

Updated

Cosmo and Fido's

Straight Talk

**The conflict in the Church of England
about marriage, sexuality and gender
identity**

**Two Anglicans engage in a 'full and frank'
conversation**

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1	You've Lost	page 14
Chapter 2	You're Ignorant	page 24
Chapter 3	You're Judgmental	page 29
Chapter 4	You're Unjust	page 33
Chapter 5	You're Unkind	page 39
Chapter 6	You're Cruel	page 53
Chapter 7	You're Wrong (to be so sure about the Bible)	page 55
Chapter 8	You're Obsessed (so even if you're right, you're still wrong)	page 79
Chapter 9	You're Unrealistic	page 83
Chapter 10	You're Fearful	page 90
Chapter 11	You're Contributing to a Culture of Dishonesty	page 94
Chapter 12	You're Cancelled	page 98
	Afterword	page 105
	Bibliography	page 107

Introduction

The Church of England is certainly not the only Christian denomination beset by controversy regarding homosexuality, but it has been engaged with the issue for longer than most. It had some influence in the production of the *Wolfenden Report* in 1957 which recommended decriminalisation of homosexual genital acts carried out in private by men over 21. (There was never an equivalent criminal offence regarding acts between women). The recommendation was controversial at the time and was not enacted until ten years later in the *Sexual Offences Act 1967*.

In 1979 and 1989 there were two Church of England pieces of work, known respectively as *The Gloucester Report* and *The Osborne Report*, which were considerably more liberal regarding homosexuality than much of society was back then. However, since the turn of the century the situation has been reversed, with secular law and society becoming very affirming of homosexuality and official church teaching and policy remaining unchanged from its traditional stance that the right place for sex is within marriage and that marriage is, by definition, the union of a man and a woman.

In 2001 the age of consent for homosexual genital acts was reduced to 16 to parallel the heterosexual age of consent. In 2004 civil partnerships were brought in and in 2014 'same sex marriage' was introduced in British law. The divergence of official church policy and social attitudes has led to increasing pressure for the Church of England to change its official stance and for the provision of services of blessing for these 'marriages' and permission for clergy to be in non-celibate civil partnerships and 'same sex marriages'.

Another Church of England report in 2013, *The Pilling Report*, observed how out of step the official church position was by then with societal attitudes, deplored 'homophobia' and 'transphobia' and suggested clergy should be able, with agreement from their parochial church councils, to offer appropriate services to mark 'faithful same sex relationships'. It also recommended the organisation of 'shared conversations' in every diocese to facilitate listening to the experiences of LGBT+ Christians.

The transgender controversy appeared much more recently and, with little research and debate by comparison with the gay issue, the Church of England in 2019 signalled its willingness to recognise, support, and even celebrate the 'transitioning' of people, including children, from one sex to another. It officially recommended that clergy use the service of renewal of baptism to mark someone's transition.¹ It also produced a document 'Valuing All God's Children' ostensibly to combat LGBT bullying in church schools, but which went beyond this by affirming aspects of transgender ideology, even in relation to primary school-age children.²

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46516299>

² https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Valuing%20All%20God%27s%20Children%20July%202019_0.pdf

The *Valuing All God's Children* document (page 20) contains these words which apply to primary and secondary schools.

"In creating a school environment that promotes dignity for all and a call to live fulfilled lives as uniquely gifted individuals, pupils will be equipped to accept difference of all varieties and be supported to accept their own

Things came to a head in 2023 for several reasons.

First, the 'shared conversations' recommended by *Pilling* had taken place, and so had a nationally produced course (*Living in Love and Faith*) designed for parishes to take part in and then give feedback as to 'views on the ground'. Both the tenor of the 'shared conversations' and the *Living in Love and Faith* process (which did contain some excellent contributions from the orthodox/traditional/conservative side in the course material), were, on balance, significantly slanted towards the revisionist/progressive/liberal view. Regarding the trans issue it was even more so. All this created an expectancy that significant change was imminent.

Secondly, pressure for change had been building for a long time anyway and something had to give at some point. The 1987 motion of General Synod³ and the 1998 resolution of the Lambeth Conference⁴ had held a conservative line. However, as far back as 1991, the

gender identity or sexual orientation and that of others. In order to do this it will be essential to provide curriculum opportunities where difference is explored. . . ."

The Church of England received funding from Stonewall to help it produce this document and two Stonewall executives are thanked in the 2017 and 2019 editions. Until the 2019 version, material produced by Mermaids was listed in the appendix. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/26/stonewall-funded-church-of-england-trans-guide/>

³ The 1987 'Higton motion', which passed General Synod with very little dissent (403 votes to 8) said that homosexual genital acts fall short of God's ideal for human sexuality, and 'should be met with both compassion and a call to repentance.'

⁴ The 1998 Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion passed Resolution 1.10, the main points of which were. 'This conference. . .

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;

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;

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;

cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;

Liberals in the Church of England and abroad angrily denied this resolution was binding on any of the provinces of the Anglican Communion, and five years later Gene Robinson, a non-celibate alcoholic in a same sex relationship was consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire in The Episcopal Church of America. Same sex marriage rites then appeared in USA and Canada shortly thereafter.

Bishop's statement *Issues in Human Sexuality* 1991⁵ had spoken about 'accepting' lay people who in 'good conscience' were in 'faithful, loving, stable same-sex relationships', even though it said homosexual relationships could not be viewed as equal to heterosexual marriage and clergy could not claim the liberty to be in such relationships. This double standard was justified by some on the basis that clergy should be expected to conform to higher standards but others saw in it a trajectory that would spell trouble for the future.

Clergy in civil partnerships were supposed to give assurances of celibacy, although it was never clear how public those assurances should have been. Some clergy chose to lie about their sexual conduct with their civil partner and are now admitting this and saying they felt justified in doing so.⁶ Others relied on the senior clergy pursuing a 'light touch' policy or giving tacit approval. The fact that, by 2023, that document was now seen by a majority of bishops and General Synod as far too conservative and in urgent need of revision was a measure of how things have changed in the interim.

Occasional restatements of the Church's official position that, to be holy and blessed, sex should be within marriage and that marriage was the union of one man and one woman had manifestly failed to halt the gathering momentum for the kind of change seen in the more liberal Western provinces of the Anglican Communion, where today bishops are in 'same sex marriages' and 'same sex wedding ceremonies' can be held in church with liturgies that express the revisionist position regarding marriage.

Further, it had become clear that such restatements of the historic position were unlikely to continue to be officially made in the Church of England, given that senior bishops were now publicly disagreeing with it. Despite the oaths bishops make to uphold the teaching and doctrine of the Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury by 2023 was refusing to say whether he personally agreed with the still 'official' doctrine, whereas the Archbishop of York felt free to share his revisionist position that sexual intercourse within 'stable, committed, same sex partnerships' was not sinful.

Thirdly, attitudes to sexuality in Western society had continued to move at speed in a 'progressive' direction and although the Church of England institution was clearly moving with it to some extent, the angry reaction by many public figures, including government ministers, to the resistance that has been shown by those within the Church who do not want change demonstrated the huge gap between traditional Christian belief and contemporary values.

Although there was and is some pushback regarding aspects of transgender ideology in the UK, as regards homosexuality, the Church of England was now greatly at odds with what most people of influence confidently claimed as right in this area. For the established

⁵ The 1991 Bishop's statement 'Issues in Human Sexuality' said homosexual relationships could not be viewed as equal to heterosexual marriage. Although churches should 'accept' lay people who in good conscience believed they could be in loving, stable, homosexual partnerships, clergy could not claim the liberty to be in such relationships. Some saw this as introducing a double standard which was not going to be sustainable and indeed there is now a majority of bishops wanting to allow clergy the same licence as lay people.

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/richard-coles-celibate-husband-church-b2499007.html>

Church, which has never relished being counter-cultural, this was all very uncomfortable, and more and more bishops and clergy began to succumb to the pressure for change in its position.

It had become clear that the preponderance of all senior clergy - bishops, archdeacons, cathedral deans and clergy and members of General Synod wanted the church to continue to move towards changing the church's stance. Resisting this were most Evangelical and traditional Anglo-Catholic clergy and lay people.

Fourthly and finally, there was a meeting of the Church of England General Synod in February 2023, at which the proposals for services of blessing for same sex couples was the biggest item on the agenda.

The bishops had been meeting among themselves beforehand to prepare the ground. Those bishops wanting a clear-cut Synod authorization of new liturgy knew they still lacked the numbers to steer this through Synod in an open and straightforward way under Canon B2, which would have required a two-thirds majority in each of the three 'houses' of Bishops, Clergy and Laity. Canon B2 allows Synod to authorise new services "such as in the opinion of the General Synod is neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter." The archbishops in their provinces and bishops in their dioceses however have discretion to approve new forms of service resources under Canon B4 if they are "in their opinion reverent and seemly and neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter." Also, under Canon 5A the archbishops can introduce them 'experimentally' as a prelude to proposing to Synod forms of worship under Canon B2. Canon B5 allows clergy to use their discretion if they incorporate new forms of prayer which are 'reverent' and don't indicate a departure from doctrine.

The archbishops and bishops knew that, politically speaking, they had to get Synod's approval by at least a bare majority in each house on such a contentious matter as commending or authorising so-called 'prayers of love and faith' for 'same sex couples' by routes other than canon B2.

Before the Synod meeting the bishops collectively released 'Prayers of Love and Faith' in draft form while at the same time saying that the doctrine and teaching of the Church of England that the right place of sex is within marriage and that marriage is the union of a man and a woman, would remain unchanged.

To an honest observer, this of course appeared thoroughly contradictory and no coherent theological explanation was given by the bishops for what they announced. Various legal ruses were explored to enable bishops to avoid being seen to be changing doctrine (even allegedly 'non-essential' doctrine) by the back door. Some said the church was going to simply ask for God's blessing on two people who wanted to come before him and was not making a theological statement about the nature of marriage or approving sex outside of it. This argument probably helped persuade some wavering bishops to go along with the idea of these 'services of blessing.' However, after the publication of the draft prayers, some of the prominent bishops seeking an official change in teaching and liturgy to embrace 'same sex marriage' did not disguise their hopes in their public comments. This was because they

wanted to signal to frustrated LGBT+ campaigners that the proposed service resources were a significant step in the right direction towards fully practising 'equal marriage' and so they should be supported, however far short they fell of the eventual goal.

Some bishops also tried the argument that we now have two types of legal marriage in UK law; 'civil marriage' which is open to same sex couples and 'holy matrimony' which is not (yet). While the church might recognise, celebrate and bless couples who have recently entered into a 'civil marriage', it was not currently accepting that same sex couples could enter the blessed state of 'holy matrimony'. The distinction between two types of marriage would have provided a way of blessing same sex couples who were in a 'civil' marriage whilst being able to claim that the Church's doctrine of 'holy matrimony' was not being changed. But it was a novel theological understanding and was controversial among people right across the spectrum of beliefs about homosexuality, not least among those heterosexual Christians who had been married in a registry office and then had a church blessing, who felt that the bishops might be saying that their marriage was only a 'civil' one and not in the blessed league of 'holy matrimony'.

Conservatives noted that in practice it would not be too difficult for revisionist clergy to make approved 'stand-alone' services of blessing look very similar to services of blessing following an opposite sex civil marriage ceremony even if there were subtle changes in wording which were followed to the letter. Overall, there would be enough 'wedding' customs, such as smart suits, white dresses, and the couple holding hands, exchanging vows and rings, kissing and being showered with confetti etc to make this look like a church celebration and blessing of a 'marriage' between two people of the same sex. All the guests would view it as a church 'gay wedding' whatever the liturgical small print were to say.

Both revisionist campaigners and conservatives were dismayed by the bishop's proposals. Revisionists, because they wanted the church to fully practice 'equal marriage' legally and liturgically without delay and conservatives, because the proposals were seen as getting far too close to it. The truth is that what happened among the bishops was the result of a political stalemate between two highly irreconcilable views. While a majority of bishops wanted to be seen as continuing to 'move towards greater inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people' they were aware that those strongly pushing for approval of services of blessing for gay couples did not yet have the required numbers to get it over the line under Canon B2.

General Synod met from the sixth to the ninth of February 2023 and the bishop's proposals, fronted by the Bishop of London, were discussed by Synod in a marathon eight-hour debate. The motion proposed by the bishops was basically a call to approve their idea for services of prayer, dedication and blessing for same sex couples, and to welcome new guidance about what was expected of clergy and lay people as regards sexual morality. This new guidance would replace the 1991 document produced by the bishops *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The clear impression given was that the existing discipline outlined in that document, which held that clergy be either married to someone of the opposite sex, or be celibate, would be relaxed in some way, even as they claimed, for obvious tactical reasons, that 'doctrine and teaching' was to remain unchanged. There was also another apology to LGBTQ+ persons for not being 'inclusive' enough.

The leading revisionist bishop, the Archbishop of York, declared that the prayers, the guidance for clergy and reassurance provision for those clergy at odds with their diocesan bishop on the issue would all be presented together, and that he would not support the prayers otherwise.

The motion by the bishops faced many attempts at being amended by both liberal and conservative clergy and lay members of Synod. Some (like the Oxford campaigner Jayne Ozanne) wanted to amend the motion by urging bishops to go further and fully embrace the concept of 'same sex marriage' so that the church can 'marry' same sex couples within two years. There was a lot of support for this from clergy and lay representatives (and a lot of anger and impatience at the slowness of progress towards fully practising 'equal marriage'), but their numbers fell short of a majority inside each of the houses. Some Liberals thought the apology was worthless while the church still held out against fully marrying gay couples itself. Conservatives were suspicious that the apology was for simply holding to the traditional doctrinal position.

There were lots of amendments proposed by orthodox representatives seeking to push back against the direction of the bishops. All bar one were defeated. Even though some proposed amendments came close in the houses of clergy and laity, the 'voting by houses' system meant the bishops were always going to be able to easily block these. There was a rare moment of unity within the houses of clergy and laity when it was suggested that the bishops, having outlined their motion, sat back and didn't vote on the amendments, so refraining from using their effective powers of veto. The sustained applause after this proposal made the bishops squirm uncomfortably in their seats.

The one amendment that did pass was an endorsement of the position that the teaching of the CofE regarding marriage and sex would not be changed. A majority of bishops felt they couldn't really object to this, since they had been collectively claiming that they were saying the same thing and there was clearly not a two-thirds majority in each house for such a change in this. The vote however was still very tight among the clergy and laity, and even among the bishops, only 22 out of 42 voted for this amendment. 14 opposed it and 4 abstained. So, while significant, it was hardly a ringing confirmation by Synod or the bishops of the still 'official' doctrine of traditional marriage and sex.

In the end the bishop's motion, with that one amendment, was passed in all three houses. However it was close in the House of Clergy and even closer in the House of Laity. The result was: Bishops, 36 in favour, 3 against, with two recorded abstentions; Clergy, 111 in favour, 85 against, with 3 recorded abstentions; Laity, 103 in favour, 92 against, with 5 recorded abstentions.

The bishops said they would (1) refine their liturgical proposals and (2) provide the new guidelines on what is expected of Christians as to sexual moral standards, particularly for clergy and (3) show how consciences of clergy will be protected when the services become legally available. They then set up a different working group for each of these three tasks. They originally said they would bring detailed proposals from all three groups to the July meeting of Synod. This was hopelessly unrealistic. The three groups soon fell apart for three main reasons. First, each of the three issues identified were thoroughly interrelated.

Separate groups were never going to bring consistency of thinking. Secondly, the groups, to be properly representative, had of course to contain people with radically different, irreconcilable views. Thirdly, even if it were possible through painstaking work to produce a compromise package of proposals which left some wriggle room for differing interpretations and seemed to produce enough change while enabling the bishops to claim church teaching was not being changed ‘in any essential matter’, that was never going to happen by July of that year. But since the bishops’ goal involved somehow squaring a circle, one wondered how this could ever have been achieved with any integrity, however long they ended up giving themselves.

Even if prayers and liturgy managed to display some kind of ‘creative ambiguity’ about whether it was a ‘same sex marriage’ being blessed or merely the individuals who have recently formed this state-approved legal relationship, the question of whether clergy who entered ‘same sex marriages’ or non-celibate partnerships would be allowed to continue serving in parishes or even take senior appointments was recognised as harder to fudge. If there were to be new guidelines replacing *Issues in Human Sexuality* which mean they could, then this was seen by conservatives as likely to produce increasing numbers of ‘facts on the ground’ that would be very hard to reverse and would clearly manifest a *de facto* change in church teaching.

Furthermore, if the bishops convinced themselves, and perhaps Synod too, that they could make such significant change to church policy while not doing anything that is ‘contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter’, then it seemed unlikely they would want to put much effort into ameliorating those who were thoroughly against what they are doing and taking the radical steps necessary to avoid a full schism.

Everyone picked up on the muddle-headed and frankly dishonest meanderings produced at the July 2023 Synod by those representing the process being carried out by the bishops. Those with principled views on both sides were very frustrated. The Archbishop of York, realising that the LLF prayers were going to be a lot easier to introduce with ‘creative ambiguity’ than new guidance about the behaviour of clergy and ‘pastoral reassurance’, reneged on his promise to support the prayers only if they formed part of the overall package. What further reduced trust in the bishops were suggestions from them that they might seek some way to bypass Synod by introducing change using their executive powers under Canons B4 and B5A. There was very strong pushback against this and soon after the July synod a comprehensive range of Evangelical groupings and the Catholic group on Synod came together to write a letter of protest regarding this idea. This described any attempt to do this as ‘illegal and unconstitutional’ and would completely undermine trust in the integrity of the leadership of the Church of England. It would be an abuse of power.⁷

Revisionists, frustrated that official progress might not come within the lifetime of the current Synod or the next one either if the canon B2 route was followed, pushed hard for change through other routes. Apart from seeking the introduction of ‘experimental liturgy’ they are now, especially in dioceses such as Oxford, where all the bishops are committed to

⁷ <https://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Letter.pdf>

the LGBT+ ideological cause, seeking to bring in their goal by stealth in continuing to use diocesan machinery to promote the LGBT+ agenda through communications, using their power and influence to prevent the selection and appointment of orthodox clergy who are vocal in opposition, appointing liberal trustees over church plants that become Charitable Incorporated Organisations, choosing revisionist Area Deans, and weaponizing the use of safeguarding procedures against orthodox clergy.⁸ Some have urged secular authorities to intervene to force change on the Church more quickly.

Before the November synod there were meetings of the College of Bishops (all the bishops including Suffragans) and the House of Bishops (all diocesan bishops) where legal advice was shared but not disclosed regarding the legality of the bishop's proposals. There were strong debates among the bishops regarding the process as well as the outcome of the LLF project. Eventually the Bishops voted to simply ask Synod to endorse the LLF prayers for use within existing services and to follow the Canon B2 route for 'stand-alone' services of blessing. (i.e. waiting till there was a two-thirds majority in each House of Synod for this).

The campaigning revisionists were outraged and felt they were being offered mere 'crumbs' and that this outcome was worse than useless. So at the November Synod meeting the Bishop of Oxford placed an amendment that effectively called for the archbishops (under Canon 5A) to authorize 'stand-alone' services of blessing for an 'experimental period', thus delaying the need for the B2 route through Synod for a number of years, by which time the composition of the Synod might be different and everyone will have got used to seeing the church do same sex 'wedding blessings'. The archbishops and the Bishop of London supported this amendment and it passed by a majority in each House (but by just one vote in the House of Laity).

To all but the most militant revisionists like Jayne Ozanne, who resigned from Synod, it looked like a welcome (though extremely close) victory for the revisionists, but after that Synod things went somewhat quiet on a public level. As commended by the bishops with Synod's support and in the absence of legal challenges for this, at the end of 2023 a few prayers of blessing for same sex couples were noted in the press taking place within ordinary services under Canon B5, but the archbishops have not yet permitted the 'stand-alone experimental services' under Canon 5A which Synod so narrowly called for and which are the bare minimum those wanting change desire for now.

There may be a number of reasons why this hasn't happened yet. It would put the legal spotlight on Justin Welby. It would be a step that is anathema to orthodox Anglicans globally and it could be that Welby, with an eye to his legacy, doesn't want the Anglican communion, let alone the Church of England, to finally break up under his watch. Also there was a lot of criticism, even from those open to change, about how the process was being carried out and the way the bishops were using, or misusing, their power. The decision to keep legal advice about LLF prayers and blessings secret was widely criticised last year as indicating a lack of transparency. Bishops were (and still are) generally nervous about their future with

⁸ See the case of Bernard Randall, chaplain to a school with an evangelical foundation, being treated as a Safeguarding risk by the Diocese of Derby for saying that pupils have a right to believe in the still official church position, although he has eventually been vindicated by the secular authorities.

all the safeguarding criticisms and insecure about their role in a culture where they are seen as less and less relevant. The revelation that the Reverend Paula Vennells, the disgraced former chief executive of the Post Office, through Welby's influence, was shortlisted for the position of Bishop of London, despite having very little ministerial experience, did not help the leadership of the CofE to feel confident in its discernment. Respect for the hierarchy of the CofE is pretty low all-round.

However, it seems the biggest reason for the delay is that Justin Welby is trying to fix a deal outside of Synod to provide some sort of 'pastoral reassurance' or even 'structural differentiation' before he then permits 'stand-alone gay wedding blessings' on an 'experimental basis'.

At the recent February 2024 Synod, the preparatory papers, content and tone of the debate reflected a bit more clarity. The Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, is now the sole LLF lead bishop since his co-lead bishop, the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, resigned over the appointment of a conservative interim theological adviser to the House of Bishops.

Bishop Martyn, no doubt bearing in mind the critical angst directed against the bishop's management of the LLF process throughout 2023, offered 'Ten Commitments'. These contained the usual reassuring words about humility, repentance, listening, honesty, transparency, and unity but basically said that the movement towards change would continue, and especially 'the exploration' of allowing clergy to enter into 'same sex marriages'.

Bishop Martyn clearly had more grasp than the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, did of the legal issues around procedure, and the complexities of the ways these are combined with pastoral and administrative issues, even if he avoided the awkward underlying theological questions at the root of the conflict. So gone were the vacuous statements in response to questions and the muddle of last year which revealed either incompetence, wilful obfuscation, , political stalemate or a mixture of all three. There was a more sombre realism in the debate. Some found the less heated tone a sign of hope, but for others it perhaps reflected weariness and a lull in the fighting which will amongst certainly resume in earnest later this year in the July Synod if there are definite proposals presented. Bishop Martyn's main motion was anodyne and seemed designed not to say anything inflammatory. Even this was not voted on however, because Synod, after rejecting some significant proposed amendments, thought that the untouched motion was not significant enough to warrant further debate and a large majority voted to proceed to other business. The motion that had been put forward was as follows:

'That this Synod welcome the further work carried out on Living in Love and Faith and the focus on reconciliation and bridge building; and ask that the proposal for a set of commitments through which the whole Church can continue to pursue the implementation of the motions previously passed by Synod on Living in Love and Faith, be brought back to Synod as soon as possible.'

A majority still held out against formally recognising a need for structural differentiation by rejecting an amendment put forward by Charlie Skrine, Rector of *All Souls Langham Place*, and also one put forward by Ed Shaw of *Living Out* which was to insert an acknowledgement

that 'for many in the Church of England, including members of General Synod, some of the issues raised are not matters on which they can agree to disagree.'

In response to this amendment, the voting figures were as follows:

Bishops	FOR=8,	AGAINST=20,	ABSTAIN=2	(28.5% voting bishops in favour)
Clergy	FOR=83,	AGAINST=92,	ABSTAIN=2	(47.4% voting clergy in favour)
Laity	FOR=86,	AGAINST=98,	ABSTAIN=1	(46.7% voting laity in favour)

Of total votes, 45.7% voted in favour of the amendment. So slight majority were able to defeat a motion which simply acknowledged the deep division, which nearly half voted for, which in itself demonstrates the deep division the slight majority refused to acknowledge!

So although the forces for change are strong, there are significant forces holding it back. Orthodox Evangelicals still have the canons⁹, legal support and the recent majority Synod vote preserving the traditional teaching behind them, and continue to mobilise to resist. Revisionist bishops are simply not welcome to preach, confirm or ordain people in increasing numbers of parish churches. Some Evangelical churches are withholding or diverting 'parish share payments' to avoid bankrolling what they regard as diocesan apostasy. Parliamentary interference to force changes to canon law is unlikely because very few among the bishops want disestablishment, which would be the probable result.

The majority of the Anglican Communion worldwide continues to be dismayed by what it sees as a further significant milestone in the Mother Church's departure from the historic faith and her alignment with the wealthy but declining churches of the 'West' against the materially poor but growing 'Global South' Anglican churches. The unity of the Anglican church has already of course been broken and conservatives say we have had a foretaste of what will happen within the Church of England if it maintains its current direction.

Although the majority of bishops now are trying to frame their proposals as 'pastoral provision in an age of uncertainty', it looks, as Vaughan Roberts' said in the November Synod, rather like it is a time of competing certainties. So the battle lines continue to become clearer and 'structural differentiation' or outright schism is getting nearer.

⁹ **Canon B 30 Of Holy Matrimony**

1. 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.

2. The teaching of our Lord affirmed by the Church of England is expressed and maintained in the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

3. It shall be the duty of the minister, when application is made to him for matrimony to be solemnized in the church of which he is the minister, to explain to the two persons who desire to be married the Church's doctrine of marriage as herein set forth, and the need of God's grace in order that they may discharge aright their obligations as married persons.

This book explains in a frank way the issues at the heart of this conflict. It is written to help people appreciate all the arguments from a revisionist point of view and the corresponding answers given by those who hold the traditional, biblical understanding of these matters.

Written by a vicar of 25 years parish experience, who has taken part in the *Shared Conversations* organised by the Church of England, and is part of the Oxford Diocese, where many of the leading protagonists are based, this book simplifies and condenses the theological and biblical arguments from the more academic tomes but makes careful reference to its sources to enable further reading.

It has the title 'Straight Talk' because it aims to be frank and to the point. Within the Church, people can sometimes confuse the virtues of courtesy and gracious conversation with the sins of lack of honesty and clarity about, and engagement with, the fundamental issues at stake.

The author is on the apostolic/traditional/biblically faithful/orthodox/conservative side of the debate but has tried to present the progressive/revisionist/liberal/affirming/inclusive views with accuracy, fairness and an appropriate degree of rhetorical force.

He is married to Anna, and has four children and four golden retriever dogs. He is also the author of *God is Good, Exploring the Character of the Biblical God*, Resource Publications, Wipf and Stock, 2020.

Chapter One

You've Lost

Cosmo

My dear Fido, you must now realise that the game is up. Look around you. Dinosaurs like you have lost the argument. Enlightened culture has changed and there is no going back. Across the world, from Toronto to Tokyo, Santiago to Sydney, people are celebrating their freedom to be themselves, declaring that 'Love Is Love' and rejoicing in their sexuality and gender identity. In the Western world, schools now mark *Pride Month* and teach LGBT+ history. Children learn how the heroes of Stonewall Inn, Greenwich Village, in Lower Manhattan, rose up against the forces of bigotry and oppression. Kids now know girls can marry girls and boys can marry boys. Furthermore, boys can become girls and girls can become boys or neither one sex or the other. Simple binary is old hat. Gender is a spectrum.

In Britain, rainbow *Pride* colours adorn government buildings, corporate logos, police cars, trains, supermarket advertising, search engine homepages, football captains' armbands, and even cathedral altars. Nearly everyone under fifty years old and increasing numbers of those who are older than that, assume that promoting LGBTQ+ rights is akin to standing up for the rights of women and ethnic minorities. The arts world and the philosophical intellectuals began the movement in the 1960s; media and 'Big Tech' followed in the 1990s, then both public and private corporate sectors, and now even 'Middle England' institutions like *The Girl Guides* and *The National Trust* are committed to the cause.¹⁰ Countless gay celebrities are regarded as national treasures. Social media has enabled transgender icons to have a highly visible and influential effect on young people the world over and transgenderism sits very well with both neo-liberal internet corporate culture and leftist progressives alike.

Those in the Western church like you who are holding out against gay marriage and trans equality are viewed as unreconstructed traditionalists or biblical fundamentalists. You are generally thought to be unfortunate reactionaries who can't or won't see that traditions can evolve, and the trajectory of the biblical story is towards inclusion. Young people just see you as bigots. You're in the company of uneducated, gun-toting, American rednecks, primitive and brutal African rulers, nasty right-wing governments and state churches in Russia and Eastern Europe, hard-line Islamic clerics and lunatic fringe racists and xenophobes.

