

The House of Bishops

# Working Group on human sexuality



Report of the House of Bishops

# Working Group on human sexuality

November 2013

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# Foreword

None of us involved with the work of this group was unaware of how difficult a subject we were asked to tackle when the work began. Our expectation that it would be – in management jargon – challenging has been met. In the end we have not been able to achieve a unanimous report. But the experience has left us feeling more positive than we might have expected. It has been a privilege to listen to deeply personal accounts of Christian lives lived with same sex attraction. We have all learned and been changed by the experience and by other aspects of the group's work. We have been conscious of large numbers of people praying for us and for our work.

The subject is more divisive than just two perspectives might suggest. I doubt if there are any two of us who agree in every detail on the ground we have covered. Against that background, it is encouraging that our meetings have been marked by honesty and openness and by love and respect. Our disagreements have been explored in the warmth of a shared faith. To that extent, prayers have been answered and we are grateful to God.

We have relied heavily on the staff team throughout. All of them had other heavy commitments but they have been unstinting in serving us. Malcolm Brown and Martin Davie attended all our meetings, took minutes, wrote papers and drafted much the greater part of the report. Lauren Fenn, and then Caroline Kim, have made all the arrangements for our meetings with unfailing efficiency and good humour.

We decided at our first meeting to ask three people to be our advisers. From the second meeting onwards they have taken a full part in the work and the members of the group cannot imagine how we would have managed without them. The group decided that the best way to reflect the way we have worked was to ask our advisers to sign the report. They graciously agreed.

One of our advisers, Jessica Martin, challenged us to think about human sexuality more widely than most of our evidence was leading us to do. We asked her to write a paper which now forms the prologue to the report. We wanted to give others a chance to read it and reflect on it and we feared that, if we tried to integrate it into the main body of the report, much would be lost.

Joe Pilling  
*Chair of the Working Group*

*November 2013*



Prologue

# Living with holiness and desire

**The Revd Dr Jessica Martin**

## **The beginning**

Desire begins and ends with God. We who are creatures recognize our incompleteness, through desiring when we do not possess – and we yearn towards the holy when we hope for what we cannot see.<sup>1</sup> The created universe we inhabit is filled with promise, and our human lives with promises, both human and divine.<sup>2</sup> Everything we are and everything we do has a holy thread of promise running through it, and we do not know yet what we shall be.<sup>3</sup>

But, whatever it is, through God's grace, that we may become, we have some distance yet to get there. Sin, death and damage are fundamental to the world into which we are born, and they make us darker and more sorrowful entities than any innocent creature looking trustfully towards its maker for fulfilment.<sup>4</sup> We are violently separated from the source of our being. Why we have this tragic inheritance is beyond our understanding, but something of its meaning speaks in the narrative of the Fall with which the Scriptures begin.<sup>5</sup>

That's one true thing. But at the same time there is another true thing about our humanity, which is that here and now, in our mortal bodies and particular histories, God is with us.<sup>6</sup> God breathes within the human condition in the person and history of Jesus. Because of his birth every birth is a fulfilment as well as a nascent hope, every moment has a completion as well as a potential, the promise of every relationship is holy as well as local and mortal.<sup>7</sup> Because of Jesus' bitter suffering unto death and because he was raised from death, every piece of degrading damage may be transformed and redeemed, every sin forgiven, every death made the occasion of new life.<sup>8</sup> It is holy to be human because everything about being human, its loss and its splendour, is saturated with God.

The Scriptures speak of God reaching out towards his separated creatures and bringing them back into intimacy with him: ‘the kingdom of God has come near’.<sup>9</sup> This is a gift of love.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes it is imagined as the relation of parent and child<sup>11</sup> (adopted<sup>12</sup> or natural<sup>13</sup>), sometimes as the relation of spouse with spouse,<sup>14</sup> sometimes of sibling with sibling,<sup>15</sup> sometimes of friend with friend.<sup>16</sup> These are incomplete analogies, the analogies of promise, and like all rich comparisons they are fruitful and alive exactly because they are incomplete. Each expresses a human bond in which a promise meets a gift (or, at any rate, the nearest we humans can come to a gift). No real relationship, and no particular kind of relationship, is fully identified with our divine bond – or fully separated from it either. In every human encounter where a promise meets a gift, there is God, offering to change its meaning with his presence.<sup>17</sup>

The promise of God which is our hope, and the promises which found and direct our living in time and society are intimately joined together. When we make the promises of human relationship we are also on holy ground.<sup>18</sup>

### **Here and now**

Augustine of Hippo (whose influence upon modern Western understandings of fallenness and desire is difficult to overstate) sees in the restless longing heart an impulse which might in the end toss us towards the divine embrace.<sup>19</sup> His famous insight sees desire as the place of possibility – a creative place, perhaps a place under pressure, but not one of gratification. It is the space which always changes, which joins the past to the future. It cannot be an end in itself. Were it to become so we would be forced to worship craving.

The world of late modernity is where we live. Its commercial drive, the global capitalism which drives its macro-relationships, is founded very largely upon making desire an end in itself (though it is, fortunately, not completely successful in this, or we would already be living in hell). Its effects are particularly acute in countries where basic needs – food, water, shelter – are no longer the visible impulse for the empire of buying and selling. The market in the developed world operates in the gap between what you’ve got and what you think you ought to have to be happy; it is reliant upon the endless retreat of happiness into a consumer future which never arrives.

This has profound effects upon all kinds of human well-being but it is particularly destructive in its effect on relationships. It does not help that,

while human desire is much more diverse than just the sexual, for various reasons sexual desire has become a primary cultural medium for all the other kinds, and therefore a normal currency for selling the commodities designed to generate want. So sexual desire has become deeply linked to a cycle reliant on dissatisfaction and disappointment for its continuance.

At the same time (especially but not exclusively in Europe and North America) the last half-century or so has seen the growth of a perception of sexuality as the ultimate place of freedom and gift. In its purest and crudest form, such a philosophy argues that there are no other conditions attached to sexual encounter apart from those of the shared delight of the moment; that the experience of desire is its own sufficient reason for sexual encounter, and that sexual intercourse is always fully private and has no necessary social outworkings.<sup>20</sup>

This is a seductive vision. It has seduced several generations so far (though later generations have had to notice that there are many situations in which sexual encounter has a noticeable social impact). Its normative mutterings are still the loudest of our assumptions about what makes a relationship valuable. Nothing may openly challenge the sovereignty of desire, which is explicitly and mistakenly linked to the primacy of self-fulfilment (mistakenly because, as any parent knows, wanting things and then getting them is not a reliable route to happiness and security). So, as a philosophy for living – deliberate or accidental – desire is not serving us well.

When you idolize the ecstatic experience of the moment, you sever your past from your future. The present doesn't necessarily inform how you live in time, because within the logic of the moment you can only find out what to do next by being overmastered by another desire. Meanwhile the severed past is allowed, even encouraged, to die. In multiple sexual relationships great swathes of people's intimate histories become meaningless, unshared, unspoken, beyond response. The now stretches out and out, behind and before. It is a kind of refusal to live within time and its consequences, but it saves no one from ageing or from death. It is, in the end, lonely. Living for oneself alone is a wish which isolates as it gratifies,<sup>21</sup> and it is merciful that many people see through it sooner or later.

The idolization of desire is intimately connected to abuse, because an overriding desire tends to be selfish rather than generous. It doesn't offer

the space to consider the particularity of another person – their own needs and wants, their history, even their own experience of the moment. So you won't be well placed to decide upon a sacrificial or self-denying stance in relation to a person whose vulnerabilities you haven't had time to discover. Other factors will determine what happens – factors you probably never meant to be decisive, to do with the balance of power between you and your partner and determined by age, gender, income, status or beauty.

The long-term effects of impulse are working their way now through our law courts in a series of sexual abuse scandals which expose our profound confusion about the limits of liberation. We are discovering, painfully, that what we thought was a philosophy of generous mutuality is too often reliant upon the acquiescence of the powerless – usually, but not only, women and children – in the driven fantasies of the powerful.

Our combined, inconsistent perception of sexuality as both innocently free and essentially commodified is being particularly hard on the undefended and the vulnerable: upon children, the poor and the disenfranchised. Commodified sex, in its fully business-dominated forms of trafficking, prostitution and pornography, privileges consumer demand and minimizes personal encounter. It invites its users to believe that the fact of the transaction frees them from the constraints of seeing a person as a person. In reality, even the most distanced and virtual form of pornography relies on a residual idea of the imagined encounter as personal – though it also betrays it when the user discovers that, after all, he (and, increasingly, she) is alone. Pornography addiction is a basic modern problem, a cheap and quick way to discover that the god of craving will endlessly escalate his demands, shifting ground from imagined and malleable mutuality to more explicitly dehumanized scenarios of power and violence. It is a deathly terrain and dominated by the fear of death itself.

These extreme consequences of commodification are now very widespread, because of the internet and because physical travel between richer and poorer countries is easy and cheap. But we live with the ordinary, everyday outcomes of our confusions as well. Anyone who accepts uncritically the cultural invitation to live as if yesterday's promises could be endlessly revised by the sovereign demands of new desires is settling for disappointment. 'Choice' is central for almost every public context, from the trivia of shopping to the life choices of conception, birth

and death. But its representation (perhaps because the demands of the market have infiltrated our welfare systems along with everything else is often deliberately deceptive in focusing on the moment before a decision is made.

This is the moment of desire, and it's not the most important thing about choice. The most important thing about choice is that it excludes all other possibilities; you decide not to do a far wider set of things than the one you have actually opted for. So choices exist not in the moment of making them but in the living out of their consequences through good and ill. Our human failures to live out our choices are more complicated to characterize than their fully commodified counterparts, because few people actually live according to the pure logic of desire (love being the resilient and persistent condition it is, no matter how impoverished our philosophy) and therefore most shared lives are a mixture of generosity and selfishness about which it would be presumptuous to generalize.

But we are under pressure. We perceive, rightly, that our children need protection, a safe space to grow up in at their own pace; but we acquiesce in their early covert sexualization at the same time – in, for example, the pressure we put upon them to conform to particular impossible body shapes and sexualized ideals of beauty, all themselves shaped by the profit motive. The commercially-driven images of the perfect and beautiful family are also not, on the whole, replicated in the modern consequences of serial monogamy and widespread divorce and relationship break up (circumstances which also have observable economic consequences for the state, incidentally, in the pressure they bring upon services for the old as well as the young. They are becoming very anxious, our children, and many of them are pinched as they grow up by a variety of different sorts of poverty, from the economic to the emotional and spiritual.

So this is our everyday reality. Most of us manage – since the grace of God is larger than we imagine it to be – to maintain generously conceived private lives in some form or other; but we struggle daily with a constant cultural nudging of our human interactions towards a consumer relationship which conceives of the self as selfishly lonely and constantly hungry. It is harder to stay with a past promise when we are constantly impelled towards the endless horizon of a new one; hard to be satisfied with the actual families we are dealt in the face of the better ones we might acquire. In the circumstances, it's very striking that we manage as

much faithfulness as we do – and suggests a healthy, even life-saving scepticism about advertising culture. We want to get married. We want to grow old together. We want to nourish our children. Their flourishing matters to us very much.

Is this a set of circumstances into which an Anglican bishops' 'Working Group on human sexuality', born out of a very specific set of anxieties about same sex relationships, can offer much? In looking at this one aspect of human sexuality we have discerned two basics. First, that we cannot talk about same sex relationships in isolation. Culturally the whole issue is being made to bear more freight than it can or should possibly carry. Second, that we cannot say anything about human sexuality without speaking first of our sense of the body and bodily relationships as holy. Christianity is incarnational: God and body come together in Christ. Anything Christians might think about same sex relationships (especially as we have not discerned how to speak with a single voice on this topic) has no value except as part of this larger vision of all our human relationships; and for this reason the vision itself comes first, before we ever start talking about single-issue specifics.

### **Living with promise and gift**

Christ is the centre of everything.<sup>22</sup> God and man; heaven and earth in little space;<sup>23</sup> particular time spreading backwards and forwards to join the promises of God to the gift of himself. Jesus the gift offers himself all the way from first breath to last, a choice lived sacrificially, generously, in and through each successive moment. From conception to death to resurrection, a life where gift meets promise, healing through touch and word, proclaiming the presence of God with human beings. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus contemplates what is asked of him and keeps choosing to face towards love's sacrifice.<sup>24</sup> He allows his body to be broken and given away to nourish others.<sup>25</sup> Through his living in time, and the gift of his body, he joins God to humanity, death to life, the unfinished to the complete.

The two great commandments Christ brings out from Leviticus and Deuteronomy are the foundation of living well: to love God and neighbour.<sup>26</sup> This radical command to love cuts across the usual confines of kin, tribe, gender and nation; Jesus is someone for whom all humanity is 'my brother, and my sister, and my mother'.<sup>27</sup> He is properly cautious about where sexual desire belongs in the radical command to love – they are not straightforwardly aligned. He declares that sexual desire in its

imaginings is as powerful and as dangerous as in its actions.<sup>28</sup> He proclaims sexual bonds to be lifelong but recognizes that this can be beyond the capacity of limited human love.<sup>29</sup> He perceives the sexual bond as powerful enough to remake family relationships, so that the family unit becomes concentrated round the couple united sexually rather than around their kin relationships.<sup>30</sup> Meeting a Samaritan woman by a well, he first offers her the water of life and then reflects the sexual contingencies of her life back to her. What she registers is a profound recognition: 'he told me everything I ever did'.<sup>31</sup> We do not know what happened next. He sees clearly that all humanity falls short of love's promise: 'let him who is without sin cast the first stone'.<sup>32</sup> Forgiveness overcomes sin: he even suggests that God's overflowing gift of forgiveness is the means by which human beings learn to offer the overflowing gift of love.<sup>33</sup>

No relationship, seen in the light of Christ, can be transactional or even purely contractual; all need to be properly attentive relationships which seek to recognize and to be recognized. People can never treat each other as if they were things, even by mutual agreement, because to do that is to damage the soul. Human bodies are sites for the sacred and holy.<sup>34</sup> You need to treat them with the greatest possible respect, so that in the body of another you see something to cherish as tenderly as if it were your own.<sup>35</sup> Our relationships are modelled on the generous pattern of Jesus, rooted in mutual trustfulness and not in the wielding of power for its own sake.

For Jesus the natural citizens of the kingdom of God are children. This is because they are powerless and therefore especially beloved.<sup>36</sup> Our responsibility to our children is a common one, a shared commitment across the whole human family. Kin is not the last word in permanent relationships – in the Christian understanding we are ourselves adopted children of our heavenly Father, grafted into the family of faith through the generosity of God. We are also Gentiles, accepted by grace into the family of Abraham. Families are made by the love of God, not the love of God by families.<sup>37</sup>

God is the end and fulfilment of human desire, and our generously conceived desires point beyond their objects and towards God. Desire's balancing point between past and future means that it can only exist as a gift nourished by a promise. Desire joins what has been to what will be, and when it is hallowed by an exclusive choice it can grow into a shared

common life, faithfully given all the way to its last breath. Such a life is not really a private arrangement, but one of the goods of community, worked out in a network of relationships which live out promise by self-giving: to children, family, the wider society. They need to be remembered and nurtured throughout a whole life. These relationships are not limited by the confines of kinship and procreation; we, the adopted children of God, will particularly honour the relationships touched by the encompassing love beyond tribe and blood. In a world in which contraception has effectively separated sexual bonds from procreation, and in which families contain many members not linked by blood, this vision calls us to highly demanding kinds of lived-out commitment where we find ourselves.<sup>38</sup>

We will fail at all this. Because we are flawed, we will fail each other all the time. We need to forgive each other even as we hope to be forgiven. Relationships, too, will fail; but no bond of love can ever be forgotten or belittled. Our past speaks to our future, always. At the centre of the Christian faith is *anamnesis* – not-forgetting.<sup>39</sup> In Christ all things may be made new,<sup>40</sup> every failure may be made the occasion of a generous forgiveness.



# Part 1

## INTRODUCTION



# Introduction

## **The establishment, membership and work of the Group**

- 1.** On 1 July 2011 the House of Bishops announced that alongside a review of its 2005 Pastoral Statement on civil partnerships it intended ‘to draw together and reflect upon biblical, historical and ecumenical explorations on human sexuality and material from the listening process undertaken in the light of the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution’ and to ‘offer proposals on how the continuing discussion within the Church of England about these matters might best be shaped in the light of the listening process’.<sup>41</sup>
- 2.** Following this announcement, the House then set up a Working Group on Human Sexuality to take this work forward. The Chairman of this group was Sir Joseph Pilling and the four other members were the Rt Revd Michael Perham, Bishop of Gloucester, the Rt Revd Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead, The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Ebbsfleet (now the Bishop of Fulham) and the Rt Revd John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick.
- 3.** With the agreement of the House of Bishops Standing Committee, three advisers were appointed to assist the Group in its work. These were the Revd Dr Jessica Martin, Professor Robert Song and the Venerable Rachel Treweek, the Archdeacon of Hackney. These advisers participated fully in the meetings of the Group.
- 4.** The Group was supported in its work by the Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, the Director of Mission and Public Affairs for the Church of England, and by Dr Martin Davie, the Theological Consultant to the House of Bishops. Administrative support was provided by Mrs Lauren Fenn and Mrs Caroline Kim.
- 5.** The House of Bishops Standing Committee also agreed the following terms of reference for the Working Group:
  - To draw together and reflect upon biblical, historical and ecumenical explorations on human sexuality and material from the listening process undertaken in the light of the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution;<sup>42</sup>

- To advise the House on what proposals to offer on how the continuing discussion about these matters might best be shaped;
- To offer a draft of the consultation document that the House intends to produce;
- To keep the Standing Committee and the House in touch with its work from time to time; and
- To report to the House through the Standing Committee by October 2013.

**6.** The timetable of the Group was subsequently amended so that it would report to the House by December 2013.

**7.** The Working Group held 15 meetings, two of which were residential meetings held at Glenfall House, Cheltenham and Ripon College, Cuddesdon. At five of the meetings there was presentation of oral evidence by individuals and groups who were chosen for their expertise.

**8.** In addition to this oral evidence the Working Group also issued an invitation to all the bishops of the Church of England and any other interested parties to submit written evidence to the Group.

**9.** A list of those who provided evidence can be found in Appendix 2.

### **The listening process and the Group's participation in it**

**10.** As can be seen from its terms of reference, the work of the Group has been part of a wider process of listening in the area of human sexuality that has taken place across the Anglican Communion and within the Church of England.

### **The listening process in the Anglican Communion**

**11.** In Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference the bishops of the Anglican Communion stated: 'we commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons'.

**12.** This commitment to listening was reiterated in the statement issued by the Primates of the Anglican Communion after their meeting in London in 2003, in the recommendations of the *Windsor Report* of

2004 and in resolutions passed by the Anglican Consultative Council at its 13th and 14th meetings in 2005 and 2009.

**13.** This commitment has borne fruit in a number of different ways.

**14.** First of all, there have been listening processes that have taken place within the various provinces of the Anglican Communion. These have taken a variety of different forms and details about how far they had got by 2007 can be found on the Listening Process pages of the Anglican Communion Website.<sup>43</sup>

**15.** Secondly, from 1999 to 2005 there were the ‘International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality’ which were established by the Archbishop of Canterbury ‘to move the whole Communion forward from the Lambeth resolution’ and which took the form of three rounds of conversation about sexuality between bishops from across the Anglican Communion with a variety of different views and experiences on the subject.<sup>44</sup>

**16.** Thirdly, in 2008 there was the publication of *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*,<sup>45</sup> which was a series of essays which were intended ‘to help bishops, clergy, and lay people in the Anglican Communion to listen to God and to each other on the subject of human sexuality’.

**17.** In 2008 the Windsor Continuation Group proposed a shift of emphasis to Mutual Listening and this was endorsed by the 2009 Primates Meeting. The Anglican Consultative Council endorsed this shift in emphasis and commissioned the Continuing Indaba Project which is described as ‘a biblically-based and mission-focused project designed to develop and intensify relationships within the Anglican Communion by drawing on cultural models of consensus building for mutual creative action. The hope for the project is that it will produce a package to enable deeper relationships for the sake of mission around the Anglican Communion.’<sup>46</sup>

### **The listening process in the Church of England**

**18.** Within the Church of England the listening process has taken three forms.

**19.** Firstly, at the national level there was the publication in 2003 of *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*.<sup>47</sup> This was a detailed guide to the debate about human sexuality in the Church of England, the Anglican Communion and the Church as whole that looked at the key issues under discussion and how the debate could be handled in a way that was both theologically rigorous and pastorally sensitive. It contained a number of sections entitled ‘voices from the debate’ which were intended to enable the voices of gay, lesbian and transgendered people to be heard directly.

**20.** This report was debated in General Synod in February 2004 and there was a further General Synod debate in February 2007 on the House of Bishops statement on civil partnerships. In both of these debates gay and lesbian members of Synod spoke openly about their experiences and concerns.

**21.** In 2006, people from across the Church of England with a wide spectrum of views on human sexuality met together at St George’s Windsor in order to build relationships and to enable us to understand one another’s opinions. This was followed by a further meeting in 2008 at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine, London, attended by some of the same people and some new to the group. The second process was designed by a group of people in co-operation with the Facilitator for the Listening Process for the Anglican Communion. The group included gay Christians, and drew upon experience of listening from the wider Anglican Communion.

**22.** Thirdly, there have been various initiatives in many, though not all, of the Church of England’s dioceses. In some dioceses this has taken the form of informal discussions, whereas in other dioceses there has been the production of study material, debates at Diocesan Synod and the holding of conferences, workshops, or study days on sexuality.

**23.** From the evidence received by the Group it appears that the listening process across the Church of England has been uneven, with the amount of listening and the form that it has taken being dependent on local initiatives and local enthusiasm. There has been no systematic process of listening involving the Church of England as a whole.

## **The listening exercise undertaken by the Working Group**

**24.** The Working Group heard directly from gay and lesbian people during the evidence days in which a variety of different groups and individuals were invited to give evidence in person to the Working Group. These respondents spoke from a variety of different theological and personal perspectives and included both those who were in sexually active gay and lesbian relationships and those who had same sex attraction but chose not to embrace a gay identity or a same sex relationship and were either single or married.

**25.** The group felt that, although what it heard during the evidence days was extremely valuable and informative, it wanted to engage in a more extensive process of listening in which the members of the Working Group would go to different parts of the country and simply listen to people's experiences, as distinct from receiving prepared evidence and responding with questions.

**26.** This process of wider listening was designed by a group including those who could draw upon the experience of the 2008 listening process at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine and one member of our working group. It established norms, processes of invitation, and rules of confidentiality based upon the Chatham House Rule. The design team did not include any who had presented to our group's meetings – they were not chosen from among the lobby groups – and represented a diversity of people, lay and ordained.

**27.** The process took the form of ten meetings, nine of which were attended by two people from the Working Group and one of which was attended by one person.

**28.** These meetings were held in various venues across the country. Sometimes they took place in people's homes and sometimes they took place in suitable neutral venues. Some of the meetings were facilitated, but in others those from the Working Group simply met the people concerned.

**29.** At these meetings those from the Working Group met people in a wide variety of different situations. They included people who were gay, lesbian and transgendered and someone who had same sex attraction but out of fidelity to his reading of Scripture chose to resist it, and was married. There were both Christians and non-Christians and both

clergy and laity. Some of them were single, some had been married but were now divorced, some were in civil partnerships and some were in informal long-term same sex relationships. A number of the people had children, some of whom were adopted, some of whom were from previous marriages and some of whom had been conceived through artificial insemination.

**30.** It would be impossible, without a very long report, to encompass all the beliefs and opinions that were expressed by those we met through this process. As we shared our experiences of the listening process within our working group, the most significant and telling points were the following:

- Opposition to gay and lesbian relationships was a generational matter. It simply was not an issue for most young people.
- The Church of England's current teaching and practice were deeply off-putting to those outside the Church and therefore a serious impediment to mission.
- A key issue was the different ways in which Scripture was read and the harm done to people by some ways of reading it.
- It could be as difficult, if not more difficult, to be a Christian in a gay or lesbian environment as to be gay and lesbian in the Church.
- Not all gay and lesbian Christians felt comfortable with aspects of the current gay and lesbian culture in this country.
- The Church needed to learn to live with diversity over sexual practice and theological understandings of sexuality.
- It was important for gay and lesbian Christians to receive affirmation from the Church. The lack of such affirmation was a contributory factor to the bullying and lack of self-worth experienced by many gay and lesbian people, especially teenagers.
- Not all gay and lesbian Christians wanted to enter into civil partnerships. Some wanted to be single and others



wanted some form of recognition (preferably blessing) from the Church and not just legal recognition from the State. Many gay and lesbian Christians would opt for marriage when this became available.

- The Church's current discipline, with regard to ordinands and clergy, was inconsistently applied, encouraged a culture of dishonesty within the Church, and was particularly difficult for the partners of the people concerned. Some clergy in committed relationships chose not to be in civil partnerships so as not to be asked questions about their sexuality.
- Gay and lesbian clergy still found some difficulty in securing appointments and this compared unfavourably with the positive support for diversity among secular organizations. The Church authorities were prevented from doing more in this area because of the views of conservative groups and congregation members.
- The Church of England's current teaching and practice was helpful to those with same sex attraction who believed that Scripture forbade same sex sexual relationships because it assisted them in resisting sexual temptation. They would experience any change in a more permissive direction by the Church of England as a betrayal.
- The issues raised by the transgendered people we encountered were not primarily about sexuality as such, but about feelings of shame and exclusion in relation to gender.

**31.** Everyone from the Working Group felt that the listening exercise that it had engaged in was extremely worthwhile. They felt moved and privileged to listen to the stories that were shared with them on the listening days. We are all extremely grateful and extend our thanks to all who participated, often speaking bravely and at considerable personal cost.

**32.** As well as identifying the key points noted above, the exercise reinforced for the group the fact that the debate about sexuality is not abstract or theoretical, but about real people facing real situations. It

also highlighted the fact that it is important to avoid any sort of stereotyping of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. They are as diverse as the population as a whole and have a variety of experiences and viewpoints. Finally, it highlighted the fact that many gay and lesbian people have responsibility for children and this has to be taken into account when considering how the Church should respond to their relationships.

**33.** A number of members of the Working Group noted that they had been impressed by the quality of the relationships of the people they had met during the exercise and felt that this needed to be taken into account in any theological reflection on such relationships.

**34.** The group as a whole felt that the exercise of listening that they had engaged in was one that they wanted to recommend strongly to the Church as a whole.

**35.** Engaging with each other in places of great difference and daring to explore territory together which we may not have previously visited – asking questions and entering into robust conversation with genuine respect for the perspective of the other without hiding behind ‘niceness’ – is rich treasure that the members of Christ’s Body often appear reluctant to unlock, touch and sift. One of the key findings of the Working Group as a result of this exercise was that as members of Christ’s Body we needed to name fear for what it was and commit to personal engagement and encounter in a place of difference.

**36.** Such encounters are not about persuasion or endeavouring to reach a place of consensus. Encounter is about sharing our stories, experiences and beliefs on a personal level and being willing to reflect theologically on them together. It is about each person being willing to contemplate carrying a few more question marks in the lifelong search of discovering yet more of what it means to be God’s people, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of their own convictions about what it means to live as a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

**37.** The group felt that the challenge for the Church of England is how to maintain openness to personal encounter and creative engagement with difference while not simply saying ‘anything goes’ in the area of sexuality (a position that none of the group would want to adopt), but instead giving clear corporate teaching about the disciplines

of the Christian life, rooted in Scripture and the Christian tradition and addressing the real issues that people are facing, and setting out and upholding a clear and consistent pattern of practice for clergy and laity based on this teaching.

**38.** This report focuses on questions concerning same sex relationships. However, the group believes that the experiences of those with transgender and intersex conditions raise important theological and pastoral issues. Some of these issues were outlined in chapter 7 of the 2003 House of Bishops report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* and the Church of England needs to address them.

# A rapidly changing context

*The cultural and political ground is changing. There is a revolution. Anyone who listened, as I did, to much of the Same Sex Marriage Bill Second Reading Debate in the House of Lords could not fail to be struck by the overwhelming change of cultural hinterland. Predictable attitudes were no longer there. The opposition to the Bill, which included me and many other bishops, was utterly overwhelmed, with amongst the largest attendance in the House and participation in the debate, and majority, since 1945. There was noticeable hostility to the view of the churches.*

*I am not proposing new policy, but what I felt then and feel now is that some of what was said by those supporting the bill was uncomfortably close to the bone.... We may or may not like it, but we must accept that there is a revolution in the area of sexuality, and we have not fully heard it.*

From the Archbishop of Canterbury's Presidential Address to  
General Synod, 5 July 2013.

**39.** It is a measure of the speed with which questions around human sexuality are changing within the wider social context that, between the setting up of our Working Group and the drafting of this report, the Government's measures to introduce same sex marriage had gone from being a line in a speech by the Prime Minister to an Act passed by both Houses of Parliament on free votes with very substantial majorities. Although the Bill was controversial in the country at large, the very strong support it received in the media and across all the mainstream political parties suggests that we are witnessing rapid changes in social attitudes.

**40.** The group's Terms of Reference did not specify questions around same sex marriage but the issue has been a backdrop to our deliberations. The Church of England's submission to the Government consultation on the subject (discussed in draft by the Archbishops'

Council and the House of Bishops, and signed off by both the then Archbishops) is an important document among the recent official church papers pertaining to questions of sexuality, and the speeches of particular bishops in the debate in the Lords also contribute to the body of evidence before us.

**41.** It is worth noting that the issue of same sex marriage, affecting as it did the social understanding of all marriages and raising important questions about the extent of freedom to express different views about marriage in public, did not divide the Church on quite the same lines as the more familiar arguments about the acceptability or otherwise of same sex relationships. Whilst some in the Church publicly supported same sex marriage, and saw it as all of a piece with the wider questions of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) equality, many others who would locate their views at the liberal end of the spectrum on same sex issues found themselves opposed to the proposals for same sex marriage, mainly on the grounds that they represented a confused understanding of equality and could be prejudicial to the meaning of marriage in society in general. However, many people in the Church, having so decisively lost the argument in Parliament, now want to think again and move on.

**42.** Although these recent developments in Parliament raise important questions for the Church and its pastoral practice when such marriages become a reality, we have concerned ourselves with the wider theological and ethical questions upon which approaches to same sex marriage may, in due course, be based, rather than focus specifically on same sex marriage.

**43.** Nevertheless, the experience of conducting our work simultaneously with the Parliamentary progress of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, and the associated public debate, has been salutary. It has demonstrated, if proof were needed, that difficulty in holding a reasoned debate about questions of sexuality is not confined to the Churches. In Parliament, in the media, and in many other forums, finding common ground has been elusive. It has often felt like a collision between incompatible world views, even without factoring in any religious dimension.

**44.** The arguments about same sex marriage revealed the way in which religious participants in the debate were often assumed to be

arguing from principles which are inaccessible to reason. Increasingly, 'religion' seems to be treated as if it is an individual peculiarity to be accommodated or tolerated, and to have nothing to say to public concerns. This is not the place to discuss the advance of this kind of secularism, but it needs to be noted that contributions to public debate from the Churches, whatever the subject, are contested on such grounds.

**45.** One aspect of this trend is that all religious (not just Christian) arguments are assumed to be about imposing revealed knowledge and authoritative (and authoritarian) teaching on others. It can be forgotten that Christians also appeal to reason and to the common good. The fact that, on most subjects and certainly on issues in sexuality, there is a lively debate amongst Christians and between faiths is usually ignored where public policy is concerned – in part because the Church itself often looks as if it wants to restrict debate.

**46.** The frequent suggestion that Christians, and explicitly the Church of England, are consistently negative toward homosexual people is contradicted by the history of the Church's engagement with these issues. The then Bishop of Durham, later Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, was instrumental in the establishment of the Wolfenden Committee, issuing in the Wolfenden Report of 1957, which led, in 1967, to the decriminalization of most homosexual acts. Ramsey had numerous supporters in the Church as well as in Parliament. Many senior church people have campaigned publicly against the marginalization of lesbian and gay people, then and to this day. But in more recent years, the Church as a whole has been perceived as more cautious or negative.

**47.** The context of the debate has, of course, shifted markedly since the 1950s and 1960s. Then, the arguments adopted by Ramsey and others were based on the principle of tolerance of minorities, and decriminalization did not imply that the Church ceased to see homosexual activity as sinful. Sometimes, homosexuality was understood as a kind of handicap which should arouse pity rather than hatred. But since the rise of the civil rights movement, first in America and then elsewhere, the public debate has moved on from toleration (which can be highly patronizing and sometimes a device for maintaining hegemonies of power) to the call for full equality as a basic human right.

**48.** For homosexual people, as for other groups, this movement has been extraordinarily powerful in shaping public discourse and a rights-based approach to equality is now so well embedded in much Western thinking as to be almost taken for granted by many. In the context of gay and lesbian equality, the Marriage (Same Sex Partners) Act of 2013 was a landmark – but a divisive one, not least within the Churches, and within and between some political parties.

**49.** The debate on same sex marriage saw many liberally-minded Christians expressing reservations and opposition to the Government’s proposals and to the public position of many prominent LGBT activists (in the Church and beyond). However, this has not been the only area of the argument which has witnessed a degree of fluidity. Some well-known evangelicals have very publicly moved from a traditional conservative to a more inclusive position. One group – Exodus International – dedicated to helping people overcome same sex attraction has decided that their activities caused harm and ceased that aspect of their ministry.

**50.** So although positions remain entrenched, there is movement – and it is not all in one direction. This may reflect the fact that whilst the general social consensus (and certainly the media consensus) in Britain may be very relaxed about issues of sexuality, the deep philosophical and ideological foundations for such views are still not fully resolved. It may also reflect the fact that, despite the appearances of intransigence on both sides, faithful Christians continue to listen for the word of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

**51.** Despite these signs of movement, the depth of disagreement within the Churches has made it impossible for the issue to be resolved. There remains much pain on all sides. It is noteworthy that, whilst the 1998 Lambeth Conference seemed to be dominated by arguments about sexuality, the 2008 Lambeth Conference (with issues of sexuality being very much part of the context, not least of the Indaba groups) said nothing new on the subject. It has become harder to occupy the middle ground of uncertainty and tentatively seeking after truth.

**52.** Meanwhile, the unresolved nature of the issue has led to the formation of new structures within Anglicanism, such as GAFCON (the Global Anglican Future Conference) and the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FOCA) created to focus opposition to what they see as the

growing threat to Christian teaching posed by secularization and especially by liberal attitudes to sexual morality. Organizations such as these have changed the dynamics of Anglican relationships across the world in ways which are still emerging.

**53.** Everyone knows that the Christian Churches are arguing about sexuality, and about homosexuality in particular. For this, the Churches are often condemned as being out of touch with a world which has ‘moved on’ from such concerns. But the notion that the prevailing culture has ‘got it right’ on such issues is simply an assertion. Many people remain uncertain and confused about questions of sexual ethics, and attitudes which, a few decades ago, seemed liberating have sometimes been revealed as having a dark and oppressive side which has shocked many. Sometimes, apparent social consensus can themselves be excluding, making it hard for people publicly to express doubts, hesitations and disagreements. The Church’s internal arguments about sexuality may not have been edifying to outsiders, but their very honesty may have some value; a reminder that what may seem certain to many is still not convincing to others.

**54.** The rapidity of change in the context around our group’s work suggests that if the Church can model a serious engagement with the issues – and one which recognizes the urgency with which many long to see these issues resolved – it may offer a profoundly important service to the common good of all.



# Listening to each other – and continuing to do so

*I am absolutely committed not to exclude people who have a different view from me, I am also absolutely committed to listening very carefully to them. We are not going to get anywhere by throwing brickbats at each other.*

Archbishop Justin Welby<sup>48</sup>

**55.** Both in the background to our work, and in the processes of our own meetings, attentive listening to differing views and positions has been central. Within our group, it has also been challenging – not just on odd occasions but frequently. Taking each other seriously, and attempting to recognize Christ in one another, whilst resisting the temptation to put one’s own commitment to truth to one side in the interests of superficial unity, has been very demanding.

**56.** The episcopal members of the Working Group were chosen deliberately to reflect the range of views held within the Church of England on a topic which has proved deeply resistant to any form of compromise and which, not only in the Church of England but in the Anglican Communion itself, threatens to be a continuing source of division. It is therefore not surprising that we have been unable to achieve what long years of struggle by numerous others have so far failed to achieve; namely a single set of recommendations or propositions which will somehow resolve the tensions within the Church. In many respects, our disagreements as a group are as deep as ever they were, and this is true of the wider Church also.

**57.** It is worth, at this stage, setting out the nub of the disagreement – the sticking point, as we understand it, which has prevented us from coming closer as a result of our deliberations. It turns, as has the Church’s ongoing disagreement on questions of sexuality, on the meaning and authority of Scripture.

**58.** Further reflections on Scripture are to be found elsewhere in this report. The problem we are unable, collectively, to solve is between the

belief that God's purposes revealed in Scripture are eternal, unchanging and consistent, and the plain fact that faithful, prayerful, Christians who aspire for their lives to be governed by Scripture, do not agree about the implications of the scriptural texts for same sex relationships. To point to the fact of disagreement within the Church is one thing, but to validate differing views or to endorse the idea that the Church's understanding of the meaning of Scripture might change, seems, to some in the Church and on our Working Group, to be tantamount to denying that Scripture is authoritative to the Church and to open the door to relativistic readings of all scriptures.

**59.** The meaning and implications of Scripture are, of course, filtered through the fallible and sinful minds of human beings. But the safeguard here has always been the Church. Without claiming infallibility for the Church on earth, the Church's vocation is to discern the will of God for the world and to do so it must, as far as is possible, come to a shared mind about how to apply the Scriptures in each generation.

**60.** But how does the Church come to a mind on such matters? None of us believes that the meaning of Scripture can be discerned by simple majorities. And even when one searches for wider consensus, questions arise about which church we are talking about. The Church of England is, for many purposes, a unit of governance which can make up its own mind. But it is also a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion – and a Church with a particular salience within that Communion. Moreover, the Anglican Communion itself is only a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. And, since we believe the Church to be one with the saints who have gone before us, the teaching of the Church of today cannot lightly be separated from the teaching of the Church in the past.

**61.** Because of the centrality of Scripture in the life of the Church, changes which imply that Scripture has been interpreted wrongly or too narrowly in the past, or that the meanings of Scripture once considered certain are, in fact, uncertain, will only be contemplated with great caution. Yet such conclusions remain a possibility, precisely because of the inadequacies of fallen humanity and the fact that it is God's nature to go on revealing himself afresh in every generation.

**62.** The fact that the Church has always read Scripture in one way (if, indeed, it has) creates a presumption in favour of that reading, but it

is not wholly conclusive since the Spirit is alive in the Church and is, we believe, leading us into all truth. On the one hand, the work of the Spirit should make us receptive to the possibility of new knowledge and new insights, since Scripture itself teaches us that all truth is God's truth. On the other, since we live in the theological interim where the presence of the Spirit is challenged by the persistence of sin, a belief that the Spirit is calling the Church to change is not, in itself, a reason to change if the mind of the Church is divided.

**63.** One way to resolve this impasse would be for those with spiritual and pastoral authority in the Church to declare what the Church shall teach. It is the duty of leaders in the Church, especially bishops, to bear the responsibility of setting boundaries to what can be taught or practised within the Church. But ours is not a Church where the leaders can expect to govern without consent, even if they are themselves of one mind. Exercising authority in order to rule, conclusively and finally, that disputed ways of understanding Scripture will be resolved in one way, will not stop the debate, although it may divide the Church irrevocably.

**64.** Our work together has not resolved our differences. But our work has been conducted in an atmosphere of respect which has deepened as we have engaged with one another. We have learned something profound about the importance of face-to-face encounters in dealing with situations where those who are deeply opposed to each others' views are wont to caricature or misrepresent each others' beliefs and motives.

**65.** Something greater than propositional agreement is at stake here. As a group, we continue to seek the presence of Christ in one another. In the end, we are not prepared to say that our deeply held views render any of us un-Christian or put any of us outwith the Church of Christ. We commend to the wider Church a version of the process which we have found ourselves undergoing – attentive listening to brothers and sisters in Christ whose understanding of God's demands and our responses is very different from our own.

**66.** We do not regard the trajectory of any process of attentive listening, or facilitated conversation, to be a foregone conclusion. If we presumed that there was only one desirable direction of travel, we would not only be subverting our own professed desire to see stronger

bonds of sympathy between Christians who disagree but we would be contradicting our own approach to reading cultural trends which we explore in greater depth elsewhere. For now, it is enough to say that we are acutely aware that some trends which once seemed inevitable, and which may have been proclaimed as good, can later be found to have damaging consequences of which few were initially aware.

