

Where Do I Stand?

(On the issue of Same-sex Blessings)

by Mark Larratt-Smith

1. Facing the Issue

“Where do you stand on the issue of a same-sex blessings in the Anglican Church?” It’s a question that is asked by many from an assumption that there is a simple choice. My problem is that I cannot give a simple twenty-five-words-or-less answer. I cannot simply respond to the issue of same-sex relationships as a social issue in the context of the secular society in which we live. I am a Christian, a life-long Anglican. If my Christian faith is real, I have to address the issue in the broadest possible context of that faith.

The problem is that the question about a same-sex blessing is a symptom, not the issue itself. Before we can discuss the treatment of homosexuality in the Anglican Church, we have to be clear about the nature of reality from a Christian perspective. We need to address our understanding of ourselves and of all of our relationships – starting with our relationship with God and continuing – flowing - inevitably into our relationships with each other. For this reason, I strongly support the conclusion of the St. Michael Report that the issue is in fact a matter of doctrine not just of pastoral care.

In order to answer the question about same-sex blessings, we first have to start with our understanding of the underlying theology. There are two theological implications that seem to me to be most relevant in the debate about same-sex relationships: the implications for the sovereignty of God and the nature of sin.

2. The Sovereignty of God

A. Can We Know God?

If a Creator exists, then He is the centre of the reality that is His creation. By definition as its Creator, God, not any human being or institution, is Sovereign. He sets the rules of creation. For every one of His creatures, our relationship with our Creator is the most important relationship we have. I need to try to know Him as best I can for who He really is not who I would like Him to be. If I am honest in this I can never be satisfied by the temptation to invent my own comfortable mental image of a god who will simply reflect and re-enforce my preferences and prejudices. This raises two fundamental questions. First: can I ever know God? Second: even if I can know Him, can I trust Him?

Part of the reason why I am so sceptical of comfortable man-made gods is that it is so inconceivable that any image that I might create on my own could bear any relationship to the Creator of the universe. How can I, a creature bounded by space and time, ever reach out and touch the face of my Creator? I can empathise with those who decide that if God exists He must be completely unknowable. From a strictly human perspective their

conclusion is inescapable, but that perspective is based on the assumption that a relationship between Creator and creature depends entirely on the initiative of the creature. What is impossible for the creature must be entirely possible for the Creator, since the rules of creation are His. He can reach out to us, even if we cannot reach out to Him. What is more, it seems to be a reasonable working assumption that if God is the Author of creation in all its marvelous and relational intricacy, He has a motive to wish to interact with it and to self disclose in some manner to those of His creatures who have the capacity to respond to His initiatives.

This still doesn't fully answer the first question. How might we expect the Creator to reach out and reveal Himself unmistakably to His creation? How can we hear Him and know that we are not just creating our own comfortable idol? The Christian answer is that God has reached out to humankind consistently throughout history and that the record of His intervention is primarily contained in the collection of writings we call the Bible. The Bible is an amazingly diverse collection of human writing, written in many literary and cultural forms over many hundreds of years, by a multitude of individuals each with their own personal perspectives and limitations. I am a historian by training, taught to assess fragmentary and conflicting pieces of evidence from the past. There are inconsistencies in the Bible, as in any human record of historic events compiled from different perspectives, but it is remarkably complete and coherent when you compare it to any other similar body of evidence that stretches over so many centuries – if indeed you could find a comparison in the first place. Taken together, the Bible provides a compelling record of the Lord God Almighty disclosing Himself to His chosen people, Israel, through their history and the voices of the prophets and then enlarging and completing that disclosure in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the face of this record, those who challenge the motivation of faith or who question inconsistencies of detail in an effort to discredit or selectively edit the record must also submit to scrutiny as to their own motives.

