

13. Matters of the heart: James E. Loder on homosexuality and the possibility of transformation

- Mark S. Koonz, USA Lutheran pastor and writer

Psychology - Treating the deeply wounded spirit in the homosexual

Is transformation of the homosexual condition either desirable or possible?

14. A pastoral letter in defence of marriage - Philip

Tartaglia, R.C. Bishop of Paisley

Politics - a Roman Catholic response to the proposals for same sex marriage

Why should Christians oppose the legalisation of same sex marriage?

15. Compassion and community - Jock Stein, formerly

Warden of Carberry Tower

Pastoralia - Balancing righteousness and compassion

What does it mean to be compassionate in the current situation?

Epilogue:

Drawing a line in shifting sands - Fearghas

MacFhionnlaigh, art teacher and Gaelic poet

Philosophy -Subterranean dynamics transmuted today's philosophical landscape

Why should we stand up against our society's approach to homosexuality?

EMBRACING TRUTH

Homosexuality and the Word of God

By Church of Scotland writers unless otherwise stated

Synopsis

Introduction - David W. Torrance, retired parish minister

Part 1: Clearing the ground

1. Confusion and clarity - Andrew Goddard, Anglican clergyman and writer

Ethics - common criticisms of the traditionalist stance: some responses

How can a traditional stance that is countercultural convince to-----day's youth?

2. Same sex science: The social sciences cannot settle the moral status of homosexuality -

Stanton L. Jones, Provost of Wheaton College

Sociology - broad beliefs shaping our culture that are unsustainable

What do we really know about the complexities of sexual behaviour?

3. Facts and figures - David J Randall, retired parish minister

Statistics - evidence about same sex relationships

What do the statistics tell us about the homosexual lifestyle?

Part 2: Christian belief

4. **The authority of Scripture: is the Bible the Word of God or does it contain the Word of God? - David W. Torrance**
Scripture - the importance of its authority for deciding moral issues
Is the Bible God's infallible Word or does it only contain the Word of God?
5. **The biblical affirmation of sex - Tom Smail, former Anglican College principal**
Scripture - the complementarity of marriage a reflection of God's image
Does a lack of marital complementarity promote societal disintegration?
6. **The Church's traditional view - Angus Morrison, parish minister**
Tradition - teaching of the one catholic apostolic church on sexual behaviour
Why would ecclesiastical acceptance of homosexual practice be schismatic?
7. **Understanding Marriage - David J Torrance, parish minister**
Theology - the nature of marriage
Is gender more significant than sex for the biblical concept of marital 'union'?
8. **Same sex relations: some theological pointers - David J Torrance**
Theology - the illogic of same sex 'marriage'
Does same sex 'marriage' re-interpret the meaning of 'marriage'?

Part 3: The Bible and Homosexual Practice

9. **Robert Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*: Review - Paul Burgess, Prof. Emeritus Gujranwala Theological Seminary, Pakistan**
Hermeneutics - Examining the biblical verdict on homosexual practice
Did the Bible's indictment of gay sex include caring committed partnerships?
10. **Accommodation and pastoral concern: what does the biblical text say? - Robert A.J. Gagnon**
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
Scripture - Jesus' and Paul's pastoral concerns for sexual sinners
Should pastoral concern trump moral rectitude according to Scripture?
11. **How seriously does Scripture treat the issue of homosexual practice? - Robert A. J. Gagnon**
Scripture - God's creation of complementary human beings radically offended
Why does Scripture take homosexual practice so seriously?

Part 4: Wisdom and obedience

12. **The celibate path: a Christian's journey with homosexuality - Calum MacKellar, visiting professor at St Mary's Uni. College, London, and director of research at a medical charity.**
Experience - struggling with homosexual tendencies in the context of church
Why is the church often a dangerous place for homosexuals?

Embracing Truth:

Homosexuality and the Word of God

is

a Handsel Press publication of contributions
by 14 Scottish, English and American authors
(Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic),
covering a wide range of issues concerning
Same-Sex Relationships and the Bible and the Church
written from a moderate traditionalist stance.