**67.** We are also conscious that it is far from straightforward to represent human history as an unbroken ascent to greater enlightenment. Even those who believe in the progressive improvement of the human condition recognize set backs, false turnings, unforeseen consequences and useful correctives. Reading the signs of the times accurately is a fraught matter and we believe the only sound approach to unresolved differences is to enter into conversations with open minds, prepared to be changed ourselves, as well as to seek change in others.

**68.** This report goes on to call for further conversations and listening. These are not easy options if we are to get beyond a stalemate in which rival certainties fight for dominance. We have certainly met with many respondents across the spectrum of viewpoints who radiated great certainty on many aspects of the subject. But wherever we have turned – whether to Scripture, theology, science, or social trends – we have encountered divided views, sincerely and prayerfully held. Any suggestion, therefore, that the arguments are so conclusive that further discussion of the issues is no longer necessary does not do justice to the integrity of the theological convictions that are held or to the significant areas of scientific uncertainty that persist.

**69.** At many points, we have found that divisions are becoming more entrenched. We have noted the uneven way in which the listening process has been taken up. We have strongly appreciated the way in which the responsibility of being part of the House of Bishops Working Group has made us listen to one another, and to other groups within the Church including men and women in same sex relationships.

**70.** All this has shown us that listening is no guaranteed path to consensus. Good personal relationships cannot in themselves resolve conflicted principles. We are not certain that consensus, in terms of agreement on all key points of belief and practice, is possible, not least because we are part of a global Church and a worldwide Communion.

Therefore, the contexts and cultures in which doctrine and practice are worked out are widely disparate (and, despite globalisation, do not seem to be coming closer). This is not the only issue on which Christians, wrestling with the Scriptures, have not been able to come to a single view.

**71.** But listening attentively to each other can so enable the Spirit to move amongst us that we come to recognize, first of all each other's humanity, and then, perhaps, our shared belonging to one another in Christ through our common baptism. We will not always find it easy to discover Christ in others but, unless we commit ourselves to encountering them at the deepest level, we will never know whether we are encountering Christ or not.

**72.** We believe that such listening needs to be a multifaceted endeavour. Because lesbian and gay people have for so long felt marginalized and unheard within the Church, and acknowledging the continuing power vested in the institutional Church, it is right that the first step should have been for the Church and its spokespersons to listen to the theology and experience of lesbian and gay people. This should continue.

**73.** In our listening encounters, that sense of marginalization of lesbian and gay people from the Church came across with considerable force. Whatever our own views and differences on the subject of human sexuality, it was not a message that any of us had intended to give or with which any of us could be comfortable. We do not differ from each other in our desire to welcome the presence and ministry of gay and lesbian people within the Church. We recognize, however that, just as we differ among ourselves about what faithful discipleship requires in respect of people's sexual lives, so the gay and lesbian people we met were not all of one view about what welcome and affirmation by the Church would mean in terms of policy and practice (see Paragraph 30).

**74.** We recognize that many may therefore hear our unanimous desire for the Church to welcome gay and lesbian people as inadequate. We hope that our proposal for continued attentive listening through facilitated conversations which could only succeed if all participants are genuinely welcomed as such, is received as an earnest of our intentions.

**75.** We are very aware that issues of language and terminology on matters of sexuality are fraught with difficulty. We recognize that we may be perceived as a group of people, holding authority in the Church, who are unilaterally defining the terms by which other people are described. We have tried to use expressions like ‘lesbian and gay’, ‘LGBT’, ‘people who experience same sex attraction’ and so on, with as much care as we can, but we recognize that people have the right to choose how they describe themselves and may feel misrepresented when others choose descriptive terms. We have tried to use expressions that reflect common usage.

**76.** Theologically, we recognize that, for Christians, their most fundamental identity is in Christ. But that does not mean that all the other identities which people bring to Christ are marginal or unimportant. We hope that the terminology in this report will not be taken to carry implications about other people and their lives which go further than the straightforward meaning of the words we have used. This care with words should, we believe, continue as part of the basis for the proposed process of continued listening.

**77.** Power relationships within any institution are complex and those who are perceived as powerful by some may themselves feel marginal and misunderstood. We believe that, notwithstanding the continued ‘outsider’ status felt by many gay and lesbian people in the Church, some (perhaps many) are confident enough in their theology and relationships, and in their new-found position of affirmation in society, for us to propose that they too might listen carefully and prayerfully to those who hold firmly to the Church’s traditional teaching. Similar attentive listening, of course, is just as valid for those who hold firm views on these topics regardless of their sexual orientation.

**78.** It has been impossible to avoid a degree of polarization in the depiction of the positions and arguments within the Church, but we are well aware that there are a number of nuanced positions which cannot be simply subsumed into a two-fold typology. Listening, therefore, is more than a two-way process. Our own experience as a group tells us that there is much to learn from people whose views are very hard to label as being on one side of the argument or the other.

**79.** Although we recognize that there are limitations in applying a word from one culture to another, we believe that something like the

‘Indaba’ process, which was adopted at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, offers a promising way forward. We are not committed to the word itself but to the practice of respectful and prayerful listening that it signifies. We say more about the possible shape of such a process in a later section (Paragraphs 309 ff.).

**80.** It will also be clear from the way our arguments develop in the rest of this report, that we do not regard the teaching of the Church as simply malleable or open to change without the most rigorous testing against Scripture, experience, and the mind of the Church. As we have discovered, that testing continues but has, so far, not demonstrated a case for change which all of us can accept.

**81.** We are well aware of the growing pressure from many for change in the Church and the increasing impatience with the issue on the part of those who feel that they have spent too long arguing a self-evident case on one side or the other. Others are impatient with the Church because they believe that the imperative of mission calls us to put other issues first and waste less energy on a matter which is, to them, of secondary importance.

**82.** But the impact of this issue on the unity of the Church suggests that it is far from being a marginal matter. We do not doubt that the missionary task of the Church would be eased if questions of sexuality could be settled but, as they touch directly on the nature of the Church’s relationship to culture, whichever way they were resolved would affect the whole nature and direction of the Church’s mission in the world. So these issues may not be as peripheral as some might claim and attempting to force closure in defiance of the prayerfully held convictions of fellow Christians would fail to reflect the deep and unresolved ambiguities surrounding all questions of sex and sexuality in different cultures today.

**83.** We are therefore wary of proposing a set time-frame for a process for Christians with different views to listen to one another. What matters is the depth of listening that takes place. Listening cannot be hurried, let alone be constrained to reach any particular conclusion. Nevertheless, the Church of England’s travails over these issues are becoming an increasing scandal to many and, as we will argue, a massive missiological challenge. Any implication that a process of facilitated conversation is the equivalent of kicking the issues into the

long grass and therefore need not be pursued with a sense of urgency, is to be resisted. We therefore propose an initial time-frame of around two years for implementing our key proposal for facilitated conversations, recognizing that the process itself may not lead within that time to the kind of definitive position for the Church for which many, in their different ways, hope.

1. We warmly welcome and affirm the presence and ministry within the Church of gay and lesbian people, both lay and ordained.
2. The subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views on both sides, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England needs to commit itself at national and diocesan level.
3. Consultation on this report should be conducted without undue haste but with a sense of urgency, perhaps over a period of two years.
4. The Church of England should address the issue of same sex relationships in close dialogue with the wider Anglican Communion and other Churches, in parallel with its own facilitated conversations and on a similar timescale.

**84.** These are our first conclusions, and it is against this background that our further reflections and recommendations should be read. We will go on to consider some of the different kinds of problems which we have grappled with, and then seek to evaluate their significance. But first we consider some reflections on the place of the Church of England within the Anglican Communion, and a summary of the Church's current teaching on sexuality.



# The obligations of belonging to the Anglican Communion

**85.** In addition to having regard to its agreed doctrinal authorities the Church of England also has to take into account the obligations it has to the other Churches of the Anglican Communion, and to the particular position of the Archbishop of Canterbury as both Primate of All England and an instrument of unity within the Anglican Communion. Since the emergence of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England has always accepted the principle that individual Churches have an obligation to take into account the views of the Communion as whole.

**86.** This principle was laid down in the Encyclical letter from the Lambeth Conference of 1920 which declared that the Churches represented at the Conference were a fellowship of Churches that, ‘are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognizes the restraints of truth and of love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship.’<sup>49</sup>

**87.** In the years since 1920 this principle has been frequently reiterated in the face of various challenges to the unity of the Communion.

**88.** For example, in 1930 the report of the committee of the Lambeth Conference that looked at the nature of the Anglican Communion stated that the freedom of each of the Churches of the communion resembles the ‘freedom of a member of a living organism.’ As such:

It performs its distinctive functions under the direction of the Head, and for the benefit of the whole body. If it functions in separation from the other members, or in imperfect correspondence to the will of Christ, it is not necessarily separated from the body, but its own life is impoverished, and the whole body is weakened and distracted.<sup>50</sup>

**89.** The Toronto Congress of 1963 is widely acknowledged as the ‘turning point’ in the Anglican Communion as, under the leadership of Archbishop Michael Ramsey, those present sought to define the relationships between the constituent Churches. The Congress adopted Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence (MRI) as the defining model. This model was drawn from Canon Max Warren’s work on partnership as an alternative to dominating power. Interdependence was seen as offering local freedoms to adapt to cultural contexts while establishing global responsibilities to common values.

**90.** For another example, in his opening address at the Lambeth Conference in 1988 Archbishop Robert Runcie addressed the tensions in the Communion over the question of the ordination of women to the episcopate and argued that the real issue facing the Communion was not conflict over the ordination of women as such, but the bigger issue of the relation of independent provinces to each other. He reminded the conference that:

The New Testament surely speaks more in terms of ‘interdependence’ than ‘independence’. The relationship of Jesus with the Father in the bond of the Holy Spirit as witnessed in St John’s Gospel surely gives us the pattern of Christian relationship. Life together in communion implies basic trust and mutuality. Think of St. Paul speaking of life in the Body in the first letter to the Corinthians: ‘The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need for you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.’ (1 Corinthians 12.21). The good of the body requires mutual recognition and deference in Christ. Or think of Paul’s collection for the saints in Jerusalem, a practical expression of communion on the theological ground of unity in Christ.<sup>51</sup>

**91.** He then went on to argue that the question facing the Communion was, ‘are we being called through events and their theological interpretation to move from independence to interdependence?’ and underlying this was the even more fundamental question:

.... do we really want unity within the Anglican Communion? Is our worldwide family of Christians worth bonding together? Or is our paramount concern the preservation or promotion of that particular expression of Anglicanism which has developed within the culture of our own province?<sup>52</sup>

His answer to this question was:

I believe we do because Anglicans believe in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Creed. I believe we do because we live in one world created and redeemed by God. I believe we do because it is only by being in communion *together* that diversity and difference have value. Without relationship difference divides.<sup>53</sup>

**92.** The 1920 principle has also been re-affirmed in recent years in the face of increasing divisions over the issue of human sexuality. Thus, in response to unilateral actions taken by some Churches within the Communion in relation to this issue the *Windsor Report* of 2004 (which was endorsed by General Synod) re-stated the principle that the autonomy of the individual Churches of the Communion was limited by their obligations to the Communion as a whole. As a consequence, in the exercise of its autonomy each Church should:

- consider, promote and respect the common good of the Anglican Communion and its constituent churches (as discerned in communion through the Instruments of Unity)
- maintain its communion with fellow churches, and avoid jeopardising it, by bringing potentially contentious initiatives, prior to implementation, to the rest of the communion in dialogue, consultation, discernment and agreement in communion with the fellowship of churches (through the Instruments of Unity), and
- be able to depart, where appropriate and acceptable, on the basis of its own corporate conscience and with the blessing of the communion, from the standards of the community of which it is an autonomous part, provided such departure is neither critical to the maintenance of communion nor likely to harm the common good of the Anglican Communion and of the Church universal (again, as determined by the Instruments of Unity).<sup>54</sup>

**93.** Thus also, in his first Presidential Address at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, Archbishop Rowan Williams noted that there were a range of views about what the future shape of Anglicanism should be like. Some were happy with a loose federation, others saw the Communion as simply a family of independent regional or national Churches and

still others wanted a more centralized Communion with a firmer and more consistent control of theological and ethical diversity.

**94.** He went on to say that each of these options represented:

... something rather less than many – perhaps most – Anglicans over the last century at least have hoped for in their Communion. A federation of such variety that different parts of it could be in direct local competition is not really a federation at all, and would encourage some of the least appealing kinds of religious division. An ensemble of purely national or local churches both ignores the complexities of a globalised society and economy and seems to make little of the historic and biblical sense of churches in diverse places learning from each other, challenging one another and showing responsibility to each other. A centralised and homogenised Communion could be at the mercy of powerfully motivated groups from left or right who wanted to redefine the basic terms of belonging, so that Anglicanism becomes a confessional church in a way it never has been before.<sup>55</sup>

**95.** As an alternative to these options he put forward a vision of an Anglicanism:

... whose diversity is limited not by centralised control but by consent – consent based on a serious *common* assessment of the implications of local change. How do we genuinely think *together* about diverse local challenges? If we can find ways of answering this, we shall have discovered an Anglicanism in which prayerful consultation is routine and accepted and understood as part of what is entailed in belonging to a fellowship that is more than local. The entire Church is present in every local church assembled around the Lord's table. Yet the local church alone is never the entire Church. We are called to see this not as a circle to be squared but as an invitation to be more and more lovingly engaged with each other.<sup>56</sup>

**96.** The other Anglican provinces within the British Isles – The Church in Wales, The Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Ireland – face similar questions on matters of human sexuality and on issues such as same sex marriage. The recent Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act applies equally to England and Wales, whilst the Scottish

Parliament is proposing similar legislation. The Anglican Churches in these islands are autonomous provinces but seek to maintain close relationships – for example the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church is the regional representative on the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion and thus represents the Church of England in that meeting.

**97.** So, while the Church of England may be legally free to decide its own belief and practice in the area of human sexuality without having regard for the rest of the communion, it would be unwise for it to do so. It needs to engage in continuing consultation with the other Churches of the Communion through the various structures that exist for this purpose and to try to seek an agreed way forward based on Anglicans thinking together about human sexuality in the light of the classic Anglican sources of theological authority.

**98.** Within the Anglican Communion, different provinces encounter questions of human sexuality in different contexts. Many face issues and tensions similar to those faced by the Church of England. Opportunities for an open and honest conversation about these matters will be welcomed well beyond the Church of England.

**99.** Although the Church of England has a special relationship with other Anglican Churches, it also needs to take into account the concerns and convictions of its other ecumenical partners as well. This is because the obligations that flow from membership of the one Church of Jesus Christ extend to all other Christian Churches and not just to those Churches belonging to the Anglican Communion.

**100.** In making decisions about human sexuality within the parameters set out in this section the Church of England starts from its existing teaching about sexuality, marriage and civil partnerships which needs to be taken into account. The next section of the report outlines what this teaching is.

# The current teaching of the Church of England

## About human sexuality

**101.** There are three key statements which define the current position of the Church of England about human sexuality.

**102.** The first of these is the motion passed by General Synod in 1987 by 403 votes to 8 at the end of a debate initiated by the Revd Tony Higton. This motion, sometimes referred to as the ‘Higton motion’ runs as follows:

This Synod affirms that the biblical and traditional teaching on chastity and fidelity in personal relationships is a response to, and expression of, God’s love for each one of us, and in particular affirms;

- (1) that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship.
- (2) that fornication and adultery are sins against this ideal, and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion.
- (3) that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met with a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion.
- (4) that all Christians are called to be exemplary in all spheres of morality, and that holiness of life is particularly required of Christian leaders.<sup>57</sup>

Since there has been no further resolution of the Synod, there is a sense that the Church is still committed to this 1987 motion. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how a resolution that is now 26 years old, on a subject that continues to be controversial, can still be said with any certainty to represent the mind of Synod.

**103.** The second is the House of Bishops statement *Issues in Human Sexuality* which was published in 1991. The intention of this statement

(which declared that it did not pretend to be ‘the last word on the subject’) was ‘to promote an educational process as a result of which Christians may both become more informed about and understanding of certain human realities, and also enter more fully into the wisdom of their inheritance of faith in this field.’<sup>58</sup>

**104.** The statement declares that there is in Scripture ‘... an evolving convergence on the ideal of lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual union as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings’<sup>59</sup> and it goes on to say that what it calls ‘homophile’ orientation and activity (it preferred the term ‘homophile’ to ‘homosexual’) cannot be endorsed by the Church as:

... a parallel and alternative form of human sexuality as complete within the terms of the created order as the heterosexual. The convergence of Scripture, Tradition and reasoned reflection on experience, even including the newly sympathetic and perceptive thinking of our own day, make it impossible for the Church to come with integrity to any other conclusion. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are not equally congruous with the observed order of creation or with the insights of revelation as the Church engages with these in the light of her pastoral ministry.<sup>60</sup>

**105.** It also argues, however, that the conscientious decision of those who enter into same sex relationships must be respected, and that the Church must not ‘reject those who sincerely believe it is God’s call to them’.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, because of ‘the distinctive nature of their calling, status, and consecration’ the clergy ‘...cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships.’<sup>62</sup> The 1991 statement is now 22 years old and none of those who framed it are still members of the House of Bishops.

**106.** The third statement is Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. The key parts of the Resolution are sections b to e which declare that the Conference:

b. in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;

- c. recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;
- e. cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.<sup>63</sup>

### **About marriage and civil partnerships**

**107.** There are two key texts which give the most authoritative declaration of what the Church of England believes about marriage. These texts are the Preface to the marriage service in *The Book of Common Prayer* and Canon B 30 'Of Holy Matrimony'.

**108.** The Preface to the BCP marriage service states that marriage is:

... an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men...

**109.** Drawing on the teaching of St Augustine of Hippo, it further states that marriage was instituted by God for three reasons:

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.



Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

**110.** Building on what is said in the Preface to the marriage service, Canon B 30 declares that

The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.<sup>64</sup>

**111.** The 1999 teaching document from the House of Bishops addresses the question: 'Why is marriage important?' by explaining that:

God is love (1 John 4.16), and in creating human beings he has called us to love, both himself and one another. The love of God the Father for his Son is the ground of all human love, and through the Holy Spirit we may dwell in that love, which the Son has shown to us (John 15.9). Marriage is a pattern that God has given in creation, deeply rooted in our social instincts, through which a man and a woman may learn love together over the course of their lives. We marry not only because we love, but to be helped to love. Without the practice and disciplines of marriage, our love will be exhausted and fail us, perhaps very harmfully to ourselves and others. When publicly and lawfully we enter into marriage, we commit ourselves to live and grow together in this love.<sup>65</sup>

**112.** Although it acknowledges that marriage is 'not the only pattern that is given us for a life of love' it argues that it is, nonetheless, an important one because:

Through marriage each of the partners grows in maturity, and is helped to overcome personal failings and inadequacies. It is a school of patience and forgiveness. By it a new unit of society is created: a couple, stronger than the sum of its members, held together by the bond of domestic friendship. Together the couple can extend love to other people: to their own children, in the first instance, who belong naturally within their domestic circle; and not only to them, but to many others who interact with them in a variety of ways. Their love enables them to make a strong contribution to society so that the weakening of marriage has serious implications for the mutual belonging and care that is exercised within the community at large.<sup>66</sup>

**113.** This statement also declares that ‘sexual intercourse, as an expression of faithful intimacy, properly belongs within marriage exclusively’<sup>67</sup>

**114.** The teaching contained in these statements has been reflected in the statements about marriage that have been issued by the Church of England in response to the development of civil partnerships and the proposal to introduce same sex marriage.

**115.** Following the introduction of civil partnerships in 2005 the House of Bishops issued a Pastoral Statement on this subject in which it said:

It has always been the position of the Church of England that marriage is a creation ordinance, a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace. Marriage, defined as a faithful, committed, permanent and legally sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman, is central to the stability and health of human society. It continues to provide the best context for the raising of children.

The Church of England’s teaching is classically summarised in *The Book of Common Prayer*, where the marriage service lists the causes for which marriage was ordained, namely: ‘for the procreation of children, ...for a remedy against sin [and].... for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other.’

In the light of this understanding the Church of England teaches that ‘sexual intercourse, as an expression of faithful intimacy, properly belongs within marriage exclusively’ (*Marriage: a teaching document of the House of Bishops*, 1999). Sexual relationships outside marriage, whether heterosexual or between people of the same sex, are regarded as falling short of God’s purposes for human beings.<sup>68</sup>

**116.** In response to the Government’s consultation document about the introduction of same sex marriage the House of Bishops and the Archbishops Council submitted a joint paper in June 2012, in which they argued against the proposed legislation. In this paper they state that:

Despite the continuing debate in the Church of England on some key ethical issues in this area, the proposition that same sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. To that extent, the Prime Minister’s claim that he supports same sex marriage from conservative principles is readily understandable. Same sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity, two of the virtues which the *Book of Common Prayer* uses to commend marriage. The Church of England seeks to see those virtues maximised in society.

**117.** However, they then go on to argue that redefining marriage would be a serious mistake for a number of reasons:

... the uniqueness of marriage – and a further aspect of its virtuous nature – is that it embodies the underlying, objective, distinctiveness of men and women. This distinctiveness and complementarity are seen most explicitly in the biological union of man and woman which potentially brings to the relationship the fruitfulness of procreation. And, even where, for reasons of age, biology or simply choice, a marriage does not have issue, the distinctiveness of male and female is part of what gives marriage its unique social meaning.

Marriage has from the beginning of history been the way in which societies have worked out and handled issues of sexual difference. To remove from the definition of marriage this essential complementarity is to lose any social institution in which sexual difference is explicitly acknowledged.

To argue that this is of no social value is to assert that men and women are simply interchangeable individuals. It also undermines many of the arguments which support the deeper involvement of women in all social institutions on the grounds that a society cannot flourish without the specific and distinctive contributions of each gender.

We believe that redefining marriage to include same sex relationships will entail a dilution in the meaning of marriage for everyone by excluding the fundamental complementarity of men and women from the social and legal definition of marriage.<sup>69</sup>

These arguments did not, however, convince the Government to change its proposals or Parliament to amend the legislation.

**118.** The 2013 Faith and Order Commission report *Men and Women in Marriage* unpacks in greater detail what is said about the Church of England's understanding of marriage in the 2005 Pastoral Statement and in the 2012 response to the proposals for same sex marriage. The report acknowledges the importance of finding forms of 'pastoral accommodation' to address the pastoral needs of those in 'hard circumstances or exceptional conditions.' However, it also affirms that devising such accommodations does not mean the Church 'redefining marriage from the ground up, which it cannot do.'<sup>70</sup> It also argues that the debate about same sex marriage is not just an argument about names:

... names govern how we think, and how we think governs what we learn to appreciate. When marriage is spoken of unclearly or misleadingly, it distorts the way couples try to conduct their relationship and makes for frustration and disappointment. The reality of marriage between one man and one woman will not disappear as the result of any legislative change, for God has given this gift, and it will remain part of our created human endowment. But the disciplines of living in it may become more difficult to acquire, and the path to fulfilment, in marriage and in other relationships, more difficult to find.<sup>71</sup>

**119.** On the subject of civil partnerships themselves the 2005 Pastoral Statement contended that the legislation that introduced civil

partnerships left open the question whether such relationships would be sexual in nature in the same way as marital relationships and that: ‘One consequence of the ambiguity contained within the new legislation is that people in a variety of relationships will be eligible to register as civil partners, some living consistently with the teaching of the Church, others not.’ In these circumstances, it said:

...it would not be right to produce an authorized public liturgy in connection with the registering of civil partnerships. In addition, the House of Bishops affirms that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership.<sup>72</sup>

**120.** Having said this, it further declared, however, that it will be important

... to bear in mind that registered partnerships do allow for a range of different situations – including those where the relationship is simply one of friendship. Hence, clergy need to have regard to the teaching of the Church on sexual morality, celibacy, and the positive value of committed friendships in the Christian tradition. Where clergy are approached by people asking for prayer in relation to entering into a civil partnership they should respond pastorally and sensitively in the light of the circumstances of each case.<sup>73</sup>

**121.** On the subject of the clergy and civil partnerships it explained that:

The House of Bishops does not regard entering into a civil partnership as intrinsically incompatible with holy orders, provided the person concerned is willing to give assurances to his or her bishop that the relationship is consistent with the standards for the clergy set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The wording of the Act means that civil partnerships will be likely to include some whose relationships are faithful to the declared position of the Church on sexual relationships.

Nevertheless, it would be inconsistent with the teaching of the Church for the public character of the commitment expressed in a civil partnership to be regarded as of no consequence in relation to someone in – or seeking to enter – the ordained

ministry. Partnerships will be widely seen as being predominantly between gay and lesbian people in sexually active relationships. Members of the clergy and candidates for ordination who decide to enter into partnerships must therefore expect to be asked for assurances that their relationship will be consistent with the teaching set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*.<sup>74</sup>

**122.** The Statement acknowledged that clergy ‘are fully entitled to argue’ for a change in the Church of England’s teaching about human sexuality. However, ‘they are not entitled to claim the liberty to set it aside, simply because of the passage of the Civil Partnerships Act’ and, because of the ambiguities about whether civil partnerships are sexual in nature, ‘the House of Bishops would advise clergy to weigh carefully the perceptions and assumptions which would inevitably accompany a decision to register such a relationship.’<sup>55</sup>

# Part 2

## SUMMARIZING THE EVIDENCE





# Sexuality, culture and Christian ethics

**123.** A Christian understanding of sexuality cannot be reduced simply to a series of problems or disputed issues. Sexuality is something fundamental to our being, whatever our orientation and whether or not it is expressed in a physical relationship. Sexuality is something that we interpret, to ourselves and to others, in terms moulded by culture – not only the prevailing culture of the society around us but also the culture of the Church through which the presence and reality of God is built into our understanding and interpretation. Whatever problems the Church may have with issues of sexuality, we believe that the wider culture is much more confused about sexuality than is often recognized.

**124.** The Prologue to this report (Jessica Martin’s essay on ‘Living with holiness and desire’) has already suggested some of the theological reasons for suspecting that our culture’s dominant attitudes towards sexuality are not the last word in human enlightenment. This is not just about questions of homosexuality, although they are the aspects of sexuality that have caused most disagreement within the Churches. For that reason, most of our report is, as our remit required, about homosexuality. But our deliberations have been set within a much wider concern about the gaps between Christian understandings of human sexuality and the ways in which sexual issues are discussed, presented and lived in our society today.

**125.** We note, in particular, the ambiguities and tensions – sometimes below the surface, sometimes very visible – about how to evaluate relationships and public expression of human sexuality. The Prologue pointed to the unresolved tensions between the notion of childhood innocence and the commercial and cultural sexualization of children from a very early age. Our culture does not seem able to deliver what people say they want for their children. Standing as we do within the culture and not wholly outside it, this is a matter which involves both personal morality and societal structures.

## **Sex, power and commodification**

**126.** Questions about the sexualization of childhood bring us close to questions about sex and power. Our age and culture has a laudable aversion to abuses of power in personal relationships. Serious personal and institutional alertness to the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults is a relatively recent development which goes some way to rectifying a long history of, sometimes wilful, ignorance and the marginalization of vulnerable people's experiences. That is an important gain, and although there is still some way to go before people throughout society experience full protection from abuses of power in sexual terms, it is a reminder that some modern social trends are deeply welcome.

**127.** However, it is salutary to recall how some of the abuse of vulnerable people that is only now being uncovered seems to have been associated with the new culture of sexual freedom and experimentation which began, for some, in the 1960s. It is now possible to look back on that era and see, as was not always apparent at the time, that the celebration of sexual freedom was very often a celebration of sexual freedom for men with much more ambiguous implications for women. The advent of reliable contraception did much to liberate women from fear of pregnancy and from unplanned families but the removal of fear also removed one of the most widely accepted reasons for a woman to refrain from sex if she was not ready or certain of her mind. Only much more recently has the message that 'no means no' begun to be accepted in ways which help to rebalance the power relationship in sexual encounters, and it is still far from being universally recognized.

**128.** The point of these observations is not to bemoan the 1960s or to argue that things used to be better in some previous age. But it is important that morally ambiguous situations be recognized for what they are, and it is possible to be grateful for new developments, opportunities and freedoms without pretending that everything in the garden is therefore rosy. Whenever freedom is celebrated, it is worth asking, freedom for whom? And it is worth digging below the surface to recognize that human relationships, of all kinds but perhaps especially sexual ones, are rarely free from the potential for the abuse of power. To paint the trajectory of social trends concerning human sexuality as an inexorable progression to greater enlightenment is simply misleading. Insisting that the Church should catch up with modern mores and be 'relevant' begs many questions.

**129.** Nowhere is this clearer than in the way commercialization has encroached upon understandings of sexuality. The obvious manifestations of this are in the burgeoning pornography industry and the prevalence – even perhaps the normalization – of sexual imagery in advertising. But it goes deeper than this. In a society where the commercial contract has become the paradigm for all manner of relationships that were once modelled on something more profound than money, it is difficult to communicate the notion that one should do anything which does not gratify immediate wants. An age of built-in obsolescence in commodities perhaps finds it harder to accept the value of permanence in anything. The fact that many relationships do endure for life, and the fact that sacrificial love is present in many relationships of different kinds, is testimony to the durability under stress of the kind of virtues which the Christian faith has always celebrated.

### **Singleness and celibacy**

**130.** Even though the idea of covenantal relationships is not by any means dead, it is increasingly counter-cultural. For all the contemporary social commentary on sex and relationships, there is remarkably little about making things work for life. The notion of happiness, conceived in pretty superficial terms, serves consumerism well but serves human relationships very poorly. The profound happiness that may mature and emerge in the course of a long commitment to another person is very different from the transient happiness of the fleeting moment. Christian spirituality is not, in the end, about being ‘happy’ but about the hard work and joys of faithful living.<sup>76</sup>

**131.** It is, perhaps, another aspect of the commodification of sexuality that our culture has so little to say about singleness, other than as a condition to be escaped from, and virtually nothing to say about celibacy as a way of giving oneself to others in a different, perhaps less exclusive, manner. The Christian tradition has much to say about deep happiness, marriage, and celibacy, although the Church of today has not always been very articulate about all those aspects of its own inheritance.

**132.** As is well known, at times in the history of the church, celibacy has been upheld as a superior vocation to marriage. As that understanding has, in effect, been reversed over centuries, it is important that the case for celibacy is made afresh. There is not space here for a comprehensive theology of celibacy, but some points are worth noting.

**133.** Professor Robert Song, in a contribution to our group's work, noted that the New Testament sees an important shift of emphasis, compared to the Old Testament, on the importance of having children. Prior to the coming of Christ, children were a sign of God's blessing on his people. They were an assurance that God's faithfulness would not cease at one's death.

**134.** But, in the eschatological vision of the New Testament, Christ has overcome death. There is no marriage in heaven (Matthew 22.30). As the American theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, suggests, the sacrifice made by people called to celibacy is not so much the absence of sex but the absence of heirs to take forward their lineage.<sup>77</sup> Instead, says Hauerwas, celibate Christians commit themselves to the family of the Church, rather than the nuclear family, and therein form sustaining relationships across the generations. Whilst celibate people are often praised for being free to serve God and the Church without the constraints of a partner or family, Hauerwas stresses instead the call to the Church to become a family for all its members and the way in which single and celibate people call the Church to its eschatological task.

**135.** As Song notes, marriage and procreation remain witnesses to the goods of creation. They are rightly to be celebrated. But celibacy is an eschatological witness to the new order in Christ, and should thus be accorded its proper esteem in the life of the church.

### **Permanence, fidelity and culture**

**136.** Permanence, fidelity and openness to the nurturing of family life provide the essential context for a Christian ethic of sexual relationships, for the simple reason that they are a reflection of God's love for us. In turning to God, we offer our whole lives, as Christ offered himself unconditionally for us. And a whole life, for fallen, fallible human beings, is not an unbroken story of perfection but one of muddle, error and ambiguity. That is what we are and it is all we have. It follows that as we offer our sexual selves to God as one part of our lives, much of that offering will be flawed; what may have seemed good comes to be seen as tainted, and many of us will turn out to have loved unwisely somewhere in our lives.

**137.** It is not just that each individual is fallen and flawed. Structural sin is part of a deep understanding of how societies work. We have to do the best we can in the situation we are given. In this context, it is

worth reflecting on the difficulty many have in living by the Church's discipline that the only proper place for sexual intercourse is within marriage. Marriage is about a great deal more than sex and, as a social institution, concerns a whole web of relationships and not just the couple concerned. Marriage implies the founding of a new domestic unit and, for most, openness to starting a new family.

**138.** These economic categories are part of what marriage is, and in Britain today the prospect of setting up home, let alone being sufficiently economically independent to have children, is becoming more and more remote for many young people. Historians have shown how, over centuries, the number of illegitimate births (until recently a good indicator of pre-marital sexual intercourse) often correlated to the economic prospects of young men.<sup>78</sup> The widespread availability of effective contraception has, of course, tended to break that correlation. Now, as economic change means that the wherewithal to marry, establish a home, and found a family is increasingly the preserve of the over-thirties or the better-off, it is not surprising that clergy report that they prepare few couples for marriage who are not already living together in a sexual relationship.

**139.** For those called to marriage and family life who cannot gain the necessary economic independence until well past the peak of sexual maturity and often late in the childbearing years, the Church's sexual ethic is a hard calling. That some live by it sacrificially is testimony to God's amazing grace and the depth of some Christians' faith.

**140.** The ways in which human sexuality is expressed in society are changing, and not all the changes are about the wholesale rejection of the virtues for which the Christian faith stands. People still try to make the best of the opportunities they are offered and most seek – even if they do not always have the ability to sustain – permanent and faithful relationships.

### **Good news and mission amid social change**

**141.** It is tempting, but often misleading, to argue from what is the case to what ought to be the case. The great variety of modes of living, and of sexual relationships, today make it particularly difficult to discern where, in the confusion and ambiguity, God's purposes for humanity may be reflected. Living in a culture which has pressed non-judgementalism to the status of a moral absolute does not make it easy

for people to make effective moral decisions. But Christian theology points to the Light of the World and still has something important to say about how we might live well.

**142.** To return to the themes of the Prologue, we note that our culture tends to misunderstand desire. Desire becomes an idol if it is treated as an end in itself. Desire, properly understood, points to the bonds of relationship that are worked out in the course of a whole life. It is the whole of one's life that is offered to God, and it is the whole of one's life that ought properly to be offered to another person in the sexual relationship – that is the offering to which human desire ought to lead us.

**143.** Our fallen nature makes all our relationships messy. Even if the outward appearance is flawless, the inner life of people in relationship is often much murkier. That is part of our nature, although not, under Christ, the last word. But the darker sides are part of what we bring to God as well.

**144.** How, then, can the Christian vision of permanence and fidelity, with our human relationships echoing the relationship God offers us all in himself, be Good News to fallen human beings? The Church's vocation is to bring whole people into the presence of that loving God, and it cannot do so if it is only willing to acknowledge the aspects of the person and their relationships which are already acceptable. If the Church is to live up to its vocation, it must find ways to acknowledge and address effectively the messiness of the relationships through which people express their sexual natures and which are moulded by personal beliefs and morality, personal vulnerabilities, social pressures and the shape of a social order which seems so inevitable that it is too often taken as a given.

**145.** The Church's teaching, on sexuality as with other issues, reflects a concern for the common good. An awareness of human fallenness understands the inevitability of mistakes and differences but can still say with integrity that the good of the community requires most people, most of the time, to live virtuously. A good society cannot be based on the principle that individual freedom to choose is the only absolute good. In the sheer variety, confusion and messiness of human sexual relationships, the importance and the limits of social norms can become apparent. But the Church's consciousness of the pervasive nature of sin means that articulating norms for the common good does not entail the

rejection of those outside those norms. And the truth of God's unconditional love means that we are all called as sinners to seek the Christ like vision of love and to make it as much our own as a fallen world will allow.

**146.** The rapidity with which social attitudes about sex and sexuality have changed in recent years is, as all of us agree, a major challenge to the Church's mission. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has put it,

We have seen changes in the idea about sexuality, sexual behaviour, which quite simply [mean that] we have to face the fact that the vast majority of people under 35 think not only that what we are saying is incomprehensible but also think that we are plain wrong and wicked and equate it to racism and other forms of gross and atrocious injustice.<sup>79</sup>

**147.** When the public perception of the Church, especially amongst the age group that is most under-represented in church attendance, is as an institution deeply at odds with the values to which they aspire, the Church has a problem. The missiological response, however, is not a foregone conclusion. The Church has, at many points in its history, sought to call people to embrace a world view that is deeply at odds with the prevailing culture. In many contexts through the Church's history, this missionary endeavour has been very effective in calling people to Christ. But the most effective missionaries, following the example of St Paul, have always sought aspects of the indigenous culture which they could affirm and thus lead their hearers deeper into Christ. The Church's current divisions on matters of sexuality have been made more acute, and yet more urgently in need of resolution, precisely because Christians cannot agree whether the current social trends are, broadly, to be affirmed and deepened, or contradicted with a sharply counter-cultural ethic – and, if the latter, which aspects of which culture are to be countered.

**148.** Most of these observations are as applicable to heterosexual as to homosexual relationships. There are particular theological and moral questions about homosexuality which are especially vexing for the Church today. But the fundamentals of Christian vocation apply to all. The apparent trajectory of history is a very unreliable guide to God's purposes. The human propensity to abuse power and mistake covetousness for godly desire affects us all. The Church stands

increasingly apart from the dominant trends in culture when it upholds the virtues of permanence and fidelity in human relationships, and it is remarkable that so many, whatever their sexual orientation, seek to embody those virtues and see the Church as the community that can enable virtue to endure.



# Sexuality and social trends

**149.** The underlying context of the preceding section of our report is about change within society. Sometimes change is about a shifting perception or growing awareness of what has always been the case. Sometimes, attitudes and behaviours change so that new majorities are formed and approaches to moral questions shift within society at large. Here, we attempt to examine three questions: the prevalence of homosexuality in the population at large, current attitudes (as captured in responses to a survey about the Government's proposals on same sex marriage), and the ways in which attitudes towards homosexuality have changed over time, including in the Churches.

## **How prevalent is homosexuality?**

**150.** Identifying the proportion of the population which is homosexual is far from straightforward. Much depends on the nature of the questions asked in surveys, the different options from which respondents may choose and whether the question is geared to establishing respondents' current self-understanding or looks at their life as a whole. The sensitivities around the subject may also lead to a degree of under-reporting. In other words, not all the people who self-identify as homosexual may wish to do so to a pollster.

**151.** The frequently quoted figure of 10% of males being gay is derived from the Kinsey report of 1948 and has been widely discredited. Although most surveys across the world report much lower figures, many caveats apply and there is a substantial margin for error in most statistics on this subject.

**152.** The most recent British data are those supplied in 2012 by the Office of National Statistics on the basis of 186,946 people questioned between April 2011 and March 2012 for the Integrated Household Survey. The results of this survey were that:

- 93.9 per cent of adults identified themselves as Heterosexual/Straight,

- 1.1 per cent of the surveyed UK population (equating to approximately 545,000 adults in the population as a whole) identified themselves as Gay or Lesbian,
- 0.4 per cent of the surveyed UK population (i.e. approximately 220,000 adults in the whole population) identified themselves as Bisexual,
- 0.3 per cent identified themselves as ‘Other’,
- 3.6 per cent of adults stated ‘Don’t know’ or refused to answer the question,
- 0.6 per cent of respondents provided ‘No response’ to the question.<sup>80</sup>

**153.** These data give a combined total of 1.5% of the adult population that self identifies as homosexual or bisexual (and a further 4.5% who cannot be categorized from the survey results). The 1.5% figure, therefore, only gives a snapshot of those who self-identified in this way when the survey was taken. It does not take into account those with a degree of same sex attraction who chose not to identify as homosexual or bisexual, those who would have identified as homosexual or bisexual in the past but who no longer chose to do so or those who did not identify as homosexual or bisexual at the time of the survey, but might go on to do so in the future.

### **Social attitudes toward homosexuality**

**154.** A very frequent claim is that attitudes to homosexuality among Christians are wildly out of step with the rest of society. It is also suggested that the official teaching of the Churches is often at odds with the beliefs of their members.

**155.** In order to explore the substance behind these claims, we considered a number of recent surveys and analyses of opinions. As the Government’s proposals on same sex marriage were being hotly debated at the time, we looked at a YouGov poll on attitudes towards same sex marriage which gave us a very contemporary snapshot of social attitudes. We also wanted to capture something of the way attitudes in society have changed over time, and looked at two studies. Those by Ben Clements (British Social Attitudes) and a study by Crockett and Voas (see below) were the most helpful sources that we identified for this purpose.<sup>81</sup> We considered a number of other studies, most of which addressed very specific questions. These helped to fill out

our understanding of the subject but added little to the big picture except to confirm that the general range of attitudes and trends was as depicted in the surveys noted above.