Trusting that the God I worship is not just the creature of my own imagination, but the Lord God Almighty - my Creator - isn't just a matter of evaluating the consistency of the historic record. At the deepest level, it is a matter of a personal relationship. How can any creature have a relationship with God even if the initiative in that relationship is entirely on God's side? The Christian answer is that Jesus as the Son of God, as God made visible, is God in relationship with each one of us. In his last appearance to his apostles, as recorded by St. Matthew, he promised: "... surely I am with you always to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20b). The reality is that the mainstream Christian Church, of which Anglicanism is a part, has for over two millennia accepted this claim: "...very God, of very God...who ... was made man ... was crucified ... he rose again ... and sitteth on the right hand of the Father" (Nicene Creed). Over the course of my life as I have not just read scripture, participated in public worship, and engaged in personal prayer, I have encountered the Living God in the person of Jesus Christ. I am not a good disciple, but I am His disciple, not because I have reached out to Him, but because He has reached out to me.

B. Can We Trust God?

The second basic question that is raised by accepting the existence of a Creator God, is whether we can trust Him. For all of its beautiful intricacy, this world is not a happy place.

We may live in comfort for a time and have experiences of great beauty and delight, but the daily news is filled with stories of human depravity and natural disaster. Whatever our individual experiences of life, at times we all suffer deeply from pain and in the end we all die. From the natural perspective, every human life is a tragedy. How can we trust the Creator of such a world?

The advantage of a home-made god is that expectations are low. We don't really expect a human created god to solve the problems of the world. But then, if we are foolish enough to create such a god, we are likely foolish enough, against all the evidence of history, to insist that we can solve all those problems ourselves.

If we do believe in a Creator God, we cannot let Him off so easily. If He is almighty and also the author of a deeply flawed and damaged creation, how can we trust Him? If we cannot trust Him, we have no alternative but despair. We may mask it with stoicism or with efforts to live individual moral lives, but despair, like death is always lurking in the shadows.

It is not surprising that a creature cannot fully comprehend the mind of his Creator. The really difficult question is why He gave humanity sufficient moral awareness to enable us to see just how bad the world can be. It doesn't make sense for a Creator God to give His creatures even the delusion of having a higher standard of morality than His own. That would make reality not just tragic, but a horribly twisted, cruel joke. It makes far more sense to believe that the infinite Creator God who invented love and beauty has good purposes for His creation that are simply beyond the comprehension of his creatures.

An intellectual belief in a loving God isn't much help to us when we face tragedy, or injustice, or death. But, the experience of Christians over the centuries, is that the real issue is not whether we can comprehend God's purposes, but whether we are able to trust Him when we cannot understand.

How can we trust the author of a flawed creation? Here again, I find the Christian gospel to be the only avenue of hope. Even after many years as a believer, I find it startling, even overwhelming, to encounter God's radical solution to this issue. It is right there in the words we use weekly in the (BCP) communion service: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

What remarkably comforting words those are! God's solution is not just to send His son as a visible representative of Himself. He "gave" His son to suffer the most horrible death on our behalf. When I am visited by Jehovah's Witnesses claiming that we all believe in much the same god, my response is that if, as they profess, Jesus Christ is simply one of God's angels, a creature, however exalted, but still a creature, then I can have no personal trust in such an arms-length manipulative god. The breathtaking claim that God, Himself, in the person of His incarnate son, Jesus Christ, came into our world of suffering and died on a cross for us may be hard for the modern secular mind to accept, but for me it is quite simply the only possible way of trusting God when I cannot understand Him or His

purposes, since He has submitted Himself fully to the same world in which we all must suffer and die.

An Anglican, Dorothy Sayers has provided what is for me one of the clearest and most powerful statements of this conclusion:

For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is – limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death – he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair.”

C. The Sovereignty of God and Same-sex Relationships

How does my understanding of God affect my views of same-sex relationships? It is clear to me that both scripture, and the tradition of the Church over the last two thousand years regard all sexual practices outside of heterosexual marriage to be sin. Whatever else you want to say about the motion endorsed by the last General Synod affirming the sanctity of committed same-sex relationships, it is undeniably a change in the historic faith of the Church. That some theologians attempt to erect an intellectual smokescreen around this fact by the conflicting arguments that either a) change is always occurring, or, b) that the change is really not change at all is just not convincing.

Why is this a problem? The first clue is in this very attempt to reinterpret both scripture and the history of the Church. That effort clearly reveals the priorities of those involved: justifying same-sex relationships is of a higher importance than listening to God through the channels of communication – scripture first and then the 2000 year tradition of interpreting scripture– that are basic to the Christian faith as practiced within the Anglican Church.