Among professional people in key areas such as politics, law, civil service, education, health and social services, even those who privately have reservations about adopting progressive attitudes or still have religious faith convictions at odds with them, do not dare to admit this publicly. Such people know their careers are at risk and they might also become social

¹⁰ <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/pride/>
<https://www.restoretrust.org.uk/media-and-press/8i2x7ugu2thi88lt7qpyefao8ri8o7#:~:text=The%20National%20Trust%20has%20asked%20volunteers%20at%20Ickworth,which%20is%20encouraging%20its%20houses%20to%20support%20Pride.>

outcasts.¹¹ Andrew Selous, who is a Church Estates Commissioner, and represents the Church Commissioners in both the House of Commons and General Synod, reported to Synod in the recent debate that while more and more MPs are clamouring for the Church of England to embrace 'same sex marriage' or be disestablished, those who support the church's current official position would only come to him in secret, as they were frightened of the response of the media and their colleagues.

Equal marriage, as it is now rightly called, is legally and socially embraced by nearly the whole Western world. Most mainline church denominations have either revised their position accordingly¹² or are clearly moving in this direction¹³. A tipping point could even be reached soon within the Roman Catholic Church as the old stance crumbles in the face of cultural change in countries that were once marked by traditional Catholic social values. Many Evangelical church leaders who would have been stoutly preaching a conservative line on sexuality in the past, are now finding many reasons to be silent and several high-profile ones, on both sides of the Atlantic, have seen the light on this issue.¹⁴ World renowned scholars like Walter Brueggemann and highly popular spiritual writers like Richard Rohr and Rob Bell add their considerable theological and spiritual weight to the call to affirm LGBTQI+ people.

The transgender movement is forging ahead, with increasing legal, medical and social acceptance of the right of every person to have their own sense of gender identity recognised and affirmed by society, whatever gender they were assigned at birth. To misgender someone is widely seen as completely unacceptable and something that should be penalised severely by professional employment bans and even prison.¹⁵

In the UK, influential church leaders such as the acclaimed former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Rowan Williams, and high-profile Baptist minister Steve Chalke (not to mention your

¹¹ Eg. Throughout the general election of 2017, Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal Democrat Party and known to be an Evangelical Christian, was repeatedly asked by journalists whether gay sex was a sin, despite the fact that he had an impeccably liberal voting record on 'same sex marriage', the age of consent and everything to do with gay and trans rights. Eventually he realised he could not deflect the question any longer and felt he had to say 'no it's not' sensing that otherwise his leadership of the party was doomed and his political ambitions over. Only when they were indeed over did he quietly recant. See *Tim Farron, Confessions of a Faithful Liberal* SPCK 2019

¹² In the UK, these include the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, The Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) and the Episcopal Church of Scotland.

¹³ The Anglican Church in Ireland and Wales, as well as, it is contended, The Church of England

¹⁴ Examples are Rob Bell, Steve Chalke, Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo.

¹⁵ In 2019 a tax expert for the Centre for Global Development, Maya Forstater, did not have her contract renewed because of her resistance to transgender ideology expressed on Twitter. The judge in the Employment Tribunal hearing, Mr Justice Tayler, said her stance that she should not be forced to recognize a person's chosen gender if it was at odds with their biological sex was, "not worthy of respect in a democratic society."

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/dec/18/judge-rules-against-charity-worker-who-lostjob-over-transgen>

As I write this update, the Teaching Regulation Agency, has banned a Christian teacher from the profession for misgendering a girl at an Oxford State School. [Christian teacher who was suspended for 'misgendering' a trans pupil is banned from teaching | Daily Mail Online](#)
[Canadian Man Jailed After 'Misgendering' His Daughter \(breitbart.com\)](#)

own recently departed area bishop, Fido), have declared 'to be trans is to enter a sacred journey of becoming whole.'¹⁶ The Church of England's General Synod has officially recommended the use of the renewal of baptism services to mark someone's transition from one gender to another.¹⁷ The person who oversaw the committee that did this and publicly endorsed its recommendations was none other than Bishop Julian Henderson, the president of the Church of England Evangelical Council!¹⁸

As a result of this growing enlightenment, many Western governments, with the urging of progressive, affirming Christians, such as the majority of General Synod members¹⁹, either have banned, or have committed themselves to banning, any kind of practice which can be described as 'conversion therapy'. Although there may be some legal difficulties in defining conversion therapy, there is a large measure of agreement among opinion formers that any purportedly therapeutic practice, whether spiritual or psychological, which is predicated upon the view that someone can be or should be helped to move away from a homosexual or transgender identity or their associated desires and practices, is abusive, so much so that no valid form of consent can ever be recognised in law.

So, Fido, why don't you come over to the side of inclusion and equality? When all is said and done, don't you want to be on the right side of history? It's not like we're still in the 1950s when attitudes to difference were summed up by landlords advertising tenancies with the proviso '*No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs.*' Can't you see that those sorts of sentiments, perfectly legal to express back then, are totally out of place now? The world has moved on, and it's a jolly good thing too. While that generation might be forgiven for such prejudice, there is no excuse these days. We mustn't equivocate. Saying that civil partnerships are OK for gay clergy but not marriage, for example, is like saying black people can sit on the bus but must still sit at the back.²⁰

Increasingly, it is only the most conservative people within the Church who feel strongly about resisting change. Many moderate and charismatic Evangelicals, more 'open to the Spirit', sense that this is the way things are going and that maintaining opposition to gay equality is too damaging to the credibility of the Gospel and hindering the mission of the

¹⁶ <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/former-archbishop-of-canterbury-becoming-transgender-is-a-sacred-journey/>

¹⁷ <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/services-mark-gender-transition-house-bishops-response>

¹⁸ [Guidance for welcoming transgender people published | The Church of England](#) Admittedly he did later distance himself from this recommendation under pressure from fellow Evangelicals [Exclusive: Leading evangelical bishop apologises for role in gender transition liturgy guidance – and now opposes it \(christiantoday.com\)](#)

¹⁹ General Synod passed the motion in 2017 'That this Synod: (a) endorse the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK of November 2015, signed by The Royal College of Psychiatrists and others, that the practice of gay conversion therapy has no place in the modern world, is unethical, potentially harmful and not supported by evidence; and 3 (b) call upon the Church to be sensitive to, and to listen to, contemporary expressions of gender identity; (c) and call on the government to ban the practice of Conversion Therapy.'

²⁰ See Alan Wilson "More Perfect Union". Racial segregation on buses was a defining civil rights issue in 1960s America.

Church. I think that you'll find that effective support for your position will drain away leaving a small rump of dyed in the wool traditionalists who will slowly die out. Do you really want to be among them?

Fido

Cosmo, you are of course right that enormous and seemingly irreversible change has occurred in recent years regarding sexual ethics and ideas about gender in the Western world.

Most significantly, I think, few outside the Muslim and Orthodox Jewish communities now think that sex should be kept for marriage, unlike fifty years ago when, despite the 'sexual revolution' and the 'swinging sixties,' many still did.

Concerning homosexuality, in the space of thirty years, the UK has gone from legally banning its promotion in schools to legally requiring it to be taught by schools in a positive light. The idea of 'same sex marriage,' which would have seemed bizarre to nearly everyone as recently as the 1980s, has now been enshrined in law.

In relation to gender identity, biological reality, at least for adults, now must bow to someone's inner sense of who they are. This ideology holds that men therefore can have babies and menstruate. Women can have beards and penises. People who object to this are vilified and threatened.²¹ Even those who plead for people to be allowed to respectfully disagree on these matters are being treated as heretics who are seen as highly dangerous and to be punished with the utmost severity.²²

Using a person's preferred gender pronoun when it doesn't correspond with their biological sex is not considered a kind, protective or gracious accommodation to their mental state, but an obligation to be enforced by law.

If someone believes that they are an amputee inhabiting the body of an abled-bodied person, (a condition called 'Bodily Integrity Identity Disorder') pretty much everyone would still agree they should not have healthy limbs removed by the National Health Service. They should be referred for psychiatric help. Likewise, a skeletal anorexic girl who believes she is grossly overweight is rightly seen as having a mental illness. However, if someone believes they are a woman trapped in a male body or a man in a female body then the powerful

²¹ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1472253/NHS-news-trans-sex-offenders-female-only-wards-patients-reported-to-police-GB-News-woke-vn>

²² See the recent case of Rev'd Bernard Randall, a chaplain to a school with an orthodox, evangelical Christian foundation. He gave a moderate, classically liberal sermon about the right of young people to disagree over LGBT+ matters and was dismissed by the school and reported by it to PREVENT, the government's anti-extremist programme originally designed to combat Islamist and far right ideology. The Diocese of Derby, far from backing him to the hilt, accused him, through its safeguarding department, of being a risk to children. This sinister development shows how far some Church of England dioceses have adopted Stonewall ideology despite the CofE's orthodox doctrine of sex and marriage never having been officially overturned through its system of decision making. The Randall case is being legally fought as I write, but the courts have a mixed record in safeguarding Christian freedom of expression in this area. <https://christianconcern.com/cccases/rev-dr-bernard-randall/>

transgender lobby is eager to penalize anyone daring to question this²³ and the NHS is willing to prescribe puberty blockers, give cross sex hormone treatment and provide surgeons to castrate genitalia and cut off breasts.

Furthermore, what happens if a counsellor agrees to help someone who experiences gender dysphoria and who wants their sense of gender to correspond with their biological sex? Or what if a therapist agrees to help a man (even a man with a wife and children) who *voluntarily* wishes to diminish his unwanted homosexual feelings? Both are regarded by LGBT+ campaigners and their allies as offering to do something shamefully immoral which should result in them being professionally struck off or even subject to criminal proceedings. This is because they are seen as colluding in the person's denial of something ideologues say is intrinsic to their very being. Their 'internalised homophobia and transphobia' must not be pandered to as this is the equivalent to abuse, they claim.

Despite all this, I would not say that *everything* is always getting worse in terms of our society acknowledging the truth in sexual matters. In the last ten years, for example, we have become more willing to face up to the truth that predatory behaviour by those with power is exploitative and damaging to people's lives.²⁴ Gone are the days of the 1970s and 1980s when the *Paedophile Information Exchange*, which campaigned for the abolition of the age of consent, was free to operate, supported by libertarian politicians and even received public money for its nefarious activities.²⁵

Although the age of consent for homosexual practice was reduced to 16 in 2001, exposing impressionable young men to the wiles of those much older, this has been somewhat mitigated by the introduction of a law to prevent teachers from forming a sexual relationship with any pupil under 18.²⁶

Also, it is important that the fundamental dignity of all human beings is recognised. Therefore, an emphasis on the wrongness of bullying, nastiness, hypocrisy and prejudice towards others who are different is to be welcomed and indeed is something that owes a debt to the Judeo-Christian worldview which sees all people as made in the image of God. Bullying and nastiness are clearly incompatible with love. Hypocrisy and prejudice are obviously inconsistent with truth. We are all worthy of respect as human beings, and

²³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/composer-suspended-over-tweet-backing-rowlings-gender-views-mq8f7mgk8>

²⁴ For example, it is difficult to imagine today someone like Peter Tatchell, who is lauded so much for his gay rights activism by revisionist Christians (he was a headline speaker at the *Greenbelt* Festival), being able to publicly advocate sex between adults and children as young as nine, which he did in a letter published by *The Guardian* 25 years ago (25th June 1997). His letter included these words '.....*The positive nature of some child-adult sexual relationships is not confined to non-Western cultures. Several of my friends—gay and straight, male and female—had sex with adults from the ages of nine to 13. None feel they were abused. All say it was their conscious choice and gave them great joy. While it may be impossible to condone paedophilia, it is time society acknowledged the truth that not all sex involving children is unwanted, abusive and harmful.*' The slogan 'love is love' would not carry the intended direction of rhetorical force in this area today.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Tatchell

See also the '#MeToo' movement.

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paedophile_Information_Exchange

²⁶ Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 (in force from January 2001)

humility is appropriate for all of us, as we are all fallen creatures, needing God's grace. Many people attend 'Pride' marches, not intending to promote hedonistic behaviour but to stand in solidarity with people who have felt excluded from society and not always had their human rights protected. It is seen as a celebration of kindness and diversity.

I think that it is a good thing if two people of the same sex, whether or not they identify as gay or lesbian, are able to live together without attracting hostility, unkindness and judgmental comments. In times gone by, assumptions were less likely to have been made about this scenario, but now that assumptions are, understandably, often made, while this can cause 'straight' people to experience embarrassment or in certain contexts, disapproval, increased tolerance might ameliorate some of the remaining negative effects of these assumptions.²⁷

I would not want our society to go back to the hypocrisies of the pre-1960s or the kind of nastiness I remember from schooldays in the 1980s. Alongside the prevalence of racial slurs, genuine homophobia was then widespread, defined as a contemptuous mocking of anyone perceived as gay and lacking in appropriate heterosexual machismo.²⁸ Amid the AIDS pandemic, when many people in society were being scornful, judgmental and fearful about 'gays', the very same people being most contemptuously homophobic were often people happily abandoning other aspects of Christian sexual morality.

Nor would I want us to treat LGBT+ identifying people unjustly or send any messages condoning violence, hate, or scapegoating as does happen in some countries. In Africa, for example, HIV/AIDS is spread mostly through heterosexual promiscuity yet in many African countries it is homosexuality that is regarded as the greatest threat to public health and wellbeing. (However, it has to be said that African countries that have recently brought in harsh 'anti-gay' laws have probably done so in response to the attempted neo-colonialist imposition of LGBT+ ideology upon them. Ironically, this has meant much harsher treatment of those who identify as gay than would have otherwise been the case).

I also think that today there is less naivety about the idea of heterosexual marriage being a cure for people's problems. In the past it was assumed that marriage would help someone to 'sort themselves out' sexually. While some people with homosexual inclinations could achieve sufficient heterosexual functioning to enable a reasonably satisfactory marriage, for many in it did not work at all.

Within conservative churches, there is now more understanding and sympathy for those with same sex erotic attraction, gender dysphoria and intersex characteristics. Several high-

²⁷ I know of two 'straight' female friends, both committed Christians and teachers, who moved together to a provincial village and attracted some unfavourable attention because people who didn't know them assumed they were in a lesbian relationship.

²⁸ At my Liberal Catholic CofE grammar school in the 1980s, where parents had merely to show some tenuous link to a church to get their children in, if they passed the 11+ exam, homophobia was rife. This was in contrast to my conservative evangelical CofE church and youth group, where there was kindness and acceptance of people 'for who they were' alongside the teaching of traditional Christian ethics. True Christians embody truth and grace. Those who are merely nominal Christians go with the flow as regards truth and show little grace to those who fall foul of whatever orthodoxy is fashionable.

profile church leaders feel able to be open about what it is like to struggle personally with sexuality issues within the context of seeking to follow orthodox, biblical faith. I have great admiration for these people and am glad that they are now getting more of the respect they deserve and finding love and support from their congregations and colleagues.²⁹ We are seeing conservative Christians recognising the failures of the past which led people to suffer in silence, and the ways in which the church could be much better in supporting those who are unmarried and trying to live a holy life, although it should by no means be assumed that married people always find life easy either.

Sadly however, despite the things that have got better inside and outside church communities, sexual sin and resulting societal dysfunction continues its cancerous growth in the context of the breakdown of the family structure and weakening of community within much of Western society. The best protection for children and vulnerable adults is to be known and cared for by strong communities built on stable family networks underpinned by healthy marriages. Marriage rates in the UK are at an all-time low and most children are now born to unmarried mothers, despite abundant evidence that children generally benefit from being nurtured by married parents.

Ironically, given the fact that most ethnic minorities are generally more conservative than whites regarding sexuality, opposition to LGBT+ ideology is often likened to racism. The comparison with racism is indeed compelling if we are talking about ignorant prejudice against people because they appear different. There *are* bigoted people who are both homophobic and racist, and for similar reasons. However, a sincere belief in marriage as traditionally understood is not a bigoted view akin to racism. It is, by contrast, a principled belief based on truth. I believe there are many who still recognise that you can respect people without endorsing everything in their belief system. In fact, we see that in a multi-faith society, communal peace requires that we do. Just as Christians are called to respect and indeed love, all people, whatever their spiritual beliefs, without denying our own commitment to our faith, so we also can love and respect LGBT+ identifying people without agreeing with LGBT+ ideology.

However, it is conceded that as regards homosexual practice as well as premarital sex, those committed to the historic position of the church seem like a forlorn and beleaguered remnant. We are the 'queer' ones now. Traditional Christian doctrine and teaching does often seem powerless in the face of the political and social orthodoxy embedded in our culture, just as the Christian faith itself often seems powerless in places where totalitarian ideology exerts a tight grip over people's lives.

But God is still God.

For those who want to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, the most important consideration is 'what is right in God's eyes?' What honours God and helps people to become all that they are meant to be in Christ? For Christian believers, history is '*his-story*.' Ultimately, being

²⁹ Such people I have found an inspiration include David Bennett, Vaughan Roberts, Ed Shaw, Sean Doherty, Sam Allberry, Mario Bergner

obedient to God's revelation of his character and purposes and what makes for human flourishing is what will put us on the 'right side of history'.

The biblical prophets who were mocked, imprisoned or killed were seen as 'being on the wrong side of history' when the people of Israel decided Yahweh and his commands were old hat and they were bedazzled by the pagan gods of the surrounding nations, the worship of whom involved sexual perversion. The faithful Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, exiled in Babylon, the centre of world power, were told to 'get with the programme' and do what everyone else was doing in bowing down to the statue Nebuchadnezzar made. Otherwise, they would be burned alive. Yet their faith and integrity won through.³⁰

The person most despised as 'being on the wrong side of history' was Jesus on the cross.³¹

But crucifixion Friday became resurrection Sunday and Christians who were slandered, mocked, and thrown to the lions were willing to hold out this hope in a world that was deeply hostile to Christian faith and values, knowing that they would receive eternal reward.

Marching in step with the *zeitgeist* is easy, but as Christians we are not called to the wide path, but the narrow way.³² Our call is not to ape the changing fashions of this world, but to be faithful and true to Christ, the Living Word of God.

Why should we jeopardise our faith and the wonderful calling of being God's holy people and forfeit our eternal reward in heaven, just to fit in more comfortably with a world that is passing away?³³

We are not worshippers of Eros any more than the gods of power and money so adored by Western society. Those who love, trust and obey God reject the selfish individualism and godless attitudes of the world that dominate the philosophical climate.

There are still faithful people in the Western church who experience same sex erotic attraction, or who once identified as 'gay' or who still do to some extent, but who do not see this as their primary identity. Their foremost sense of identity is that of being children of God made new in Christ. Some of these people will testify to experiencing a change in their thoughts and feelings which has accompanied inner healing.³⁴ Others speak about God's grace enabling them to overcome desires which conflict with following Jesus.³⁵ Attempts to ban any ministry to LGBT+ identifying people based on biblical truth will ultimately fail, as will campaigns to silence those who have moved away from homosexuality and transgenderism. These voices will eventually be heard because God will honour them.³⁶

³⁰ Daniel 3:17-18 *'If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'*

³¹ Isaiah 53:1-8

³² Matthew 7:13-14

³³ 1 John 2:17

³⁴ <https://www.xoutloud.com/book/>
<https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>

³⁵ <https://www.livingout.org/>

³⁶ <https://banneroftruth.org/uk/resources/articles/2018/voices-of-the-silenced/>

An example of someone who was, until recently, mercilessly mocked as being ‘on the wrong side of history’ was Mary Whitehouse. Now, however, even socially liberal commentators are re-evaluating her legacy and recognising the valuable work she did in warning about children being exposed to ‘video nasties’³⁷ and speaking out about the general dangers of pornography.³⁸

There is a recent example of a turnaround that happened more quickly than in the case of Mary Whitehouse. A Christian couple called Nigel and Sally Rowe were very involved as supportive parents in their two adopted six-year-old sons’ Church of England primary school on the Isle of Wight. One day it was announced, without any warning, that one of the boys in one of their sons’ class and one of the boys in their other son’s class, had ‘transitioned’ and they would both henceforth be coming dressed as girls and with new girls’ names.

The Rowes felt that the impact of this would be confusing and distressing to their sons and other children and complained about the way this was being handled. The school stated that they did not “*require any formal medical/psychological assessment and reporting when a pupil seeks to be treated as transgendered*”. It cited the Church of England’s guide for its church schools on ‘LGBT children’ (*Valuing All God’s Children*³⁹) and dismissed their complaint. The school gave the Rowes an ‘accept it or leave’ ultimatum after they were told that one of their sons would be demonstrating ‘transphobic behaviour’ if he showed an ‘inability to believe a transgender person is actually a real female or male.’

Supported by the *Christian Legal Centre*, Nigel and Sally challenged the policy being used by the Department for Education which allowed this to happen. The Rowes highlighted to the education department evidence that revealed how trans-affirming policies can lead to catastrophic outcomes. But Whitehall officials refused to properly assess this evidence and rejected the Rowes’ complaint.

When Nigel and Sally Rowe shared their story publicly in 2017, they were widely labelled as bigots and ostracised and abused by many in their local community. Much hate was directed towards them on social media. On ITV *This Morning*, Phillip Schofield, at that time the exalted high priest of sofa television, with a face that exuded serious moral condemnation, told the Rowes that they were ‘*the ones with the problem*’ and told them mockingly, ‘*Attitudes change. We’re less medieval now than we used to be.*’

However, at the High Court in February 2022, Lord Justice Lane granted the Rowe’s permission to bring a full judicial review of the Department of Education’s decision. Lawyers for the Department, knowing they were on shaky ground, have now settled the case and the Department of Education paid the Rowes £22,000, implicitly recognising the validity of their case.

³⁷ Film classification came about through her campaigning

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/mar/29/tv-tonight-was-mary-whitehouse-right>

³⁹ See page 3 above for the relevant words cited

Not only this, but a speech from the Attorney General in 2022 emphasised that a schools' duty was to protect children, rather than pander to trans ideology.⁴⁰

In 2017, it looked like the Rows were 'on the wrong side of history.' Five years later they were vindicated, and since then more and more people are becoming emboldened to say that, as regards trans ideology, the emperor has no clothes.

Already it can be seen that churches which have changed their doctrine and practices to fit in with the world's values have continued their steep decline. Young people have not decided to return to these churches. In fact, young people who are seriously seeking God want and need something authentically different from what the world has to offer.

It is true that some who call themselves 'Evangelical' and/or 'Charismatic' have turned aside from biblical truth and argue for the revisionist position, but the vast majority do not, and we are seeing a unity among them and traditional Anglo-Catholics on the issue which, together with the bulk of active Christians worldwide, makes up a dynamic force for the spread of the true Gospel.

Ultimately it will be those who espouse the values of the Kingdom of God who will be 'on the right side of history'. And God's kingdom *will* come, on earth as it is in heaven.

⁴⁰ In a speech at the Policy Exchange in August 2022, the Attorney General provided clarification and guidance on the law on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in schools, she said:

'The problem is that many schools and teachers believe – incorrectly – that they are under an absolute legal obligation to treat children who are gender questioning according to their preference, in all ways and all respects, from preferred pronouns to use of facilities and competing in sports. All this is sometimes taking place without informing their parents or taking into account the impact on other children. Anyone who questions such an approach is accused of transphobia. In my view, this approach is not supported by the law.'

She added: "No child should be made to fear punishment or disadvantage for refusing to adopt a preferred pronoun for a gender questioning child." And crucially that in this context, "the right to freedom of belief, thought, conscience and speech must be protected."

Furthermore, the Attorney-General has said that social transition "is a serious intervention" and that any decision to socially transition a child at school "should only be taken after all safeguarding processes have been followed, medical advice obtained, and a full risk assessment conducted.'

The Attorney General then concluded that we must be sensitive to the fact that *'gender distress may be a response to a range of developmental, sociological and psychological factors.'*

Chapter Two

You're Ignorant

Cosmo

Fido, it seems to me you don't understand that in all this debate about the rights and wrongs of social changes, at the end of the day we're talking about real human beings here. People like you and me. These people are not 'problems' to be discussed. They are sisters and brothers in Christ. Just how many gay and trans children and adults do you know? I think if you were to meet and spend time with people for whom this is all very personal, you would find a different perspective. I think you would find it hard to reject them as people and I think your pastoral heart might find enough compassion to overcome rigid doctrine, tradition and fixed ideas about what is best for society.

Many formerly conservative minded people have changed their minds after getting to know LGBTQIA+ people. You might too.

Fido

I *do* see these matters as connected with the lives of real people. Throughout my life I have known and listened carefully to lots of people who find LGBT+ issues personally relevant to them. These include friends, relations, fellow church members and ministry colleagues. As someone who has been ordained for twenty-seven years, I have a good deal of life and ministry experience.

I have read much personal written testimony of people who identify as gay or trans or admit to same sex erotic attraction and who are on both sides of the debate in terms of the morality of homosexual practice. I have listened to such people, who I know well, one to one. As a diocesan representative in the 'shared conversations' process I once spent three days in a residential conference, meeting and conversing with a large number people who identified as both Christian and gay, and listening to many of their personal stories in small groups.

I have, like everyone else who tries to follow Christ in a fallen world, struggled myself at various times with a range of issues to do with sexuality and identity, including such things as feeling broken hearted, lonely, having low self-esteem and self-hatred, depression, and poor sense of body image, and temptation to do things I know are wrong. I have sinned sexually, like everyone else. I didn't marry till I was thirty-four years old, so had sixteen years as an adult single person.

So, I think the explicit accusation of ignorance, and the implied charges of prejudice, bigotry and inability to empathise, are unfounded.

I do acknowledge that many people have changed their minds over the issue of homosexuality or transgenderism after meeting or befriending someone who identifies as gay or transgender. Some have changed their views through the 'coming out' of a family member.

However, I would question how thought through some people's opinions were if they did an about-turn simply after getting to know to some extent someone who identifies as LGBT+. A lot of older people, for example, have a default position of general conservatism. The LGBT+ phenomenon no doubt initially appeared as something of a shock, especially if the images in their minds were lurid pictures of some of the people in *Pride* parades. But when they met LGBT+ identifying people in everyday life and found that they didn't have two heads, they perhaps thought, with relief, 'they're just like us!' Furthermore, they may have found them charming, witty, creative, good conversationalists, thoughtful and sensitive. I hear older people say things like, 'my granddaughter's flat-mate at university is gay and he's a very nice young man!' I also hear Christian young people say, 'I know what the Bible says but I've got gay friends, so I'm torn.'

Charles Dickens once agreed to meet with a woman who was unmarried and co-habiting with a man. He was enough of a Victorian moralist to assume this woman would come across as an unpleasantly immoral character, but found she was not as he had expected at all. She was thoughtful, intelligent and well spoken. His views about morality of co-habitation outside of marriage were shaken as a result.⁴¹

If all that undergirds our opinions on what is moral or immoral is prejudice it might well take only one encounter with someone who challenges our stereotypical image to cause us to change our opinion.

It is, on the other hand, possible to have a view that sex should be within marriage and also recognise that those who have sex outside of marriage can be, in many respects, as decent and moral as the next person. We can hold our view even when we get to know struggles, pain and virtues of another person. The same goes for people who identify as LGBT+ and for followers of non-Christian religions.

If my belief in Jesus as the unique Son of God and the only way of salvation is susceptible to change by having a 'nice' Hindu friend or finding myself admiring the religious discipline of a Muslim, then I would say that my Christian faith was not very deeply grounded. If we truly believe deep down that salvation is only through Christ, we won't be wobbly about our faith whenever we meet a non-Christian who might seem to be a 'good' person and who we might count as a friend.

It is also possible to deeply love someone while believing something different to what they believe. I do not cease to love my son or daughter if their beliefs do not align with mine. So, if they at some point identify as gay or trans, and/or they adopt associated ideologies, my

⁴¹ Years later Dickens left his devoted wife of twenty years, who had borne him ten children, to take up with a young actress, showing how deep his commitment to sexual morality really was.

continued love for them does not require me to change my beliefs as to what is right or true, any more than if they adopt a non-Christian outlook on life for any other reason.

Everyone, including every person who identifies as LGBT+, is made in the image of God and possesses many things to like. But everyone, including such people, is also seriously flawed and needs the grace of God to save and transform them.