### **YouGov poll – key points**

**156.** The YouGov survey was taken in March 2012 (after the Government’s proposals on same sex marriage, and the various responses, had become public) and surveyed 1,707 residents. It asked a range of questions including questions about same sex marriage, legal recognition of same sex relationships and the Church of England’s official view of same sex marriage. The following points were among their findings:

- Overall, a majority of respondents (47%) believed that the Church of England was right to defend marriage as being solely for heterosexual people compared to 37% who disagreed.
- However, this figure reflects wide differences between age groups, with 69% of over-60s agreeing and only 28% of those aged 18–24.
- Men were also more likely than women to agree that the church’s position was right – 51% of men and 43% of women thought the Church was right whilst 33% of men and 40% of women disagreed.
- Overall, 40% of respondents thought that the language used by opponents to same sex marriage encouraged homophobia and hatred towards gays and lesbians, whereas 32% thought that it did not. Again, this concealed a strong difference across the age groups with 55% of 18–24 year olds believing that language used to argue against same sex marriage encouraged homophobia and only 33% of over 60s agreeing with that proposition.

### **Ben Clements, *Anglicans and Attitudes towards Gay Marriage* (2012)**

**157.** The survey by Clements (University of Leicester) looked at attitudes towards homosexuality and, specifically, same sex marriage, among Anglicans. Data was collected from a number of independent surveys. Among the findings were these:

- The proportion of Anglicans who thought that sexual relations between adults of same sex was either ‘always wrong’ or ‘almost always wrong’ has fallen from 69.7% in 1983 to 37.4% in 2010.
- Anglicans are less likely than all respondents to believe that same sex relationships are as valid as heterosexual ones (52.4% compared to 61.7%) – although a majority of Anglicans do hold that same sex and heterosexual relationships are equally valid.
- Anglicans are much less supportive of same sex marriage (24.4% compared to 42.8%).
- Anglicans are both more likely to support civil partnerships (45.6% to 32.5%) and more likely to oppose any form of legal recognition for same sex couples (22.4% to 15.0%).
- Around two-thirds of Anglicans in the sample agreed with the Church of England’s stance on same sex marriage, although a quarter of Anglicans disagreed with the church’s position.
- Three groups are consistently more likely to have more ‘liberal’ views on the issues: women, those aged 18–29 and Labour Party supporters (closely followed by Liberal Democrat supporters). In terms of educational levels, those with A-levels or other below-degree level qualification were most likely to have liberal views – more so than those with degrees *and* those with lower qualifications.

**158.** The survey attempted to correlate views to degrees of religiosity, grouping respondents according to whether they attended church reasonably frequently (at least monthly) and how they rated the personal importance of religion. Those who attend services regularly are more likely to oppose same sex marriage and more likely to reject any legal recognition for same sex couples. A similar correlation was shown with respondents’ views about the personal importance of religion.

**Alasdair Crockett and David Voas, *A Divergence of Views: Attitude change and the religious crisis over homosexuality* (2003)**

**159.** The survey by Crockett and Voas is now ten years old, and it is likely that social attitudes have changed further since it was taken. However, it is the clearest study we have found in mapping how general social attitudes have changed over a defined period rather than giving a snapshot at one particular moment in history.

**160.** Crockett and Voas noted the extraordinarily rapid change in social attitudes to homosexuality over recent decades. Because churches are ‘repositories of tradition’ the authors suggest that they have moved less quickly and find it difficult to adjust to new social attitudes. The survey draws on evidence from the British Social Attitudes and British Household Panel surveys.

**161.** They noted a large, and growing, gap between the views of older and younger people, and a large, and growing, gap between women and men. Whilst the proportion of people who believed same sex activity was not at all wrong had grown substantially since 1983 (and at a similar rate among religious and non-religious people), this concealed a growing gulf between liberals and conservatives. In other words, attitudes hardened in the study period.

**162.** ‘The attitudes towards homosexuality of a young female Christian and an elderly male Christian are likely to be opposite extremes – even if they belong to the same denomination.’

**163.** The tendency to suppose that homosexuality is condemned by only a small minority was shown to be wrong. In 2000, opinions were fairly closely balanced – 46% thought same sex unions were ‘always wrong’ or ‘mostly wrong’ whereas 41% saw them as ‘not at all wrong’ or ‘rarely wrong’.

**164.** Nevertheless, the speed of change was striking. Going back to 1987, and looking only at those with the most strongly expressed views, 64% thought same sex relationships were ‘always wrong’ and 11% thought them ‘not at all wrong’. In 2000, these figures were 40% and 34% respectively – a significant shift away from strong condemnation and a large increase in those taking a strongly positive view of same sex relationships. (NB opposition to same sex

relationships rose steeply between 1983 and 1987, probably as a result of the AIDS crisis, before falling away sharply year on year.)

**165.** The difference in attitudes between the youngest and oldest groups changed dramatically in the period studied. 'In 1983–4 (both years pooled together), those aged 65 and over were 80% more likely to see same sex relationships as always wrong than those aged 18–24. By 1999–2000 (both years pooled) they were 221% more likely.'

**166.** In 1983–4, men were 16% more likely than women to believe homosexual practices were always wrong. By 1999–2000 they were 57% more likely to believe this.

**167.** Putting gender and age together sharpens the polarity. In 1983–4, men aged 65 and over were just over twice as likely as women aged 18–24 to see homosexual practices as always wrong. By 1999–2000 they were eight times more likely ('A staggering disparity').

**168.** The split over homosexuality was larger within the religious sub-population than in society in general. Liberal Christians (especially young liberal Christians) were more accepting of homosexuality than average. Conservative Christians (including young ones) were more likely than average to disapprove.

**169.** The attitudes of occasional churchgoers in 1983 were roughly midway between those of regular attenders and non-attenders. In 2000 the attitudes of occasional attenders were roughly the same as for non-attenders.

**170.** The odds of an 18-year-old Anglican having 'anti-gay' attitudes were 48% *lower* than for other respondents. For a 51-year-old Anglican the odds were equal. For a 65-year-old Anglican, they were 32% *higher* over the period concerned.

**171.** The attitudes of younger members of some Churches (notably the Church of England and the Church of Scotland) were far closer to those of the general population than those of their older co-religionists. Older affiliates of all denominations were less liberal than their non-religious peers.

**172.** Crockett and Voas went on to look in depth at how attitudes are passed on between parents and children. They concluded that, ‘in a secularising country like Britain, in contrast to the United States .... The relative success of churchgoing parents in transmitting disapproval of homosexuality to their children is not an effective brake on increased acceptance of homosexuality among the population as a whole, but it does serve to ensure that the religious community will remain starkly polarized on the issue for the foreseeable future.’

**173.** Overall, the message of rapidly changing attitudes, not least within churches, is impossible to ignore. The trend has almost certainly continued since 2003. Although it is sometimes assumed that people become more conservative in their views as they get older, the evidence for this is patchy at best. There is no credible reason to assume that the attitudes to questions of sexuality among younger cohorts will change as they age. However, even quite strong trends can take unexpected turns – and we have noted the apparent effect of the emergence of HIV/AIDS in temporarily interrupting the trend toward more liberal views on homosexuality during the 1980s – but excluding unpredictable events, we seem to be witnessing, over the last three decades, very rapid changes toward the inclusion and acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual people. The Churches are not immune from this trend.

# Homophobia

*The majority of the population rightly detests homophobic behaviour or anything that looks like it. And sometimes they look at us and see what they don't like. I don't like saying that. I've resisted that thought. But in that debate (on same sex marriage in the House of Lords) I heard it, and I could not walk away from it.*

From the Archbishop of Canterbury's  
Presidential Address to General Synod, 5 July 2013

**174.** Despite the great change in the climate of opinion on same sex orientation in the last 20 years, and the confidence that many lesbian and gay people show, the problem of prejudice against lesbian and gay people is still with us, and serious. Nor is it confined to any particular age group or to those who are out of touch with changes in society.

## Definitions

**175.** The use of the terms 'homophobia' or 'homophobic' presents some difficulties. Its usage has extended beyond its original technical and psychological meaning of irrational hatred and is sometimes used to denote any opinion on gay issues which questions a presumed consensus. Sometimes, it has been used in ways which tend to foreclose rational argument rather than to pursue it. It is, however, the term in common use and is usually seen as analogous to racism or sexism and understood to combine unfair treatment, bullying and belittling.

**176.** We approach this question of definition with some trepidation. In polarized arguments, the right to define words is too easily assumed by the powerful in ways which deny to others the opportunity to describe their own experiences adequately. Our group is well aware that the way we are constituted precludes us, in some people's eyes, from having any part in defining a term like homophobia since it is not a phenomenon which any of us have directly experienced at the receiving end. But as approaches to homophobia within the Church range, at one extreme, from denying that any such thing exists, through



to regarding the Scriptures as intrinsically homophobic, we cannot avoid discussing terms and meanings. Therefore, with due caution and recognizing the limits of our collective experience, it is worth trying to unpack the word's meanings, including its more technical meanings when used in academic discourse.

**177.** Some of the difficulty with the word is that the –phobia suffix suggest that ‘homophobia’ describes a recognizable pathology. However, homophobia has never been listed as one of the clinically recognized phobias and, for that reason, some have attempted to coin a different terminology, but no alternatives have achieved widespread recognition.

**178.** The word ‘homophobia’ is of relatively recent coinage, first recorded in print in 1969 to describe the fear among heterosexual men that they might be thought to be gay. By the 1970s, the word was being used in academic psychology to refer to a variety of psychological aversions to homosexuality and/or homosexuals.

**179.** In psychology, and more broadly in the social sciences, three variant forms of homophobia have formed the accepted framework for discussion, although many further sub categories have been postulated:

- *Institutional homophobia*: the entrenchment, within the structures and behavioural systems of groups and institutions, of negative attitudes to homosexuals and/or direct discrimination against them. The parallel with institutional racism (cf. The MacPherson Report on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry) is apparent.
- *Internalized homophobia*: the adoption of negative attitudes to homosexuality by people who themselves experience same sex attraction, whether or not they present themselves as gay/lesbian.<sup>82</sup>
- *Social homophobia*: fear among heterosexuals of being identified as gay. Social homophobia is reported mainly among men and is seen as a sign of insecurity about sexuality in general. It is often associated with subcultures which are stereotypically male and where membership of the group appears to require overt demonstrations of masculinity. The prevalence of homophobic bullying among boys of school age (where weak, studious or

otherwise marginalized boys are stigmatized as ‘gay’) is another well-attested arena for social homophobia.

### **Using words with care**

**180.** All these meanings demand care in their usage. The association of social homophobia with insecurity about male sexuality is congruent with accounts of homosexuality in antiquity, in which penetration of a man by another man was seen as essentially a demonstration of power – the ‘unmanning’ of the one penetrated. In such a context, male homosexual acts are likely to be interpreted as aggressive and intended to reduce other men to the (inferior) status of women. But to adopt only this image of homosexuality from antiquity when the reality of gay relationships has been demonstrably more varied over many generations suggests a determination to portray homosexuality in a pejorative manner which may justify the ‘homophobia’ label.

**181.** The concept of internalized homophobia does not constitute an accusation that everybody who has experienced same sex attraction but does not self-identify as gay is homophobic. Human sexuality is not simply or irreducibly binary – people’s sexual orientation may emerge as a process of discovery or remain ambiguous. Internalized homophobia is about failure to connect actions towards others with one’s own context and does not imply that opinions must be determined by orientation.

**182.** The concept of institutional homophobia does not imply that every structure of belief which questions particular positions on issues of sexuality must be irrational and anti-gay. Within LGBT communities there is debate and disagreement about the construction of identities, terminology and other matters. There is no less debate about the construction of sexual identity among and between straight people. Debate is one thing; incitement to hatred and the creation of a mental atmosphere in which derogatory, prejudiced or violent behaviour is encouraged, is quite another, but how far the latter is exacerbated by open debate is complex and raises difficult issues about the limits to free speech. The boundary needs careful policing and systematic disadvantaging of homosexual people can take place in any institution if structures are not in place to ensure that minorities are treated with respect.

**183.** None of these points, however, diminishes the fact that homophobia in various manifestations is a reality and a matter for serious concern. No person possesses perfect self-awareness and no culture is without blind spots: homophobia is a particular manifestation of the sin – personal and structural – in which we all share. But the harm done by homophobia is capable of being challenged and limited.

**184.** Homophobic bullying in schools is widespread and especially harmful to young people whose struggle to make sense of their sexuality makes them vulnerable. Many gay and lesbian people tell of direct experience of aggressive or deeply hurtful behaviour by others, not excluding physical violence. Gay people have been attacked and sometimes murdered by strangers, solely on grounds of their sexuality (or assumptions about their sexuality) and many gay and lesbian people have been driven to depression, and sometimes suicide, by homophobic treatment. In some other parts of the world, social and institutional homophobia is manifested in some very ugly and violent forms.

**185.** We are aware that people who identify as post-gay report that they often feel doubly excluded or disadvantaged – acceptable and mistrusted simultaneously by the Church and by many gay people. In any consideration of the prejudice and bullying which LGBT people experience, including in the Church, the position of post-gay people must not be excluded.

### **Homophobia and open debate**

**186.** Because the Church has sometimes been labelled ‘homophobic’ for publicly expressing its traditional understandings of sexuality, it needs to be stated very clearly that this working group, and the Church in its official and episcopal statements, makes a firm distinction between open debate on matters of personal and public ethics and hatred or bullying directed at gay and lesbian people whether by individuals or institutions.<sup>83</sup>

**187.** We stoutly defend an open and reasoned discussion of human sexuality and the place of sexuality in public ethics. We also unreservedly and robustly condemn hatred, bullying, disadvantage and violence perpetrated against gay and lesbian people, whether by individuals or institutions. It helps to understand the different ways in which homophobia is understood, but it is the commitment to combat

homophobia in this generally-understood sense that informs the whole of this report.

**188.** We recognize that the way debate is framed and conducted can itself contribute to a climate in which prejudice can claim justification. In the Churches' handling of the debate on human sexuality, not least on the international stage, this consideration has not always been kept clearly in sight. In so far as the Church has exacerbated the reality and the threat of homophobia in society, through the way that it has conducted its discussions on sexuality and shaped its practices, the Church is called to repentance.

**189.** We therefore strongly commend the work undertaken by the group which has developed the 'Don't Throw Stones' initiative. This work has brought together:

Anglicans who – in the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury – *disagree* with each other on 'whether the Christian Church has the freedom, on the basis of the Bible, and its historic teachings, to bless homosexual partnerships as a clear expression of God's will' and how the Church should respond to Christians in such partnerships', but *agree* together that 'any demonizing of homosexual persons, or their ill treatment, is totally against Christian charity and basic principles of pastoral care' (Windsor Report).<sup>84</sup>

**190.** They go on to affirm that:

We are united in our conviction that it is therefore imperative for Anglicans world-wide to:

- 'listen to the experience of homosexual persons and...assure them that they are loved by God' (Lambeth I.10)
- challenge 'ingrained and ignorant prejudice' and make clear that 'bigotry against gay people' is unacceptable (Archbishop of Canterbury)
- 'give the strongest support to the defence of homosexual people against violence, bigotry and legal disadvantage' (Archbishop of Canterbury)

- ‘appreciate the role played in the life of the church by people of homosexual orientation’ (Archbishop of Canterbury).

We are committed to working together to encourage church communities and individual Christians:

- To acknowledge and repent of their own involvement in ‘throwing stones’ through the victimisation and diminishment of homosexual people and
- To stand in solidarity with homosexual people when others ‘throw stones’ – both literally and metaphorically – at them.<sup>85</sup>

**191.** *Don’t Throw Stones* was presented to the 2007 Primates’ Meeting where it was unopposed. It was endorsed by the Anglican Consultative Council and officially adopted by the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion in 2009. The views and commitments of *Don’t Throw Stones* are fully endorsed by all the members of our group.

**192.** The Archbishop of Canterbury has committed the Church to combatting homophobic bullying in Church of England schools. While there is no validated evidence to suggest that the incidence of such bullying is significantly higher in Church of England schools than in other schools this project is designed to make schools aware of the issue and to help them respond appropriately. The National Society is initiating a project to provide materials which meet the need of teachers and governors in schools for additional support to help them offer a safe environment for gay and lesbian pupils whilst also recognizing the teaching of the Church on homosexuality and marriage.

# Arguments about science

**193.** A large number of groups and individuals touched on scientific issues in their submissions or oral evidence to the Working Group. In addition, the Working Group received material on scientific issues from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Core Issues Trust and the Society of Ordained Scientists and had two presentations on the scientific issues relating to its work, one from Dr John Hare and the other from Professor Glynn Harrison. Those on the Working Group also had a copy of the chapter on ‘The Witness of Science’ by David De Pomerai and Glynn Harrison in Phil Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*.

**194.** Here we look at the evidence surrounding some of the key scientific controversies relating to homosexuality.

## **Are human beings sexually dimorphic?**

**195.** By ‘sexually dimorphic’ we mean clearly divided between men on the one hand and women on the other.

**196.** The great majority of human beings are unambiguously either male or female in terms of their chromosomes and the primary and secondary sexual characteristics that their bodies display. To that extent we can say that the human norm is to be either male or female. That is what is statistically normal.

**197.** However, as was explained by Dr Hare in his presentation to the Working Group and explored in more detail by Dr Susannah Cornwell in her submissions to us, there is a small minority of people<sup>86</sup> who have conditions such as Klinefelters Syndrome, Mosaicism, Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia in which there are forms of congenital sexual development that lead to various degrees of ambiguity about the sex of the person concerned, either in terms of their chromosomes or in terms of the sexual characteristics that their bodies display. The umbrella term that is now used to describe these conditions is ‘intersex’ conditions.

**198.** The situation of the people with intersex conditions differs from that of transsexuals. Transsexuals are people who experience what is known as ‘gender identity disorder’ or ‘gender dysphoria.’ Unlike people with intersex conditions, their bodies are unambiguously either male or female, but as the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People puts it, they live ‘with a conviction that their physical anatomy is incompatible with their true gender role. They have an overwhelming desire to live and function in the opposite sex’<sup>87</sup>

### **Is sexual attraction fixed and immutable?**

**199.** A representative study carried out in New Zealand, supported by other studies undertaken elsewhere and large amounts of anecdotal evidence, seems to indicate that for some people sexual attraction can and does change so that they move from being ‘gay’ to being ‘straight’ and vice versa. So, at least for some people, sexual attraction is not immutable. They may not necessarily self-identify as ‘bisexual’, if bisexual is understood as attraction to people of both sexes at the same time.<sup>88</sup>

**200.** Rather than thinking about the human population in terms of a fixed binary division between two sets of people, those who are straight and those who are gay, it seems that we need to accept that while there is a large majority of people who only ever experience heterosexual attraction and a smaller number who only experience homosexual attraction, there is also a significant minority of people who either experience some form of bisexual attraction or who move between heterosexual and homosexual attraction at some point or points in their life.

### **What are the causes of homosexuality?**

**201.** There continues to be a vigorous debate, reflected in the evidence presented to the Working Group, about whether homosexuality is due to nature or nurture. That is, whether it is a psychological condition caused, perhaps, by the nature of parenting or early childhood experiences, or is a biological condition. There is a further debate among those who see it as a biological condition concerning the precise nature of its causation, with some seeing it as genetic and others seeing it as hormonal.

**202.** It is difficult for non-specialists to make a judgement about this continuing debate since the specialists themselves are divided. At the moment most experts seem to think that there is at least some

biological influence involved in same sex attraction, although no one theory about what this influence is has yet been proved beyond reasonable doubt. The general consensus seems to be that the origins of same sex attraction are complex and probably due to a combination of biological, social and psychological factors. In the words of David de Pomerai:

In many (perhaps most?) cases, multiple causes are likely to combine, and the relative proportion of those elements in the overall mixture will vary from one individual to another. Only a complex and highly variable *mixture* of underlying mechanisms – some biological, as well as some psychosocial – seems adequate to explain the reality of [homosexuality] in human society, and no single mechanism can claim to hold the key to [homosexuality].<sup>89</sup>

**203.** It is important to note that it is a simplification of the scientific evidence to say that any one individual is ‘born gay’. It seems likely that there are people who for biological reasons have a greater propensity to same sex attraction, but whether they will become involved in same sex sexual relationships or identify as gay or lesbian will be shaped by familial, social and personal factors. To adapt the old feminist slogan ‘biology is not destiny.’

**204.** It is also important to note that because human beings are psychosomatic unities (or to put it in traditional Christian terms ‘embodied souls’ or ‘ensouled bodies’) all choices that people make in every area of their lives are shaped by a complex mixture of biological, social and psychological factors. One can identify biological, social and psychological factors at work in numerous areas of human life. In that sense there is nothing unique about the range of factors that are thought to explain homosexuality.

### **Is homosexuality harmful or is harm the result of social prejudice?**

**205.** The evidence indicates that there is a greater instance of mental and physical illness and substance abuse among homosexual people than among the population at large. Thus a major study by researchers from Harvard Medical School in 2001 concluded that ‘homosexual orientation... is associated with general elevation of risk for anxiety, mood and substance-use disorders and for suicidal thoughts and plans’.<sup>90</sup> In addition, many gay men in particular have a tendency to



engage in high risk sexual activity. However there is disagreement about the reasons why this is case.

**206.** One view is that it is due to the discrimination that gay and lesbian people continue to face. Thus the submission from the Royal College of Psychiatrists declares:

There is now a large body of research evidence that indicates that being gay, lesbian or bisexual is compatible with normal mental health and social adjustment. However, the experiences of discrimination in society and possible rejection by friends, families and others, such as employers, means that some LGB people experience a greater than expected prevalence of mental health and substance misuse problems.<sup>91</sup>

**207.** On the other hand, the Core Issues Trust point out that the three scientific papers referred to by the Royal College of Psychiatrists at this point actually refuse to attribute the causation of mental health issues among gay and lesbian people to societal factors. For example, one paper cited states, ‘It may be that prejudice in society against gay men and lesbians leads to greater psychological distress... conversely, gay men and lesbians may have lifestyles that make them vulnerable to psychological disorder.’<sup>92</sup>

**208.** This would seem to indicate that a causative link between social prejudice and health issues among gay and lesbian people is neither proven nor ruled out by the evidence. But the alternative possibility that homosexual orientation ‘and all it entails cuts against a fundamental, gender-based given of the human condition, thus causing distress’<sup>93</sup> is likewise neither proved nor ruled out by the available scientific evidence.

### **Is there an issue about the durability and stability of same sex relationships?**

**209.** There seems to be general agreement that, while there are undoubtedly examples of long-term, stable and sexually faithful relationships, gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships have tended to be less long-lasting than heterosexual ones, less sexually exclusive and more promiscuous.<sup>94</sup> A key subtext of Jeffrey John’s book *Permanent, Faithful, Stable*, for example, is the need for the Church to support permanent, faithful and stable relationships among bisexual and gay people, in order to counter some of the tendencies within the bisexual and gay community as a whole.<sup>95</sup>

**210.** There is disagreement about the cause of these tendencies. As with the issue of health problems among gay and lesbian people, one explanation is the lack of social support until recently. Thus the submission from the Royal College of Psychiatrists suggests:

A considerable amount of the instability in gay and lesbian partnerships arises from lack of support within society, the church or the family for such relationships.<sup>96</sup>

**211.** However as the Core Issues submission points out, the very paper which the Royal College cites to support its position states:

We do not know whether gay male, same sex relationships are less enduring because of something intrinsic to being male or a gay male, the gay male subculture that encourages multiple partners, or a failure of social recognition of their relationships. The ‘social experiment’ that civil unions provide will enable us to disentangle the health and social effects of this complex question.<sup>97</sup>

**212.** Despite changing attitudes toward same sex relationships over the past few decades, recent studies suggest that same sex cohabitations and same sex unions (in countries where they have been introduced) continue to have higher rates of dissolution than different-sex cohabiting couples and different-sex marital unions.<sup>98</sup>

**213.** It is not yet known why there are problems of permanence and fidelity in same sex relationships. It may be due to lack of social support or lack of time for changes in social attitudes to exert their effect; alternatively, it may reflect a reality that human beings are constituted in such a way that intimate relationships between people of the same sex are inherently less stable, the role of children in stabilizing many heterosexual relationships, or some combination of all these factors. In the absence of compelling evidence one way or another, we can only take a neutral stance. The key message from these complexities in the data is that there continue to be dangers in claiming a certainty we do not possess.

### **Do sexual orientation change efforts work?**

**214.** There is continuing controversy about whether sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) – forms of therapy which aim to help people reduce or overcome same sex attraction – can ever be successful

and whether they in fact do harm. Indeed, this difference of view masks a more fundamental divergence of opinion over whether seeking to reduce or overcome same sex attraction is a legitimate activity.

**215.** The submission from the Royal College of Psychiatrists was strongly critical of SOCE:

A small minority of therapists will even go so far as to attempt to change their client's sexual orientation...This can be deeply damaging. Although there is now a number of therapists and organization in the USA and in the UK that claim that therapy can help homosexuals to become heterosexual, there is no evidence that such change is possible.<sup>99</sup>

**216.** However, as critics of this position have pointed out, although there were a series of well-documented reports from the 1940s through to the 1970s of successful therapy to help people deal with unwanted same sex attraction, the controversy that now surrounds efforts to change people's sexual attraction means there have been no randomized, controlled trials of such therapy in recent years. As Goddard and Harrison note, 'this does not mean that we have evidence that SOCE does not work. We simply do not know whether they work or whether they do not work.'<sup>100</sup>

**217.** In the absence of randomized, controlled trials we have to rely on those studies that have taken place and on anecdotal evidence. To quote Goddard and Harrison again, the data from such sources:

... suggest that some individuals report benefit in the form of increased heterosexual interest and/or marked reduction in same sex interest after participating in one of these approaches. Because of the absence of controlled experiments we do not know whether, regardless of a particular therapy approach, these changes would have happened anyway. Nor do we know whether it is the particular approach, as opposed to a general placebo effect, that has been effective. Nevertheless, despite our lack of knowledge about the mechanisms for change, there are undoubtedly individuals who have reported significant changes in the strength or direction of their sexual attraction either spontaneously or as a result of participating in some form of SOCE.<sup>101</sup>

**218.** One problem is that arguments about the principle of SOCE have been influenced by ways in which SOCE has sometimes been practised with less than proper professionalism. Psychiatrists and counsellors who have had to pick up the pieces may naturally be sceptical of the claims made for SOCE, but it seems to be a step too far to claim that such procedures are, by definition, impossible. The arguments about efficacy have been clouded by deeper differences over legitimacy. This is yet another example of the way in which the evidence turns out to be both complex and contested. The idea that science can give us clear and unequivocal answers, even on its own terms let alone in the field of morality, turns out to be over-optimistic.

**219.** Our assessment of the significance of the scientific evidence in terms of our remit is explored in Part 3 of this report.

# Arguments about Scripture

**220.** On two things concerning Scripture and sexuality, almost everyone is agreed: the Bible contains no positive depictions of, or statements about, sexual activity between people of the same sex, and Jesus himself is not recorded as mentioning the subject at all. But the significance of these two facts, and of other questions of scriptural interpretation on the subject, is deeply contested.

**221.** Most also acknowledge that where sexual activity between members of the same sex is referred to in Scripture, the references are strongly negative. But whilst for some, including one member of our group, this is in itself a conclusive point, others argue that, as with many scriptures, the authors' intended meaning can be distorted, whether in translation or by mistaking the nature of the culture in which they lived, and that what appears to be a plain meaning requires deeper exploration if it is to be properly understood. Moreover, those who agree that such exploration and interpretation are essential to a proper understanding of Scripture do not agree about how such insights might nuance an understanding of the text or what the implications might be for contemporary ethical decision-making.

**222.** As we have noted, these tensions are as real in our Working Group as in the Church at large. Individually, we may be confident that we understand what Scripture is saying, yet we draw different conclusions from Scripture. We cannot, as a group, express the same confidence in the interpretation and application of Scripture as we may hold individually.

**223.** This report cannot attempt a definitive account of the debate about the meaning of Scripture, even if such an enterprise were conceivable. Nor, given the many nuanced positions held by various scholars, can we reproduce the whole range of their arguments. To give a sense of these complexities, we include in the Appendices two essays on the Scriptures and homosexuality which were prepared for us. One, by Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead, epitomizes a conservative understanding of the biblical texts. The second, by the Revd David

Runcorn, argues a scriptural case for a more inclusive ethic. Both would identify themselves as evangelicals within the Church of England and both believe they are taking a high view of the authority of Scripture. We include these two contributions, not because they sum up the whole range of scriptural scholarship on this subject – they emphatically do not – but because they epitomize the way in which study of the same sources can lead to very different conclusions.

**224.** The depth of the difference between these two papers, coupled with the level of commitment that lies behind them, demonstrates both the difficulty and the importance of finding some process through which Christians with different convictions can come to listen to, and hear, each other without focusing too quickly on the search for detailed agreement.

**225.** There is a considerable body of literature on the Scriptures and same sex relationships. The summary in *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, though ten years old, still gives a helpful picture of the range of views held by different scholars, and the chapter on ‘The Witness of Scripture’ in *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* adds to this.<sup>102</sup> We commend both these pieces of work as very useful background reading.

**226.** The relative paucity of scriptural discussion in our report reflects the fact that there has been much written on the subject but little which indicates any movement toward agreement or movement between positions. Since *Some Issues*, there have been a number of major additions to the literature on Scripture and homosexuality. In the space of our report, we can do no more than briefly mention a few.

**227.** A number of studies have approached the subject through a distinctive hermeneutic. Dale B. Martin, in *Sex and the Single Saviour*, asks how being gay shapes the hermeneutic process so that an encounter with the Scriptures ceases to focus only on the texts which appear overtly to mention same sex relationships.<sup>103</sup> Deryn Guest, in *When Deborah Met Jael*, argues for a specifically lesbian hermeneutic of suspicion (that is, an approach to the texts which seeks to uncover suppressed or hidden stories and nuances lying beneath the dominant ideologies of the writers) which is shaped by the viewpoints of grassroots lesbians.<sup>104</sup>

- 227.** Queer theology is becoming a distinctive genre in its own right, reclaiming the epithet ‘queer’ from negative usages and treating difference as a fundamental characteristic of all societies, including those of biblical times. With an extensive literature of its own, we cannot do justice to queer theology here but note the important contribution to the literature in Patrick S. Cheng’s *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*.<sup>105</sup>
- 229.** Whilst much of the argument about sexuality and Scripture has focused on the New Testament and especially the work of St Paul, Richard M. Davidson’s book, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, is an important new addition to the literature.<sup>106</sup> Davidson argues for a holistic view of sexuality in the Old Testament, and whilst his perspective is essentially a conservative one, he also engages constructively with feminist theological perspectives.
- 230.** An important addition to the recent literature, from within the Church of England, is Richard Burridge’s major work on biblical ethics, *Imitating Jesus*.<sup>107</sup> This book was shortlisted for the Michael Ramsey Prize in 2009 and winner of the prestigious Ratzinger Prize for theology in 2013 – the first time this prize has been won by a non-Roman Catholic. Burridge offers a comprehensive approach, both to the ethics of the New Testament and to the New Testament’s centrality for ethical thought today, focusing on the radical call to follow Christ and seeing the whole New Testament as an outworking of that imperative. Christ, he argues, calls humanity into a new community, no longer defined by the boundaries of difference, and the New Testament’s references to sexuality can consistently be understood in that light.<sup>108</sup>
- 231.** These books and many others, open up a variety of perspectives on the role of Scripture in the ethics of sexuality. Yet, although arguments and evidence for different approaches grow, scholarly attempts to find ways beyond conflicting approaches are less numerous.
- 232.** Groves, Holder and Gooder, in ‘The Witness of Scripture’ attempt to engage with differing views, without forcing the argument to a series of definitive conclusions. However, there are few other examples of deep engagement across the divisions.<sup>109</sup>
- 233.** Throughout our work, we have sought to approach Scripture with the utmost seriousness. We believe that the majority of those we

have encountered in the course of our work take a similarly serious approach to Scripture. We have been alert to the problem of begging the question – arguing perhaps that, because God is against homosexuality all the Bible texts must be read that way, or that, because God is love, texts which appear to question the sexual expression of love by homosexual people must be mis-readings – but we have sought to dig deeper than this.

**234.** We were very aware of the passionate concern among many of those we met for the integrity of Scripture and the necessity for the Church to subject itself to the authority of Scripture in every aspect of its life. One of the main reasons for the intensity of the arguments about sexual morality is that, for many, any deviation from, or modification to, what they see as the Bible's teaching would constitute an apostasy. A Church which made such a move would, in their view, have rejected the authority of the Bible and, thus, have turned away from the revealed word of God. This is why, for many, the question of sexual ethics is not a secondary issue but one of absolutely fundamental significance for any Christian Church. This view has been powerfully put by one member of our Working Group and the whole group has benefited from hearing that view put sympathetically and with deep personal commitment.

**235.** We respect that view and do not deviate from the desire to place Scripture at the heart of ethics and discipleship. We believe that continuing to struggle with the meaning and implications of Scripture is essential precisely because Scripture is authoritative for Christians. But we do not all believe that the evidence of Scripture points to only one set of ethical conclusions. In short, Christians who share an equal commitment to Scripture do not agree on the implications of Scripture for same sex relationships.

**236.** As the two papers appended to this report demonstrate, there are a number of different types of argument about Scripture and sexuality. These include the translation of those texts which clearly speak about same sex relationships, the meaning of texts about same sex relationships in the cultural context of their times, and broader questions which are not so much about the meaning of discrete texts but about the Bible's wider understanding of relationships under God. Below, we try to epitomize these different kinds of argument, without



claiming any kind of comprehensiveness in a field which runs to millions of published words.

### **Translation problems**

**237.** Translation is never an exact matter: subtleties of meaning can be difficult to convey intact from one language to another. We should not make too much of this – many centuries of the translator’s art have been brought to bear on the biblical texts and the number of different translations have, between them, demonstrated numerous variants. The task of translation is always a matter of balancing the precise wording of the original against the need for that meaning to be communicable to readers in other languages. Moreover, many modern translations are explicitly concerned with making the texts accessible in the context of contemporary language usage. Thus the call for new biblical translations continues as the cultural use of language changes. As translators know well, the meaning of words is not always self-evident and their meaning in their social context is sometimes even more elusive.

**238.** Translators will seek meaning through comparing different occurrences of the same, or similar, words so that context can supply nuanced meanings. But some of the words in Scripture that are relevant to issues of sexuality occur infrequently and their meanings cannot easily be tested by comparing different contexts.

**239.** When words in New Testament Greek are translated in ways which, in today’s English, equate to modern words indicating homosexual people or practices (as in 1 Corinthians 6.9 and 1 Timothy 1.10) it is important to be clear whether the original meanings really do convey something close to the English translations. We will touch later on the question of cultural meanings: here we are concerned with the way the words are translated.

**240.** To take just one example, ‘sodomite’ in the NRSV is a translation of the Greek word *arsenokoitēs*. Most scholars recognize that the precise meaning of this word is extremely difficult to pin down. It is a compound noun which combines *arsen* meaning ‘male’ and *koites* meaning ‘bed’. The general meaning is reasonably clear. But in a compound noun, the first part could be either the subject or the object of action. To determine which reading is correct, the obvious method would be to compare this occurrence of the word with others to see if a

contextual meaning emerges. The problem is that *arsenokoitēs* does not occur in Greek literature prior to the New Testament and only rarely afterwards, usually in commentaries on 1 Corinthians 6 or 1 Timothy 1. Asserting that all the sources agree that *arsenokoitēs* must be translated in one particular way is to beg the question.<sup>110</sup>

**241.** Much more could be said, even on this one point. But we use it as an example of how the apparently plain meaning of words in English translations may conceal a great deal of scholarly difficulty. How one translates *arsenokoitēs* will not settle the arguments about the meanings of Scripture one way or the other, but it is a warning that we should not take meanings too much for granted. There are some questions which are not susceptible to easy consensus amongst scholars.

### **Cultural meanings in Scripture**

**242.** David Runcorn expresses clearly the central question about culture which divides one view of Scripture from the other – ‘is *this* really *that*?’ In other words, when a text speaks of homosexuality, is the phenomenon that is being described or condemned the same phenomenon that concerns us, and the Church, today?

**243.** As an example of how the debate has deepened, Runcorn draws on the widely accepted claim that homosexual relationships in antiquity were characterized by abusive power and were seen as ‘unmanning’ the passive (male) partner. That may indeed be, broadly speaking, the nature of many homosexual relationships at the time St Paul was writing, and they are a long way from the faithful and enduring same sex relationships which are the subject of the Church’s present consideration.

**244.** But what if, as Keith Sinclair suggests, same sex relationships of equality and fidelity were not unknown in those days? Immediately, it becomes hard to claim definitively that, in St Paul’s writing, *this* is not *that*. It also, incidentally, puts in question the idea that committed same sex relationships are a modern deviation from a historically permissive homosexual culture. But it does not conclusively prove what was in St Paul’s mind as he wrote. Was he speaking of every same sex relationship whatever its character, or was he condemning only the way those relationships were most widely known at the time? The text alone cannot tell us.

**245.** It is sometimes argued that references to cultural understandings of homosexuality are irrelevant in the context of Scripture because the scriptural texts treat all homosexual encounters as contrary to God's will. But, again, this is to beg the question. Until we know what St Paul meant when he wrote of such matters, we cannot say what it was in those encounters that he believed to contradict God's purposes for humanity.

**246.** As both Runcorn and Sinclair show, there is a great deal more scriptural evidence that can be adduced on this question. The paragraphs above are only a brief example of how arguments from Scripture require careful cultural contextualization. Our knowledge of that wider context, whilst extensive, cannot take us into the mind of the writer. We are looking at the balance of probabilities and, sometimes, what is completely convincing to some is quite unconvincing to others.

### **Male and female in the Genesis narratives**

**247.** At the very beginning of the Bible, God's intentions for the relationship between men and women are set out as part of a vision of the ordering of creation before the Fall. As is well known, there are, in effect, two narratives in Genesis which examine this relationship. In Genesis 1.27 we read that, 'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them'. Genesis 2.18-24 starts with God's insight that 'It is not good that the man should be alone', leading to the creation of the woman from the man's rib.

**248.** These are not incompatible narratives – both tell a story of God's purposes in creating humankind and both categorize humanity as male and female. But the two passages emphasize different aspects of God's truth. Claims that the passages offer incompatible and competing accounts of God's purposes can only be made by greatly exaggerating the differences between the two accounts. But it remains that the passages give us different insights into the relationship between male and female.

**249.** Genesis 1 emphasizes the way in which male and female, together, reflect the image of God and implies the equality of male and female before God. Genesis 2 stresses, rather, the significance of companionship but also introduces an implication of priority for the male.

**250.** Both narratives have been used, in the context of the Church's debate about sexuality, to point to God's purposes in creating male and female human beings. If the fundamental purpose is procreation, then the distinctive characteristics of male and female are clearly at the heart of the matter. But if the stress is more on companionship, the difference between male and female may be less centre-stage.

**251.** The question here is not about one or the other being 'true' but about the relative emphasis placed on the different insights of the two passages. One passage cannot be abandoned in favour of the other and so, in seeking to elicit the implications for marriage and partnerships, both sexual difference and human companionship are significant. Neither tells us the whole story without the other.

**252.** This is, again, only one example of a particular kind of argument. The creation narratives lie close to the heart of the debate about sexuality but can be deployed in different ways to reach differing conclusions. Much more can be, and has been, said on the relevance of the creation narratives, some of it in the Appendices to this report. But it remains that we are dealing with the kind of narratives which portray a rich and complex picture of God's purposes in creation but do not lend themselves to 'reading off' unambiguous rules for the conduct of human affairs.

**253.** We can say with confidence that the created nature of humanity as male and female is built into that natural order, and also that human beings are intended to live in relationship with others. Beyond that lies profound poetic insight but little agreement about ethics.

# Perspectives from two theologians

**254.** The study of theology is not, of course, a separate matter from the study of Scripture, but an appreciation of the depth of the Christian tradition in relation to sexual ethics requires some reflection on how the Church has reasoned through the centuries. As in our short consideration of the scriptural arguments, we cannot hope to do justice to the considerable amount of relevant material that has been published, although we have done our best to engage with a reasonable amount. We are also aware that the Christian tradition has not one but several strands, and different approaches to doing theology can be helpfully complementary.

**255.** We are aware that, compared to many church reports, this report contains no substantial theological chapter forming the foundation upon which an eventual set of conclusions and recommendations are then based. This is not a careless omission. A theological chapter of that sort would either have to be a synthesis of what has gone before, attempting to do justice to a variety of theological views, or would have to take a view of its own, which must inevitably fail to reflect the debates in the academy and in the church. Given the lack of theological common ground in the existing literature, among our many respondents, and in our own group, the first approach is likely to be banal and the second to (mis)use theology to attempt foreclosure on the wider arguments. There is a great deal of existing theological literature on the subject. In it, readers may find plenty to confirm their views on matters of sexuality and, perhaps, material that will challenge them or change their minds. But that is beyond the proper task of theology in a report like this.