In fact, what is involved is an attempt to redefine the nature of Almighty God, in order to make Him fit with our contemporary society’s view on a single social issue. In this it does not seem to me to be any different from any other attempt to create a tame god who will comfortably reflect and endorse our own sense of what is appropriate. It is just another example of making one of the gods of stone or wood that the Old Testament prophets denounced. Its implicit message is that, if I don’t agree with God’s version of reality, I will reconstruct a god who is more congenial with my own view of the world. As I have stated above, such a god is not worth worshipping and certainly not the source of any hope to rely upon.

The central issue here really isn’t about same-sex relationships at all, but about God’s sovereignty and the creation of idols. The problem is, once you start redefining god, where do you stop? The issue may be same-sex relationships this year, and perhaps polygamy or euthanasia next year, but why stop there. In the light of human reason and the current advances of science, why do we really need to accept all the difficult doctrines in the creeds: the fully divine, fully human nature of Jesus; the virgin birth; the Resurrection...

The slippery slope of re-inventing God is well illustrated by the fact that one of the leading Canadian proponents of same-sex blessings, Bishop Michael Ingham, is also the author of a book that denies Jesus Christ's central claim that "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) He argues that choice of a religion is a purely personal matter and that all religions are equally valid paths to God. By implication, a god constructed of stone or wood - or a golden calf - is just as valid a god as the Lord God Almighty.

3. The Reality of Sin

But there is an even more serious implication to the changes proposed by proponents of affirming same-sex relationships. "Sin" is not much in fashion these days, either as a word or as a concept. Yet the reality of human sin is at the heart of the Christian gospel and of Anglican worship. The bible begins with an account of how sin entered the world and ends with an account of God's judgement on sin. In between it is filled with stories of human sin and failure. Confession of our sins is an essential element in Anglican worship.

A. Why Is It Important to Believe in Sin?

Why is it so essential? For me, the most compelling reason is myself. If I am honest, I have to acknowledge that I am a sinner. I can blame others all I want and develop the most elaborate excuses to justify my own actions and failures to act, but deep down, I know that if they were the acts of someone else, I would see them clearly as self-deception. All of us have episodes in our lives where we have hurt others or done things we regret. I am no different. I have to acknowledge that I am a sinner. I may not have committed murder or participated in a genocide, but, like everyone else, I have contributed - and continue to contribute - to the pain and suffering of this broken world.

If my understanding of sin rests on my Christian faith, then I must come to grips not just with the ten commandments and the other "shalt nots" of the Old Testament, but with Jesus' extension of those laws in the Sermon on the Mount. To quote just one example:

"You have heard that it was said, "do not commit adultery." But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5: 27-28)

By that standard, I expect that most men are adulterers. I certainly am.

Sin is a reality in all of our lives, and all the excuses and the "therapeutic" explanations in the world will not cover that reality. Saint Paul's words to the early Christians in Rome ring true across the centuries:

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members. What a wretched man I am! (Romans 7: 21-24a)

For me, the compelling attraction of the Christian gospel is that sin is not a dead end. When Jesus raised the Old Testament bar to impossible levels, when he said *“be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matt 5:48), but it was not to discourage us, but rather to show us another way. At the end of Romans 7, Paul goes on to write: *“Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

I have stated previously that my ability to trust God is based on the fact that He identified Himself so completely with us by entering into this world of sin and death as a man in the person of Jesus Christ. The marvellous good news is that God not only identified with us through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but that through that act of identification, He has washed away all of our sins. Through Jesus sacrificial death on the cross, He has fulfilled the law and set us free from the condemnation of sin and death. As the third Eucharistic prayer in the BAS states:

In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.

There is a superficial view of Christianity that regards any mention of sin as negative, person-destructive, “hell-fire-and-damnation” preaching. I often wonder whether such extreme sensitivity is not a cover for an unwillingness to acknowledge sin and accept forgiveness. Because that is what the gospel is: good news that our sins, though they overwhelm us, are forgiven by Jesus’ death on the cross.

For me, the very heart of the gospel is my relationship with my risen Lord who loves me enough to have died for me, so that all my sins are washed away in His blood.

