

"GENERAL COUNCIL REPORT ANALYSIS" by DGLAIRD, Sep. 16, 1988, about LINE BY LINE COMMENTARY OF THE RECENT REPORT FROM GENERAL COUNCIL

The purpose of the conference is that we might have a place for DIALOGUE in the Report issued by General Council - on a line by line basis.

Because the General Council has issued an official version with slight variations in the numbering of item, note 1 is my retyping of that new official version from one of the pamphlet issued by the General Council office.

It was great to retype the report - word for word. I came to have a new respect for the care and attention to words and concepts which went into this report.

Gordon Laird

2(of 19) JWRAMSAY Sep. 17, 1988

Apparently, Howie Mills issued a press release that says clearly that 1) the church did not sanction the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and 2) that the media has really misrepresented us. Has this been posted here? I think that the smaller communities especially need to hear this plainly and simply. Neither of the Sept. 8 releases contain this kind of clear statement.

JWRAMSAY

3(of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 17, 1988

Joe, I don't know of another news report from Howie Mills. If we hear about it I am sure it will get posted in UNITED CHURCH NEWS.

I just picked up 75 of the report "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality" from our United Church Book Shop - they are only 1.75 for 25, much cheaper than photocopying. We will have some on the table at the back of the Church - and I will freely offer them to people when I am visiting them.

The first page of "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality" deals with a quotation from a previous General Council which deals mainly with the United Church view of Marriage.

I am very happy to see this - many of the petitions from congregations mentioned this concern. In a number of the Conference petitions there was specific mention of this item.

For example quoting from the B. C. Conference summary which was printed in my Commissioner workbook p. 232:

II we expressed general agreement on the following:

"II That marriage and the family are important and the church has responsibility for supporting the values and functioning of these institutions, including fidelity."

For me personally I was offended that the Recommendations from the Division s of MPE and Mission in Canada include this 'faint praise' for marriage:

Item 1 j)

Marriage and family are institutions which have evolved over time. The community of faith has attempted to respond in changing circumstances to god's call to be just, faithful and compassionate in relationships which support human intimacy and the nurture of family members.

I wrote my sermon "Covenant of Marriage:, which I also uploaded as a Conference branching off "Toward a Christian Understanding" exactly because I thought that marriage had received a poor representation in the first recommendations.

By way of explanation, it was explained that the NCG and the meeting of the two Divisions was not attempting to bring information which had already been covered in previous General Councils. But for me that explanation did not satisfy because most people are not at General council, nor do they carry in their head the past actions of General Council.

So the high view of Marriage needed to be stated again - and was done so by quoting from the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council.

It would be useful to see how many of the Petitions were on this subject or

included reference to this subject. I know a number from B. C. Conference were, as well as the reference in the B. C. Conference petition itself. This page indicates that these petitions were heard and responded to.

One of my major concerns about the original recommendations was answered to my satisfaction by the first page of the Report.

Gordon

4(of 19) PCCHYNOWETH Sep. 17, 1988

Gordon: I hope the typo in #10 in the first note is just that a "typo" and not an editorial comment! (Hint: United vs Untied).

I'm glad you opened this discussion.

Watch for more later (maybe).

Peter.

5 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 17, 1988

Peter, thanks for the editing - I have often hit UNTIED for UNITED - long before this issue came up! Hope it is NO KIND OF PORTENT!

Dgl

6 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 18, 1988

The second section is entitled "Council Confessed..." and includes four categories of confessions:

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

CONFESSIONS OF SIN

CONFESSIONS OF INFIRMITY

and CONFESSIONS OF FACT

The idea of "Confession" is a departure from the language of the report "Toward a Christian Understanding..." That appeared to me to contain more affirmation and propositions.

I am more comfortable with the confession of the partial nature of our wisdom on the subject of human sexuality than with strong declarative statements on subjects upon which so many "professionals" of various kinds disagree.

First, Confessions of Faith:

Seems to me these confessions are not that controversial :

1. Creation by God
2. God speaking through Old and New Testaments
3. God's Spirit offers comfort and challenges
4. We are created in the image of God and called into covenant community.

Second, Confessions of Sin:

1. We are a broken and hurting community - fractious and judgemental [spelling?] - hurt, misunderstanding and estrangement.

Comment GL: AMEN!!!

2. We confess before God that as a Christian community, we have participated in a history of injustice and persecution against gay and lesbian persons in violation of Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Comment GL: This has been pointed out to me to be one of the most controversial, What this statement DOES NOT SAY [in my opinion] is whether gays or lesbians persons are or are not approved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. IN my opinion that would be to turn the statement around and make it say what it does not say.

What it DOES SAY [in my opinion] is that "injustice and persecution" are in violation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And I believe there are many passages from Old and New Testament would support that statement - the concern for the widow, orphan and stranger at the gate in many of the prophetic books. The New Testament Matt 25:31ff speaks of the concern for the oppressed. Jesus in his sermon in Nazareth Luke 4:18ff speaks of setting at liberty the oppressed.

But have we, as a Christian community, "participated in a history of injustice and persecution...?"

Certainly in our society there is no question that there has been oppression of gays and lesbians. It still goes on in popular TV programs - the caricaturing of the mannerisms and lifestyles of gays and lesbians.

During General Council itself during the weekend break a member of our congregation attended a British live comedy in one of the Victoria theatres. She was there with some delegates from one of the central provinces. My friend said that the whole theme of the "comedy" was the male actor posing as gay. Without the fun at the expense of gays there would have been no plot at all. She also said that those around her thought it was very funny.

My personal confession is that I have, indeed, participated in jokes against gays. As a male there have been times when it seemed the only "macho" thing to do, in order to prove that I wasn't gay myself.

I have no trouble making this confession as a personal confession. I would have to think further about the question of us "As a Christian community, participating...."

We might need the help of gays and lesbians to help us understand our participation, because persecution is not often as obvious to the oppressor as to the oppressed.

## CONFESSIONS OF INFIRMITY

7. our confusion and struggle to understand homosexuality, even as we confess our history of sinfulness.

Comment GL: Certainly the confusion and struggle is obvious. I have heard Christian doctors make definite statements on every side of the argument as to "what causes" homosexuality. Is it genetically or environmentally caused?

I am not sure of the relevance of the last half of this sentence: "even as we confess our history of our sinfulness." Certainly we have a history of sinfulness, but why this fact was added at this point, I am not sure.

8. WE confess our inability at this time, given our diversity in our understanding of the authority and interpretation of Scripture, to find consensus regarding a Christian understanding of human

sexuality, including homosexuality.

Comment GL: I agree, in spite of many people telling me the Bible is very clear about the questions of sexuality and homosexuality. I found the Bible study which came with the NCG study to be very helpful in understanding the complexity of this issue. There are many rules and prohibitions of the Old Testament, in particular, which we ignore. We consider many of the prohibitions of Leviticus to no longer apply Christians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So while the prohibitions against homosexuality in Leviticus are clear and uncompromising just so are the prohibitions against the eating of certain animals, birds, fish and reptiles.

In the New Testament we find we are also selective as to their application for today. Questions of the role of women, the applications of the passages on divorce are examples.

#### CONFESSIONS OF FACT

9. We have not responded to the acclamation of appreciation - of our Christian gay and lesbian brothers and sisters...

Comment GL: This may be controversial for some as well. This restates a decision of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council - and has the church "face" the fact that there are presently gays and lesbians in our midst as Christian and as Ministers. I am aware of gays and lesbians functioning well in various roles of Christian ministry.

10. We confess that only recently has The United Church of Canada become aware of and involves in the dialogue leading towards a Christian understanding of human sexuality.

Comment GL: This is truly my experience. Even though our congregation cosponsored a meeting on a previous report in 1982, and participated in the study issued by the NCG from Oct. 1986 to date, the numbers participating was not very high. At maximum we had a dozen people in the meetings. Some meetings had as few as 4 people. We sent in our "Affirmations" to the NCG as requested. But I understand that Affirmations were received from only 600 congregations.

But when the Report was issued in March, 1988, there was a tremendous outpouring of effort - very belated, in my judgment. And it was too late to really dialogue about the issue. There wasn't enough time, and the mood was too frantic for education.

There were over 1800 Petitions produced by the process - three times as many as the number of Affirmations received.