**256.** Instead, we have sought to engage with theologians who have interesting new things to say and who are not readily co-opted to support any one position within the church's current disputes. In the course of our work, we heard two impressive presentations from theologians whom we had invited to meet us because they are well known for their work on sexual and relational ethics: Professor Oliver O'Donovan and Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP. Both kindly supplied us with

transcripts of their presentations to our group, so we can summarize their contributions with a number of direct quotations.<sup>111</sup> In Part 3 of this report, we will go on to draw upon some of these theological insights.

### **Timothy Radcliffe**

**257.** Timothy Radcliffe began with the observation that for most of the Church's history, sexual conduct has neither been a major concern nor understood primarily in terms of rules. The shift began at the Reformation but it is only with the Enlightenment that we see an overriding concern for the regulation of sex: '... my suspicion is that both this obsession with sex and a stress on rules (are) both relatively late and alien to traditional Christianity'.

**258.** Instead, Fr Radcliffe proposed a Eucharistic sexual ethic that started with Jesus's gift of his body at the Last Supper. This might help us to overcome the dualism – the splitting of body and soul – which has been a constant problem for Christian thought, especially since Descartes. 'If we are in essence minds, then what we do with our bodies is not that important.... Our permissive society has an implicit contempt for the body'.

**259.** He went on to discuss sexual intercourse as 'mutual generosity' – the complete gift of the body to the other person. 'When you have sexual intercourse with someone, then you say with your body, "I give myself to you and I receive you as a gift."'

**260.** To give the body is to be vulnerable. And yet much sexual behaviour is linked to 'domination and violence, invulnerability.... Whenever dominance is introduced into a sexual relationship, then the heart of our sexuality is denied.'

**261.** Fr Radcliffe went on to discuss the problem of macho culture. 'Wounded male pride cannot bear to show vulnerability.... Until recently, homosexuality was seen as effeminacy and so buried and hidden. This sometimes led to concealment and dishonesty.'

**262.** The gift of the body also entails fidelity. As Jesus gave himself once and for all, sexual intercourse is an act of covenant: 'we give ourselves for ever'. But in our society, marriage is a fragile institution and no bonds are as secure as they once were. 'We live in a society of

short-term contracts, whether at work or at home’, and this makes things very difficult for couples. The Church must find ways of offering ‘a complete welcome’ to people whose marriages have broken down.

**264.** The challenge to the Church is to ‘cherish the inherent meaning of sexual intercourse as covenantal... while coping with the inevitable failures that even the best Christians will experience’.

**265.** Another aspect of Jesus’s self-giving is that: ‘It is a fecundity that will explode into fruition on Easter morning.’ Fecundity and fertility are intrinsic to sexuality, too. Fr Radcliffe noted how hard the Catholic concept of an unmarried clergy was in many parts of Africa where the idea of fertility lay at the heart of understandings of sexuality, in a culture rooted in the rhythms of the agricultural year with its cycles of sowing and reaping. In some places he had visited in Africa, he perceived that homosexuality ‘so contradicted the deep relationship between sexuality and fertility as to be hardly comprehensible’.

**266.** Fr Radcliffe noted that not every marriage is fertile and that we must avoid a ‘mechanical or simplistic’ understanding of fertility. Jesus ‘is God’s fertile word. And surely it is in the kind and healing words that we offer each other that we all share in fertility of that most intimate moment.’

**266.** ‘How does all this bear on the question of gay sexuality? We cannot begin with the question of whether it is permitted or forbidden! We must ask what it means, and how far it is Eucharistic. Certainly it can be generous, vulnerable, tender, mutual and non-violent. So in many ways I think it can be expressive of Christ’s self-gift.’

**267.** ‘And what about fertility? ... Biological fertility is inseparable from the fertility of our mutual tenderness and compassion. And so that might seem to remove one objection to gay marriage. I am not entirely convinced, since it seems to me that our tradition is incarnational, the word becoming bodily flesh. And some heterosexual relationships may be accidentally infertile in this sense, but homosexual ones are intrinsically so.’

**268.** We can also see how homosexuality can be expressive of mutual fidelity, a covenantal relationship in which two people bind themselves to each other for ever. But the proposed legislation for ‘gay marriage’

implies that it is not understood to be inherently unitive, a becoming one flesh. This is why no equivalence is proposed either for non-consummation, the becoming one flesh, nor for adultery, which is the denial of that bond.

**269.** Fr Radcliffe concluded: The truth of that love which is God is beyond our grasp. We do not possess it; it possesses us. ‘All that each of us can do is to share what we believe to be true, and hope to learn from others too.’

### **Oliver O’Donovan**

**270.** Professor O’Donovan began by reminding us of the Socratic wisdom of ‘knowing how much we do not know’. He recognized that ‘certainties about the sexual phenomena of our time are few’ but he believed that some of the phenomena are new: ‘The human race has often seen homosexual behaviour before, in a variety of contexts; but it has not seen anything like this construction of it, with these sensibilities and aspirations.’

**271.** When dealing with new phenomena we have to work with ‘plausible analogies’. He suggested that we should ask whether analogies with marriage, or with disability, or sickness, or with racial membership are useful or not. ‘It will require a great deal of straightforward observation, perhaps over several generations, before we can begin to answer any of these questions with confidence.’

**272.** In this respect, theology has both a reflective and a practical aspect. ‘A major reflective focus in the present set of questions is Christian belief in God as creator of the world and sovereign Lord of history.’ Whilst creation is not just about individual vocation, theology will take vocation very seriously in relation to creation: ‘“the tree is known by its fruit”. And that is another reason why theology will insist on the time it needs to observe.’

**273.** Theology is also a practical discipline which ‘... may help us to determine a path of conduct which does not presume improperly upon knowledge we cannot have, but makes the most of the knowledge that is given us’.

**274.** Professor O’Donovan went on to discuss the place of ‘pastoral accommodation’ (a concept which appears in the 2013 Faith and Order



Commission report *Men and Women in Marriage*, referred to in Part One). ‘A pastoral accommodation is a response to some urgent presenting needs, without ultimate dogmatic implications.’ It may be paradoxical in relation to basic moral belief. ‘It is difficult for people to get their minds around pastoral accommodation, they are so used to thinking that everything they do incarnates the justice and love of God.’

**276.** He cited the example of the proposal some time ago for *Common Worship* to include a prayer to be used after abortion. This was rejected by the General Synod. ‘Synod thought it was being asked to invoke the blessing of God on an abortion. But the text of the prayer acknowledged sorrowfully that a human life had been taken; it could have sustained a witness to the meaning of the act that is certainly not maintained by simply taking no notice.’

**275.** Professor O’Donovan challenged the distinction between voluntariness and involuntariness – the notion that morality is only concerned with acts of the will. This leads to the assertion that what cannot be helped is outside the scope of morality. ‘Suppose we leave behind the protecting-from-blame mindset and ask what a wise and redemptive pastoral care can do to help us act with freedom. It will, I think, avoid presenting us with... dogmatic certainties about myself and my powers.... in talking to us of ourself it will talk simply of power, love and self-control.’

**276.** He went on to express reservations about the concept of identity – ‘a notion of self constructed out of contingencies’. Identities are ‘homes to venture out from and explore. If Christianity has a saving message to speak to human beings, it must surely be, “You may be free from the constraints of your identities”.’

**277.** He concluded: ‘To find a way of acting, then, that is charitable, modest, provisional, ideologically light, keeping the Church’s mind flexible and open, a way of acting that has more of the experiment than the conclusion about it, does not base itself on sweeping assertions of fact or principle that turn out to be false coinage which nobody can honour: that is the almost superhuman demand made of you and of those who will later build on your work.’



# Part 3

## REFLECTING ON THE EVIDENCE



# Christian ethics – the Anglican tradition

*Anglicanism is a mediating tradition. It mediates between a received Christian tradition and the formation of a people of faith. The distinctive content of the tradition that is passed on depends upon the questions and challenges that confront the community of faith. As new questions and challenges are confronted, particular strands of the Anglican tradition come to the fore, are drawn upon and are further developed in the attempt to mediate Christian faith.<sup>112</sup>*

**279.** Christian ethics is the activity of a community of faith, in our case the Church of England, and so it is important that our consideration of the ethics of sexuality should embody an authentically Anglican approach.

**280.** Anglican social ethics is, however, a more elusive concept than, for example, Roman Catholic social theology. In Anglicanism, there is not a single magisterium acting as the source of authority and teaching. Anglican understandings of authority have developed as the attempt to bring together the claims of Scripture, tradition and reason. God speaks to us supremely through Scripture. Christians through the generations have worked with Scripture and their faculties of reason to discern the mind of Christ, and the tradition of the Church ensures that this sense of the mind of Christ is passed on to each generation.

**281.** This approach is often attributed to Richard Hooker. ‘Rejecting the Genevan tendency to derive all from Scripture, he appealed to reason, Scripture and tradition as complementary authoritative guides in worship, belief and morals’.<sup>113</sup> As Hooker himself wrote:

... what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity with reason overrule all other inferior judgements whatsoever.<sup>114</sup>

**282.** For Hooker, Scripture is the key source of ethical authority. The Anglican tradition continues to emphasize the primacy of Scripture, but that is not to render reason or tradition negligible or dispensable. Whenever Scripture, or tradition, or reason is not accorded a proper place in the process of ethical reflection, something is wrong.

**283.** Scripture, tradition and reason each contribute complementary ways of knowing God, ways of understanding the significance of the church, and approaches to how we perceive the world around us, and each influences the way we work with the other two. This understanding means that there is more than one way in which Anglicans approach social ethics but that the distinctively Anglican contribution is the bringing together of a number of voices in dialogue. It is worth looking in a little more detail at Scripture, tradition and reason in Anglican social ethics.

## **Scripture**

**284.** Canon A 5 declares that:

The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.

**285.** The priority given to the Scriptures reflects the belief of the Church of England that they are the primary means given by God to enable us to know God and to obey God's will for our lives and thus be saved. This belief was classically expressed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in his 1547 homily 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture':

In these books we shall find the Father from whom, the Son by whom, and the Holy Ghost in whom, all things have their being and keeping up; and these three persons to be but one God, and one substance. In these books we may learn to know ourselves, how vile and miserable we be, and also to know God, how good he is of himself, and how he maketh us and all creatures partakers of his goodness. We may learn also in these books to know God's will and pleasure, as much as, for this present time, is convenient for us to know. And as the great clerk and godly preacher, St John Chrysostom saith, whatsoever is required to the salvation of man is fully contained.<sup>115</sup>

**286.** The way in which the Church of England is enjoined to use Scripture in Article VI (of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion) is

important in understanding how the Scriptures relate to conduct. Article VI says:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

The Articles of Religion were carefully drafted. Article VI does not say that everything that can be, or is claimed to be, proved from Scripture must be believed as an article of faith, nor does it say that things that cannot be proven from Scripture may not be believed. It leaves room for Anglicans to disagree about aspects of Scripture but makes Scripture the touchstone for the things necessary to salvation.

**287.** The Church of England has continued to make statements about the importance of Scripture which follow Cranmer. Thus the *Porvoo Common Statement* of 1993 agreed by Church of England, the other Anglican Churches of the British Isles and most of the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, declares that:

We accept the canonical scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments to be the sufficient, inspired and authoritative record and witness, prophetic and apostolic, to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. We read the Scriptures as part of public worship in the language of the people believing that in the Scriptures – as the Word of God and testifying to the gospel – eternal life is offered to all humanity, and that they contain everything necessary to salvation.<sup>116</sup>

**288.** As the *Windsor Report* puts it: 'Within Anglicanism, scripture has always been recognised as the Church's supreme authority, and as such ought to be seen as a focus and means of unity.'<sup>117</sup>

**289.** It follows that, when thinking how to respond to the changes in sexual ethics and practice that have taken place in our society, the Church of England must give highest regard to the teaching of the Scriptures. It further means that it would not be legitimate for the Church of England to require anything in terms of its belief and practice that was obviously contrary to the Scriptures.

## Tradition

**290.** The Montreal World Conference on Faith and Order, in its document *Scripture, Tradition and traditions*, speaks of (the) Tradition

as ‘the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation, in and by the Church, Christ Himself present in the life of the Church’.<sup>118</sup>

Tradition (capital T) is here contrasted with tradition (with a small t), which is the process whereby the Tradition is handed on, and ‘traditions’, that is to say the diversity of forms of expression of the Tradition to be found among the Churches, and which also denotes the different confessional traditions – Lutheran, Reformed and so on. The Montreal Statement also suggests that ‘we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel... testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit’. It further notes that ‘We can speak of the Christian Tradition... whose content is God’s revelation and self-giving in Christ, present in the life of the Church.’

**291.** The link between Tradition and revelation is an important part of the attention given to the question of authority in the Church in the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. (ARCIC). In the 1981 *Elucidation* to the 1976 Agreed Statement on Authority (ARCIC I), we read that Tradition can be understood both in terms of the exposition of the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Spirit, in order to ‘illuminate the faith according to the needs of each generation’, and the Spirit-filled contemplation of human experience and thought which will ‘give to the content of the revelation its fullest expression and widest application’. In both of these (complementary) understandings of Tradition, ‘the Church is seeking the fullness of revelation, and [t]he seal upon the truthfulness of the conclusions that result from this search will be the reception by the whole Church, since neither approach is immune from the possibility of error’.<sup>119</sup>

**292.** In its report, *The Nature of Christian Belief*, the House of Bishops of the Church of England pointed to the Montreal document and the ARCIC I material quoted above in seeking to address the question of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. The House also refers to the important document of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*. There we read of the ‘close connection and communication’ between ‘sacred tradition sacred Scripture’ which ‘form one sacred deposit of the word of God’.

**293.** *The Windsor Report* speaks of Scripture as ‘the Church’s supreme authority’. Tradition meanwhile ‘consists primarily of what the Scripture-reading Church has said’.<sup>120</sup> This would seem to agree with what we read in *Growing Together in Mission and Unity* where



we read that both Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that ‘the Tradition of the Gospel is alive in the Church, in continuity with the earliest Christian centuries when the apostolic witness, memory and interpretation took normative form in the canon of Scripture’.<sup>121</sup>

**294.** Considerable attention is given to the question of Tradition in the 2006 Anglican–Orthodox Agreed Statement, *The Church of the Triune God*. Here we read, ‘the life of the Spirit in the Church is the essence of Tradition (*paradosis*.) ... Revelation is Tradition and becomes Tradition within the Church. It is so precisely because it was transmitted in Christ and the Holy Spirit... The preservation of the truth in the midst of the diversity of the new life in the Spirit should not however be understood in a narrowly conservative way. Tradition is not a principle which strives to restore the past: it is not only a memory of words, but the constant abiding of the Spirit. It is a charismatic, not a historical, principle.’<sup>122</sup> The Report continues by indicating that ‘both Scripture and Tradition require interpretation if they are to be integrated into the faith and life of local churches’. It is important to distinguish, however, between the process whereby the Church constantly receives Scripture and Tradition into its life and worship (which is described as being ‘essentially open-ended’) and the processes whereby the Church assesses the orthodoxy of new doctrines.

**295.** As this brief survey of some of the documents shows, Anglicans understand Tradition to refer to the transmission through every age of God’s self-revelation (to which Scripture bears the normative witness). To return to the distinction made in the Montreal document, (the) Tradition cannot fail to reflect the mind of Christ, for it is ‘the Gospel itself’. On the other hand, as the Articles teach (see Articles XIX and XXI) the Church may err in matters of historical tradition.

## **Reason**

**296.** In Anglican theology reason is used in two senses. On the one hand it is used to refer to the human capacity for rational thought. The importance of reason in this sense is that the exercise of rational thought is required in order to understand and apply the teaching of the Scriptures. It is in this sense that Richard Hooker declares:

... the natural measure whereby to judge our doings, is the sentence of Reason, determining and setting down what is good to be done. Which sentence is either mandatory, shewing what must be done; or else permissive, declaring only what may be

done; or thirdly admonitory, opening what is the most convenient for us to do.<sup>123</sup>

**297.** Reason also refers to the moral awareness that human beings possess because of their creation in the image and likeness of God and the way that this awareness is expressed in the moral convictions of particular cultures. Taking reason seriously in this sense includes reflecting on how the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church form our moral consciousness.

**298.** The capacity for reason is, of course, one central characteristic of human beings. It has often been discussed as if reason is therefore a common and universal faculty which all hold in common. It is now more generally accepted that reason is, in the words of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, 'tradition constituted'.<sup>124</sup> That is, the way we reason, and what we understand to be reasonable, is formed by our development within the communities and social groupings we inhabit and is shaped by the traditions and narratives through which those communities make sense of the world around them.

**299.** It follows that reason cannot be applied to ethical problems as if it came from nowhere and brought no baggage with it. Reason is part and parcel of our moral formation and, for Christians, the ways in which we have been taught the Scriptures and the traditions of the church community (not only the formal traditions, but the stories and shared histories which bind the faithful community together) all help to shape what we mean by 'reason'.

**300.** In addition, human reason helps us to set the insights of Scripture and tradition alongside the expanded understanding of the universe and the human race that we are gaining all the time through the growth of scientific knowledge. But the claim that 'science' alone offers a 'reasonable' way of perceiving the world neglects the 'tradition constituted' nature of reason. This helps explain some of the difficulty we have had as a group in assessing the scientific evidence around matters of sexuality. An appeal to 'science' does not offer a kind of ethical trump card which overrules the teaching of Scripture or the understandings of the Church, although science, and reason itself, certainly contribute to the processes of ethical reflection.

## **Holding the strands together**

**301.** Putting Scripture, tradition and reason together in the Anglican way does not imply that each stands in isolation from the others as a way of making ethical judgements. Scripture remains the starting point and the primary source of authority for Christians, but no one reading of Scripture is thereby vindicated. We are to exercise reason in order to illuminate God's self-revelation to which Scripture bears primary witness, in order that it may be rendered the more deeply intelligible and received afresh in every generation. Tradition assists us to see how the Church, the community of faith, has read, received and understood the texts; thus it enables us to hear the Living Word speaking through the written word. Scripture, Tradition and Reason therefore need to sit alongside one another. Together, they serve the transmission of the one gospel of Jesus Christ from one age to the next and must be allowed to interrogate each other.

**302.** This is not a methodology which any one person can 'get right' on their own. The Anglican Church has developed an approach to ethics which is conciliar by nature. Since the bitter conflicts around its inception and in its formative times, it has sought to hold together rival traditions, theologies and priorities for the sake of the common good and in recognition that God's Kingdom is greater than any human system of belief. The three elements of Scripture, Tradition and Reason are emphasized differently by distinct traditions within the Church itself. The point is that an authentic Anglican approach to ethics needs to bring all three into dialogue, not just as strands of ethical reasoning but as living and vibrant traditions within the Church.

**303.** The argumentative nature of Anglicanism, especially on ethical issues, is therefore not to be wondered at. But the key to Anglican social ethics is that the parties remain open to dialogue with each other. Each requires the corrective influence of the others if it is to reflect the nature of God who is greater than all. The great majority of Anglicans recognize that all three strands have their place, and the fractious nature of Anglican debate may have less to do with claims to unique insight than the anxiety that one approach will be unjustly ignored by over emphasis on another.

**304.** The current travails within Anglicanism on the subject of sexuality can be understood in part as a fundamental struggle to allow Scripture, tradition and reason to take their proper place in the quest to

formulate a viable ethic. This is taking place in a Church which does not agree what the proper place of each of the three elements should be and in a wider culture where notions of sexuality and sexual behaviour are changing rapidly and are also hotly contested. The intractability and fractiousness of the issue calls for a process of listening attentively to all the perspectives which come together in Anglican ethical reflection. This listening ought to continue if the Church recognizes the authentic concerns of all its disputatious members.

**305.** Anglicans have not always sought the final resolution of issues where the process of conversation and dialogue does not result in easy consensus. An example is the question of war – there remains within Anglicanism a strong and well-developed pacifist position and another (traditionally more influential) which emphasizes theories of the just war. Both positions are presented as scriptural and reasonable and both have long histories within the life of the church. The dialogue continues. On many issues, there is scope for profound ethical disagreement between Anglicans. But when the different ethical stances represent people and traditions and not just theories, disagreement can call into question the very identity and belonging of the protagonists.

**306.** Anglican social ethics developed during the twentieth century into a fairly well-defined mode of enquiry. In the 1920s and '30s under the influence of Joseph Oldham, William Temple and others, it sought systematically to bring diverse disciplines and expertise together, valuing forms of knowledge that were not uniquely theological, debating at length, and seeking to offer guidance that trod a careful line between unwarranted specificity and bland vagueness. Listening to differing perspectives was, and remains, intrinsic to that approach.

**307.** Most of all, Anglican social ethics is characterized by listening to each other within the church. If one emphasis in theological ethics is allowed to dominate all others, the whole nature of Anglicanism, as a conciliar Church which holds together distinctive traditions, is lost.

**308.** The Anglican approach to social ethics is profoundly Christian in its refusal – in theory if not always in practice – to countenance premature foreclosure on matters where discerning the mind of the Church and the mind of Christ is elusive. In the flawed way of all institutions, that can be a counter-intuitive gift to a world fixated on immediacy, certainty and intolerance of difference.

# Scripture and theology

**309.** All the problems we identified around scriptural meanings and implications (Paragraphs 220–253, 284–289) are an object lesson in the limitations of textual scholarship when it comes to questions of practical ethics. But Christians do not simply read Scripture as an academic exercise. Reading the Bible is a spiritual as well as an intellectual endeavour, and most Christians do so in the context of prayer and in the expectation that the Holy Spirit is present to guide their understanding.

**310.** Where informed readings of Scripture drive Christians to contradictory ethical conclusions, scholarship alone cannot resolve the issue. Prayer accompanied by a deep commitment to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit – not only in the thoughts, words and lives of those with whom one agrees but in the contributions of those one believes to be wrong – is perhaps the only way in which brothers and sisters in Christ can discern what God is saying to our present context through his word.

**311.** We have listened to scholars who have studied these texts in depth. We are impressed by their diligence but have found, like many others, that whilst scholarship has deepened our knowledge it has not changed our individual beliefs about what God may require of lesbian and gay people or of his church. Whilst some of us are wholly convinced by one particular understanding of the meaning of Scripture on this subject, others are unconvinced or more committed to a different set of readings.

**312.** In the face of conflicting scholarship, as well as conflicting beliefs, we believe that the Church should be cautious about attempting to pronounce definitively on the implications of Scripture for homosexual people. We do agree that, as all Christians are called to faithfulness, exclusivity and life-long commitment in their sexual relationships, same sex relationships which do not seek to embody those aspects of vocation cannot be right. We learn from what previous

generations of the faithful have understood the Holy Spirit to be saying to the Churches, wait for the Spirit's guidance in our own generation, and commit ourselves to finding ways for the Church to continue to listen for his voice.

**313.** We find this approach to be strengthened by our encounters with Oliver O'Donovan and Timothy Radcliffe. We take very seriously Professor O'Donovan's insights about how much we do not yet know and the need for time to allow our understanding to deepen, even to the extent that this may take more than one generation. Given the rapidity with which the social context is changing, the time it takes to understand this and assess the moral implications, and the continuing divergence of views amongst prayerful Christians, we too seek a path of conduct 'which does not presume improperly upon knowledge we cannot have, but makes the most of the knowledge that is given us'.

**314.** We are keen to explore Professor O'Donovan's thinking about pastoral accommodation, recognizing that this is not offered as a moral compromise or as an attempt to pre-empt agreement on doctrinal matters. We believe that there is, sometimes, a pastoral imperative to offer acceptance, care and prayerful assistance into a situation which remains, to many, morally ambiguous.

**315.** Professor O'Donovan's reminder that we need constantly to search for the most plausible analogies to offer insights into things we do not yet fully understand recalled Fr Radcliffe's approach to questions of sexuality. This introduced us to some important theological insights, but we were also impressed by his willingness to accept that he remained unsure about some of the implications – notably, the significance of procreation in an understanding of sexual intercourse. It seems likely that respectful conversations about these questions will need to explore both the potential and the limitations of 'useful analogies' which will be drawn from theological, as well as other, sources.

**316.** So, from our engagement with theologians and biblical scholarship, most of us find the conciliar Anglican approach, through which different approaches to Scripture, tradition and reason can share insights and test each other's positions without forcing closure prematurely, to be reinforced. This is certainly not to imply that there is no ultimate truth, let alone that all views, opinions or practices are

equally acceptable. But it points us towards a focus on process rather than on meticulously drafted propositions, and we will develop this idea further in a later section (Paragraphs 352–368).

**317.** It is important, however, to note the minority view within our group which not only places Scripture as primary among the three strands of Anglican reasoning, with which we all agree, but makes a single view of Scripture both the first and final source of authority to which both tradition and reason must be subordinated. From this viewpoint, the meaning and implications of this single perspective on Scripture are both clear and unchanging and any attempt to read Scripture otherwise suggests that Scripture is being treated as an equal dialogue partner with other perspectives.

**318.** We have sought to accord full respect to that viewpoint as one which has an honourable and extensive history among Anglicans. It remains that the majority of our group is not persuaded either that the meaning and implications of Scripture are so clear and certain or that the Scriptures can be read quite so independently of the Church's traditions and of human reason. To make one reading of Scripture definitive in that way would, in effect, make one wing of the Anglican family the sole arbiter of Anglican ethics and bring an end to the conciliar approach which has for so long characterized Anglicanism.

**319.** This is why our most important conclusion is that the conciliar processes of Anglican ethics should be enabled to continue in a more structured and focused manner.

# Countering prejudice and homophobia

**320.** In Part 2 we discussed the vexed term ‘homophobia’ and its various usages. Despite our reservations about some of the ways the word is used, we have been acutely conscious throughout our deliberations that the hatred, prejudice and exclusions experienced by LGBT people continue and are utterly contrary to Christ’s command that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. In response to the question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Our Lord told a parable about a Samaritan who, in the context of the people to whom the parable was addressed, was a rejected and despised person.

**321.** Opposition to homophobia may seem a self-evident position but, because the Church’s approach to sexual ethics is not framed in terms which are identical to the predominant cultural viewpoint and are often misunderstood, it is important for the Church to make its stance absolutely explicit.

**322.** The ways in which the Church has conducted its own discussions on questions of sexuality have frequently failed to reflect this teaching. This is not to suggest that the Church must always adopt the language and values of secular society or accept uncritically the views and culture of any group on its own terms because it is a minority which has suffered the prejudices of a majority. As we have heard from respondents, there is a much richer debate around, for example, the nature of equality, than has been apparent in some of the recent arguments about LGBT issues.

**323.** But it remains that the way the Church has engaged in these debates has not always been sufficiently alert to how its interventions are likely to be heard by people whose experience of the world may be different or whose concerns have been shaped by the knowledge that their sexuality continues to expose them to prejudice, exclusion and violence. People have been more inclined to speak – and to speak about others – than to listen. Good listening is a prerequisite for being heard accurately.



**324.** The fact that people in the Church sometimes feel as if they too are a beleaguered minority, as religious voices of all kinds seem increasingly marginalized in social affairs, does not imply any equivalence in the debate about sexuality. Christians in England are not, qua Christians, subject to anything comparable to the treatment which many lesbian and gay people experience, or fear, in everyday social contexts. The long history of Christianity's dominant position in wider culture means that there is still a differential in terms of the power relationship.

**325.** How debate is conducted in England makes a difference to how Christians are perceived far beyond this country. Christianity has been historically dominant in our own culture but Christians are often in small, and sometimes beleaguered, minorities elsewhere. As members of the global Anglican Communion, we cannot fail to be aware that Anglican Christians in some countries have been subject to violence and intimidation because of others' perceptions about what Anglicans believe about homosexuality. It is important – and for some, a matter of life and death – that the Church and church people speak with great care and attentiveness to how their words will be received, not only in their own culture but in cultures where Christians are marginalized.

**326.** Achieving this, without resiling from sincerely held beliefs, is not easy. In a polarized and sometimes febrile debate, disagreement is sometimes assumed too quickly to be based on irrationality and prejudice. This is as true for the debate within the Church as for the Church's engagement with secular opinion.

**327.** The debate within the Church focuses on divine and human love. What does a loving creator God ask of his people? What does the love of Christ mean for fallen humanity? What does it mean to love selflessly in our human relationships and in the communities we inhabit? All sides in the debate have, at times, lost sight of that focus on love or allowed it to be obscured in the way we speak to one another. But it remains that, where that imperative of love is being faithfully and prayerfully pursued, it is inappropriate to apply the term 'homophobic' to the conclusions which may be drawn, even if they are interpreted by some as scandalous or offensive.

**328.** Because we believe that celibacy is an honourable estate to which some Christians, whether heterosexual or homosexual, believe

themselves to be called, we seek to affirm them in that vocation. Structures of advice and support for people called to celibacy are as appropriate a part of the Church's ministry as support for marriages. Neither Christians who experience same sex attraction and who seek support in living according to the teaching of the Church as they understand it, nor the organizations and individuals who offer that support, should be labelled 'homophobic'.

# Science, society and demographics

**329.** In Part 2, we considered the evidence about the scientific issues which lie behind the moral arguments on sexuality. We have only discussed a small amount of the material we have examined, but it became apparent that neither the medical nor the social sciences have arrived at any firm consensus that would impact decisively on the moral arguments.

**330.** This is not entirely surprising. Scientific insights into human sexuality are one way through which we perceive the works and purposes of God. But what is the case is not an automatic pointer to what ought to be the case. It may be one source of insight into what ought to be the case, without necessarily being determinative.

**331.** We have been committed as a group to taking the scientific evidence seriously and we commend this approach to the whole church. This approach is intrinsic to the Anglican tradition of social ethics. Despite assertions to the contrary from a minority of religious people and some of the so-called New Atheists, most people among both the scientific and Christian communities believe that science and religion are not in fundamental opposition to one another.

**332.** We should also be clear what scientific method entails. It is essentially an inductive process in which a hypothesis is tested against the accumulation of empirical evidence, a process repeated until it becomes possible to form a thesis. The movement from hypothesis to thesis is about seeking evidence that could falsify the hypothesis and, in that process, the hypothesis is either confirmed or modified. A thesis is always open to challenge from new evidence which may suggest that the picture is different, or more complex, than first believed.

**333.** Theology combines inductive and deductive methods. Some knowledge of God is derived from human experience, such as the cumulative experience of being loved or the ways in which patterns of worship lead us into the divine presence. But much of our knowledge of God is received through the traditions and Scriptures of the Church, in

encounter with our capacity for reason, and shapes the way we perceive and account for our experience rather than the other way around.

**334.** Although such a characterization is over-simplified, it helps us to see the shape of the Church's engagement with scientific method. The Church's teaching (on sexuality as on other matters) represents the wisdom of generations of Christians wrestling with Scripture, the Church's tradition and their own reasoning. But where that teaching contradicts Christians' experience of the world and of God's nature, a process of testing begins. Just as the inherited teaching of the Church represents the fruits of generations of such testing, so the struggles of today's Christians contribute to that process. But the teaching of the Church, like a thesis in scientific enquiry, stands until the evidence contradicting it is sufficient to change it. In the case of the Church, such evidence cannot be simply empirical. It emerges from an encounter with the Holy Spirit in the world and the world is understood through the story of God's activity within it.

**335.** The scientific evidence on sexuality is not unequivocal. We note that scientists – including those who are also Christians – can nonetheless find their scientific knowledge supporting different conclusions. But we believe that this uncertainty constitutes a call to the Church to continue exploring the scientific evidence with the greatest commitment.

**336.** Earlier, we considered some of the evidence concerning the attitudes of people in Britain towards homosexuality. We acknowledge that data from single opinion polls may lack robustness and that the way a question is framed can have a significant influence on the responses it elicits. We also know that interpreting opinion poll data must be done rigorously as it can be too easy to read into the figures rather more meaning than they can actually bear.

**337.** But with these caveats, the data from the opinion polls and other sources is impossible to ignore. In particular, it highlights the extraordinarily rapid rate at which social attitudes have changed, the growing difference in attitudes according to age (and to some extent gender) and the fact that differences of view on questions of sexuality are not simply a matter of secular opinion being at odds with Christian opinion but something which divides both Church and society.

**338.** The correlations between age and views on sexuality do not entail an inevitable trajectory of change. It is possible that an individual's views may change as they age. But the emerging picture is one of the Church, at least in its official teaching, being increasingly out of step with wider society.

**339.** In the long history of the Church we have, of course, been through similar times before. As we have seen, there is quite enough moral ambiguity in popular views of sexuality to challenge the idea that the direction of social change is always towards greater enlightenment and the greater good. But the gap between popular attitudes and church teaching is significant on two counts: for what it may say about how an incarnate God works in the world, and for its missiological implications.

**340.** We believe that God's grace is mediated, not solely through the institutional church, but by God's presence before us in the world and his continuing activity in the Holy Spirit which is not confined to working through Christians. Part of our calling as disciples is to seek out this prevenient grace of God and celebrate his works.

**341.** This is a very different matter from assuming that the wisdom of the age inevitably reflects the will of God. It may do, but where it does not accord with the current wisdom of Christ's Church, a long process of discernment, reflection and reception is necessary. As David Runcorn notes in Appendix 3, there is biblical warrant for such a process in the well-known 'Gamaliel principle' (Acts 5.38-39).<sup>125</sup>

**342.** The Anglican–Orthodox Agreed Statement of 2006, *The Church of the Triune God*, expresses this important point thus:

‘The Gospel appraises and transforms cultures. Christians are called to be critical of the culture in which they find themselves, and to modify them in the light of their faith in Jesus Christ. The Church takes culture seriously and yet also stands over against it. Her attitude towards cultures should be dialectical, one of approach and distance, of judgement and transformation.’<sup>126</sup>

**343.** Discerning on these terms whether something is of God cannot be an instant judgement. In human affairs of all kinds, short-term flourishing may be the precursor of long-term ills. Time may

demonstrate a congruence between God's will and cultural trends, but we submit that, given the rate of change in public opinion evidenced in the opinion polls which we considered earlier, it is too soon to enshrine such a judgement in the Church's doctrinal teaching, and we cannot be sure what the outcome will be when it is possible to make a confident judgement.

**344.** It is, equally, too soon to conclude that the Spirit cannot speak to us, in part, through the shifts in popular culture. We must keep in mind that divisions of opinion on this subject are at least as acute, if not more so, amongst English Anglicans as amongst the population at large.

**345.** Moreover, the Spirit speaks to us, not only in social trends but through real people's lives. We note once again the quality of love which we recognized in the lives of the people we met who were in same sex relationships – and in the lives of those who experienced same sex attraction but chose to live celibate lives. All human love falls short of God's ideal and we are not of one mind about the significance of the sexual relationship as a signifier of godly love. But it remains that the Church is called to listen for the voice of the Spirit in the relationships which people build as individuals as well as in the culture which they build as citizens.

**346.** Missiologically, it is clear that the shifts in popular opinion on sexuality constitute a challenge which the Church cannot ignore. We have been told by numerous respondents that younger people in particular find the Church's teaching on homosexuality a major stumbling block in the way of receiving the gospel message.

**347.** Mission is not about conforming to culture, although all missionaries through the centuries have sought to make the gospel message intelligible to the cultures to which they are reaching out. In this process of presenting the gospel in ways which cultures can hear, Christian mission has often been enabled to renew and refresh the life of the sending church in crucial ways.

**348.** The Church needs to think afresh how its traditional teaching on sexuality can commend itself to a culture which is increasingly relaxed about same sex relationships, or whether the teaching itself does not sufficiently represent the gospel imperative and must be refreshed by new insights.

**349.** We are living through a period of rapid social change to which the Church is seeking to respond theologically, missiologically and pastorally. At the level of declared doctrine, we are agreed that there is not sufficient consensus to change the church's teaching on human sexuality. Less formally, there is a debate at every level of the Church including among ordinary Christian people, and that debate needs more time to develop.

**350.** It may be that there is a majority of members of the Church of England ready to embrace a new attitude at a formal level. That is something that might in time be tested through a concerted process, nationally and in the dioceses, which might also reveal the depth of commitment with which people hold their different beliefs. Meanwhile, we uphold the church's official teaching whilst recognizing that it is important for alternative views to be explored openly as part of an ongoing process of discernment. As leaders in discerning the gospel message for our culture, it is right that those with teaching authority should be able to participate openly and honestly in that debate.

**351.** This brings us to our next tranche of recommendations. These follow from our reflections on the evidence and express the position which most of our group take on the traditional teaching of the church, and the missiological challenge we believe the Church faces today.

5. Homophobia – that is, hostility to homosexual people – is still as serious a matter as it was and the Church should repent for the homophobic attitudes it has sometimes failed to rebuke and should stand firmly against it whenever and wherever it is to be found.
6. No one should be accused of homophobia solely for articulating traditional Christian teaching on same sex relationships.
7. The Church should continue to pay close attention to the continuing, and as yet inconclusive, scientific work on same sex attraction.
8. Since *Issues in Human Sexuality* was published in 1991 attitudes to same sex attraction, both in English society generally and also among Christians in many parts of the world, have changed markedly. In particular, there is a great deal of evidence that, the younger people are, the more accepting of same sex attraction they are likely to be. That should not of itself determine the Church's teaching.
9. The Church should continue to listen to the varied views of people within and outside the Church, and should encourage a prayerful process of discernment to help determine the relationship of the gospel to the cultures of the times.
10. The Church of England needs to recognize that the way we have lived out our divisions on same sex relationships creates problems for effective mission and evangelism within our culture, and that such problems are shared by some other Churches and in some other parts of the Anglican Communion. The Church of England also needs to recognize that any change to the Church's stance in one province could have serious consequences for mission in some other provinces of the Communion.
11. Whilst abiding by the Church's traditional teaching on human sexuality, we encourage the Church to continue to engage openly and honestly and to reflect theologically on the circumstances in which we find ourselves to discern the mind of Christ and what the Spirit is saying to the Church now.
12. Through a period of debate and discernment in relation to the gospel message in our culture, it is right that all, including those with teaching authority in the Church, should be able to participate openly and honestly in that process.



# A process for listening to each other

**352.** We began our report with our conviction that the way forward for the Church should be through an intentional process of attentive listening between Christians whose understandings of Scripture and God's calling for the Church and the world differed widely.

**353.** We are drawn to this conclusion, partly through the experience of working with profound differences within our own group but also because we have been very cognizant of the patchy and often inadequate nature of the listening process that has taken place so far within the Church. What we are proposing now is a rather different approach to listening and real conversation.

**354.** Finding the right word for the kind of process we envisage is not easy. The listening process inaugurated at the 1998 Lambeth Conference was about members of the Church listening to the views and experiences of lesbian and gay people. Although that process may not have fully run its course, we are proposing something different. We propose a structured process so that members of the Church who hold radically different understandings of the implications of Scripture and Christian ethics for gay and lesbian Christians might listen to one another, whatever their own sexual orientation. With so much rancour and pain surrounding these differences over so many years, a first objective is to find ways to recognize that apparent antagonists are nevertheless sincere and prayerful Christians striving to live faithfully.

**355.** The kind of process we have in mind is not dissimilar to the 'Indaba' process adopted by the 2008 Lambeth Conference. We recognize that the word 'Indaba' is not universally felt to be helpful, and we are not committed to that word. However, a description of Indaba is nonetheless useful in indicating the kind of process we believe would be helpful to the Church.

**356.** The Anglican Communion Office offers the following reflection on Indaba, initiated by The Most Revd Thabo Makgoba, Archbishop of Cape Town and a member of the Lambeth Conference Design Group:

Indaba is a Zulu word for a gathering for purposeful discussion. It is both a process and a method of engagement as we listen to one another concerning challenges that face our community and by extension the Anglican Communion. An Indaba first and foremost acknowledges that there are issues that need to be addressed effectively to foster on going communal living. Originally, in the Zulu context, these might be stock theft, poor service delivery but in the case of the Anglican Communion it might be questions related to the way we handle the Bible, sexuality, post colonialism, autonomy concerns and the many missional challenges. It is these issues that need to be brought to the 'table'.

In Indaba, we must be aware of these challenges (issues) without immediately trying to resolve them one way or the other. We meet and converse, ensuring that everybody has a voice, and contributes (in our case, praying that it might be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) and that the issues at hand are fully defined and understood by all. The purpose of the discussion is to find out the deeper convergences that might hold people together in difference and come to a deeper understanding of the topic or issue discussed. This will be achieved by seeking to understand exactly the thinking behind position other than my own.