B. The Nature of Sin and Same-sex Relationships

How does the current debate over a same-sex blessing relate to the nature of sin? I am not going to rehearse all of the arguments I have read concerning the biblical treatment of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular, but I find the record to be remarkably consistent. If the Anglican Church continues to believe that our Creator and Redeemer God communicates with His Church primarily through scripture and the cumulative experience of the Church over nearly two thousand years, then I am convinced that we must accept that God considers all sexual relationships outside of the marriage of a man and a woman as sinful, including same-sex relationships - of whatever commitment or duration.

For me, one of the most powerful stories in the bible is the episode of Jesus’ encounter with the woman taken in adultery (John 8: 3-11) and his declaration to her: *“then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin”*. His offer of forgiveness is gracious and complete but he does not tell her that sin does not matter or that living in adultery is really OK. He identifies her sin for what it is and calls on her to repent – to go and sin no more. We are not told the outcome of the story, but Jesus’ statement to Peter in Matthew’s gospel, makes it clear that forgiveness is not just a limited “one-time” offer but is available to us unconditionally and repeatedly. St. Peter tells us that *“He himself bore our sins in this body*

on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24) The soul shattering implication is that He has done this for each one of us and for all of our sins up to “*seventy times seven*”(Matt 18:22) .

It now appears that proponents of change have found a better way of dealing with sin than the agony of our Saviour on the cross. Human progress and the latest of scientific studies (no doubt endorsed by a compliant god) have now shown that homosexual practices are not actually sin. They are merely another legitimate alternative mode of the fundamental human right to individual sexual self-expression.

This momentous discovery not only redefines God and His place in the human pantheon, it makes the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ entirely unnecessary. Why bother with a doctrine of sacrificial atonement that is difficult to understand and involves a lot of pain and suffering, if Church authorities can simply redefine sin so that it is no longer sin? An added benefit is that there is no need for guilt or repentance. There certainly is no need for - and no possibility of - anything like forgiveness. Churches can thus concentrate on their true 21st Century calling of affirming the intrinsic goodness of individuals and of providing supportive therapeutic reassurance for their members' every aspiration.

While this characterisation may appear extreme, its purpose is to demonstrate just how easily a specific change proposed by people, many of them with very good intentions, can have enormous implications. That is why the main issue is not really about same-sex relationships at all. It is about the acceptance or denial of the reality of sin. If human beings can redefine sin at their option, they have no need for the Christian God.

C. Sin And Sexuality

I do believe that homosexuals have a very legitimate complaint against a Church that has often condemned them as outcasts, beyond any hope of redemption. If we accept that God's standard as preached by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is perfection, then no sinner has any hope outside of Jesus Christ. We are all broken by sin and all equally reliant on the death and resurrection of Jesus as our only hope of God's forgiveness.

In this regard, homosexual activity is simply a subset of a much broader category of sexual sins. While scripture contains references to same-sex activities as sinful, the primary focus of Christian scripture and tradition is not on same-sex relationships but on all sexual relationships outside the marriage of a man and a woman. This is a difficult perspective for our contemporary western culture to accept or even to understand. We live in a permissive secularized society that has deified the self in place of God. Our happiness, comfort, and self-actualization are at the heart of our faith. Sexual self-indulgence is a central part of this worldview, stimulated and shaped by manipulative advertising, popular entertainment and the presumption of entitlement fostered by our rights obsessed society. We have eliminated from our vocabulary uncomfortable words like “lust” and “chastity”. It is not surprising that adultery and promiscuity are now mostly considered to be simply matters of personal preference.

My purpose is not a rant against contemporary society and its sexual morals, but to point out that the issue of same-sex relationships must be considered in this larger context. The

result is to make the problem both easier and harder to address. It is made “easier” because the issue cannot – and must not - be treated, or ignored as just a problem for a minority within society. As Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount quoted above, sexual sin affects all of us. No one can claim clean hands. As sinners, we are brothers and sisters in the flesh.

The hard part is that we face a standard of conduct that is impossible for any individual to achieve, and that directly challenges the cherished values of the society in which we live. How can we ever succeed in such a confrontation when we are all so deeply compromised by our own sins and half-persuaded by the siren song of sexual self-indulgence that pervades every aspect of the culture in which we live?

