

Journeys into Darkness

A review of *Journeys in Grace and Truth*

Introduction

Journeys in Grace and Truth, edited by Jayne Ozanne, is a collection of ten short chapters by members of the Church of England who are either Evangelical, or in the case of one contributor used to be, and who seek to argue that Evangelicals should re-examine their traditional opposition to homosexual relationships. The authors of these essays are Paul Bayes, Marcus Green, David Ison, Anthony Archer, Jody Stowell, Hayley Matthews, Gavin Collins, David Newman, David Runcorn and James Jones.

In addition to these chapters there is a Foreword by Colin Fletcher (another Evangelical), an appendix on the Open Table Fresh Expression in Liverpool, and a postscript by the Christian broadcaster Cindy Kent.

In this review I shall summarise and respond to each of the pieces in the collection in turn.

I have given this review the title 'Journeys in Darkness' because for reasons that I shall explain in the course of this review I think that the material in this collection represents a series of journeys away from the light and truth of Christ and into the darkness of error.

Foreword: Challenging Times for Evangelicals

In his foreword, 'Challenging times for Evangelicals,' Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester, declares that Evangelicals should be unafraid to enter the debate about sexuality 'without excluding those who disagree with us' (p.xxviii). He argues that 'questions to do with humanity and sexuality' should not be placed 'on an equal footing with the great creedal truths of the Trinity or the humanity and divinity of Christ which we are called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation' (p.xxviii). He states that he is 'saddened and shocked by Evangelical Churches who exclude gay men and women from holding office even when they are un-partnered' (p.xxviii). He pleads for:

'...an openness amongst Evangelicals to discuss a range of different beliefs to their own and to engage biblically with those who hold them without just writing off such people as 'revisionists' or (as described by a previous generation) 'woolly liberals'. The next stage – to acknowledge them as our fellow Evangelicals – may be very difficult indeed for some but is, I think, necessary, both for the health of the Body of Christ and for our mission to a world that is so much in need of the knowledge of his love.' (p.xxix)

Fletcher also writes that he has been:

'...fascinated and challenged by the exposition of Romans 1 which frames the discussion in terms of the sin of idolatry rather than on a focus on homosexual relationships in general. Or again by questions as to exactly what sort of relationships Paul is condemning in 1 Corinthians and how they relate to what they encounter today.' (p.xxix)

Response

1. A good case can be made out for excluding unbiblical teaching on sexuality and those who promote it. As Sam Allberry notes in his book *Is God Anti-Gay?*:

'In Revelation 2 v 20-21 Jesus rebukes the church in Thyatira for their tolerance of a false teacher: 'I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching

she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

This is someone whose teaching leads others in the church into sexual sin. Jesus promises judgment on her and on any of her followers who do not repent (see v22). But the responsibility lies not just with them. The church – including the many who do not follow her – are rebuked for tolerating her. So we are not to tolerate in our churches those whose teaching leads people into sexual sin. They must be confronted, their ministry forbidden, and their teaching refuted. This is a gospel matter. If we allow this to be a matter of acceptable disagreement within our fellowships, Jesus will hold it against us. Some forms of tolerance are sinful.¹

2. The issue of homosexuality is a first order issue like the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of the person of Christ. This is for two reasons. First, sexuality is a creedal issue because it is a matter of being faithful to the first article of the creed, the confession of faith in ‘God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.’ The reason homosexuality is wrong is because it involves a rejection of the way God has created his human creatures to be as set out in Genesis 1 and 2. Accepting homosexual activity means rejecting how God has created us and rejecting faith in God as our creator. Secondly, just as a rejection of the divinity and humanity of Christ means a rejection of the gospel and therefore a rejection of salvation, so also engaging in homosexual activity involves a rejection of the fact that we have been washed, justified and sanctified in the name of Jesus Christ and through his Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11) and thereby a rejection of salvation.

3. It is clearly wrong to exclude people from ministerial office simply because they have same-sex attraction. If they have faith in Christ and their teaching and manner of life are in line with Scripture then they are as qualified to minister as anyone else. However, the issue in terms of their manner of life is not simply whether someone is ‘un-partnered,’ but whether they are sexually abstinent if they are not married to someone of the opposite sex.

4. It is not wrong for orthodox Evangelicals to describe those who argue for an acceptance of homosexual practice as ‘revisionists’ or ‘woolly liberals’ because these terms, however offensive, make the point that those concerned are illegitimately attempting to revise the teaching of Scripture and the historic teaching of the Church based on Scripture and that the reason they are doing so is because they have become unduly influenced by contemporary culture. Acknowledging them as fellow Evangelicals would be wrong because to do so would be to suggest that their views are compatible with the Evangelical commitment to the teaching of the Bible and the orthodox faith of the Church of England (which they are not).

5. It is true that in Romans 1 St. Paul does link homosexual activity and idolatry, but he does not suggest that all homosexual acts are performed by individuals who are idolaters or take place in the context of acts of idol worship. As Tom Wright observes, St. Paul is not:

‘...suggesting that everyone who feels sexually attracted to members of their own sex, or everyone who engages in actual same-sex relations, has got to that point through committing specific acts of idolatry. Nor, again, does he suppose that all those who find themselves in that situation have arrived there by a deliberate choice to give up heterosexual possibilities. Reading the text like that reflects a modern individualism rather than Paul’s larger, all-embracing perspective. Rather, he is talking about the human race as whole. His point is not ‘there are some exceptionally wicked people out there who do these revolting things’ but the fact that such clear distortions of the creator’s male-plus-female intention occur in the world indicates that the human race as a whole is guilty of a

¹ Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?*, London: The Good Book Company, 2013, Kindle edition, Loc 803.

character-twisting idolatry.' He sees the practice of same-sex relations as a sign that the human world in general is out of joint.'²

6. The language that St. Paul uses in 1 Corinthians describes same-sex activity in general. He is not addressing specific forms of such activity. There is nothing to suggest that he has in mind pederastic or exploitative same-sex activity, or that he has in mind only same-sex activity involving adultery or incest, or that takes place in the context of pagan idol worship. What he is describing is thus exactly what we encounter today, people engaging in sexual activity with members of their own sex. It is this which he says contravenes God's law and imperils salvation.³

Chapter 1: Open Table, Open Mind

In his chapter 'Open Table, Open Mind' Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool, begins by drawing attention to what he describes as 'Peter's conversion' to acceptance of the Gentiles as recorded in Acts 10. He notes that such conversion involves listening and declares that 'if we are to resolve our conversation around same-sex issues, then among other things we must listen closely and carefully to the experience of LGBTI people and among them to the experience of LGBTI Christians.' (p.3)

He then describes his experience of encountering the Open Table congregation in Liverpool, a congregation of LGBTI men who 'have expressed the love of Jesus Christ not only to the LGBTI community but also to the wider Church.' (p.5) He also describes how he has spoken with 'gay people who feel called in their own lives to observe, in full, the traditional teaching of the Church and to conform their own behaviour to its teachings.' (p.5) He says that he respects the path they have chosen but feels he must 'also respect the experience of those who feel, after a great deal of prayer and reflection, that their sexuality is a gift from God, to be celebrated as any gift is celebrated.' (p.5)

He finishes by saying that in the light of his own experience, understood in the light of the experience of Peter in Acts 10, he has come to believe 'that we need to change the Church – to make room and extend the table. How we might do so is the matter for our ongoing conversation. But that we should do so is evident for me.' (p.6)

Response

1. It is vital to listen to the experience of people with same-sex attraction. Only in this way will we know how to offer them appropriate pastoral care. However, what Bayes fails to note is that 'Peter's conversion' was brought about by three supernatural acts of revelation, the appearance of the angel to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8, 30-33), the vision given by God to St. Peter (Acts 10:9-16) and the descent of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 10:44-48). Furthermore in the subsequent discussion of the matter at the Council of Jerusalem these experiences were seen to be in accordance with the teaching of Scripture (Acts 15:13-18). It follows that if Bayes wants to appeal to the precedent of Acts he has to show that the acceptance of same-sex activity is (a) supported by supernatural acts of revelation and (b) would be in line with the teaching of Scripture. Neither of these things can in fact be shown.

² Tom Wright, *Romans Part 1*, London: SPCK, 2004, pp. 22-23.

