

A Statement in response to the Pilling Report - 12 December 2013

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We are writing to express our serious concerns in regard to the Pilling Report. We know that the House of Bishops of the Church of England will be discussing this and we would like to assure them of our prayers so that the Holy Spirit would guide them to the right decisions.

First, we would like to say that we believe that the church of Christ should not in any way be homophobic or have any kind of phobia. We should follow in the steps of Jesus Christ who embraced all the marginalized of his society; having said that, we must say that we did not read of any homophobic statement from any bishop or clergy in the Church of England. It is sad that anyone who does not support the ministry of gay and lesbians, as well as same-sex marriages, is considered homophobic. Obviously there is a big difference between those who refuse to recognize the presence of homosexuals in the church, i.e. homophobic, and those who do support Lambeth 1998 Resolution 1.10 and do not support the ministry and ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbians, as well as same-sex marriages.

The Pilling Report raises an important question which requires an answer: will the Church of England conform to its context, i.e. will the Church of England allow the society to shape its faith and practice in such a way in order to be acceptable by the society, or will the Church of England recognize that its distinctive mission is to transform the society?

The Pilling Report suggests, that while the Church of England should not change its teaching, it should give a space to provide pastoral care to gay and lesbians such as doing same-sex blessing with unauthorized liturgies. It is similar to what some churches in North America called "a local option" and now has become a standard practice in these churches. In the pretext of providing pastoral care, the suggestion in a very subtle way, encourages the turning of a blind eye to a major alteration of the teaching of the church. This suggestion, of a local option, likewise ignores an historic Anglican approach to doctrine, namely *lex orandi, lex credendi* – what we pray is what we believe. A pastoral provision, while not officially changing the church's teaching, does, in practice and in fact, change the church's teaching. The Global South are resolutely opposed to this.

The Global South considers forward movement on the Pilling Report's recommendations as equal to what the North American churches did ten years ago which caused much confusion in the Communion. This reminds us of Eli the High Priest who turned a blind eye to the wrongdoings of his sons which led to a period of spiritual dryness when the Spirit of God departed from the midst of His people (Ichabod).

The Church of England should not worry about the gap, or the principled tension, between the church and society, especially after the House of Lords and House of Commons accepted same-sex marriages. The Church should not allow the state to put pressure on it. Indeed, the Church needs to respond to the demands of the society, but not at the expense of its faith, practice, and unity. In fact, the Church needs to be the conscious of the society, providing spiritual leadership and guidance. A faithful church will always have a principled tension between her and the society. This gap makes the church distinct as salt and light. Especially at this season of Advent, we need to repent and call people to repentance in order to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was never "politically correct." He never compromised the message he came to deliver. He risked, and even lost his life, to stay true to this message.

The Pilling Report correctly recognizes that the Church of England is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It therefore obligates the Church of England to humbly consult and seek the counsel of sister Provinces on such a grave matter, in light of the spirit of the Windsor Report. There is an implication of this fact which is: if the Church of England wants to keep such unity, there must be wider consultation in order to avoid divisive decisions. Whatever decisions the Church of England will take will have an impact on its relation with the wider Anglican Communion, especially the Global South, and also the relation with its ecumenical partners and interfaith dialogues with other religions. It would be difficult to comprehend how we affirm our faith by saying the words of the Nicene Creed, "we believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," when we take unilateral actions that disrupt this oneness. Our hope and prayer is that the House of Bishops would give serious attention to the relation between the Church of England and the wider Communion, as well as other churches and other faith communities.

The Pilling Report recognizes that this issue is a divisive issue. It is astonishing that the Report makes the Church of England's observations and recommendations without reference to the same practices by the North American churches in 2002 and 2003 that tore the fabric of the Communion at its deepest level, and continue to do so. It would be very sad, indeed, for the Church of England to follow in the steps of those in North America whose similar unilateral decisions led to further division and tore the fabric of the Communion at its deepest level.

Surely, after all the Primates meetings that have discussed the divisions in the Communion and provided ways forward, the Windsor Report, the absence of one-third of the Bishops at the 2008 Lambeth Conference and the absence of many Primates from 2011 Primates meetings, the Pilling Report does not acknowledge that extensive consultations in the Communion have already been done. We regret that greater attention to these reports and Primates statements did not provide more guidance in the recommendations of the Pilling Report as representing recent, existing consultations. Most of us in the Global South have already participated in the Listening Process. After more than 10 years of listening and conversation, we do not see a value of endless conversations and indabas.

We are clear on what the Bible teaches about sexual relationships outside of the marriage of one man and one woman, and the need for pastoral care for those who find themselves in relationships outside of this. The dissenting view written by the Bishop of Birkenhead captures well our position. For us in the Global South, his view is the majority view, and we hope the Church of England Bishops will recognize this. The Church of England needs to be cautious in taking decisions that will compromise faith and the position of the Church of England within the Anglican Communion as well as the position of the Archbishop of Canterbury who tries hard to heal the torn fabric of the Communion.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:1-2

☪️ May the Lord bless you! Yours in Christ,

+Mouneer Egypt

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