The problem is made more complex because, if we are honest, we must acknowledge that, in our society, “lust” often cannot be distinguished from “love”. Our society promotes its fuzzy definition of romance and erotic love as the epitome in self-actualization and self-indulgence. How do you address the healing of a situation where these threads are deeply entangled in the specific history of a relationship between two human beings? Obviously this question is even more difficult in a long-term same-sex relationship where Christian marriage is not an option.

I pose these questions not to provide glib answers to them, but to acknowledge just how difficult the implications can be. There is no point in glossing over them. But acknowledging the difficulties posed by our sexual nature and erotic relationships must not lead us into a futile and disastrous attempt at self-justification through redefining the Christian faith. The effort is bound to be futile because it ignores the underlying realities of human nature and motivation. It is disastrous because it results in the loss of the faith that is the only hope of salvation for every one of us.

D. A Non-Western Perspective

As I have attempted to come to grips with the issues of same-sex relationships, I have found myself becoming increasingly aware of just how deeply my thinking is compromised by the society in which I live and just how shallow are the roots of the faith that I profess. I sometimes feel that my attempts to live as a committed believer in the Kingdom of God float on the surface of a vast tide of sub-conscious cultural assumptions and pervasive personal indulgences that I imbibe unconsciously from the society in which I live.

In this respect, the recent declarations by the Primates of the world-wide Anglican Communion contribute a Christian voice – an Anglican voice – that has been very helpful in crystallizing my awareness of the limited perspective from which I view the world as a North American Anglican.

I am beginning to see, however dimly, just how aberrant our society is by the norms of the rest of the world. In the West, we pride ourselves as being somehow more democratic, more evolved, more compassionate, even more “humane” than other societies, yet we compartmentalize reality so that we can ignore the evidence of political corruption, unjustifiable military aggression, self-serving economics, energy profligacy and

environmental barbarism that make our society both envied and feared by most of the world. This cultural perspective has been articulated most strongly in a recent book by a Welsh Christian author who argues:

The truth is that Westerners are perceived by non-Westerners (if we can make such a huge generalization about a truly global phenomenon) as rich, technologically sophisticated, economically and politically dominant, morally contemptible barbarians...Why barbarians? For despising tradition, the ancestors and the dead. For despising religion, or at least for treating it lightly. For the shallowness and triviality of their culture. For their sexual shamelessness. For their loose adherence to family and sometimes, also to tribe. For their absence of any sense of honour.¹

A second, and complementary perspective comes from a recent article written by a prominent American Episcopalian theologian, Philip Turner, former Dean of the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University. Turner's article is entitled "ECUSA'S GOD: Descriptive Comment on the "Working Theology" of the Episcopal Church U.S.A." Its focus is not primarily on the same-sex issue, but rather on his belief that the working theology of the American Church has shifted from a theology of salvation to a theology of "radical inclusion". However, what interested me most about his article were the personal comments about how he had come to this conclusion. He states that he might well have embraced this theological shift himself but for one eventuality.

I lived for some ten years among the Baganda, a people who dwell on the North shore of Lake Victoria. ... It was not until I spent a considerable time outside the confines of my own denomination that I came to realize that its working theology stood miles apart from the basic content of "Nicene Christianity" with its thick description of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; its richly developed Christology, and its compelling account of Christ's call to holiness of life. ...The voice now addressing ECUSA in theological tones that seem not just strange but unacceptable, comes from the Global South, and particularly from people who in the biblical sense are poor. What they are trying to point out is that the working theology of ECUSA does not accord with the great Christian tradition they received from the very people who now seem to be preaching a different gospel. Rather than dismissing this alien voice ... it might be more Christianly apt to adopt a more humble attitude and ask if what this strange voice is saying has any merit.²

Whether or not one agrees with these views, it is hard to dismiss such a profound challenge to our assumptions about the culture in which we live, especially when we all know that there are other voices that need to be listened to than just CNN. A major component of this problem is that, as Christians, we have withdrawn our faith from public life and from public

¹ Meic Pearse, *Why the Rest Hates the West*, InterVarsity Press, 2004

² Rev. Dr. Philip Turner, "ECUSA'S GOD: Descriptive Comment on the "Working Theology" of the Episcopal Church U.S.A." The Anglican Communion Institute, January 18, 2005

affairs. We have accepted the secular view that religion is a private matter with no implications for our culture or our lifestyle. As Anglicans, we perpetuate the uncritical model of acting as if we are just the secular world at prayer and must simply alter our beliefs to conform. We have not allowed the power of the gospel to inform and shape our perspectives of the deeply flawed and compromised society in which we live. In this too, I am as guilty as any other.