And in some cases no DIALOGUE has yet been experienced. Dialogue infers a willingness to listen to all the voices, particularly the quiet and hesitant ones. There has not been, in my opinion, enough of that even yet.

Gordon

7 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 19, 1988

One PS to the Confessional statements, which is an answer to a comment from a member of my congregations. So I read again: She said, "I could not make some of those confessions." So I read again: "Council Confessed..."

It was the General Council, in its wisdom, which made those confessions. The extent to which the rest of the Church can join in those confessions and accept them as their own will vary.

Seems to me it is something like being in Church on Sunday morning and reading from the bulletin a Confession of Sin - I have not written those words, they were not designed for me individually. It is a corporate confession which I have the option of making my own.

X X X

The next section begins at the bottom of page 2 with "In light of..." and ends 1/3 of the way down page 3 with "...faithful love in Christ".

This statement refers back to the confessional statements and then addresses the United Church of Canada with these words:

In light of the foregoing confessional statement, the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council challenges the United Church of Canada to continue to be a

covenant community, wherein...

Comment GL: this clearly shows the prophetic and leadership role of the General Council to the rest of the United Church of Canada. It reminds us of the fact that we have been a covenant community.

Covenant Community was the theme of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council - it was portrayed in various aspects -

Our Covenant with God (Noah, Genesis 9 8-15)

Covenant between people - various examples used such as Jacob and Laban - Genesis 31 44-50

Covenant with the nation of Israel - [Moses, Sinai, Exodus 19 and 34]

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31 31-35)

Covenant in the New Testament - in the blood of Christ

The challenge to the Church is to **\*\*continue\*\*** to be a covenant community, wherein

We recognize that all have sinned and fallen short of God's intention for us;

Comment GL: AMEN!!!

We agree that God's intention for all human relationships is that they be faithful, responsible, just, loving, health-giving, healing and sustaining of community and self;

Comment GL: this is an attempt to describe what we mean by healthy human relationships. Seems quite comprehensive to me!

We acknowledge that we are unclear at the present time, as to what God's complete intention is in relation to human sexuality, even as we affirm our support and appreciation for the gifts of Christian marriage, the charism of celibacy, and the way of chaste singleness.

Comment GL: I am happier to acknowledge that "Now we see through a glass darkly" about God's intentions than to try to [say] I see it clearly. To see it clearly I would have to be clear about poverty and famine in the world, the population, the short life of children in many parts of the world, the various aspects of the abortion debate, and how in all of this we are perfectly clear about the Will of God. I am not, so I am happy with this statement.

In response to the many Petitions which mentioned the need for a high view of marriage, there were those at General Council who felt that the mere repetition of the actions of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council [at the beginning of this report] was not enough. That Christian marriage should be held up again - but not as the only acceptable way of life.

The phrase "... the charism of celibacy, and the way of chaste singleness"

This was something I had hoped would be in the document and had, in fact, composed an amendment and located a seconder and the support of a meeting of the Community of Concern. Problem was the place where I wanted it put was inappropriate, so I withdrew, without making my motion, and had to just wait and see what happened.

What happened was very exciting. A single woman minister from Ontario [I happened to have breakfast with her one morning] brought this in on the last day of debate. Up to that time the Report showed no recognition for those whose choice is to remain single and to not engage in sex with other people. This was another point at which General Council responded to the Petitions.

When she brought it in it was immediately accepted and passed. "charism" is a beautiful word, which I have no trouble understanding, however I wish that a word of more general usage had been chosen. It was good that the word celibate [which is not part of the Reformed tradition] was accompanied by "chaste singleness".

I interpret this event as the Holy Spirit acting and bringing forth a better amendment than I had in mind, and brought it forth from someone who was more personally affected than I was.

Finally we "are called to examine" two "theologically-based but culturally-conditioned views"

an undue emphasis on sexual morality which has, from time to time, caused the Christian church to lose perspective on the whole variety of human sinfulness...

Comment GL: Our General Council was a good example of this. We must have spent half the time and energy of GC, at least, working on the issue of human sexuality. Most of the Conference meetings did the same. And how much of the time and energy in the Congregation has been spent on this issue, since March, 1988? Meanwhile there were other pressing issues: free trade with the U. S., redress of Japanese internment, "A Place for You", "the Congregation as Evangelist", Biblical interpretation, South Africa, the new Native Conference, and all the ongoing issues of all the Divisions.

an undue elevation of the sexual aspect of our being, in our times, making this an idol which we worship.

Comment GL: just watch any talk-show - from Oprah to Donahue, and the truth of this statement will be self-evident. Just examine any regular magazine which comes to your door [which we were asked to do in the first NCG-sponsored study session in our congregation] and look at the view of women and men, and their "ideal" relationships.

Reminds me of a birthday car I received: "May you have as much fun as they do in the beer commercials".

OK in total I have no problem with the section at the bottom of page 2 from "in light of the foregoing..."

To top 1/3 way down page 3 "...nor has either view liberated us to faithful love in Christ."

Gordon

8 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 20, 1988

I didn't plan this analysis to be a solo effort - but I will struggle on until I hear from someone else. It is very helpful for me to have the whole report in my mind when I go to my first Presbytery Executive meeting tomorrow.

Gordon, waiting for other contributions! dgl

9 (of 19) BOB CRAMER Sep. 20, 1988

I daresay you have an EXTREMELY fascinated and appreciative bunch of lurkers, Gordon, the Lone Pioneer! Coming from a church that won't even think, let alone talk, about these things, thus missing the chance to probe theology in depth, and coming from the wrong side of the border to boot, I just savor what I find here and pray it will someday help some of the rest of us.

One thing I very much appreciate is your probing of the concept of community. Down here we have far too much, in the general ethos, of so-called Christians having a one on one relationship with some evangelist. Or, for many more, a one on one relationship with Jesus, walking hand in hand in the Garden, whatever. That's what counts for so many folks. The notion of community is not relevant to them apparently. That is what you are REALLY probing and it sure needs opening up! (Leaders in our connectional churches talk about the connection a lot but I'm talking reality here!).

Interesting - our International Sunday School materials are stressing community, especially last year, the family of God, but also this fall, but at least among American Baptists, not too much of real world issues creeping in.

Bob.

10 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 20, 1988

We now come to the section which for many folks is the central core of the Document - the part that there is "all the fuss about". It seems unfortunate that people sought this out first and that they skipped over so much other important material.

If people believed the headline "UNITED CHURCH WELCOMES GAYS INTO THE PULPIT" they would find any support for that in these sentence.

"Council Declared....

1. That all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, who profess Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, are welcome to be or become full members of the Church.

2a. All members of the Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry."

Comment GL: For me it is very important to talk of the first sentence in the context of the "Call" issued "To Society" on the last page, almost the last item:

"To Society"

That, since within Canada, only Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon Territory have human rights legislation that provides equal protection under the law from discrimination against gay and lesbian persons, but the human rights codes of the government of Canada, the remaining provinces, and the Northwest Territories do not include such legislation, the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council:

- urge all levels of government in Canada to guarantee and ensure that the human rights of their gay and lesbian inhabitants are fully protected by law;

- urge all courts, congregations and appropriate divisions of The United Church of Canada to become active in support of human rights for lesbian and gay people;

- request the Division of Mission in Canada to make information, educational resources and study guides available to support Pastoral Charges, Presbyteries, and Conferences in these endeavours.

Comment GL:

The United Church of Canada has had, I believe, a very good track record regarding promoting human rights in Canada. I think particularly of the work which falls under the Division of Mission in Canada, and which falls under similar titles in Conferences and Presbyteries. We have five people in the National Division whose positions include concerns for human rights.

This has been true of our Church as long as I can remember, before the creation of the Division of Mission in Canada human rights were defended by those in the position of Secretary of Evangelism and Social Service - for example Ray Hord.

My point is that there is nothing new about the concern of the United Church at all levels for human rights. So at this time in history to be concerned about the human rights of gays and lesbians is well within our tradition.

Four "Provincial" jurisdictions have enacted human rights legislation to protect the rights of gays and lesbians against discrimination: Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon Territory. Last March I sent for the Human Rights Code, 1981 of Ontario to see what it contained. My reasoning at that time is that Ontario is our largest church constituency and in the national Church it would be impossible to ignore relevant legislation in that constituency.

