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978-0-521-85120-6 - Homosexuality and the Crisis of Anglicanism

William L. Sachs

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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE CRISIS OF ANGLICANISM

The Anglican conflict over homosexuality has drawn worldwide interest and divided the church. However, conflict within Christianity is not new. This book traces the steps by which the crisis emerged, and reveals the deeper debates within the church which underlie both the current controversy and much earlier splits.

William L. Sachs contends that the present debate did not begin with opposition to homosexuality or in advocacy of it. He argues that, like past tensions, it originates in the diverging local contexts in which the faith is practised, and their differing interpretations of authority and communion. In the aftermath of colonialism, activists and reformers have taken on prominent roles for and against the status quo. The crisis reveals a church in search of a new, global consensus about the appropriate forms of belief and mission.

WILLIAM L. SACHS is Director of the Center for Interfaith Reconciliation at St Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia. He is author of *Restoring the Ties that Bind* (with Thomas Holland, 2004), *The Transformation of Anglicanism* (1993), *Of One Body: Renewal Movements in the Church* (with Joseph W. Trigg, 1986) and over 150 articles.

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*In thanksgiving for the life of
William G. Andersen, Jr.
Faithful visionary*

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Acknowledgements

Although it appeared unprecedented the Anglican struggle over homosexuality in the early twenty-first century revealed dynamics with considerable historical background. Issues of human sexuality and questions of faith, leadership, and the moral life have absorbed the energies of religious people for centuries. They now prove divisive among religious groups in the global North and beyond. Anglican tensions may have cast an international shadow, and threatened the unity of one of the world's largest Christian bodies, but the circumstances were not lacking precedent. On a smaller scale there had been prior fractures among Anglicans and the shape of the moral life had long been the source of dispute among all Christians.

Unlike earlier conflicts, Anglican debates over homosexuality were intensified by travel and communications technology of unprecedented speed and range. An incessant, global conversation about being Anglican showed no sign of abating. Amid it one could sense that homosexuality was not the underlying issue and that fear for the church's future was paramount. At conferences or in chat rooms, across an array of websites and by magazines and newspapers, Anglicans voiced frustration and dismay. Many conversations followed the lines of division. Expressions of indignation and alienation could be cited without hint of a path toward resolution.

But an increasing number of conversations reveal promise for the Anglican future. This book has been shaped by such opportunities and I am grateful for them. Looking back on the Lambeth Conference of the world's Anglican bishops in 2008, Ian Douglas, a member of the design team, observed that "multi-vocal conversations" were launched and were proving resilient. Even in the midst of tension, Douglas sensed a new basis for understanding that he found promising. Although over 200 bishops boycotted the conference because of the American and Canadian presence, three times that number attended and the conference took a positive direction.

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Bishop Barry Beisner cited small-scale Lambeth encounters that held high potential. There was a sense of clarifying misconceptions and creating a reconciling communication. The theme of mission pervaded discussion and suggested a basis for fresh consensus about being Anglican. But how such consensus might be found is the recurring question. In the midst of a struggle for clarity, hospitality still pervades Anglican gatherings. At the Lambeth Conference I was honored to join the Virginia Theological Seminary contingent in their “marketplace” booth. I am especially appreciative to Katherine Grieb, Barney Hawkins, and Leslie Steffensen for their interest and encouragement.

In various settings the perspectives of Douglas, Beisner, and Virginia Seminary find echoes. I have benefitted from friendships with a variety of Anglican leaders, including the late David Beetge, Sathi Clarke, Bruce Kaye, Peter John Lee, Valentine Mokiwa, Mano Rumalshah, and Jenny Te Paa. Notable Episcopal clergy such as David R. Anderson, Sam Candler, Jim Kowalski, Titus Presler, and Ned Prevost have pressed for clarity in this book’s analysis and have offered powerful examples of faithful leadership toward reconciliation in the church and the world. St Luke’s Church in Darien, Connecticut, has offered opportunities to speak and to learn. I am grateful for the depth of friendship and encouragement there.

Working at reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, not only among Anglicans, I have been privileged to learn from the initiatives of dedicated people. It is a pleasure to thank David Ford, Tim Jenkins, and Catriona Laing of Cambridge, and Ben Quash, now of King’s College, London. Their work on “scriptural reasoning” as well as on Anglican identity offers creative direction for the church in promoting understanding. Our conversations have located questions of the Anglican future in a global framework. Not far away, at Cambridge University Press, conversations with Kate Brett, Editor, and Gillian Dadd, Assistant Editor, made the creation and finalization of this book a great pleasure. I am grateful for their friendly and patient guidance. I am also appreciative of the anonymous Cambridge reviewer whose insights were pivotal in guiding this book to fruition.

Similarly I am grateful for visits with Anglican leaders in the Middle East, notably bishops Mouneer Anis, Suheil Dawani, Clive Handford, and Michael Lewis, and with parish clergy in the region, especially Paul-Gordon Chandler in Cairo and Fa’eq Haddad in Zarka, Jordan. A pastor in the Reformed tradition, Michael Bos of Muscat, Oman, has become a valued colleague in many endeavors.

Yale Divinity School provided an opportunity to teach a course on Anglicanism in the fall of 2006. The experience sharpened insights this

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book required and wonderful friendships resulted. I am especially grateful to Dean Joseph Britton and Pamela Wesley Gomez of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and to Dean Harold Attridge of Yale Divinity School. My admiration for the work of Miroslav Volf deepened when he came by to say hello one day. His example of hospitality and his interest in reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, as well as Anglicans, inform my intentions in profound ways.

St Stephen's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia, has become home for the second time, and has offered the chance to build a program in interfaith reconciliation. I have been deeply blessed by the people of this extraordinary parish. St Stephen's welcomes people of all experiences and fosters an exceptional vision of faith in action. Daily I learn from the wondrous energies of this place. I am especially grateful to Gary Jones, rector, and to the talented clergy and lay staff, and to lay leaders and people. If I adequately expressed my indebtedness to each of you, this book would have more acknowledgements than narrative.

Efforts to understand and resolve religious divisions can absorb inordinate amounts of time. Fortunately one's family provides vivid reminders that one does not live by work alone. I am deeply grateful to Austin, to Sloan and Roger, and to two boys named Turner and Boyd. Families, and especially grandsons, require intense levels of attention that are a delight to offer, and so the ties that bind are enhanced.

For over a decade, in various capacities, I had the privilege of working with the late William G. Andersen, Jr. He offered a rare combination of faithfulness, attention to detail, creativity, and dedication to serving both people and church structures. His visionary leadership is sorely missed. In gratitude to him as friend and mentor, I dedicate this book. *Fidelium animae, per misericordium Dei, requiescant in pace.*

William L. Sachs

November 2008