³ See the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 in Anthony C Thiselton 'Can hermeneutics ease the deadlock? Some biblical exegesis and hermeneutical models' in Timothy Bradshaw (ed), *The Way Forward*, London: SCM, 2003, pp.161-173.

2. It is impossible to reconcile the idea that same-sex attraction is a gift from God to be celebrated and the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 1 that it is an expression of the fact that the human race has turned its back on its creator. Both cannot be true. Since our experience is fallible, but Scripture is not, we have to reject the idea that same-sex attraction is a gift to be celebrated.

Chapter 2: An Ordinary Bloke

In his chapter 'An Ordinary Bloke' Marcus Greene, Rector of Steeple Aston, describes his own experience of being gay and Evangelical. He explains how before he could fulfil his vocation to 'serve people and point them to Jesus' (p.11) he had to stop hiding the truth about his sexuality and 'learn how to be truly me, faithfully, worshipfully, Christ-centredly and honestly me.' (p.11)

Greene is critical of the suggestion that orthodoxy has to include both Jesus and 'traditional sexuality.' This is because:

'The true gospel gives us Jesus; a false gospel is always 'Jesus and...' This is why I am sure that many of my friends on the more conservative sides of our sexuality debates don't – can't- mean everything that gets said in the heat of the moment. We come from the same place. That orthodoxy should be 'Jesus and traditional sexuality' is clearly a false gospel, and my conservative friends no more believe in any false gospel than I do.' (p.12)

He also suggests that 'the Jew/Gentile debate is the definitive word on there being no second class Christians, and how that works as a direct correlation for these debates of ours.' (p.12)

Response

1. It is important that people should be honest with God and others about having same-sex attraction. Hiding it does not mean that it will go away, but it does prevent people seeking help from God and his people to handle such attraction in a godly way. The fact that people are now being open about having same-sex attraction is therefore something to be welcomed. However, it is also important that people should not see same-sex attraction as something that defines who they are. Those who are in Christ are a 'new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17) and part of living out this truth is accepting that same-sex attraction is not something that expresses who people truly are, and is something that can be overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit even if it is not in this life entirely taken away.

2. When Evangelicals have said that a false gospel is 'Jesus and' what they have meant is that salvation is rooted entirely in faith in Jesus (John 3:16) and that no other source of salvation should be looked for alongside this. This is irrelevant to the question of whether a traditional view of sexuality should be seen as a benchmark of Christian orthodoxy, which it should be because of its clear basis in what the Bible tells about how God made his human creatures to be.

3. It is true that what the Bible says about the inclusion of the Gentiles is relevant to the current debate about human sexuality. However, what it teaches is that all Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile, are expected to adhere to the basic biblical teaching of sexual abstinence outside marriage and sexual faithfulness within it. That is what the Council of Jerusalem meant, for example, when it said that Gentiles should abstain from 'unchastity' (Acts 15:20 and 29).⁴

⁴ See Richard Bauckham, 'James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13-21)' in Ben Witherington (ed), *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, Cambridge: CUP, 1996, pp.154-184.

Chapter 3: Principles and Prodigals

In his chapter 'Principles and Prodigals' David Ison, Dean of St Paul's, explains how listening to the experience of gay Christians has led him to grow in appreciation of the 'living Christian faith and sacrificial ministries' (p.18) of LGBTI Christians with whom he has worked and worshipped and how he has also:

'...come to see the importance of LGBTI people having access to what I've termed 'the virtues of marriage'. That's not only for the well-being of society through promoting 'permanent, faithful, stable' and nurturing relationships, but also for the personal and spiritual growth of those engaged in committed self-giving love to another person which overflows in love and nurture into the wider community – just as we aspire to in heterosexual marriage.' (p.18)

He also explains how he now sees the biblical texts relating to sexuality. He suggests that we need to reconsider how we should now understand what Genesis 1 and 2 says about marriage given that 'the command to multiply is not the primary calling of the Christian Church – indeed human success in breeding and survival threatens the very viability of our planet.' (p.20). He sees the story of Sodom in Genesis 19 as 'about abuse of powerless strangers' (p.20). He argues that the prohibitions of male homosexuality in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are concerned with 'ritual cleanness' and 'have to be assessed for their ongoing relevance to Christian faith on grounds other than whether or not they offend against ritual purity, given that Christians no longer recognise the ritual law as authoritative in itself' (p.21). He contends that the meaning of the words used in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 is 'disputed' and that their context 'is a fairly conventional list of how the law names idolatrous and godless behaviour' (p.21) Finally he declares that Romans 1:16 ff is 'a description familiar to Jews of moral degeneracy caused by Gentile idolatry' and that Paul's use of the word 'natural' in this context reflects an understanding of what is natural 'we and others may not share' (p.21). He also claims that the Pauline texts need to be read against the background of the early Church's concern 'about Greek cultural practices of older men corrupting boys.' (p.21)

Ison goes on to say that the Church 'can't simply read off verses from the Scriptures as if they can be free from cultural contexts and assumptions, or transfer morality uncritically from one historical or contemporary culture to another' (p.22) and that:

'The challenge facing us is to work through how we can move from where we are as a Church to a more truthful and consistent place, because the fruits of our current views and practices have too often been destructive. LGBTI people have felt unwanted and been excluded from churches into breakdowns or worse. There is a lack of honesty about people's sexuality and situations. There is inconsistency between public and private policy which corrupts church life and brings the Gospel into disrepute.' (p.22)

Response

1. Ison's description of the virtues of marriage makes no reference to the key biblical idea of a man and woman coming together in a 'one flesh' union and is silent about procreation. It also fails to explain how a same-sex sexual relationship could fulfil the traditional criteria of helping people to avoid sexual sin since it is in itself a form of such sin.
2. Concern about population control does not mean that Christians are entitled to say that the mandate to 'be fruitful and multiply' Genesis 1:28 has been cancelled or that it is right to call an inherently non-procreative form of relationship marriage.

3. The story in Genesis 19 does involve the abuse of strangers, but the story fits into a wider section of Genesis running from Genesis 18 to Genesis 20 which consists of a series of stories to do with sexual sin and its punishment and the account of what happened at Sodom fits into this framework by focusing on the sexual nature of what was proposed. In order to make it clear that Sodom was a gravely sinful place all the texts says is that its inhabitants wanted to have sex with men (Genesis 19:5). That in itself constitutes the wicked act (Genesis 19:6) which illustrates the more general wickedness for which Sodom, Gomorrah, and two neighboring cities are going to be destroyed.

4. The claim that the prohibition of male same-sex activity in Leviticus was due to a concern about ritual cleanliness misunderstands the reason for the prohibition, which is to do with respecting God's ordering of creation. As the American Old Testament scholar Robert Davidson puts it, the rationale for the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20, including the prohibition of homosexuality:

'...rests upon the foundational principles of creation order in Genesis 1:27-28: the creation of all humanity in the image of God as 'male and female,' unique and distinct from the rest of God's creation, and the command to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.' These principles describe the order and structure of humanity in two relationships: to God and to society. All the Laws of Leviticus may be understood as violations of these principles. The activities proscribed in Lev 18 and 20 are described as 'abominations' because homosexual practice violates the divine order of gender set forth in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.'⁵

It is because these prohibitions have to do with the permanent order of creation that they were seen as still relevant by the New Testament writers and remain relevant today.

5. As Tom Wright notes, the terms *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* used in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 'have been much debated, but...experts have now established, clearly refer to the practice of male homosexuality.' The two terms (which have a reference back to the prohibitions in Leviticus) 'refer respectively to the passive or submissive partner and the active or aggressive one, and Paul places both roles on his list of unacceptable behaviour.'⁶

6. It is true that the lists of vices in Romans, I Corinthians and 1 Timothy do echo existing Jewish vice lists, but they are not simply unreflective carbon copies of earlier material. They form an integral part of the letters in which they occur and undoubtedly reflect St. Paul believed and which as Christians we should therefore believe too.