I believe the opening sentences to that Code provide a valuable insight:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and is in accord with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as proclaimed by the United Nations:

and whereas it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination that is contrary to law, and having as its aim the creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and able to contribute fully to the development and well-being of the community and the Province...

And then in Part I

1. Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap...

2. (1) Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to the occupancy of accommodation, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap...

3. Every person having legal capacity has a right to contract on equal terms without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap...

4. (1) Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to employment without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap...

5. Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to membership in any trade union, trade or occupational association or self-governing profession without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap...

Skipping to 12

12 (1) A right under Part I is infringed by a person who publishes or displays before the public or causes the publication or display before the public of any notice, sign, symbol, emblem, or other similar representation that indicates that the intention of the person to infringe the right under Part I or that is intended by the person to incite the infringement of a right under Part I.

22 (2) The right under section 4 to equal treatment with respect to employment is infringed where a form of application for employment is used or a written or oral inquiry is made of an applicant that directly or indirectly classifies or indicates qualifications by a prohibited ground of discrimination.

Comment GL: It was surprising to me to find that the term "sexual orientation" is used in this act without any provision of a definition. The writers of this legislation must have assume that people are familiar with the term.

There is a question as to whether or now the Church would be treated by this Act. Would it apply to the Church? Would "Call" be considered "employment"? I don't know.

It is pretty clear to me what is meant by "discrimination" however. Discrimination is the opposite of "equal treatment".

OK, returning to the central points of The Report:

"Council Declared...

1. That all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, who profess Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, are welcome to be or become full members of the Church.

2a. All members of the Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry."

Council declared that the United Church of Canada will not 'discriminate' against people regarding full membership in our Church. To restate - Council declared that the United Church of Canada will give 'equal treatment' to people in regard to full membership in our Church.

By stating so, I believe that the United Church of Canada is consistent with its long tradition of support for human rights. I believe it is also clearly within the spirit and intention of the Human Rights Legislation of its largest constituency - Ontario, and that of three other 'Provinces'.

And the United Church of Canada is also consistent with its belief that Ministry belongs to [the] whole people of God when it states that anyone who is a member of the Church is "eligible to be considered" for ordered ministry.

I believe there are two critical issues in this report - which can be summarized as RIGHTS and RITES.

It is the RITE of the Church to ordain. That is covered by section 3 [GC ..affirm the present ordination/commissioning procedures as outlined in the Manual...]

Ordination is clearly the RITE of the Church and remains so.

But it is the HUMAN RIGHT of any person to have "equal treatment" in regard to membership in the United Church of Canada.

It is important to notice that the General Council did not oppose the present Human Rights legislation, but were promoting its EXTENSION to the rest of the Provinces and to the Government of Canada. There is no backing off of the Church from our historic position on human rights.

I was very happy to support this part of the Report.

Gordon

11 (of 19) RFAIRCHILD Sep. 21, 1988

The following is a rewritten version of a note I placed in LIVE FROM VICTORIA. The issue was not dealt with there and the note really belongs in the conference anyway.

A major theological flaw of the SOLM Report is to be found in how and what that report quotes in its introductory set of affirmations regarding marriage and sexual intercourse. Much is left unsaid, indeed far too much is left unsaid. While the affirmations are only that, affirmations, AND NOT THE POLICY under examination (a policy that I happen to agree with even as I disagree with the theology behind it). They stand as the background rationale for the policy and therefore should have been far better thought out and/or selected.

The fact that the affirmations are themselves citations does not excuse the framers of the report from the responsibility for presenting a balanced and theologically acceptable viewpoint. Insofar as these affirmations, and not some others, were presented they are (presumably) meant to give meaning to what follows. Certainly, insofar as many people will only ever see this particular document (the SOLM report), the affirmations are critical - they inform the reader, albeit in a summary fashion, what the United Church of Canada believes about marriage and sexual intercourse.

(Incidentally, the writers of the report GIFT, DILEMMA, and PROMISE were aware of this problem and cautioned people about how to cite the report)

## **Affirmation A**

-states that marriage is a covenant with GOD and between a man and a woman. The latter is correct. The former is not. Marriage is a covenant made before God,

not with God. We ask God to bless the marriage. We ask God to witness the marriage. We do not make covenant with God when we marry despite the Catholic view of marriage as a sacrament or the protestant view - in some cases - that it is a sacramental type of act.

## **Affirmation D**

This for me is the weakest and the most disastrous section of the affirmations. It reflect, in the selection of material (what is included and what is excluded), a totally secular and egotistical view of intercourse.

Displayed here is a very self-centered view of sexuality. Every item refers to the individual finding his or her OWN satisfaction and fulfillment in one way or another. Absent and indicating by its absence of view low view of sex is the idea that sexual intercourse may represent a gifting to the other person. Missing is the fundament Christian idea of mature love - namely that the other person's pleasure and fulfillment is an important part of the "relationship" that we have with him or her and perhaps that it may even be the most important part... for those who are truly in love and loving.

Paul talks about marriage as a life of self-giving love. This view is totally absent in this section on sexual intercourse and as such it defies both divine wisdom and the experience of those individuals truly in love and who know the giving and the gifting of love in the context of the physical relationship.

God gave us the gift of sex, not just for our own pleasure or sense of fulfillment, but so that we might gift others.

Also related to the primary error of this affirmation, and strangely so, is the glaring absence of one of the stated purposes (in the creation accounts) of intercourse: that intercourse may just be, among other things, for the purpose of procreation. A denial of our partnership with God in creation???

This omission is understandable if you are concerned to implicitly justify homosexual relationships. It is also understandable if we accept the kind of impoverished and self-centered view of sex that the affirmation presents. If sex is individual and personal, as the affirmation implies, then the mention of the human species as a whole, let alone the partner with whom one presumably has sex, is not relevant.

Shalom.....Richard.

12 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 21, 1988

Still on these points:

"Council Declared...

1. That all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation, who profess Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, are welcome to be or become full members of the Church.

2a. All members of the Church are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry."

Comment GL: It is important to notice the careful selection of the words eligible to be considered". This is what gives a lie to any of the newspapers headlines which read, "UNITED CHURCH OPENS ITS PULPITS TO GAYS". There is no automatic acceptance implied here. Furthermore our pulpits have always been open to homosexual persons, so there was no change made at this point.

Point 1 above is the subject of the referral to the Judicial Committee which could result in a remit. The point at issue is whether by including the words "regardless of their sexual orientation" this has changed the Basis of Union. The person who rules on this is the Secretary of General Council who was asked to rule during General Council.

Dr. Mills received the request from one Commissioner for his ruling - and overnight made a written response to the Petitioner. His response was that because there was no narrowing of the qualifications for membership that there was no change in the Basis of Union implied. The Petitioner disagreed. General Council was asked if it wanted, as General Council, to send this issue to the Judicial Committee.

General Council voted on it, and decided that, as General Council, we would not send it to the Judicial Committee. The Petitioner was free to send it to the Judicial Committee himself and indicated that he would.

The Petitioner then asked that, in the event that the Judicial Committee did not

support Dr. Mill's interpretation would General Council give authorization for General Council Executive to send a remit to Presbyteries?

Prior to this General Council the General Council Executive would have had this right. But just a day or two before General Council had passed a motion removing from the General Council Executive the right to send Remits. This was, I believe, the result of a feeling that only General Council should send Remits, and that there had been some erosion of the authority of General Council when the Executive did this.

It was exactly for this reason that some of us opposed the motion to give General Council Executive authority to produce and send a remit in this instance. It seemed inconsistent with a motion we had just passed a few days ago.

Nonetheless the majority of General Council agreed with the motion to empower the General Council Executive to issue a remit if the Judicial Committee agrees with the Petitioner.

And the Petitioner expressed the view that he went away from General Council much happier because that enabling motion had been passed.

Carrying on....

"[2] b. All Christian people are called to a lifestyle patterned on obedience to Jesus Christ.

c. That all congregations, presbyteries, and conferences covenant to work out the implications of sexual orientation and lifestyles in light of the Holy Scriptures, according to their responsibilities as stated in the Manual.