EXTRACTS from each chapter,
together with a two page SYNOPSIS of the whole book,
can be viewed and freely downloaded

from

www.handseypress.co.uk

Embracing Truth: Homosexuality and the Word of God, ed. David
W. Torrance and Jock Stein, Handsel Press, 2012, 252pp.
Book price: £6.95 Available by order from bookshops or from
jstein@handseypress.org.uk

EMBRACING TRUTH

Homosexuality and the Word of God

Digests

and

Study Guides

Compiled by Paul Burgess

The Digests & Study Guides

Embracing Truth is a compilation of commissioned articles by 14 different writers on a wide range of aspects relating to a Christian view of homosexuality.

They have been grouped into four sections plus a substantial epilogue at the end, creating five parts for which separate four page Digests and Study Guides have been prepared.

Each Part has a four page sheet of Digest and an accompanying four page Study Guide. Groups wishing to study *Embracing Truth* can thus choose which section they wish to study next and have copies of that section printed for distribution before each meeting. Alternatively, the Digest for the next section to be discussed can be studied prior to the session and the relevant Study Guide issued at the session itself.

Thus a group can study either all five sections (including the philosophical analysis of Western Thought in the Epilogue), or only select some, or all, of the four Parts.

Note that these and the following A5 pages are arranged for easy printing of four pages to a double-sided A4 sheet. Thus each section has 2 x 4 pages (for printing its Digest sheet and its separate Study Guide sheet).

Website viewers will thus have to read each 'sheet' as a four page document (with page 4 of each 'sheet' always preceding page 1). The Epilogue combines Digest and Study Guide on a single sheet.

Part 1 : *Clearing the ground*

....looks at how we should approach the issues surrounding homosexuality and the objections made by revisionists to traditionalist teachings on sexuality. It also examines evidence from science and the social sciences regarding the cause and effects of homosexual behaviour.

Part 2: *Christian belief*

....discusses the role of Scripture, its view of sex and marriage, and the significance of the church's stance in relation to Christian tradition and the universal church. It concludes with a reflection on the implications of same sex marriage.

Part 3: *The Bible and homosexual practice*

....reviews the Biblical teaching about homosexual practice and refutes various revisionist readings of key texts.

Part 4: *Wisdom and obedience*

....starts with the extended testimony of a celibate homosexual (probably a good 'way in' to the whole debate), and continues with some discussion of whether or not homosexuals can 'change'. It concludes with a pastoral letter in defence of marriage and a reflection on the possibilities for a compromise position.

Epilogue

.... presents a poetic reflection on, and a philosophical excursion about, the "shifting sands" of human thought and the "rock" that must be reckoned with beneath.

Chapter 3: Facts and Figures:

Traditional view:

- homosexual relationships are intrinsically insecure.
- Marriage between one man and one woman (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights definition) is good for the couple, children and society.
- 'Same sex marriage' is about as meaningful as a 'square circle'.
- Past societies flourished where absolute monogamy had been practiced.

Issues regarding the homosexual debate:

- The belligerence of political correctness:
 - Freedom of conscience is swept away in the cause of gay rights
 - 'Prejudice' is redefined to include expressing normative values
- A high degree of promiscuity associated with homosexuality (significantly more than with heterosexuality). "Gay liberation was founded . . . on a sexual brotherhood of promiscuity". (G.Rotella, *Sexual Ecology*, Dutton, 1998)
- The medical verdict: The practice of homosexuality is dangerous and life-shortening.
- The Civil Partnership option taken up by comparatively few homosexuals

Response to "The Christian Case for Gay Marriage"