Cautions, Indaba works best when participants do not go into the discussion with a hidden agenda nor prior solution. When you bring the issues, others add with their own voice and a greater truth is revealed and in the process people grow, learn and understand not only the issue, but each other. For Indaba to work, Indaba on day 1, day 2, day 3, day 4, etc. must be seen as interrelated even if their themes differ. The whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. At the end of each Indaba session the discussion will be summarised seeking to honour each of the different voices that have been heard. These written summaries will help to shape the communications coming out of the Lambeth Conference.<sup>127</sup>

**357.** It is worth expanding a little on what the process we are recommending is and is not. It is not a set of discussion groups in which people seek to out-argue each other or to 'cover' a topic. It is, rather, a facilitated process of listening to each other so the journey can continue

in an atmosphere of respect for difference. It is about our relationships as fellow human beings and not, fundamentally, about an institutional agenda about (for example) church unity. Its purpose is relational, not institutional.

**358.** Nor is it a repetition of the call for people in the Church to listen to the experiences and perspectives of gay and lesbian people. Instead, it is about addressing the real differences of theology, scriptural reading, cultural assumptions and so on between members of the church, whatever their sexual orientation. It is about mutual listening across differences.

**359.** What the process is called is a secondary matter. In the absence of any particularly striking suggestions, we suggest the term ‘Facilitated Conversations’.

**360.** Such a process of facilitated conversation for the Church of England should be developed alongside, and in partnership with the Continuing Indaba process within the Anglican Communion. Given the significance of the way the debate among Anglicans is shaped by their ecclesiology and the church’s current teaching, a wider ecumenical process would need very careful planning but might yield important fruits of understanding and respect for differing views.

**361.** It cannot be stressed too firmly that a process of facilitated conversation, unsupported by a culture and practice of prayer, is unlikely to serve the Church well. Prayer must be the context in which the process is designed, facilitated and engaged with, by those responsible for implementing the idea and by all who participate in it. Listening to each other is one part of the encounter – listening to God is its necessary companion.

**362.** Such facilitated conversations would need to reflect the structures of the Church in which the parish, the deanery, the diocese and the national Church are each salient in different ways. We believe that dioceses would have a central role in promoting and shaping the process in ways that work with the grain of local contexts, but that a degree of national-level commitment from the House of Bishops would be needed to ensure that the Church as whole could benefit from the process.

**363.** We believe that prime responsibility for encouraging and setting up processes of facilitated conversation in every diocese must fall to the bishops. It will be for bishops to ensure that a process is established and pursued within their diocese and to bring the experience and findings back to the House or the College so that there can be reflection on the overall process within the Church of England.

**364.** Establishing a properly facilitated conversation in each diocese will need care. Some will press ahead more rapidly than others. Preparation will need time and detailed attention and will need a degree of national coordination (not, however, close and detailed central management) to support the diocese-by-diocese process.

**365.** Overall, we would expect it to take some two years for every diocese to reach the point of having completed such a process. There should be clear plans for evaluation and determining next steps.

**366.** Alongside facilitated conversations working through each diocese, the process of listening could be extended through encounters around the Communion. One suggested model (which would require considerable care in planning, but for potentially impressive effects) would be for small groups to visit countries where the context of lesbian and gay people is very different, where for example gay people's rights are not protected and where homophobic violence is more prevalent. Such visits would create opportunities for participants to hear firsthand accounts from those countries and also to explore how decisions made in other parts of the Communion can rebound on Anglicans elsewhere.

**367.** The effectiveness of such visits would not only be seen in the interaction with local Anglicans but in the interaction between members of the groups itself. This suggests that groups should be small enough to enable real reflection and mutual encounter to take place – probably no larger than twelve.

**368.** The companion links between some English dioceses and relevant countries elsewhere in the Communion could be useful vehicles for setting up such visits.

# The Church's practice

**369.** So far, we have mainly considered the Church's doctrines and teachings on sexuality. The members of the group approach those questions through different traditions and with different emphases. There are those within the group who, after extensive listening and theological reflection, would wish to see a change in the church's teaching in due course. There are others who, though supportive of change, are not yet convinced that the evidence received gives sufficient warrant to advocate a change in the Church's position.

**370.** We recognize that there is widespread experience of homosexual people not being accepted and welcomed into church unconditionally. We are united in the conviction that as Churches, of whatever theological perspective on the matter of sexuality, real repentance is called for to demonstrate the unconditional acceptance and love of God in Christ for all people.

**371.** We noted earlier in the report (Paragraph 105) that *Issues in Human Sexuality* distinguished, within the Church's discipline, between the clergy and lay Christians in that, whilst the good conscience of lay people who chose to enter a sexually active same sex relationship should be respected, the clergy, in the words of *Issues*, cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships. In the section which follows, we are concerned particularly with the pastoral care of faithful Christians who seek ecclesial recognition for their same sex relationship.

## **Celebrating permanent and faithful partnerships**

**372.** We note that many people within the Church do not believe that *Issues in Human Sexuality* gave a sufficient or adequate theological rationale for distinguishing lay and clerical vocations to relationship in this way, and they do not believe that the Church of England's present rules that impose different disciplines on clergy and laity in relation to sexually active same sex relationships can be sustained in the long term.

**373.** However, we are clear that it is entirely legitimate for the Church to require higher standards of conduct from its clergy than for the laity (and, indeed, higher standards from its bishops than from the clergy) in various aspects of life. The facilitated conversations which we propose should explore the extent to which different disciplines on sexual conduct should be required of bishops, clergy and laity.

**374.** Since *Issues in Human Sexuality* appeared, the political and cultural context has changed immensely. The introduction of civil partnerships (and the first same sex marriages in prospect) means that the legal and social frameworks surrounding same sex relationships have been formalized in important ways.

**375.** When the legislation concerning civil partnerships was debated in the House of Lords, the majority of the bishops who voted on the issue took a positive line, even though views on civil partnerships were divided in the Church more generally.<sup>128</sup> And in the Church's response to the Government's consultation on same sex marriage, the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council welcomed civil partnerships for their emphasis on fidelity and commitment and for their role in giving important legal rights to committed same sex couples.

**376.** Opposition to same sex marriage has largely focused on the detriment to the social understanding of marriage which may follow from conflating heterosexual and same sex relationships within a single legal and social institution. Nevertheless, as same sex marriage will become a legal reality in a matter of months rather than years, the Church will have to think through its pastoral and institutional response to same sex couples who marry. Even assuming that civil partnerships continue as a legal option, their incidence is likely to decrease sharply. Some gay and lesbian Christians may choose to remain in, or enter, civil partnerships, but many are likely to marry.

**377.** What, then, should the Church of England be prepared to do to support those who enter into civil partnerships or, in future, same sex marriages? The House of Bishops will, no doubt, want to issue a pastoral statement or letter of some kind before the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act comes into force and, in that, will need to address the immediate questions that will arise.

**378.** If, as we recommend, the publication of this report leads to a period of consultation and reflection, there is a good case for that letter or statement being of an explicitly provisional nature while the Church of England engages in the process of attentive listening and facilitated conversation which we recommend. Some degree of provisionality may also be sensible given the uncertainties now created over the future of civil partnerships, on which the Government is expected to launch a consultation in the autumn of 2013.

**379.** We do not, therefore, intend to address here all the specific issues that the House of Bishops will need to deal with in light of the changing legislative scene. We do, however, want to encourage some further thought on what clergy should do when approached by parishioners or members of their congregations who are about to enter into a civil partnership or same sex marriage and would like some public recognition of, and prayer for, their new situation.

**380.** So far the Church has resisted calls to celebrate civil partnerships in any formal or liturgical way. Objections often cited include the difficulty of knowing whether a couple adhere to the Church's teaching on sexual activity within the relationship without imposing intrusive or distasteful questioning, the fear that recognition of celibate civil partnerships will constitute the thin end of a wedge and open the way to celebrating formally sexually active relationships, and the fact that any formal liturgy, in itself, would be taken to constitute a revision of the Church's moral and doctrinal teaching.

**381.** Against those views, many argue that, if the Church is prepared to view civil partnerships as embodying important virtues, failure to celebrate them publicly is inconsistent. A civil partnership is intended to be grounded on the virtues of fidelity and mutual support and comfort, seeking to embody particular goods which the Church champions against the depredations of an increasingly individualistic, consumer-oriented culture in which fidelity and mutuality are under strong cultural challenge. As the Church's response to the same sex marriage consultation said, we believe that same sex relationships can embody some important virtues, and clearly a civil partnership is one way of demonstrating public commitment to those virtues.

**382.** Anxiety about opening the way to celebrating relationships that do not conform to the church's teaching penalizes those gay and lesbian

Christians who steadfastly seek to live by that teaching in enduring and faithful relationships. And, in any event, the House of Bishops acknowledged, as long ago as 1991 in *Issues in Human Sexuality*, that gay and lesbian lay Christians might in good conscience decide to enter into sexually faithful monogamous relationships. Moreover, some form of celebration of civil partnerships in a church context is widely seen as a practice that would give a clear signal that gay and lesbian people are welcome in church.

**383.** This is a question on which our group is not of one mind – not least since a willingness to offer public recognition and prayer for a committed same sex relationship in an act of public worship would, in practice, be hard to implement now for civil partnerships without also doing so for same sex marriage (which, like civil partnerships, makes no assumption, in law, about sexual activity).

**384.** We all recognize, however, that a formal liturgy, episcopally and Synodically approved, for the celebration of civil partnerships (and the more so for same sex marriage) would have important doctrinal implications, since the doctrines of the Church of England are, in part, expressed through its liturgy. So, although some of our members would like to see such an approved liturgy, we recognize that this would, as it were, put the cart before the horse. Unless the Church of England agrees to some modification of its current teaching on committed, permanent and faithful relationships between two men or two women, it cannot prescribe a liturgy to celebrate them.

**385.** There is also, for some, a concern about the connotations of formally blessing a civil partnership or same sex marriage. To say that the Church blesses an institution which, for many Christians is morally ambiguous would be, for some, to foreclose prematurely on the moral and doctrinal position of the Church.

**386.** Nevertheless, there is significant and growing pressure for the Church to reconsider what affirmative ministry it is able to offer to faithful same sex relationships. In the House of Lords debate on same sex marriage, the Archbishop of York commented that the Church needed to think through the anomalies in a situation where it is willing to bless a tree or a sheep but not a faithful human relationship.<sup>129</sup> The pastoral and missiological pressure to find ways of communicating good news to people in same sex relationships is becoming acute,



although all of us recognize that sharing the good news is not always the same as meeting a demand within the Church.

**387.** So whilst we are cognisant of the objections to the liturgical celebration of committed same sex relationships, whether civil partnerships or in future same sex marriage, and not all our group would support any step in that direction, some of us believe there is scope to consider less formal approaches to recognizing and praying for same sex couples after they have registered a civil partnership or entered into a same sex marriage. This would be consistent with the statement in the 2005 Pastoral Statement that, ‘Where clergy are approached by people asking for prayer in relation to entering into a civil partnership they should respond pastorally and sensitively in the light of the circumstances of each case.’

**388.** A pastoral response of this sort would not require all clergy or all parishes to adopt the same practices or require the teaching of the Church to be modified. It would be recognized as, in Oliver O’Donovan’s expression, a pastoral accommodation, addressing a pressing pastoral need without entailing a final moral judgement.

**389.** In this respect, a decision by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 2013 (albeit on the issue of clergy in same sex relationships rather than of public acts of worship) may offer a precedent. The Kirk faced divisions very close to our own between those who sought to uphold the Church’s traditional teaching by completely debarring such appointments and others who sought a change to the Kirk’s teaching on the subject.

**390.** The Assembly, however, strongly supported a third approach which re-affirmed the Kirk’s traditional teaching on sexuality but left scope for congregations with conscientious objections to that teaching to appoint ministers in civil partnerships provided an appropriate process of consultation had been held. Although this decision has still to be ratified by the Presbyteries, it was widely felt to have prevented a disastrous schism.

**391.** The issue of offering some form of service in church following a civil partnership or same sex marriage is slightly different, but the divisions within the Church of England are very similar. Those of our group who wish to see a change in the Church’s practice in this regard

have already accepted that the Church's official teaching on sexuality stands unless and until a new process of facilitated conversations allows a consensus for change to form. Meanwhile, however, we believe that parishes and clergy, who conscientiously believe that celebrating faithful same sex relationships would be pastorally and missiologically the right thing to do, should be supported in doing so.

**392.** Clearly, clergy should not, in such matters, act unilaterally without the support of their PCC, nor should PCCs or others be able to compel a priest to conduct such a service. Consultation and agreement between clergy and PCC on the policy would be essential, although the decision whether to conduct such a service in individual cases should be for the priest alone.

**393.** For the reasons already expressed, we do not believe that a service, authorized nationally or at diocesan level, would be the right way forward for such a celebration at this time. Such a service should not be capable of being mistaken for the marriage service. It may be that the House of Bishops should issue guidelines to assist in keeping such boundaries clear.

**394.** We are aware that some would wish to go a step further and enable Church of England churches to be the place where civil partnerships could be registered. Since 2011, it has been possible in principle for places of worship to be used for the registering of civil partnerships though they must first go through the process of becoming 'approved premises', the registration has to be conducted by the civil registrar (rather than by a minister of religion) and, in the case of the Church of England and some other national denominations, no churches may become approved premises until or unless the relevant national body has cleared the way by giving general policy consent.

**395.** In the case of the Church of England, the relevant national body is the General Synod. It has yet to consider the issue, although we understand that a private member's motion on the subject is due for debate, probably in 2014.

**396.** In the meantime, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act has secured royal assent and created a new context. It will not be possible for same sex marriages to be solemnized in Church of England churches or by Church of England clergy. If ever the Church of England were to

change its teaching on same sex marriage, the Synod would need to legislate by way of measure and amending canon before its buildings or clergy could be involved in solemnizing same sex marriage.

**397.** Against that background, we have decided not to offer a view on whether the Synod should give its consent for Church of England churches to become approved premises so that civil registrars can register civil partnerships in them. Such a step would clearly be of some practical advantage if the registration were immediately to be followed by a service of prayer and thanksgiving, since both events could happen, seamlessly, at the same location.

**398.** As against that, there are some issues of perception, and potentially scope for confusion, in conflating what is an entirely civil, legal action with an act of worship.

**399.** Given the fast-changing legal context, we believe that there are some difficult judgements here which are for others to take. The recommendation that the majority of us make for an act of worship to mark the formation of a same sex relationship is not dependent on a formal legal registration taking place in church.

### **Questions to candidates for ministry**

**400.** Another area of the church's current practice which has come under scrutiny is the questioning of those who offer themselves for authorized ministry as to their sexual history and conduct. The guidelines for such questions are set out below. There have been reports that some candidates with homosexual orientation are subjected to intrusive questioning, that such candidates are unfairly treated since heterosexual candidates seem less likely to be asked about their attitudes towards the Church's teaching on sexual relationships, and that candidates may feel under pressure to give misleading or prevaricating answers.

**401.** In the Ordinal, those to be ordained priest are asked, 'Will you endeavour to fashion your life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people?' The candidate responds, 'With the help of God, I will.' These promises are made in the most solemn and holy context.

**402.** The controversies concerning homosexuality and ministry have put additional pressure on Diocesan Directors of Ordinands (DDOs) to ensure that a candidate with homosexual orientation is not likely to be a source of scandal. This may, at times, have led some DDOs to question such candidates in ways which breach a reasonable boundary between proper concern and intrusiveness. Our evidence for this is mainly anecdotal but appears sufficiently widespread to suggest a need for clearer guidance for DDOs and others involved in the selection of candidates.

**403.** It is also clear that the questions asked of candidates, and the style of questioning, vary considerably between dioceses. This inconsistency makes it difficult for candidates to know what to expect and creates the potential for serious injustice. More helpful guidelines for DDOs are needed to set consistent standards of practice.

**404.** The questions asked of candidates for ministry should reflect the agreed teaching of the House of Bishops. But evaluating someone as suitable for ministry is always more than a matter of correct answers to a set of questions. The Church's selection processes are, rightly, structured around a relationship between the candidate and those responsible for their selection, but this in itself gives scope for considerable variance in practice and questioning between dioceses.

**405.** The existing advice is to be found in Section 2 of the DDO *Handbook Before the Bishops' Advisory Panel* at Paragraph 15:

**15 Sexual orientation, civil partnerships, marriage breakdown and divorce**

There are occasions when a candidate's personal life, such as their sexual orientation, civil partnerships, marriage breakdown or divorce, reflect sensitive issues in the life of the Church and which are a matter of current debate. The House of Bishops' statement *Issues in Human Sexuality* (GS Misc 382, 1991) embodies the criteria which the House would wish to apply to ordinands and makes clear that all Christians are called to chastity and fidelity and to respect the will of the Church on matters of sexual morality (see Criterion E (Relationships)). This requirement is even clearer for ministers since they are called not only to live the Gospel but also be acceptable and accessible as

pastors. In relation to the specific issue of homosexuality this means that: ‘clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships’ (*Issues in Human Sexuality* Paragraph 5.17).

The House of Bishops’ Statement does not claim to be the last word on the subject but it was commended by Synod for discussion and response by the Church. Nevertheless, it expresses the theological standpoint and pastoral practice of the House of Bishops and reflects the position on human sexuality of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion as a whole as stated in the General Synod motion of November 1987 and Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (GS Misc 722, 2003) is a guide to the current debate on matters of human sexuality that complements rather than replaces *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

Candidates for ordination who are in civil partnerships or who are intending to enter into them will be expected to give assurances that their lives are in accordance with the teaching outlined in *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

**406.** Paragraph 21 of the statement notes that:

... it would be inconsistent with the teaching of the Church for the public character of the commitment expressed in a civil partnership to be regarded as of no consequence in relation to someone in – or seeking to enter – the ordained ministry. Partnerships will be widely seen as being predominantly between gay and lesbian people in sexually active relationships. Members of the clergy and candidates for ordination who decide to enter into partnerships must therefore expect to be asked for assurances that their relationship will be consistent with the teaching set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

For candidates in civil partnerships, the Sponsoring papers should indicate that this issue has been addressed with the candidate, that he/she is aware of the House of Bishops’ Guidelines and has agreed to live within them, and that the candidate’s specific situation has been discussed with the sponsoring Bishop and he is fully content to sponsor the candidate.

Bishops' Advisers would expect the DDO and Sponsoring Bishop to have explored fully matters to do with sexuality with all candidates before going to a Bishops' Advisory Panel. Were any fresh evidence to emerge at the Panel the Bishops' Advisers would be asked to assess the candidate against the rest of the criteria and return a 'No Decision' verdict to the Sponsoring Bishop for his final decision.

**407.** DDOs have to state in their Sponsoring Papers for candidate under Criterion E (relationships) that they have discussed *Issues in Human Sexuality* with the candidate and that he/she is content to live within the guidelines.

**408.** It will be noted that the guidelines do not refer only to questions of same sex activity. The focus is on the Church's teaching about sexual activity for heterosexual and homosexual candidates for ministry. As noted in Section 2.1, that teaching is increasingly in tension with the prevailing culture's approach to all sexual relationships.

**409.** Those of us in the group are agreed that a vocation to ordained ministry involves the willingness to live in an exemplary fashion, striving to embody Christian morality and the teaching of the Church. We recognize that clergy, like others, will sometimes fall short of this ideal, but the point is that such failures are understood to be shortcomings and not regarded as irrelevant to the exercise of Christian ministry. What is demanded of candidates for ministry is not a promise that they will never fall short but an indication that they understand the implications of the Church's teaching for their lives and will strive to exemplify it.

**410.** Just as, in the words of the guidelines, 'clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships', so clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into pre- or extra-marital sexual relationships, however 'normal' or trivial such relationships may be to the surrounding culture.

**411.** We therefore believe that all candidates for ministry should be treated in the same way regarding their sexual conduct: that is, they should be reminded that they are called to chastity and fidelity in their relationships and to order their lives according to the will of the Church

on matters of sexual conduct, and they should be asked to give an assurance that they will seek to live by that standard.

**412.** As the 2005 Pastoral Statement from the House of Bishops acknowledges that clergy are fully entitled to argue for a change to the Church of England's teaching on human sexuality, it would not be appropriate for candidates to be questioned in ways which imply that they may not so argue in the course of their ministries.

**413.** All ordinands are asked the same question in the course of the ordination service concerning the ordering of their lives and households. The question implies a common standard for all. We therefore believe that care should be taken to ensure that questions do not require a homosexual candidate to go into more intimate detail about their life than would be required of a heterosexual candidate.

**414.** This brings us to our final recommendations, focusing on the pastoral response which the majority of our group believe the Church of England should make as a result of the missiological challenges we identified earlier.

13. The Church needs to find ways of honouring and affirming those Christians who experience same sex attraction who, conscious of the Church's teaching, have embraced a chaste and single lifestyle, and also those who in good conscience have entered partnerships with a firm intention of life-long fidelity.
14. The whole Church is called to real repentance for the lack of welcome and acceptance extended to homosexual people in the past, and to demonstrate the unconditional acceptance and love of God in Christ for all people.
15. The Church's present rules impose a different discipline on clergy and laity in relation to sexually active same sex relationships. In the facilitated conversations it will be important to reflect on the extent to which the laity and clergy should continue to observe such different disciplines.
16. We believe that there can be circumstances where a priest, with the agreement of the relevant PCC, should be free to mark the formation of a permanent same sex relationship in a public service but should be under no obligation to do so. Some of us do not believe that this can be extended to same sex marriage.
17. While the Church abides by its traditional teaching such public services would be of the nature of a pastoral accommodation and so the Church of England should not authorize a formal liturgy for use for this purpose. The House of Bishops should consider whether guidance should be issued.
18. Whether someone is married, single or in a civil partnership should have no bearing on the nature of the assurances sought from them that they intend to order their lives consistently with the teaching of the Church on sexual conduct. Intrusive questioning should be avoided.



# A Dissenting Statement by the Bishop of Birkenhead

**415.** It is with much regret that I have concluded that I cannot sign the report of the House of Bishops' Working Group on Human Sexuality ('the Report'). I offer this dissenting statement to set out another vision and explain why. Those who have been part of the Working Group on Human Sexuality have gone out of their way to listen to my views. They have sought to produce a report that, in their view, goes as far as possible to meet those concerns. I am supportive of many of the Report's recommendations and share many of the concerns driving the Report as we wrestle with being faithful to Christ in our changing culture. For the sake of the peace and unity of the Church I would have loved to have put my name to a unanimous report. I have no desire to see issues of human sexuality distracting us from proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. However, after much prayer and soul searching, I have concluded I cannot sign.

**416.** Why have I reached this conclusion? For a number of reasons which I try to set out in more detail in this statement:

- I believe Scripture and Christian tradition offer a clearer and better vision from God for the world in his gift of our sexuality as men and women and that this is sufficient for directing the Church at this critical time of major cultural change. In particular, I am not persuaded that the biblical witness on same sex sexual behaviour is unclear.
- I believe the trajectory in the Report will undermine the discipleship and pastoral care of many faithful Christians and, by leading the Church into the kind of cultural captivity which much of the prophetic writings warn against, weaken our commitment to God's mission.
- I believe in the unity of Christ's Church and think the Report has not heeded the view of General Synod expressed in February 2007 that 'efforts to prevent the diversity of opinion about human sexuality creating further division and impaired fellowship within the Church of England and the

Anglican Communion... would not be advanced by doing anything that could be perceived as the Church of England qualifying its commitment to the entirety of the relevant Lambeth Conference Resolutions (1978: 10; 1988: 64; 1998: 1.10).<sup>130</sup>

**417.** Although this lack of agreement is painful for me and all of us who have been part of the Working Group, no one who has listened, as we have, to so many, can fail to be unaware of the pain of many in the whole Church. I think a unanimous report with my colleagues would suggest that the differences between us do not continue to be deep and real. By submitting a dissenting statement in this way, I pray the House and College of Bishops will continue to be able to bear the pain of the Church in our own life together, and continue to seek and trust God for his better way.

### **The mystery of human sexuality**

**418.** It is important to begin by stressing there is much in the Report's analysis and recommendations with which I agree and hope the Church will accept. I want to make clear at the outset that I am in agreement with Recommendations 5 –7 and absolutely committed to challenging prejudice against or exclusion of those we may perceive as being 'different' from ourselves, whatever form of difference that may take. We are talking about friends and family and the body of Christ. This raises the issue of the many kinds of sexual 'difference' now encountered among us in our society and how we speak about that difference. Over the last eighteen months the Working Group has heard from those who are committed, with passion and conviction, to wanting the Church to revise her teaching and some who were actively campaigning for that change. There was also passionate argument, including argument from those with bisexual and same sex attractions, that the traditional teaching of the Church should remain unchanged. Whilst there were encouraging accounts of affirmation and acceptance by church communities on all sides of this debate, many had more painful stories to tell, stories of shame, ignorance and exclusion. The need to repent of our readiness to exclude, judge and patronize those who are different from ourselves, whatever those differences may be, has become even clearer to me. This is a challenge that faces all of us involved in this conversation because, sadly, prejudice and intolerance sometimes have a strange tendency to flourish among those who were once their victims.

**419.** We need as a Church to recognize that this isn't only about 'homophobia'. I strongly agree with the recognition in Paragraph 181 that 'Human sexuality is not simply and irreducibly binary'. The challenge to radical inclusion and acceptance must extend well beyond the categories of what once we called 'homosexuality'. We live today in a pluralistic sexual culture that explores and celebrates a kaleidoscopic range of sexual interests and practices. With evidence that more women may identify as 'bisexual' than 'lesbian' we need as a Church to recognize that this is not simply a matter of learning more about 'homosexuality'.<sup>131</sup> The term 'homosexual' gave way some time ago to 'LGBT' (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered) and is already being supplemented by 'Q' (Questioning/Queer), 'P' (Post-label) and 'A' (Asexual).<sup>132</sup> This coalition of sexual minorities has banded together to resist and repudiate the stigma and prejudice of the past. One positive development of this has been the challenge to the Church to respond with a renewed conviction that the love of God is extended to all, whatever their lifestyle, interests or patterns of relationship.

**420.** I also agree that we need to be clear about what can be learned from the social and biological sciences and must examine the question of the relation between the findings of science and the Church's traditional teaching and reading of Scripture (Paragraphs 193–219 and 329–335). My understanding is that, in recent years, attempts to discern the causes of different sexual interests have moved well beyond the false polarities of 'nature' versus 'choice' which still sadly shape much popular discussion. I believe that these recent insights need to be integrated into our conversations on these matters. The magnetic draw of sexual desire, whether towards people of the opposite sex, same sex or both, is rarely 'chosen' in any straightforward or simple way.

**421.** Human desire is experienced from deep within the self and sexual desire is clearly a complex phenomenon shaped by a mysterious interplay of genetic disposition, environmental events and unconscious habits formed from previous behaviours and choices. We should not be surprised, therefore, when we meet some people who tell us they have experienced same sex attraction from their earliest memories of sexual awakening, others who describe more recent developments in adulthood, and still others for whom their experiences are more flexible and 'fluid'. Whilst the evidence seems to suggest that the overall genetic contribution to same sex desire is relatively weak, there may be significant variation between individuals and we still have much to learn.<sup>133</sup>

**422.** In evaluating claims about genetic or other biological contributions to our different experiences of desire and attraction, the field of modern genomics (not least in the fascinating new field of epigenetics) suggests that there is complex gene-to-environmental interaction at play in a wide range of personality characteristics and human behaviour. Although a great deal remains uncertain and contested, it is thus possible that genetic factors contribute to characteristics such as empathy and humility.<sup>134</sup> This poses questions about the limits of human responsibility in relation to a whole range of personality characteristics and not just the nature of one's sexual interests. For example, personality characteristics that dispose toward promiscuity or unfaithfulness may well be shown to be linked, at some level, to background genetic and environmental factors.

**423.** Whatever the background factors, however, what we do in response to our desires and attractions is something for which we are all responsible. The scientific questions do not remove or negate the ethical claims of the gospel. Radical inclusion is followed by the call to radical holiness. The gospel often calls us to challenge the 'desires of the heart' and it seeks to discipline our responses around a pattern of life that expresses obedient love for God.

### **'Loving to the end' (John 13.1): Gospel love, inclusion, transformation and obedience**

**424.** Jesus never discriminated among those who could be invited to the gospel banquet of grace, forgiveness and renewal. For Jesus, there was no difference between the person caught in behaviour that was sexually immoral and those who misused property and wealth, exploited relationships or wielded unjust power. He could be found eating and drinking with those at the very margins of culture. The call to 'repent and believe' was applied equally. Indeed, it is the ultimate 'inclusion' of the Christian gospel. The spirit of self-righteousness, discrimination and ignorance that has sometimes characterized the Church's approach to issues of human sexuality in the past is a violation of the Spirit of Christ and of the Christian gospel.

**425.** But the gospel never leaves us where we are or without direction for life in Christ or without power to be transformed. We need to be clear that although God's love meets and accepts us as we are, offering forgiveness and redemption in Christ, the inclusive call of the gospel is to radical discipleship and obedience. Whatever our life experience,

therefore, we are summoned to a new life, a life of love for God that is no longer ‘conformed to the world’ but characterized by the pursuit of holiness as the image-bearing children of God. This means that for the Christian, whether ‘straight’, ‘bisexual’ or ‘gay’, our identity can never be rooted in the pattern of our sexual interests and the identity categories that have evolved in the last few decades. As one theologian puts it:

...those of us who have been baptized into Christ can own no identity except ‘Christian’. Biblical discipleship is not trying to conform oneself to a ‘straight’ identity, anymore than it is trying to conform oneself to a ‘gay identity; it is being conformed to Christ’.<sup>135</sup>

**426.** In Paragraph 327 the Report rightly says ‘the debate within the Church [about human sexuality] focuses on divine and human love. What does a loving creator God ask of his people? What does the love of Christ mean for fallen humanity?’ These are the right questions to ask, but I do not think the Report gives an adequate answer to them. Before turning to some of the specific details and critiques of the Report I wish to offer an alternative theological and pastoral perspective.

**427.** One of the crucial lessons we are learning through our conversations on sexuality is that this is not simply abstract theological debate or argument about biblical texts but about real human lives with poignant stories all around us which we need to hear. The story of one couple known to me is Greg and Margaret: during his teenage years Greg’s first sexual stirrings were focused strongly on another young man. He said he developed a love with all the passion and drama that comes with adolescence. But that magnetic pull of love and affection conflicted deeply with Greg’s faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. After a time of crisis in that friendship, Greg began to find that women were included in his attraction, and much later he met Margaret. They were married and had two children, Rob and Jenny.

**428.** Jesus said ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit’ (John 12.24). Greg sought to apply this to his attraction to his friend, and through many ups and downs there was a death and fruit. Greg’s prayer to Jesus became and remained thankful for his words, without which he wouldn’t have known love for Margaret; and Rob and Jenny wouldn’t have been born. The question is ‘Can Jesus rightly ask us to let our sexual attractions and interests be part of the wheat that dies?’ Even if

the story does not end like this but with a life of singleness? John 12.24 is followed by John 13.1: 'Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.' This means quite simply his death (no one has greater love than this, John 15.12), his willingness to be that grain of wheat himself; what he offers of himself, he asks of us, every part of us, including our attractions and desires.

**429.** Jesus teaches that love and obedience go together in the gift of God and the gospel. Loving as he loved means keeping his commandments (John 14.15). The structures of sexual relationships given by God in creation and re-affirmed in the law and the gospel are given because of love, love for us and for all life which will come into the world because of such love. Whatever our attractions, the key is whether we have heard and responded to Jesus' words to receive eternal life. Such life comes from receiving his washing, receiving him and doing what he says: 'Abide in me as I abide in you' (John 15.4). There will be pruning and much fruit. Greg's story witnesses to this, and not just because of Margaret, Rob and Jenny, but because, he says, in learning that Jesus' words applied to sexual attraction he learned they applied to everything else in life too.

**430.** In today's culture, it is not easy to insist on self-denial. We have been seduced (as the Prologue to the Report explores) by popular philosophies spinning the illusion that the uninhibited expression of our desires ('being who you are') is the key to human flourishing. It is claimed that for healthy psychological development a commitment to sexual abstinence is neither possible nor desirable. But the Christian gospel insists that we are fallen creatures, the 'devices and desires' of our hearts having been deeply corroded and corrupted by sin. Christian discipleship, in all areas of life, whether same sex desire, 'heterosexual' desire, or other non-sexual desires, is always a call to radical submission, discipline and re-ordering of our errant desires in the way of Christ. This, I believe, is the key to human flourishing according to the gospel.

**431.** It has always been difficult for human beings to grasp the gospel principle that less equals more; that the denial of self could possibly result in life abundant. But that is what is at stake here, life in all its fullness for ourselves and for future generations. 'We love because he first loved us.'<sup>136</sup>

## **Following Jesus faithfully in the present time and culture**

### **'If a trumpet does not sound a clear call': The Report's lack of clarity**

**432.** So what does it mean to follow Jesus today and how does the Report contribute to that call? I hope to show what I believe are intellectual and theological problems within the Report which, however well-intentioned, will make the cost of discipleship more difficult to know. It is important to recognize that this question of faithful discipleship is a distinct question from that of what our society should legislate in a particular area. It has long been recognized that the Church may in some circumstances accept certain changes in the law, and even acknowledge some positives (such as harm reduction) in them, while maintaining a clear and distinct witness in the Church's teaching and discipline to a higher calling for those who accept Christ as Saviour and Lord. Archbishop Justin has referred to a 'revolution' in relation to society's view of sexuality which is now reflected in the current law on marriage. Does the Report help us in the pastoral and missional challenges we face in explaining to the Church and wider society what it means to follow Jesus? With much regret I believe it does not do so and may even prevent the Church speaking clearly, faithfully and prophetically into the cultural debates about human sexuality. A question that has haunted me is whether Greg would have been helped by the Report to know what following Jesus meant, and my conclusion is that he would not. He would not have been encouraged to 'die' and consequently there would have been no new life, no marriage to Margaret and no birth of their children. If we do not sound a clear call there will be negative personal and pastoral consequences in people's lives.

**433.** In reading the Report two key questions for me are:

- What, in the light of this report, would the Church of England say to someone – perhaps a Christian, perhaps someone considering discipleship – who says they identify as gay or lesbian or (increasingly likely) as bisexual, and asks how as a follower of Jesus to respond to their experiences of sexual attraction and whether they can enter a same sex sexual relationship or some other relationship structure?
- What, in the light of this report, would the Church of England offer to wider society as the call of Christ when it is experiencing rapid rejection of traditional Christian

sexual morality and asking major questions about sexual relationships?

**434.** I have concluded that the Report does not offer a consistent or coherent response to these questions in three key respects which shape the discussion that follows:

- (I) The claim to ‘abide by the Church’s official teaching’ could give the impression that the Church still believes, as I do, that everyone should remain single and abstinent unless and until they find themselves able to marry someone of the opposite sex. But readers are not given reasons why they should do this. I do not see in the Report a clear Christian account of what it means to live a life of obedient love, a vision of the shape of holiness, a way of setting our story as sexual creatures in the biblical story of salvation, a message about what the gospel call to die and rise with Christ means (Paragraphs 436–448 below).
- (II) Conversely there are statements in the Report that undermine confidence in traditional Christian teaching and give the impression that the Church has little or nothing to say about same sex relationships (Paragraphs 449–471 below).
- (III) Examples of these two elements in the Report are its development of a Christian sexual ethic that says nothing about marriage between two people of the opposite sex (Paragraph 442) and its proposal that in public services recognition should be given to permanent same sex relationships. (Paragraphs 472–482 below).

**435.** As a result of these three features, I believe the Report will cause confusion to many faithful Anglicans, particularly those who experience same sex attraction. As a pastor and friend to such people I believe the Church should support and not undermine them. Two quotations from friends of mine, both of whom experience same sex attraction, will serve to illustrate this point:

‘To Anglicans like me who are same sex attracted, the Church of England’s increasingly ambiguous position on homosexuality is deeply confusing and distressing. It leaves us feeling unsupported in our loyalty to the Church’s previous clear teaching that sex is exclusively for the marriage of a man and a woman – and gives the impression that generations of believers



wasted their lives in orientating their lives around this core biblical truth. It unlovingly gives men and women like me unclear signals as to how we should best live our lives in a Christ-like way, and raises the suspicion that the Church is keener on appeasing the world around us – rather than protecting us and preserving what it previously said was in our best interests.’

‘As someone who has experienced same sex attraction since my teens, I was so grateful that my Church showed me unconditional acceptance whilst gently guiding me to live according to the teaching of the Church of England. This pastoral care has enabled me and the many people in the same situation whom I know to flourish. We agree that the church's failure at times to show unconditional acceptance to same sex attracted people is pastorally disastrous. But a dilution of the Church's teaching would be equally disastrous, and a slap in the face to those who have quietly sought to live faithful lives.’

## **I The need for, and lack of, a biblical vision**

**436.** In ‘Scripture and Same Sex relationships’ (Appendix 3) I attempted to set out the ‘big picture’ of what Scripture teaches about sexuality and how this relates to the situation we face today: the integral nature of our existence as men and women in God's good creation, the significance of the negative texts on homosexual practice, the renewing of the world in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus with marriage as a sign of that new creation in the union of the new heaven and earth, and the warnings to the people of God not to be assimilated into their culture. I concluded that when the New Testament passages concerning sexuality are read in their historical context what is striking is the universal expectation that Christians will be different in their sexual behaviour from their pagan neighbours.

**437.** The first Christians believed that a distinctive pattern of sexual behaviour was an integral part of Christian discipleship because they believed that the one true God, the God of Israel, had lovingly created human beings to be sexual creatures who would come together in marriage as men and women in joyful obedience to the first command (‘be fruitful and multiply’). Sex was important to the first Christians (as it was to their Jewish forebears and contemporaries) not because they were sexually obsessed, or paranoid, or psychologically damaged. It

was important because they saw being made male and female as a vital part of the true identity of human beings as those called by God to bear his image and share in his rule over the created order.

**438.** The historical evidence also tells us that this view of sexuality continued to be the view of sexuality upheld by orthodox Christianity during the early centuries of the Church's history. It was the alternative sexual morality taught and practised within the Church that was one of the Church's most distinctive features and a major source of its missionary success.<sup>137</sup>

**439.** Scripture teaches us (and experience confirms) that all of us, and all our relationships, are, in different ways, and to varying degrees, distorted and fall short of God's goal for our flourishing. We all have to acknowledge that we are sinners in every area of our lives (including our sexual lives). However, the good news is that all sin is dealt with through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul declares in Romans 6.1-11, Jesus died to put to death our old, sin-centred, selves and rose again so that we might share with him in a new life where sin no longer controls us and we can live in the way that God desires.

**440.** This is the heart of the Christian faith. In learning to live it out in our own fellowships, with all the pain, misunderstanding and anger that will inevitably result, we are enabled to bear witness not just to 'a different way of life', still less to 'a set of rules' which we are just about (or not quite) managing to 'keep'; we witness to the Lord of creation and covenant, of new creation and new covenant: the loving creator and life-giver himself, who has broken into our world in Jesus Christ to bring life out of death.

**441.** In discerning what patterns of behaviour need redeeming and the pattern of the resurrection life we are called to live out, it matters profoundly that the truth of God given to us in Scripture shapes the Church in her life and practice. This is because it is through Scripture that we learn from God about the old sinful life to which we have died and about the new resurrection life which we are summoned to inhabit.

**442.** Learning to live the resurrection life involves learning to say 'no' to all forms of sexual sin, both in terms of sinful thoughts and in terms

of sinful behaviour, as taught by Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.27-30). This truth was also taught by the Early Church and so, for example, St Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the teaching they had received that ‘God’s plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality. Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God’ (1 Thessalonians 4.3-4, J. B. Phillips, *New Testament in Modern English*).

**443.** In line with these two quotations and the overall biblical teaching which they reflect, the Christian Church has consistently taught from biblical times that the sexual holiness which the resurrection life entails involves the restriction of sexual activity to the context of marriage between one man and one woman. All other forms of sexual activity (whether heterosexual or homosexual) are to be rejected by God’s people as incompatible with their love for God. As C. S. Lewis puts it in *Mere Christianity*, ‘There is no getting away from it; the Christian rule is “Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence”’.<sup>2138</sup>

**444.** The motion passed by General Synod on sexual ethics in 1987 (which remains the most authoritative Church of England declaration on the subject) followed this unbroken tradition of Christian teaching faithfully when it stated that:

This Synod affirms that the biblical and traditional teaching on chastity and fidelity in personal relationships is a response to, and expression of, God’s love for each one of us, and in particular affirms;

- (1) that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship.
- (2) that fornication and adultery are sins against this ideal, and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion.
- (3) that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met with a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion.

- (4) that all Christians are called to be exemplary in all spheres of morality, and that holiness of life is particularly required of Christian leaders.<sup>139</sup>

**445.** Some will argue that I should not be concerned as the Report declares that it abides by this traditional teaching. Paragraph 349 declares ‘we are agreed that there is not sufficient consensus to change the church’s teaching on human sexuality’ and Recommendation 11 talks about ‘abiding by the Church’s traditional teaching on human sexuality’. Regrettably, however, I do not think these commitments to abide by the Church’s traditional teaching are reflected in the case made out in the rest of the Report.