7. When St. Paul refers to same-sex relations as 'unnatural' in Romans 1:26-27, what he is referring to is what goes against the way God created the world. Both the fact that St. Paul's whole argument in Romans 1:18ff is about how human beings have turned away from the evidence for God and his will presented by the created order and the numerous intertextual echoes of Genesis 1 and 2 in these verses indicate that he has the creation accounts in mind. Furthermore, the standard Jewish and Greco-Roman critique of same-sex relations was that they went against the created order and were therefore 'unnatural' (which is what St. Paul says in Romans 1:26-27).⁷

8. These two converging pieces of evidence point to the fact that what Paul thinks is wrong with both female and male same-sex activity is that it is a violation of the created order laid down by God as witnessed to by Genesis 1 and 2 and that it involves a refusal to accept the witness of creation in

⁵ Robert Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh – Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007, p.155,

⁶ Tom Wright, *1 Corinthians*, London: SPCK, 2003, p.69.

⁷ See Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, pp.254-270.

that it entails human beings ignoring the obvious fact that male and female human beings are so designed physically as to be sexually complementary. It is this latter point, alongside the strong Jewish dislike of homosexual relations as a distinctively Gentile form of vice, which explains why Paul chooses to use them as his prime example of the result of human beings turning away from God. If we say we do not share St. Paul's view of what is natural then what we are saying is that we do not accept his reading of the creation accounts in Genesis and we would then have to explain why, as Christians, we do not accept it.

9. There is nothing in the language used in either Romans or 1 Corinthians or 1 Timothy that suggests that what the early Church was really concerned about was 'Greek cultural practices of older men corrupting boys.' What we find instead is a general rejection of both gay and lesbian same sex activity on the grounds that it goes against the created order and is forbidden by God's law.

10. It is true that we have to read what is said in the Scriptures in its historical context and then work out how to apply what it says today. However, in the case of what the New Testament says about homosexuality the transfer is not difficult. The New Testament says that both gay and lesbian sexual relationships in general are wrong because they violate the created order and are prohibited by God's law as a result. If this true then it is as relevant today as it was when the New Testament was written.

11. It is also true that the Church needs to move towards a 'more truthful and consistent place' in regard to same-sex relationships. However, what this needs to mean is not an acceptance of such relationships, but that the Church is consistent in saying the such relationships are wrong, but that people who experience same-sex attraction are loved by God and will be supported by the Church as they seek to live with this attraction in a way that honours biblical teaching about the way God has created them as male and female human beings and calls them to live in consequence.

Chapter 4: A Lifetime of Learning

In his chapter 'A Lifetime of Learning' Anthony Archer, a Lay Reader and member of General Synod, explains how his view of homosexuality has changed due to his getting to know gay and lesbian Christians and his study of the biblical material.

He then goes on to look at the texts normally seen as forbidding same-sex relationships. On the Old Testament he argues that the stories of Sodom (Genesis 19) and Gibeon (Judges 19) are about 'abusive sexual acts perpetrated on outsiders for reasons of both lust and hatred and cannot be used as basis for a 'blanket condemnation of loving, faithful same-sex partnerships' (p.28) and that 'many would assert that the Levitical prohibitions were purely a reference to the idolatrous practices of the pagan people who had previously inhabited the land.' (p.28) On the New Testament he says that Paul's concern in Romans 1 'was for men and women naturally attracted to each other yet abandoning that attraction for reasons of idolatry. The presenting issue was the idolatry not the homosexual acts, which were one of its consequences.' (p.29) He also says that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 are vice lists used to challenge an 'anything goes' version of Christianity rather than a 'nuanced or detailed moral analysis of particular sexual behaviour.' (p.29)

Archer further notes that getting to know LGBTI people has convinced him that 'their sexual orientation is the way God has created them' and that God did not do this 'to make an example of them or compel them to a life of forced abstinence.' (p.30). He asks:

Why would a loving God want to withhold his blessing from one particular group of people? What conceivable harm is done by two people of the same sex entering into a relationship which they

hope and pray will be lasting, covenanted and monogamous, in the same way as a couple of the opposite sex?’ (p.30)

As Archer sees it, the energy currently spent on debating bible verses should be ‘directed instead towards a workable theology for same-sex relationships’ and that what is needed is ‘a Church where all, with integrity, can embrace our LGBTI brothers and sisters in Christ, rather than one where the unspoken issues continue to cloud the picture and a lack of honesty permeates relationships between those holding the starkly different viewpoints.’ (p.32)

Response

1. Neither Genesis 19 nor Judges 19 say anything about the psychological disposition of the men of Sodom or Gibeah. What they do tell us is that they desired to have sex with another man and that this desire was as such sinful. What we see in these verses is in line with all the other verses referring to homosexuality in the Bible which reject homosexual activity as such without asking about the nature of the sexual relationship involved. There is thus precisely a ‘blanket condemnation’ of such activity which would cover even loving and faithful same-sex partnerships (which were known in the ancient world).

2. As we have noted, the motivation for the prohibition of male same-sex relationships in Leviticus is their violation of the created order. There is nothing in Leviticus to suggest that same-sex relationships were rejected because of their association with idolatry. As Michael Brown notes, to say this is to get the approach taken in Leviticus and the rest of the Old Testament the wrong way round:

‘...homosexual practice was not considered sinful because it was found in the context of pagan idolatry (or, put another way, it was not considered sinful only if it occurred in conjunction with idol worship). Rather, the opposite is true: according to the Old Testament, because idol worshipping pagans were so degraded in their sexual practices, they even included homosexual acts in their temple rituals.’⁸

3. There is nothing in the language of Romans 1:26-27 that refers to people who are naturally heterosexual. As we have seen, ‘unnatural’ refers not to behaviour which is unnatural for the people concerned, but to behaviour which is contrary to the way God created the human race.

4. As we have also seen, there is nothing in Romans to suggest that they desired members of their own sex as a result of specific acts of idolatry. Furthermore, in Romans St. Paul objects to same-sex relationships not because they are idolatrous, but, as we have just said, because they are against the created order.

5. It is true that 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy do not give us a ‘nuanced or detailed moral analysis of particular sexual behaviour.’ However what they do tell us is that the Levitical prohibition of male homosexual activity still applies to Christians and that such activity excludes people from God’s kingdom and is incompatible with the new identity that Christians have through Christ and his Spirit. What St. Paul says in Romans 1:26 indicates that lesbian sexual activity is equally wrong.

6. It is difficult to know why Archer thinks that experience of meeting LGBTI people shows that they have been created with a sexual orientation towards members of their own sex. All that we can learn from meeting people is they have a sexual attraction to members of their own sex. This cannot tell us that this is way God made them to be and in fact this idea is ruled out by two considerations.

⁸ Michael Brown, *Can you be Gay and Christian?*, Lake Mary: Frontline, 2014, p.122.

The first is the witness of nature which tells us that human beings are created with sexual organs that are designed for sexual activity with the other sex and the procreation of children as a result of this. In Romans 1 St. Paul sees homosexual activity as a rejection of this visible witness of the body just as idolatry is a rejection of the witness of the creation as a whole to God.⁹ The second is the witness of the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 which tell us that God created human beings as male and female and ordained that they should relate sexually to the other sex in marriage in a way that would lead to the procreation of children.

7. No one has ever suggested God created people with same-sex attraction so that he could make an example of them or so that they would be forced to live a life of sexual abstinence. The Bible does not say that, nor has the Christian tradition. What the Bible does say is that same-sex attraction, just like other forms of ungodly desire, is the result of God allowing people to reap the consequences of being part of a race that has turned its back on its creator (see Romans 1:18-32). Same-sex attraction is a result of the fall not of creation.

8. There is no reason to think that God has withheld his blessing from those with same-sex attraction. Just like all other human beings they are created in God's image and likeness and are capable of rightly relating to God and dwelling forever in his kingdom.

9. The harm done by two people entering into a same-sex sexual relationship, even if it is 'lasting, covenanted and monogamous' is that they are proposing to live in a way that involves a rejection of the way that human beings were created to be and therefore a rejection of the God who made them. As C S Lewis once said, 'There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."¹⁰ Those who enter into a same-sex relationship in the face of the witness of nature and Scripture are refusing to say to God 'thy will be done' and therefore face the danger of God eventually saying to them 'thy will be done' with the result that they are cut off from him for ever.