Furthermore, there are many people, Christians and otherwise, whose lives have been marked by great achievement and acclamation, the morality of whose sexual behaviour a genuine Christian could not in good conscience condone. I've heard people say that discovering the existence of devoted gay priests in tough inner-city parishes has caused them to change their views in a revisionist direction. However, the fact that someone is an impressive or appreciated church leader in a challenging environment does not mean that their sexual conduct is necessarily justified or that they are immune from being entangled in the sordidness of sin. It is possible to have the Holy Spirit within us but to grieve him by our actions.

Cosmo

You can't compare the scandalous sins of those who pretend they are one thing, when in reality they are quite another, with the desire of gay people to have publicly recognised loving relationships. Gay people don't have a choice about the way they are. That is how they are born and how God made them.

Fido

Studies have shown that genes play only a limited role in the causes of same sex erotic attraction.⁴² However, even if they did play a determinative part, biblical theology teaches that we are all fallen creatures from the moment we are conceived. Everyone is born with a tendency to sin, which is to reject God's truth and live selfishly at the cost of other people's wellbeing. Therefore no one should say 'because this is who I am, no-one can declare my resulting actions immoral.' In no other sphere would our evaluation of the morality of some kind of compulsive behaviour be determined solely on whether there might be some genetic factor at work. All of us in Christ are called to put to death our genetically inherited sinful nature, and live according to the Spirit, who brings glory to the Father and the Son. This means rejecting any kind of perversion, which includes same sex 'sexual' relations. The stories of those who have a strong desire for homo-erotic or perverted 'fulfilment' should be listened to with respect and compassion (and they are by many orthodox believers) but if we believe the Gospel of salvation in Christ, this must be the overarching story in which we find hope.

⁴² [Massive Study Finds No Single Genetic Cause of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior - Scientific American](#)

Cosmo

So it may be that you know a bit about some gay people today and have heard some of their stories, but are you aware of the suffering gay people have historically endured which has left a deep, perhaps even subconscious, legacy of hurt and pain in the psyche of the homosexual community? Do you realise how the Church has been complicit in their dehumanisation and victimization and how taking a hard theological line just pours salt into these longstanding wounds?

Do you not realise thousands of gays wearing pink triangles were incarcerated by the Nazis in death camps and very few survived? They were told they were 'biological mistakes of the Creator'. Heinrich Himmler's aim was to rid Germany of every single homosexual. In the camps they were disproportionately used for medical experiments in a quest to find the physiological cause of their 'degenerate abnormality.'

Just as the persecution of the Jews was underpinned by centuries of 'Christian' theology, so the treatment of gays came from attitudes developed by the Church. Very few Church figures spoke out for the Jews. *None*, it appears, spoke up for homosexuals.

Theologians have recognised that the Jewish Holocaust changed everything about how we should view Jewish people. The same should go for gay people. Moral disapproval leads to hate. Hate leads to cruelty and violence.⁴³

Fido

It is tragically true that in many so-called 'Christian' countries at various times Jewish people and Jewish communities have been libelled, deprived of property, discriminated against, expelled and suffered appalling violence. These things have happened whenever true, biblical Christianity has been rejected in favour of intolerant nationalism, political scapegoating or just plain wickedness. Very sadly, Martin Luther, so instrumental in the Reformation, succumbed towards the end of his life (possibly influenced by ill-health) to intemperate language regarding the Jews and failed to heed the apostle Paul's words in Romans chapters nine to eleven, regarding God's continuing love for and purpose for the Jewish people, despite their continuing unbelief. It is true his ungodly religious invective was used by the Nazis but the motives for their genocidal actions were to do with regarding Jews as racially subhuman enemies who, through their alleged grip on Germany's finances had betrayed the country, causing the loss of the First World War. Jews were defined by the Nazis racially, not religiously. Baptised Jews who believed in Jesus were not spared the death camps, so 'religion' was not the Nazis' motivating force but a neo-pagan, 'blood and soil' racism.

⁴³ See Andrew Linzey in his chapter of introduction to *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, 2005

Regarding the treatment of those identified as 'homosexuals' by the Nazi regime, this was motivated by their murderous desire to rid Germany of all who were considered biologically inferior. They were not interested in punishing specific homosexual acts per se, but eliminating those who had a homosexual disposition. They targeted them along with the mentally and physically disabled, and all those who they considered an unproductive burden on society, such as habitual criminals, Roma travellers, sex offenders, and those who were homeless or unemployable. These were sent to the camps which had originally been used mainly to incarcerate political prisoners such as Communists.

It is true that, just as the sad history of anti-Semitism made it easier for the Nazis to demonise Jews, anything said or done by the Church to suggest homosexuals were less than human and should be mocked or despised would have provided ammunition for the Nazis to use against them, and also discouraged opposition to what they were doing. Anything like this should be abhorred and repented of.

I would in no way condone what the Nazis did to those they identified as homosexuals, any more than I would condone what they did in the camps to anyone. Statements of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion which have confirmed the traditional view have also deplored any attacks on the dignity of gay people, and constantly re-iterated that they are not less than human and are made in the image of God like every other human being. It is true that in some parts of the Anglican Communion in Africa, clergy are under political and cultural pressure to support the criminalisation of homosexual acts⁴⁴, but among conservatives in the Church of England and most of the Anglican Communion it is considered that it is no more 'biblical' to criminalise homosexual acts than adulterous ones.⁴⁵

When the primates of the Anglican Communion agreed to discipline The Episcopal Church of America for its steps towards conducting 'same sex marriages', they also confirmed their rejection of criminal sanctions against 'same sex attracted' people.⁴⁶

Cosmo

If you were more educated with regard to church history you would know that the church for many years taught that the purpose of sex was procreation. Contraception was declared to be wrong by the Church of England until well into the twentieth century. However,

⁴⁴ See page 16 para 2

⁴⁵ <https://anglicanmainstream.org/response-to-the-archbishops-statement-on-the-decriminalisation-of-homosexual-acts/>

⁴⁶ *"The Primates condemned homophobic prejudice and violence and resolved to work together to offer pastoral care and loving service irrespective of sexual orientation. This conviction arises out of our discipleship of Jesus Christ. The Primates reaffirmed their rejection of criminal sanctions against same-sex attracted people. The Primates recognise that the Christian church and within it the Anglican Communion have often acted in a way towards people on the basis of their sexual orientation that has caused deep hurt. Where this has happened they express their profound sorrow and affirm again that God's love for every human being is the same, regardless of their sexuality, and that the church should never by its actions give any other impression."*
<https://www.anglicannews.org/features/2016/01/communique-from-the-primates-meeting-2016.aspx>

eventually the Church came round to accepting it as morally OK. The church began to see the purpose of marriage as love and companionship rather than the vehicle for preserving the continuation of the human race. Once the insistence that the possibility of procreation was essential to sexual intercourse was dropped, the Church had no continuing rationale for opposing gay sex. If marriage is about love and companionship primarily, then it can include same sex couples.

Fido

It is true that at various times the Church, affected by the issues most keenly felt in the surrounding culture, has emphasised different aspects of marriage at different times. The 1662 Prayer Book, after saying marriage was 'instituted by God in the time of man's innocency' and symbolised the mystical union 'betwixt Christ and his church' did list procreation as the first reason for marriage, followed by it being a remedy against fornication, and then finally as a source of companionship and support in good times and bad. The 1980 Alternative Service Book reversed this order and referred to sexual intercourse more positively, speaking of the 'joy of bodily union' which 'strengthens the union of hearts and lives. However, before it does this it says "*The Scriptures teach us that marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of his grace, a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh.*"

Although the nuances regarding the 'goods' of marriage may change over time, the doctrine of marriage has been fundamentally based on the Scriptures. Marriage is God's creation. Genesis refers to the 'not goodness' of man being alone. If the problem was simply Adam not having any friends this could have been remedied by more Adams. But God brought Eve out of Adam to provide a healthy counterpart – a complementary being - and for their sexual union to be good. Marriage in Scripture is founded on only two things but each are essential. They are covenanted permanence and sexual differentiation. Procreation is one of the 'fruits' of marriage but the lack of possibility of procreation, does not invalidate the marriage or render sexual intercourse immoral. If it did, then there would have been a Mosaic law against sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who was clearly already pregnant. Such intercourse was not declared sinful because although it had no procreational possibility or motive, it still bound husband and wife together in joyful expression of their 'one flesh' union.

Chapter Three

You're Judgmental

Cosmo

I do think there is something rather unsavoury in the way you see it as your business to pass judgment on other people's sex lives Fido. Jesus was very much against judging people. 'Judge not' he said, 'lest ye be judged.'

Fido

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount were instructions to avoid a critical, judgmental spirit that is eager to identify moral failings in other people in a way that would leave us open to being judged in the same manner. Jesus said, 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'⁴⁷

We should not construe Jesus words as meaning that we should not be discerning about what is right and wrong. Most of the time this discernment should of course be focussed on our own actions as people committed to growing in holiness. Sometimes, however, we are called to make judgments about right and wrong, good and bad, in relation to *other people's* actions. We might have to assess someone's suitability for a particular role by reflecting on their character. We might have to adjudicate in a dispute or take part in some kind of disciplinary procedure. Someone might be accountable to us, perhaps, as in the case of Christians within the church, voluntarily. If we truly care about people, we will want them to make morally good choices. This need not mean being a censorious busybody, but it might mean loving someone enough to occasionally challenge their thinking, words or behaviour.

I think that everyone, including you Cosmo, realises this. It's just that in relation to LGBT+ matters, your objection to my stance is not really about judgmentalism *per se* but about the *accuracy* of my judgment as to what is right or wrong, holy or unholy, spiritually good or spiritually harmful. Ironically, your readiness to accuse me of being judgmental simply because I hold to a traditional, biblical view of sexuality and gender identity is, I venture to suggest, an example of judgmentalism!

1 Corinthians 5 gives an example of how the apostle Paul dealt with an issue of sexual immorality within the church. The apostle Paul did not congratulate the Corinthians on their refusal to judge any church members as to their sex lives. On the contrary, he wrote:

⁴⁷ Matthew 7:1-2

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

Cosmo

Yes, but this was a case of incest, and something that everyone, including pagans, regarded as intolerable. Gay relationships are acceptable today in right-thinking society, so they should be in the church too.

Fido

Paul highlighted the scandalous nature of this conduct and said that 'even pagans do not tolerate this kind of behaviour' as a way of seeking to prick the conscience of the Corinthian church. He was not saying that the church should take its cue as to what is right and wrong from pagan society. Paul is saying that whereas we should expect that people outside the church may be sexually immoral, greedy, dishonest and idolatrous, we should not associate with people who claim to be *believers* yet act this way. This requires some sort of 'judgment'. You may not agree with the church's traditional understanding of the biblical sexual ethic, but you should not label it as 'judgmental', only that it is incorrect.

Cosmo

You say that, but the *degree* of judgmentalism to which gay people, especially gay clergy, are subject to seems greater than for anyone else. Many straight Christians, including ordinands, clergy and theological college lecturers, for example, engage in premarital or extra-marital sex and all is forgiven. Even if traditional moral theology can also accommodate forgiving gay clergy for fleeting relationships and one-night stands if they confess and repent enough, gay clergy who want to avoid promiscuous behaviour are totally condemned if they enter 'permanent, faithful, stable' relationships. So far from discouraging sexual immorality, your views are actually *contributing* to it.

Fido

I agree that diminishing standards of sexual morality in the church generally might contribute to making people who identify as gay or lesbian feel that they are being unfairly targeted for moral censure if their conduct is singled out for condemnation.. But the remedy for this is not to declare sinful actions holy, but to have an increased commitment to biblical holiness across the board, along with compassionate forgiveness, discipline and rehabilitation for those who fall. If an ordinand is saying that they have a homosexual orientation and that celibacy is too bleak a prospect for them, then they should not be ordained until they are willing to make that sacrifice with the grace God provides. If someone believes they have uncontrollable hormones and attraction for the opposite sex and are not willing or able to be married and stay faithful, they should not be ordained either. Even if they are married but have a history of premarital immorality they should not be ordained unless they demonstrate that they are a changed person. Everyone must make sacrifices in their calling to follow Christ and particularly so for ordination. In some parts of the Anglican communion, clergy risk death. We should not change our doctrine of marriage, grounded in Scripture and tradition for two thousand years, in order to reduce the cost of clergy's sacrificial commitment to their holy calling.

Cosmo

But the testimony of many gay clergy is that they feel called *as gay people* to ordination. They passionately feel that they are good priests, not *despite* their homosexuality, but *because* of it. It is, for them, a special charism, a gift. For many, their sexuality is intimately bound up with their spirituality.⁴⁸

Fido

My experience of life and ministry has taught me never to underestimate the depths from which we need redeeming or sinful humanity's capacity for self-deception. This capacity is

⁴⁸ See 'The Other Way' *Anglican Gay and Lesbian Journeys* 1998, by Colin Coward

particularly marked in relation to sex and applies to everybody. Whenever anyone writes or speaks about their own 'story' when it comes to sex, I believe it is wise to recognise that one person's 'truth' might not be accordance with God's truth – reality, in other words.

I remember, for example, reading the autobiography of Jimmy Hill, the footballer turned television presenter and pundit. He described his inability to be faithful to one woman only as the price he had to pay for having so much 'love for women' within him! Christians are not immune to doing this. They can present their sexual choices as simply the expression of 'how God made them' or even invoke Christian virtue or the leading of the Holy Spirit when in reality, it is their carnal desires which are driving them in a particular direction. People can develop theologies to justify the satisfaction of their powerful urges, and others can collude in this for their own self-serving reasons, praising them for their 'honesty', 'courage' and 'authenticity'.

Sexuality *is* intimately bound up with spirituality, which is why it is especially important to be holy in our sexuality, and to be wise and discerning about the spiritual forces seeking to lead us away from pure worship of the one, true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I do want to affirm people who identify as LGBT+ as made in the image of God and I do want them, like everyone else, to know God's salvation, forgiveness, transformation and healing in their lives. Judgementalism comes from a place of fear, pride and lack of love. These are things I agree we should repent of. True love for people is longing for the redeeming work of God in their lives so that they will be blessed with all that is holy and good.

Chapter Four

You're Unjust

Cosmo

The former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, is universally admired for his courageous stand against apartheid in South Africa. He has said several times that he sees the question of homosexuality as a simple one of justice. He said 'I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. I'd rather go to the other place.' He held a blessing ceremony for his daughter's same sex wedding. She was recently refused permission to officiate at her godfather's funeral in a Church of England church because she is married to a woman.⁴⁹

Ask any young person in the UK whether that is just or if it is fair that gay and lesbian people can't get married in church when straight people can and they will say 'no', or 'of course not' (or words to that effect!) People instinctively know that this is a fundamental issue of *justice*. That is why UK law, in common with most developed countries, no longer bans gays and lesbians from marrying. Why should the church be dragging its feet about embracing this giant step forward for human rights? As in many areas God's Spirit is moving in the world and lamentably the Church, instead of being in the vanguard of the exciting new changes the Spirit is bringing, is, thanks to you and your fundamentalist friends, way behind the times.

Fido

Desmond Tutu's context in South Africa is one where truly homophobic attitudes have similarities with the racist views he fought against with others for so long. This means he is most concerned about violence and prejudice against LGBT+ people and he expresses this in typically forthright terms. However, it is possible to combine respect for the dignity of LGBT+ identifying people and support for their human rights, whilst holding a traditional view of sexual ethics. You will no doubt say that Tutu's position is that 'same sex marriage' must be blessed by the Church in order to give lesbian and gay people that dignity. Most other African Christians do not agree with him.⁵⁰ The fact that he is Desmond Tutu and an icon for civil rights activism does not mean he cannot be wrong about sexual ethics.

Discernment of what is just and unjust must be based on truth. It's easy to claim something is unfair if language is used deceptively to distort the true picture. Before legitimately claiming that someone is unjustly being denied access to some socially recognised

⁴⁹ [Church of England bans Desmond Tutu's gay daughter from officiating at funeral | News | The Times](#)

⁵⁰ Tutu's daughter, Mpho Andrea Tutu van Furth, is not licensed to minister in South Africa either, because of her 'same sex marriage.' She was ordained in the Episcopal Church of America.

arrangement, you should be clear about what that socially recognised arrangement is. If the very definition of marriage is 'the publicly recognised sexual union of man and wife for life' (which is what it used to be in everyone's eyes) then the situation is not one of gay and lesbian people being *banned* from it. In fact, anyone who was of age and not already married was always entitled to get married under the traditional definition of marriage, whether they had homosexual inclinations or not. Some chose to marry despite their homosexual inclinations and some very wisely decided it was not for them. Until relatively recently, nearly everyone who identified as gay would have readily agreed marriage was a heterosexual institution which held no interest for them.

It is only by first re-defining marriage to be something like 'the public recognition of two people's feelings of emotional commitment for one another' (whatever that commitment might mean to them) that you can say that people who are denied it are being treated unjustly. I think one of the reasons why the secular State has now seen fit to legislate for 'same sex marriage' is because in our culture the understanding of marriage has, in the last forty years or so, changed to become more like the second definition given above.

The prevalence of pre-marital and extra-marital sex, co-habitation outside marriage, adultery and divorce has meant that in many people's eyes a wedding is not the beginning of a publicly recognised sexually exclusive lifelong union but a celebration of two people's feelings of love and commitment and a desire to mark this at a time, often after years of 'being together' anyway, when they can afford a 'big splash'. So I can understand why governments across the Western world have reflected this new understanding of marriage in law in a way that allows for same sex couples to have access to it. The aim was to give homosexual partnerships equal societal status, as a way of countering prejudice and affirming gay people, and this made sense with the changed understanding of marriage in our culture.

Cosmo

Yes, Fido. You need to accept that marriage has always evolved. It developed in the Bible from a polygamous, patriarchal, property arrangement where the woman's consent was often not required, to something more egalitarian based on love. In English law it has evolved over the centuries in a similar way, and the Church's understanding of marriage has adapted accordingly. Allowing 'same sex marriage' is just another tweak. Why get so uptight about it?

Fido

Yes, ancillary *customs and rights* associated with marriage have changed over the years, but there have always been two *fundamental essentials* to biblical marriage from the Genesis account of Adam and Eve right through to the New Testament. These are that marriage is a *lifelong covenant*, rather than a temporary contractual arrangement, *and* that it involves the *sexual union of male and female*.

The Genesis account of creation in chapters one and two is the theological basis for marriage. Opposition to 'same sex marriage' is much more theologically grounded than a mere appeal to certain so-called 'proof texts' that appear later in the Bible. Those are relevant to a post-Fall world, but the theology of marriage is there from the beginning when God declared it all 'very good'. Woman was created from man and the sexual union of male and female in marriage when they become 'one flesh' is a glorious *reunion*. When God said, 'it is not good for man to be alone', he wasn't primarily talking about the problem of someone not having any friends, but the fact that male and female complementarity and mutual interdependence is important for the health of the human race.

The fact that 'same sex marriage' is a fundamentally different thing to heterosexual marriage is shown by our legal framework still having to treat 'opposite sex marriage' and 'same sex marriage' differently in at least three respects.

First, an 'opposite sex marriage' can be annulled (declared to have never properly come about) if there is no 'consummation'. This reflects the biblical teaching that heterosexual intercourse is a sacramental act, and expresses the one-flesh unity and commitment to covenantal love that is vital to true marriage. A 'same sex marriage' cannot be annulled on similar grounds because there is, in relation to 'same sex marriage', no theological rationale for the concept of 'consummation', nor any agreement on what the definition of 'consummation' is, even if it were thought to be required. There is nothing in homosexual practice that equals the mutuality of heterosexual intercourse. The concept of marriage has in effect, been divorced from true sexual intercourse between a man and a woman and therefore there is no longer an understanding of what sex truly is as well as marriage.

Secondly, regarding the legalities of divorce, there is much less certainty over what counts as marital unfaithfulness within a 'same sex marriage', since the definition of sex itself is less clear. There is no equivalent to the 'one flesh' consummation which clearly demarcates sexual exclusiveness.

Thirdly, there are divergences over parental rights on divorce since at least one of the partners to a 'same sex marriage' with children will be a non-biological parent. 'Same sex marriage' is going to increasingly create new, artificial family structures with associated rights and responsibilities, the complexity of which the legal system is going to have to contend with for years to come.

You say that marriage in the Bible began as a 'polygamous, patriarchal, property arrangement' and evolved into something more egalitarian based on love. On the contrary, the biblical foundation of marriage is found in the first two chapters of Genesis. There we see God's 'very good' pattern of one man and one woman joined together in loving union and encouraged to be fruitful. Both were created in the image of God. Eve is described as Adam's 'helper', but this should not be taken to mean she was inferior. God is described as being our 'helper' (with the same Hebrew word *ezer*). Eve, like God, gives Adam strength, encouragement and support.

After Genesis chapter 3, sin spoilt what God had created 'very good' in all sorts of ways. Due to the Fall, men ruled over women oppressively and women desired to 'have men' more

than they desired God. Polygamy was never approved by God but was a symptom of the inequality that came about through sin. Furthermore, the journey from post-Fall patriarchy and polygamy to more equal, loving relationships was not one caused by mere evolutionary process. It came about through God choosing people of faith culminating in God's new kingdom pattern in Christ.

The biblical patriarchs of faith were not generally polygamous by desire, although sin did lead some of them into taking more than one wife. Abraham was devoted to Sarah and only took a concubine, under pressure from her, to seek to ensure he had a son and heir. He and Sarah didn't fully trust God's promise to give them one miraculously. Isaac was only married to Rebecca. Jacob only wanted Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah as well and then took their two maidservants as concubines at their instigation and because of their procreational rivalry.

It was the kings of Israel who really got into polygamy in a big way, mainly because instead of trusting in God, they wanted to make alliances with the surrounding pagan nations and each treaty involved marrying a foreign princess. None of the examples of polygamy in the Bible end well. All produced jealousy, rivalry, internecine conflict and, it was normally associated with idolatry. So the Bible witnesses to polygamy being a bad thing and always causing trouble.

Why didn't God explicitly forbid polygamy? Well, he did explicitly tell Israelite kings not to marry pagan princesses or develop harems.⁵¹ As for polygamy generally, God in his love gave Israel laws that were realistic as well as humane. If God had explicitly banned all men from taking more than one wife, what would have happened was that powerful men would have taken other women anyway as concubines, but would not have given them the rights and status associated with marriage. Instead, Jewish tradition, out of which Christianity emerged, had, by the time of Jesus, re-discovered something of God's original intention, as expressed in Genesis 1 and 2, that his ideal pattern for marriage was one man and one woman. However, like people all through history, powerful Jewish men struggled to live up to this ideal, and when marriage to one person only became difficult, they resorted to using the divorce procedure to get a new wife and keep themselves technically monogamous. Jesus said this was still adultery in God's eyes. The serial monogamy that resulted had similarities to the way men today feel morally free to go from woman to woman. Avoiding marriage in the first place provides an even more convenient way of exercising sexual selfishness than marriage followed by easy divorce.

Cosmo

So if God managed to tolerate people in Israel having more than one wife, why can't he tolerate two people today of the same sex getting married?

⁵¹ Deuteronomy 17:17, 1 Kings 11:1-2

Fido

Well, by the time of Jesus, Jews had realised, in relation to polygamy, that there was a difference between what God tolerated because of sin and what was holy and good and best for human flourishing. Within the Church we recognise polygamy as wrong, and societies more influenced by Christianity than Islam or paganism do outlaw it, although, as we continue to reject our Christian heritage, this is likely to change.

However, in the Church, just as we want to witness to the 'one-flesh' permanent, covenantal nature of marriage as revealed in Genesis and Jesus' teaching in Matthew, we should also witness to its grounding in the sexual complementarity of male and female. It's clear that the revisionist position now demands much more than mere tolerance. But celebrating and embracing 'same-sex marriage' as a Christian way of life, is a regressive step, like approving polygamy or serial monogamy. If we are going to go backwards, we should go right back to the beginning as Jesus said we should. We actually need to be *more* radical about marriage, not less.

People talk about the 'sexual revolution' and everyone assumes they are talking about the 1960s. But there was a sexual revolution in the first century. The church community called Christian men to revolutionary new standards in bringing their sexual desires under the authority of Christ. That meant no more using and abusing women, homosexual practice or bestiality. From then on, the church taught that the marriage bed be kept pure, that men's bodies belonged to their wives (as well as vice versa). Man's sinful nature wants to live for pleasure whatever the harm caused to others. The Holy Spirit however conforms men to the true practice of love and faith.

Cosmo

Whatever you say about the Bible or the early church, society's understanding of marriage has evolved and the State has now recognised that by implicitly re-defining it as an institution available to same sex couples. Therefore, should not the Church accept the new definition and offer same sex couples a church wedding or blessing at least? The Church of England is the national, established church. Surely it must accept the new legal definition of marriage in English law and not be exempt from laws forbidding discrimination? Why should the Church be the one remaining place where bigotry is allowed?

Fido

Well, Cosmo, to be frank, I have at times wondered whether all of us in the Church of England should accept that the meaning of the word 'marriage' has changed to mean something (whatever that something is) for which sexual differentiation is unnecessary.

Churches that believe in the traditional, biblical definition of marriage could withdraw from solemnising what everyone now calls 'marriage', and develop new terminology for their members, such as 'sexual covenant,' to describe what the word 'marriage' used to mean. Holding a 'sexual covenant' service for opposite sex couples would have no legal force but would be of spiritual significance to husbands and wives who understand marriage according to the traditional, biblical definition. They might contract a 'civil marriage' before or after the sexual covenant ceremony to avail themselves of any remaining benefits a legal State marriage might confer.

There would be lots of problems with this, however. There would be confusion regarding terminology and a reluctance among Christians to abandon the biblical associations that accompany the word 'marriage.' Most clergy in the Church of England would not want to lose the power to solemnise marriages under English law, since that would be a radical kind of 'disestablishment.' It could signal a retreat and a retrenchment and the abandonment of Christian truth in the public realm. Those who think like you do, Cosmo, will not want this because you are convinced that the institution of marriage has not changed in a fundamental way, and you would want to retain the Church of England's role in what the nation understands marriage to be, marrying both opposite sex and same sex couples without distinction.

Cosmo

Indeed.

Chapter Five

You're Unkind

Cosmo

Fido, have you ever thought that you are approaching these matters in an unnecessarily complicated way? You're missing the heart of the Gospel, which is about love, inclusion, kindness, and mercy. Jesus preferred the outcasts and the 'sinners' to the respectable religious people. He put compassion before rules and was quite happy to scandalise those who upheld the letter of the law by loving those on the margins. There is a deep hunger among LGBTQIAP+ people for acceptance. Welcoming them is much more in tune with the Gospel than excluding them.

Fido

I agree that the heart of the Gospel is God's loving mercy and kindness towards sinners. All who believe in Jesus (who trust and obey Him) are included. Jesus did mix with those who were socially disapproved of by those who prided themselves on keeping Jewish law.

I would agree that churches should be places where all feel welcome, and sinners are treated with merciful kindness. But mercy towards sinners is not really what is being asked for by revisionist Christians. You are seeking a change in theological understanding of what is right and wrong. Mercy for people who sin sexually is not what is wanted. Full endorsement and celebration of homosexual relationships is. Vindication is desired rather than grace. In fact the offer of grace, forgiveness and new life becomes an insult unless homosexuality is affirmed as good and right. We both agree that the Gospel is one of inclusion, but we differ as to what it is we are including people in. I would say that we are including people in a new life of holiness, non-conformity with the world and joy in living for Jesus as our priority. This means rejecting homosexual behaviour. You say inclusion means rejoicing in homosexuality as something good and God-given.

Cosmo

The Christian faith *is* about love and inclusion. God loves *everyone* and everyone has a place at the table. Obsessing about the rights and wrongs of people's personal lives is just missing the point. It really is simple. The hashtag *#BeKind* expresses it beautifully. Gay, bisexual and transgender people, like everyone else, are just trying to get on and live their lives, to love and be loved. Life is challenging enough and there is so much nastiness in the world.

Christians should, above all, be kind to those who are different. We should accept people just the way they are – as God made them.

You say that you are against bullying and nastiness. Well, there are names for those things in this context. They are homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. The remedy for homophobia, biphobia and transphobia is to treat everybody without discrimination. Marriage is for everybody, not just straight people. Transgender people should have equal rights to cisgender people.

