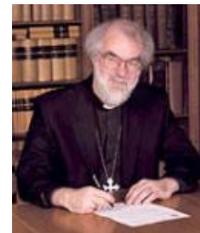


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On Homosexuality — A Change of Heart by the Archbishop of Canterbury?

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The Telegraph [London] reports that Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has changed his views on homosexuality, now affirming a far more traditional understanding than had characterized his earlier thinking.



Rowan Williams has distanced himself from his one-time liberal support of gay relationships and stressed that the tradition and teaching of the Church has in no way been altered by the Anglican Communion's consecration of its first openly homosexual bishop.

The declaration by the archbishop - rebutting the idea that homosexuals should be included in the church unconditionally - marks a significant development in the church's crisis over homosexuals. According to liberal and homosexual campaigners, it confirmed their fears that the archbishop has become increasingly conservative - and sparked accusations that he has performed an "astonishing" U-turn over the homosexual issue.

Consider this remarkable section of the paper's report:

The revelations came in a newspaper interview last week in which the archbishop denied that it was time for the church to accept homosexual relationships, suggesting that it should be welcoming rather than inclusive. "I don't believe inclusion is a value in itself. Welcome is. We don't say 'Come in and we ask no questions'. I do believe conversion means conversion of habits, behaviours, ideas, emotions," he told a Dutch journalist.

"Ethics is not a matter of a set of abstract rules, it is a matter of living the mind of Christ. That applies to sexual ethics."

At the same time he tried to distance himself from a controversial essay he wrote 20 years ago, in which he defended same-sex love. "That was when I was a professor; to stimulate debate," he claimed. "It did not generate much support and a lot of criticism - quite fairly on a number of points."

Response to the Archbishop's statements has been fast in coming:

The Rev Giles Goddard, the chairman of Inclusive Church, a liberal group, said the archbishop's comments revealed an "astonishing" change in his position. He added: "The implication is that there is no justification in scripture for the welcome of lesbian and gay people. It appears that he has moved into the conservative camp."

The Church of England Newspaper reported August 25:

*The Archbishop of Canterbury has issued a warning to the liberal wing of the Anglican Church saying that not every controversial issue facing the Communion is negotiable. Speaking in an interview with the Dutch evangelical daily newspaper *Nederlands Dagblad*, the Most Rev Dr Rowan Williams said that 'boundaries are determined by what it means to be loyal to Jesus Christ' when questioned on unity in the church and the row over homosexuality.*

He went on to speak of necessary doctrinal boundaries:

He also pointed to the letters of Paul and said that boundaries are determined by what it means to be loyal to Jesus Christ. He said: "You reflect the loyalty of God in Christ. It also concerns the international arena. Christians will always have reconciliation as a priority and refuse to retaliate. "By no means everything is negotiable for me. I would not be happy if someone said: Let us discuss the divinity of Christ. That to me seems so constituent of what the Church is." The Archbishop also said he feared the divisions taking place in the American Episcopal Church could be repeated in the UK at some stage in the future.

This is a truly important development — but also a developing story. Stay tuned.

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