Furthermore, even if their relationship is beneficial to them, temporally speaking, their choice will contribute to the public acceptance of homosexuality and therefore to an increased number of people engaging in a homosexual lifestyle. This will cause harm because, as a large number of studies have shown, a homosexual lifestyle is linked to greatly increased incidence of serious physical and mental ill health.¹¹

10. It is difficult to see how the development of 'a workable theology for same-sex relationships' could be separated from a continuing debate about the meaning of verses of the Bible. How could you judge whether such a theology was 'workable' in the sense of enabling people to live rightly before God without engaging in a debate about whether or not it was in accordance with what is taught in particular biblical verses?

11. There does need to be integrity and honesty in the way in which LGBTI people are treated in the Church, but those who hold to an orthodox biblical position would not be acting with honesty or integrity unless they continued to hold that same-sex sexual activity is sinful and therefore something that faithful Christians must abstain from and sought to persuade those with same-sex attraction that this is the case.

⁹ See Gagnon, op.cit. pp.254-270.

¹⁰ C S Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, Glasgow: Collins, 1974, pp.66-67.

¹¹ For this last point see, for example, Jeffrey Satinover, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, Ch.3, Gagnon, op. cit. pp. 471-483 and Gabriele Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution*, Kettering, Life Site Press, 2015, pp.146-151.

Chapter 5: Evangelicals, Gender and the New Jerusalem

In her chapter 'Evangelicals, Gender and the New Jerusalem' Jody Stowell, Vicar of St. Michael and All Angels, Harrow Weald, declares that most ordained Evangelical women 'have a sense of having already risked enough by being ordained, especially when their tribal family is ambivalent about the reality of their existence' and yet they also 'know first-hand that we cannot close the door on revisiting Scripture in the direction of fuller inclusion. We might say that we are not yet convinced, but we can never with integrity say that the matter is concluded.' (p.35)

She goes on to say that 'the primary biblical text that I look to with regard to gender and sexuality is found in Genesis 1-3.' This is 'the lens through which I look at the rest of the biblical narrative.' (p.35) Genesis 2, she says, suggests that 'both genders are full representatives of humanity' and that 'in order to know ourselves more fully, we have to engage in a meeting of persons with other human beings' (p.35) However, in her view:

'...it is not a *necessary* interpretation of the text that we might find a deeper knowledge of ourselves *only* in the face of someone of the opposite sex. Just as in fact it is not a necessary interpretation of the text that we must all marry in order to have that meeting of persons through which we know our-self better.' (p.36)

She also suggests that we should move away from the Western Christian idea of wanting to return to Eden in favour of the Eastern Christian approach of looking towards the new humanity that is to come. She suggests that it is not a necessary interpretation of Scripture to believe that we will retain gender in the world to come and that 'there is a possibility that the conversation that is now being conducted on gender and sexuality, particularly with regards to the fluidity of gender and the new knowledge we have about intergender conditions, is going to show us something of the *new* humanity towards which we are headed.' (p.37) As she sees it, this means that 'while the first human order teaches us something and is significant, I am not absolutely convinced that it is the ultimate 'end' or form of humanity.' (p.37) What she thinks we can know for certain, and what constrains our sexual ethics, is that 'God is good' and there is an 'imperative upon us to encounter other human beings as those made in the image of God.' (p.37)

Stowell also reflects on what the biblical stories about Jesus have to say about the issue of sexuality. She declares that the stories in Mark 7 and elsewhere where Jesus tells the religious that they are using Scripture 'to perpetuate their own system, their own status quo, their own worldview' challenge her 'desire to belong as the lens through which I interpret Scripture.' (p.38) She further notes that the story of Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath in Mark 3 'speaks about those who refuse to look again at Scripture and in so doing who grieve Jesus by their hardness of heart.' (p.38) She says she found this passage 'disturbing because it spoke to my own desire to stay silent and wait for someone else to speak, and I found it liberating because I finally knew that I would rather risk being wrong with a soft heart, than to grieve Jesus with my hard heart.' (p.38) 'These stories' she states, 'challenge my desire for my own comfort, against the need to do the hard work of thinking through this issue and then to have an open conversation about it.' (p.38)

Stowell concludes her essay by declaring:

'As Evangelicals I believe we desperately need to be allowed to have the conversation. Even if we do that at risk of being 'expelled' then we must still do it anyway.' (p.38)

Response

1. It is not clear why ordained Evangelical women 'cannot close the door on revisiting Scripture in the direction of fuller inclusion.' Holding that it is legitimate to interpret Scripture in a way that permits the ordination of women does not logically entail holding that it may be legitimate to interpret Scripture in a way that supports same-sex relationships. The one does not follow from the other. It is a perfectly coherent position to hold to say that Scripture permits women to exercise ministry, but does not permit homosexual activity.

2. The Christian tradition has never said that Genesis teaches us that we can only find deeper knowledge of ourselves through our relationships with those of the opposite sex or that we all need to marry in order to know ourselves better. What it has said is that Genesis teaches that God created human beings as male and female and instituted marriage as a permanent and exclusive sexual union between one man and one woman.

3. It is true that the Bible teaches that the bodies we will possess in the world to come will be both in continuity with our present bodies yet also different (see 1 Corinthians 15:34-49). However, there is nothing in the traditions of either Eastern or Western Christianity or in the teaching of the Bible to support the idea that we are moving towards a 'new humanity' in which the distinction between male and female will no longer exist. If Jesus' resurrection is the pattern for ours and if he was resurrected as a male human being, it follows that we likewise will be raised to new life as the sexed human beings God created us to be.

4. It is important that we do not allow a desire to belong to determine our reading of Scripture and that we avoid grieving Jesus by 'hardness of heart.' However, it is also important that we pause before accepting the idea of an 'open conversation' about sexuality.

To begin with, we need to ensure that the conversation partners in any such conversation include not only present day Christians, but also those Christians of past generations whose voices are available to us through the Christian theological tradition. This is for two reasons. First, they are still part of the Church, still members of the 'communion of saints,' and therefore their voices deserve a hearing. Secondly, as C S Lewis once put it, we need 'to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds' in order to prevent ourselves from being led astray by the errors that are peculiar to our own time.¹²

In addition, we need to ask what the purpose of any such conversation should be. Simply sharing ideas will not be helpful unless the end result is that those taking part in the conversations gain a deeper apprehension of biblical truth and a deeper commitment to living out that truth in everyday life. The purpose of conversations therefore needs to be to achieve this goal and thought would need to be given about how to bring this about.

The problem we face at the moment is that what those calling for conversations really want is the opportunity to challenge the traditional approach to sexuality and for their approach to be accepted as part of a legitimate diversity of theological opinion within the Church. When Stowell talks about the risk of being 'expelled' this is because she knows that the ideas she wants to put forward go against existing Evangelical orthodoxy, but she wants them to be heard anyway. The issue that has to be addressed is how to have a conversation with those who want to put forward unorthodox ideas without skewing the conversations from the start by giving such ideas parity of status with the

¹² C S Lewis 'On reading old books' at http://jollyblogger.typepad.com/jollyblogger/2005/10/c_s_lewis_on_th.html

beliefs about sexuality that Evangelicals, and indeed the Christian tradition as a whole have held since the earliest days of the Church,¹³ and which therefore have the burden of proof on their side.