Can you not recognise the damaging effects of a restrictive theology on people? Have you stopped to consider the implications of being wrong? You will have allied yourself to a position which has caused untold misery to people made in the image of God. You will have been a blockage to the establishment of justice and equality, and you will have on your conscience the effect of your rejection of people for simply being who they are. I shouldn't need to remind you about the people from the LGBTQIAP+ community who have committed suicide because of attitudes like yours. Do you really want to break the unity of the Church, hurt those you should have been loving, and destroy the credibility of the Gospel message by taking such a reactionary stance? Churches and church leaders that are non-affirming cause great distress and make people feel they are unloved. No wonder young people have deserted the Church in droves.

Surely the most important message of the Bible is love? Love is love. Discrimination against people just because of who they are or who they love is the worst kind of prejudice.

No doubt you'll try to say that you 'love the sinner but hate the sin' but how is 'love' sin? How is 'being who you are' wrong? To deny LGBT people sexual intimacy with life partners is cruel and heartless. Straight people need intimacy and so do queer people. Celibacy may be a calling for some, but it should never be imposed on people.

Transgender people are among the most disadvantaged on the planet. They face so much difficulty just trying to live their lives in peace. Churches should be places where their gender identity is affirmed and celebrated.

Fido

It is true that for Christians, love is the supreme virtue. The Bible tells us our God is, in his very nature, love. Therefore, no-one can love people more than God. If God says something is not true or good, then it cannot be loving. No-one is kinder, wiser, more compassionate, more just and more gracious than the one who created and redeemed us. Of course God's church should be 'inclusive' in the sense that God is 'inclusive' - wanting all people to come to a saving knowledge of him. Therefore, I say again, the debate is not about whether we should be 'inclusive', but it is about *what it is we are wanting to include people in*. If we are wanting to include people in the redeemed family of God, committed to living in grace, purity and truth in the light of his holy love, our authority for understanding what this

means is the Bible. If the Bible is negative about certain things, then that is not because the God it reveals is nasty, bigoted and 'exclusive' but because he knows best and has our highest welfare at heart.

Therefore, we should not think that there is a trade-off between loving people and speaking the truth. In Jesus we see that love and truth belong together. It is not loving to tell people that something is good when it is in fact, bad. It is not kind to say that something is life-giving when in fact it results in spiritual death. To love someone truly is to want the very best for them from an eternal perspective.

Slogans such as 'Love is Love' or statements such as 'how can love be sin?' are rhetorically powerful and there is often a heartfelt emotional cry behind them, but as logical arguments they rely on the assumption that the forms of sexual expression being promoted or celebrated are indeed expressions of real love as distinct from lust. Christians are called to love everyone, but this actually means, among other things, according to the Bible, behaving in a sexually pure way and *refraining* from sex with anyone other than one's opposite sex spouse. It is not 'love' to take someone's virginity and move on. It is not 'loving your neighbour' to sleep with your neighbour! Crucially, the biblical models of real love in a 'same sex' context are ones that demonstrate *friendship, loyalty, and sacrifice*. There is absolutely no celebration in the Bible of sexual desire or practice between people of the same sex even though revisionists have been desperate to find this somewhere, even claiming it can be found in the relationships of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and, blasphemously, Jesus and John.

Throughout the Bible close, intimate, same sex *friendships* are celebrated and affirmed.⁵² We should understand that the cultural context of both Old and New Testaments was one where non-genital same sex physical and emotional intimacy was a feature of people's lives, much more so than in our hyper-individualist Western culture where men only relate in an emotionally and physically close way to each other in certain rare circumstances (such as in the joy and delight of sporting success).

For example, men reclined on each other when eating together in Jesus' time. The Leonardo Da Vinci painting, *The Last Supper*, depicting Jesus sitting in the centre of a long table, flanked by the apostles who are also seated, is stylized art. In fact, they would have been reclining on each other around a low table in a circle. In some middle eastern lands today, where sodomy is a serious criminal offence, you see men holding hands in the street with other men as a sign of friendship and intimacy and this is completely socially acceptable (in contrast to public displays of affection between opposite-sex people which are not acceptable).

⁵² I think it is theologically sound for the Church of England to provide a service marking a same sex covenanted *friendship*. This would have to be clearly distinguished from a service of marriage or anything pseudo-sexual, and this will be unsatisfactory for those same sex couples who say it falls short of their desire for their relationship to be called 'marriage' and be recognised as 'sexual.' So whether there will be any demand for it is another matter.

In among all the depictions of close same sex relationships in the Bible, however, nowhere are homosexual acts ever sanctioned as expressions of true love.⁵³

Cosmo

But homosexuality is the expression of love that is most appropriate for some people based on who they are and who they love.

Fido

Again, the cry that people should be allowed to be 'who they are' and 'love' accordingly is based on the belief that experiencing homosexual attraction is a core part of our very being as created by God. This belief is continually reinforced in myriad ways that are so common now, people don't think to question them. For example, all media, from the BBC and established news outlets to racy online magazines consistently speak about the dark days in Britain when 'being gay' was illegal or illegal for people under a certain age. However, in English law there has never been a criminal offence of 'being gay', as if such a law could possibly be framed according to respected legal jurisprudence. It is only certain *genital acts* that were ever criminalised, unlike Nazi Germany which abandoned all principles of godly law-making.

This way of talking about our history subtly conveys the message that homosexual desires are intrinsic to the very nature of someone's being and therefore any criminal sanction against homosexual genital acts in the past was a criminal sanction on someone's simple existence. The illogicality of this is shown by the observation that it would be bizarre if today a same sex attracted young man under 16 was regarded as breaking the law, not for engaging in any sexual activity, but simply for 'being gay.' On turning 16 it is only certain *behaviour* that then becomes legally open to him. It is not that his very being suddenly ceases to be criminal. People who engage in sex with opposite sex minors do not find themselves in trouble with the law because 'being heterosexual' is illegal around those under sixteen. Specific acts of a sexual nature must be proven.

I accept that homosexual desire for intimate genital pleasure is *felt* to be a very important part of someone's identity, especially if one sees oneself as a member of a group of people who have experienced collectively a sense of oppression and unfairness. But the call of Christ is to embrace a *new* identity in him, which must override other identities, even if those identities have some validity in themselves.

⁵³ James Jones, former Bishop of Liverpool, suggested the Bible did sanction homoeroticism on the basis that David and Jonathan's relationship was emotionally close and 'physical'. However, physicality and emotional closeness mark all authentic same sex friendships. They do not necessarily imply a pseudo-sexual relationship. https://web.archive.org/web/20080212232929/http://liverpool.anglican.org/people/bishops/jamesspeeches/0712_Lambeth_essay.htm

For example, being British is part of my identity, and national identities have some affirmation in Scripture, but my identity in Christ is a greater and deeper one. If there is a conflict between the demands of my British identity and the demands of my identity in Christ, the latter must prevail. If the demands of my identity in Christ trump even those identities which are valid and not morally problematic in themselves, such as nationality, how much more must they eclipse identities which are not even recognised by Scripture, such as those based on sexual feelings corrupted by the Fall?

I accept that in a post-Christian society secular law and philosophy is going to slide away from Christian foundations, but the Church should be the one part of society that continues to witness to God's truth, however much it might appear that we 'inhabit a different moral universe.'⁵⁴

I do understand that for many people who identify as gay and who want to follow Christ, the call to live a celibate life might feel like being sentenced to a life of loneliness and sexual frustration. In a sex-mad world the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is enormous. However, everyone is called to trust God for the ultimate satisfaction of the desires of our hearts. Our deepest need is to know that we are loved, and the greatest love is not found in marriage but in the community of those who share Christ's suffering and lay down their lives for each other⁵⁵. Real intimacy is the sharing of unconditional love in Christ. Sexual practice which is outside of God's will and therefore harmful to our best interests and those of others cannot promote true intimacy.

It is true that a happy and loving marriage brings great blessings and is a sign of God's covenant love with his bride, the Church, but we must avoid idolising marriage or suggesting that marriage is the answer to everyone's problems. Christians should repent of these unbiblical attitudes. The challenge for a church that is true to the New Testament pattern is to be community of love where people find the intimacy of sharing in each other's lives, particularly their struggle and pain.

Tragically, people commit suicide for a variety of reasons, but I believe we do not genuinely love people if we give them false comfort and deny that sinful choices bring harm to all concerned. I believe it is no mere co-incidence that the embrace of all things LGBT+ in Western society has been accompanied with ever increasing incidences of self-harm and suicide. Perverted sexual practices bring spiritual, social and physical harm, as does mutilating healthy bodily tissue as a remedy for gender dysphoria, and then calling it 'gender re-assignment surgery'. (An example of Orwellian doublespeak if ever there was one).

For Christians, it is not just people who identify as LGBT+ who are called to 'deny themselves and take up their cross.' The single person who experiences difficulty in finding a suitable wife or a husband is tempted to settle for second best – a sexual relationship with someone

⁵⁴ The Bishop of Oxford's main point in his publication arguing for the Church to embrace 'same sex marriage', *Together in Love and Faith*, is that otherwise we will be regarded as holding totally different values from the world. Sadly, he does not seem to realise that this is the mark of a faithful church.

⁵⁵ John 15:13

who is not spiritually right for them. A married person might experience unsatisfactory intimacy in their marriage and be tempted to find it in affairs. Monogamy requires discipline and involves denial of the pleasures of experiencing sexual gratification through other relationships.

One of the reasons that homosexual partnerships between men are generally less 'monogamous' than heterosexual relationships is that fidelity is a concept which is clearer and makes more sense within a male/female relationship of marriage, even though it may be just as challenging. If we pursue our own concept of marriage, dispensing with the requirement of gender difference, then why should we be committed to retaining the requirement of exclusivity? Why should a faithful sexual relationship necessarily mean it must be a monogamous one if we have already changed the definition of marriage in a fundamental respect? It is likely that 'polyamory' will become an accepted phenomenon in societies which have become detached from Christian ethical moorings.⁵⁶ In a culture which has embraced 'same sex marriage', the instinct that marriage must be a relationship between two persons only rather than three or more is only a conservative hangover from the biblical heterosexual ideal.

Single, celibate people have more scope for enjoying friendships, have greater freedom of movement to respond to life opportunities, have more control over their financial resources, and if they are not desperate to get married, are probably at least as contented and happy as happily married people and they will be a lot happier than *unhappily* married people. Single people who are promiscuous, however, cause great spiritual damage to themselves and others. Those who help themselves to other people's spouses help to destroy community. Those who enter homosexual partnerships are rejecting God's design for the complementarity of sexual relationships and disbelieving in the God-given sufficiency of their own masculinity or femininity to enter such a heterosexual partnership should they have the opportunity and desire to do so. A person who embraces transgenderism is rejecting their masculinity or femininity altogether. Neither is something a faithful minister of the Gospel can affirm as 'a sacred journey towards wholeness.'

In the Bible, Esau is an example of someone who despised his birthright and came under God's judgment.⁵⁷ He said his birthright was not worth the denial of his craving for his brother's stew. He claimed he would die of starvation if he didn't satisfy this craving. His legacy was a spiritual dynasty in opposition to the people of God. To reject the sex and gender we have been given by God as our birthright is to do something similar.

What is really unkind (and unjust) is to promote and celebrate sin and evil. Jesus was not being unkind when he urged people to repent. He was not being unjust when he warned of the consequences of rejecting the truth. The Gospel does not offer 'inclusion' without faith, repentance, and a commitment to holiness.

To say that 'God made people gay or transgender' is to fail to account for the fallen-ness of humanity. If homosexuality and transgenderism were designed by God as manifestations of

⁵⁶ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-are-so-many-young-women-buying-into-polygamy>

⁵⁷ Genesis 25:29-34

the glorious variety of his creation, like different hair or skin colour among human beings, they would not be condemned in Scripture. God loves us as we are but in his love he does not want to *leave* us where we are. His love is a *transforming* love. To reject the transforming power of God in our lives is to reject his love and to say, '*my* will be done' rather than '*your* will be done.' The expression 'love the sinner but hate the sin' may sound like a cliché when it is spoken glibly or hypocritically, or misunderstood, but at its heart is the biblical insight that 'love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.'⁵⁸ To truly love someone involves hating everything that works in their lives against God's redemptive purpose.

Those who are willing 'to deny themselves and take up their cross'⁵⁹ find great blessing in following Christ but have a tough race to run. They need a church where their commitment to holiness is respected and encouraged as part of truly loving community life. Churches that abandon biblical standards of sexual holiness deprive Christians of essential support in following Jesus in true love and faithfulness.

Cosmo

I do think it is very offensive to characterise gay relationships as being fuelled by lust rather than love. This is just not the reality of the gay people I know whose lives are marked by caring, friendship, companionship and mutual support. It's not all about sex any more than straight relationships are all about sex.

Fido

I whole-heartedly agree that that there can be much love shared between people of the same sex in the ways you have mentioned above. Indeed, the greatest kind of love, *sacrificial love*, can be shown between them. However, these manifestations of love can be shown between any people – friends, siblings, parents, children and colleagues serving in dangerous occupations. The only thing a 'homosexual relationship' can add to this love is the kind of erotic attachment that is a parody of that present between male and female. This is the element within a 'homosexual relationship' that is contrary to biblical teaching. So same sex companions can live together, dine together, holiday together, sit on the sofa watching TV together, even share the bringing up of adopted children if there are special reasons making this the best option for the child. But 'sexual' behaviour between them is something Christians should not claim liberty to indulge in, especially if they are leaders, because it so clearly contravenes biblical teaching.

The confusion over the relationship between the various meanings of the word 'love' and the meaning of sexual terms is particularly harmful for children. One eleven-year-old came home from secondary school and told her mother she was bisexual. Her mother asked her

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:6

⁵⁹ Matthew 16:24

to explain what she meant. She said, 'my teacher told me that if I love boys, I'm straight, if I love girls, I'm a lesbian, and if I love boys *and* girls, I'm bisexual.'

Cosmo

If the relationship is one of love, then why can't homosexual activity be an expression of that love? It seems to me you are putting rules in the Bible above what might be loving in a particular situation. Aren't you being legalistic? The Bible says that grace triumphs over law. Haven't you heard of 'situation ethics'?

Fido

As John Stott says, love needs God's law to guide it.⁶⁰ I'm not talking about the law, as in sacrifices and ceremonies to make us ritually clean and acceptable to God. Grace is what saves us, not religious works. I'm talking about the law of Christ in our hearts drawn from the moral principles in God's word. Jesus said that love is the fulfilling of the law and that all the laws hang on the love of God and neighbour. So loving God and loving our neighbour means living out God's law. Jesus said, 'if you love me you will obey my commands.'⁶¹ We must not claim that we have a better idea of what love truly is than God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Cosmo

Is it not though *unkind* (not to mention unrealistic) to demand of young gay Christians, fizzing with hormones and legitimate desires to remain celibate if they are sharing their lives with people they are attracted to? And older gays and lesbians who have settled down to live with a life partner have a right to sex too don't they? In the Bible, celibacy is referred to as a calling that is for some people, but not for all, and should never be forced on anyone. Isn't it better that gay people are able to marry and be supported in that by the Church, rather than having them 'burn with passion'⁶² and tempted to be promiscuous?

Fido

⁶⁰ Stott, *Same Sex Relationships* p64

⁶¹ John 14:15

⁶² 1 Corinthians 7:9

The teaching about celibacy being a calling for *some* and not to be *forced* on anyone is given in the context of heterosexual marriage being the only other godly option. Paul would have been horrified to hear his comments about it being 'better to marry than to burn with passion' to be used as an argument for allowing homosexual relationships or the concept of 'same sex marriage'. In his eyes, the difference is clear. Heterosexual sex within marriage is good and right, although there might be a higher calling appropriate to some, provided they don't suffer continued 'burning with passion.' But homosexual intercourse is against God's purpose and design for human beings created in his image, and therefore the call to refrain from it applies to all Christians, not as a forced and unnatural imposition of celibacy, but as a requirement of normal holy living.

Cosmo

But this will be experienced by gay Christians as enforced celibacy.

Fido

Only if there is a prior assumption that all people have a *right* to sex in the sense that they have a right for their own particular sexual desires to be fulfilled. The feeling that men have a right to sex on their terms is what fuels the dangerous 'incel' movement where aggrieved involuntarily celibate men fantasise together about getting revenge on all the women who have refused to sleep with them. Courts are now entertaining the idea that people who don't feel able to form something akin to a marriage relationship have 'a right' to use the services of a 'sex therapist' (a prostitute). Some disabled people want their carers to be compelled to arrange this as part of their professional role.⁶³ Also, women who identify as lesbian report that some 'male to female' transgender people get angry with them for refusing a 'lesbian relationship' with them.

We know that in our society, the degrading effects of pornography have caused sexual desires to become so disordered that people's proclivities are often bound up with the desire to dominate or be dominated, to be violent, or experience violence or other forms of depravity. Maintaining the same level of sexual stimulation by overcoming the law of diminishing returns requires increasingly depraved sex. People do not have a right to depraved sex.

The only 'right to sex' that the Bible supports is that between husband and wife in marriage and within Christian marriage husband and wife are taught to sacrificially and submissively love, cherish, honour and respect each other. Sexual holiness before, during and after marriage is the best way to protect people from the harm caused by people using others for their own ungodly ends, which is the definition of lust.

⁶³ <https://www.miragenews.com/people-with-disability-have-right-to-sex/>

Cosmo

But we are talking here about consensual acts of love within loving relationships of mutual benefit.

Fido

The question as to whether celibacy is an unfair burden or not depends first on the prior question of whether the sexual practice desired is morally right or not. To say that something is morally right because it is 'an act of love' is a circular argument. It does not explain the basis on which something can be really understood as a true act of love. Some adult consensual incestuous acts could be considered to be acts of love, unless they are ruled out *a priori* as intrinsically morally degraded. One of the dangers of the 'plus' at the end of the LGBT initials is that there seems to be no clear rationale for which initials might be acceptably added to the list. Do people have a right to consensual sadomasochistic 'bondage' sex for instance or sex involving asphyxiation, if that is the only way they can get turned on? Would you really say that anything necessary for consenting adults' sexual arousal that takes place between them is morally unproblematic?

Cosmo

Why couldn't a definition for moral sex be something like "sexual acts between two people which cause no harm and are entered into with full consent between those with capacity to give that consent and are part of a loving, stable relationship"?

Fido

It seems to me that such a definition lacks a rational basis why it should be limited to two people and why it should be even limited to *people*, rather than including consenting animals. What about erotic stimulation as part of a 'loving, stable relationship' with a faithful pet dog? And what is the definition of 'harm'. For a Christian believer, whether something causes harm depends on whether it is right before God and spiritually healthy. Actually, there is plentiful evidence that practices associated with homosexuality are harmful from a medical point of view although in the current climate of fear most of the medical profession is loathe to admit this.

What *is* full consent? What if someone expressly declares that any harm they may suffer is outweighed by the sexual gratification they receive in the process? Should people have to sign a legal contract before taking part in any sexual act, specifying exactly what they are

consenting to? This was something that the rich and powerful man required of his sexual partner in *Fifty Shades of Grey*, to make sure he was legally covered in having his sadistic desires satisfied.

Everything about this is wrong. Sex should not be thought of as a 'thing' that we consume. It should not be 'delivered' as part of a contract with terms and conditions. It is a God-given bodily expression of love within a covenant of faithfulness bringing male and female together as one flesh and bringing about a new family unit normally able to produce and nurture children.

Lovemaking within a such a covenantal context is very different to a transactional legal bargain where two people contract to satisfying certain selfish compulsions each may have. Making love God's way does not need a lawyer's contract to ensure no-one gets hurt or no-one gets hurt beyond what they might have agreed to be hurt in pursuance of carnal satisfaction, or which limits liability in the event that someone does get hurt beyond what they have agreed to.

For a Christian believer, humility leads us to recognise God knows much better than us what is truly loving and what will cause hurt to us or to other people, whatever we may tell each other.

That is why the Bible's revelation of objective truth is a much surer basis on which to build our lives than our own subjective feelings about what constitutes a 'loving, stable relationship' and the quality of moral acts within that.

Cosmo

You've gone too far now. You are being grossly offensive in comparing gay relationships to violent, degraded sex and even sex with animals!

Fido

I'm not saying these things are on a par. I was making a philosophical case that if we are to morally justify men having sex with men or women with women we would want to come up with a definition of a moral sexual relationship which is based on some truth principle that clearly excludes things that the vast majority of people consider wrong, such as bestial practices. This is a philosophical point that relies on people instinctively knowing certain things are immoral when many people now say they no longer instinctively feel men having sex with men to be wrong and many in our pornographic age even embrace what you have called 'violent, degraded sex'.

Can you give me a rationale for why humans committing sexual acts with animals is wrong?

Cosmo

The very idea is revolting!

Fido

Yes, but *why*? For most people there is an instinctive ‘yuk’ factor. But is this just prejudice or is it grounded in the awareness that it is, objectively speaking, profoundly sinful and something God detests? Zoophiles⁶⁴ would say that it is mere zoophobia. At one time most people would have said that the idea of men having sex with each other was revolting, but now a sustained campaign by LGBT+ activists and allies to normalise it in art, books, films and television has changed that. What people find revolting can change, according to their underlying beliefs. If zoophiles were able to carry half as much influence in the arts world as LGBT+ activists, attitudes to bestiality could shift significantly. Also, since we are now blurring the line between male and female, the line between human and animal could be blurred too. Anything seems possible in our brave new world.

Cosmo

Well, it’s obvious sex was designed by God to be between *people*. Animals are too unlike us to be complementary sex partners and be able to consent to a loving, equal relationship.

Fido

I agree. Eve was a suitable sexual partner for Adam because she was ‘bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh’. But she was also ‘different’. She was designed to complement Adam and be joined to him physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Adam and Eve needed to be both *similar* to each other but also *different* to fulfil God’s purposes for their sexual life together. So, for example, incest, like homosexual behaviour, contravenes the principle that the partners to sex as designed by God must be sufficiently different i.e. they must not be from the same nuclear family and not of the same gender.

Cosmo

Here you go again, being offensive. You’re comparing gay sex to incest! How dare you! Those who commit incest are perverts to be completely shunned!

Fido

⁶⁴ Zoophilia is sexual attraction to animals and/or sexual activity with animals

I'm not talking about incest between adults and children which of course is different to homosexual acts among consenting adults. But I cannot see why *adult, consensual* incest should be condemned while adult, consensual homosexual conduct approved of. Both fall foul of Scripture for the same reason. The two people involved are sufficiently similar (both human) but insufficiently *different* (too close as relatives or both the same gender).

I'm really not trying to be gratuitously offensive and if my words are twisted and whipped up and claimed to be hate speech it will be those who do that who will be guilty of stirring up hate. What I'm doing is employing critical thinking to identify the solid, spiritual basis for deciding what is moral and what is immoral. Otherwise, all is subjective, and we would eventually find ourselves in a chaotic, amoral world that would be terrible for everyone.

Chapter Six

You're Cruel

Cosmo

I think I have to go further Fido and say that you are not only being unkind, but downright cruel. The inevitable consequence of church leaders continuing to promulgate the views you express will be that young people within those churches who are gay, bisexual or trans, will feel forced to try to deny who they are and will experience pressure to submit themselves to some kind of conversion therapy.

You are part of system that has caused intolerable stress and psychological harm to people. People have allowed themselves to be subjected to scorn, derision, attempted exorcism, electric shock aversion treatment, 'corrective rape', intimidating prayer, and forced group confession. This is all on top of the subtly soul-destroying and oppressive cloud of heteronormative culture and expectation. Of course, none of these things have achieved anything beneficial to the people it has been inflicted upon. They have only resulted in mental distress and sometimes hospitalisation and suicide. How can you justify such torture?

Fido

I cannot and do not want to defend anything that has been cruel, or based on false ideas, or which has lacked love and compassion for the individuals involved. Some of the things you mention, such as 'corrective rape' are obviously immoral and illegal and I've never even heard of that ever being part of any supposedly Christian ministry. I believe 'aversion therapy' has been used by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists in the past, but I can't see how that has any basis in Christian theology.

All the specific things you mention are abusive and should never happen as part of authentic Christian ministry. Anyone in a church context guilty of behaving in this kind of manner towards someone should be subject to severe discipline.

The goal of authentic Christian ministry is to reassure people of God's love, to help them confess sin and know God's forgiveness, to be strengthened, encouraged and comforted in the truth, and to impart God's healing in body, soul and spirit.

I am a believer in Christian ministries of healing and deliverance. In the Gospels we see Jesus and the apostles delivering people from evil spirits and bringing healing to various afflictions. I believe these ministries are still empowered by the Holy Spirit today.

The ministry of inner healing particularly relates to people who have suffered the ravages of sin in relation to their identity, their self-esteem, body image, masculinity or femininity.

Responsible Christian healing ministry should always seek to deal with the roots of anxiety, depression, self-hatred, bitterness and self-rejection, by helping people open themselves to God's healing power. This is done by helping people to acknowledge their pain and trauma, naming sin for what it is, both how they have been sinned against and how they have sinned against others, and giving and receiving forgiveness. The sinful thought patterns that come from spiritual forces of evil must be rejected and replaced by biblical truth, which as Jesus said, would set people free.

Authentic Christian ministry should never be held out as a way of simply 'converting someone from gay to straight'. It may well be that inner healing as regards certain things will result in homosexual or transgender inclinations being reduced or heterosexual feelings emerging, but these possible outcomes should not be the focus of the ministry. Does a young Christian man or woman with homosexual feelings need deliverance from an evil spirit? This question was asked to Martin Hallett, who left a homosexual lifestyle after nine years to become the co-founder of *True Freedom Trust*. He said 'yes', but the deliverance needed was not from 'a spirit of homosexuality' but 'a spirit of self-rejection'. *True Freedom Trust* has always denied it is involved in 'conversion therapy' because the popular understanding of 'conversion therapy' is that it is something that seeks to tackle homosexual feelings head on, rather than recognising that these feelings are rooted in the way people see themselves.

The ministry of deliverance from evil is an important one today, as ever, but those who carry out this ministry must be godly, prayerful and wise. Not every problem in a person's life is caused by the presence of an evil spirit. Ministry in the area of sexuality and gender identity is very unlikely to bring true healing if it is based on a simplistic idea of 'deliverance.' You can't minister to a person's psycho-sexual identity simply by shouting at 'the demon of homosexuality' or 'the demon of transgenderism' to leave them.

I would not support any Christian ministry that lacked wisdom, gentleness and true spiritual insight.

Chapter Seven

You're Wrong (to be so sure about the Bible)

Cosmo

You speak about the Bible and 'biblical standards' but surely you must realise that there are different views as to how we should understand and interpret Scripture? There are very real complexities here. The Bible is a collection of varied writings, containing the thoughts of people caught up in the mystery of God's involvement with the world. It was all written very long ago and we see in it divergent viewpoints and some depictions of God which are, quite frankly, appalling, but remarkably we see an emerging ethic of inclusiveness. We must adjudicate between regressive 'texts of rigour' such as those that condemn homosexual practice and 'inclusive, welcoming, texts of love'.⁶⁵

Jesus, although limited by his Jewish first century context, called people to imagine a new society where barriers were broken down, the marginalized brought into centre stage and the simple ethic of love overrides everything. The early apostles struggled to be true to his legacy, sometimes regrettably retreating into rather conservative attitudes, but the arc of Scripture bends towards justice and inclusion. The Bible is not the last word. God's Spirit is working today, leading us into all truth, and taking us in new and exciting directions. Therefore we should give greater weight to passages in the Bible that speak of inclusion and tolerance than those that are intolerant and exclusionary.

No doubt you will say that in Genesis 2 God creates 'Adam and Eve', not 'Adam and Steve', and you'll bang on about a few isolated and obscure references in Scripture, but such fundamentalist proof-texting will not do anymore. Let's leave behind the 'clobber texts' and focus on the more worthy parts of the Bible. We need a more open, compassionate way of reading Scripture and we should not be afraid to interpret the Gospel afresh for our generation, which clearly wants to embrace fully our LGBTQIAP0+ sisters and brothers.

How can you be sure you are right about this matter, or that the Bible is so black and white? How do you know that these parts of Scripture you refer to have not been misunderstood or really are authentic revelations of divine truth?

⁶⁵ "As often happens in Scripture, we are left with texts in deep tension, if not in contradiction, with each other. The work of reading the Bible responsibly is the process of adjudicating these texts that will not be fit together." <https://outreach.faith/2022/09/walter-brueggemann-how-to-read-the-Bible-on-homosexuality/> Brueggemann, a world-renowned scholar, says that the Gospel is different from the Bible, which contains much that is inimical to the Gospel. He is not merely saying that there is a divergence between what the Bible describes and what it prescribes, he is saying that we have to adjudicate between the prescriptive parts, because not all that the Bible claims to be revelation about God is in line with the Gospel.