4. Finding a Solution

“The most important [commandment],” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 29-31)

I have argued that the implications of changing the Church’s traditional views about same-sex relationships strikes at the heart of the Christian faith because it substitutes our own tame god for the reality of the self-revealing Lord God Almighty and because it denies the reality of sin. Even where there is an attempt to minimize the effect of these changes, they constitute a slippery slope for the Anglican Church. Like the proverbial limpet, once it has lost its grip on the rock of reality, it becomes just a piece of flotsam awash in the tide.

But what about Christian compassion? What about the Christian belief in a God who is the Author of love and its chief Practitioner – to the point of death on a cross? Christian love is often regarded as incompatible with God’s judgement. There is a contemporary view that Christian believers face a choice between worshipping an angry judgmental Old Testament God who punishes sinners and a gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who turns the other cheek. Such a caricature is entirely at variance with the record of biblical self-disclosure of both Yahweh, the Lord God Almighty of Israel and Jesus Christ His Son, the Redeemer of humankind in the New Testament. It is also incompatible with the faith of the Church from the earliest times. God’s justice and His mercy are inseparable and, we His people, are called to act in the same manner. As the prophet Micah said: *“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”* (Micah 6:8)

But how does one act justly and love mercy at the same time while walking humbly with God? It is not by ignoring the law or by pretending that sin is not a reality. It is by accepting that reality and acting in love and mercy toward our fellow humans. I still remember vividly a sermon that I heard in the mid-1970s. The preacher argued that there can be no compromise on matters of God’s justice (the Old Covenant). To include mercy, justice must be completed and transcended by sacrifice (the New Covenant).

How might we apply Micah’s words and their implication of sacrifice to the same-sex issue? From the perspective of our homosexual brothers and sisters, their call to sacrifice is demonstrated by their commitment to continue to grapple with issues of conduct and faithfulness within a faith that defines acting upon their deep desires as sinful.

But, if that sermon on Micah is correct, the rest of us are also called into sacrificial living. If we are to love mercy we must do so with a humility that grows out of being aware we are sinners attempting to lead a sacrificial life. It is not just that each of us must face our own unruly sexual desires, or even that we need to address the reality that contemptuously dismissing another person amounts to murder (Matthew 5:22) - whether the reason for that dismissal is related to sexual orientation or to some other issue entirely. At the deepest level, we must be committed to changing ourselves - not our doctrines. It is not an easy path and it is certainly not one that will appeal to those who would subordinate the Christian faith to the values of the world. We can only become credible – as Jesus Himself demonstrated – at our own cost through sacrifice.

It means genuinely welcoming into our Church all sinners including homosexuals, wherever they are on their personal journey. In our commitment to our Lord, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. All of us need to recognize that our status as redeemed members of the family of God comes from Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf not from our own merits or by the denial of our sin. We cannot solve our estrangement from God by offering band-aids of personal *affirmation* when the radical healing of *forgiveness* is what we all need. In the end denying this need cuts us off from the only real hope that is available to us.

However painful the process, we must also as a Church begin to face the reality of living as followers of Jesus Christ in a self-absorbed post-Christian society where the gospel that we profess is radically at variance with the values of the culture in which we live. It has been said that pride is the worst of all sins - even that it is the one unforgivable sin - because it alone cannot admit to any need for forgiveness. If I create my own tin god, if I deny the reality of sin and of salvation through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, I have turned my back on the gospel that I have received from God through the Church. If I walk away from God, I have lost all hope. If the Anglican Church turns its back on its Creator and Founder by denying its history and its faith, it is no longer part of the Church, the Bride of Christ, on whom alone the faithful can depend.

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