Chapter 6: Ever, Honestly, Truly Me

In her chapter 'Ever, Honestly Truly Me' Hayley Matthew, Rector of Holy innocents, Fallowfield describes her journey from her conversion to her present home within Liberal Catholicism. She records how after a failed attempt to deliver her from homosexuality she came to know:

'...that God was and is and had been with me all along, and that the sleepless nights lying awake worrying about having something evil inside me was a lie, and that it was the lie that was evil and controlling and dangerous, hedging me about with unGodly fear. At that moment, Jesus set me free indeed, although it took some years for me to live in the fullness of that freedom and more especially, to feel able to openly express it.' (p.42)

She goes on to declare that:

'Aside from doctrinal papers, spiritual seeking and theological and doctrinal rigour, if I am honest there has been one key factor in continuing to know God's favour – at every point where I have suppressed, denied, hidden, been ashamed of or rejected a non-heteronormative sexual orientation, God's presence has simply disappeared from my life. No matter how faithful, active and honest I am in all other realms, the denial of personal relationship and the *possibility* of love (whether or not it is either found or acted upon) has culminated in a denial of God. This inextricable link also works the other way round. When I embrace the LGBTI community in work or ministry, in friendship and/or relationship, when I allow myself to love (should there ever be occasion to) - God's grace and Spirit is almost overwhelming. Few and far between as moments of genuine love for me, from one adult to another, have been, I have known in those moments God's love for me in a way that I have never experienced at any other time.' (p.44)

She also records that alongside this experience of God's love, 'I have felt the Lord's sadness, over another suicide, another broken relationship, another person afraid to be themselves, or one who feels they must 'decide' between Church and their own mental health, for no-one can continually deny or fracture themselves without risking a serious impact on their health and wellbeing.' (p.44)

Matthew also argues that the 'world has changed' because 'We have entered into a journey about our genetic and psychological development over many thousands of years, and now are far more aware of how we have come to understand ourselves as spiritual and physical and often sexual beings.' (p.44) She acknowledges that it is hard to have one's certitudes shaken, but comments that:

'Jesus Christ is the *only* true and living Word. What 'Word' simply repeats itself over and over ad infinitum without ever listening to the voice of the beloved or entering into the deepest of dialogues where we seek to know one another, to learn and grow in one another's sunshine and shadow? Not the Jesus I know, that's for sure.' (p.44)

Response

1. This essay is focussed on Matthew's experience and does not make any attempt to show how this experience coheres with the teaching of Scripture or the Christian tradition. We are simply expected to accept her account of her own experience as normative.

¹³ For this point see S Donald Fortson III and Rollin G Grams, *Unchanging Witness – The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition*, Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.

2. Matthew seems to suggest that the for someone with same-sex attraction to seek to live in accordance with traditional Christian teaching must mean 'risking a serious impact on their health and wellbeing.' However, there are plenty of counter examples of people with same-sex attraction who are living perfectly healthy and happy lives that are in line with traditional Christian teaching.¹⁴

3. It is difficult to know what Matthew actually means when she talks about Jesus not simply repeating himself ad infinitum but rather 'listening to the voice of the beloved or entering into the deepest of dialogues where we seek to know one another, to learn and grow in one another's sunshine and shadow.' What in specific terms is she talking about here? Where does the biblical witness to Jesus fit into the picture?

Chapter 7: A Credible Witness

In his chapter 'A Credible Witness' Gavin Collins, Archdeacon of the Meon, explains how he has come to move away from the traditional Evangelical position over sexuality.

He argues that we have to accept that:

'...the plain and evident reality is that for a significant number of people today the deepest 'connection' on a human level, emotionally, psychologically, relationally and physically – is found in someone of the same sex, rather than someone of the opposite sex. This is a reality that the Church needs to acknowledge, and work out a coherent, defensible and pastoral response to.' (p. 50)

Furthermore, he says, 'as an Evangelical, it is my firm commitment and conviction that that response must be shaped by Scripture, and that we are not free either to bend or to ignore elements of Scripture just because we find them unpalatable or uncomfortable in the context of our contemporary world.' (p.50)

Collins finds a solution to the tension between these two realities by turning to 1 Corinthians 7 and Matthew 19. In 1 Corinthians 7, he declares, Paul teaches that 'the reality of the human sex drive is such that celibacy is not a realistic or sustainable option for many, perhaps the majority of people, and that is therefore better for them to go ahead and be married.' (p.51) In Matthew 19 Jesus 'makes exactly the same point, and says that, while celibacy and singleness may be the better option from a Kingdom perspective, 'not everyone can accept this...but only those to whom it has been given... The one who can accept this should accept it.' (vv11-12).' (p.51)

In the light of these two passages, Collins declares that he cannot see:

'...how it can possibly be a Biblically valid standpoint for the Church to require a standard of behaviour from same-sex attracted Christians that in both of these key passages the Bible itself says many/most of us who are heterosexual are inevitably not able to live up to ourselves – Jesus' teaching on logs and specks in the eye come forcibly to mind here. Indeed, I would go further and say that for the Church to impose a forced celibacy or require heterosexual marriage as the only valid options for someone with a deep rooted same-sex attractedness who does not have the gift/strength of celibacy, is both practically and pastorally unrealistic. In my opinion it is doomed to promote either sin, in the form of immorality or promiscuity, or else dissonance, psychological dishonesty and potentially serious psychological harm.' (p.51)

¹⁴ See for example the stories at <http://www.livingout.org/stories>

Collins also goes on to argue that in the light of the fact that Scripture itself is unclear 'as to what constitutes a valid marriage' (p.52) and the fact that the Church now re-marries those who have been divorced and where there is no likelihood of children 'it has therefore become a logical and right step to move away also from third traditional plank of 'one man and one woman' and to concentrate instead on the inherent qualities that mark out Christian marriage, i.e. love, faithfulness and commitment' (p.52)

Seeking to hold together the teaching about marriage in Ephesians 5 with 1 Corinthians 7 Collins says that:

'...as a Church we need to stand alongside and support all couples who desire to live in loving faithful commitment. This is true whether they be heterosexual or homosexual. In doing so I believe we enable all to see more of those core characteristics of God – love faithfulness and commitment – manifested in our world today. As we do so, we will in turn enable the world to see more of God's presence and to know more of God's love in our midst.' (p.55)

As Collins sees it sexual ethics should not be seen as a 'first order' issue. 'Whilst there are clear disagreements between theologians and Biblical scholars as to the meaning a right application of the various key Bible passages, I simply fail to see how they can be legitimately taken as grounds for writing someone off as having strayed beyond the fold.' (p.54)

Response

1. Collins is right to identify the need to develop a 'coherent, defensible and pastoral response' to the existence of people with same-sex attraction and to say that such a response must be shaped by Scripture. However, his appeal to 1 Corinthians 7 and Matthew 19 as providing a biblical basis for the acceptance of same-sex relationships will not work.

Given what he says about same-sex activity in Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:10 it is inconceivable that St. Paul would have said that the advice he gives the unmarried in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 and 25-40 means that it is right for people into same-sex relationships. For St. Paul same-sex activity is a sinful form of behaviour from which Christians have been delivered (1 Corinthians 6:11) he would not therefore have advised Christians to return to it.

On Matthew 19:11-12 Allberry is correct when he writes that:

'Eunuchs were the celibates of their day, and Jesus indicates that their celibacy might be the result of birth, or human intervention, or a voluntary decision to forego marriage. Whatever its cause, that Jesus goes there right after his disciples have balked at the commitment and seriousness of marriage shows that Jesus regards it as the only alternative.

One marries, or remains single.

There is no third possibility, whether of a homosexual partnership or a heterosexual unmarried partnership. As far as Jesus is concerned, the godly alternatives before us are (heterosexual) marriage or celibacy.'¹⁵

2. Collins is right to note the dangers of promiscuity and psychological dissonance among those with same-sex attraction. However, his solution is to promote behaviour which the Bible describes as sinful, which is not an acceptable Christian approach. The only legitimate Christian approach is to work pastorally with people to help them to either come to terms with being single or enter into

¹⁵ Allberry, op.cit, Loc. 414-424.

marriage with the knowledge that continuing same-sex attraction may be something that they have to deal with. As countless examples show, both of these alternatives can work (they are not doomed to fail as Collins suggests) and they are the only alternatives that are compatible with biblical teaching.

3. It is not true that the Bible is unclear about what constitutes a valid marriage. As Genesis 2:24 teaches and as Jesus reiterated (Matthew 19:3-7) marriage is an exclusive and permanent union between two people of the opposite sex. It is also the means by which the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' is rightly fulfilled.' The Church may or may not be right to re-marry divorced couples, but the fact that it does so does not mean that it no longer believes that marriage is intended to be life or that it allows people to enter into marriage on a temporary basis. Similarly, the fact that it marries couples where there is no likelihood of children does not signify a change in what marriage involves. As three American writers put it 'True marriage can exist even where children do not come of the union, but it always remains the type of union that would naturally be fulfilled by children, were they to come.'¹⁶ The Church of England has thus remained loyal to the biblical understanding of marriage and there is reason why it should depart from it by abandoning the basic requirement that marriage should be between a man and a woman.

4. It is true that 'love, faithfulness and commitment' are characteristics of marriage, but that does not mean that the presence of these characteristics makes a relationship a marriage. The relationships between Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan possessed all three characteristics but neither of these relationships was a marriage. Similarly, two sisters might demonstrate love, faithfulness and commitment without being married. The Church cannot therefore focus on love, faithfulness and commitment and simply set aside the biblical teaching that marriage is a permanent exclusive relationship between two people of the opposite sex.

