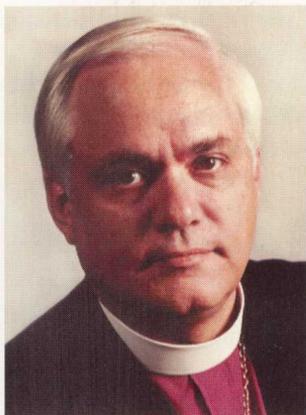


Lambeth 98: Scripture Rules



I am writing on the final day of the 1998 Lambeth Conference in Canterbury. We are completing three weeks that have been full of the joys one would expect from a great gathering of the Church's leaders, "elect from every nation yet one o'er all the earth." And all this during a beautiful English summer, overlooking Canterbury Cathedral, our communion's historic home.

But I must confess that a dark shadow hung over this Conference that was only dispelled in the final days. This shadow was the work of our American Episcopal Church. By tolerating an overt non-theist in its midst - the Bishop of Newark - and by promoting practices clearly contrary to the Bible and the Church's historic teaching - the ordination of practicing homosexuals and "blessing" of same-sex partnerships - our Church was threatening its own unity and the unity of the Communion.

Frankly, we Americans needed help. Last September in Dallas, Stephen Noll, our *Encompass* editor, had urged the forty Third World bishops gathered there: "The handwriting is on the wall. Please spell it out for us, by the grace of God that is given you and the help of the Holy Spirit." On August 5 they did just that when they passed a strong, clear Resolution on Human Sexuality.

This Resolution (see inside) was not easily won. We faced, sadly, opposition prepared to thwart the will of the majority. Our team at Lambeth worked hard to provide support in terms of networking, information, planning, and praying (intercessors prayed every waking hour of the Conference). The crisis point came when the Archbishop of Canterbury, seeing the determination of the Third World bishops on this issue, intervened to ensure a fair and orderly debate. The dam then broke and the Conference did spell out its position by a vote of 526 for, 70 against, 45 abstaining.

Archbishop George Carey said at the end of this historic debate that "if this Conference is known and named by what we have said about homosexuality we will have failed." I agree. This Conference was not about sex. It was about the authority of Scripture in the Church, which is at the heart of our identity as Christians and Anglicans. It was no accident that the day after the sexuality vote the Conference passed a strong statement of biblical authority.

Furthermore, I think this Conference will be known as the moment when the voice of the "South," i.e., the Two-Thirds World Anglicans, became the voice of the Communion. It was a bold but caring voice. It is the voice of the Decade of Evangelism. It is a voice seeking help to teach, to nurture, and to employ the new converts who are the fruit of the past decade's expansion. It is a voice challenging us to take the Gospel to our secularized societies in the West.

Our African, Latino, and Asian comrades acknowledged our role here. "The Conference would have been a disaster without you," one Nigerian bishop told us as we bade farewell. "We are not self-sufficient. You managed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to keep us together."

I hope that the result of Lambeth 1998 will be the forming of an alliance of Anglicans from the West and the South committed to the biblical Gospel and to our Lord's Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. We have seen a work of God. Our work has just begun.

With great thanksgiving to God and greetings to you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James M. Stanton". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

James M. Stanton, Bishop of Dallas
President, American Anglican Council