We can of course disregard the Bible verses such as Leviticus 18:22 that speaks of the abomination of a man 'lying with a man as with a woman'. Lots of things are listed in the Old Testament as 'abominations' that we don't bother about today such as eating non-kosher food. I hope you won't even think about mentioning Leviticus 20:13.⁶⁶ The idea of imposing the death penalty for being gay is something worthy of *Islamic State* and should have no place in Christian theology today. The story of the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah is about God's aversion to arrogance, cruelty and violent rape of strangers seeking hospitality. Other references to homosexual acts are in the context of shrine prostitution, so these have no bearing on stable, loving relationships.

The term 'homosexuality' wasn't even coined till the nineteenth century, so the understanding of 'homosexual orientation' is a modern, scientific insight. Regarding Romans chapter 1:18-27 and 1 Corinthians chapter 6:9 and 1 Timothy chapter 1:10, it is obvious that Paul either had no knowledge of faithful, loving, stable gay relationships between people with a homosexual orientation, or if he did, he wasn't referring to them when he spoke about same sex 'sex'. It's likely that he was talking about abusive, exploitative sex between older powerful men, and much younger men or boys, who may have been slaves. Or he might have been talking about prostitution or the excesses of Roman Emperors. Even if he had meant to condemn all homosexual behaviour, his ignorance of the kind of mutual, lifegiving relationships we know about today, render his views obsolete. After all, Paul was wrong about the Last Days, what women should be allowed to do in the church, and about slaves having to obey their masters, so it's likely he was not always right about sex either!

So, all in all, don't you think you are on shaky ground making this an issue to go to the stake over?

Fido

I think you are right to suggest our view of the Bible influences the conclusion we come to over LGBT+ issues. I agree of course that the Bible is a collection of writings by different authors using varied genres over a long period of time. Christianity does not hold that the Bible was dictated by God using a human cipher to simply record audible words direct from God, in the manner that Muslims believe the Qur'an was transmitted through Mohammed. However, the Bible itself witnesses to the belief that God, through his Holy Spirit, inspired certain people, through their differing backgrounds, personalities and experiences to write down material that faithfully tells the story of God's love and redeeming work in his creation.

While there will be differences of emphasis, and some passages or even books of the Bible may *seem* to portray, on the surface, contradictory and irreconcilable impressions of God's character and purposes, I believe that with diligent study and faithful insight, they together can harmoniously represent the full depth of truth necessary for us to be 'wise unto

⁶⁶ *If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.* NIV translation.

salvation'. Scripture does not reveal an unstable, unreliable God but the one who is the same, yesterday, today and forever⁶⁷. So, understood properly, with the spiritual illumination that comes through belief in Jesus Christ, Deuteronomy is not opposed to Ruth⁶⁸ and Leviticus is not contrary to Isaiah or Micah. James is not at loggerheads with Paul, nor Peter with John. Nor is the Old Testament contrary to the New.⁶⁹ There is a unity, an integrity and a complementarity to them, as Scriptures breathed into being by one God who is faithful, true and wise.

Jesus believed in the enduring truth of the Hebrew Scriptures. He used the phrase '*it is written*' to appeal to its authority in being the definitive revelation of what God is like and how we should live, provided the spirit of it was properly understood. There were many times where Jesus corrected misunderstandings of those Hebrew Scriptures, and called people to reject false interpretations ('*You have heard it was said. . . . but I tell you*'), but he never criticised anything written in the Scriptures as being intrinsically misleading in revealing what his heavenly Father was like.

So, for the Christian, all Scripture is 'God-breathed' and useful for being trained in following Jesus.⁷⁰ It is therefore reliable in what it says about God, his character and deeds, and the right way to live in response, and makes us 'wise for salvation.'⁷¹ It is not a collection of cleverly made up stories,⁷² nor does its message originate from human understanding, but from God the Holy Spirit.⁷³ Jesus said the Holy Spirit would remind the apostles of everything he had said to them,⁷⁴ validating the Gospels, and the Apostle Peter, called by Jesus 'the rock on which he would build his church' regarded Paul's letters as 'Scripture' in the same league as the Old Testament.⁷⁵ The early church communities very quickly recognised what was authentic Christian Scripture and rejected spurious gnostic writings which were not in tune with the Gospel. It is true that formal acknowledgement of the canon came later, but this was a recognition of what had already in practice been accepted by the Church.

I recognise that some take the view that Scripture is simply a historic record (even if it accepted as the primary one) of people's evolving understanding of God, from a primitive, tribal, warlike patriarchal conception to a modern, enlightened, compassionate, egalitarian

⁶⁷ Hebrews 13:8

⁶⁸ One of the contributors to the CofE's course *Living in Love and Faith*, Walter Moberly, argues that, for example, the book of Deuteronomy (written, he says, by bitter Israelites) instructs younger generations of Israelites to be vindictive towards the Moabites but that the book of Ruth provides a corrective to this and suggests they should be kind to them. We are given the implicit and not so subtle invitation to see how, just as we should privilege Ruth over Deuteronomy, we should privilege passages about 'inclusion' over passages which are negative about homosexual practice. For a critique of this way of reading the Bible, see the author's article on the Fulcrum website <https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/the-Bible-and-living-in-love-and-faith/>

⁶⁹ See Article VII of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion

⁷⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁷¹ 2 Timothy 3:15

⁷² 2 Peter 1:16

⁷³ 2 Peter 1:20-21

⁷⁴ John 14:26

⁷⁵ 2 Peter 3:16

one, and that the process of receiving evolving doctrinal revelation advances today. If we believe this then we are more likely to be open to the view that developments like 'same sex marriage' are faithful to the trajectory of inherited Scripture, if not the understanding of the writers at the time.

However, I believe that the Scriptures are the authority *par excellence* for our spiritual growth as disciples, helping us to trust and obey God as Jesus charged us, and that we cannot sit in judgment on Scripture and determine which parts are true and helpful in what they say about God and which parts need to be filtered out or deconstructed to fit better with the emerging big picture as we see it.

The God revealed from the first chapters of Genesis is seen to be the God of the whole universe, not a localised tribal god only interested in the Israelites. His covenant with Abraham was predicated on him bringing blessing to all the nations. From the beginning his nature is revealed to be an inclusive one. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures, like that of the New Testament, is a gracious, compassionate and forgiving God, as well as a God of wrath, terrifying in his holiness.

Regarding the authority and relevance of the Old Testament, the commands and laws given in the Hebrew Scriptures are not all directly applicable to Christians today, because it is clear from Jesus, the fulfilment of those Scriptures, those commands were given to the Israelites at a particular stage in salvation history. The laws requiring separation of clean and unclean things, the laws of sacrifice, the civil penalties imposed for wrongdoing among the Israelite community are not binding on us today, because Christ has fulfilled the laws of sacrifice, has made all things clean by redeeming creation, and his kingdom now must be seen to transcend an individual nation state with its particular rules, regulations and punishments. The kingdom of the risen Christ is now the focus of faith rather than any territorial kingdom state of Israel. That is why we talk about the *New Testament*. We are not Jews living under the Old Covenant but Jews and Gentiles living *together* under the New.

The application of ritual, ceremonial and civil boundary markers that were designed to separate symbolically 'clean people' from symbolically 'unclean people' is no longer appropriate. However, as Jesus said, these laws remain part of Scripture and continue to be useful therefore in helping us to see how God prepared his people to understand something of the need for holiness, the polluting effects of sin, and why the cross was necessary to make atonement for our sins and purify us from all wrongdoing.

Aside from these laws that are not directly applicable to us today, there are many laws in the Old Testament which contain principles about holiness, justice, stewardship of resources and compassion that are, when properly understood and transposed from their ancient near east context to us today, very clearly relevant now in helping us to live according to the values of the kingdom of God. Indeed, through our Christian heritage, these principles have shaped our laws for centuries.

The Anglican Reformers in the sixteenth century put this succinctly in article VII of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*. Rites, ceremonies and civil penalties do not bind us, but we

are not free from God's moral law.⁷⁶ Therefore, unlike Jews under the old covenant, Christians *can* eat prawns and pork, wear mixed-fibre clothing and don't have to make animal sacrifices, but we are still subject to the moral principles that reflect God's design for human beings and guide our relations with our neighbours. Therefore, for example, adultery is recognised as a bad thing which offends God, even though we do not have the death penalty for it as they did in ancient Israel (nor should we). The state *should* help the poorest and most vulnerable. People *do* have a duty of care not to injure others. We *ought* to take care of our environment.

Leviticus 18 lists forms of sexual behaviour which God found morally offensive, not just in Israel but among the pagan peoples too who were living in the land before the Israelites were called to drive them out. These things are said to have defiled the land so that the land itself 'vomited them out.' There was to be no sex with close relatives, other people's wives, or animals. Men were not to approach women for sex during menstruation and homosexual intercourse was forbidden in verse 22. Because condemnation of these practices was not restricted to Jews under the Old Covenant, but included Gentiles, these are moral prohibitions that apply to everyone, Jew and Gentile, at all times, including Christians today.

Although the death penalty for certain breaches of *Torah*, as explained above, does not apply to Christians living under the new covenant, Leviticus 20:13 does shed light on the question of whether God's law only referred to non-consensual or unequally abusive same sex 'sexual' practices. It describes *both* parties to homosexual intercourse as doing what is 'detestable', or an 'abomination', and therefore the prohibition applies to consensual behaviour. God is just and would never have specified the death penalty for Israelites under the Old Covenant who had been on the receiving end of non-consensual abuse. Although some say that it was only cultic male shrine prostitution which was being condemned, there is no hint of this in either chapter 18 or 20. The list of prohibited sexual practices applied whether they were specifically in the context of idolatrous worship or not. So, for example, adultery, incest and bestial practices were forbidden whether or not they were part of a cultic feast to pagan gods or included a financial transaction.⁷⁷

Cosmo

This distinction between civil, ceremonial and moral laws in the Old Testament was not something that the Jewish people recognised at the time, or Jewish rabbis today for that matter.

⁷⁶ Article VII says *'The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore there are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.'*

⁷⁷ The revisionist Sherwin Bailey in his book *'Homosexuality and the Western Tradition*, says. *'It's hardly open to doubt that both the laws in Leviticus relate to ordinary homosexual acts between men and not to ritual or other acts performed in the name of religion.'*

Fido

Jews living under the Old Covenant in Israel had no theological motive or reason to distinguish between them. They were obliged to obey all the laws however they might have been categorized. While Jews today don't have the Temple so can't make animal sacrifices, it is only believers in Jesus who are living in the New Testament era who have a theological reason to make a comprehensive distinction between the types of law in the Old Testament. According to the New Testament, we don't have to observe the rituals and ceremonies that divide the ritually clean from the ritually 'unclean', but we *will* want to observe commands which clearly reveal what God wants from *everyone in every age* and which directly reveal the moral nature of his character. So 'don't murder', 'don't steal', 'don't slander your neighbour' 'don't commit sexual immorality' are all commands which we should heed as if they were addressed to us in the first place. Jesus *intensified* these moral commands rather than abrogated them. He said that not only was murder wrong, but cultivating anger. Not only adultery was wrong, but cultivating lust.

Cosmo

Just because the Genesis account gives the typical pattern for human sexuality, that does not rule out the *atypical*. Heterosexuality might be the 'norm' in the sense that it reflects the majority experience, but why cannot we accept that a significant minority are homosexual, and afford these people the dignity given to everyone else?

Fido

If there was room in God's eyes for the 'atypical' sexual union between people of the same sex, why is same sex 'sex' regarded so negatively in Leviticus 18 and the epistles in the New Testament?

Cosmo

Jesus never said anything explicitly about homosexuality or transgenderism. But perhaps he gave a sign. Maybe the Gentile Roman centurion's 'boy' he healed was the centurion's sexual partner and Jesus' healing of him was a sign that he validated their relationship. Just as the Gospel he preached was for the marginalized people like women and poor people, here he is demonstrating that the kingdom belongs to gays. As the archetypal *outsiders* in

Jewish eyes, they have become the archetypal *insiders* in God's eyes, like the eunuchs and the prostitutes.⁷⁸

However, even if this is incorrect and Jesus, like all Jews at the time, thought homosexual acts were always wrong, he was limited in his understanding by his historical context. It wasn't until Jesus encountered marginalised people like the Syro-Phoenician woman that he learned to be non-discriminatory.⁷⁹ Perhaps if he had knowingly met a loving gay couple he would have gained the insight we have today about sexual orientation and the goodness of faithful same sex relationships.

Fido

The fact that Jesus is not specifically recorded as saying anything directly about homosexual practice should not be taken to mean he approved of it or was ambivalent. This 'argument from silence' is based upon the anachronistic idea that the issue of homosexuality was a subject of debate among Jews in the first century as it is among Christians today. It wasn't. All Jews in Jesus' time understood that it came into the category of *porneia* (Greek for 'sexual immorality') and for Israel this concept was based on the Leviticus 18 holiness code. Jesus didn't mention homosexual practice specifically (although he talked about *porneia*) because no one thought there was any doubt over whether it was sinful. He would have no more thought it was a specific issue he should have addressed than he would the other Levitical prohibitions regarding sexual behaviour such as incest, sex with animals or mixing sex with menstruation. When Jesus referred to *porneia* as evil all his Jewish hearers would have believed *porneia* included homosexual practice, so it would have been grossly misleading to them if Jesus thought differently but didn't say so.

So the fact that Jesus is not recorded as saying anything directly and specifically about homosexual behaviour is actually evidence he *concurred* with the blanket Jewish view. Had he disagreed, he would have said so, as we know Jesus was unafraid to challenge Jewish assumptions, such as the moral legitimacy of men divorcing their wives to marry another, and the supposed licence the 'eye for an eye' principle gave for acts of personal revenge.

You contend that, even if Jesus would, if asked, have agreed that same sex genital acts were always sinful, the Jesus who walked this earth was a product of his time and limited in his knowledge of how to be a non-discriminatory Christian. I cannot accept that Jesus was himself infected with any sinful, prejudicial attitudes.⁸⁰ The Jesus who walked this earth was the sinless Son of God and a perfect, unblemished sin-offering. He was the one through

⁷⁸ See Luke 7. Geoffrey John preached this in a sermon in Liverpool cathedral about how Jesus' actions spoke louder than any words in including gay relationships in the kingdom.

<https://soundcloud.com/livcathedral/sunday-29-may-1030am-very-revd-dr-jeffrey-john-dean-of-st-albans?in=livcathedral%2Fsets%2Fsummer-term-2016>

for Ian Paul's critique of the sermon see <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/did-jesus-heal-the-centurions-gay-lover/>

⁷⁹ Mark 7:24-30

⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:21: | Peter 2:22

whom all things were made⁸¹ and who now sits at the right hand of the Father, enthroned in the heavenlies.⁸² The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman⁸³ is often referred to as the incident where Jesus initially refuses to heal the daughter of woman because she is a 'Gentile dog', but is then convicted by the woman's heroic persistence and refusal to be disrespected, like some first century Rosa Parks⁸⁴. He learns from her what it is to be Christlike!

However, the woman, who came from an area steeped in demonic idol worship, asked Jesus not to *heal* her daughter, but to *exorcise* her. Jesus knew that unless this girl was going to be brought up in an environment of faith in the true and living God, an exorcism would not help, as she would be vulnerable to even more demonic infestation.⁸⁵ He tested the faith of her mother by telling her in language she would have understood that his mission was first to the Jews, the children of God under the covenant. The woman admitted her unworthiness but appealed to mercifully be allowed to 'eat the crumbs that fell from the table.' Jesus recognised this as genuinely humble, saving faith which would safeguard the woman's daughter in the future and so he delivered her daughter of her demons.

As for this idea that Jesus showed he accepted homosexuality because he healed the Roman centurion's servant, and Jews at the time assumed Gentile soldiers kept servant boys to have sex with, this is an example of the manipulation of Scripture to support an ungodly agenda.⁸⁶ That everyone knew the servant was 'valued' by the centurion for sexual purposes is a totally unwarranted speculation. Some prejudiced Jews may have assumed Roman centurions used their servant boys this way, but the Jews who interceded on the centurion's behalf told Jesus what a worthy man he was, which they would not have done if they thought he indulged in this kind of *porneia*.⁸⁷

Jesus healed the centurion's servant because he was struck by the faith of the centurion and because of his mercy and compassion. Even if there was a homosexual element to their relationship, the power imbalance meant it would have been an unequal, pederastic type of relationship and hardly the type of egalitarian gay relationship people claim meets with God's approval.⁸⁸ In fact, you have been saying that such relationships didn't exist then or Jesus didn't know about them if they did.

Yes, Jesus reached out to prostitutes who were social outcasts and said those like them and the tax collectors, who knew they needed God's mercy, were nearer the kingdom than the

⁸¹ John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-20

⁸² Luke 22:69; Ephesians 1:20-21; Hebrews 1:3-4

⁸³ Matthew 15:21-28

⁸⁴ Rosa Parks was the black woman who ignited the Montgomery civil rights bus boycott in Alabama in 1955. She was ejected for refusing to give up her seat in the 'black section' to a white person when the 'white section' became full.

⁸⁵ Matthew 12:43-45

⁸⁶ Dean Jeffrey John peddles this distorted exegesis

<https://soundcloud.com/livcathedral/sunday-29-may-1030am-very-revd-dr-jeffrey-john-dean-of-st-albans?in=livcathedral%2Fsets%2Fsummer-term-2016>

cf. <http://www.robagnon.net/HomosexCenturionStory.htm>

⁸⁷ Luke 7:4

⁸⁸ <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/did-jesus-heal-the-centurions-gay-lover/>

self-righteous Pharisees, but in doing that he never condoned prostitution, extortion or fraud. These were things to be repented of.

Although Jesus did not explicitly speak about homosexuality, he explicitly affirmed Genesis 1v27 and 2v24 which teaches the binary division of humanity into male and female and the unique 'one flesh' union of male and female when a man leaves the relational orbit of his parents and forms a new family unit with his wife.⁸⁹ So it is misleading to say that Jesus was 'silent' on the subject of homosexuality, as if Jesus did not believe and teach that marriage was a heterosexual institution given by God. To parrot this well-worn trope is to divorce Jesus from his Jewish context in which everyone knew homosexual practice was *porneia*. Denying the Jewishness of Jesus is a staple ingredient of anti-Semitism and dismissive attitudes towards the Old Testament within the church reveal this latent evil is still there.

As for the rest of the New Testament, Romans 1 teaches that homosexual practice is a product of a fallen, idolatrous world. God gave sinful humans over to the consequences of their idolatry, which meant the degrading of our bodies through sexual impurity. Having exchanged the truth for a lie, and worshipped images of gods such as Eros, God allowed people to give up natural relationships, and be consumed with shameful homosexual lust. This led the way to even more corruption and evil practices and the spiralling down of society.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. [Romans 1:24-27 NIV]

The letter of Romans does not say that homosexual behaviour is the worst sin or unforgivable, still less that other sins don't matter by comparison, but it does choose to highlight it as an example of how idolatry distorts the image bearing calling of humanity at a fundamental level. In Genesis 1, which is the only place where it is specifically said that humankind is made in God's image, this is closely connected to the fact that he made us male and female. In marriage and sexual intercourse man and wife unite to form one flesh which is in fact a glorious *re-uniting* of male and female, separated when woman was created out of man. In God's plan this served not only to reflect his image more fully but even, as revealed in the New Testament, somehow mirrors the relationship of Christ and his Church and the heavenly consummation of God's love for human beings.⁹⁰

Homosexual practice involves the rejection of our God-given masculinity and femininity and homosexual acts do not provide the complementarity of physical lovemaking and deep 'one flesh' unity. There is no understanding of 'consummation' as there is in the marriage of man

⁸⁹ Matthew 19:4-6

⁹⁰ Ephesians 5:32

and wife. The fact that the word 'sex' not only means genital intimacy and copulation but also refers to what gender category a person is, is a clue that, by definition, sex is a physical union of male and female and sexual differentiation is an intrinsic part of this. Gay 'sex' is not sex as designed by God and is a parody of it, driven often by a disordered desire to compensate for a lack of security in one's own masculinity or femininity by erotically attaching oneself to someone of the same sex.

Although the union of male and female helps us to reflect the image of God in relationships, erotic (from the Greek *Eros*) married love is not regarded as the greatest form of love. Jesus said the greatest love is sacrificial love, known in Greek as *agape*. Therefore those who are celibate are not denied the highest form of love, which is the fellowship of suffering on behalf of someone else. Fellowship with Christ by sharing in his sufferings is the deepest form of intimacy. The 'knowing' of a woman by a man is a Hebrew way of referring to sexual intercourse. But Paul says his desire is to *know Christ* and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

1 Corinthians 6 v9-10 says

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [NIV translation]

Paul employs a novel Greek word *arsenokoites* which literally means 'manbedder' and *malakoi*, which literally meant 'a soft one,' but was a euphemism for a man who allowed himself to be penetrated by another male. The word *arsenokoites* is a compound Greek word, coined by Paul, based on Leviticus chapter 18 v22 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). It referred to the 'active' partner in sex between men. If Paul had just meant to condemn pederasty (older men having sex with young men or boys) he would have used the Greek words *erastes* (for the older man) and *eromenos* (for the boy). All the English version translations of these verses, compiled by teams of renowned scholars, translate *arsenokoites* and *malakoi* in a way that refers to homosexual intercourse generally rather than specifically prostitution, pederasty or non-consensual, exploitative sex.

If Paul had just meant to refer to those who practice homosexuality in a coercive or an unequal way then why does he condemn both the unrepentant active *and* unrepentant *passive* partner in 1 Corinthians 6 v9? The connection with Leviticus 18 and 20 also confirms it applies to both. Romans 1 also condemns lesbian behaviour and the fact that the lustful attraction is *mutual*, rather than one-sided and unequally exploitative, is explicitly mentioned. Neither Leviticus 18, nor 20, nor Romans 1, nor 1 Corinthians 6, nor 1 Timothy 1:10⁹¹ says the problem is prostitution or coercive exploitation. If those had been the only

⁹¹ 1 Timothy 1:9-10 says 'We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine'

types of homosexual conduct Paul was speaking against, he would have been specific about this.

Scholars such as NT Wright, Ian Paul and Robert Gagnon have shown that there was a variety of expressions of homosexual conduct in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament.⁹² Yes, there was prostitution and pederasty, but there were also relationships described as 'mutually loving and caring'.⁹³

Aristophanes' speech in Plato's Symposium, for example, contains an account of how Zeus created three types of people, male, female and androgenous. He split each into two, thus creating people who would then search for their 'lost halves'. Those split from the androgenous human became attracted to the opposite sex and wanted to cling to 'their other half.' Those split from the male became attracted to other men and wanted permanent unity with them and those split from the female likewise sought union with another woman. Modern commentaries on this speech have no doubt he is talking about gays and lesbians.⁹⁴ So we have here an example of a mythical foundation given for the known ancient phenomenon of 'stable, loving, same-sex relationships.'

William Loader is the most prominent expert on ancient and biblical views of sexuality, having written great volumes on the subject. He himself thinks gay sex is OK, but says that you cannot get this from the Bible. It was well known that some people were predominantly attracted to members of the same sex, but nevertheless he comments, 'Nothing indicates that Paul is exempting some same-sex intercourse as acceptable.'⁹⁵

So, just because the word 'homosexual' was not coined till the 19th century, that does not mean there were not people who were known to be inclined towards same sex erotic desires in antiquity. The evidence cited above proves it. The concepts of 'stable same sex relationships' or 'homosexual orientation' are not modern insights that Jesus and Paul were unaware of. They were not ignorant about the reality of human nature and of the world they lived in nor of Greek pagan ideas which sought to explain the world they lived in and which contrasted with God's revelation in the Jewish Scriptures.

The key passages in both the Old and New Testaments make no distinction between same sex intercourse that is done 'well' and that which is done 'badly', anymore than it makes a distinction between adultery, incest or bestiality that is done 'lovingly' and that which is done 'exploitatively'.

Even if we see the Bible as giving an evolving picture of inclusiveness there is no indication of a trajectory towards accepting homosexual behaviour any more than there is regarding any other deviation from the two options of opposite sex marriage and celibacy.

⁹² <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/were-loving-faithful-same-sex-relations-known-in-antiquity/>

⁹³ See *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Gagnon 2001 Abingdon Press pp 350-361

See also <https://religionnews.com/2014/06/03/nt-wright-homosexuality-science-gender/> and <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/were-loving-faithful-same-sex-relations-known-in-antiquity/>

⁹⁴ [Symposium by Plato The Speech of Aristophanes Summary and Analysis | GradeSaver](#)

⁹⁵ William Loader. *Making Sense of Sex* p137

Scholars who claim the Bible is not really negative about homosexual acts generally are criticised by leading fellow revisionist theologians who dismiss their attempts to get round what the Bible actually says as wishful thinking. These theologians say that we have to face up to the reality that the Bible speaks against *all* homosexual activity. However, they then say we must recognise that the Bible is fallible and therefore we should judge the Bible as being simply wrong about this question.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *'Where the Bible mentions homosexual behavior at all, it clearly condemns it. I freely grant that. The issue is precisely whether that Biblical judgment is correct.'* (Walter Wink, "Homosexuality and the Bible")

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 (Dan O Via, Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views p 93).

'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.' (Diarmaid MacCulloch, Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700, p 705)

'The task demands intellectual honesty. I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says. But what are we to do with what the text says? I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority when we declare that same-sex unions can be holy and good.' (Luke Timothy Johnson). http://www.firstpresboone.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/905883_HomosexualityandtheChurchLTJ.pdf

'It is impossible to explain away these texts' [that condemn homosexual practice] Walter Bruggemann <https://outreach.faith/2022/09/walter-brueggemann-how-to-read-the-Bible-on-homosexuality/>

'We should let Paul say what he said, and then make the decisions we should make, which should take into account the modern world [and therefore be more liberal on homosexuality]. Paul's own view...in Romans 1....is a completely unambiguous condemnation of all homosexual activity.' (EP Sanders. Paul, the Apostle's life, lessons and thought. Fortress, Minneapolis, 2015 p370). Sanders is a heavyweight liberal New Testament scholar.

'Paul employs same sex passion and its fulfilment in same sex intercourse, among both women and men, as his first item of evidence for human depravity....I will therefore want to take what Paul says seriously, but his views are to be assessed in the light of all relevant available information, as a result of which we should feel free to reach different conclusions from Paul if the evidence suggests this is appropriate.' (William Loader, The New Testament on Sexuality, pp320-1)

John Pike says, "The evidence suggests that the ancients and biblical writers were aware of a wide variety of homoerotic contacts and relationships, including loving relationships. While alternative readings of the biblical texts have been suggested, the vast majority of scholars, including progressives and/or gay/lesbian scholars such as Dan O. Via, Louis Crompton, Diarmaid MacCulloch, William Schoedell, Walter Wink, Bernadette Brooten, Pim Pronk and Martti Nissinen, are agreed that the biblical texts condemn intercourse between two males in any context, regardless of any loving disposition or orientation, and, in the case of Romans 1, probably between two females as well. Progressives who take this view have responded in a variety of ways: for Brooten, Romans 1:26ff is not authoritative, MacCulloch believes that 'in this, as in much else, the Bible is simply wrong', Wink also questions whether the Bible is correct, while for Nissinen 'Ultimately, it all turned out to be about loving one's neighbour as oneself...'

Cosmo

Genesis 1v27 speaks of the creation of male and female along with other dualities such as day and night. Yet day and night are not absolutes. We have 'in between' aspects such as dawn and dusk which are a mixture of day and night. Therefore, when it comes to gender Genesis 1v27 does not necessarily insist on a straightforward binary division of male and female. The phenomenon of sex and gender is more complicated than that.

Fido

The creation of day and night, light and darkness is of a different type to the creation of male and female. Day and night alternate in a revolving pattern and dawn and dusk is the phenomenon of one changing into another. But male and female humans were not created to change into one another, so there are no 'in-between' sexes. In a fallen world, there are (mercifully very rare) cases of people being born with genital deformity and their gender may be difficult to determine from mere observation of genitals. There may even be chromosomal abnormality. But that is different from saying they constitute a designed 'third sex' or that there are many different sexes or genders.