3. That the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council affirm the present ordination/commissioning procedures as outlined in the Manual, and those actions taken at the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council, which state, it is inappropriate to ask about the sexual orientation of those in the candidacy process, or those in the call/appointment/settlement process."

The present ordination/commissioning procedures as outline[d] in the Manual

remain. We may not ask questions about sexual orientation, which has been the case since the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council.

The reason for this is clear when, for example, you read the Human Rights legislation from Ontario. A similar provision is made there. Such questions are prejudicial by nature - that is, they pre-judge. They are not consistent with "equal treatment".

When discussing this in congregations within our Presbytery I am shocked at some of the interpretations I have heard. People are already thinking of ways that they can get around this prohibition. Perhaps by asking about living arrangements, etc, rather than "sexual orientation". What shocks me is the low level of trust implied, and also the lack of integrity implied. Some seem to imply that they would follow this to the "letter" but not "in Spirit".

Some assume that this gives a Carte Blanche to any homosexual candidate. That if a Pastoral Relations committee does not choose that candidate that they could be sued.

In my judgment [not being a lawyer, not even a 'Church lawyer'] the question would be whether they behaved in a **\*\*prejudicial\*\*** manner to such a candidate. Did they, in fact, give "equal treatment". Our personal integrity and our integrity as a Church would be at stake. And that has always been the case.

There is a present duty laid on all congregations, presbyteries and conferences by the provisions of this section:

c. That all congregations, presbyteries, and conferences covenant to work out the implications of sexual orientation and lifestyles in light of the Holy Scriptures, according to their responsibilities as stated in the Manual.

I brought this to the attention of our Presbytery Executive yesterday and a small committee has been struck to work out where this duty fits within the present structures of our Presbytery.

Gordon

13 (of 19) BOB CRAMER

Personally, Gordon, I'm 'with' your comments, position, etc. all the way so far as I can see. But I think your way of dealing with what I think most folks would consider the 'basic' issue begs their question or demand. I certainly cannot condone the way most headline writers wrote; yet they were perhaps conscious of the 'real agenda' of homophobes, who are legion: the question was, would the United Church in an unambiguous way CLOSE the doors to homosexuals (who by definition, according to homophobes, are deceptive and not worthy of trust, having lived so long in the closet)? And the UCCanada did NOT close that door, not by a long shot. So the degree to which it was left open doesn't matter, to those folks whose fear and mistrust is so strong. The Council joined in the sneak attack upon 'real Christians'. Anyway that's how I would analyze this if it had been a USA church that this were happening to. Bob.

Remember I am not arguing my case, but trying to say what I think the door-closers would say if THEY weren't a bit confused about their own agenda. Bob.

14 (of 19) DGLAIRD

Richard Fairchild, some immediate reactions to your note:

1. You have used the description SOLM Report - I suggest you refer to the "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality" Report [MMHS for short?] to make sure that people realize you are talking about the new policy statement of the United Church of Canada, rather than some of the preliminary documents. I also suggest that people throw away their printed-offline or over versions of the Report and go to the United Church Publishing House outlet and get some packages of the newly printed Report. It is essential in the matter of numbering but it is also a very presentable looking document.

2. The distinction between what is a Covenant BEFORE God and a Covenant WITH God is one that means much more to you than to me. I think God is involved IN all our Covenants nomatter how we describe them. For example my Marriage with Marilyn - probably involved a Covenant BEFORE God. But it involved God in the midst of our Marriage - and so was also a Covenant WITH God. And I believe anything in which God is present IS sacramental.

3. I would agree with your comment about Affirmation D - and would have preferred to see something like "a life of self-giving love". And I agree that the omission of reference to procreation and the resulting family life is a huge omission - which I am at loss to explain. Perhaps someone else can. Maybe it

has to do with affirm[ing] those couples who marry and have no intention of having children - I don't really know.

Where I part with you, thought, is at the point you ascribe motives to those who framed the words of the Report. "...if you are concerned to implicitly justify homosexual relationship..." That is a case, in my estimation, of your making a judgment why commissioners left out some things you thought were important. It was, you say, to "justify homosexual relationships". In this instance, Richard, you have made an assumption about motives which is, I believe, unwarranted, and in my case anyway, just plain wrong.

Richard, what is the POLICY which you state you agree with?

Bob Cramer: I have noticed all through this process of arriving at this Report, and still today, there is always the option of seeing a "conspiracy" lurking somewhere in it.

I feel it myself on many occasions. But my approach is to not assume a conspiracy when a simpler [and more generous] explanation would suffice. I agree it is a case of "fear and mistrust" being very strong at the present time. I remember asking about that point right at the beginning of "Live from Victoria", when I noticed the language of fear and mistrust before Council.

In this instance I believe that people who see a conspiracy "out there" should look inside and check out what has hooked their fear and dread and why that should be.

15 (of 19) DGLAIRD

Continuing "Council Declared...

3. That the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council affirm the present ordination/commissioning procedures as outlined in the Manual, and those actions taken at the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council, which state, it is inappropriate to ask about the sexual orientation of those in the candidacy process, or those in the call/appointment/settlement process.
4. That the report "Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles, and Ministry" does not reflect the present

position of the United Church of Canada; therefore this report ought to be considered an historic document and the decisions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council be circulated for study and reflection in our struggle to find God's direction for our church."

Comment GL:

Point 4 is how General Council dealt with the 117 page report. This was done on the last day, and was in no way an automatic outcome. It replaced a motion to continue to offer the SOLM report to the Church. I am sure there were many Commissioners opposed to this motion, feeling that it did not give credit to a lot of work of the National Coordinating Group and of the two Divisions. It passed, I believe, SOLELY as a Response to the Petitions. The People of the Church WERE HEARD.

This is well worded. Because it IS a Historic Document - in that it did happen - it was part of history. This is not the same as rejecting the Report. But it is to cease any promotion of the SOLM Report.

And it was important to state clearly that the SOLM Report does not reflect the present position of the United Church of Canada. In my judgment most of the present arguments still refer back to the SOLM report.

Continuing...

"Council Issued a Call...

To the Church:

5. That there be further church-wide study of the authority and the interpretation of Scripture and the theological and cultural premises that inform our understanding."

Comment GL:

This could not be more important. The most intensity of this whole debate centred and continues to centre on the interpretation of Scripture. The 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council issued a document which in my GC Workbook is entitled "AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE DOCUMENT" which is an

excellent first step in having the Church address this question. The intentions stated in the Workbook were that this document be sent to the Church for reflection and response with a final report to the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Council. It is an urgent matter that we get on with it.

I would like to comment on the last part of point 5: "...and the theological and cultural premises that inform our understanding."

This wording was a result of a last-day amendment by June Lythgoe of B. C. Conference. June is in a position like "Dean of Women" at U. B. C. and made a significant statement, both at B. C. Conference and at General Council.

June said something like this: "I believe we are going through a 'paradigm shift' in our society of which the Homosexual debate is only a symptom. The shift involves a move from a patriarchal style of life that has been with us in all the centuries up to now. But there is now a significant shift happening." June felt that we need to give more attention, not only to the interpretation of Scripture, but to the trends in the social organization in our society.

The Commissioners agreed with the amendment and considered it a 'friendly amendment'.

16 (of 19)

Continuing:

"6. That the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council ask congregations, presbyteries, Conferences and appropriate Divisions to respond to the call for further study and dialogue, related to the broad spectrum of sexual responsibility and continue to make available existing educational resources, including those of the ecumenical community."

Comment GL:

We are to continue the study and dialogue. I believe that much of the rage which we have heard in the last 6 months is because many congregations only began significant study of this issue AFTER March 6, 1988 when the SOLM report came out. As far as "Dialogue" is concerned there has been little of that.

I attended a meeting of one of the congregations in our Presbytery. I was there in my role as Commissioner. It was a good meeting, after we dealt with those whose intention seemed to me to be to dump their anger on me.

But I want to report the almost last comment of the evening. One speaker said the only people the congregation had not been talking to or listening to is gays and lesbians. And suggested that another meeting be called in which they were present. To the Credit of the process in the United Church of Canada - there was never an official time in this process in which the people affected were not represented. Gays and Lesbians were present in the NCG, in the meetings of the two Divisions, at General Council and in Sessional Committee #8.

