

South African Press Association

Africa's answer to the 'homosexual problem'

Joyce Mulama

April 17, 2004

Africa's Anglican archbishops have vowed not to receive donations from western churches which support the ordination of gay priests.

"We do not want any money from the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. This is not rhetoric. It is not a matter of a joke. We mean what we say," the chairman of the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa, Nigeria's Archbishop Peter Akinola said, as the other clergymen nodded in affirmation.

Akinola was addressing a news conference in Kenya's capital Nairobi, on behalf of the continent's 12 archbishops, on Friday.

The conference followed a two-day meeting to review the African bishops' stand on homosexuality. Five archbishops from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East also attended the gathering. The church in the four regions does not condone homosexuality.

"Those who have chosen a different path away from Anglican doctrines must repent and come back to the Anglican fold or be kicked out of the communion," Akinola said.

"We have recommended to the Lambeth Commission (in London) to take this clear line of disciplinary action against ECUSA because of what it has done."

He said the Episcopal Church of the United States of America (ECUSA) had violated Anglican teachings by supporting gay unions.

Last August the Episcopal church consecrated Gene Robinson, who had lived with a man for 13 years, as bishop of New Hampshire diocese.

The move prompted the majority of churches from Africa, Asia and Latin America to sever links with Robinson's diocese.

The Lambeth Commission was formed to gather views on homosexuality and look into measures to mend the differences that have threatened to tear apart the 450-year old Anglican Communion.

"We believe the commission will accept our recommendation because we represent more than half of the entire Anglican world," Akinola said.

Of the 70-million Anglicans worldwide, 42-million live in Africa.

To show their seriousness, the bishops issued a three-month ultimatum on Friday to the Episcopal Church of the United States to repent or face dismissal from the Anglican Church.

The church in Africa depends on funding from the west, particularly from the Episcopal Church of the United States to run its projects.

IPS could not establish how much money they received from the west. But Akinola said: "A few provinces have been receiving money for HIV/Aids programmes and rehabilitation projects."

"We have just requested our primates to get exact figures of what they have been getting from ECUSA and make them available by end of May. But at the moment, we don't have any figures." According to unofficial statistics, 70% of the African church's funding comes from the United States. "We are saying no to dependency syndrome. We have realised that we have to be self reliant," Akinola said.

"If we denounce ECUSA, then it is also best that we refuse their money. We will not accept their money because they have decided to redefine Christianity to suit their needs.

"We are going to suffer for a while. But if we do so to gain our independence, it will be a good thing for the continent," said Akinola.

By refusing the funds, the Anglican church in Africa will not be subjected to manipulation by the west, he said.

In a desperate attempt to make money, the bishops have decided to embark on profit-making activities to support the church.

These activities will include renting out church buildings and using the money to support existing projects, as "we look for other ways of ensuring that the church sustains itself", Akinola said.

During a visit to Kenya last year, former South African Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu said he did not understand the hue and cry over the gay debate.

He urged gay people seeking election in churches to remain celibate. This sparked a furious reaction from Kenyan clergy.

"I do not see Africa ever taking a homosexual to be a bishop," said Akinola.

"The answer to the homosexual problem is continuous teaching and convincing them that homosexuality is not a way of life." - Sapa-IPS

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