5. The Church cannot rightly support loving and faithful same-sex sexual relationships, because the fact that they are loving and faithful does not cancel out the fact that they are sinful. As Allberry notes, St. Paul's response to the illicit relationship recorded in 1 Corinthians 5 is instructive in this connection:

'...as much for what he doesn't say as for what he does say. There is no question about whether the couple in question love each other. Paul does not ask about their level of commitment or whether they are being faithful. That is not the issue. Whether or not they are in a long term relationship is beside the point; the fact remains that it is wrong and should not be happening.

Paul does not distinguish between faithful illicit relationships and profligate illicit relationships, as if the latter are out of bounds but the former might just squeak in by virtue of their faithfulness. Consistency and faithfulness while sinning in no way diminish the sin. Paul calls for the church member in question to be expelled from the fellowship, and for the whole church to express remorse at what has happened (1 Corinthians 5:2). Faithfulness demonstrated in an otherwise prohibited relationship does not make it less sinful.'¹⁷

6. As noted above in response to Colin Fletcher, sexuality is a first order issue involving faith in the first article of the Creed and the possibility of loss of salvation. Someone who argues in favour of same-sex relationships has moved outside the orthodox fold in a serious way.

¹⁶ Patrick Lee, Robert P George and Gerald Bradley, 'Marriage and Procreation: Avoiding Bad Arguments' at <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2011/03/2637/>

¹⁷ Allberry, op.cit, Loc.377-386.

Chapter 8: Desire, Intimacy and Discipleship

In his chapter 'Desire, Intimacy and Discipleship' David Newman, Archdeacon of Loughborough, agrees with Gavin Collins that 1 Corinthians 7 and Mathew 19 make clear that chastity is not 'a universal gift' (p.58). He also draws attention to the words of the *Book of Common Prayer* that marriage was given 'for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body' and comments that 'these ancient guides were clear-sighted about the potential of sexual desire to wreak havoc with human relationships and leave a trail of destruction in family and community life. So they counselled those who could not guarantee their self-control to seek out marriage.' (p.59)

He then goes on to argue that:

'If we live in a society that constantly arouses sexual desire, and if for some that desire is felt towards those of the same-sex, and if celibacy is a gift given only to some, then it seems to me that there is a major injustice if the remedy offered to the heterosexual of channelling that sexual desire into a faithful committed relationship is denied to the gay person. It is my serious pastoral encounters with a number of gay people that have helped me to feel the force of this. They want to be true both to the people they feel themselves to be and to live out a disciplined and responsible discipleship. A Church that simply offers the option of celibacy is failing to understand what they feel and need, which is to offer a sustainable and potentially holy way of life comparable to heterosexual marriage. Of course some gay people have embraced the path of celibacy and found fulfilment and peace in that choice. I know such people who have served God with distinction and courage. However, I do not believe either from the Scriptures or from my own experience that such is a calling for all gay people.' (p.60)

Newman goes on to note that 'one of the key interpretative challenges' that has arisen in recent times is to determine what the biblical references to homosexual behaviour actually refer to:

'Are the 'practising homosexuals' of 1 Corinthians 6:9 or 1 Timothy 1:10 in any way comparable to those living in faithful and committed relationships today? In the same way when looking at the connection in Romans 1 between idolatrous worship, same-sex relationships, and every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity it is hard to see how the behaviour Paul is referring to equates to that of responsible gay Christians today. Is it not far more likely that promiscuity and religious prostitution are his actual targets?' (pp.60-61)

As Newman sees it:

'If loving and faithful same-sex relationships are a comparatively new phenomenon in the way they are lived out today, then we are not going to find much direct and explicit discussion of them in Scripture. However, what we can observe in Scripture is the process of the inclusion of new theological, pastoral and ethical insights, which in turn leads to the acceptance of new groups of people.' (p.61)

Newman sees this process at work in the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and views the Council as providing a model for the Church today:

'The Council of Jerusalem reached a point of decision about God's will for the Gentiles resolving not to make it unnecessarily difficult for them to join the Church. I look for similar grace-filled wisdom in relation to same-sex relationships. I love the phrase by which the apostles express their conclusions – 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...' The words convey a measured wisdom and authority which reflect the fruit of an attentiveness to God combined with a mature human judgment. They

had reflected on the new reality before them, listened to the Scriptures and discovered a way of grace that was permissive yet responsible, enabling yet disciplined and which opened them to an understanding and experience of God and the Scriptures that went far beyond their previous awareness.’ (p.63)

He finishes his essay by declaring that ‘Sex is one of God’s good gifts and it is a challenge today to keep it at the service of loving relationships. I hope that the church can move forward with imagination, integrity and grace-filled wisdom to enable that to happen for all God’s people.’ (p.63)

Response

1. The points previously made in response to Collins in relation to 1 Corinthians 7 and Matthew 19 also apply to Newman’s appeal to these passages. In addition, the authors of the *Book of Common Prayer* would certainly not have seen entering into a homosexual relationship as a ‘remedy against sin’ since they would have known from the Bible that such relationship was itself sinful. It would have been like saying you can avoid sin by committing adultery.

2. It is not an ‘injustice’ for someone with same-sex attraction not to be able to channel their sexual desire into a ‘faithful committed relationship.’ The classic definition of justice going back to Plato is ‘to give each his due’ and it is not owed to those with same-sex attraction that they should be given the opportunity to enter into a sexual relationship with someone of their own sex. This because like all other human beings they were created by God to have sex only in the context of heterosexual marriage. According to the Bible sex outside of this context is sin, and no one is owed the opportunity to sin.

Not only would facilitating such a relationship not be an act of justice towards the people concerned, but it would also be an act of injustice towards God since it would deprive him of the obedience which is his due.

3. What people want and what they need are not the same thing. Those with same-sex attraction may want to be in a sexual relationship with someone. However, this does not mean that such a relationship is what they need. Like all human beings what they truly need is to live in obedience to God and that involves sexual abstinence outside heterosexual marriage. Newman claims that neither Scripture nor his own experience supports the idea that sexual abstinence is called for outside marriage, but he provides no evidence to support this departure from the universal teaching of the Christian Church.

4. As we have previously noted, the language used in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10 and Romans 1:26-27 is not language that refers specifically to promiscuity or prostitution. It is language which covers all forms of same-sex sexual activity, including loving and committed same-sex relationships which were a phenomenon that those in the first century would have been aware of.¹⁸

5. The decision made by the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 does provide a model for responding to the current dispute about sexuality, but it does not point us in the direction Newman wants to go. The Council made a decision on the basis of what the Bible taught and, as previously noted in response to Marcus Green, part of what it decided was that all Christians, Gentiles as well as Jews, should observe the biblical prohibition of *porneia* (sexual activity outside heterosexual marriage). Following the precedent of the Council would thus mean continuing to say no to same-sex activity.

¹⁸ See Gagnon, op.cit. pp.348-361.

Newman would of course say that we are facing a new situation and thus need to make a new decision, but he does not explain wherein the newness lies. Same-sex relationships and even same-sex marriages were already known in biblical times, so what is new?

Chapter 9: Where You Go I Will Go

In his chapter 'Where You Go I Will Go' the author and speaker David Runcorn stresses the importance of reading the Bible 'wisely', listening carefully to the diversity of voices and texts that the Bible contains.

He then declares:

'When I read the Bible alongside the contemporary phenomenon of faithful, committed same-sex relationships I hold two interpretative principles in mind. Firstly, 'Homosexuality' and 'Sexuality' are modern concepts. The words themselves are only found from the 19th century onwards. Bringing them into engagement with ancient texts where they are not known needs to be done with great care. Secondly, where the Bible texts refer to same-sex sexual activity and condemns it – as they always do – we must be as clear as possible about the concerns, contexts and intentions of the original writers. That means asking 'What precisely is being condemned here and why? And 'what relevance does this text, and its apparent meaning, hold for understanding the contemporary expression of faithful committed same-sex love as we know it today? My conviction continues to grow that when that happens the texts no longer support the conservative reading on same-sex attraction in the way so long presumed.' (p.69)

Runcorn then goes on to look at the story of Ruth and notes that in that story Ruth's commitment to Naomi meant that she crossed 'dangerous boundaries', and became 'a bridge builder' and 'modelled a different way of being and belonging' (p. 69) He then further notes that Ruth's words to Naomi 'Where you go I will go, your people shall be my people, your God, my God' (Ruth 1:16-17):

'...are often read at weddings – they were at mine. They said what we wanted to say to each other. But they are not about marriage. We were borrowing from another expression of committed relationship to express what we aspired to in our own.