**446.** If we ask ‘What substantive arguments does the Report advance to defend the truth of the existing teaching it claims to uphold?’ then it is hard to find them. Given the cultural ‘revolution’, and the criticisms levelled at Christian teaching, any desire to uphold this teaching requires the Church, and particularly her bishops, to re-state and promote that teaching and proclaim it afresh in our new context. Those seeking to live out this teaching also need practical encouragement and pastoral support. I don’t think the Report offers this to them. I believe it is time to speak again with conviction; not singling out same sex or bisexual attractions and behaviour especially, but to set out the whole attractive biblical vision for the ordering of human relationships that I believe holds such good news for human flourishing.

**447.** The Prologue and Paragraphs 123–148 contain much wisdom and truth. But here and throughout the Report, it is striking that whenever permanence, faithfulness and openness to the nurturing of family life are commended and it might be expected that the gift of our creation as men and women and the blessing of their sexual union in marriage might also be celebrated, there is silence (see Prologue p. xv, Paragraphs 136, 140, 144, 148). Our embodiment as men and women is treated as marginal to permanence and faithfulness and the nurturing of family life, not as intrinsic to them.

**448.** Rather than upholding the Church’s teaching by rooting sexuality in God’s loving creation of human beings as male and female and in the God-given institution of marriage, the Report (as shown more fully below) undermines that teaching by commending a sexual ethic based solely and simply on the values of permanence and fidelity.

This is the approach advocated in *Permanent, Faithful, Stable*<sup>140</sup> and it is an ethic that makes no distinction between homosexual relationships and heterosexual marriage. If the Church were to adopt this ethic she would be failing to abide by her traditional teaching and would undermine the theological basis for her rejection of same sex marriage.

## **II Undermining the Church's teaching**

**449.** The Report also leaves the impression that the Church has no reason to believe the Church's traditional teaching. This aspect of the Report is summarized in Paragraph 68:

We have certainly met with many respondents across the spectrum of viewpoints who radiated great certainty on many aspects of the subject. But wherever we have turned – whether to Scripture, theology, science, or social trends – we have encountered divided views, sincerely and prayerfully held. Any suggestion, therefore, that the arguments are so conclusive that further discussion of the issues is no longer necessary does not do justice to the integrity of the theological convictions that are held or to the significant areas of scientific uncertainty that persist.

**450.** As the Report as a whole makes clear, this statement is not saying that the arguments are conclusive enough to support the truth of the Church of England's current teaching, but not conclusive enough to shut down any further discussion. It is saying that there needs to be open discussion about sexuality in the Church of England because the Working Group has not found the arguments from Scripture, theology, science or social trends to be conclusive either for or against the Church's current teaching. As far as the Report is concerned the jury is still out. That is a conclusion and a rationale and basis for further discussion which I do not share. It represents a shift from the current position that I believe will actually make fruitful discussion about sexuality more difficult.

**451.** I believe that we need to continue with the vision of Lambeth I.10 as a whole. I am therefore keen for there to be continuing listening to the varied experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. I do not believe this requires the Church to say, as the Report does, that this listening is the means by which we may be able to learn what we currently do not know, namely whether or not what the Bible teaches

and the Church has held for two thousand years is true. Rather, I believe such listening needs to be part of continuing discussion and discernment concerning how the biblical teaching about sexuality should be applied pastorally in relation to the full range of people's life situations and a constructive engagement with the arguments and concerns of those, both inside and outside the Church, who are not yet convinced of the truth of this teaching.

**452.** The argument that the current debate in the Church about sexuality needs to be seen as inconclusive is central to the Report. The contents and structure of Parts 2 and 3 and the juxtaposition of two contrasting views of the biblical material in Appendices 3 and 4 are meant to lead the reader to accept the conclusion that the current debate is inconclusive. This conclusion is what underlies the Report's key recommendation, namely that the Church needs to embark on a process of 'facilitated conversation' about sexuality. According to the Report it is because the current debate is inconclusive that we need a facilitated conversation to help the Church 'to think afresh how its traditional teaching on sexuality can commend itself to a culture which is increasingly relaxed about same sex relationships, or whether the teaching itself does not sufficiently represent the gospel imperative and must be refreshed by new insights' (Paragraph 348). The claim is we cannot reach any conclusions at the moment, but holding facilitated conversations may help us to do so in the future.

**453.** As I try to set out below, the way that the Report links the proposal for facilitated conversation with the argument that the present debate about sexuality is inconclusive will in fact undermine the chances of what I also seek, namely successful conversations taking place.

**454.** The Report knows (because it sets out the evidence in Paragraphs 101–122) that the Church of England has previously held that the relevant evidence does allow the Church of England to reach clear conclusions about sexual ethics. This can be seen, for example, in the first principle set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*:

Homophile orientation and its expression in sexual activity do not constitute a parallel and alternative form of human sexuality as complete within the terms of the created order as the heterosexual. The convergence of Scripture, Tradition and

reasoned reflection on experience, even including the newly sympathetic and perceptive thinking of our own day, make it impossible for the Church to come with integrity to any other conclusion. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are not equally congruous with the observed order of creation or with the insights of revelation as the Church engages with these in the light of her pastoral ministry.<sup>141</sup>

**455.** In contrast, the Report holds that at the moment the Church is not in a position to make this affirmation. I think it is in effect saying, ‘We do not know what the proper Christian approach to the issue of sexuality is.’ If that is right I do not see how to avoid the conclusion that the Report holds that there are no conclusive arguments for believing that the Church of England’s current teaching on sexuality is true. Will that not mean, if the Report is adopted, that the Church of England will continue formally to abide by its existing teaching while at the same time having declared that it has no good reason to think that this teaching is true? This is a position I cannot support. It is also a position I doubt will win the respect of those who conscientiously reject the traditional teaching and offer an alternative vision.

**456.** The Report concludes that the current debate about sexuality in the Church of England is inconclusive, and it gives evidence to support that assertion by looking at social trends, science, theology, theological method and the teaching of Scripture. In what follows I would like to offer a brief critique of this evidence to raise the question as to whether the conclusions are as inconclusive as the Report asserts. I hope this will help in the discernment process in whatever facilitated conversations take place in the next two years.

**457.** On *social trends* the Report surveys statistical data about attitudes to sexuality in society and the Church and argues that we need to be open to the possibility that these are the result of the work of God (Paragraphs 14–173 and 336–344). However, the Report does not offer criteria for deciding whether the changes of belief and practice are the result of the Spirit at work in the Church and society or whether they are the result of society and the Church becoming increasingly disobedient to God and deaf to what God is saying (cf. Hosea 4.13-14, Amos 2.6-7 and Romans 1.18-32).

**458.** On *science* the Report surveys the evidence submitted and considers the differences between scientific and theological method (Paragraphs 193–219 and 329–335). It also argues that continuing scientific uncertainty is one of the reasons that the debate about sexuality must be judged to be currently inconclusive. However, what it does not do is explore questions about the relation between the findings of science and the Church’s traditional teaching that were raised during the course of the Working Group’s discussions. An example would be whether what causes some people to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex should be seen as part of God’s action in giving forms of sexual attraction and activity as part of his glorious gift, or seen as one of the ways in which the disorder of creation and the fallen autonomous nature of human beings has found expression. It may have simply been impossible, given the limitations of time and expertise among us, to have addressed these questions, but without addressing them, I don’t see how the scientific argument can be used for not having confidence in the Church’s traditional teaching.

**459.** On *theology* the Report summarizes the presentations to the Group made by Fr Timothy Radcliffe and Professor Oliver O’Donovan (Paragraphs 254–278 and 313–315). It emphasizes that they warn us to take seriously the things that we do not know and to avoid closing down the debate about sexual ethics prematurely. But remaining open to debate is not the same thing as claiming that the Church no longer has a basis for what it has taught until now.

**460.** I wish there had been time and means to engage with the large amount of other theological evidence submitted to the Group. The brief was ‘to draw together and reflect upon biblical, historical and ecumenical explorations on human sexuality’ (Paragraph 5) but we didn’t engage with the discipline of ‘queer theology’ which, though highly problematic to me, is a significant part of the current academic study of sexuality.<sup>142</sup>

**461.** If these assessments are in any way accurate then the Church will need great care in any future facilitated conversations as to the adequacy of theological resources for discussion in dioceses, deaneries and parishes.

**462.** On *theological method* the Report gives one view of the traditional Anglican understanding of the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and reason (Paragraphs 279–300). An outline is



then given as to how Anglican ethics has been characterized by a ‘conciliar’ approach in which Scripture, Tradition and reason are held in proper balance. The Report concludes that the position I am advancing is an example of reading Scripture ‘independently of the Church’s tradition and reason’ and ‘to adopt it would make one wing of the Anglican family the sole arbiter of Anglican ethics and bring an end to the conciliar approach which has for so long characterized Anglicanism’ (Paragraph 318). I do not accept that characterization as a summary I would recognize, for the reasons I’ve set out in this statement and in Appendix 3. This is not at all to focus on a narrow reading of Scripture, or to exclude a proper place for Tradition and reason; on the contrary, I’ve tried to set out the view that does most justice to the joint witness of Scripture, Tradition and reason in relation to matters of sexuality.

**463.** It is in relation to the *teaching of Scripture* that the ‘inconclusive’ judgement presents the most radical undermining of the Church’s traditional teaching by which the Report declares it abides, and again I offer these comments for the future facilitated conversations. I don’t think the Report shows why previous Anglican statements (and the Christian tradition as a whole) have been wrong to hold that we could say what Scripture has to say about homosexuality. The argument it produces is to suggest briefly in Paragraphs 227–253 that three types of arguments used in the debate about Scripture all point to our inability to say conclusively what Scripture teaches. In each case I believe those arguments are very weak.

**464.** In relation to how to *translate* the words in the Bible commonly seen as referring to homosexuality it is said we should be cautious about concluding that we know what such words mean (Paragraphs 23–241). Unfortunately, the example the Report chooses to illustrate its argument – the issue of how to translate the noun *arsenokoitēs* in 1 Corinthians 6.9 and 1 Timothy 1.1 – does not support its case. This is because there is an overwhelming case, well-documented in the literature, that the word means someone who sleeps (i.e. has sex) with other men.<sup>143</sup>

**465.** The Report concludes that the biblical text does not allow us to decide whether *cultural differences* between biblical times and today mean that the sort of homosexual conduct described in Scripture is different from the form of homosexual relationships practised by

faithful Christians today (Paragraphs 242–246). In its view we cannot know precisely what St Paul means when he talks about homosexuality. However I do not see the evidence to support this claim or the engagement with the views of biblical scholars who argue in detail that we can know what St Paul and the Bible as a whole are talking about when they refer to homosexual activity.<sup>144</sup>

**466.** In relation to *the creation of human beings as male and female* in Genesis 1 and 2 as a basis for sexual ethics the Report claims (Paragraphs 247–253) that Genesis 1 focuses on sexual difference whereas Genesis 2 focuses on companionship and that ‘if the stress is more on companionship, the difference between male and female may be less centre-stage’ (Paragraph 250). This does not recognize that the two creation stories both focus equally on the relationship between men and women, and that in his teaching (recorded in Matthew 19.3-12 and Mark 10.2-12) Jesus appeals to both chapters and is clear that Genesis 2 is concerned with God uniting the man and woman in marriage, not simply ‘companionship’. The further claim that we cannot read off ‘unambiguous rules for the conduct of human affairs’ (Paragraph 252) from the opening chapters of Genesis does not address the fact that Jesus appealed to these texts to teach on marriage and sexual behaviour as has the Church for the whole of its existence over two millennia.

**467.** For the reasons I have just given, I do not believe the Report’s attempt to prove the lack of clarity in biblical teaching about homosexuality succeeds. I think those claims are also further undermined by the clarity with which the traditional reading is widely acknowledged as valid even amongst scholars and theologians who reject it. Thus Walter Wink writes ‘Where the Bible mentions homosexual behaviour at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is precisely whether that Biblical judgment is correct’.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, Dan O. Via writes in response to the work of the conservative American scholar Robert Gagnon: ‘Professor Gagnon and I are in substantial agreement that the biblical texts that deal specifically with homosexual practice condemn it unconditionally. However, on the question of what the Church might or should make of this we diverge sharply’.<sup>146</sup> Likewise, the Oxford Church historian Diarmaid MacCulloch declares ‘This is an issue of biblical authority. Despite much well-intentioned theological fancy footwork to the contrary, it is difficult to see the Bible as expressing anything else but disapproval of homosexual activity.’<sup>147</sup>

**468.** I conclude with great regret that the Report thus does not give an adequate account of biblical teaching. As a result, if adopted, it will cut the Church adrift from her Scriptural moorings and, by depriving her of a prophetic vision, allow her to be swept along by the currents of contemporary Western culture. This is something which I cannot support.

**469.** The Report will I fear undermine the teaching it claims to uphold by what it says about social trends, science, theology, theological method and Scripture. It doesn't show that the evidence from these fields demonstrates that the theological debate about sexuality is inconclusive, or provide sufficient grounds to overturn the Church's of England's previous reports and established teaching.

**470.** At this point a comparison with the theological debates that took place in the Church of England in the twentieth century may be instructive. During the twentieth century there were many in the Church of England, including ordinary Christians, eminent scholars and even a number of bishops who held with deep and sincere conviction that the traditional teaching of the Christian Church about the Trinity and the person of Christ needed to be reconsidered because it lacked a proper biblical basis, was intellectually incoherent and constituted a major stumbling block to mission.<sup>148</sup>

**471.** Faced with this challenge to its traditional theology from many within its own ranks the Church of England did not declare that it needed a period of open debate to discern what it should believe and teach about the nature of God and the person of Christ. Instead it continued to uphold its traditional teaching, and expected its authorized ministers to do the same, on the grounds that examination of the matter showed that that the arguments offered against this teaching were not convincing. Even if it is argued that the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ are more fundamental to the life of the Church than questions of sexual ethics, this still does not address the question of why the Church of England should take a different approach over the issue of human sexuality than it took in relation to the debates about these doctrines.

### **III Affirming non-marital sexual relationships theologically and liturgically**

**472.** In addition to the difficulties already discussed, I believe that while the Church must welcome all and acknowledge the good that exists in all relationships, it cannot commend and affirm non-marital sexual relationships in its teaching or practice. This is the teaching summarized in resolution I.10 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 to which the terms of reference refer, and to which the Working Group is asked to give attention. I have come to the conclusion with great regret that the Report if adopted will undermine this teaching both in its theological argument and in its proposals for the recognition of permanent same sex relationships.

**473.** The Report undermines Lambeth I.10 theologically when it declares in Paragraph 312 that:

In the face of conflicting scholarship, as well as conflicting beliefs, we believe that the Church should be cautious about attempting to pronounce definitively on the implications of Scripture for homosexual people. We do agree that, as all Christians are called to faithfulness, exclusivity and life-long commitment in their sexual relationships, same sex relationships which do not seek to embody those aspects of vocation cannot be right. We learn from what previous generations of the faithful have understood the Holy Spirit to be saying to the Churches, wait for the Spirit's guidance in our own generation and commit ourselves to finding ways for the Church to continue to listen for his voice.

**474.** This does not show why the previous statements from the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion (summarized in I.10) have been wrong to teach as they have in relation to homosexual behaviour. These statements have been clear that what is wrong with same sex activity is precisely the fact that it is same sex activity, regardless of whether or not it takes place in the context of 'faithfulness, exclusivity and life-long commitment'. In saying this, these statements have followed the teaching of Scripture which scholars are overwhelmingly agreed is always negative about sexual behaviour between people of the same sex and says nothing at all about whether such relationships should be faithful, committed or exclusive.

**475.** On the recognition of same sex relationships, Lambeth I.10 said that the Conference ‘cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions’. But the Report in Recommendation 16 says that priests should, with the agreement of their PCC, ‘be free to recognize a permanent same sex relationship in a public service’. I understand very well the desire for pastoral accommodation but I cannot see how this can be the right way forward for at least six reasons.

**476.** First, the Church cannot hold a public service for a couple simply on the basis that it discerns virtues and good qualities in their relationship. It must also be confident that the pattern of relationship it is affirming is in accordance with God’s will. It expresses that confidence liturgically by proclaiming a form of life which is in accordance with God’s will and asking the couple to affirm publicly that they seek to live faithfully within this way of life. This means that as long as the Church of England continues to ‘abide by its current teaching’ it cannot with integrity offer or formally allow a service for any pattern of sexual relationship other than marriage, even though Christians can recognize moral goods, such as love and fidelity, in particular non-marital sexual relationships and qualities of character in the partners. Good, compassionate pastoral care requires the Church to help people to respond obediently to God’s love by living rightly before him and thus it cannot be pastoral to affirm a form of relationship which is contrary to God’s will.

**477.** Secondly, Paragraphs 372–399, and Recommendation 16 which follows from them, are ambiguous about the commitments and disciplines of holiness in relation to sexual life, in particular whether the proposed services would be open to those in a sexually active relationship or only to those whose relationship is a celibate one. This means that the recommendation does not fit with either the Church’s teaching, which the Report says it abides by, or with the demands for sexual exclusivity (with which not all gay couples would agree) set out in Paragraph 312. The recommendation also does not recognize that such a service will not meet the stated needs of many same sex couples who reject the Church’s teaching. They want the whole of their relationship (including its sexual aspect) to be affirmed by the Church and, increasingly, wish their relationship to be affirmed as a form of marriage. Ambiguity will not be enough and there will thus be continuing pressure for the full acceptance of their understanding of their relationship by the Church.

**478.** Thirdly, Paragraphs 369–399 talk about the recognition not only of civil partnerships but also of same sex marriages. If the Church did celebrate in a public service the fact that two people had just entered into a same sex marriage this would be incompatible with its doctrine of marriage (which says that a marriage can only be between a man and a woman) and would inevitably be understood in both the Church (nationally and globally) and wider society as the Church of England affirming same sex marriages even if refusing to solemnize them in church.

**479.** Fourthly, by proposing that priests should, with the agreement of their PCC, ‘be free to recognize a permanent same sex relationship in a public service’ the Report undermines a bishop’s authority within his own diocese, bypasses the need for formal authorization and opens the possibility for a range of services to be offered. The Primates of the Communion in 2003 stated: ‘The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no theological consensus about same sex unions’. The Report, in contrast, acknowledges the lack of consensus but then proceeds to suggest the development of new liturgies at a parish level in a manner which risks producing liturgical anarchy in this controversial area and pressure being put on individual bishops and priests to permit and offer such public services.

**480.** Fifthly, liturgical ambiguity and authorized diversity will lead to the cultural captivity of the Church, inhibiting her ability to proclaim the biblical and Christian teaching about sexual ethics and the power of Jesus Christ to liberate people from all sin, including sexual sin. The Church will lack credibility in declaring that sexual activity is given exclusively for heterosexual marriage, or in declaring that people can and should refrain from same sex sexual activity, once it is holding authorized services that affirm sexually active gay and lesbian relationships. Pressure is also likely to grow for liturgical recognition of non-marital heterosexual relationships.

**481.** Sixthly we need to be clear that, even if what is proposed are not called blessings, that is what they will in fact be. They will be occasions when God’s blessing is invoked upon a same sex relationship. The theological reasons why we should not bless sexually active same sex relationships in this way are highlighted in the following quotation from the Canadian theologian Edith Humphrey who asks what such blessing would mean:

It would be to declare that these so-called ‘unions’ are in themselves pictures or icons of God’s love, to say that they display the salvation story, to rejoice that they are glorified or taken up into God’s own actions and being. It would be to declare that they have a significant and fruitful part in creation, and that they are symbols of the in-breaking and coming rule of God, in which the Church now shares and in which we will eventually participate fully. It would be to ‘speak a good word’ about this sort of relationship, explicitly declaring it to be a condition in which the way of the cross and the way of new life come together. Precisely here, the Church would be saying, you can see the love of God in human form, and the glory of humanity. It would be to name God as the one who blesses an act for which in fact repentance is required. So we would replace God with an idol, and so we would rend the Church.<sup>149</sup>

**482.** Earlier, in Paragraph 435, I quoted two Christian friends who experience same sex attraction. Their words, along with those that follow from a third Christian friend, offer a final reason why I cannot, as a pastor, support this recommendation:

‘I would feel hugely undermined and discouraged if the Church of England was to affirm the kind of gay relationship which I believe the Bible teaches is sinful and should be resisted. Christians like me who experience same sex attraction need our Church to encourage us to stand firm against the pressures of the world, rather than providing an example of accommodation. I already feel isolated in the world, holding the position I take, and I fear that any change in the Church’s teaching would make me increasingly lonely in the Church as well.’

### **Unity, Listening and continuing discernment**

**483.** The Report’s proposal for facilitated discussions about sexuality (Paragraphs 55–83, 352–368 and Recommendation 2) is one with which it is hard to disagree. Who can object to further conversation? However, there are two problems with the current basis on which it is proposed it should be conducted. First, as I have already indicated, the proposal for facilitated discussions rests on a false premise, namely that we cannot currently be sure what the Church should believe, teach and practise in the area of human sexuality. Secondly, and stemming from this, to attempt such a discussion shaped by this Report’s proposals and

on the basis of its arguments is likely, I believe, to be highly damaging and may prove impossible. I reach this conclusion because I remain convinced that General Synod was correct to state in February 2007 that while ‘continuing efforts to prevent the diversity of opinion about human sexuality creating further division and impaired fellowship within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion’ are to be commended and opportunities for ‘an open, full and godly dialogue about human sexuality’ to be welcomed:

... such efforts would not be advanced by doing anything that could be perceived as the Church of England qualifying its commitment to the entirety of the relevant Lambeth Conference Resolutions (1978: 10; 1988: 64; 1998: 1.10).<sup>150</sup>

**484.** As I have attempted to show, much in this Report will be legitimately perceived as a qualification of the Church of England’s commitment to a central element of these resolutions, namely their re-affirmation of the traditional Christian sexual ethic. Most importantly, the Report effectively distances itself from the position that ‘abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage’ and ‘homosexual practice’ is ‘incompatible with Scripture’ and ‘cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions’. Continuing discussion, without clear reference to the authority of biblical teaching and its place in the evaluation of tradition, reason and experience in the life of the Church will create further division and impaired fellowship within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion. Those who uphold traditional teaching will not be encouraged to engage in discussion when they believe that the Church of England has already effectively decided to walk away from this teaching.

**485.** The Report will also damage relationships between the Church of England, the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches, the Black Majority Churches, between the Church of England and the Churches of the Orthodox tradition and between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. In terms of the relationship between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, the approach taken by the Report goes against what was said in the 1994 ARCIC II report *Life in Christ* which declared:

Both our Communion affirm the importance and significance of human friendship and affection among men and women, whether married or single. Both affirm that all persons,



including those of homosexual orientation, are made in the divine image and share the full dignity of human creatureliness. Both affirm that a faithful and lifelong marriage between a man and a woman provides the normative context for a fully sexual relationship. Both appeal to Scripture and the natural order as the sources of their teaching on this issue. Both reject, therefore, the claim, sometimes made that homosexual relationships and married relationships are morally equivalent, and equally capable of expressing the right ordering and use of the sexual drive. Such ordering and use, we believe, are an essential aspect of life in Christ.<sup>151</sup>

### **A better way forward: ‘Loving to the end’**

**486.** I believe that the proper way forward for the Church of England is to proclaim the biblical teaching about the liberating power of Jesus Christ, and its implications for sexual ethics, however costly. This must be coupled with the establishment of effective structures of pastoral care for those wrestling with sexual attractions that fall outside the boundaries set by Scripture. We need to be a community in which everyone, whatever their pattern of sexual attraction, can feel as at home as anyone else, because we have all been ‘washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God’(1 Corinthians 6.11). This, I believe, can and should go alongside continuing dialogue and continuing listening to those who experience same sex or bisexual attractions and other sexual minorities. This is a faithful and pastoral way to help maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and to safeguard the holiness and unity of the Church, equipping her for effective mission in the twenty-first century.

**487.** The vision set out here embodies an approach which I believe would be more in line with Scripture, with the Reformed/Catholic ethos of the Church of England, and with the witness borne to Scripture by the Christian Church down the ages and across the world than that recommended by the Report. It would also keep the Church of England in step with the wider Christian Church across the overwhelming majority of denominations today as it is a vision shared by both the Roman Catholic Church in its moral teaching and by Evangelical churches as recently summed up in the ten affirmations contained in the report *Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality* from the non-denominational Evangelical Alliance.<sup>152</sup>

**488.** What are the hallmarks of this better vision?

- a. It affirms God's love and concern for all, whatever their sexuality, recognizing we are all sinners whose only hope is in the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
- b. It seeks to be marked by love, truth and grace in ongoing debates, repudiating and regretting all attitudes and actions which victimize or diminish people whose sexual attraction is directed towards people of the same sex or towards people of both sexes.
- c. It commends marriage as an institution lovingly created by God in which one man and one woman enter into an exclusive relationship for life, believing this to be the only form of partnership approved by God for sexual relations and thus the only form of sexual partnership that properly expresses love for God.
- d. It encourages churches to be safe spaces where everyone, including those with same sex attraction or bisexual attraction, is able to share and explore his or her story with fellow believers for mutual encouragement and support as we help each other grow together into maturity in Christ.
- e. It commends and encourages all who experience same sex or bisexual attraction and have committed themselves to chastity by refraining from homoerotic sexual practice, welcoming as leaders those of them God calls to ordination.
- f. It supports all those who responsibly seek to help Christians who experience sexual attractions in conflict with their commitment to live in accordance with biblical teaching, encouraging the Church to offer all Christians counsel and pastoral support to live a chaste life.
- g. It calls on churches to welcome and accept all, whatever their sexuality and whether or not they follow the church's teaching on sexual behaviour, in the hope that, like all of us who are living outside God's purposes, they will come in due course to see the need to be transformed and live lives of loving obedience in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox Church teaching.

- h. It calls on churches not to be conformed to the prevailing sexual culture, but to seek to resist and transform it so that both the Church and wider society will flourish by more closely reflecting God's standards in their beliefs about sexuality and their sexual behaviour.

**489.** Because our society increasingly rejects limiting sexual intercourse to marriage and sees any opposition to homosexual practise as morally reprehensible, if the Church of England were to commit herself afresh to this vision then there would undoubtedly be strong criticism. Like Christians in many other contexts we would have to learn to be confident in holding beliefs that many in our society did not share or even understand. Dissent within the Church of England would also likely continue, but a process of facilitated conversation framed by this vision would give plenty of opportunity for honest debate and the confronting of the sins of homophobia of which the Church must repent. But fidelity to God's way means learning in our own generation what it is to carry the cross (Mark 8.34-38).<sup>153</sup> 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die' said Bonhoeffer. Death is never easy, but being willing to accept the criticism that this approach will attract is, in my view, an unavoidable part of being faithful to that call of Christ and thus an unavoidable part of our loving obedient response to God's love for us. Jesus loved us to the end and, as he loved us, he calls us to love one another.



# Part 4

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



# Findings and recommendations

**490.** Although the recommendations are often regarded as the only part of a report which really matter, they appear at the end of this report for a good reason. The points which follow have been developed after careful thought and argument, and how they were arrived at is as important as their content. They should not, therefore, be read out of sequence but after reading the whole report.

## **The foundation of our report**

**1.** We warmly welcome and affirm the presence and ministry within the Church of gay and lesbian people, both lay and ordained. (Paragraphs 73 –6)

## **On the next steps for the Church of England:**

**2.** The subject of sexuality, with its history of deeply entrenched views, would best be addressed by facilitated conversations or a similar process to which the Church of England needs to commit itself at national and diocesan level. This should continue to involve profound reflection on the interpretation and application of Scripture. (Paragraphs 55–83, 309–19, 361–4)

**3.** Consultation on this report should be conducted without undue haste but with a sense of urgency, perhaps over a period of two years. (Paragraphs 83, 364–5)

**4.** The Church of England should address the issue of same sex relationships in close dialogue with the wider Anglican Communion and other Churches, in parallel with its own facilitated conversations and on a similar timescale. (Paragraphs 323–5, 360, 366–8)

## **On the teaching of the Church and the missiological challenge:**

**5.** Homophobia – that is, hostility to homosexual people – is still as serious a matter as it was and the Church should repent for the homophobic attitudes it has sometimes failed to rebuke and should stand firmly against it whenever and wherever it is to be found. (Paragraphs 174–92, 320–8)

- 6.** No one should be accused of homophobia solely for articulating traditional Christian teaching on same sex relationships. (Paragraphs 186–91, 327–8)
- 7.** The Church should continue to pay close attention to the continuing, and as yet inconclusive, scientific work on same sex attraction. (Paragraphs 193–219, 329–35)
- 8.** Since *Issues in Human Sexuality* was published in 1991 attitudes to same sex attraction, both in English society generally and also among Christians in many parts of the world, have changed markedly. In particular, there is a great deal of evidence that, the younger people are, the more accepting of same sex attraction they are likely to be. That should not of itself determine the Church's teaching. (Paragraphs 39–51, 156–73, 336–49)
- 9.** The Church should continue to listen to the varied views of people within and outside the church, and should encourage a prayerful process of discernment to help determine the relationship of the gospel to the cultures of the times. (Paragraphs 304–7, 309–11)
- 10.** The Church of England needs to recognize that the way we have lived out our divisions on same sex relationships creates problems for effective mission and evangelism within our culture, and that such problems are shared by some other Churches and in some other parts of the Anglican Communion. The Church of England also needs to recognize that any change to the Church's stance in one province could have serious consequences for mission in some other provinces of the Communion. (Paragraphs 85–100, 146–7, 325, 346–9)
- 11.** Whilst abiding by the Church's traditional teaching on human sexuality, we encourage the Church to continue to engage openly and honestly and to reflect theologically on the circumstances in which we find ourselves to discern the mind of Christ and what the Spirit is saying to the Church now. (Paragraphs 313 –6)



**12.** Through a period of debate and discernment in relation to the gospel message in our culture, it is right that all, including those with teaching authority in the church, should be able to participate openly and honestly in that process. (Paragraphs 122, 350)

**On the Church's pastoral response:**

**13.** The Church needs to find ways of honouring and affirming those Christians who experience same sex attraction who, conscious of the church's teaching, have embraced a chaste and single lifestyle, and also those who in good conscience have entered partnerships with a firm intention of life-long fidelity. (Paragraphs 131–5, 328, 386–8)

**14.** The whole Church is called to real repentance for the lack of welcome and acceptance extended to homosexual people in the past, and to demonstrate the unconditional acceptance and love of God in Christ for all people. (Paragraphs 186–92, 320–3)

**15.** The Church's present rules impose different disciplines on clergy and laity in relation to sexually active same sex relationships. In the facilitated conversations it will be important to reflect on the extent to which the laity and clergy should continue to observe such different disciplines. (Paragraphs 371–3)

**16.** We believe that there can be circumstances where a priest, with the agreement of the relevant PCC, should be free to mark the formation of a permanent same sex relationship in a public service but should be under no obligation to do so. Some of us do not believe that this can be extended to same sex marriage. (Paragraphs 120, 380–3)

**17.** While the Church abides by its traditional teaching such public services would be of the nature of a pastoral accommodation and so the Church of England should not authorize a formal liturgy for use for this purpose. The House of Bishops should consider whether guidance should be issued. (Paragraphs 118, 384–8, 391–3)

**18.** Whether someone is married, single or in a civil partnership should have no bearing on the nature of the assurances sought from

them that they intend to order their lives consistently with the teaching of the Church on sexual conduct. Intrusive questioning should be avoided. (Paragraphs 400–14)

+Jonathan Fulham  
+Michael Gloucestr:  
    Jessica Martin  
    Joe Pilling (Chair)  
    Robert Song  
    Rachel Treweek  
    +John Warwick  
+Keith Birkenhead – *Dissenting*

*Staff*

Malcolm Brown  
Martin Davie

*November 2013*

## Appendix 1

# Members of the Working Group

Sir Joseph Pilling  
The Bishop of Gloucester  
The Bishop of Birkenhead  
The Bishop of Ebbsfleet  
The Bishop of Warwick

Chair  
The Rt Revd Michael Perham  
The Rt Revd Keith Sinclair  
The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker  
(from May 2013, Bishop of Fulham)  
The Rt Revd John Stroyan

### **Advisers**

The Revd Dr Jessica Martin  
Professor Robert Song  
The Ven Rachel Treweek

Priest in Charge, Duxford, Hinxton  
and Ickleton  
Durham University  
Archdeacon of Hackney

### **Staff**

The Revd Dr Malcolm Brown  
Dr Martin Davie  
Mrs Lauren Fenn  
Mrs Caroline Kim

Director of Mission and Public Affairs  
Theological Consultant to the House  
of Bishops

# Evidence Received by the Group

## **Evidence given in oral presentations**

As noted in the introduction, Working Group held a series of evidence days in which a variety of different groups and individuals were invited to give evidence in person to the Working Group.

The groups who gave evidence in this way were:

Anglican Mainstream

Changing Attitude

Inclusive Church

Reform

The individuals who gave evidence were:

The Revd Dr Babatunde Adedibu (from the Redeemed Christian Church of God)

The Rt Revd John Baker

Mr Jonathan Berry

The Revd Dr Sean Doherty

The Revd Dr Andrew Goddard

The Revd Dr John Hare

Professor Glynn Harrison

The Revd Prebendary David Houlding

The Rt Revd James Jones

The Revd Professor Oliver O'Donovan

The Very Revd June Osborne

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP (from the Roman Catholic Church)

The Revd Thomas Seville CR

Professor Adrian Thatcher

As was also explained in the introduction, the Working Group also issued an invitation to all the bishops of the Church of England and any other interested parties to submit written evidence to the Group. Evidence was received from the following (this does not include submissions from those listed above).

As explained in Paragraphs 24–34, members of the group also met a number of other people as part of an extensive process of listening to their experience. These meetings were arranged on the basis that the names of those concerned would not be published.

### **Individuals**

Kenneth & Audrey Agnew	John Stapylton-Boyce
April Alexander	The Rt Revd Ian Brackley
Michael Allen	The Revd Professor Gerald Bray
Phil Almond	Martin Brion
The Rt Revd Donald Allister	Michael Brooks
Martin Andrews	Robert S. Brooks
Richard Ashby	The Revd Laura Burgess
Vincent Ashwin	Dr W R Burnham
The Rt Revd David Atkinson	The Revd Sarah Burrow
The Revd Martin Ayers	The Revd Bob Callaghan
Nicholas Baines	A. R. F. Carter
Hugh Baker	Nicholas Chapman
The Revd Hugh Balfour	The Revd Tim Chapman
The Revd Robert Bashford	Miriam Childress
The Revd Dr Christina Beardsley	Suzanne Clackson
The Rt Revd James Bell	Stephen Coles
The Revd Piers Bickersteth	The Revd John Cook
The Revd Julian Bidgood	Andrew Cooper
Jonathan Blanchard	John Cooper
Charlie Bourne	The Revd Stephen Cooper
Susannah Cornwall	David Greenman
The Revd Dr J E Cotter	The Revd Andrew Grey
The Very Revd Nicholas Coulton	Sarah and Rachel Hagger-Holt
The Revd Colin Coward	Liz Hammond
Gillean Craig	Steven Hana
The Revd R W Crook	Mrs Faith Hanson
Vernon Cutler	The Revd Roger Harper
John Davis	Diane Harris
Andrew Davidson	Tim Harris
Michael Davidson	Professor Glynn Harrison
The Rt Revd Michael Doe	Damian Hart
Trevor Donnelly	Warren Hartley
John Dunnett	The Revd Benny Hazlehurst
Martin Fairley	Savi Hensman
Simon Falshaw	The Revd Michael D. Hewitt

Dick Farr  
Stephen Fenn  
The Revd Sharon Ferguson  
The Revd Jonathan Fletcher  
The Revd Jonathan Frai  
Bill Fraser  
Peter & Claire Frost  
Matthew Fuller  
Peter Furness  
Dr Susan Gilchrist  
Kevin Gilderson  
Stephen Golden  
Matthew Grayshon  
Marcus Green  
Andrew Keep  
The Revd Gordon Kendall  
Mrs Denise Kendall  
Robert Key  
The Rt Revd Graham Kings  
Catriona Laing  
Sally Layburn  
Miss J Legget  
Clive Lemmon  
Helen Lober  
Jonathan Lockwood  
The Revd Dr Joel Love  
Stephen Lyon  
Sarah Maxwell  
Dr Peter May  
Martin McGonigle  
The Revd Angus Macleay  
The Revd Andrew Mclellan  
The Right Revd Malcolm Menin  
Steve Midgley  
Rhys Morgan  
Larry Morris  
Terry Musson  
The Revd James Mustard  
The Revd James Nash  
John Newbold  
Jane Newsham

Tim Hind  
Christopher Hobbs  
The Revd Jane Hodges  
Christine Holt  
The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam  
The Revd Richard Hopkins  
Peter Howe  
H. G. Hulme  
John Humphrey  
Dr S Hurren  
Eric Hyom  
The Rt Revd Dr John Inge  
The Very Revd Dr David Ison  
Susannah Izzard  
Mrs D. A. Jenner  
John Percival  
Mary Perren  
Malcolm Peters  
Mrs Olive Piggott  
Kathy Playle  
Rich Plummer-Powell  
Martin Podlubny  
The Revd Dr David de Pomerai  
The Rt Revd John Pritchard  
Ann Reddecliffe  
The Revd Dr Robert Reiss  
Mr R. D. I. Robertshaw  
The Rt Revd Tony Robinson  
Brian Rowley  
Penny Seabrook  
The Revd Simon Scott  
The Revd Rupert Shelley  
Graham Singh  
The Revd Robert Slipper  
Colin T. Smart  
The Revd James Dudley-Smith  
Father Ron Smith  
Mark Smithers  
The Rt Revd Humphrey Southern  
Reginald N. Sparrow  
Mrs D. Staple

The Revd Canon Mark Oakley  
 David Page  
 The Revd Alasdair Paine  
 The Revd Tom Parsons  
 The Rt Revd Nigel Stock  
 Alan Strange  
 Chris Sugden  
 Hugo Summerson  
 Paul Sutton  
 David B. Taylor  
 Mr & Mrs J. Thomas  
 John Tibb  
 Andrew Towner  
 The Revd Gary Townsend

G. S. Steed  
 The Revd M. L. Stevens  
 The Revd Canon Beaumont Stevenson  
 Nicholas Townsend  
 Stephen Tucker  
 Mary Underhill  
 Adrian Vincent  
 James Walters  
 The Rt Revd Martin Warner  
 The Rt Revd Frank White  
 The Revd Canon Alan Wilkinson  
 Kenneth C. Williams  
 Susan Timmins Jason Ward  
 D. G. Gordon-Watkins

### **Churches**

All Saints, Little Shelford  
 Christ Church, Cambridge  
 Christ Church, Finchley  
 Christ Church, Peckham  
 Christ Church, South Cambs  
 Henham, Elsenham and Ugley  
 Holy Trinity, Norwich  
 Immanuel Church, Brentwood  
 The Parish of High Ongar  
 St Andrew the Great, Cambridge

St Batholomew's, Arborfield  
 St Bride's Liverpool  
 St James' Church, Barkham  
 St John's Bromley  
 St Nicholas, Sevenoaks  
 St Paul's, Throop  
 St Peter's, Harold Wood  
 Sileby, Cossington and Seagrave  
 Terrington, St Clement  
 Wargrave with Knowl Hill

### **Groups or Organizations**

Accepting Evangelicals  
 Ekklesia  
 The Evangelical Group on General Synod  
 The LGB&T Anglican Coalition  
 The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement  
 Royal College of Psychiatrists

Sibyl  
 Trans Awareness Group  
 The Core Issues Trust  
 The Society of Ordained  
 Scientists  
 Modern Church

# Scripture and same sex relationships

**Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead**

## **1 Introduction**

How can it be possible for the Lord our God to call us to love him with all our heart, mind, body and soul, and love our neighbour as ourselves, and then set limits and boundaries to sexual expressions of ‘love’ for those who are attracted to those of their own gender?

That Scripture teaches that loving the Lord and loving our neighbour includes such limits and boundaries is the contention of this paper; that the God who reveals to us the nature of love in his creation of the world, in his calling of Israel, in his incarnation and atoning death, in his resurrection and promise of a new heaven and new earth, calls us to love and be loved, gives this, as one of a number of prohibitions, as part of that same love.

That this has been the teaching of the Church, one holy, catholic and apostolic from the beginning is not in dispute. Should it continue to be the teaching? Is the Holy Spirit leading us into new truth? Until the present time the Anglican Communion through the Lambeth Conference has said No. The two most recent studies by the House of Bishops in the Church of England – *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991) and *Some Issue in Human Sexuality* (2003) – have said No. What has changed to cause the Church to revise that conviction?

Among the many arguments advanced, the most significant for the long-term life of the Church is that Scripture must now be read differently. No Church can live in integrity if it proclaims loyalty to Scripture, but then ignores Scripture when faced with new proposals for her life. Those who would argue for this change know that they must convince the Church that Scripture as it has been read is mistaken.



