurisdiction of any diocesan synod, with the concurrence of its bishop, to authorize the blessing of committed same sex unions.” In the course of debate, a motion to defer this clause was moved and carried:

That Resolution A134 be amended by:

- 1) Deferring consideration of section 2 until the meeting of General Synod in 2007; and during the period of deferral:
- 2) Request that the Primate ask the Primate’s Theological Commission to review, consider and report to the Council of General Synod, by its spring 2006 meeting, whether the blessing of committed same sex unions is a matter of doctrine;
- 3) That on receipt of such a report, the Council of General Synod distribute it to each province, diocese and the House of Bishops for consideration.