It is absolutely fundamental to dialogue that both sides of any argument be represented strongly. It is also fundamental that there be a LOT of LISTENING. It is my faith that Christ is the Mediator Who creates dialogue.

It is important that we have all the ecumenical resources in this study which are available. The people here on ECUNET are such a resource.

Continuing...

"7. That the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council urge the appropriate divisions and Courts of the Church to take action to address the Church's participation in oppression of people on the basis of sexual orientation."

This is one of the many duties which Conference Divisions and other Courts of the Church have received from this Report. My hunch is that we are unclear about the ways we have participated in oppression - so we may need to do some meditation about this and dialogue with those we have oppressed. And then we are to "take action".

Continuing....

"8. That the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council through the appropriate Divisions and courts of the Church address the issue of our concern for pastoral care of individuals and groups in our United Church of Canada community, who feel unheard, manipulated, or estranged."

Comment GL:

This is a big question. I believe this refers to many more people than those who have spoken first and loudest. Those who feel unheard may indeed be STILL UNHEARD. So we will have to hear them. And listening to people whose hurt is so deep that they have not yet put it in words will take a lot of listening. There are those who have homosexual children or relatives and have not yet been able to say that out loud. There are those who themselves are homosexual who may not yet have been heard. This General council and its Report have not, in my judgment, made life easier for homosexuals within the United Church. It is even more dangerous to their careers if they speak out. There has been manipulation and estrangement on all sides of this issue. Some have named it and some have not yet named it.

This will take an unbelievably sensitive pastoral care on behalf of Conferences and Presbyteries.

Gordon

17 (of 19) RFAIRCHILD

Gordon, Response to Point 2 of your note:

A Covenant BEFORE and a Covenant that "God is in involved IN" is different than a Covenant WITH God.

This is more than hair-splitting.

Much is known about Covenants and how and why they were made in ancient Israel and the Mid-East. Covenants made between nations and groups invoked God, and in particular called down his curses should the covenant be broken (covenant BEFORE God). Further, they asked God to prosper the parties who made the covenant and guard them as long as they remained faithful to the covenant (God IN the covenant relationship). These covenants were not made WITH God unless - as in the case of Israel - you are talking about the covenants God made with Noah/the world, Abraham/his family and all the righteous, Moses/the people Israel, etc.

Marriage is contracted or covenanted between two individuals. We believe and hope that this is in accordance with both God's plan for humankind as a whole and for the individuals particularly. Further it is a covenant relationship in which God,

as an invoked party, is present to bless, to sustain, to teach, to unite, and so on. God, as in all covenant formulations, is present as both witness and guarantor of the covenantal relationship. The marriage covenant is NOT made WITH God, although God is an important party to it, it IS made BEFORE God.

On the other hand there are covenants that we, like our ancestors make WITH God. Our baptism/confirmation is a covenantal rite by which we enter "formally" into a covenant with God. That covenant with God is, as is almost always the case, initiated by God and accepted by us. This last is significant because it distinguishes covenants with God from that which we humans seem so prone to try to do - namely to make bargains with God, the purpose of which is usually an attempt to manipulate God. NOW, what turns on the distinction between WITH and BEFORE may not strike everyone as being significant, nevertheless it should not be ignored.

In Covenants made BEFORE God and Covenants made WITH God the element of blessing/cursing enters in; and in both cases a person's promises and a person's faithfulness are put to the test. God is present in both cases as either a witness/agent or the main player. However in a covenant WITH God the breaking of covenant is a breaking of faithfulness with God while the breaking of a covenant with other people is a breaking of faithfulness with them. The relationship that one then has with God in the latter case is somewhat different than the relationship that one has with God in the former case.

In breaking covenant with God one severs, from one's own side, the relationship with God. God may decide, and in Christ has decided, to maintain his end of the covenant relationship, but that is the grace of God's covenant with us. Technically: by breaking covenant one ends the covenantal obligations and the relationship which they either codified or initiated.

In breaking covenant with other people one's relationship with God is maintained, although that relationship may of a sudden be distinguished by a certain negativity; i.e.: the curses invoked as part of the act of covenanting may be actually carried out. It should be noted that in the marriage covenant there are no explicit lists of blessings and curses to be carried out by God in the event of the success or failure of the parties to be faithful. The blessings and curses may, however, be considered to be implicit to that covenant (as our experience with marriage shows).

If you take I John 4: 19-21 seriously (How can you say you love God whom you have not seen if you do not love your brother whom you have seen) you might conclude that all of the above is so much dross. However there is an important difference between "not loving God" and "not being in covenant with god". Often we do not love god (because we do not love our brothers and sisters), but that does not cancel the covenant we are in with God - rather it activates other features of it: judgement, the need for repentance, forgiveness, etc.

## **Response to thoughts about "motive"**

My point in saying "...if you are concerned to implicitly justify homosexual relationships..." was not intended to be accusatory, but rather meant to suggest the logical coherence between the present affirmations and ANY justification of homosexuality. To put it in terms of logic - affirmation D is can be seen as helpful, if not a necessary or sufficient, condition for an affirmation of homosexual practice.

Certain it is necessary, but not sufficient, condition to LEAVE OUT (as was done) any reference to procreation if the case for homosexual practice is to be made. I am sorry that the note seemed to be more pointed than that. It was not meant to be.

I cannot say what the motives of the commissioners were - though I am sure, given the discussions in other places - that some of the commissioners on the SOLM committee were not unaware of the importance of leaving out a reference to procreation in the affirmations under discussion. While it is both malicious and presumptuous to ascribe motives to the commissioners, it is also naive to assume that they had no motives and no basic theological and logical skills. IT CAN BE PRESUMED, however, that some people knew the significance of what they were devising and voting on, others did not, and still others knew but considered it to be less significant than some other point in the report. To say this is not to say very much, nor should it be construed to be doing so.

## **Response to the Policy Question:**

I am in favor of the resolution that state[s] all members of the church "are eligible to be considered...". In one stroke General Council affirmed the traditional polity of the church - whereby congregations, presbyteries and conferences are involved in the process leading to ordination. The power to decide belongs to these

groups.

I wish that General Council had actually given some moral leadership on the issue at hand, but I certainly can live with the fact that they in fact did nothing (and likewise did not change anything for what some people would regard as the worst).

### **Note Regarding Conspiracy (directed by Gordon to Bob)**

Gordon, you are right in saying that some people went to Victoria thinking that the whole process was rigged. That feeling came from their previous experiences with what a professor of political science here in Halifax has called "the oligarchy of the United Church" (I might suggest you re-read my essay: CONCILIAR PROCESS.

Since General Council was presented with a clear indication of "the mind of the church" and failed to reflect that mind in either its policy statements or its public pronouncements (moral leadership) the feeling that the process is rigged continues. The more rabid, and perhaps the more foolish, among those opposed to the idea of homosexuality thus end up speaking about a conspiracy.

I do not think there is a conspiracy. I do think that the United Church hierarchy, of which I am a part, is in fact oligarchical. When it makes decisions that are patently out of step with the majority of the church the classical justification for that decision is soon heard, namely, it is stated that "we struggled with the issue, we learned new facts, God's spirit was present and we felt directed to this decision". What is being heard by the majority is this: "You, the majority, are unenlightened" (in the theological sense of the term 'unenlightened').

Personally I am astounded that people think that there is a conspiracy of radical-liberalism or humanism in the United Church of Canada. There is no conspiracy. There is, however, a considerable insult - an insult that bears an astounding relationship to the insults that occur in "class" situations, or in situations where a minority rules without serious reference to the wants and desires of the majority. The majority are being told by the minority that they are standing in the wrong place and that the minority has a finer grasp of reality. It is an alienating kind of situation.

This situation may be justified theologically in the finest way and by the finest kind of theologians and all kinds of appeals may be made to how attempts were made

to involve the people in study and dialogue, but in the end, in terms of human dynamics, structural analysis, and political insight - it stinks.

Shalom — Richard

18 (of 19) DGLAIRD

Continuing...