I want to reciprocate that borrowing. I want other expressions of committed relationship to receive the same support, delight and gifts that I know my marriage has received. I long for the sustaining of the varied vocations to faithful, human loving in our world for the enriching of the whole. I am so grateful to those who, like Ruth, have offered, stayed, persisted, endured rejection and isolation in a socially and ethically conservative Church and isolation in a socially and ethically conservative Church and so have become sources of renewing, partnership and grace to all. And I mourn those for whom the cost was too great.' (p.69)

Developing the thought of a variety of different forms of relationship, Runcorn adds:

'It seems to me that if, in the Kingdom for which we pray daily, there is neither male nor female nor, ultimately, marriage, then other ways of relating and belonging are opened up. Even the creation injunction to 'Be fruitful and multiply' is no longer for understanding as only procreation within heterosexual marriage. Sex is not just about fertility and children. And if celibacy (as only very briefly expounded in the new Testament: 1 Cor7) can now be chosen as a fruitful expression of discipleship in community whose life points to the coming Kingdom, might not other patterns of committed, non-procreative relationship be possible too? There are, and always have been, other patterns of fruitful human belonging – and thank God for that. However well intended there has been an

Evangelical focus on marriage that has placed a heavy burden on marriage itself as well as treating so many other forms of relating as somehow incomplete.’ (pp.69-70)

Finally, Runcorn argues that it is legitimate to take into account experience of the lives of gay people because of Jesus’ words ‘By their fruit you shall recognise them...a good tree cannot bear bad fruit’ (Matthew 7:16-18). In his view:

‘What is often missed is that there are two sides to applying the test of fruit. There is the evidence of positive, good fruit of the life and faith of Christians who happen to be gay. I see that everywhere. But there is also the bitter fruit that has been the result of excluding teaching and behaviour in the Church towards gay people. This needs real honesty. The damage has been huge but often hidden.

The challenge of this test is that fruit needs time to grow and feel its quality. You cannot know beforehand – particularly if it is fruit you have not known before, or perhaps did not even plant yourself. This must be a longer-term strategy for discernment. Furthermore, you cannot grow fruit at a distance, it requires our willingness to be directly and positively involved in the nurturing and growing process. Fruit requires tending, care and feeding. This test calls us to patient and non-anxious inclusion within a trusting theology of time.’ (p.70)

Response

1. It is true that the terms ‘homosexuality’ and ‘sexuality’ were 19th century inventions, but that does not mean that the phenomena to which they refer were not previously known. Absence of a word does not mean ignorance of that which the word describes.
2. Runcorn claims that if we ask what was being condemned by the Bible and how this relates to ‘contemporary expression of faithful committed same-sex love’ we find that ‘the texts no longer support the conservative reading on same-sex attraction in the way so long presumed.’ However, he does not give any evidence to support this claim and so it remains simply an assertion.
3. We can agree with David Runcorn that we should support a variety of ‘vocations to faithful, human loving in our world.’ The problem that the Bible and the Christian tradition has is not with loving relationships other than marriage, but with sex outside marriage, which is not the same thing.
4. Although it is true that the New Testament teaches that there will be no marrying or being given in marriage in heaven (see Matthew 22:30) there is no suggestion that we will cease to be male or female in the life to come. As we have previously noted, the resurrection of Christ rules out this idea.
5. Genesis 1:28 is still a command to have children through heterosexual sex and should not be evaded by an appeal to a relationship being fruitful in other ways. A same-sex relationship is intrinsically incapable of fulfilling Genesis 1:28.
6. A variety of forms of committed non-procreative relationship between people of the same sex are indeed possible and can be supported by the Church (monks and nuns, for example, are in a committed, but non-procreative relationship with each other). However, in order to be in line with biblical teaching these relationships have to be not alternatives to celibacy, but forms of it.
7. Runcorn’s appeal to the test of fruit in Matthew 7:16-18 needs to be read in the context of what is said in Matthew 5:17-20 about the righteousness required of believers. According to this earlier passage the righteousness required of believers not only includes but exceeds the moral demands of the Jewish law. This means that the test of fruit in Matthew 7:16-18 has to include observance of the sexual ethic of the Jewish law, including its restriction of sex to heterosexual marriage and its prohibition of homosexuality. From a Matthean perspective engaging in same-sex sexual activity

would thus automatically count as 'bad fruit' however good the lives of the people concerned might be in other respects.

Chapter 10: Making Space for Grace and Truth

In his chapter 'Making Space for Grace and Truth', which was originally published in 2008, the former Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, reflects on the conversations about sexuality that have taken place both within the Diocese of Liverpool and between the Diocese of Liverpool and its partner dioceses of Akure and Virginia.

In his essay Jones draws attention to the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and comments:

'In Acts 15 the Council of Jerusalem was dogged in a controversy. There was dissension and debate about the means of salvation. This was a first order issue. Some Christians were insisting that salvation required the Gentile converts to be circumcised. 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved' (15:1). What I find of special significance is that Luke describes these detractors as 'believers.' Even though the doctrine they were proposing undermined the doctrine of grace through faith the author included them within the body of believers. Within that space there was heated debate as they wrestled for the truth. This example has informed my own attitude and practice when it comes to theological and ethical debates, offering and in turn hoping for a generosity of spirit and the space to question and to listen to different interpretations and experiences of both first and second order issues.' (p.74)

He further comments that the account in Acts makes him question the notion of 'impaired communion.' As he sees it:

'We are in Christ by the grace of God, None of us earns or merits that place. In Christ we find ourselves alongside and at one (whether we like it –or them – or not) with all others who by God's grace are also in Christ. We cannot take ourselves into Christ, neither can we remove each other from being in Christ. It is all by Christ. Now it is clear that controversy can impair friendship, can affect ministry and even undermine mission but only Christ can determine communion, with him and through him with one another. As in the Council of Jerusalem and the controversy over doctrine and practice so today in the Anglican Communion there may be impaired mission, impaired ministry, impaired friendship but as to 'communion' that is only and forever in and through Christ alone.' (p.74)

In his essay Jones also highlights the fourfold framework for the debate on sexuality in the Diocese of Liverpool:

'The first point of the quadrilateral is to recognise the authoritative Biblical emphasis upon the uniqueness of marriage as a divine ordinance for the ordering of human society and the nurture of children.

The second is to acknowledge the authoritative Biblical examples of love between two people of the same gender most notably in the relationship of Jesus and his beloved and David and Jonathan.

The third is to register the role of conscience in the Anglican moral tradition; in the Church of England's oaths of canonical obedience the vow is to be obedient 'in all things lawful and honest' which means that should you be pressed to do something which in good conscience you deem not to be honest then conscience would demand that you dissent.

The fourth point is to understand that disunity saps the energy of the church and to affirm the importance of unity to the mission of God. Each of these sides merits closer inspection and deserves its own essay. But the point I want to make is that holding these four together has produced space within the Diocese for us to have a genuine conversation. '(p. 75)

Jones finishes by drawing attention to John's description of Jesus as 'full of grace and truth' and its relevance for the continuing debate about sexuality:

'The description in John's Gospel of Jesus 'full of grace and truth' presents us with a person who created space around himself for others to 'see the Kingdom of God.' He was neither truthless in his grace, nor graceless in his truth. I fear that in our debates with each other and with the world especially on the subject of homosexuality we have come over as graceless. Jesus was a pastor, as well as a prophet. He spoke commandments with compassion. And when in John 8 he was asked to judge an adulterer he said "Neither do I condemn you" before adding "Go away and sin no more". The Pastor spoke before the Prophet. Had it been the other way around she would not have been there to hear his words of mercy. I am not here equating homosexuality with adultery but simply registering the priority Jesus gave to the pastoral approach.

