

Old letters show Anglican leader's 'liberal stance' on homosexuality

Liberals in the worldwide Anglican Church can take comfort from views expressed eight years ago on the vexed issue of homosexuality by Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, the London Times said Thursday.

In correspondence seen by the Times, Williams expressed the belief that gay sexual relationships can 'reflect the love of God' in a way that is comparable to marriage, the report said.

Gay partnerships posed the same ethical questions as those between men and women, and the key issue for Christians was that they were faithful and lifelong, the correspondence revealed.

He described his belief that biblical passages criticising homosexual sex were not aimed at people who were gay by nature.

The Times report is based on letters Williams wrote to an evangelical Christian when he (Williams) was still the Archbishop of Wales.

They underline the assumption that Williams personally takes a liberal view on the issue, while, as leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, he defends the orthodox position that homosexual practice is incompatible with scripture.

'I concluded that an active sexual relationship between two people of the same sex might therefore reflect the love of God in a way comparable to marriage, if and only if it had about it the same character of absolute covenanted faithfulness,' wrote Williams.

He described his view as his 'definitive conclusion' reached after 20 years of study and prayer.

He drew a distinction between his own beliefs as a theologian and his position as a church leader, for which he had to take account of the traditionalist view.

The issue overshadowed the recently-ended Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops from around the world which was boycotted by opponents of gay marriage and the ordination of gay priests.

However, a split was avoided, and Williams said he was 'encouraged' by how the gathering had handled the controversial debate on sexuality.

In a recent interview, Williams said: 'When I teach as a bishop I teach what the church teaches. In controverted areas it is my responsibility to teach what the church has said and why.'

Williams, the Times said, was 'publicly conservative, privately liberal.'

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