Cosmo

The Anglican tradition is to balance Scripture with *reason* and *tradition*. Traditions can evolve and, with modern insight, doesn't *reason* suggest we should re-interpret Scripture in a more inclusive way?

Fido

It's often said that the traditional Anglican approach is to imagine a 'three-legged stool' which symbolises three equal sources of authority – Reason, Tradition and Scripture, and perhaps to see these as sometimes in tension or even conflict with each other. However, the Protestant Reformers saw reason and tradition as tools to help us understand Scripture, which is the primary revelation of God's truth. If reason and tradition suggest we should read Scripture in a particular way, then this is not a case of them *overriding* Scripture, but helping us to be *faithful* to it.

In the matter of homosexuality, reason suggests the traditional reading of Scripture is correct. Not only has it been believed by the Church for two thousand years, we also see from the way we were made that men and women are designed to complement each other anatomically, physiologically and psychologically. Even if we did not have the Bible, reasoned observation should tell us that, when it comes to sex, the penis was made for the vagina, and healthy families need the complementary combination of father and mother in the parenting role. All other things being equal, children have a better upbringing when they have a mother and a father. Please note the words *all other things being equal*.

Cosmo

Leviticus chapter 18:19 gives a prohibition on 'approaching a woman for sex during her menstrual period.' If all the commands in that chapter are moral ones which apply to us even now, why is this command not regarded as important for Christians to observe today? Why is this not mentioned in the New Testament? Isn't it homophobic to say that Leviticus 18:22 is applicable to us today but not 18:19?

Fido

I think that the Leviticus 18:19 command does have a moral aspect (along with all the other commands in that chapter) and therefore does indeed apply today in the same way that 18:22 does. Leviticus 18:24-25 tells us that it was included in the things pagans did which defiled the land before the Israelites entered, so sex during menstruation was not just something God wanted only Israelites to avoid for Jewish ritual purity reasons.

The world says that sex is fine for any person with any other person, at any time, as long as there is valid consent and a condom is used to safeguard participants from sexually transmitted diseases and prevent inconvenient pregnancy if that is a possibility. However the biblical position is radically different.

The context the Bible gives for sex, in both Old and New Testaments, is one of heterosexual marriage only. Within marriage husband and wife should not unilaterally deny each other sex. Both husband and wife should recognise their bodies belong to each other. However, there is a God-given limitation to this. A husband should not have sex with his wife or propose it during 'the uncleanness of her period'. If he proposes sex and the wife says, 'I'm on my period', that should be the end of the matter.

Why might God see sex during menstruation as intrinsically immoral rather than just something ritually unclean or 'dirty' for Jews under the old covenant?

The ethic of avoiding sex during menstruation probably has within it the provision for the woman's body of a chance to 'rest' from sex during these few days in the month when she is bleeding. It seems to lower the risk of infection and physical damage to the women's body through sex and increase the respect the husband has for his wife, teaching him the discipline of waiting till her period is over for the satisfaction of his sexual desires.

Some claim that sex during menstruation is not necessarily painful or more dangerous for the woman, or less hygienic if certain conditions apply, or may even be desirable from the woman's point of view, but I think that the God who made our bodies knows best what is good for us, and we should respect what the Bible says about this. Apart from biblical

guidance, it makes sense that God designed the days of the month where the woman cannot conceive to be the days when her body is less healthily geared for sex.

Orthodox Jews and Muslims take the same view.

With regard to the New Testament, Gentiles are urged to refrain from 'sexual immorality'. The Jews understood 'sexual immorality' to include all the behaviours listed in Leviticus 18 so the New Testament does implicitly confirm the continuing applicability of Leviticus 18:19.

Cosmo

When The Council of Jerusalem decided that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses, the Jews in Jerusalem wrote to the Gentiles freeing them from this burden, but still requiring them to avoid certain practices that would have made table fellowship with Jews very difficult. These were (1) eating blood, (2) eating the meat of strangled animals and (3) eating meat offered to idols. (4) committing 'porneia' (forbidden sexual acts under the Jewish holiness code). If the avoidance of porneia had to be specified by the Jewish believers, does this not suggest it was a ritual, ceremonial matter, like the eating of 'unclean food'? As we wouldn't be worried about the first three stipulations today, why should we be concerned about doing things that Jews then regarded as sexually 'unclean', like gay sex?

Fido

What the four stipulations that were given to the Gentiles in the letter had in common was not that they were all purely ceremonial matters that were only relevant when table fellowship with Jews was in mind, but that they were perceived by Jews to be four prominent examples of behaviours (whether we now class them as ceremonial or moral matters is irrelevant) which Gentiles were generally known to indulge in and which were a source of great offence to Jews.

Cosmo

OK, let's assume all the commands in Leviticus 18 are 'moral' commands because they reflected standards, the non-observance of which was supposedly reprehensible in God's eyes for pagan Gentiles as well as Jews. However, was not the purportedly 'moral' command prohibiting gay sex actually based on the oppressive, patriarchal view that sex was about male dominance over females and that anything that resulted in males taking the 'female' passive or submissive role in sex undermined what was believed to be a fundamental aspect of the created order?

Fido

It seems that what you are saying is that Leviticus, rather than being 'God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'⁹⁷ is actually a very misleading book because it contains commands predicated on discredited notions of male superiority and dominance.

We inevitably come back to the question, 'do we trust the Bible to reveal what is right in God's eyes' or is the Bible a partially corrupt human document that we have to de-construct using other sources of authority? I can't see how someone can have a high view of the Bible and dismiss Leviticus as merely reflecting the worldview of male hegemony and female inferiority. Leviticus chapter 18 begins with the words 'The LORD said to Moses. . . .' Do we believe that the commands that followed *were* indeed God's words or do we believe they were made up by Israelites because of their macho, patriarchal agenda and then merely *attributed* to God in order to claim divine legitimacy?

Cosmo

Couldn't Leviticus 18 be talking about shrine prostitution, rather than loving homosexual relationships?

Fido

No, there is no indication that the only problem with same sex 'sex' was if it was in the context of male prostitution, religious or otherwise. When the prophets wanted to condemn male shrine prostitution in Israel, they did so explicitly, rather than refer to homosexual practice generally.

Cosmo

It seems to me that Romans 1 is pretty important to your argument. But isn't Paul here criticising those who rebel against what is natural *for them*. What is 'natural' can depend on cultural factors or one's own disposition. Paul called men having long hair 'un-natural' but wasn't that a culturally determined thing? Paul says it was 'un-natural' for wild Gentile olive branches to be grafted on to the Jewish cultivated olive tree, but God did it anyway! So, could not Paul be referring only to people who were *naturally heterosexual* pursuing homosexual relations, because of an overspill of wanton lust or desire to rebel against their God-given orientation?

Fido

It is true that the word 'natural' can mean something that is culturally conditioned or something that 'feels right' to one individual but not to another. To most people, using their

⁹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:16

right hand to perform tasks feels more 'natural' than using their left. But a substantial minority are 'naturally' left-handed. In one culture, such as in the West, it is 'natural' to shake one's head to signify the answer 'no'. In another culture, such as the Indian subcontinent, it sometimes feels 'natural' to shake the head to indicate the answer 'yes'.

However, in the Bible, the word 'natural' can also refer to something that is intrinsic to the nature of creation. Therefore, the various different meanings of the word 'natural' have to be deduced from the context. The context of Romans 1:26-27 where Paul says that both men and women exchanged 'natural' relations for 'unnatural ones' is however an account of how, through idolatry and the rebelling against God's created order, the truth has been exchanged for a lie and God has given people over to the degrading of their bodies and to shameful lusts. Thus the word 'natural' in this context refers to what is in accordance with God's creative design for humanity. Sin has distorted this so that people pursue what is 'unnatural' in the sense that it violates God's creative intention. The word 'natural' refers here to what is objectively right in God's eyes, not a subjective preference or culturally conditioned custom.

The subjective understanding of the word 'natural' would not make sense in this context. Could we really interpret this passage today as saying that homosexual practice is only wrong if someone is 'heterosexual' and that if someone is 'homosexual' they would be guilty of 'un-natural' behaviour if they got married and engaged in heterosexual practice? No, biblical morality does not depend on the vagaries of people's subjective sexual preference at any given time. It is based on objective truth about what is pure and wholesome in God's eyes and what is impure and degrading.

There is nothing in this text which suggests the behaviour being talked about is an intemperate *addition* to 'natural' heterosexual drives. What is condemned is the *exchange* of natural desires for unnatural ones.

Cosmo

If people have been 'given over' to homosexual desire as a result of human idolatry isn't this something that is an indictment on humanity generally, rather than those who find themselves with homosexual drives?

Fido

Absolutely it is. And everyone is called to repentance and a new life in Jesus. Repentance involves sexual holiness, which among other things, Scripture says, rules out homosexual behaviour.

Cosmo

For many years people thought Scripture forbade women exercising spiritual leadership or being ordained, and also that it sanctioned slavery. There are verses that seem clear regarding both positions. Slaves are supposed to bow their heads and obey their masters and women are to keep quiet and let the men run the Church. We don't hold to these apparently 'biblical' ideas anymore, so why should we maintain opposition to homosexuality?

Fido

There are indeed passages that, on a surface reading, seem to restrict women in the Church from exercising any ministries involving leadership in relation to men. However, if we believe that Scripture reveals a consistent picture of God's will and is not merely a collection of contradictory viewpoints, we should interpret what might seem puzzling verses in the light of others. Generally, a good principle is to interpret difficult passages in the light of ones that are easier to understand. For example, there is a verse (1 Corinthians 14:34) where women at Corinth are commanded to 'be silent'. We should interpret this as 'be quiet' or 'be orderly' or 'respectfully submissive'. If we think 'be silent' meant a woman was not to literally utter a word whenever there was a get-together of believers that would be absurd and plainly contradictory to many other passages where women prophesy and pray, read Scripture, host a gathering in their homes, and teach people the Gospel.

This interpretation is like the understanding of 'be silent' that we might recognise today. When a judge bangs his gavel and says 'silence in court' he is not commanding that literally no-one makes a sound, but that the business of the court proceeds in an orderly, respectful way without people shouting out chaotically. Looking at the context of the Corinthian church helps too. People used spiritual gifts enthusiastically, but not always wisely. Some, especially uneducated women, were tempted to abandon conventional standards of seemly behaviour and call out disruptively, bringing Christianity into disrepute.

Another example is 1 Timothy 2:12 where it appears on a surface reading that Paul forbids any woman to have any position of teaching authority in relation to a man.⁹⁸ If this were so it would, apart from appearing highly unreasonable, clearly contradict parts of both the Old Testament and New Testament. In the Hebrew Scriptures we see that occasionally God raises up godly women leaders and blesses them with spiritual authority in the nation. Deborah, Huldah, and Esther are the outstanding examples. In the New Testament, women were the first to be called to announce the resurrection. Priscilla, a Jewess from Rome, took the lead in explaining the Gospel more fully to Apollos, a promising preacher in Ephesus. She is mentioned as a more prominent leader than her husband, Aquilla. Lydia, a 'dealer in purple cloth', in other words a successful businesswoman, hosted the apostles and a church in her home in Philippi. Phoebe was Paul's representative in taking his letter to the Romans,

⁹⁸The Greek word *authentein* which modern translations translate as 'authority' is used nowhere else in Scripture and from its use in other Greek sources does not always have a positive connotation and can mean something like a 'domineering' or 'usurping' kind of authority rather than a godly, servant-hearted kind of leadership.

which probably also meant reading it and explaining it. Junia was called ‘outstanding among the apostles’. Phillip had four daughters who prophesied (i.e. proclaimed messages from God that strengthened, encouraged and comforted others in the church, whether men or women).

Scholarly exegesis has suggested that Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 2 are properly understood in the context of the cultural scene in Ephesus (where Timothy lived) where women were taught and encouraged to sexually and spiritually manipulate men. Certain pagan myths held that women were the primal originators of man. Also, there was the influence of gnostic teaching that suggested Eve, in eating the forbidden fruit, opened the door to wisdom and spiritual understanding. The goddess Artemis, goddess of childbirth, among other things, was believed to protect women in pregnancy if they worshipped her. Worshipping Artemis involved seeking ungodly power over men. The ‘Children of Artemis’⁹⁹ is an organisation that exists today to teach and promote witchcraft. Witchcraft involves the manipulation of spiritual power to achieve control over others. Knowing the historical context of that part of the letter and the attraction to females of access to demonic power (both then and now) helps us to make sense of things in that chapter which would otherwise be baffling.¹⁰⁰

Cosmo

Aren’t you employing the same reasoning to get round restrictive texts about women that others do to argue for a more inclusive attitude to gay people?

Fido

I believe not. As I’ve said, there are indications in Scripture that although leadership in many ways naturally falls to men, women can sometimes exercise godly authority in relation to people generally, including men. Responsible exegesis of certain passages (working out what the Scriptures meant to the original hearers) and biblical interpretation means taking into account other relevant passages as well and both the literary and historical contexts.

Regarding the ethics of homosexual practice, there is simply no positive biblical material whatsoever, and responsible study of the contexts and the broad sweep of creation and redemption theology confirms the apparently plain and obvious meaning of the relevant passages rather than questions it. That is what makes it different from questions about whether women can or should exercise any kind of spiritual leadership.

⁹⁹ As I write, the British Museum has an exhibition of female power, ‘from the divine to the demonic’ staged in partnership with the Children of Artemis. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/feminine-power-divine-demonic>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.jimreynolds.org/the-artemis-cult-a-d-62-1-timothy-211-15-and-women-today/>

Cosmo

What about slavery then?

Fido

The Bible, from beginning to end, gives no theological support to what most people understand as 'slavery' which is something that involves trafficking and cruel exploitation. There was a type of 'slavery' recognised in the Old Testament which was a humane alternative to slaughter after battle or starvation but this was carefully regulated by God's commands. Furthermore, so called 'slavery' for Israelites was much more like indentured servitude for a period of time than the inhuman chattel slavery carried out on American plantations. If God's laws had been faithfully kept, there would have been no one in Israel who became destitute enough to sell themselves into slavery. The defining symbol of salvation was being called *out of slavery to freedom* in the promised land. Kidnapping was a capital offence under God's law. Old Testament law in Israel completely forebode anything like the transatlantic slave trade abolished in the 19th century. There is also nothing that supports, and plenty that contradicts, the pseudo-scientific racist underpinning of that kind of slavery.

The New Testament recognised slavery (which was not necessarily cruel or degrading in individual cases) as a fact of life in Roman times and advised those believers who were under the legal authority of others to serve well and thus gain respect for themselves and their faith. Slave owners were not ordered to let go of their slaves (which would not in many cases been to their benefit within the realities of Roman society then), but they were instructed by Paul to treat their slaves fairly and justly. The equality in Christ the New Testament teaches in time fatally undermined the idea of enslaving one's brothers and sisters in Christ. In his letter to Philemon Paul hints strongly that Philemon should forgive his returning slave Onesimus from any wrong he felt he had done to him and should treat him as a brother.

Those who argued in the nineteenth century that Scripture supported the forced transportation of Africans across the Atlantic and their enslavement on the American and West Indian plantations were those who were heavily invested in the trade for financial profit, so were hardly disinterested interpreters of Scripture. The key opponents of the slave trade were the Evangelicals who took Scripture seriously and saw the Trade and the cruel exploitation and dehumanising oppression as completely incompatible with Scriptural values. Even those who had thought their ownership of African slaves could be justified from Scripture if their slaves were well treated, saw that the transatlantic system was institutionally cruel and degrading and sought its abolition, even if they had disagreements about the means of bringing it to an end.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Hodge

It is true that we can be blinded to Scriptural truth by culturally conditioned assumptions and personal biases. Ironically, this truth seems to escape those who argue the Bible is OK with 'same sex sex'. We live in times when Westerners view the Bible through a cultural lens in which sexual desires are believed to be crucial to personal identity and it is thought that any curbing of homosexual desire leads to psychological damage. We constantly hear the mantras 'you must be yourself', 'you have a right to sexual pleasure' and 'you must accept no limits to your desires.'

The remedy for reading Scripture with cultural blinders (such as those exhibited by supporters of slavery) is to return to the Scriptures with earnest attentiveness and a spirit of submission and willingness to repent of misusing it for our own ends.

This is all very different from saying 'we have mercifully learned to ignore what the Bible says about women and slavery and can therefore ignore what it says about sex' which is the kind of argument you seem to be making Cosmo.

Cosmo

The Old and New Testaments were written so long ago in a very different age and culture. Shouldn't we be very reluctant to transfer commands from either into the lives of people today? The New Testament, for example, says women should cover their heads in church. In most churches in the West, that only happens at posh weddings.

Fido

It is true that some things in the New Testament epistles were written to address specific pastoral situations in the churches to which they were addressed. I've already mentioned how Paul's letter to Timothy in Ephesus reflected the background of Artemis worship and the influence on the church of the pagan and gnostic ideas that women were the primal originators of man and the ones who prised open the way to spiritual knowledge by 'eating the forbidden fruit.'

Regarding Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church in his first letter, chapter 11, this was a culture where it was regarded as seemly and respectful for women to cover their heads as a sign of their submission to spiritual authority, and for men to *uncover* theirs as a sign of *their* submission to spiritual authority. In determining the applicability of the biblical principle Paul was observing then to today's different culture, we do not necessarily copy the outward manifestation of it that Paul demanded in Corinth. The principle that it would be wrong in church to flout social convention in a way that brought the church into disrepute or caused other people to stumble still holds as much as it ever did. So women, for example, should not dress in church in a way that is sexually provocative, or men in a way that is contemptuous of authority.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet and that was a symbol of the humble attitude of service he commanded that we follow. Jesus words were, 'You must wash one another's feet.'¹⁰² But in those days washing feet was culturally appropriate in the middle east. People wore sandals and their feet got dirty in the dusty streets. If we have visitors to our home in the UK, taking their shoes and socks off and washing their feet would seem odd (even a bit rude as it could imply we think they smell!). On the other hand, providing food and drink, making up their bed, taking care of their every need, and cleaning up after them would be the appropriate acts of humble service today. Cleaning bathrooms is perhaps an equivalent, humble act of service. Obeying Jesus does not mean we necessarily *literally* 'wash each other's feet'. We can do it *metaphorically* in a way that is appropriate to our culture, and therefore follow the spirit of Jesus' command.

Cosmo

In Acts 15, Peter is given a new revelation that Gentiles are acceptable to God and not to be called 'unclean'. Does this not offer a paradigm for the inclusion of gay and transgender people into the church?

Fido

Everyone who is 'in Christ' is a member of God's church. Your question about inclusion is phrased in a way that suggests I am against 'inclusion' for some people. The question should not be whether we should welcome everyone on an equal basis (of course we should), but *'what it is we are welcoming people into?'* The question is *'is gay sex and changing your gender something that God approves of, based on what happened in Acts 15?'*

The answer to this question is no. As I've already said, Jesus abolished the distinction between those who were ritually clean and unclean and provided a new basis for those who were to be considered part of God's people. This was faith in him. According to Jesus' teaching, faith in him required a commitment to holiness that was even more far-reaching than that under the old covenant and certainly meant pursuing sexual holiness. No-one was more committed to Gentile inclusion than Paul, and yet it was he who specifically taught that homosexual conduct was seriously immoral. Transgenderism is based on the gnostic idea that our physical body can be one sex and our 'inner being' another and therefore, it too is contrary to the Gospel of wholeness.

Some claim that just as the Spirit revealed to Peter that God was doing a new thing in removing the ritual purity barrier between Jews and Gentiles, the Spirit is telling us today to include LGBT+ people by changing our doctrine of marriage and gender identity. But this would be an entirely new revelation such as to move us into a new dispensation, just as the revelation of the abolition of the clean / unclean distinction given to believing Jews marked the transition of the Old Covenant into the New. But there are no more dispensations. We

¹⁰² John 13:14

are already living in the last days. While the Holy Spirit communicates to us today by assuring us of God's love through prophecy and words of knowledge, and guiding us into all truth, he is not going to move us away from the doctrines of the New Testament which the Old Testament foreshadowed. The Holy Spirit works in continuity with apostolic teaching not in contradiction to it.

Cosmo

Eunuchs feature throughout the Bible. Deuteronomy excludes them from the life of Israel, but some Old Testament passages show a more inclusive attitude towards them, and in the New Testament, Jesus honours them and the first person to be baptised from the African continent is the eunuch who served the Ethiopian Queen Candace. This offers us a paradigm for the inclusion of LGBTQIAP02S+ persons, including intersex and asexual people.

Fido

A 'eunuch' (literally 'keeper of the bed') was the name originally given to men who were castrated by kings so they could run their harems and not be a sexual threat or competitor to the king. Also, by not having their own children, it was thought they would be more loyal to their master. The meaning of the word was also stretched to include those who were castrated in furtherance of a religious ritual. The word 'eunuch' was further extended by Jesus to cover those who were born with genital abnormality and those who voluntarily stayed celibate for the sake of service in God's kingdom.¹⁰³

It is true that in Deuteronomy 23:1 God's law said that no one who had been emasculated by crushing or cutting could 'enter the assembly of the Lord'. Scholarly work has established that the prohibition referred to exclusion from taking a full part in sacrificial worship and decision making bodies within Israel and also non-eligibility to marry Israelite women. The rationale for the latter was the importance of sex in marriage and the ability to produce children. Israelite women were considered to have a 'right' to sex *within marriage* and have a husband who was fertile. Those who had been castrated (voluntarily or not) were either symbolically representative of pagan society or had been implicated in pagan worship or both.

However, it is also true that the prophets said that a eunuch who worshipped the Lord would be honoured with a legacy greater than that of sons and daughters.¹⁰⁴ God is an 'inclusive' God for those who worship him, but he is not a God who is unconcerned with holiness, purity, and the making of moral choices which transgress his moral law.

Although some eunuchs may have had a homosexual inclination there is not a straightforward parallel here for those who identify as LGBT+ today, except perhaps for those who identify as 'asexual'. Some people claim that in Matthew 19:12 Jesus exempted

¹⁰³ Matthew 19:12

¹⁰⁴ Isaiah 56:4-5

eunuchs from the Genesis institution of male/female marriage and therefore allowed for 'same sex marriage' in its place, but this seems highly fanciful and unwarranted. Jesus is actually saying that eunuchs who are 'born that way' or 'made that way by men' are unable to marry (the implied reason being that they lack the male organs necessary to consummate a marriage to a woman). This is in contrast to those who *could* marry (because they have their genitals intact) but choose not to (thus becoming 'voluntary eunuchs' for the sake of the kingdom of heaven).

The honour given to eunuchs who were faithful to the Lord in both Testaments is a foreshadowing of the honour to be given to those unmarried people, whether they are same sex attracted or not, who choose to be faithful to Jesus in the face of considerable pressure to conform to the world's values and practices.

Cosmo

Scientists observe homosexual behaviour in the animal world. Does this not suggest that homosexuality is a feature of evolution and not something inherently wicked that humans, with our capacity to know right from wrong, choose to perversely indulge in?

Fido

The Fall affected all of creation, including the animals. Furthermore, animal behaviour is not a sure guide for what is moral among humans. Black widow spiders eat their male partner after mating and the male seems to welcome this fate, so there is apparent 'consent'. However, I don't think this suggests similar behaviour among humans is morally unproblematic!

Chapter Eight

You're Obsessed (so even if you're right, you're still wrong)

Cosmo

Even if you have a point about the Bible being negative about certain sexual practices, does it need to be an issue to divide us over? Why can't each person decide for themselves what their conscience will allow? If you don't like same sex marriage, don't enter one! If you think gay sex is wrong, don't practice it! If you think someone can't change their sex or gender, then don't change yours! If you don't want to conduct a gay wedding or celebrate people transitioning through an act of worship, just let another priest do so!

There are so many more important things we should be concentrating on, like environmental issues and serving the poor, but you are obsessed with what people do between the sheets or how they see their gender. I'm sure that God is not the least bit interested in what people do in their bedrooms or their choice of personal pronouns. He is concerned about the big issues of structural inequality, discrimination and prejudice, and climate change.

In Romans 14, Paul gives a model for Christians who disagree to live together happily. 'Stop passing judgment on one another.'

I think it's rather obsessive of you to focus on a very small number of odd, restrictive Bible verses rather than exploring the great themes of the Bible relating to equality, justice, inclusion, broad-mindedness and tolerance. You're just making yourself look very silly with your prudish and bigoted obsession with sex. Why don't we as a church just agree to be kind and accepting, like the decent, right-thinking people we want to feel comfortable in inviting to church? Moralising and speaking of sin, especially in relation to sexual matters, is just a big turn-off.

Fido

Sexual holiness is regarded as important in the Bible because it relates to a highly significant aspect of what it means to be human, to live well and honour God. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit¹⁰⁵ and sexual sin desecrates God's temple. We're told to flee from it.¹⁰⁶ It is not disconnected from other forms of social responsibility such as protection of the vulnerable and the right use of power. In the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, sins of arrogance, complacency, material selfishness and contempt for the vulnerable were bound

¹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁰⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:18

up with sexual perversion. And the consequence of their sin was that they suffered the most cataclysmic kind of climate change!¹⁰⁷

Regarding homosexual practice, there is enough biblical material to make it clear that this is something God does see as seriously wrong, an aspect of sexual immorality which is profoundly at odds with God's holiness. Every positive description of sex or celebration of it in the Bible is in the context of heterosexual relations. Every law presupposes heterosexual marriage as the context for family matters. The fact that homosexual practice is not referred to explicitly in the New Testament more than three or four times¹⁰⁸ is not evidence that it is regarded as of little consequence. The New Testament letters were written largely to address relevant pastoral concerns¹⁰⁹ and homosexual conduct was generally known by the early church, so influenced by its Jewish roots, to be completely wrong. Therefore it was unnecessary to mention it more often.

There is, to give another example, only one explicit mention in all the New Testament letters of adult consensual incest and that was only because there happened to be a case in the Corinthian church of a man having sex with his father's wife. No-one would think to argue that the lack of more than one reference to incest indicates that it was considered unproblematic. It indicates the opposite. The vast majority in the early church knew it was wrong and therefore it only once became an ethical issue that apostles had to speak about.

The basis of the Gospel is that God offers us forgiveness and new life. To deny the reality, the pervasiveness and destructiveness of sin and its offensiveness to God is to deny our need for God's grace. It lies at the heart of human pride and stubborn rejection of God.

We live in a world where we understand more than ever the damage done to people through adult sexual abuse of children and male sexual abuse of women. The wrong use of sex is clearly a big deal. So this means a holy, loving and compassionate God takes *all* sexual sin seriously. We are called to 'work out our salvation in this area with fear and trembling?'¹¹⁰

I would rather, as a church leader, not have to spend time on debating sexual ethics with other Christians. Like others holding the beliefs I've outlined in this conversation, I'm not blind to spiritual and political reality in this country. Short of some miraculous divine intervention, sexual libertarianism and the legal enshrinement of the concept of 'same sex marriage' is not going to be reversed anytime soon. But within the *Church*, the reason I and others like me are still having to invest time and energy on this issue is because of those in the Church like you who are not content with your political and social victories in secular society. You wish to change our doctrine and practice in a way that we believe is seriously unbiblical and will be disastrous for the integrity of the Church of England's witness to Christ in our nation. While God's sovereign purposes will ultimately prevail, our commitment to

¹⁰⁷ See Genesis 19, Ezekiel 16:49-52, Jude 7

¹⁰⁸ Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10 and arguably Jude 7

¹⁰⁹ It is interesting though that the letter of Paul which contains the greatest amount of general theology, the letter to the Romans, has the most of all to say about homosexual practice, and this is in its first chapter.

¹¹⁰ Philippians 2:12

serving God within the Church of England means we cannot shirk our responsibility to give prophetic warning of the consequences of such unfaithfulness.

Romans 14 is about Paul telling strong Christians to avoid looking down at weaker Christians who might have scruples about what they eat and what special days they observe. These things are not core to the Gospel and should not be barriers to fellowship. But time and again, Paul emphasises that sexual holiness is not an 'indifferent' thing over which Christians can agree to differ. It is an essential matter of faithfulness to God.

Cosmo

The church has been through difficult times of controversy before over subjects such as contraception, re-marriage after divorce and the ordination of women. The 'biblical' position is clearly against all three of these things but the Spirit led us into seeing new truth. Eventually the dust settles and people wonder what all the fuss was about. It will be the same with same sex marriage, homosexuality and trans rights. You should have some historical perspective.