I know there are some – from all sides of the argument – who might feel that to be in conversation with those with whom you profoundly disagree is to legitimise their own position and compromise your own. I know too that the continuing debate does not alleviate the suffering of those most affected. In this time we are particularly dependent on the grace of those who are hurt by the words and actions of others. All I know and can testify to through our own discussions within the Diocese and with our partner Dioceses is that entering the debate prayerfully in the company of the One who is 'full of grace and truth' takes you to places beyond 'all that you can ask or imagine.' I know that many are pessimistic about the future but I find myself strangely and surprisingly optimistic that if we can maintain the space to listen to 'the still small voice' there might emerge a new understanding and paradigm that none of us can yet imagine.' (p.79)

Response

1. Jones is correct when he says that in his account of the Council of Jerusalem St. Luke describes those who advocated the necessity of circumcision as 'believers' (Acts 15:5).

However, St. Luke also highlights the fact that their position was grievously wrong when he quotes St. Peter as saying to them 'why do you make a trial of God?' (Acts 15:10). As David Gooding notes, to 'make a trial of God' means putting God to the test. This is something forbidden in Deuteronomy 6:16 and consists of 'trying God's patience, seeing how far you can go and what you can get away with before pushing God too far and provoking him to intervene'¹⁹ The members of the circumcision party were doing this by suggesting that God's work in purifying the Gentiles through faith was not enough and needed to be supplemented by circumcision and full observance of the Jewish law. To suggest that, St. Peter declares, is to insult God and to risk his judgment.

Furthermore, St. Luke records that the whole council, guided by the Holy Spirit, agreed that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised or to observe the Jewish law in its entirety and sent out a letter announcing that decision.

The significance of this for the current debate about sexuality is that it highlights the fact that while it may be correct to describe all sides in the present debate about sexuality as 'believers.' in the sense of being professing Christians, this does not mean that those holding to a revisionist position

¹⁹ David Gooding, *True to the Faith*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990, p.231.

are not grievously wrong because of their rejection of clear biblical teaching and does not mean that the Church should not, under the guidance of the Spirit decide and declare that their position is wrong.

It is not enough for there to be 'a generosity of spirit and the space to question and to listen to different interpretations and experiences of both first and second order issues.' The record of the Council of Jerusalem shows that there also needs to be an identification of error and a clear decision by the Church to follow the path that God has laid down.

2. Jones is also right to say that communion is something that is bestowed on us by the grace of God. However, he is wrong to say that communion cannot be impaired in the sense of the outward and visible expression of the relationship that believers have in Christ being limited in some way, most notably by their not sharing Holy Communion together. Such outward and visible impairment of communion does exist at the moment in both the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion as a way of bearing witness that the revisionist teaching and practice in relation to sexuality is grievously wrong and something of which people need to repent.

3. In relation to the fourfold framework for the debate about sexuality in the Dioceses of Liverpool

The first point would be better if it emphasised that in the Bible marriage means marriage between two people of the opposite sex, that it is seen as the only legitimate context for sexual activity and that it exists not just for the nurturing of children but for their procreation through the sexual union of their parents.

The second point needs to highlight that the two relationships referred to are examples of non-sexual friendship.

The third point needs to acknowledge that the Anglican tradition has also held that conscience can err and that it needs to be informed and corrected by the teaching of Scripture.

The fourth point needs to note that there can be unity in error as well as in truth and that it is only the latter that the Church should seek after.

4. Jones' appeal to St. John's description of Jesus as 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14) fails to do justice to what St John actually meant.

As a number of commentators have pointed out, the pairing of 'grace' and truth' in John 1:14 is a deliberate echo of the regular pairing of 'steadfast love' and 'faithfulness' as a description of God in Old Testament passages such as Genesis 24:27, Exodus 34:6 and Psalm 25:10.²⁰ God's 'grace' is his steadfast and merciful love to his oppressed and disobedient people and God's 'truth' is his faithfulness to his promises to be merciful. Both of these are manifested in Jesus, the person in whom the God of the Old Testament is incarnate, because through his death and resurrection he delivers God's people from sin and death and thus shows God's faithfulness to his promises and hence his truthfulness.

The relevance of this to the debate about sexuality is that sexual sin, including the sin of same-sex sexual activity, is part of the life of sin and death from which God in Christ has delivered his people (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Romans 1-8 throughout) with the corollary that such sin should no

²⁰ See, for instance, B F Westcott, *Gospel of John*, London: John Murray, 1924, p.13, E Hoskyns and F N Davey, *The Fourth Gospel*, London: Faber and Faber, 1947, pp.150-151 and D A Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Apollos/Eerdmans: Grand Rapids/Cambridge/Leicester, 1991, pp.129-130.

longer form part of their lives. As St. Paul puts it in Romans 6:12-14, because the grace of God means that we have died and risen with Christ:

‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.’

A church, therefore, that is willing to accept same-sex sexual activity (or any other form of sexual sin) is a church that has ceased to truly believe in the grace and truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Appendix and Postscript

The Appendix by Kieran Bohan and Warren Hartley describes the history and ethos of the Open Table Fresh Expression in Liverpool and their hope that Open Table

‘...can be a place where LGBT people and others can meet God, the source of life, love and being and thus come to know that they are children of God. Through that encounter we ourselves are transformed, and become agents of transformation in an imperfect world. As LGBT people we believe that our lives, our identities and our relationships are precious gifts from God, which we are called to live out with integrity. Our desire is to continue to build a community where this is evident and which equips others to go out and do the same.’ (p.82)

Response

1. It is true that LGBT people just like all other people can be ‘children of God’ in two ways, first because they are created by God (Acts 17:28-29) and secondly because they have been adopted into God’s family and thus can call God Father through Christ in the Spirit (Galatians 4:4-6). However, according to the Bible it is because human beings are children of God in both these ways that they ought not to engage in same-sex activity. Such activity is contrary to the way they were created (‘against nature’ Romans 1:26-27) and is also contrary to the saving activity of God which has made them members of God’s family (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

2. It is also true that through meeting with God people can be transformed, but according to the Bible part of this liberation is being set free from sin, including the sin of same-sex activity (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

3. People’s lives are a gift from the God who created them, but this is not necessarily true of identities and relationships which can be the result of sin rather than the work of God. Thus an identity based on same-sex attraction and a relationship involving same-sex sexually activity can both be seen to be the result of a sinful denial of who God made people to be, men and women who are intended to relate to each other sexually in the context of heterosexual marriage.

The Postscript by the Christian broadcaster Cindy Kent argues that Christians no longer need to observe the Old Testament law (including the laws relating to sexual activity). Kent writes:

‘We, as Christians, are no longer ‘under the law.’ I certainly don’t live my life by following the Old Testament Law for if I did I would be ‘under a curse’ according to St Paul in his letter to the Galatians.’ (p.84)

She goes on to say:

'The Church I belong to needs to be accepting and inclusive in order to be complete. God is a God of love – in all its many and varied forms – and if two people love one another then where there's God there's Love.' (p.85)

Response

1. What St. Paul actually teaches in Galatians 3:10-14 is that what leads people to being cursed is basing their relationship with God on observing the Old Testament law rather than on faith in Jesus Christ and his saving work. However, St Paul also teaches that through the Spirit Christians are enabled to live in the way laid down in the law, which is the point he makes in Galatians 5:16-24 and Romans 8:2-9, and this involves among other things living a life of sexual holiness which includes not engaging in same-sex sexual activity.

2. It is not clear what Kent means when she talks about the Church becoming complete. Where we can agree with her is that in fulfilment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) the Church needs to be 'accepting and inclusive' in the sense of inviting all people everywhere to enter into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. However, this also involves teaching people to live a particular way of life ('teaching them to observe all I have commanded you' Matthew 28:20) which the New Testament says involves abstaining from all kinds of sexual immorality including same-sex sexual activity (see for example 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8).

3. It is true that 'where there's God there's love' in the sense that those in whom God is present will love other people. However, true love for another person will mean seeking their highest good and according to the teaching of Scripture engaging in same-sex sexual activity is never for someone's good because it contradicts the way God made them to be and risks permanent exclusion from God's kingdom. It follows that if two people truly love one another according to the Christian understanding of love they will not enter into a same-sex relationships just as they would not enter into an adulterous one.

M B Davie 13.7.16