This paper is intended to show that Scripture is not mistaken. Now that marriage itself has been redefined by the state to include same sex relationships in a way not even envisaged when this Working Group was established in November 2011, the sobering words of the Barmen Declaration written for an entirely different spiritual and cultural challenge, have some relevance:

If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! But if you find that we are taking our stand upon Scripture, then let no fear or temptation keep you from treading with us the path of faith and obedience to the Word of God.

I have drawn on the published and unpublished work of scholars including N. T. Wright and others. I am aware that the literature is vast and I make no claim to have engaged with the whole of it; there are many biblical themes which warrant more attention than given here. This submission focuses on the positive gift of God, rather than the extensive warnings of judgement, and the scope of the call to the whole Church rather than particular pastoral words to individuals or groups, though of course all of these concerns matter in the purposes and presence of God with his people.

I submit that the weight of scholarship does not legitimate a revisionist reading of the biblical material. In 2003 *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* produced by the House of Bishops concluded:

The various suggestions for revising the traditional view of the biblical material have not succeeded in changing the consensus of scholarly opinion about the meaning of the key passages in Leviticus and the New Testament. At the moment, the traditional understanding of these passages remains the most convincing one in the minds of most biblical scholars. (*Some Issues* 4.4.34)

As long as this is true, 'it is difficult to see that an appeal to the revisionist reinterpretation of the passages in question provides an adequate basis for a Church that takes the scholarly reading of Scripture seriously to alter either its traditional teaching about homosexuality or its traditional practice' (*Some Issues* 4.4.35).

When the Church of Scotland's Working Group (their equivalent of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality) in their

submission to the General Assembly this year looked at the biblical texts, it concluded:

Although the Group reflects different views on what the church's attitude to homosexuality should be, there was somewhat surprise at the degree of concord reached regarding the plain reading of Scripture in the specific mentions of same sex sexual activity. There was almost a weariness with interested readings of certain key texts, which tortuously attempted to repudiate the writer's clear intention to condemn behaviour as bad. The Bible, when it occasionally takes up the subject of same sex activity, presents it as a wrong choice.' ('A Challenge to Unity' 4.13.18)

## **2 The biblical context**

The larger biblical context must always be kept in mind. The smaller texts are vital but we cannot start there.

From Genesis to Revelation there is a bifocal trajectory. The Bible tells a story of heaven and earth, the two halves of God's good creation. They belong together, and according to Ephesians 1.10 they are designed to be finally united in Christ. This coming-together of the two halves of the good creation is reflected in the nature of creation: sea and dry land etc., and ultimately male and female, first in animals and then in humans. In Ephesians 2 this is reflected in the coming together of Jew and Gentile; in Ephesians 5, in the union of husband and wife, explicitly linked to Genesis 2.

In Revelation 21, the ultimate union of heaven and earth is again described as a marriage (of the Lamb and the Church). We see the goodness of creation and the ultimate goodness of the new creation. There is no Gnosticism here; no downgrading or marginalizing of the body, male and female. The union of husband and wife is a sign of both original creation and new creation; this is why it is procreative in a way that nothing else can be.

## **3 The first-century Jewish context**

Ancient Israel and first-century Jews were creational monotheists. Leviticus prohibited same sex activity (as also sex with animals, etc.) because it was not part of the good creation. Jews then and now are positive about creation (food, wine, sex, etc.).

First-century Jews regularly adapted their ancient legislation to contemporary conditions (e.g. the Jubilee laws) but there is no sign that they did that with marriage. They were firmly opposed to the pagan playing-around with the good creation (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon 14.26).

The early Christians saw themselves as basically the ‘renewed Jews’. Within that renewal certain things previously mandatory became *adiaphora*: circumcision, food laws, sabbath. Some see this as ‘liberalization’, a slackening of tight Jewish legalism, but this is mistaken. The reason, rooted in Christ’s death and resurrection, was the transformation of Israel into a global family, thus losing ethnic badges. Interestingly, the Jewish insistence on endogamy (marrying within the same clan or tribe) was ‘translated’ by Paul into a Christian version (1 Corinthians 7, 2 Corinthians 6): you now marry ‘in the Lord’. People misread the New Testament’s fresh use of the Old Testament as ‘bringing it up to date’, in order to imply that that’s what we now need to do with the New Testament itself; but that is not at all the way in which the New Testament thought they were using the Old Testament.

There is no example in Jewish first-century thought of the stories of David and Jonathan, or Naomi and Ruth, giving hermeneutical tools for affirming same sex relationships among their pagan contemporaries.

The description of our identity in Genesis 2 as male and female is not to exclude other kinds of human relationships. On the contrary, this is the core relationship from which all other relationships can be explored; it is core to community, tribe and ‘nation’ as the ensuing chapters on Genesis describe. Marriage is not set over against community it is the very basis of its existence and continuance. Of course the goodness of this gift has been distorted by human rebellion. Genesis 1 and 2 describe equality (the description of the woman’s creation in the image of God) and dignity (taken from the man’s side). Of course the cultural distance is vast, but until now the core understanding of marriage as a union of man and woman has remained the same. It is hard to see how these texts can be used to justify changing the doctrine of marriage as part of God’s good gifts in creation.

#### **4 The first-century pagan context**

It is claimed that in first century circles same sex behaviour was essentially exploitative: men with boys, masters with slaves, etc.; or that it was just ‘experimenting’, as in some cultures today. It is claimed that there was no sign of ‘permanent, faithful, stable’ same sex partnerships, whereas today we have such things. This is the revisionist argument about ‘reading the New Testament in context’.

The reality is different. As Plato’s Symposium makes clear, the ancient world knew about every variety of sexual behaviour imaginable, including regular lifelong same sex partnerships. Plato remained widely read and taught in the first century and beyond, so we should not say, ‘Ah, that was in Athens in the fourth century BC, but in Corinth in the first century AD it was all different.’

Philo, in the first century, discusses the Symposium; Plutarch (a near-contemporary of Paul) discusses loving same sex relations; two second-century AD novelists make male –male romances a theme; the satirists Martial and Juvenal speak of willing male –male quasi-marital unions; Lucian and Ptolemy (both second-century AD) speak of female –female quasi-marital unions (see the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6 below).

Recent major studies in pagan antiquity reveal the full range of sexual behaviour – and interesting local customs about regulating man/boy sexual behaviour. Various kinds of same sex ‘weddings’ were known, perhaps the most famous being that of Nero himself.

It looks as though the Roman world of the day was increasingly polarized, with some ‘accepting’ that homosexual practice, including ‘unions’, was the new norm, and others finding it appalling and wanting to legislate against it.

In that context, how can it be confidently asserted that first-century Christians did not know about the kind of homosexual practice that is being commended today? How do we know they didn’t know? The brevity of the prohibitions signifies that whatever ‘goods’ might be discerned in such relationships, these goods did not mean the sin could be overlooked or ignored.

## 5 The Teaching and Practice of Jesus

It is regularly said that ‘Jesus didn’t mention it’. It is also regularly said (and argued, e.g. by Richard Burridge) that ‘Jesus was ‘inclusive’, therefore ...’ But Jesus didn’t mention many things which were not issues for his first-century Jewish context: wife-beating, drug abuse, bestiality, idolatry ... and yet we assume ‘he would have been against them’. He wasn’t aiming to offer an encyclopaedic, comprehensive set of moral instructions. The fact that something is not central to Jesus’ teaching (in the way that, say, the plight of the poor obviously is) doesn’t mean it is unimportant, or ‘flexible’.

More particularly, Jesus wasn’t ‘teaching a new ethic’ as such: Jesus was launching God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven, and summoning people to become part of it by following him and having their lives entirely transformed.

In particular, Jesus warned specifically about the radical evil that lurks within the human heart. Picking up from Jeremiah 17.9 (and indeed Genesis 6.5), he insists that what makes someone unclean is what comes out of the heart: ‘Evil intentions come from inside, out of people’s hearts – sexual immorality (*porneiai*), theft, murder, adultery (*moicheiai*), greed, wickedness, treachery, debauchery (*aselgeia*), envy, slander, pride, stupidity’ (Mark 7.21-22). This list is not trying to be comprehensive, but it certainly includes, within the three Greek words highlighted, the full range of sexual misdemeanours noted in Leviticus 18 and elsewhere, and would certainly have been so understood. The same passage gives the lie to today’s fashionable Gnosticism, ‘finding what is truly inside me’, ‘going with the heart’, and so on. Jesus, like Jeremiah, warns against any such thing. The heart, even in devout Christians, is no safe guide, especially in such matters – as pastors and bishops know well (e.g. when faced with the clergy person who says ‘Jesus told me it was all right to sleep with him/her’...).

Jesus, however, implicitly promises a cure for the disease of the heart. Moses, he says, allowed divorce ‘because of the hardness of your hearts’ (Mark 10.5). But he is summoning people, not to the Deuteronomic legislation which had to take account of Israel’s hard-heartedness, but to the original plan for creation: ‘From the beginning of creation, ‘male and female he made them’ ... and so on (Mark 10.6-9). Interestingly, the passage continues by prohibiting divorce on the one hand and then welcoming children on the other. There is something powerful and

important about that whole sequence. Jesus' kingdom-agenda envisages, not the abandonment or reframing of male –female marriage, but its firming up and re-establishment.

Some will say, 'Well, but we now allow divorce.' Yes: originally this was on the basis of Matthew 5.32, 19.9 (permission in case of sexual immorality) and 1 Corinthians 7.15 (the unbelieving spouse who wants to separate). Both of these envisaged the possibility of remarriage (otherwise it isn't really a divorce). Whether the contemporary Church has its marital discipline with regard to divorce and remarriage right is a moot point. But it is hard to see how hermeneutically Jesus' restrictions on divorce practice in the first century can be an argument for abandoning the Church's discipline in relation to same sex practice in the twenty-first century.

Attempts have been made to suggest that Jesus and the 'beloved disciple' were in some kind of a same sex partnership (or that Jesus' movement more broadly embraced a kind of sexual libertarianism); or that the centurion's relationship with his slave was likely to have been of this nature. Had there been the slightest suspicion of any such thing not only would Jesus' other followers have been horrified, but in the close communities of first-century Palestine word would have leaked out. All sorts of insults and calumnies against Jesus occur in later Jewish sources, but never that, as it assuredly would have done had there been the smallest whisper. On the contrary, deep friendship between people of the same gender is described and celebrated, just because there was no hint of sexual impurity.

Jesus's teaching on marriage and celibacy is the key (Matthew 19.1-12). Jesus challenges us to a righteousness that exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees *and* calls us to a love that includes all who will come, be cleansed, healed and forgiven in the kingdom of God. Jesus was not afraid to challenge misunderstandings of God's will – 'You have heard it said... but I say to you....' – but nowhere do we have a record of him doing so on same sex unions and his general teaching in sexual matters is more rigorist (e.g. adultery in heart) not more lax.

## **6 The teaching of Paul: introduction**

Paul, like Jesus, was not a 'moralist' in the modern sense. What he taught about Christian behaviour grew, like everything else, out of his belief that through the Messiah and the Spirit, Israel had been radically

renewed, so that Jews and pagans alike could come, through dying and rising with the Messiah, into a new life, a new community, with new ways of life (2 Corinthians 5.17). In that new life, the basic vocation of Israel was re-affirmed (to be the people of God in and for the wider world; to be people in whom creation was honoured and new creation anticipated).

Like Jesus, Paul believed that human hearts by themselves were hard and corrupt and untrustworthy, and that the secret of the new behaviour was the renewal of both heart and mind. Romans 12:1-2 remains basic, and highly relevant:

- present your bodies as a living sacrifice;
- don't let yourselves be squeezed into the shape dictated by the present age; instead,
- be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

In particular, Paul warns against the possibility of even Christians being seriously deceived, precisely in the area of sexual morality (Romans 16.18, Ephesians 5.6).

Paul assumed that his congregations would stand out from the surrounding pagan world, not least by their refusal to behave in the way pagans did, not least in regard to sex. This is very clear in e.g. Colossians 3.1-11 and Ephesians 4.17–5.20. In both, interestingly, sexual misbehaviour is set in parallel with sins of the tongue (lying, deceit, violent speech, etc.). It is impossible to read either passage, knowing the Jewish and pagan worlds of the day, and then to conclude (as people regularly try to do) that Paul would have made an exception had he known about 'permanent, faithful, stable' same sex partnerships. He is a theologian of creation renewed.

An interesting footnote to Paul's passages. In the New Testament manuscript tradition, places with a large number of textual variants in the manuscripts of the third and subsequent centuries include the texts about divorce. These clearly reflect a real difficulty in the Early Church, with scribes reflecting the attempts of the Church to put the strict New Testament line into practice. But there is no such set of textual variants in relation to homosexual practice. No scribes were wanting to, or trying to, change what was quite clear, and accepted right across the Church.

## **7 The teaching of Paul: Romans 1 in context**

The clear statement of Romans 1.26-27, near the opening of Paul's greatest letter, has of course been a major problem for those wanting to argue that same sex practice is not contrary to Scripture, and can somehow be allowed by the ethical life of the Church as it is described in the New Testament. Every attempt has been made to marginalize it by whatever means possible. But Paul in Romans 1 –3 is not only 'demonstrating that all are sinful', and neither is he simply using standard Jewish anti-pagan rhetoric that we can simply discount. Paul is not saying 'people are naturally heterosexual, and become homosexual by choice, through worshipping idols'. He is not, in other words, claiming to describe individuals who can say 'I didn't choose to be homosexual and I am not worshipping idols'. (Parallel: in Rom. 2.21 f. he is not saying that all Jews are thieves or adulterers, etc.) He is talking far more broadly about what happens when humans as a whole, when a culture as a whole, turns away from the creator God. The whole section is rooted in Genesis 1, 2 and 3, and is in particular a retelling of Genesis 3, where the humans worship and serve the creature rather than the creator, and discover that their humanness is therefore seriously damaged... There is much more than that going on in Romans 1, but not less.

The point, in context, is that Paul sees the overall distortion of male-plus-female relationships into female-female and male-male relationships as a central and symbolic indication of what happens when people stop worshipping the creator God: their humanness, even perhaps their image-bearingness, deconstructs. Paul's point is about pagan society in general, not about any particular individuals. He is not saying 'accept this point, then that point, and then you'll see that same sex relations are wrong'; he is saying 'idolatry means the fracturing of God-given image-bearing and fruitful humanness, as you can see from the existence, within such societies, of same sex relationships.'

7:4 Paul of course sees male/female intercourse as 'in accordance with nature' as opposed to same sex relations as being 'against/contrary to nature' (Romans 1.26). Here 'nature' basically and quite simply means 'the way creation as a whole works'. It is a distortion to reply 'But supposing someone's 'nature' is homosexual?' or 'But same sex coupling happens in some parts of the animal kingdom.' That is beside the point. Paul, as a creational monotheist, has a strong view of creation itself and how it functions, and though he knows of all



kinds of inner desires, he distinguishes between desire and acting upon them. He knows nothing of an inner ‘nature’ consisting of varieties of sexual attractions which constitute an ‘identity’ at the core of one’s being which must be allowed to determine self-understanding and self-expression and which competes with the obvious and given created and creative male/female order. He does speak of same sex couples here as being ‘inflamed in lust for one another’. These are, in other words, specifically not ‘exploitative’ relationships with a stronger (or richer) partner abusing a weaker one, but relations of mutual consent and enjoyment.

In particular, it’s important that in the overall argument of Romans 1.18–4.25 Paul sees that through Abraham’s faith the sin of Adam will be undone, so Romans 1.18-27 is matched, and reversed, by 4.18-25:

- Humans did not acknowledge God’s power and divinity; they did not give him glory or thank him; instead, they worshipped, served and gave glory to creatures rather than the creator;
- Abraham’s faith, by contrast, was a matter of trusting in God’s promise, giving him glory, not weakening in faith, recognizing his power to do what he had promised; in other words, worshipping the creator, the life-giver (4.17). The result: Abraham and Sarah were fruitful even in old age.
- The fracturing of fruitful image-bearing in (necessarily sterile) same sex relationships is reversed by the restoration of humankind symbolized and modelled in Abraham and Sarah conceiving Isaac: from death to life (4.19, 24 with 1.32).

There is also a parallel, within Romans, between 1.18-32 as a whole and 12.1-21 as a whole – though the ‘reversal’ has been sketched several times by then (2.25-29; 6.1-14; 8.1-17). Specifically, the ‘darkening of the heart’ in 1.21 is part of the ‘learning to think in foolish ways’ in the same verse; and the renewal of the heart in 2.29 (cf. 6.17) is matched by the renewal of the mind in e.g. 8.5-8, leading to 12.1-2: present your bodies, be transformed by the renewal of the mind. There can be no doubt that Paul envisages the renewed heart and mind as producing the opposite kinds of behaviour to what is found throughout 1.18-32.

Romans 1.26-27 is therefore tightly integrated into the whole letter, and into Paul's entire vision of humanity renewed in Christ and by the Spirit. One cannot 'pick it off' by first misreading it and then dismissing it as irrelevant, or upstaged by 'contemporary knowledge'. Romans offers a theology of creation renewed (8.18-30, with its central image of birth-pangs). In that, the vision of creation as in Genesis, with male-plus-female as its high point, is not abolished, but enhanced and renewed. It is revealing that, as in Colossians 3 and Eph. 4-5, Paul speaks of 'lies', in this case 'exchanging God's truth for a lie' (1.25). Paul would have said that to engage in sexual practices outside marriage was to tell lies with one's body.

Paul is describing what happens when a culture turns away from the creator God. That must be the question we ask about our culture and what could happen in the renewed creation in Christ. Given that Romans 12 speaks of the renewing of our minds, echoing the language of Romans 1 about futility, why is there no suggestion of a renewed same sex relationship? And given the existence of committed same sex relationships in the ancient world and culture, there could have been if Paul or anyone in the ancient Church believed that such renewal was included in the gospel. But they didn't. Rather homosexual activity was a witness to the effects of sin on the pagan world. This applies not only to promiscuity, but sexual behaviour that contravenes the clear witness of the way in which human beings are physically made by God, in his image and for sexual activity between men and women alone. Nowhere in the New Testament does any perceived faithfulness or commitment in same sex relationships in the ancient world render God's prohibition valueless.

### **8 1 Corinthians 6.9a: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* and 1 Timothy 1.10**

8:1 Within the long list of those who 'will not inherit God's kingdom', Paul itemizes two words which have become controversial. The first word, *malakos*, is a specific and well-known use (though only here in the New Testament) of a more general word meaning 'soft'. Danker (in the revised Bauer Lexicon) defines it as 'pertaining to being passive in a same sex relationship', hence effeminate, especially of catamites, men and boys who are sodomized in such relationships, being the opposite of *arsenokoitēs*.

There are plenty of classical references for this: some moralists objected to the *malakos* because he was playing the part of a female, i.e. behaving in a way unworthy for a male. But there is no doubt as to the practices being denoted. As Danker notes, the NRSV translation ‘male prostitutes’ is too narrow a rendering (the word denoted anyone who engaged in such practices, and all the evidence suggests that this was by no means confined to those who did it for pay), and the REB ‘sexual pervert’ is too broad. One might add that NJB ‘the self-indulgent’ is completely unwarranted, as is Nicholas King’s translation ‘pederasts’. And if the meaning of *malakos* as ‘passive male homosexual partner’ were in any doubt, its immediate coupling with *arsenokoitai* removes that doubt.

Thus, the word *arsenokoitēs* is, apart from here and 1 Timothy 1.10, otherwise almost unknown, though parallel formations are found in some ancient literature with Jewish (e.g. Sib. Or. 2.73) or New Testament roots. The consensus is that it reflects the Septuagint of Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13, where it is prohibited to ‘lie’ (*koitē*) with a ‘male’ (*arsēn*) as with a female: it means, literally, ‘male-lying’ or ‘male-bedding’, and is clearly used, especially when paired as here with *malakos*, in relation to the active partner in a homosexual union. In Leviticus the idea of male dominance is entirely absent from the text, which is about not transgressing the boundaries with regard to marriage and sexuality established in Genesis 1 and 2.

That much is more or less given with the etymology, but how Paul and his hearers were applying that has remained inevitably controversial. Danker (DBAG 135) adjudicates upon the range of literature ancient and modern: ‘Romans forbade pederasty with free boys... Paul’s strictures against same sex activity cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple-prostitution... or limited to contract with boys for homoerotic service.’ This is backed up by the quotation of the present passage in Polycarp, Philippians 5.3, where Polycarp, warning the young men in the congregation to be self-controlled in relation to fleshly lusts, does not seem to be warning against either prostitution or pederasty. Tony Thiselton’s comment (1 *Corinthians*, p. 452) is worth quoting in full:

The claims often made that ‘the issue of “homosexuality” – psychosexual orientation – simply was not a biblical issue’ are confused. Paul addresses every form of ‘desire’, whether

heterosexual or materialistic, and distinguishes between passionate longing and action (cf. 7.9). It is true that 'homosexual orientation' does not feature as a phenomenon for explicit comment, but to dismiss the parallel, e.g. between heterosexual desire and an illicit habituated heterosexual relationship, is itself to isolate same sex relations from other ethical issues in a way which [certain writers arguing for gay relationships] rightly deplore. Many also argue that abusive pederasty was the standard form in which Paul encountered male intimacy. But Wolff [German commentary on 1 Cor.] shows that this is far from the case. Paul witnessed around him both abusive relationships of power or money and examples of 'genuine love' between males. We must not misunderstand Paul's 'worldly' knowledge.

One might also cite the famous Warren Cup, from early first century, and also a first-century BC gemstone now in a museum in Leiden: both illustrate same sex male–male penetrative sex between 'equals' and with apparent mutual enjoyment.

Thiselton's further remarks on assessing the relevance of the New Testament's retrieval of Leviticus (p. 542) are worth pondering. Of course, also to be pondered is the point of the whole passage, which, starting from the problem of Christians taking other Christians to law, insists on transformation: 'That, of course, is what some of you were! But you were washed clean; you were made holy; you were put back to rights – in the name of the Lord, King Jesus, and in the spirit of our God' (6.11). In other words: Paul is not here making a big thing of sexual malpractice, but he takes it for granted that when someone becomes a Christian any such practices are abandoned. If that is not done, further serious problems result, as he shows in chapter 10. All this explains why Tom Wright translated 6.9 as 'practising homosexuals of whichever sort'.

Significantly the Levitical prohibitions of 17–18 seem to be behind the Council of Jerusalem's instruction to the Gentile Christians in Acts 15.19–21 as well as Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6.9 and 1 Timothy 1.10. These texts are examples of how the Early Church, in a way consistent with the gospel account of the teaching of Jesus, was able to read the Hebrew Bible in relation to the kingdom of God, by relinquishing the food laws, but not the teaching on sexual relationships.

In Corinthians there is a ‘Yes’ to the alternative of marriage and sexual abstinence. It is true that there is no provision for ‘sexual needs’ other than in marriage, where the goodness of sexual activity is affirmed. But the whole tenor of the letter is to inculcate love for all in the body of Christ, married or not, and that the experience of worship, principally at the Lord’s Supper will be the place where that love is known. There is an expectation throughout the New Testament that love will bring self-control, which is not deemed to be an impossible goal, because it is a fruit of the Spirit.

1 Timothy 1.10 simply repeats *arsenokoitai*, as part of a long list of those for whom ‘the law’ is useful in the sense of keeping them in check. The characteristics that are listed (see 9,10) are described as ‘behaviour contrary to healthy teaching in accordance with the gospel of the glory of God...’ As with 1 Corinthians 6, this cannot be reduced to exploitative or wild practices, as though this allowed ‘permanent, faithful, stable’ relationships.

## **9 Conclusion: New Testament and same sex practice**

Reviewing the passages in historical and epistolary context, one cannot but be struck particularly by the universal early Christian expectation that Christians would be different from pagan society; would be different in a Jewish way, that is, a creational-monotheist way, in which sexual behaviour mattered very much as part of joyful obedience to the first command (‘be fruitful and multiply’). Sex is important in Judaism and Christianity, not because one is obsessed or paranoid or psychologically damaged (though people may be all of those things) but because sex is a vital part of the true human identity as image-bearing and creation-sharing creatures. The evidence goes all the way through the first two or three centuries and beyond that Christians were known for sexual continence.

It remains the case that the New Testament emphasizes other things than sexual purity. Poverty and riches obviously are prominent as well as sins of the tongue, especially lying. But that doesn’t mean that sexual holiness isn’t important, or that it is *adiaphora* (see N. T. Wright’s address to the Durham Diocesan Synod on ‘*adiaphora*’ at end of this paper).

The New Testament, from Jesus onwards, regularly speaks of transformation. Baptism is not about ‘affirming’ people ‘as we are’,

but about us dying and coming up radically different the other side as resurrected sons and daughters of God. The Spirit comes to enable people to put to death what is earthly in them. Jesus called his followers, not to follow him and discover they were all alright as they were, but to take up their cross, deny themselves, and follow him to shame and suffering. This central challenge must not be neutralized or caricatured.

The New Testament texts in question are not ‘just a few odd texts’ which are ‘obscure and hard to interpret’. Some of our traditions of reading have made them harder than they needed to be, but mostly they are clear. They didn’t need a great deal of spelling out at the time because few if any early Christians would have imagined raising the question as it is raised today (just as Jesus never spoke about circumcision because, though it was a big issue in Paul’s Gentile churches, it wasn’t for his hearers). The texts in question are visibly and demonstrably symptomatic of the larger Jewish worldview at a point where it was strongly and emphatically re-affirmed by the early Christians, drawing on Jesus’ warnings about the evils which come from the heart and about the transformation and healing which was necessary, and was offered (not least of course through his cross and resurrection).

There is so much more to say about the warnings, especially in the Old Testament prophets right up to the Book of Revelation, which speaks of the excluded as well as the included, of conformity to the prevailing culture, and the presence of false teachers in the church’s life. No one treated these things as matters of indifference or private opinion.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whoever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. (1 John 5.2-5)

## 10 Executive Summary of Bishop N. T. Wright's Address to Durham Diocesan Synod, May 2010

Paul's principle of *adiaphora*, set out especially in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14, deals with issues about which one ought not to divide the church. Wrongly described as 'tolerance' ('tolerance' is an Enlightenment parody of the New Testament virtue of 'love'), this is about learning to accept as fellow-Christians those who disagree over things which symbolized and expressed a former identity – i.e. particularly things to do with Jewish life (food laws, Sabbath) or previous pagan life now rejected (meat offered to idols). Paul, as a pastor, knows that people do not always change deeply-felt and – held practices overnight, and urges that these things are *adiaphora*, things one ought not to 'make a difference' about.

This is of central importance. People sometimes suppose that because you are advocating 'tolerance' or 'diversity', or 'accepting difference', this is somehow automatically justified or validated. But that is clearly not so (consider polygamy, infanticide, etc.). For Paul, to say that keeping the Sabbath or the food laws was now 'indifferent' (do it if you like, don't if you prefer not to, and don't judge one another) was a major, explicit and fully conscious redrawing of the symbolic boundaries of the community of the people of God. These were mandatory right across Judaism. This was a way of saying that what God had done in Christ was a radical redefinition of his people, so that they would no longer be coterminous or continuous with 'Israel according to the flesh'. One could put it like this: to change something from being mandatory to being optional, from being necessary to being '*adiaphora*', is a major symbolic change. Perhaps the *key* question facing the Anglican Church right now is: how do you tell the difference between the differences that make a difference and the differences that don't make a difference?

The principle of *adiaphora* goes closely with that of subsidiarity (that issues should be decided at the most local level possible). One does not call an international Ecumenical Council to decide which tune to use for 'O Little Town of Bethlehem'. Equally, the Parochial Church Council cannot decide, locally, to serve hamburgers instead of Communion bread. This leads to:

The principle of subsidiarity is umbilically related, of course, to the imperative of communion. According to ‘subsidiarity’, issues should be decided as locally as possible; according to ‘communion’, this must be done in such a way as to maintain *koinōnia*. This, explored in the Virginia report, can be an elusive concept but clearly relates both to the actual sharing of the Eucharist and to the notion of ‘being in communion’.

In the Early Church (e.g. Ignatius) this was maintained by the relationship of each Church with its own bishop, and of the bishops with one another; then, by the fourth or fifth century, of the ‘five great sees’ which would be consulted on key issues. This was used in the Windsor Report as one possible model for how the Anglican Communion might see itself. The principle was clear: we wanted to remain ‘in communion’, and were aware that there were some things which, for ostensibly and arguably good reasons, might well jeopardize that.

The principles of *adiaphora* and subsidiarity indicate that when such a question is raised in more than one or two places, or if it has a *prima facie* case on the basis of Scripture, tradition and reason, the question at issue cannot in the first instance be decided locally, but must be brought to the central councils of the church.

The point can be summarized epigrammatically: the question of whether a particular issue can be decided locally is not itself a question that can be decided locally. Or, the step from ‘mandatory’ to ‘optional’ cannot itself be a ‘local option’. That is the principle – which operates in many other spheres of life as well as in Church and theology – which the Americans in particular have chosen to ignore at a formal level, and many clergy in the UK have ignored at an informal level.

Where something is *adiaphora*, the principle is clear: you defer to the ‘weaker sibling’; i.e. if someone’s conscience is wounded by what you find yourself free to do, you are no longer walking in love. This is of course open to manipulation by a small minority who claim especially tender consciences in order to prevent any innovation. But the main principle is that it is up to the innovator to make the case, and to be clear that people are not offended, before going ahead. Cf.



William Temple's remark about the obligation on a theologian: if making an innovation, to explain to the worried faithful how what they cherish in the old way of putting things is retained and enhanced in the new way.

The vital question remains: which issues count as *adiaphora*, how do you know, and who says? The Anglican practice has been (de facto at least, though now highlighted specifically by *The Windsor Report*) that for an innovation to be accepted it should first come through the Lambeth Conference, meaning that Lambeth says 'this is an allowable practice'. It then goes to provinces; then, if accepted in principle, to dioceses; then, if accepted in principle, to parishes. That is what's happened with child Communion. It is in principle what is happening with women bishops. It has not, of course, happened with same sex relations whether for laity or clergy, or with the ordination of those who practice them. But again the principle is clear: no Church at whatever level can simply assume that something previously forbidden is now *adiaphora*, or indeed that something previously mandatory is now reduced to optional status.

For the full text, see: [http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Diocesan\\_Address\\_May\\_2010.htm](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Diocesan_Address_May_2010.htm)

# Evangelicals, Scripture and same sex relationships – an ‘Including Evangelical’ perspective

## The Revd David Runcorn

*This paper seeks to trace the journey of Christians within the Evangelical tradition, holding a high view of the Bible, who have come to accept the place of committed, faithful same sex relationships within the church, on the basis of (not in spite of) the teaching of Scripture.*<sup>154</sup>

The Revd David Runcorn

Anglicans affirm the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures as the medium through which God by the Spirit communicates his word in the Church. The Scriptures are the “uniquely inspired witness to divine revelation, and the primary norm for Christian faith and life”. The Scriptures must be translated, read and understood, and their meaning grasped through a continuing process of interpretation...<sup>155</sup>

‘My confidence is not in the certainty of being right, but rather on the grace and mercy of God, before whom I have sought truth as best I can.’

### 1 Some introductions

For simplicity I will refer to ‘Conserving Evangelicals’ and ‘Including Evangelicals’ in this paper (hereafter ‘CEs’ and ‘IEs’). Every label is a libel to some degree. The terms are chosen to express the faithful intent in each position and to affirm that they are partners in the gospel – and in this debate. The choice of verbs is also deliberate – to suggest movement and meeting rather than unyielding positions.<sup>156</sup>

For CEs and IEs obedient submission to the Scriptures in personal discipleship and in the life and practice of the Church is primary and non-negotiable. This commitment is experienced as a journey of constant discovery, re-discovery and renewal. So the challenge Evangelicals often pose to each other is not ‘Are we being biblical or not?’ but ‘Are we being biblical *enough*?’ CEs and IEs share a concern when any debate within the wider Church appears to ignore, misread or marginalize the place of the Bible.

The point of division in this debate emerges in the task of ‘seeking meaning through a continuing process of interpretation’. Here IEs, with others, have come to believe that there is place for faithful same sex relationships in the Church. Careful study and conversation persuades them there are fresh exegetical challenges to long-held convictions about what Scripture teaches. This is undoubtedly influenced by the greater openness to same sex relationships in society as a whole and thus to the reality of lives most personally shaped by it. This also means that the reading of Scripture is now happening in participation with, and not at distance from, those whose lives and relationships are the particular focus of this debate.

It must be noted that IEs are no one group. However, one attempt to co-ordinate IEs is *Accepting Evangelicals* which presently has just under 600 members.<sup>157</sup> The majority are openly listed on their website. ‘Confidential’ membership is an option for ‘those who are concerned that their public support would put them at risk of prejudice or discrimination. Their names will remain confidential and will not appear on our website’. Seventeen per cent presently opt for confidential membership.

Their statement of aims summarizes the IE position very well:

**‘We are an open network of Evangelical Christians ...**

who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same sex partnerships at every level of church life, and the development of a positive Christian ethic for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Accepting Evangelicals is for everyone who would call themselves Evangelical.

## We welcome...

people who believe that loving, faithful same sex relationships built on mutual commitment and self-giving love are not condemned in the Bible and

people who are willing to accept the Christian integrity of those who affirm same sex relationships, although they do not personally hold this view.

**We welcome people from all Christian Churches, Fellowships & Denominations.'**

This is a tradition that contains strong divisions of opinion of this subject. At the time of writing the wider Evangelical world is absorbing news that three very influential leaders on either side of the Atlantic – Steve Chalke, Jim Wallis and Rob Bell – have recently expressed support for faithful, same sex relationships.<sup>158</sup>

## **2 Reading Scripture**

Debates on same sex relationships focus all too quickly on 'The Texts' – those six or seven passages in the Bible that actually speak of homosexuality or homosexual activity. IEs, along with other 'revisionists', are frequently asked to supply texts that support their view that Scripture supports same sex relationships. They cannot do so because there are none. But the lack of explicit biblical teaching on significant social and ethical issues is not the same as claiming there are no scriptural grounds to support a particular viewpoint.

The tendency to centre contentious debates around the absence or presence of supporting texts is actually strongly criticized by respected scholars within the Evangelical tradition.

Bishop Tom Wright notes real dangers in assuming that what the Bible teaches on any issue can be determined by simply reading a Bible text or verse as if that is proof:

First, there is an implied, and quite unwarranted, positivism: we imagine that we are 'reading the text, straight', and that if somebody disagrees with us it must be because they, unlike we ourselves, are secretly using 'presuppositions' of this or that sort. This is simply naive, and actually astonishingly arrogant and dangerous. It fuels the second point. Evangelicals often use

the phrase ‘authority of Scripture’ when they mean the authority of evangelical, or Protestant theology, since the assumption is made that we (evangelicals, or Protestants) are the ones who know and believe what the Bible is saying... the phrase ‘authority of Scripture’ can, by such routes, come to mean simply ‘the authority of evangelical tradition, as opposed to Catholic or rationalist ones.’<sup>159</sup>

R. T. France expands on what faithful reading of Scripture therefore demands:

A truly biblical hermeneutic must not confine itself to the overt pronouncements.... but must be open to the biblical evidence as a whole, including its narrative and incidental parts. When this broader approach is undertaken it may lead us to re-examine the way in which we have read the more ‘obvious’ texts... If this makes deriving guidance for the real world from the biblical text more complex than it might at first have seemed, so be it. Let us hope that by embracing the wider range of biblical evidence we are enabled to be more responsible in offering biblical guidance for the issues of our generation.<sup>160</sup>

Christian history warns of the hazards of using texts alone to establish the biblical teaching on any issue. In the eighteenth-century slavery debate, abolitionists were denounced as ‘revisionists’ on the basis of the ‘plain meaning’ of Bible texts. ‘No examples of more willful and violent perversions of the sacred text are to be found [than] in the writings of the abolitionists. They seem to consider themselves above the Scriptures...’<sup>161</sup> The mandate for the enslaving of black Africans was found in Genesis 9.20-25. In addition, Romans 13.1-7, 1 Corinthians 7.20-21, Colossians 3.22-25, 1 Timothy 6.1-6 and Titus 2.9 were all quoted in support of slavery, as was Paul’s apparent acceptance of it and the silence of Jesus on the subject.

The Christian Church today believes slavery to be evil and wrong on the basis of biblical teaching and ethics. But on what scriptural basis? Nowhere in the Old Testament or New Testament is slavery actually condemned – quite the reverse in fact. For in significant periods of Christian history it has been worryingly easy for churches to teach and support slavery in its most abhorrent forms and preach ‘Onesimus’ (at best) to slaves as their role model.<sup>162</sup>

A reading of Evangelical history reveals a tradition that, though often fiercely reactive at first, will move to revise, reverse or adopt ‘including’ positions on important social and ethical issues it previously opposed on the grounds of Scripture. The list would include slavery, apartheid, usury, divorce and remarriage, contraception and women in society and the Church. This observation makes no presumption as to conclusions on same sex relationships. I simply observe that the unsettling process of reading, re-examining, repenting, re-interpreting and revising even long unquestioned biblical convictions under the compelling of the Spirit is not a task this conserving tradition is unfamiliar with nor unwilling to undertake. Indeed its own understanding of Scripture requires it.

### **3 IEs, Scripture and ‘The Texts’**

This is very familiar ground on all sides of the debate. I will engage here with some aspects of those few biblical texts that mention homosexuality, and only in sufficient detail to show the reasons that IEs have moved from traditional interpretations. I hope this proves more illuminating than frustrating. There is always more that could be said on all sides.

In more recent debate there has been a move away from a focus on individual texts towards a concern to read them in the context of the wider biblical narrative. This is to be welcomed for the understanding of human identity and vocation needs setting in the context of God’s intention for the whole of creation. For this reason, I start with the creation stories in Genesis.

## **Genesis 2 – human origin and vocation**

### **Revisiting the ‘traditional’ reading**

In the traditional reading, Adam, the first human being, is created from the dust and breathed into life in the goodness of creation. But he is alone. God provides a partner for him – a woman. Created in God’s image, the mutual joy and partnership of the man and woman in marriage affirms God’s created intention for humanity. They are literally made for each other. This ordering, by definition therefore, must exclude homosexual relationships.

Of course it is right that any account of the origin of humanity must *of necessity* be of the creation and sexual union of a man and a woman. Heterosexual relating is ‘typical’ in creation and it is not only the Hebrew and Christian traditions that have therefore created forms of public covenant for this relationship to ensure its honouring and protection in society.

It is sometimes argued that the whole created order has a bi-focused structure (a more familiar term for this is ‘complementarity’ but that word needs more careful defining in this context). In this view the heterosexual marriage and the union of husband and wife together is a central expression and metaphor for God’s plan for the both the original creation and the new creation.

This approach does raise a number of questions.

- i. For Christians the starting place for understanding the Divine intention for life is Jesus Christ and the community that comes into being through his words and deeds. Now Jesus strongly affirmed the place of marriage. But he also insisted that a redeemed, gospel community must not only transcend such (bi-focused) social institutions but even renounce them (Luke 14.26). Marriage itself is for this age only (Matthew 22.30).
- ii. Doesn’t a bifocused reading of Genesis 2 for human ordering in creation actually exclude *any other kind of human relationships at all* – friendship, community or society? There is only marriage on offer. What are we to assume from that? The sexual union of husband and wife indeed offers a metaphor of extraordinary intimacy for expressing the love of Christ for his Church and thus for the final uniting of all life in the love of God. But does this have to be an excluding metaphor rather than a unique expression of a vocation all humanity shares and expresses in different ways?
- iii. Marriage, as introduced in Genesis 2, is far more than the union of two individuals. In ancient Hebrew culture it expresses a vocation to *community*.<sup>163</sup> This is often missed. But can the language of bifocus express this truth at all? Or is society itself bifocused – and if so how?

- iv. The theological focus in this creation account is not on a supposed bifocused ordering of heaven and earth but on the vocation of humanity made in the divine image. Where a bifocused world is to be found in the New Testament it is more often presumed to be part of the old order overturned by the gospel (male/female, Jew/Gentile, etc. – cf. Galatians 3.28). In any case, a faithful Christian understanding of the divine image in creation will surely be *Trinitarian*.
- v. This whole approach needs a defence against the claim that a bifocused ordering of human sexual relating expresses in some intentional way what it means to be made in the Image of God. Is the claim being made that man and woman in married union somehow ‘complete’ the expression of what it means to be made in God’s image? It needs to be shown that God’s image in humanity is understood as expressed through marriage and sexual differentiation in Hebrew or Christian theology. And can this be so without implying sexual differentiation within God – something utterly foreign to the biblical tradition? Augustine and Aquinas follow the majority Christian tradition in finding the image of God expressed in humanity’s unique capacity to think, reason and discern. If so, then marriage, gender and sexuality, though significant in themselves, are not ingredients for use in discussions about divine likeness.<sup>164</sup>
- vi. The claim that Genesis 2 reveals God’s pattern for human relating also requires an acceptance of a great deal else that is presumed there about the divine ordering of life. That whole creation narrative comes embedded in the cultural assumptions of an ancient, conservative, patriarchal society. It is told, at least initially, entirely from the male perspective and presumes a world created and ordered entirely around male needs. He is alone. No other creature meets his need. At last the woman is made for him (but not man for the woman). He names her as he has named the creatures – a generic not personal name at that). This is what ‘having dominion’ means. At this point of her creation the woman is passive, without choice or voice.
- vii. Marriage as found in Genesis 2 is theologically, culturally and relationally a very long way from a Christian understanding of marriage. Overall there is a great deal in this ancient story that Christian teaching challenges as a basis of loving human relating of *any* kind.