Fido

Regarding divorce and remarriage, we should look carefully at what Jesus said in Matthew 19. The context was that many Jews thought they could get round the prohibition on adultery by divorcing their wives legally before taking a new woman. They differed as to how easy this should be. Some rabbis said the grounds needed to be really serious, like adultery. Others said they could be relatively light, like their wives being a bad cook. That is why the chapter says that they asked Jesus what he thought. Jesus took them back to God's original creative intention in Genesis 1 and 2, re-affirming that God made us male and female and that marriage was a 'one-flesh' union of male and female that was meant to be permanent. Divorce was permitted under the law of Moses 'because of the hardness of men's hearts' but the Jews needed to understand that using a prescribed procedure to legally divorce their faithful wives in order to marry a more attractive woman was, in fact, a morally adulterous thing to do.

Although the Church has decided that clergy can remarry people in church who have been divorced from someone still living, the guidelines issued by the Bishops make it clear that clergy should not remarry people who have left their spouses in order to take up with someone else, which would be 'consecrating an infidelity' and blessing the kind of adulterous action Jesus was talking about.

That is different from the situation where a couple's marriage irretrievably breaks down without the involvement of a third party and then sometime later one of them wishes to re-marry, or the situation where the person wanting to remarry has been deserted by their unfaithful previous spouse. From the context in the Gospels, Jesus was not talking about either situation. Furthermore, in Matthew's Gospel Jesus specifically excludes from criticism

those who divorce and remarry because their spouses have been unfaithful. So permitting the church blessing of remarriage in some circumstances where a previous spouse is still living is different to seeking to bless homosexual unions which Scripture consistently rejects.

Also we've discussed women in spiritual leadership and seen that a biblical case can be made for it because of examples in the Old Testament and New Testament of women doing this with God's apparent approval. The texts that seem restrictive can be interpreted, as we've seen, according to responsible scholarship, as forbidding behaviour other than godly, humble leadership. By contrast, no reasonable case has been made that the Bible does not forbid all homosexual practice and honest revisionists accept that.

Regarding contraception, the arguments of 'conservatives' were to do with a belief that the sole purpose of sex was for procreation. However, while procreation is obviously one of the fruits of marriage, Genesis reveals that sexual differentiation and marriage were both given to remedy man's 'aloneness'. Sex within marriage is designed to bring husband and wife together as 'one flesh' to provide a deep, intimate union underpinning their mutual commitment to each other. Sexual pleasure between man and woman in marriage is celebrated in the Song of Songs. Therefore procreation is not the only reason God instituted marriage and according to Genesis 2, it was not even the primary reason, even-though it provided the right context in God's eyes for humans to 'go forth and multiply.'

So, married couples limiting the size of their family through contraception does not remove any of the essential components of marriage even though the availability of contraception to *un*married people has undoubtedly contributed to greater promiscuity by reducing the fear of unwanted pregnancy, and this in turn has undermined marriage.

Any decision by the Church to celebrate same sex unions will be the cause of far greater division than any of the controversies that have gone before, because it will mean a fundamental rejection of the biblical basis for marriage. The twisting of Scripture necessary to justify it will put the church on a path of deepening apostasy and spiritual decay as has been demonstrated by the churches around the world which have gone down this route.

Likewise, the embrace of transgender ideology is spiritual unfaithfulness of the highest degree. It involves a blatant rejection of the created order.

Chapter Nine

You're unrealistic

Cosmo

Whatever you think the Bible says or your own theology dictates, you must be *realistic*, Fido. The simple fact is there are people who are gay and people who are transgender. They need to be accepted and affirmed for who they are. Trying to hold out some kind of 'higher calling' to live in a way that denies them happiness in the real world, in the hope of some nebulous reward in an afterlife just does not cut it. If you think that the Church can provide a substitute community for the natural relationships based on sexual desire and gender identity that people want to pursue, you are deluded. The idea that people must sacrifice their desire for sexual intimacy and all they get in return is membership of a religious Sunday club for an hour or so a week, is risible. Are they supposed to just go home to an empty house afterwards where they are lonely and sexually frustrated?

You may be able to point to some people who say they've stopped being gay or transgender but the truth is that these are few and far between. So to suggest to people that they can be 'healed' or their orientation can be changed is to offer false hope, apart from being offensive, homophobic and transphobic.

Fido

I agree that any church which is merely an hour long 'Sunday club' for the religiously minded will not provide the level of friendship, intimacy, support and love that people need who are called to live with a radically different mindset to the world. I accept that there are churches which fail to do this. Orthodoxy as to the doctrine of marriage is not enough. There must be respect, understanding, compassion, and a determination that those who have given up their desire for a 'same sex marriage' or same sex erotic relationship for the sake of Christ should indeed, through the Church family, receive the kind of blessings *in this age* that Jesus promised in Mark 10 v29-31. . .

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."

Gay identifying or same sex erotically attracted Christians who practice celibacy out of love and obedience to Christ are certainly in the category of those who place Christ above human relationships. Sadly there are churches where this is not recognised.

Also, if there is no teaching about the basis of our salvation, the cost and rewards of discipleship, call to holiness, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and the real resurrection hope, then no-one is going to even contemplate living a life that involves sacrifice and non-conformity with the world.

But there are churches, friendship groups, residential communities, networks and ministries that provide both empowering teaching, true community and pastoral love and support. The question is whether these oases of hope are going to be supported and validated by the Church of England authorities? If they are not, then the lack of support for LGBT+ identifying Anglican Christians who want to live according to traditional, biblical Christianity could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To be a Christian is to believe in God's definition of reality. The Christ-centred life *is* the real life we were created and redeemed to enjoy.

It is the *world* and its philosophies which distorts the truth and denies reality. Romans 1 speaks of God giving over sinful humanity to the consequences of its idolatrous rebellion and suppression of the truth. Degrading homosexual lust follows on from futile thinking and there is a downward spiral of a depraved mindset interacting with ever increasing evil behaviour. So, we see the denial of the created order, of the creation of male and female, the persecution and censorship of those who want to teach the truth to children, and the public approval of those who teach and practice outright rebellion against reality.¹¹¹

There is evidence that the philosophy behind transgenderism, which I believe is linked to that which is behind homosexuality, is already being exposed for what it is. Many women, in particular, have woken up to the dangerous absurdities which result from defining womanhood as something which is solely in the mind.¹¹²

Many people have come to see the insanity of according full legal privileges to people simply on the basis of their own sense of gender identity. There is, quite rightly, a rebellion against that idea that women's and girls' changing rooms, sleeping quarters, refuges from domestic violence, hospital wards and prisons should be open to biological men who declare themselves transgender women, even if they have a history of sexual offences or violence against women and retain their male genitalia and appearance.

The mantra that 'trans men are men' and 'trans women are women' is being exposed for the lie that it is because following through on this logically would mean, not only the end of women's safe spaces and women's sport, but the end of the concept of womanhood itself.

Transgender philosophy reflects a move away from our spiritual heritage and biblical faith tradition that God made us male and female and we are a unity of body, soul and spirit. In forsaking this, we are embracing the belief that sex and gender are human constructs rather

¹¹¹ See the case of Bernard Randall <https://christianconcern.com/news/chaplain-branded-as-risk-to-children-by-cofe-for-sermon/>

¹¹² <https://www.economist.com/international/2021/06/05/a-backlash-against-gender-ideology-is-starting-in-universities>

than divine realities. There are a tiny number of people who in our fallen world are born with indistinct sexual features and even chromosomal abnormality. These are known as intersex persons and their gender (and sexual) identity may be a journey of discovery which everyone should accept is not straightforward. If, when they were born, the medics and parents felt on balance the child was, on the biological evidence, more likely to be one sex than the other, and should be nurtured as such, then this is the only situation where I think it is valid to talk about someone being 'assigned a gender at birth.' This assignment may or may not align with how the person feels as they grow up and more evidence may come to light which might call into question the original assignment.

However, that is quite different from believing, according to the new thinking, that gender is never something we can recognise as God-given when someone is born, but something that is always merely 'assigned'. If someone feels passionately that their "inner being" is at variance with the physical anatomy they were born with, then the dominant philosophical voices are demanding the right for their physical anatomy to be changed and/or the rest of society to legally and socially accommodate their feelings in order to ameliorate their sense of gender dysphoria. On the other hand, attempts by anyone, even with full consent, to help align people's psychological identity to their biological make-up should be banned as it offends LGBT+ sensibilities. This is a modern expression of ancient Gnosticism. Physical matter is of little or no consequence and if there is a conflict between our mystical sense of identity and the body our souls inhabit, the body can be tampered with as much as we like, but the 'inner self' is sacred and must suffer no intervention, even by agreement.

People's sex on their birth certificates can now be changed, even if they have produced offspring with someone of the opposite sex. Children can have puberty blockers, cross sex hormones and be taken abroad for 'gender re-assignment'¹¹³, which should be described as what it is - genital mutilation. Under the new philosophical regime, men can be pregnant and victims of rape must refer to their male attacker as a woman if he identifies as one. The terms 'mother' and 'father' are being erased from official discourse.

Lies are impossible to sustain without a tangled web of inconsistency and absurdity. In the UK, the vague and undefined calls to ban 'conversion therapy' by politicians were designed to suggest to the public that the aim was simply to protect people from coercive and abusive practices (even though the law already prohibits anything coercive and abusive). Things that are obviously evil and illegal like so-called 'corrective rape' and electric shock treatment are deliberately conflated with prayer, counselling and orthodox Christian teaching.

Government lawyers no doubt explained to ministers that framing a law to ban something required the discipline of defining what they were banning. Their unsurprising conclusion was that banning 'conversion therapy' was too legally complex. Were church leaders really to be criminalised for teaching traditional, biblical sexual ethics and counselling and praying for their flock to abide by this teaching? Was there to be a legal prohibition on inner healing that might result in a change in sexual desires and gender identity? How do you frame a law

¹¹³ Thankfully 'gender reassignment surgery' (genital mutilation) is still illegal in the UK for those under 18.

which bans therapeutically helping people to move away from homosexuality and transgenderism but not towards it? How can you ban a talking therapy as ‘conversion therapy’ but at the same time allow people’s bodies to be mutilated in the name of therapeutic care?

The political backlash following the leak of the news that the government under Prime minister Boris Johnson was dropping the idea of banning ‘conversion therapy’ immediately produced another U-turn. Homosexuality was, after all, to be protected from the ‘conversion therapy’ bogeyman, but not transgenderism. More outrage predictably followed and the government he led had to cancel its planned flagship LGBT+ international conference because of a mass boycott.

The decision to exempt transgenderism from the ‘conversion therapy ban’ gave the game away. If outlawing ‘conversion therapy’ was in truth about prohibiting only practices that were sinister, coercive and abusive, the ban should of course have applied to people who identified as transgender and indeed it should have applied to anyone wanting any kind of psycho-sexual help. However, the revelation that the prime minister and others knew that banning ‘conversion therapy’ generally might actually prevent good therapy to help people to move away from transgenderism (i.e. non abusive, responsible, loving help) shows how this proposed legislation was not about promoting truth, consistency and people’s wellbeing but merely swaying with the wind of perceived cultural opinion in a way that was politically advantageous. So, it was believed that as far as the voting public is concerned, ‘being gay’ was unproblematic, but ‘being transgender’ was still not something we ought to uncritically affirm, particularly for children. Therefore, it was decided that ‘conversion therapy’ should continue to be available to transgender people, even though in relation to homosexuality, it was apparently, ‘deeply abhorrent’.

Although I would contend that the spiritual and philosophical roots of transgenderism are linked to those of homosexuality, the level of doublethink necessary to sustain the former is greater. So, many instinctively feel uncomfortable with the idea of male to female transgender people competing against women in sports, having access to women’s changing rooms, hospital wards, domestic violence refuges and prisons, especially if they maintain their male appearance and genitalia. But if ‘trans women’ are truly women then logically they *should* be able to compete against other women and have access to women only spaces. They *are* women and should be treated as such for all purposes. Once a pseudo-therapeutic fiction is regarded as fact, it is of no use complaining this has undesirable consequences.

However, even those in the vanguard of the new religion, like Labour politician Lisa Nandy, found themselves caught up in logical and philosophical absurdity. So, when she was campaigning for the leadership of the party she was asked, in February 2020, if a transgender person (known as Zoe Lynes) who as a biological man (known as Christopher Warton) had raped a girl, should be imprisoned in a women’s prison she replied, ‘I believe fundamentally in people’s right to self-ID. I think trans women are women, I think trans men are men, so I think they should be accommodated in a prison of their own choosing.’

She was completely oblivious as to the nonsense of her position. If a 'trans woman' *is* a woman, a 'trans woman' should not have a *choice* as to where they are imprisoned (as if going to prison was like choosing a hotel), but should be *required* to go to a woman's prison. Going to a male prison whilst identifying as a female would be highly dangerous - a lot more dangerous than any 'conversion therapy'.

Speaking of reality as compared with fantasy, consider the implications for a young man who has his genitalia cut off because he is convinced that it will help him be happier in his body as someone who sees himself as female. Despite his belief that he is a woman, the reality is that even after surgery, every cell in his body will still be male. The body itself will experience the trauma of genital mutilation and will try to heal itself through the replacement of healthy body tissue that has been removed. So a person who has had his male genitals cut off and a fake vagina created by a surgeon, then has to insert a gruesome carrot-shaped metal implement into it for twenty minutes twice a day to prevent the male genitalia from starting to grow back. This is extremely painful. The ideologues seeking to persuade people to have 'gender reassignment surgery' do not warn people about this. Nor do they speak about the psycho-social consequences. A male to 'female' trans person might think that after surgery they will be able to go out and date normal heterosexual men or lesbian women but they will likely find that the only people interested in them will be those who have a fetish for trans people and who they might ironically regard as 'too weird'. An honest counsellor would warn them about this, but 'trans affirming' ideology overrides basic principles of counselling care.

Then think of those who as children are sold puberty blockers, the health consequences of which are unknown. The next thing on the trans conveyor belt is the administration of cross sex hormones, often rendering people sterile for life. These downsides are not fully explained to the children and vulnerable adults on whom they are inflicted.

Think of the girls who are sold breast binders on *Amazon* because they want to identify as boys. With no trace of irony, the rainbow advertising caption tells them, "be who you are". When the painful and crippling practice of foot-binding girls was customary in China, because small feet were considered necessary to be attractive, British missionaries campaigned against it. Those influenced by Christian understanding knew that our bodies are a good gift to us and we should not harm them in order to appeal to some humanly constructed ideal of what is considered acceptable or best to fuel desire. Now we are behaving like the pre-Christian, pagan Chinese. What is going on is probably the biggest 'safeguarding' scandal in the UK today, and what makes it worse is the censorship and intimidation of those who are trying to research the truth of what is happening.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ James Caspian, a counsellor and academic at Bath Spa University was banned from researching the phenomenon of transgender regret and de-transitioning by the university's 'ethics committee' because of fear of adverse comment on social media by the transgender lobby <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41384473>

There are many testimonies of people being delivered from sinful sexual lifestyles and gender confusion. It is only because of academic fear and media bias that more people don't yet know these stories, but they are coming out.¹¹⁵

Cosmo

I still think that, for all your claims about truth and people becoming ex-gay and ex-transgender, the reality is that people are what they are and they need to be able to live and love in a way that makes sense for them. Everyone, for example, needs intimacy and how can you expect gay people to live without the same intimate closeness to another human being that heterosexual people know they can have if they meet the right person?

Fido

Tragically, one of the problems in our society today is loneliness. Many of us lead socially isolated lives. We crave intimacy and people equate this with sex. But it is a false equation. It is possible to have physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy without sex and to have sex without any intimacy whatsoever. A person who identifies as gay or same-sex-attracted should not think the Bible's message means they are to experience no intimacy. People who admit to being same sex erotically attracted but are committed to remaining chaste should be able to live in a shared household, without finding temptation unbearable, if they are getting support and encouragement from fellow believers.

In a 'stable gay relationship' today, there would be many aspects of that relationship, physical, emotional and spiritual, that could be completely affirmed by faithful Christians, especially genuinely sacrificial care. Many a gay man dying of AIDS has been tenderly cherished and nursed by his partner. But these expressions of love are things that can be affirmed in any intimate, loving relationship, such as between very close friends and family. Homoerotic genital practices themselves between people of the same sex do however fall outside the biblical revelation of what real love is, just as perverted sex or sadomasochistic behaviour or sex without total commitment is not an expression of real love among 'straight' people.

Cosmo

Isn't it better though if people who are gay are able to settle down and be with one person they love, than to be expected to remain single and celibate and likely fall into promiscuity or other harmful practices because they are miserable and lonely? Doesn't marriage provide a better alternative, even if you have theological problems with it? Could it not be regarded,

¹¹⁵ <https://www.xoutloud.com/>

in your eyes, as 'the lesser of two evils?' Surely making vows of faithfulness to each other should be the least objectionable thing gays get up to in the eyes of conservatives?

Fido

I'm glad that you recognise promiscuity is harmful, as there are many people in our Western culture who say it is liberating.

The question as I see it, is whether the Church adopting 'same sex' marriage and fully endorsing it, results in helping people to lead holier lives.

I think it does not. If the Church were to embrace something so contrary to God's revealed purposes for human beings, then this would have a wide-ranging negative effect on all relationships. The very nature of Christian marriage is undermined. Young people will not be easily or willingly categorised as belonging to one of two tribes, one 'gay' and the other 'straight'. They will be encouraged to 'experiment' in order to 'discover' their sexuality and tick a particular box, even though in young people's eyes, sexuality is becoming more fluid.

The idea that Christian young people will neatly identify as gay as children and will then live celibate lives until they find 'the right one' and enter a 'same sex marriage' for life is to assume they will take on an imitation of conservative heterosexual Christian values. No, the embrace of LGBT+ ideology will mean the death of all authentically Christian sexual ethics, and there will be soon no clear moral boundaries regarding sex at all.

I think in twenty years' time, possibly sooner, the reality of what we have done in destroying the basis of family life will be apparent to everyone. Reality will come upon us like a whirlwind.

Chapter Ten

You're Fearful

Cosmo

Why are you so frightened of diversity Fido? Doesn't the Bible say, 'perfect love casts out all fear?'¹¹⁶ I think I know why you are fearful. It is because of your fundamentalist tendencies. You really must learn to have a more sophisticated view of Scripture and a more open attitude to truth. I would also recommend some counselling to learn to be less uptight about sex. Learn to recognise how your conservative upbringing has made you nervous of the 'other'.

This fear has long bedevilled Christianity in history. Fear of Judaism, fear of Wicca, Witchcraft and Paganism, fear of Islam, and other noble religious traditions, fear of sex and bodily desire. Saint Augustine has a lot to answer for. One of my hopes is that the celebration of sexual desire and difference represented by the rainbow colours will ripple out and result in the church embracing the full range of diversity. Some of our more progressive churches in the Anglican communion have led the way with multi-faith services and preaching which enlightens the faithful to move beyond the rigid interpretations of dogmatic theology.

Yes, our LGBTQIAP02SK+ sisters and brothers are in a very real sense priests of the new order, the ones who God has made the archetypes of the new humanity, leading us into an appreciation of the diverse nature of truth and true religious pluralism.

Everyone is made in the image of God. We must learn to see the Divine in everyone.

Let's us go beyond a dead literalism in reading the Bible. The Spirit is present in all people and all religious faiths. God is in everyone and everything. Outdated ideas about sin, judgment, sacrifice, atonement and holiness have all served to produce a scapegoating mentality that requires some form of hate object to restore its sense of spiritual equilibrium. But once we reach a more advanced spiritual knowledge, we can deconstruct the Bible and strip away the layers that reflect male, violent, misogynistic, homophobic and transphobic, totalising perspectives.

¹¹⁶ | John 4:18

Then all the colours will bleed into one and our own droplets will merge into the vast sea of faith. I do think we have much to learn from the wonderful Buddhist concept of Nirvana.

Fido

It is a true that everyone is made in the image of God. Genesis 1v27 makes that clear. However, that does not mean we are all Divine or that the Divine lives in us irrespective of whether we have faith in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Also, because in everyone God's image is seriously marred, we are all in a state of alienation from God unless we are in Christ. The Bible also makes clear that only those united to Christ in faith share in his Holy Spirit. Only then can we say that God lives in us, the hope of glory in our hearts. Only then can we rightfully say we are God's children.

It is also true that 1 John 4:18 says 'perfect love casts out fear.' But the context is God's love being made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, which is what the verse before it says. And verse 18 says that the fear it is talking about has to do with punishment.

I don't fear punishment because I know that Jesus died in my place and took the punishment for my sins. I am secure in that. However, this does not mean I am unconcerned about living faithfully, handling the word of God correctly and persuading people not to wander from the truth. There is a right 'fear of God' when it comes to obedience and we are called to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling', because it is God who works in us 'to will and act according to his good purpose'.¹¹⁷

The 'progressive' churches you speak about, such as the Episcopal Church of America are deconstructing the Bible in a way that is producing a different gospel. Jesus is no longer The Way, The Truth and The Life¹¹⁸, but one way of salvation among many. A recent Presiding Bishop of this Church taught this explicitly¹¹⁹ and even criticised Paul for casting out a spirit of divination from the slave girl in Philippi, because he was failing to respect her 'spirituality'.¹²⁰ A thorough-going revisionism about sex accompanies a distortion in how we

¹¹⁷ Philippians 2:12-13

¹¹⁸ John 14:6

¹¹⁹ <https://virtueonline.org/heresies-episcopal-presiding-bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori>

¹²⁰ This is from her sermon, after a reading from Acts 16:16-40. . .

'We live with the continuing tension between holier impulses that encourage us to see the image of God in all human beings and the reality that some of us choose not to see that glimpse of the divine, and instead use other people as means to an end. We're seeing something similar right now in the changing attitudes and laws about same-sex relationships, as many people come to recognize that different is not the same thing as wrong. For many people, it can be difficult to see God at work in the world around us, particularly if God is doing something unexpected.

There are some remarkable examples of that kind of blindness in the readings we heard this morning, and slavery is wrapped up in a lot of it. Paul is annoyed at the slave girl who keeps pursuing him, telling the world that he and his companions are slaves of God. She is quite right. She's telling the same truth Paul and others claim for themselves. But Paul is annoyed, perhaps for being put in his place, and he responds by depriving her of her gift of spiritual awareness. Paul can't abide something he won't see as beautiful or holy, so he tries to destroy it. It gets him thrown in prison. That's pretty much where he's put himself by his own refusal to recognize that she, too, shares in God's nature, just as much as he does – maybe more so!'

read everything in the Bible. The fear of accepting what the Bible says about sexuality leads revisionists to pursue the most twisted lines of biblical exegesis.

When it comes to the richness of God's varied creation, diversity is indeed something to celebrate. But as regards adherence to the values of God's kingdom, God wants uniformity, not diversity. He wants truth tellers, not multi-faceted liars, people of single-minded courage not cowards running off in many directions. He wants straightforward purity of conduct, not 'manifold sins and wickedness'.

I don't want dead orthodoxy or to read the Bible with a wooden literalism. The Bible is God's living Word. With the Holy Spirit in us, who is the Spirit of Christ and The Father, the adventure of faith brings a fullness of life and 'solid joys and lasting pleasures' that 'only Zion's children know'.¹²¹

It has become apparent that the differences between us lie deeper than mere disagreement over one area of sexual ethics. For me, living the Christian life is about trusting and obeying God's Word. For you, I fear it means inviting people to grasp equality with God by being their own arbiters of what is good and true. Like the serpent, you use the seductive line 'did God *really* say. . .?'¹²²

Cosmo

You criticise 'Liberal' churches, like the Episcopal Church in America, but many gay and transgender people come from Evangelical backgrounds. Some testify that they were taught a dualism where the body is considered bad and that it is only the soul that is good. This means they have repressed and been ashamed of their bodily desires, leading to mental health problems and a lack of integrity and wholeness. It is only when they have left Evangelical circles that they have discovered the richness of incarnational theology and the nourishing of the eucharist, which has enabled them to integrate their faith with their bodily life.

Fido

It is true that some 'church fathers' such as Augustine did, partly as a result of their own struggles with lust, have a nervousness about sexual desire. Also the church has at times been influenced by Greek pagan and gnostic ideas in which the purity of the soul has been contrasted with the baseness of the body. To safeguard her status, Mary was deemed to be a perpetual virgin (contrary to Scripture) and clergy were forbidden to marry as it was thought that sex with their wives would make them too impure to offer the daily 'sacrifice of the mass'. The idea of enjoying sex was frowned upon, even for married people.

<https://davidould.net/katherine-jefferts-schori-a-case-study-in-apostasy/>

¹²¹ The last two lines from John Newton's hymn 'Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken'

¹²² Genesis 3 cf. Philippians 2:6

As well as fighting against Roman Catholic superstition and heresy, the Reformation sought to change this ungodly attitude to marriage and family life. The Puritans (unlike the Victorians) were far from prudish about sex and celebrated sex within marriage as pure and chaste. Puritan ministers preached a lot from the Song of Songs. It was probably their favourite book of the Bible.¹²³ In reaction to the Catholic denial of the goodness of marriage, Protestantism exalted it too much and forgot that St Paul greatly prized singleness and celibacy and 'wished that all men were like him.'¹²⁴

If any Evangelical church has taught, or given the impression, that the body is bad and the soul or spirit is good, all I can say is that I don't regard this as authentic biblical teaching. Gnostic, pagan ideas can infiltrate all religious traditions. The Bible teaches that God declared his creation, including body, soul and spirit, *good*. Our fallenness through sin has affected body, soul and spirit together. It is not that the body is bad and the soul and spirit are good. All three were created good but all three are marred by sin. Our eternal hope is not some disembodied existence in the clouds but true resurrection and imperishable spiritual *bodies*. Christianity is the most materialistic of all religions in the sense that we believe the material world was created good. It is fallen, but it will be redeemed. In so far as any supposedly 'Evangelical' church has failed to teach this, it is sub-biblical and heretical.

I accept that some Evangelical churches have overemphasized the intellectual side of faith and neglected the body and the emotions. On the other hand, some have overemphasised spiritual emotion. A suspicion of sacramentalism has often led to a downplaying of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.

I also accept that some Evangelical churches have an *over-realised* eschatology, claiming that full healing is always God's will for this life. People with same sex erotic attraction might then be misled into thinking there is a straightforward 'cure'. Others have an *under-realised* eschatology, with little sense of God's kingdom power breaking into our present lives. They might give the impression that for some unlucky people the Christian life is an unrelenting burden until we reach heaven. There is deficient understanding that the Holy Spirit can bring deep healing and transformation, sometimes in miraculous ways. There *are* people who testify that God has delivered them from seemingly overwhelming sexual urges and whose lives transparently reveal genuine healing and restoration of God's purpose and design for human sexuality and gender identity.¹²⁵

¹²³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prolific nineteenth-century Baptist preacher who loved to read his Puritans, compiled an annotated list of no fewer than 57 Puritan and contemporary books devoted to the Song of Songs. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/play-me-that-hot-puritan-love-song.html>

¹²⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:7

¹²⁵ See <https://www.livingout.org>
<https://truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>

Chapter Eleven

You're contributing to a culture of dishonesty

Cosmo

It is very important for the image of the Church as an institution that people believe in its integrity. Anything that smacks of hypocrisy is to be deplored. One of the consequences (intended or not) of anti-gay policies within the Church is that gay Christians who pursue a calling to ordination have been forced to live double lives. Many have kept their orientation secret from the church authorities or their own congregations. If they have a partner, they might have to be kept 'hidden' with all the pressure that might put on their relationship. Unlike heterosexual clergy, whose spouses are recognised and who enjoy full support for their marriage relationship (and also care and support should they break up), gay couples have none of this, unless they happen to encounter sympathetic bishops, diocesan directors of ordinands and theological college principals. Many are of course, sympathetic, and increasingly so, but whether as gay clergy they will always and everywhere be welcome and supported has remained unguaranteed and a source of worry.

People have been tempted to 'play the game' and hide the reality of who they are and who they love. Indeed, several bishops still have same sex partners who they keep secret in the same way that supposedly celibate Roman Catholic clergy sometimes have mistresses.

Surely this is all very unsatisfactory. The deception and hiding of the truth is profoundly unhealthy. It is probably an important ingredient in the safeguarding problems and scandals that from time to time get media exposure. If people were able to be honest about their sexuality, then sexual matters, particularly those that relate to homosexuality, could be aired openly and without shame. If people are able to be open about who they are and who they love, that is when potential problems can be identified and tackled. Secrecy, shame, lack of acceptance and hypocrisy militate against this.