“To Society:

That, since within Canada, only Quebec, Manitoba, Ontario, and the Yukon Territory have human rights legislation that provides equal protection under the law from discrimination against gay and lesbian persons, but the human rights codes of the government of Canada, the remaining provinces, and the Northwest Territories do not include such legislation, the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council:

- urge all levels of government in Canada to guarantee and ensure that the human rights of their gay and lesbian inhabitants are fully protected by law;
- urge all courts, congregations and appropriate divisions of The United Church of Canada to become active in support of human rights for lesbian and gay people;
- request the Division of Mission in Canada to make information, educational resources and study guides available to support Pastoral Charges, Presbyteries, and Conferences in these endeavours.”

Comment GL: This expresses the continuing interest in and support for Human Rights legislation - and the wish of the Church that the rest of the Provinces as well as the Federal Government recast their present Human Rights Codes to include protection for gays and lesbians.

Another duty is provided for Conferences, Presbyteries and Congregations to make themselves aware of existing Human Rights legislation and to press for appropriate revisions in favour of equal treatment for lesbian and gay person[s].

Continuing....

"Having studied the petitions sent to it, the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council also received the report, "Toward a Christian Understanding of Sexual Orientations, Lifestyles and Ministry", along with the Dissenting statements (parts 2 and 3 only), as fulfilling the mandate given by the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council, 1984."

Comment GL: it says that the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council has fulfilled the duty placed on it by the 30<sup>th</sup> General Council.

This is my last note of "analysis" - anything further will be response to the notes of other people.

Gordon

Final comment on the process of analysis: This has taken me about 10 hours to go through the Report in detail. And I had the advantage of seeing the words being put together, painstakingly, at General Council. Yet I have heard people who in one 90-second read say that they know exactly what the Report says and why they are opposed to it.

Dgl

19 (of 19) DGLAIRD Sep. 23, 1988

Richard, thank you for your elaboration of your previous note.

Re: Covenant - that you for your detailed analysis. I fail to see the significance of its connection with the Report but maybe other people do.

Your comments about "Motive" and "Conspiracy" were very helpful. Of course all people come to situations with motives. The problem comes when one person states for other persons what their motives are.

I am interested and surprised that you agree with General Council on the major point which has so many people upset.

You maintain the point of view that it is an insult to other people when we

disagree with them. I maintain that it is not simply a given that General Council went against the view of the majority. The only expression of majority position was in relationship to the SOLM 117 page report. I believe it is yet to be seen what the view of Church people is to this current 4 page "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality" report.

The problem is that it requires the assurance that:

1. Every Church member has a copy of this report for their private study.
2. That they have had a chance to read the report and consider it for themselves without having the report pre-judged for them by media reports and by the loud outcry of local people and groups.
3. That they have had a free and open place in which to state their opinion on the Report and have it heard.

My experience of one Presbytery meeting and other congregational and ministerial meetings is that I have yet to hear much talk about "the Report itself". What I have heard is the expected loud voices making predictable assumptions about what General Council did. I have sensed little openness to hear from the people who might find something favourable to say about any provisions of the 4 page Report. But occasionally there is a voice or two, very quiet, very hesitant which supports it. And that voice is seldom heard, and if heard, given any credit.

I have not yet seen the mood or the Grace which is required for Dialogue. I hope there is still the time and space for it.

Gordon

Ecunet Members who are reading this Conference: CURT ACKLEY, DMLOCHHEAD, DONEL, DGLAIRD, BOB CRAMER, JIM UHRICH, WJDEARBORN, JPMULLEN, RFAIRCHILD, JWRAMSAY, GAMILNE, RCBURGESS, JSTRANGWAY, JREATON, DFPETRIE, CAHOLMES, LESLOUGH, PCCHYNOWETH, AMAUNDER, FRANCIS DE RUIJTE, HJARBON. REDMAN, PAUL CURRIE, DAVID HEWITT, MECHE, DONALD LOCKHART, TED BENDELL, DAVID LOVEWELL, DAVID MODDLE, ATHABASTCA, MARTA, TOM POWELL, JEAN WILSON, ALBERT FOWLER, WARREN BRULEIGH, STEWART CLARKE, DENNIS MCINDLESS, JIM LOCHHEAD, JCAPERS, PBY BROOKHAVEN.

20 (of34) RCBURGESS Sep. 23 1988

Gordon, a few comments:

Thank you for opening and contributing so generously to this conference. It is helping me think through my feelings on this issue, instead of simply reacting to it.

Your definition of a "human right" as requiring "equal treatment" in regard to membership within the United Church of Canada is significant. And I appreciate your uploading a pertinent summary of the Human Rights Code of the Province of Ontario. Even though I am a resident of Ontario, I've never seen the code before. However, having read this part of it now, it raises some questions in my mind, if we apply it to membership in the United Church. The list of bases against which unequal treatment of persons is prohibited not only includes sexual orientation, but also creed. The question this raises in my mind is: does this mean that we must admit someone to membership in the Church if they refuse to profess faith in Christ, because they are Moslems, or Hindus, or Buddhists, or adhere to some other creed? My intention here is not to imply that these people are somehow inferior. They just believe differently than we have traditionally believed. If this is so, then the General Council's statement on Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality appears to still be in contravention of the Province of Ontario's Human Rights Code. General Council's first declaration makes professing faith in Christ a pre-requisite to membership in the Church. Does this represent unequal treatment for those who adhere to a different creed? If it does, what kind of community can the church be in obeying the letter of the law? It can no longer be a community of common faith.

Perhaps there is a great deal of work needed to precisely interpret what the Human Rights Code means.

21 (of 34) DGLAIRD Sep. 24, 1988

Richard, I agree with you exactly. By uploading some parts of the Human Rights code for Ontario I am not inferring in any way exactly how it should be interpreted. It may be that the Church is exempt from various parts of it. Certainly in the area of faith there will be some common sense exemptions. It will only be as your act is tested in the Courts that its full implications will come out. I strongly suggest you get your own copy if it, though. It is called "Human Rights Code, 1981" and is available from the Queen's Printer for Ontario in Toronto.

They sent my copy for free.

I have heard some people assume that the Church is automatically exempt from such Human Rights legislation. I don't think that should be assumed. The Church is mentioned in section 23 (1) which I will quote:

(1) The right under section 4 to equal treatment with respect to employment is not infringed where,

(A) A religious, philanthropic, educational, fraternal or social institution or organization that is primarily engaged in serving the interests of persons identified by their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, creed, sex, age, marital status or handicap employs only, or gives preference in employment to, persons, similarly identified if the qualification is a reasonable and bona fide qualification because of the nature of the employment.

I don't know the significance of the fact that "sexual orientation" is not mentioned in this section.

22 (of 34) GAMILNE Sep. 25, 1988

Time to drop another oar in the water here.

I have a bit of a problem with the wording of Paragraph 1 of "Council Declared... in Membership, Ministry, and Human Sexuality. There is in my mind, a sort of discrimination caused by the inclusion of the statement 'regardless of sexual orientation'. It seems to me that if there is to be no doubt of who might actually be included in the words 'all persons' then we should say what existing human rights legislation in other places say. If we did that, it should go something like this: "That all persons regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or handicap who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to him, are welcome to be or become full members of the United Church of Canada."

If the statement can not be said in this fully inclusive manner, then I personally feel that the words "regardless of their sexual orientation' should have been left out altogether. As you notice, I left out the word 'creed' in that statement, but creed is covered in "...who profess faith in Jesus Christ..."As pointed out by RC Burgess, this does set a certain discrimination, but then whoever said the church

should not be discriminating about membership. MMHS is pretty definite in saying that all members of the church should live by the discipline of Christ.

My great concern for what is going on in the church right now, is that it is beginning to appear as though there is a sort of apartheid appearing. It is okay for those who are different from us to exist in our society, as long as we don't have to associate with them, or horrors, be served by them.

Apartheid is not simply racial discrimination of the minority whites in South Africa against the majority blacks. In fact the whites there see themselves as a majority, because they have succeeded (they think) in dividing the blacks into factions and homelands to the point where the whites are a majority dealing with a bunch of minorities. Apartheid by definition is a demarcation between any two (or more) groups of humans. It is a we-they syndrome, and it is always predicated on the fear of losing control to some group that the present power group does not trust to maintain the status quo. That is a tongue in cheek way of saying that apartheid is by definition predicated on injustice.