### Exploring an ‘including’ reading

The first human being, in the original goodness of life, made in the image of God, is alone. God declares this ‘not good’. This is not a consequence of sin. Nor is it a need that God can fulfil. A hunger and longing for relationship lies at the good heart of being human.

Now in the first creation account God decrees and it happened. In this second creation story, the choice is all with the human being in the search for companionship. God decrees nothing here (except what is *not good*). Rather he is present as one who serves (cf. Jesus in Luke 22.27), creating creature after creature in the search for a suitable helper for Adam. But only Adam, it seems, can recognize who this is. He must choose. When God finally creates from *within* and *out of* the human being, the companionship of Eve is recognized and celebrated as pure gift. ‘There is no divine blueprint; there is only what makes glad the heart of each of us’.<sup>165</sup> Moore spells out further the significance of this drama for our context. ‘A companion, in the sense of companionship which is in view in this text, is somebody you actually want to be with and share your life with. An imposed companion would be no companion at all.’<sup>166</sup>

As to the patriarchal setting of the story there are signs of an alternative, subverting voice in the narrative in the way the woman is created out of the *side* of the man (not head or feet), and that she is created *last* (hitherto a sign of superiority in the creation narratives). Her description as his ‘ezer’ – helper – also critiques the narrative’s male-centredness for the name carries no sense of subordination. To the contrary it is the same term by which God is known to Israel as one who helps/saves.

Marriage now appears almost as an aside – ‘for this reason’ (eg ‘and while we are on this subject’). For it offers, as the founding expression of human relationship, a primary illustration of the life-fulfilling and life-giving companionship that all humanity is created for. Marriage of man and woman is thus ‘typical’ (Moore), and to be utterly revered as that. But what is typical does not rule out the atypical. As we have noted, no other relationships *of any kind* are acknowledged in this account but we do not draw excluding conclusions from that.

### **What may be concluded from this?**

- Human beings are created with a life searching/life fulfilling longing and need for loving relationship and community.
- Within this world heterosexual love between man and woman is ‘typical’ and accorded special place through marriage. Many who strongly support same sex partnerships would wish to retain a distinctive place for heterosexual marriage.
- This creation story comes embedded in the cultural assumptions of an ancient patriarchal society marked by male hierarchy and female subordination. A Christian reading of this story therefore requires critical, theological discernment.
- IEs find no grounds here for excluding the possibility of same sex relationships (that is unless any relationships outside of heterosexual marriage are excluded). Rather, the question is simply not addressed.

### **Other texts**

#### **Genesis 18–19 – The sin of Sodom**

IEs question whether this notorious story has anything directly to say about faithful same sex relationships. However, its actual concern is very relevant to, and all too often ignored, in this debate. This concerns the covenant obligation to honour the stranger in the midst.

What happens in Sodom is in direct contrast to what happened earlier at Abraham’s tent. That hospitality, not homosexuality, is the issue here is made clear by Lot’s protest to those who come demanding access to his guests. He does not say – ‘do not do this because homosexuality is wrong’, but ‘do not do this because they have come under my roof’ (19.8). In Ezekiel 16 the sin of Sodom is ‘pride’ and inhospitality. The message is clear. Hospitality offered leads to blessing. Hospitality rejected leads to destruction.

(But what should be the marks of a *Christian* reading of this harrowing story, set in a male-centred world in which a binding hierarchy of social obligation requires the honouring of (male) guests above the most basic

obligation to protect your own family? In such a world a man will offer his own virgin daughters to distract gang rapists rather than breach this code. Doesn't this culture reveal unredeemed extremes of violent sexism and patriarchy?)

To welcome an *other* into home or community is to offer hospitality solely on the basis of common humanity, rather than any condition or judgement based on presumed or actual knowledge of them. The obligation to hospitality therefore confronts the behaviour of any community that excludes others to ensure the maintenance of its own hierarchical, moral or social preoccupations.<sup>167</sup> This has all too often been the experience of homosexuals in the Church. Inclusion has too often come at the price of silence or compliance. The challenge lies in an insistence that Christian debate cannot proceed on the basis of a supposed 'us' and them' but on the basis of shared humanity.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore the story makes plain that hospitality is a *theological* obligation. The refusal to welcome the 'other' into the midst is actually an assault on God's own honour who is present in that story as a guest (cf. Jesus – 'you did it to me'. Matthew 25.40).

However, Sodom is not remembered for its appalling treatment of guests. The name of this city has become a byword in history for all that is considered evil, malign and disordered about homosexual desire and behaviour. But is there actually any significance in the fact that *homosexual* behaviour referred to here? What was being sought was anal rape. Does this have any relation to homosexual orientation? We might note that levels of heterosexual sexual violence and rape remain at appallingly high levels in Western society and in the wider world. The rape of women (and men) is a common weapon of war and a widespread feature of ethnic violence in our times. When used in this way it is a means of utterly humiliating and disgracing the victim. But what heterosexual men would not be utterly offended to find their sexual orientation and relationships judged as evil and disordered on the basis of records of such abusive and violent behaviour? Homosexual men (and women) feel the same about the historic use of the story of Sodom in relation to their own orientation and relating.

### **Leviticus 18**

The question here is, 'What precisely is condemned here and why?' We note again the setting of this teaching in a culture in which male role, status and behaviour is the sole, driving concern. Although hard to

translate, the concern here seems to be men behaving ‘like women’ (ie passive/submissive) in same sex intercourse. Much more than that is simply not certain.

If so then the focus of condemnation here appears to be same sex sexual behaviour that is considered to violate the controlling belief in male dominance and superiority, and within which the insertion of the penis into the vagina is a very precise and binding act of male possession. Such behaviour is therefore to be condemned because it threatens the whole created order. This passage belongs in the wider context of Hebrew beliefs about holiness and purity in which certain behaviours were to be resisted if they were believed to symbolically or actually cross boundaries or confuse ‘categories’ that were deemed sacred.

It is at least questionable whether the concern here is with homosexuality at all. It also needs to be established whether this assertive/passive, possession/submission understanding of sexual relating has any relevance to patterns of contemporary homosexual or heterosexual relating today. In fact is this a Christian understanding of sexual relating at all? It is not for Paul who teaches sexual equality in 1 Corinthians 7. Christian relationships are characterized by mutual self-giving not male ownership and possession. ‘What is at stake here is not a supposed divine plan of heterosexuality, but a supposed divine plan for male dominance.’<sup>169</sup>

### **Romans 1.18–32 – idolatrous society under judgement**

This outspoken critique of a Godless, chaotic culture where any conviction of moral ordering has collapsed may possibly find comparisons within aspects of contemporary Western society. And homosexual behaviour can and does feature in the varied, promiscuous mix that can characterize such lifestyles.

In summary Paul here describes people who:

- i. have wilfully and knowingly turned from the creator to idolatrous living.
- ii. have in consequence been ‘given over’ by God as judgement. This seems to result in the removal of any restraining grace or moral sensibility upon human desire and behaviour.

- iii. are therefore acting out of uncontrolled, burning, inflamed, unbridled lust, and
- iv. are acting contrary to ‘nature’. Specifically they have deliberately exchanged their ‘natural’ sexual orientation for an ‘unnatural’ one.

What is clear in this passage is that it is not homosexual *behaviour* that Paul condemns. Homosexual behaviour described here is something, among many vices, that Gentile culture has been ‘given over to’ by God. The *desire itself* is one expression of divine judgement for turning away from God to idolatrous living. If this is so then the decision to ‘exchange’ passions is presumably itself compelled by God. There is no choice. This behaviour is out of human control. It is helpless. Those under judgement in this way are presumably easy to identify by lifestyles that include a helpless, burning, unredeemable addiction to indulging sex in any shape or form. Perhaps that is why Paul does not describe homosexuality as a sin. He speaks of it in terms of ‘shame’. Plainly this passage can only be applied to other social and relationship contexts with great care.

First, it must be asked how Christians are to read this in the light of contemporary understanding of homosexual orientation?

Secondly, is *this really that*? There are certainly parts of gay subculture that are highly promiscuous but in what way do we claim to recognize these verses as a familiar description of typical monogamous, homosexual behaviour in the world today? It plainly isn’t.

Thirdly, we simply do not know if Paul had any comparable experience of the faithful, covenanted, same sex relationships under discussion here. Since that claim involves making very specific comparison between two widely differing cultures and contexts there must at least be room for doubt.

Finally, if comparisons are not to be deeply offensive we need to be very clear in what way at all this passage applies to Christians today who find themselves homosexual by ‘nature’<sup>170</sup> who confess Christ as Lord, repent of their sins and renounce evil; who are faithful and chaste in their relationships; and who seek blessing upon their same sex partnership and their shared discipleship in the way of Christ.

### **1 Corinthians 6.1-11 – Christian disputes**

This passage is concerned with Christian behaviour in the community of the baptized. Some have been pursuing disputes through the secular courts. Paul denounces this. He recalls them to the reality of their baptism, stressing the distinctiveness of Christian behaviour in society by listing vices that can never be found among inheritors of the kingdom. All are examples of behaviour that is harmful, destructive or abusive of others. *Malakos* and *arsenokoitēs* are mentioned among them (Paul clearly has Leviticus 18 in mind). The two words may be paired here though no other vices are paired in this list. We have already questioned whether the pattern of sexual relating suggested by these words and their cultural context – ancient Hebrew or Greek/Roman – in any way approximates to contemporary expressions of same sex partnership. Christian relationships are based on mutuality, love and sacrifice.

Those who find no comparison more naturally read these verses as calling the whole community to gospel standards in their relationships with each other.

### **1 Corinthians 7.27-38 – sexual abstinence**

Those who believe Scripture forbids homosexual sexual relationship of any kind urge celibacy as the Christian alternative on offer. I briefly consider Paul's teaching on sexual abstinence in the light of this passage.

The priority for all relationships in the New Testament is that they are lived in the light of the coming Kingdom.

The forsaking of marriage and commitment to sexual abstinence here is for a specific reason. This is 'an emergency measure enabling the Christians to concentrate on God, who will very soon bring the world to an end'.<sup>171</sup> After all what long-term arrangements of *any* kind are appropriate when you are close to the consummation of the cosmos? Paul therefore urges the Corinthian church to choose celibacy as he has (v.7).

Celibate life here is thus envisaged as short-term. The Lord is near. Nowhere is the concept of life-long abstinence addressed at all.

Crucially, Paul recognizes this is not possible for everyone. There is no judgment on those who recognize their desires are too strong to manage. On the contrary, 'It is better to marry than burn' (vv.7-9). It is no failure, sin or weakness to need to express sexual desire. This is part of what it means to be human and a very particular way in which human companionship is expressed and sustained.

The decision regarding celibacy/abstinence or marriage is left to Christians themselves. Paul is wholly merciful, permission-giving and non-judgmental in this provision. To live within sexually expressed committed relationship is 'typical' in creation. It is a gift of God. It would therefore be a contradiction to speak as if this desire, unlike many others, can be controlled and denied expression by simple choice or act of will.

Marriage or abstinence is chosen by those who have 'so decided in their own heart' (v.37). It is a personal choice. It is not imposed. There is no scriptural warrant for a community imposing celibacy upon any of its members. It is a gift that can only be freely chosen by those to who find the grace and resources to do so.

What basis is found here for requiring lives of complete sexual abstinence of those who are homosexual in orientation? Is it better for them to burn than to marry? Nowhere is celibacy applied as a 'remedy' for what is understood to be disordered sexual desire.

We may wonder why Paul does not anywhere address the relational and sexual needs of those in the community for whom heterosexual marriage is not the option. Once again it is reasonable to suggest the possibility that this is an expression of committed relationship that Paul knew nothing of and that is why he does not directly address them in his teaching.

Finally, the Scriptures plainly condemn the *disordered* expression of sexual desire. Like all other parts of life sexual behaviour and expression needs consecration and discipline. There is need, in any age, for abstinence from sexual behaviour that is self evidently destructive of others. This remains a tragic expression of disordered humanity but a discussion that belongs in another context.

## **The tests of time and experience**

There is one other way of responding to the challenges same sex relationships present and it is taught by Jesus. He teaches tests of discernment that are specifically *not* based on prior convictions about what is permitted or forbidden. One is the test of ‘fruitfulness’. ‘By their fruits you shall recognize them ... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit’. (Matthew 7.16-18). Since fruit needs time to grow and reveal its quality this must be a longer term strategy for discernment. And as fruit requires tending and care this process requires a trusting, patient and non-anxious inclusion. Another example of this is found when the disciples try to stop someone ministering in the name of Jesus because ‘he is not one of us’. Jesus contradicts them. ‘Whoever is not against us is for us’ (Mark 9.38-40). The wisdom of Gamaliel may also be invoked here – ‘if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them... you may even be found fighting against God!’ (Acts 5.34). So in the face of a situation whose gift (or threat?) is not immediately apparent the Christian community is offered ways of proceeding that might be called Godly pragmatism.

Another New Testament example is found in the story of Peter at Joppa. This is the moment the first believers turned from being an excluding Jewish sect to an including church for the world. In relating his response to his dream and subsequent visit, as a Jew, to the (forbidden/unclean) house of a Gentile, Peter bases his defense entirely on the evidence of what he saw and experienced. The community of Jerusalem also accepts his testimony on those terms (Acts 11.4-18). This meant that strictly in terms of what they believed the Hebrew Scriptures to teach on exclusion and separation they found themselves disobeying Scripture to obey God!

IEs find here a valid, scripturally commended source of discernment – one that Jesus himself taught and used. It is the evidence of people’s lives, over time and with the support and care that all growing needs.

## **The Jesus community**

Richard Burrige notes the persistent habit of excluding Jesus himself from studies of Christian ethics. When this happens the wisdom and moral sayings in the gospels are lifted from the very stories and deeds of Jesus that give them their context. Even the Evangelical tradition has



been guilty of this. He notes, by contrast, that in Jewish belief, ‘a teacher’s actions were as important as his words. Not just illustration. The life itself was Torah. To imitate the master is a way of knowing Torah and thus becomes an imitation of God’.<sup>173</sup>

Burridge insists that a Christian approach to ethical questions must be centred on Jesus’s life and will always be asking, ‘What kind of community and events were the outcome of his words and deeds?’ The answer is one marked by unexpected welcome, healing and scandalous inclusion. ‘In seeking to follow Jesus, we are called not merely to obey his ethical ‘strenuous commands’ in the pursuit of holiness but also to imitate his deeds and his words, which call his hearers to merciful and loving acceptance of everyone, including and especially those whom some consider to be sinners, without preconditions.’<sup>174</sup>

### **In the light of this – a brief summary**

- a. Those few texts that have traditionally been presumed to establish a clear biblical ‘mind’ on this subject need more careful interpretation within the *actual* concerns of their own cultural context. When this is done their relevance to the contemporary debate is significantly called into question. IEs believe that in this area of human living and relating we have not read or taught Scripture well.
- b. Is this *that*? IEs are not persuaded that those Scriptures that make reference to homosexual activity are describing contemporary expressions of faithful same sex relationships. Indeed the comparison can be deeply offensive. It is questionable whether the contemporary expression of faithful same sex relationships is known in the Bible at all.
- c. Where the Bible does not directly address the context of *any* contemporary social debate we must seek what may be called the ‘trajectory of Scripture’.
- d. The test of experience and fruitfulness. IEs have been positively challenged and enriched in their beliefs in this debate by fellow Christians who are homosexual in orientation and (may also be) living in faithful same sex relationships. They are grateful for this.

## **Convictions, challenges, and ways ahead**

### **Proportion and perspective?**

This is a subject about which the Bible actually says so little. But this appears to be in inverse proportion to the sheer quantity and length of time devoted to debating it. Perhaps we should be asking why? As Richard Burridge notes, 'It is puzzling why being against homosexuality, about which Jesus and the gospels have nothing to say and Paul has only ... passing references alongside many other sins equally common to heterosexuals, should have become the acid test of what it means to be truly 'biblical' in a number of quarters over recent years.'<sup>175</sup>

The preoccupation is evident on all sides of the debate as well as in society as a whole.<sup>176</sup>

*'The important thing is not whether I am single or married, gay or straight, it is whether I am living in the expectation of God's coming Kingdom'.* Donald Goergen

### **Marriage**

I have described heterosexual as what is 'typical' in human creation. And in the biblical and Christian tradition, marriage between man and woman is the primary relationship at the heart of a stable society. It is 'a way of life that all should honour'. But those seeking to defend this vulnerable and exposed institution need also to recognize that marriage has always been an evolving institution, adapting itself through history (though often very slowly) in response to changing patterns within society. This is the task once again and one criticism of the recent Church of England document *Men and Women in Marriage* is that it paid insufficient attention to how this traditional institution relates to contemporary expressions of social and sexual relating.<sup>177</sup>

Marriage, in Scripture, as in all ancient societies, is for *community* creating and building. That contemporary readers see no further than two individuals coming together in the Genesis story reveals how individualized our understanding has become. The vocation to community takes us beyond romantic and privatized ideas of love. It also takes us beyond the language of 'rights' and 'equality' that has

been driving the argument for extending ‘marriage’ to same sex couples. The real issue is an anxious inability to cope with ‘difference’. When difference is defended it is too easily denounced as excluding and discriminatory.

What is ‘typical’ does not exclude what is atypical. This is an important conviction. For what is needed are communities that unambiguously affirm and support marriage as the union of man and woman without excluding or devaluing the other faithful ways in which humanity honours companionship and belonging. They are not in competition. Indeed there is an essential mutuality to this vision. Marriage cannot thrive in isolation. It has always needed a supportive community of rich committed friendship around it.

### **Covenant and friendship**

A primary way of expressing human commitments in the Bible is through covenant. This is defined as ‘an exclusive relationship between two parties based on promise and marked by faithfulness, steadfastness, patience and forgiveness.’<sup>178</sup> These covenants can take many forms. But the significance of covenant-making between people lies in their purpose. Covenanted life is to reflect the life and character of God who makes covenant with his creation.

Part of the gift of this debate is that it is reminding the Church that human beings need a wider range of relationships in community than just the model of marriage. We need to recover the gift of friendship. Atkinson notes that friendship is very often the distinctive quality in homosexual relationships. A recent survey among single people reveals a widespread feeling of being marginalized in the Church. Christian teaching on relationships is all too often focused on marriage alone.<sup>179</sup> So there is something timely about the rediscovery ‘of a long Christian tradition of deep and covenanted friendships between people of the same sex and of the opposite sex’.<sup>180</sup> These were apparently well-known in other periods of history and included public commitment to sworn friendship of men to men and women to women. Liturgies for such covenants show marked similarities to marriage vows and prayers. Their presence illustrates the significance of consenting, committed relationships alongside marriage in human community. Biblical covenant is a way of seeking holiness of life through faithful relationships.

## **Same sex relationships**

For a significant minority of men and women in society what is ‘not good’ for them is the absence of the love of a partner of the *same sex*. Marriage may not be an option but the need for companionship is the same. IEs support those couples who seek to make public their commitment to each other through civil partnership. They are to be supported in their calling to the same standards of holiness, faithfulness and love as heterosexual couples. IEs are not persuaded that this contemporary phenomenon of faithful, committed same sex relationships is one that was known to writers of the Old and New Testaments.

For IEs this is a subject on which Christians may respectfully differ.

## **Hospitable, non-anxious and healing**

This debate needs to guard a strong pastoral perspective. When the ‘good’ search for love, belonging and intimacy is happening in a society without moral compass, and where familiar boundaries for human relating have all but collapsed, it will often be a place of great wounding, hurt and bewilderment. The journey towards intimacy of any kind may be very difficult one. ‘When it comes to the place of our wounded sexuality, healing cannot start from the place of passion. The search must be for other moments ... assured of another’s steady love .... And where the wounding is too deep, we have to be loyal to these other ways, and when we are, just as much love is made.’<sup>181</sup>

In such a context to start at the place of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ is also unhelpful. The response of Jesus in the place of human brokenness was to call for mercy not sacrifice. The priority is healing not ‘principles’. In a society so obsessively preoccupied with sex, one of the gifts a Christian community can offer is precisely in being a place where sex is *not* compulsory, where other gifts of friendship and love are possible and where the necessary boundaries of trust can be repaired and built up. The choice (or call) to live celibate for whatever reasons will be understood and revered here, too.

**'Hold fast to that which is good' (1 Thessalonians 5.21)**

An honourable principle in Christian debate is to engage with the *best* of your opponent's case. This is too often neglected in the present context. There is much to admire, respect and learn from the quality of many same sex relationships. Even where we disagree this debate should proceed in a spirit of gratitude towards any in society who take their relationships seriously enough to consider to making loving, covenant commitment to one another.

Christian tradition has struggled throughout its history to unambiguously celebrate the gift of sexual love. It has more often sounded anxious and responded with attempts at control. We lack a word – somewhere between chaste and promiscuous – which expresses a celebratory, faithful, grateful way of indwelling this demanding and holy vocation and to be human and sexual.

'God has created you a sexual being...  
God is at the heart of your striving, still creating you,  
always pursuing, luring, drawing, never letting go...  
Whatever your unique mix and measure of sexuality, be very glad:  
to be a human sexual is fundamental and ordinary and  
exceptional...'

# Notes

1. Romans 8.24-5; Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1 and throughout.
2. Romans 8.18-19.
3. 1 John 3.2.
4. Romans 8.20-21.
5. Genesis 1–3.
6. Isaiah 7.14, Matthew 1.22-3. The basic form of God's promise (covenant) is: 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. Its shortened form is: 'God with us'.
7. Revelation 21.3-7.
8. John 10.10b, Romans 6.3-4.
9. E.g. Mark 1.14-15 and many others.
10. John 3.16.
11. Luke 11.2,13.
12. Romans 8.14-15.
13. Hosea 11.1-4.
14. Hosea 2.16-20, Revelation 21.2.
15. Romans 8.29.
16. John 15.15.
17. Romans 8.28.
18. 1 John 4.12.
19. Augustine, *Confessions* 1:1 (of which the beginning of this piece is really an adapted paraphrase); see also that very Augustinian poem of George Herbert, 'The Pulley': 'though goodnesse lead him not, yet wearinesse/May toss him to my breast'.
20. These assumptions depend upon the widespread availability of efficient contraception.
21. *Homo incurvatus in se* ('Man turned in upon himself') – Martin Luther commenting on Romans via Augustine.
22. Revelation 22.13.
23. '... heven and erth in litel space', characterizing Christ in the womb, is from an anonymous medieval carol 'Ther is no rose of such vertu'.
24. Mark 14.12-16, Matthew 26.46, Luke 22.39-46.
25. Luke 22.19.
26. Matthew 22.36-40, Mark 12.28-34, Luke 10.25-28, Leviticus 19.18, Deuteronomy 6.5.
27. Mark 3.34-5.
28. Matthew 5.27-28.
29. Mark 10.2-5.

30. Mark 10.6-9.
31. John 4.7-30.
32. John 8.3-11.
33. Luke 7.36-50.
34. 1 Corinthians 6.19, Romans 12.1.
35. Ephesians 5.25-33.
36. Mark 10.13-16.
37. Romans 4.13-25, Romans 8.13.
38. Romans 14.7-14.
39. Luke 22.19, 1 Corinthians 11.24-25.
40. Revelation 21.5.
41. *Civil Partnership and Human Sexuality: Statement from the House of Bishops*, GS Misc 997, July 2011, pp. 1–2.
42. The text of the resolution can be found at Paragraph 106.
43. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/reports/index.cfm>
44. The report of these conversations can be found at:  
[http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/resources/conversations\\_on\\_human\\_sexuality.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/resources/conversations_on_human_sexuality.pdf)
45. Phil Groves (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK, 2008.
46. Details of the project can be found at <http://www.aco.org/ministry/continuingindaba/about.cfm>
47. *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, 2003. Speaking at an event at the Evangelical Alliance, 27 August 2013. Reported in the Daily Telegraph, 28 August 2013.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10271438/>
48. [Archbishop-urges-Christians-to-repent-over-wicked-attitude-to-homosexuality.html](#)
49. *The Six Lambeth Conferences 1867–1920*, SPCK 1920, pp. 13–4.
50. *Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1930*, SPCK, 1930, p. 155.
51. *The Truth Shall Make You Free – The Lambeth Conference 1988*, ACC, 1988, p. 15.
52. *Ibid*, p. 16.
53. *Ibid*, p. 16.
54. <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1353/archbishops-first-presidential-address-at-lambeth-conference>
55. *Ibid*.
56. *Ibid*.
57. *General Synod Report of Proceedings* Vol. 18 no. 3, Church House Publishing, 1987, pp. 955–6.
58. *Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, 1991, p. 4.
59. *Issues in Human Sexuality*, p. 18.
60. *Ibid* p. 40.
61. *Ibid* p. 41.
62. *Ibid* p. 42.
63. <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm>. Because of the way in which it

worked the 2008 Lambeth Conference did not produce any resolution on human sexuality. However, the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON), a meeting of conservative Anglican bishops and other leaders which took place in Jerusalem in 2008, produced the Jerusalem Declaration, article 8 of which states: 'We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family. We repent of our failures to maintain this standard and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married'  
[http://gafcon.org/news/gafcon\\_final\\_statement/](http://gafcon.org/news/gafcon_final_statement/).

64. Canon B 30.1.
65. *Marriage*, Church House Publishing, 1999, p. 7.
66. *Ibid*, p. 8.
67. *Ibid*, p. 8.
68. <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2005/07/pr5605.aspx>
69. <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1478643/gs%20misc%201027%20government%20consultation%20on%20same%20sex%20marriage.pdf>
70. *Men and Women in Marriage*, Church House Publishing, 2013, p. 16.
71. *Ibid*, p. 16.
72. <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2005/07/pr5605.aspx>
73. *Ibid*.
74. *Ibid*.
75. *Ibid*.
76. Much more on theology, society and happiness can be found in, John Atherton, Elaine Graham and Ian Steedman (eds), *The Practices of Happiness: Political Economy, Religion and Wellbeing*, Routledge, 2011.
77. Stanley Hauerwas, 'Sex in Public: How Adventurous Christians are Doing it' (1978), in, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (eds), *The Hauerwas Reader*, Duke University Press, 2001, p. 499. Hauerwas also stresses that sex is never simply a private act but always has social and political dimensions.
78. See, for example, Laurence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, Penguin Books, 1990.
79. Archbishop Justin Welby, speaking at the Evangelical Alliance, 27 August 2013. Reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10271438/Archbishop-urges-Christians-to-repent-over-wicked-attitude-to-homosexuality.html>
80. [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778\\_280451.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_280451.pdf)
81. YouGov poll published at <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/gay-marriage-and-the-church/> Accessed 21st September 2012. British Social Attitudes survey of Anglicans and Attitudes towards Gay Marriage at, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2012/anglicans-and-attitudes-towards-gay-marriage/> Accessed 21st September 2012. Crockett and Voas at, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/8/4/crockett.html> Accessed 21st September 2012.
82. The concept of internalized homophobia is found in a large number of academic studies. For a recent example see, Netta Weinstein et.al., 'Is Some Homophobia Self-phobia?', in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.102 (4), April 2012, pp. 815–32. See also Ian R. Williamson, 'Internalized Homophobia and Health Issues Affecting Lesbians and Gay Men', in *The Oxford Journal of Medicine*, Health Education Research, Volume 15, Issue 1, pp. 97–107. Whilst noting the existence of the phenomenon described by the term 'internalized homophobia', Williamson also draws attention to unhelpful and inaccurate ways in which the concept may be used, and we have picked up this point in Paragraph 181.



83. See the Hansard report of the debate at: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2013-14/marriagesamesexcouplesbill/stages.html>
84. <http://www.dontthrowstones.info/> Accessed 25 October 2013. The Archbishop of Canterbury referred to in the quoted passage is Archbishop Rowan Williams.
85. Ibid.
86. Depending on the definition of intersex that is used, the estimates for the number of people with intersex conditions range from as little as 0.018 % of the population to as much as 1.7%. See the discussion in Leonard Sax, 'How Common Is Intersex?', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 39:3, 2002, pp. 174–8.
87. The Home Office, *Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People*, Home Office Communications Directorate, 2000, p. 3. There do not appear to be any reliable statistics for the prevalence of transsexualism.
88. N. Dickson, C. Paul, P. Herbison, 'Same sex attraction in a birth cohort: prevalence and persistence in early adulthood', *Soc Sci Med.* 2003 Apr. 56 (8):1607–15.
89. David de Pomerai, 'The Witness of Science' in P Groves (ed), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK, 2008, p. 290.
90. Cited in S. L. Jones, 'Same Sex Science' in D W Torrance and J Stein (eds), *Embracing Truth*, Handsel Press, 2012, p. 22.
91. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/rollofhonour/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe/psychiatryandlgbpeople.aspx#history>
92. D. O'Callaghan, *Beyond Critique*, Core Issues Trust, 2013, p. 10.
93. Jones, op. cit, p. 22.
94. See for example, M. Bochov et al., 'Sexual behaviour of gay and bisexual men in eight European countries,' *Aids Care*, 6 (5), 199, pp. 533–49 and E O Laumann, J H Gagnon , R Michael and S Michaels, *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*, University of Chicago Press, 1994.
95. Jeffrey John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same Sex Partnerships*, DLT, (2nd ed) 2000. This book, first published in 1993, was reissued in a revised version in 2012 with the new sub-title, *Christian Same Sex Marriage*.
96. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workinpsychiatry/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe/psychiatryandlgbpeople.aspx#wellbeing>
97. O'Callaghan, op. cit. p. 14.
98. See for example, G. Andersson et al, 'The Demographics of Same sex Marriages in Norway and Sweden,' *Demography*, 43(1), 2006, pp. 79–98, and C. Q. Lau 'The Stability of Same sex Cohabitation, Different-Sex Cohabitation and Marriage,' *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 2012, pp. 973–88.
99. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/rollofhonour/specialinterestgroups/gaylesbian/submissiontothecofe/psychiatryandlgbpeople.aspx#wellbeing>
100. A. Goddard and G. Harrison, *Unwanted Same sex Attraction*, CMF, 2011, p. 25.
101. Ibid, pp. 15–6. For a more detailed discussion see Groves, op. cit., pp. 293–332.
102. Philip Groves, John Holder and Paula Gooder, 'The Witness of Scripture' in (ed.) Philip Groves, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK, 2008, pp. 81–153.
103. Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
104. Deryn Guest, *When Deborah met Jael*, SCM Press, 2005.

105. Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, Seabury Press, 2011.
106. Richard M Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2007.
107. Richard A. BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, Eerdmans, 2007.
108. Other literature on homosexuality and Scripture since 2003 includes: Innocent Himbaza, et al., *The Bible on the Question of Homosexuality*, Catholic University of America Press, 2011.  
William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*, SPCK, 2010.  
Christopher Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*, T & T Clark, 2007.  
'Same sex relationships and the nature of marriage: a theological colloquy', *The Anglican Theological Review*, Vol 93, No.1 Winter 2011.  
The Church of Scotland Theological Commission on Same sex Relationships and the Ministry, APS Group 2013.  
Essays by Maggi Dawn, Andrew Mein and Arnold Browne in, Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (eds), *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, SPCK, 2007.
109. Robert A J Gagnon and Dan O. Via (in *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003) at least put their opposing positions within a single set of covers.
110. BurrIDGE references seven scholarly articles 'among many others' examining the meanings of *arsenokoitēs*. Richard BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus*, p. 128.
111. The full texts of the presentations given to the Working Group by Fr Radcliffe and Professor O'Donovan can be found on the Church of England website at: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1879636/radcliffepresentation.pdf> and: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1879683/odonovanpresentation.pdf>
112. Timothy Sedgwick, 'The New Shape of Anglican Identity', *Anglican Theological Review*, 77/2, 1995. p. 196.
113. Alan M. Suggate, 'The Anglican Tradition in Moral Theology' in, Oswald Bayer and Alan Suggate (eds), *Worship and Ethics*, Walter de Gruyter, 1996). See also, A. J. Joyce, Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology, OUP, 2012.
114. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, viii.2.
115. Text in, J H Leith (ed), *Creeeds of the Churches*, Oxford: Blackwells revised edn. 1973, p. 232.
116. *The Porvoo Common Statement* CCU 1993 p. 18.
117. The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004*, The Anglican Communion Office, 2004, p. 38, paragraph 53.
118. *Scripture, Tradition and traditions: a paper presented to the Montreal World Conference on Faith and Order* (1963), Paragraphs. 39, 45ff.
119. Quoted in: C. Hill and E. Yarnold SJ (eds) *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: The Search for Unity*, London: 1994, pp. 56–7.
120. *The Windsor Report*, 2004, Paragraph 53 (p. 38) and 59 (p. 41).
121. *Growing Together in Mission and Unity* (IARCCUM Agreed Statement), 2007, p. 22 para. 32.
122. *Church of the Triune God* (Cyprus Agreed Statement), 2006, Section IX, para.18, pp. 105–6.
123. Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* Book 1:8:8.
124. See: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue, A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd Ed), London: Duckworth, 1985.

125. '...if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!' (Acts 5.38-39)
126. *The Church of the Triune God* (The Anglican–Orthodox Agreed Statement of 2006), Para 19, Section III ('Christ, Humanity and the Church').
127. [www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/continuingindaba)
128. The bishops' voting record is on the Church of England website at: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1472983/cptimeline.doc>. The divergence of views within the wider church is apparent from the record of the Synod debate on the subject in February 2007.
129. *Hansard*, 17 June 2013, Column 37: The Archbishop of York: '...Incidentally, I am one of those who has gone on record as saying that had civil partnerships been given enough space, the church would not have escaped the possibility of a conversation. The challenge the Church of England would have faced is this, what do you do with people who are committed Christians in same-sex loving relationships? Would you rather bless a ship and a tree, and not them?.'  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/130617-0001.htm#13061712000435>
130. <http://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/marriage,-family-and-sexuality-issues/human-sexuality/lesbian-and-gay-christians,-general-synod-debate-2007.aspx>
131. <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/how-many-people-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender/> <http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/ccig/The%20BisexualityReport%20Feb.2012.pdf> (see page 13)
132. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
133. See David de Pomerai and Glynn Harrison, 'The Witness of Science' in P Groves (ed), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK., 2008, pp. 268–92.
134. See W Johnson, L Penke & F M Spinath, 'Heritability in the Era of Molecular Genetics: Some thoughts for Understanding Genetic Influences on Behavioural Traits,' *European Journal of Personality*, 25, 4, 2011, pp. 254–66.
135. Steve Holmes <http://faithinfeminism.com/feminist-conservative-on-sexuality-2>
136. 1 John 4.19.
137. See, for example, R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, HarperCollins, 1997, Ch. 5.
138. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Fontana, 1955, p. 86.
139. *General Synod Report of Proceedings* Vol. 18 no. 3, Church House Publishing, 1987, pp. 955–6.
140. Jeffrey John, Permanent, *Faithful*, Stable, DLT, 2012.
141. *Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, 1991, Paragraph 5.2.
142. A good example of the sort of engagement with Queer Theology I have in mind is P. Sanlon, *Plastic People – How Queer Theory is Changing Us*, Latimer Trust, 2010.
143. See, for example, D F Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes?,' *Vigilae Christianae*, 38, 1984, pp. 125–33 and also R. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Abingdon Press, 2001, pp. 302–39.
144. See for example R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, T&T Clark, 1996, Ch 16; *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, Ch. 4 and Gagnon op. cit. throughout.
145. Walter Wink, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, Fellowship Bookstore, 1996.
146. D. O. Via & R. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, Fortress Press, p. 93.
147. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490–1700*, Penguin, 2004, p 705.

148. The two most famous examples of this school of thought are J. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, SCM, 1963 and J. Hick (ed), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, SCM, 1977.
149. E. Humphrey, 'The New Testament Speaks on Same sex Eroticism,' NEAC 4, 2003, [http://www.edithhumphrey.net/neac\\_article.htm](http://www.edithhumphrey.net/neac_article.htm)
150. <http://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/marriage,-family-and-sexuality-issues/human-sexuality/lesbian-and-gay-christians,-general-synod-debate-2007.aspx>
151. *Life in Christ*, London and the Vatican City: Anglican Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1994, p. 32.
152. *Biblical and pastoral responses to homosexuality*, Evangelical Alliance, 2012.
153. D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. SCM, 1959. p. 7.
154. No evangelical makes this journey lightly. It is exploratory, tentative and often deeply unsettling. We have not been here before. Long held convictions are being challenged. In the preparation of this paper I gratefully acknowledge the help of Dr Roger Hurding, a friend and wise, pastoral theologian who has devoted much time and thought to this subject. But in the midst of a debate with an apparently infinite capacity for hurt, division and misunderstanding, responsibility for the views expressed in this paper must be mine alone.
155. From The Virginia Report (Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission) cited in *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* ed Philip Groves, SPCK, 2008, p. 84.
156. It is not always understood by those watching from outside, but the Evangelical tradition has always contained a significant spectrum of beliefs – and perhaps wider than it likes to admit to itself. Hence the regular internal debate about what constitutes evangelical 'identity'.
157. [www.acceptingevangelicals.org](http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org)
158. [www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/sexuality/stevechalke.aspx](http://www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/sexuality/stevechalke.aspx) and [www.christianpost.com/news/rob-bell-on-gay-marriage-support-god-pulling-us-ahead-to-affirm-gay-brothers-sisters-92395](http://www.christianpost.com/news/rob-bell-on-gay-marriage-support-god-pulling-us-ahead-to-affirm-gay-brothers-sisters-92395)
159. [www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Bible\\_Authoritative.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm)
160. *A Slippery Slope – the ordination of women and homosexual practice – a case study in Biblical interpretation*. (Grove Biblical Studies No. 16), pp. 23–4. I should note that both Wright and France hold conserving positions on this subject.
161. This and other quotations from that period, are cited in Richard Burridge, *Imitating Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2007) p. 133.
162. Onesimus was a runaway slave discussed in Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul urges him to return to his owner and urges his owner to receive him back.
163. see Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, John Knox, 1982, p32–4.
164. see Gareth Moore, *A Question of Truth*, Continuum, 2003, pp. 127–33.
165. Moore, p. 147.
166. Moore, p. 141.
167. There are parallels here with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). As the man in need is naked and 'on the point of death' (literally) there is no further way of identifying him before offering help and those who passed by at a distance did so rather than risk rendering themselves ritually unclean (i.e. by touching a non-Jew or dead body). A compassionless hierarchy of religious self preservation over care of fellow humanity is what is condemned here by Jesus.
168. Writing as a gay Christian in the Church, James Allison makes the same point. 'We are a "they".'

Dangerous people whose most notable characteristic is not a shared humanity, but a tendency to commit acts considered to be gravely, objectively disordered. Typically our inclusion within the structure of church life comes at a very high price: that of agreeing not to speak honestly.' *Faith beyond Resentment*, DLT, 2001, p. 45.

169. Moore, p. 80.
170. Paul's varied use 'natural' is contended. I am using it here to mean that which is *not chosen* in the context of sexual orientation.
171. Moore, p. 100.
172. He surveys the literature across all traditions in *Imitating Jesus*, Chapter 1.
173. Burrige, p. 74.
174. Burrige, p. 78.
175. Burrige, p. 129.
176. When the liberal website *Thinking Anglicans* recently posted news of a conference supporting women bishops there were calls for the day to be boycotted on the grounds that the evangelical group hosting it, Fulcrum, were against same sex relationships and thus homophobic.
177. Recent Faith and Order Commission report, *Men and Women in Marriage*. See [http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/12-april/news/uk/marriage-is-a-gift-'but-not-if-you're-gay'](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/12-april/news/uk/marriage-is-a-gift-'but-not-if-you're-gay)
178. David Atkinson in *Other voices*, other worlds ed. Terry Brown, DLT, 2006, p. 304.
179. <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/3-may/news/uk/the-single-often-feel-ignored-in-church,-online-survey-finds>
180. Atkinson, p305. See also Peter Atkinson, *Friendship and the Body of Christ*, SPCK, 2005, and Alan Bray, *The Friend*, University of Chicago Press, 2007.
181. from Jim Cotter, *Prayer at Night*, Cairns, 1986), p. 76.
182. Cotter, p. 73.