Fido

I very much agree of course that a culture of dishonesty is a bad thing. The image of the institution should not be the foremost concern, however. Everyone within the church is called to integrity of life, holiness, truth, love and faith, for the sake of our Lord, who is *The*

Way, The Truth and The Life. God hates lies and hypocrisy, and we should too. Everyone suffers when people collude in the suppression of the truth about what is really going on.

I think it is important to examine the circumstances in which people are tempted to be less than honest about the reality of their lives. Regarding ordinands and clergy, there seems to have been, in the last fifty years, a range of approaches by senior church people to disclosures. Some bishops, archdeacons, diocesan directors of ordinands (known as DDOs) and theological college principals have breezily proclaimed that 'being gay' is no problem at all when it comes to ordination but have been less than forthcoming about what that actually means. Less publicly, it has been intimated to individuals, sometimes with 'a nod and a wink,' that celibacy is also not expected.¹²⁶ This has been in spite of the official pronouncement of bishops in the 1991 statement *Issues in Human Sexuality* that gay clergy should be celibate. Others adopted a 'don't ask, don't tell' attitude, which has somehow been communicated to those who might have wanted to disclose their understanding of their sexuality. Certain circles in the church have had for many years a strong gay subculture, with many identifying as gay being attracted to the rituals and dressing up of High Church Anglo-Catholicism. Some theological colleges were always known to have a high proportion of gay ordinands, and those colleges varied in how much they insisted on upholding the official church position. But nothing was said too openly, and some who were embedded in the gay subculture preferred it that way, fearing that transparency might bring unwelcome scrutiny or accountability. However clergy who wanted to be known as gay could not be certain that the lax attitudes of some would be copied by others in authority over them, or that those with lax attitudes would fully support them in an open way if that required any courage.

Interestingly it is those who have an Evangelical background, but have converted to LGBT+ ideology such as the late Alan Wilson (formerly Bishop of Buckingham) and Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford who have led the revisionist campaign in recent years.

Theo Hobson, writing in *The Spectator*¹²⁷ writes

"It might seem surprising that Croft's background is evangelical. In fact, this makes sense. A liberal Anglo-Catholic is likely to have become jaded and cynical on the issue around the turn of the millennium. The relative zeal of the convert is needed. Also, the Protestant mind resists the old high-church habit of rarefied doublethink, camp irony, performative muddle – and the whispered hint that gay people have an edgy dispensation from behavioural norms.¹²⁸ Let's sort this out, it says, let daylight in."

¹²⁶ Lord Rowan Williams, a previous Archbishop of Canterbury, admitted knowingly ordaining practising homosexual clergy when he was Bishop of Monmouth in Wales. When he became Archbishop, his desire to keep the Anglican communion together under his leadership clashed with his theological liberalism. He upset gay clergy by not standing with them in the Jeffrey John affair, and by not more overtly supporting the American Episcopal Church in its sexual revisionism. Now he is retired, he is showing his colours, such as by saying that 'to be trans is to enter a sacred journey towards wholeness.' It is Liberal Catholics like Williams who are far more guilty of 'perpetuating a culture of dishonesty' than Evangelicals.

¹²⁷ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-bishop-of-oxford-why-i-support-gay-marriage/>

¹²⁸ Liberal-Catholic Archbishop Robert Runcie exemplified this approach. When asked by a young person in my youth group which he was visiting in the early 1980s about what he thought regarding the morality of clergy

Evangelicals who have become 'post-Evangelical' in their outlook¹²⁹ can still retain the desire to believe in something, and so for some the focus of their energies has become fighting for LGBT+ ideology. This can actually make those invested in the institutional status quo nervous. I know of at least one hitherto orthodox Evangelical safeguarding campaigner battling against those so invested who thinks that treating homosexual conduct in the same way as heterosexual conduct will lead to greater accountability and therefore help in the ongoing struggle to reform the culture of the Church of England in a way that will improve safeguarding. They think this 'good' will outweigh the 'bad' of getting our doctrine of marriage wrong. (I don't agree because I think the fundamental difference between what God has ordained for human flourishing and what he abhors means it will be unworkable to treat the two as the same).

Finally, it seems that some authority figures in the past, of various shades of churchmanship, responded with shock and disgust to disclosures of a gay identity. Even to admit to a homosexual disposition was to run the risk of being scorned or marked down as a 'problem'.

Understandably enough, these responses - either cynical moral indifference to the official position, or genuine homophobia, did not help foster a culture of truth, openness, integrity and genuine compassion. What the Church of England representatives were doing, which is something all people in institutions are tempted to do, was to take the easy option rather than the hard. The easy options are either to either turn people away in rejection, or to recognise no problem at all in homosexual relationships for clergy, or to put one's head in the sand and avoid the issue altogether. Sadly, the culture of the Church of England generally has often worked against the confronting of issues in a courageous and transparent way.

There have been, however, those who have been faithful to the mind of the Church as expressed in resolutions of the General Synod and Lambeth Conference, and official statements from the bishops, in that they have upheld the position that clergy are not at liberty to pursue genitally intimate homosexual relationships, *and* have offered genuine pastoral sympathy, support and understanding. While sometimes probing questions will have been asked, these have not been oppressive and over-intrusive. Integrity, faithfulness and real compassion, I believe, is the true remedy for a culture of deceit and dishonesty, rather than the abandonment of biblically sound doctrine.

Cosmo

But by apparently 'welcoming' gay clergy while insisting on celibacy is one of the roots of the problem, just as enforced celibacy for heterosexual priests in the Roman Catholic Church is at the root of much of their closeted and unhealthy behaviour.

being in homosexual relationships, he deflected the question by suggesting it was in poor taste and the subject was not something he wanted to talk about.

¹²⁹ Some continue to claim to be Evangelical and in the current philosophical climate of course it is a shibboleth that people's own sense of identity must be accepted. But these people soon show that they reject the authority of Scripture and hence fail one of the major objective tests for being Evangelical.

Fido

Well, it comes down to doctrine and belief in the Bible. Enforced celibacy for Roman Catholic priests is based on unsound, unbiblical ideas of the moral superiority of the unmarried, celibate priest. Also, unmarried priests without children can be paid less, given smaller houses and moved around more easily. Roman Catholic clergy who do not have the gift of celibate singleness (and being uniquely effective in that state) are being denied something that God has declared to be good, natural and right, namely marriage to someone of the opposite sex. This puts unnecessary strain on them and is certainly a factor in their sexual problems. But if homosexual partnerships or 'same sex marriage' are not natural or right in God's eyes, clergy denied them are being held, not to unnaturally cruel, enforced celibacy, but the biblical standards expected of all Christians, and especially those in spiritual leadership. God promises that his grace is sufficient¹³⁰ and he will provide a way out of temptation that is in accordance with his holy will.¹³¹

¹³⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:9

¹³¹ 1 Corinthians 10:13

Chapter Twelve

You're Cancelled

Cosmo

Well Fido, some would commend you for being brave. Or are you being foolish? The wind is blowing strongly for change. I've tried to reason with you but let me now remind you of how weak your position is.

While the current General Synod of the Church of England still lacks the two-thirds majority in each House needed to officially change the Church's doctrine of marriage by declaring it 'not an essential matter', stand-alone services of blessing for gay couples following same-sex marriage ceremonies conducted by a civil registrar are coming soon. These will be, to all intents and purposes, religious wedding ceremonies, with most, if not all, the usual customs associated with weddings, and will be popularly understood as such. It will only be a short time (certainly before this decade is over) before the last vestiges of pretence as to what is happening are removed and the church will be fully practising 'equal marriage'. By then there will be so many 'facts on the ground', such as openly non-celibate married or partnered gay clergy in key positions, that retreat from full equality will be unthinkable.

Yes, clergy and churches that still wish to uphold the old orthodoxy will not initially be obliged to do anything against their consciences by way of direct involvement in this kind of affirming ministry. But you know this does not mean that things will not have changed for ever. Yes, conservative clergy have been told that the bishops want to ensure 'their continued flourishing' and that they will still be given curates and promoted to higher office etc, but this will only be if they keep quiet and don't resist the change that is coming. There are any number of ways bishops can use their power to subtly accuse clergy of 'not modelling good disagreement' or raising concerns about them 'being able to train a curate to function in the broadness of the Church of England'. No bishop likes to be accused of 'false teaching'.

Further, the fact that that affirming forms of service will have received official approval will mean that those refusing to offer them will likely be the targets of accusations of homophobia from those who request them and are denied, and increasingly these clergy and churches will not be given any real support from their diocesan bishops in the stand they are taking against those attacking them.

Our bishops are 'on message' that there is no room for homophobia in the church and the refusal to offer what has been officially approved will soon be seen to be as unacceptable as refusing religious services on racist grounds. This whole campaign for change has been sold

as being based on Gospel imperatives such as justice, equality, inclusion, compassion and love and these powerful principles are going to outweigh any desire to protect the frail consciences of conservative clergy, as well you know. I know there are some on my side of the fence that think it is a mistake to admit this and some who naively think we can all be gentlemanly, but my view is that there is naivety on your side too in not accepting that your resistance is futile.

You do realise that the old 'traditional' beliefs around sexuality are now being seen as a danger to children and vulnerable adults.¹³² Professional safeguarding consultants commissioned by the Church of England are saying this in their 'lessons learned' case reviews following safeguarding incidents.¹³³ Fido, the spotlight is very much on

¹³² The late Bishop of Buckingham's chaplain, Canon Rosie Harper, who worked closely with him on the revisionist agenda wrote on Twitter "Traditional teaching, specially on sexuality is a safeguarding matter" <https://twitter.com/rosieswiss/status/1331559261504217093>

¹³³ For example, Dr Adi Cooper, commissioned by Oxford Diocese, provided a report on the case of Ben Field. He was a Baptist minister's son who got involved in the parishes of Stowe and Maids Moreton, becoming Stowe parish secretary and deputy churchwarden and who the diocese was preparing to send to a selection conference for ordination. He had entered into a homosexual relationship with an older male congregant, Peter Farquhar. Field murdered him after getting Farquhar to make him a beneficiary of his will. Field also seduced and gaslighted a lonely older woman in the church. Cooper said that the church's 'conservative views' on sexuality meant these kind of relationships could not be 'out in the open' where abuse might have been noticed and challenged.

Here are some of the excerpts from her report. . .

"The closed culture of the Stowe Church in general, including attitudes towards homosexuality, meant that the Peter Farquhar's homosexuality and the relationship between Peter Farquhar and Ben Field was a 'well-known secret'. The wider policies of the Church of England regarding homosexual practice and approach to sexuality and relationships put Peter Farquhar at risk and vulnerable to exploitation. A culture which supported openness and transparency would have better safeguarded Peter Farquhar. Whilst people continue to feel forced to hide or lie about their sexuality, they can become vulnerable to exploitation, as was Peter Farquhar." (para 1.3)

"Negative attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexual practice in the Church of England reinforce internalised homophobia." (Para 5.10)

"The current position taken by the Church of England, continuing to insist that sex is for married couples only and that any other partnership has to be a sexually abstinent friendship, is not conducive to disclosure, particularly from young people, as well as exposing people to risk, as discussed in section 1 above. This needs to change and the Church should consider how to make it possible for people to be honest about their relationships, as well as being a safe place for lesbians and gay men." (para 5.11)

"The policies of the Church of England regarding homosexual practice and the approach to sexuality and relationships continues [sic] to put people at risk because it forces people to hide, lie and become vulnerable to exploitation, as was Peter Farquhar." (para 6.1)

Dr Cooper's first two recommendations at the end of her report mentioned doing more work on "LGBT+ inclusivity" and "challenging attitudes to homosexuality."

In her report, the actions of a liberal vicar outside the parish in which Ben Field and Peter Farquhar, and his murder victim, worshipped, who conducted a clandestine 'betrothal service' for them, were not criticised. Dr Cooper not only suggested that traditional doctrine on homosexuality made Peter Farquhar more vulnerable,

safeguarding, and it is being stated by professional consultants that your non-affirming stance as regards gay and transgender people is part of the problem. Aside from the sense of condemnation and exclusion which drives people to suicide, these consultants are saying that conservative views foster a climate of shame where people's sexual relationships are kept hidden. This allows abuse to take place under the radar.

Bishops such as yours in the Oxford diocese will thus have some heavy ammunition to use against you, particularly if any complaints are made against you and clergy disciplinary procedures carried out. For a while, the church may still in theory be holding to an outdated view of sexuality and gender, but clergy like you who want to teach that doctrine and apply it to pastoral situations are going to be very exposed. You will be up against the weight of legal and psychological opinion and you will be naïve to think that you will not be hung out to dry by your bishops in such a situation.

So why not admit defeat graciously? If you cannot 'get with the programme' Fido, there will ultimately be no place for you as an ordained minister in the Church of England. Your options, if you don't fall into line, are either to be made to feel increasingly uncomfortable until you are eventually forced out, or to leave voluntarily. But where will you go if you leave? It's not as if all those of you who are resisting change are necessarily united about other things. It is most unlikely a breakaway Anglican movement could be sustained and able to flourish in this country if all that unites it are reactionary beliefs regarding sexuality and gender.

If you don't toe the line Fido, you will unfortunately find yourself 'cancelled'. Those who wish to bring the Church into the 21st century cannot be expected to be tolerant forever. Those who stand in the way of progress do tend to get flattened. If you cannot bend with the winds of change, you will break, or be broken by those of us (such as some of my increasingly zealous colleagues) who are less patient than me about enforcing progressive policies.

You have to accept that the current position of the church is untenable. Because of it young people think that the Church hates gays. This is disastrous for our credibility in 21st century Western culture and our mission to create a safe space for all.

Just think how you could enjoy your ministry and get on successfully in the Church if only you will let go of this issue! Why try to resist cultural forces that are far more powerful than

she also claimed that the Church's teaching that sex should be within marriage also made Field's other victim more vulnerable that would have otherwise been the case too.

The Bishop of Oxford, said: "I welcome the report and the recommendations it contains. . . . it is a clarion call for further improvements to our work on LGBTI+ inclusivity. . . ."

<https://lawandreligionuk.com/2020/10/23/stowe-maids-moreton-parishes-independent-safeguarding-report/>
Full report <https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/61f2fd86f0ee5/content/pages/documents/20211012-doc-events-in-stowe-and-maids-moreton.pdf>

you, and any doctrine you try to keep hold to? As they say, 'culture eats doctrine for breakfast'. As a friend, I say to you, isn't it time to go with the flow?

Why put yourself, your family and those who love you through the stress of becoming a pariah? The church is a forgiving place. Many others have seen the errors of their ways and are now delighting in showing God's love by giving full affirmation to LGBTQIAPO2SKP+ people.

Fido

I don't know what will happen to the Church of England, Cosmo, and my place within it. I don't know about the future of this country, and whether we will continue to reject our Christian heritage in a way that brings disaster and cataclysmic judgment. The clouds are gathering. My main concern is to be faithful to Jesus, come what may. This *is* about loving God and our neighbours as ourselves.

You say that young people believe the church hates gays. I think that in the UK, this is one of those convenient tropes that goes around to justify not being part of a church and which is also used to virtue-signal. 'As a moral, loving, compassionate person, I'm taking a stand for justice by *not* being part of a church!'

There are various other canards that have been used by successive generations for this purpose. 'Church is dull, boring, irrelevant and all about rules'. 'The church is a rich institution that is unconcerned for the poor'. 'Everyone who goes to church is a hypocrite'. 'Vicars and priests are all paedophiles'. In my schooldays in the 1980s the standard line most used to 'dis' the church was that all clergy were gay!

We have got to face the truth that the devil will always try to get people to hate genuine Christians. And one tool for doing this is to persuade them to think that *we* ourselves hate certain people, like those who identify as LGBT+. We have, however, to be prepared to be misunderstood, slandered and hated out of love and loyalty to Christ. The problem is that most Western Christians, unlike some of our brave persecuted brothers and sisters in many parts of the world, are terrified of disapproving looks or unpleasant comments on social media, let alone the kind of persecution that results in harassment, violence, discrimination, false accusation, arrest, imprisonment, torture and martyrdom. Our bishops, desperate to cling to their own sense of status and relevance in society, lack the will, let alone the courage, that is needed to be counter-cultural.

As for what you say about safeguarding, my view is the exact opposition of the revisionist one. I believe that it is LGBT+ ideology which is a danger to children and vulnerable adults. The really abhorrent kind of 'conversion therapy' is that which encourages and facilitates young people to get involved in sexual perversion, rejecting their gender and even mutilating their God-given bodies in the worship of a false ideology. Jesus said that true safeguarding is about protecting children from sin. "If anyone causes one of these little

ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”¹³⁴

At the end of the day I want to hear Jesus say to me ‘well done good and faithful servant’¹³⁵ and ‘whatever you did for the least of my brothers you did for me.’¹³⁶ In this context, ‘the least of my brothers’ are those who are single and/or same sex attracted or who suffer gender dysphoria but are committed to following Christ faithfully according to biblical truth. What counts is loving God and our neighbour, and we do that, Jesus says, by obeying his commands. Nothing else matters.¹³⁷ God will preserve his true Church. He knows those who love him. In the past, the Gospel has changed the culture and it can do so again.

I am very aware of the spiritual conflict that accompanies the socio-political one. During the English Civil War, many people tried to hedge their bets and tried, understandably, to avoid declaring for one side or the other. Some, like the famous vicar of Bray, abandoned all principle save that of survival in post. It eventually became impossible to remain neutral. People had to choose, and risk death either way. Similarly, everyone will eventually have to choose to identify with a particular stance on the issues covered in this conversation. This is what revisionist, ‘post-Evangelical’ David P. Gushee says. . .¹³⁸

Middle ground is disappearing on the question of whether LGBT persons should be treated as full equals, without any discrimination in society — and on the related question of whether religious institutions should be allowed to continue discriminating due to their doctrinal beliefs.

It turns out that you are either for full and unequivocal social and legal equality for LGBT people, or you are against it, and your answer will at some point be revealed. This is true both for individuals and for institutions.

*Neutrality is not an option. Neither is polite half-acceptance. Nor is avoiding the subject. Hide as you might, the issue will come and find you.*¹³⁹

Those on your side of the argument Cosmo are seeking something different than just more compassion, understanding, and recognition of LGBT+ dignity and human rights. You are looking for total victory as regards revisionist ideology. You must win this total victory

¹³⁴ Matthew 18:6

¹³⁵ Matthew 25:21

¹³⁶ Matthew 25:40

¹³⁷ Matthew 25:21 Matthew 25:40 ; 2 Timothy 4:7

¹³⁸ David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and formerly the Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University. He is also Chair of Christian Social Ethics at the Faculty of Religion and Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in cooperation with the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS Centre) in Amsterdam. He was formerly the Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy and the Senior Fellow of the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Christian Leadership at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. He was elected in 2015 Vice President and 2018 Vice President of the American Academy of Religion. In January 2016 he was elected President-Elect of the Society of Christian Ethics. He is a columnist for Baptist News Global, and has written for Religion News Service, *Christianity Today*, The Washington Post, and Sojourners.

¹³⁹ <https://religionnews.com/2016/08/22/on-lgbt-equality-middle-ground-is-disappearing/>

because the stated grounds on which you are basing your case are all to do with causes from which no dissent can be reasonably tolerated, namely long overdue justice, equality and inclusion. This inevitably leads to a 'winner takes all mentality' and can only result in conflict of the most serious kind with those you think are against these things.

Cosmo

Well, I will pray for you. You really need it. I think the God you see when you read the Bible is a different God to the one I see all around me. I don't have a 'them and us' theology. *My* God is broad, loving and inclusive, not separate and aloof from the world. If we could only realise our own oneness with the divine, we could let go of all critical, judgmental thoughts and concerns about sin and judgment, and see sex and gender transition as a sacred vehicle to God-conscious mindfulness. God is in the gay and transgender person as much as in you and me Fido. When you can see this you will have achieved the spiritual illumination of a true priest. Faith is about ecstatic union with the Divine rather than having to obey dusty biblical commands we think come from God. The Bible, like other sacred texts, must be allowed to be a vibrant, open-ended conversation, not a closed canon of infallible truth. The Spirit, present in all people, will surely guide us away from the drabness of fundamentalism towards a much wider and more generous vision of God.

Fido

When I hear some of what you are saying Cosmo, I also doubt we are worshipping the same God. The God I worship is the God revealed in Christ crucified. I've noticed that people with revisionist views about sex also dislike the Bible's teaching about sin and the need for Jesus to make atonement for us in order to put us right with God.¹⁴⁰ Jesus died in our place as our 'Passover Lamb', our substitute, and because of God's love for us, took the penalty our sins deserved.¹⁴¹ That was how he reconciled us to God, defeated evil, paid our ransom and achieved our liberation – through his body broken and blood shed on the cross. This was declared an acceptable sacrifice by his resurrection from the dead by which Jesus was vindicated. This is the basis on which we have fellowship and communion with him and one another.

We can only be true children of God through being united with Christ, the only full and sufficient sacrifice for our sins. Otherwise, we remain under his unpropitiated wrath and rightful condemnation.¹⁴² New life in Christ means new values to live by, inspired by his loving sacrifice for us.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Colossians 1:19-20

¹⁴¹ Romans 3:25-26, Isaiah 53:5-6, Hebrews 9:22, John 1:29

¹⁴² Hebrews 10:26-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Ephesians 2:3

¹⁴³ Ephesians 4:17-5:21; Colossians 3:1-4:1

My perspective is that you are living by the world's values, Cosmo. God loved the world, which is why he sent his son into it, but he loves us too much to leave us in sin and has provided us with a model of holiness, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's new life for us in Christ is a holy life, empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁴ There is a sense in which friendship with the world is hatred towards God.¹⁴⁵

John, the 'apostle of love', says,

*'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.'*¹⁴⁶

Throughout this discussion you have accused me of ignorance, judgmentalism, injustice, unkindness, cruelty, biblical shallowness, and being obsessed, unrealistic and fearful. I am allegedly colluding in sustaining a culture of dishonesty and hypocrisy within the church. My teaching and pastoral practice makes me a safeguarding risk in your eyes. You say that in fact I have already lost the argument and should bow the knee to avoid an unpleasant fate.

I think this conversation gives the lie to those who fondly imagine that if only we talk through our differences we can continue on our way together in sweetness and light. My view is that what you are saying is unfaithful to the Bible, to the Gospel, and to Jesus. It is based on love for the world, not love for God and neighbour. I believe what lies behind it is spiritual deception, theological cowardice, and the kind of corrupt worldliness which makes the Church of England, and any other denomination, ripe for God's judgment. Your false teaching is the ultimate safeguarding issue – leading others away from salvation in Christ and enticing people into an idolatrous, twisted form of Christianity. If your view prevails the unity of the Anglican church will be shattered beyond repair.

Because of the unique position of the Established Church, seriously false teaching within the Church of England and the resulting disunity damages the soul of our nation. Judgment on our nation could take many forms, none of which are pleasant to think about. Perhaps God held back this judgment until our faithful Queen Elizabeth II died, so that her eyes would not see the disasters which will unfold on this land.

However, in God there is always hope. I have on occasion lingered at the spot in Broad Street, Oxford, where an iron cross sunk into the pavement marks the place where Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer were burned at the stake for their biblical beliefs. Through their agony they lit a candle of faith which burned brightly for centuries afterwards. How fitting that it was *The Latimer Trust* which published local Rector Vaughan Roberts' faithful response to the Bishop of Oxford's revisionist theology. Latimer was onetime Bishop of Worcester. How sad that the current Bishop of Worcester has chosen to align himself with the Bishop of Oxford's revisionism. The example of Vaughan Roberts, who has demonstrated his faithfulness to Christ as someone who himself experiences same sex

¹⁴⁴ Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 18-19: Romans 15:13: Hebrews 12:14

¹⁴⁵ James 4:4

¹⁴⁶ 1 John 2:15-17

attraction, will in time show, like that of the celebrated Oxford martyrs, how God honours those who honour him.¹⁴⁷

Lord, have mercy. Come Lord Jesus.

Afterword

The discussion in this book raises several questions about the future of the Church of England. Will the numbers of people actively involved in church life nationally continue to decline, so that many parish churches become unviable?

Will the church make an official change to its doctrine of marriage and sex and if so what would the consequences be for its unity, spiritual health and the ability to arrest decline and grow?

Will the church continue to live with the tension of radical disagreement on these issues and keep the official theology of marriage and sex unchanged with only half the church believing in it, and many senior clergy undermining it? And if it manages to do that, what might be the cost in terms of sapped energy for mission, the morale of clergy and lay people, and the integrity of the institution?

For how long can the tension be maintained before something snaps? Will the Church of England follow other Anglican provinces and other denominations in pursuing the revisionist path, and would it then see further sharp decline, church congregations breaking away and very expensive lawsuits over whether they can take their buildings and assets with them?

Would theological compromise be something that orthodox, biblical traditionalists could live with, even if in practice it was workable for a time? If not, could some kind of settlement be achieved that avoids theological compromise between the two parties but allows for some kind of differentiation? Might a 'two province' solution work, with one province within the Church of England following the way Cosmo wants to go, and one province holding to Fido's convictions? How could that happen in practice? Would it be 'schism in all but pension fund' as one speaker said in the recent General Synod meeting.

My own view is that if there was the will for this, the practical difficulties could be overcome. Every diocese within the Church of England would have to be legally dissolved and new dioceses created which, whatever their geographical centres, would align with either province 'A', which would retain the current doctrine and practice or province 'B' which would go ahead with change. Churches would then have to decide to be part of the nearest 'Province A' diocese or the nearest 'province B' diocese. If different individual churches in a parish or in multi-parish benefices make different decisions then those parishes and benefices would have to be dissolved and re-constituted so all the churches in them belong to the same diocese and province. I would favour the province of Canterbury

¹⁴⁷ 1 Samuel 2:30

being province 'A' so that the great majority of the Anglican church worldwide might be in favour of remaining in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. The province of York could be province 'B', free to go the way of the revisionist episcopal churches like America, Canada, Scotland and Wales.

Such a massive change, such as not been seen since the Reformation, would need to have bi-partisan support within General Synod and among the House of Bishops and also agreement from Parliament while the Church of England is the established church. That would be a very tall order, but short of a miraculous revival in this nation which sweeps us all up in genuine love and faith, I cannot see any other option that will save at least half of the Church of England from sliding into apostasy and declining into oblivion, and the Anglican Communion worldwide from breaking up completely.

It is very difficult to see any other solution which might be seen by both sides as a 'win-win'. Like all deep division, any formal separation would not be a neat and tidy matter but a painful and messy divorce. But how can both sides in the church live together? The leading revisionist bishop in the Canterbury Province, Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, has said that he is aiming for a change whereby same sex marriages can take place in church and clergy can be in same sex marriages with no requirement of celibacy. He proposes that clergy or parishes would have to 'opt in' to this and therefore he argues the conscience of 'conservatives' would be protected as they could continue to 'opt out'. But he does not realise that we cannot have two fundamentally incompatible doctrines of something as foundational to the Judaeo-Christian tradition as marriage. By entertaining same sex marriage as an option, our doctrine will be changed and he does not take into account the seriousness of that doctrinal innovation with its rejection of biblical authority. Nor does he see that the chief grievance from the orthodox is not that our tender consciences will be bruised but that we will have become bound together in communion with an institution which is officially apostate and preaches a different Gospel.

If the Church of England implodes, this will not of course mean the end of Christianity in this country, but it will be a heavy blow spiritually. If the number of Christians continue falling, we, like other Western nations, are likely to see further decline in moral standards, a growing gap between rich and poor, increased corruption, family and community disintegration, and the loss of the shared values that underpin our democracy. We could see inter-communal strife, lawlessness and the opportunity for a populist 'saviour figure' to seize power. Other faiths will feel less secure without a viable, established Church of England witnessing to the kind of Christian values which have made the UK the longest running democratic nation and a more attractive place for minority groups (including LGBT+ identifying people) than any other place in the world.

As people lose faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even within the Institutional Church, they put in its place other quasi-religious convictions, such as adherence to LGBT+ ideology.

The people of Israel were taken into exile in Babylon because they refused to heed the warnings of the prophets and continued to worship idols. Faithful and unfaithful alike had to share in that exile. But God was still sovereign and his punishment and discipline was

restorative. All we can do is to trust the goodness of our heavenly Father, and recommit ourselves to following the Jesus revealed in Scripture and who is present in genuine believers through the Holy Spirit.

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