I am beginning to get really nervous about what is going on in my church. There is now talk about 'majority'. Two hundred congregations are not a majority. 1000 member of the CC are not a majority. I don't think anyone has really listened to the majority yet, because I suspect the majority doesn't know what to say. And I think that they are hurting the most.

There is talk about forcing a vote or referendum. Before any vote is taken on this issue, I want some sort of iron clad guarantee, that no person will be allowed to vote until such time that they have actually read the document MMHS, and are not just the recipients of some other person's interpretation of it.

Maybe, we should require the voters to recite paras 1-4 or some such before giving them a secret ballot. (Grin).

23 (of 34) RFAIRCHILD Sep. 27, 1988

Gordon,

Regarding note 19 - "You maintain the point of view that it is an insult to other people when we disagree with them"

I do not maintain this point of view. It is my charge that the attitude fostered by the polity of the United Church of Canada and held by many of those who fill the leadership roles in the church bears a striking resemblance to the attitude displayed in oligarchies, to wit: the will of the majority, when in conflict with our will (or understanding or insight, or whatever) is to be ignored or subjected to and/or overcome by "education processes, awareness training, exposure to the real facts, etc.)

Assess the pattern of behaviour the church hierarchy has displayed over the last few years when "issues" have arisen and ignore the content of the issue for the moment. I challenge you to deny the correctness of my charge.

Increasingly I see a need for a radical reformation of the process by which our church arrives at decisions, moral stands, etc. Perhaps something more Quaker in style - where argument, discussion, and voting are not allowed. Whatever process we chose ( the Morar Murray-Hayes proposal?) Full allowance needs to be made for the divine guidance granted to the majority and for the divine guidance granted to the minority (who have "studied" the issues).

It is NOT INSULTING when one person disagrees with another. It is insulting when the issue of that disagreement is an action that fails to recognize the disagreement and honor it fully.

I think that the action of General Council in leaving the decision making power in the hands of congregations, presbyteries, and conferences, honored the disagreement. I think that the confessional statements did not (even though I agree with many of them...).

24 (of 34) LESLOUGH Oct. 2, 1988

Richard, would it help at all for you to read the confessional material in the GC statement as the Council's confession? That, I understand, is who was/is confessing and there is no intention to ask anyone who would not wish to do so to confess those same things.

Re: petitions and being heard - I think Richard is correct. The GC actions took into account the petitions. That is why the statement gives responsibility to local congregations, etc. So is this a proof of the failure or success of the conciliar system??

By the way, on that item, (and this may not be the conference to ask this question) I would like to hear the Biblical base for determining faithfulness by majority vote. I cannot think of a Biblical base for abandoning the "councils of elders" system which we have to a public opinion vote on issues of any kind. I also have trouble with the hierarchical pope/archbishop/system for declaring faithfulness so...

26 (of 34) JIM UHRICH Oct. 4, 1988

Linda Slough's note triggered the idea to post a letter to the editor that appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press on Saturday, October 1. Here it is:

[Written by A. M. Watts. Faculty of Theology, University of Winnipeg]

## **CHURCH COLUMN CRITICIZED**

In the article "In the case of a major split, gays get the church" (Free Press, September 19), Fred Cleverly, referring to recent affirmations passed by the United Church's General Council, writes that people must "either agree or leave the church."

Who issued such an ultimatum? Not the council, which neither gave an ultimatum or implied one. It comes, then, from Mr. Cleverly himself.

There was a confession agreed to by the council which refers generally to injustice to homosexual persons, and specifically to their not being allowed full participation in all aspects of the church's life. Mr. Cleverly claims that all church members are compelled to agree with the confession or leave the church. Why should this be true? It is not made into part of the church's profession of faith to be taken by all members. Nobody outside of the council is required to repeat it; its words are not expected to turn up at Sunday services. General Council has often made statements that do not represent the mind of the whole church; certainly they have not always represented mine. But it has not required me to agree or leave the church.

It is not as though what the council did has no importance, but the exact nature of the document it accepted ought to be recognized. In endorsing the 11 points, which included the confession, it was not passing \*legislation\* but issuing \*exhortation\*. As a matter of fact, it was precisely those who were most opposed

to the presence of homosexual persons in the church who wanted \*legislation\*. They wished the church to put through a legislative bar to any known homosexual person being accepted for ministry, as the executive of Hamilton Conference tried to do a few years ago. General Council did not do that. After affirming the procedures that have always been in place concerning ministerial candidates, it went on to do some exhorting, i.e. some preaching. Why should it put all members in the position that they must agree with the preaching or leave the church?

Mr. Cleverly maintains that the majority in congregations do not want gay and lesbian Christians in the ministry. If that is the case, it should be remembered that congregations have full control over those who seek to become candidates for the ministry. The declaration of the council that "all members of the church (regardless of their sexual orientation) are eligible to be considered for ordered ministry" is no more than a statement of the obvious. But no person can become a candidate who is not known by, and does not have the confidence of, members of a congregation. There are no exceptions. That has been true in the past and General Council affirmed that that is the way it will be in the future. Moreover, no one can become a minister of a congregation if the congregation does not want him or her. That has been true in the past and General Council affirmed that that is the way it will be in the future.

What has been said so far is unlikely to make an impression on Mr. Cleverly since his argument seems to revolve around the assumption that our gay members are sly monsters who are bent on taking over the church; they are a small minority but their cunning is such that, with dupes like me, they will outwit the innocent majority and grab all the assets. If that sounds preposterous, not to say malicious, when stated like that, look again at Mr. Cleverly's article; it is what he is warning people against.

Those who disapprove of what was said at General Council may be right. The 11 points may deserve severe criticism; perhaps they should be tossed out. That is not my position but let the debate go on. Where, though, is the justification for saying the General Council gave a "clear message" - either agree or leave the church? NO such message was sent.

A. M. Watts  
Faculty of Theology  
University of Winnipeg

(I obtained Mac Watts' permission to post his letter here. I called Mr. Cleverly to seek his permission to post his also, and he has not returned my calls.) - Jim

27 (of 34) JREASTON Oct. 4, 1988

Jim - re 'clear message' - note #25:

If I were to receive any clear message from G. C. it would off the top of my head that those in power *\*still\** have the mind set I've been shown more and more clearly (since I first detected it in the preliminary papers we were to study as congregations - lo those many years ago) of National office (and those working in positions of power within the hierarchy) opinions and study guides on the issues of sexual persuasion.

The *\*REPORT\** as such doesn't bother me so much as the *\*message\** - once we've obtained 'loving consensus' on that issue, the next obvious move is to approach the Bible as merely 'historical data', and as such ripe for re-writing, (and don't overlook the inroads already undertaken under the guise of inclusive language).

'Way back then, one could clearly see the mind set, the attempts to lead down garden paths of sleek dialogue, and behind it all, a smug (well, perhaps that's too subjective an adjective - lets say - patronizing?) Demeanor of "We know best' - 'once you realize (or reach) our level of enlightenment, you'll certainly agree with us'.

And that is perhaps *\*still\** the problem - those of us at the 'grassroots' feel that we *\*have not yet been listened to (nor are about to be)\** - and while we play these word games and conciliar/dialogue-games with National office and the hierarchy, we still do it on *\*their turf\**, using *\*their rules\**!

Anyone versed in the finer points of debate and/or dialogue will realize that we are operating from an untenable position - those in power have time and their own precedents on their side. Those associated with the Community of Concern probably lost out as far back as that day in Sudbury when the power structure shelved that milestone of structural reform, the Murray-Hayes Report.

28 (of 34) RFAIRCHILD Oct. 6, 1988

The "rationalizations" made in reaction to the criticism I made about the

untimeliness of the Confession within the SOLM document fail utterly to take account of how that confession reads and is read.

The confession explicitly states that THE CHURCH (not the members of the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council) has sinned in certain regards.

In talking with various people who take various stands with regard to the SOLM report all agree in their reading of the confession. They understand that it is THE CHURCH confessing - or in other words that the statements of confession are statements that they are expected to agree with (BECAUSE THEY ARE THE CHURCH).

All the above individuals understood it was a group of commissioners to General Council who voted on the SOLM document. All equally understood that what is produced by General Council is meant to be understood as being produced by THE CHURCH.

Hence all that I have said before about the untimeliness of the confession stands - as does my statement that I agree with the confession. Nevertheless it was wrong to create that confession when, by and large, THE CHURCH DOES NOT YET REPENT. It is a hollow confession that angers both those for whom it is supposed to speak and those to whom it was addressed (for they know it is a hollow confession AT THIS TIME).

All I can say, I have said before. The United Church continues to maintain and foster an oligarchical structure and mind set. Until we in the hierarchy deliberately examine the patterns of our actions and the content of our statements, WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THEIR THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OR RATIONALE, we will continue to insult and alienate the brothers and sisters within our churches who do not work actively in the more senior of our church courts and committees.

Think not of what we, the elders of the church, "should say" as the church. Think of what we do say by our saying and doing.

We have proclaimed the repentance of the church with regard to a very serious issue. The church is not repentant. It is angry. After it has dealt with its anger, then repentance might be able to be proclaimed and to be believed by all.

30 (of 34) DAVID MODDLE Oct. 6, 1988

John: I am frustrated by your "slick" use of words such as dialogue and "historical". As a minister who attempts to be the best biblical scholar I can be, (poor at best) I have no intention to reduce the Bible to history. I wish, rather to treat it with the utmost respect as a document of faith and to allow it to have its own integrity. I see people like you as the ones who would reduce scripture and faith to the realm of history to be held captive by the prejudices of our age. As in all ages we must allow the Bible to speak past our cultural "blindness".

Richard \* I want to know if your argument means that the church cannot call us to repentance until we are ready? Given that belief, then I guess we better remove all Statements of Confession from our worship services until we have cleared the details of such with all members to see if they are ready to confess. I know that your argument is about timing, and yet I think there comes a time to call for confession no matter what: if GC could have picked a better time I suppose you are right, but I suspect that no time will be the "right" time for this confession.

Dave

31 (of 34) JANET COFFEY Oct. 6, 1988

Richard: Are you intentionally using "SOLM" for some reason? I find it confusing since that report was, in point 4 of Council's Declarations, declared to be an historic document and NOT the position of the UCC. The General Council statement is named "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality". It seems to me that this is a time to be as clear as we possibly can if we are to find our way through this turmoil. I share your concern about Confession but I hold that concern in tension every Sunday when we pray our Prayer of Confession yet I would not want to throw out that time of prayer.

32 (of 34) DGLAIRD Oct. 7, 1988

Reflections on a line-by-line analysis of "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality",

## **WHY THIS CONFERENCE WAS ORGANIZED**

This is a most remarkable thing. In conjunction with a remark from Richard Fairchild about the need for a line-by-line analysis of the Report - and my own comment that we needed to do exegesis on the Report - that is why this

conference is here.

## **IT DID NOT GO AS WAS EXPECTED**

This conference did not go at all as I expected. I thought I could serve as catalyst for a discussion from many people - as you may have seen on various other conferences I have set up. For example when I set up the conference "NEW FILM OF JESUS" about the Last Temptation of Christ - almost every note beyond the first note was placed there by someone other than me. I thought that might be the case here.

But what happened here was very unusual. I began to send in notes of line-by-line analysis - and looked for responses, contradictions and arguments. Except for the occasional note from Richard Fairchild there were almost no responses. These are beginning to happen now and they are very welcome. But I was faced with a decision after note 2 or 3 - whether to just stop and wait for others - or to send a nasty "anti-lurker" note, such has been often done elsewhere - or just plough ahead with my own analysis. The latter was what I decided to do.

It was so good to do that, because there is so little of it being done these days.

## **HAVE PEOPLE REALLY READ THE NEW REPORT?**

I have listened in vain for anyone to quote the text of Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality in any of the many congregational and presbytery meetings. It makes me wonder the extent to which people have really read it.

I was at VST Theological College a few days ago and came away with the same impression. It seems people are talking in general about the Report, but not about the wording of the Report. They are criticizing logistical questions - about timing, about adequacy of representation - but they are NOT TALKING ABOUT THE REPORT.

I do believe that exegesis is good for the soul. In Bible study it is one of the tools to unlock the surprises of the Bible. It is not the only tool. But it is a tool which is so seldom used. So far too often we talk about the 10 Commandments without reading them and trying to do exegesis - we refer to the beatitudes without hearing them again - and being surprised by their contents. Many of the parables have new power released for people when they are treated exegetically - rather

than with the assumption - "We already know what it says".

So I think that an exegetical reading of Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality would provide some surprises for people - even those people who are "dead set against it".

Richard has raised concerns about the adequacy of the references to Marriage. He has also questioned the way Confession was handled. And in reference to the latter point others have responded here with different understandings of the meaning and the role of Confession in the Church.

What I will say, if anyone asks me about my view of Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality is that I have listened very carefully for any comments from anyone on the TEXT of this Report - and from my viewpoint no one "has laid a glove" on the Report itself. That is my surprising conclusion from what I have heard here and elsewhere. I do have an increasing sense that the Holy Spirit assisted the Church in the writing of this Report.

## **TWO STATEMENTS FROM CONFERENCE EXECUTIVES**

I am interested in the two statements from the Executives of the two Conferences - Maritimes and Newfoundland Labrador. I noted that while both Conferences picked up and used some of the wording from Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality that Maritime Conference departed from the wording by including a clause that referred to "Faithfulness within marriage and celibacy in singleness"

Whereas the Executive of Newfoundland Labrador Conference repeated the phrase from Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality - "Further, we affirm, with the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Council, our support and appreciation for the gifts of Christian marriage, the charism of celibacy, and the way of chaste singleness."

General Council had been careful to not limit the discussion of singleness to Celibacy - because, I think, we felt that Celibacy has never been part of the Reformed tradition of which we are part. Chaste singleness has been part of the lifestyle of many people we know within our Church. So General Council used both phrases.

The words of the MM&HS report stood up well.

Newlab framed its action in the light of

COUNCIL DECLARED... 2 c)

"That all congregations, presbyteries, and conferences covenant to work out the implications of sexual orientation and lifestyles in light of the Holy Scriptures, according to the responsibilities as stated in the Manual.

By including the above statement at the outset and then casting their actions as being in light of that section.

It would be a question for those Conferences whether what their Executives did represented a process of "covenanting".

33 (of 34) RFAIRCHILD Oct 8, 1988

Dave,

Of course, the church can call us to repentance and confession - but on the other hand the "official" church should not confess for THE CHURCH that which THE CHURCH is not repentant about...

The Elders (used generically here) of the church ought to call the people to repentance and confession -and may inspire that response by their own proclamation, repentance and confession, but that is different than the elders issuing a statement that says that THE CHURCH is repentant, or has repented. Try an experiment in bible study or worship sometime. Ask the people to say only the part of the prayer of the confession that they personally believe that they are truly repentant about. The rise and fall of voice is very interesting - and very honest.

As a liturgist I try to write prayers of confession that permit people to personalize their confession as they enter into the confession of the entire church community to which they belong. Often people will talk about the prayer of confession after worship service - that part which they felt particularly accountable for and that part which they felt generally accountable for. With regard to the latter I try to create, God willing, an environment which enables those praying to "intercede" and ask God's forgiveness to be upon the whole church (whose guilt they share).

Where the community is deeply divided upon an issue, I, and my elders, have felt

that it is very dangerous, if not downright manipulative, to use the liturgy to "resolve the issue". Confession during these times is incredibly meaningful - IF The issue and those involved in are respected (Eg.: the divisions are acknowledged, the integrity of the disputants seen, the issue left as unsolved but painful).

Now - the SOLM document's confession is not a liturgical confession, however it is a solemn confession and as such is untimely. It does go some way to acknowledging division and uncertainty (good), but it still confesses that which much of the church is unable to confess at this time. Thus the confession is ill conceived and rightly is viewed as the product of "them" by many people. I say rightly - because the confession does not embrace enough of "us". It imposes upon people that which they have not assented to.

Finally, confession should never be meant to be a prophetic call to the community insofar as it speaks for the community in its prophetic nature. Confession IS properly prophetic only when those confessing are confessing for themselves and INVITING - by example - others to enter into their anguish and pain, recognize the anguish the pain that is in them and which has been caused by them - and then, hopefully, join the confession as truly repentant members of the body of Christ.