- "Since homosexual orientation is not a choice, same sex couples should not be denied the opportunity of 'marrying'." But any evidence for this (debatable anyway) would not answer questions of *values*. Descriptive information does not determine moral values.
- "Marriage has changed" -Can't argue from what 'is' to what 'ought' to be.
- "Young people see no problem with homosexuality." Moral judgements are not made on the basis of statistical trends in public opinion, or on what sort of friends we have. ("If he's a nice guy then it's right after all!")
- "The church's opposition to gays puts young people off the church." But should the church change its doctrine to avoid offense?
- "Marriage for gays might lessen gay promiscuity." This would involve a social experiment whose outcome is unproven.
- "'Homosexuality' is not a word found in the Bible!" Neither is the word 'communion'! Facile to argue for silence about a subject because different vocabulary is used or because specific texts are few.

Note: A whole section of this book examines these so called 'clobber' passages; rather than overlooking them, we need to take them seriously.

DIGEST

Embracing Truth

Part 1 - Clearing the ground

Introduction

Understanding of Bible - Christ-centred transformational view of Scripture
 Understanding for homosexuals - their sense of rejection by the church
 Understanding of restraints - by heterosexuals as well as by homosexuals
 Understanding of our identity - defined in Christ, not in sexual orientation
 Resist pressure from secular society to conform to a revisionist view

Chapter 1: Confusion & Clarity

Church's teaching starts, not *against* homosexuality, but *for* God's 'goods':

- His will for our good revealed in the witness of Scripture
- His gender differentiation in creating us in His own image
- His institution of the marriage union of a man and a woman for our good
- His gift of the virtue of chastity for our faithfulness to one life-long spouse

Brief responses to objections raised to traditionalist teaching:

Objections concerning Scripture

1. *The Bible opposes exploitive same sex; caring same sex not addressed*
 There is an unambiguous consistency and coherence in the biblical witness (in *contrast* with restrictive *and* affirmative texts for slavery, war, women's leadership, etc). Even were it true that only 'bad' same sex was condemned, this would still leave the Bible silent about 'caring' same sex. "Simply put, the Bible is negative towards same sex behaviour, and there is no getting around it." (Revisionist Walter Wink)

2. *There are many other things the Bible condemns which we now ignore, (e.g. wearing poly-cotton shirts!) so why get so het up about gay sex?*
 Wearing mixed fibres is not rejected again in the NT unlike homosexuality. [There are different types of law in the OT: **moral** (permanent), **ceremonial** (until Christ), **civil** (specific to Israel in Canaan).]

3. *Jesus never condemned homosexuality*

Jesus did not speak out against incest, or slavery, either. His references to sexual immorality ('porneia') would include same sex activity in that term.

4. *Some key biblical themes like love, liberation, justice (the foundation of rights) and inclusiveness support a case for accepting gay relationships*

A loving relationships does not justify *any* sexual expression. One can be **liberated** from opposite things! **Rights** derive from *righteousness*. To be '**inclusive**' doesn't mean accepting every *behaviour* of those included!

5. *If the church can change its mind on slavery, divorce, interest, women in ministry, etc, why not on gay relationships?*

Being mistaken on *some* issues (where there is some biblical support for a change of mind) does not entail being mistaken on a *particular* issue (where there is no such support).

Objections concerning Science and Reason

6. *Since animals do it, homosexual sex is quite natural, so why the fuss?*

The *scientific* and *theological* meanings of 'natural' are *confused* in this debate. Because of the Fall many patterns of behaviour 'found in nature' do not conform to biblical standards of human morality based on God's ordering of creation and the particular nature of human beings made in His image. Biology professor David de Pomerai believes: "There is **no 'gay gene'** as such... media reports to this effect have been very misleading".

7. *Many people are homosexuals; why shouldn't they express their natural tendencies?*

ONS 2010 sample survey found only 0.9% identified as "gay or lesbian" and 0.5% as "bisexual"; yet Kinsey's '1 in 10' gay is still widely quoted.

NB: The **Christian vision** is **not one of self-expression** but rather one in which there is **conflict between the Spirit and the flesh** (Gal. 5:17).

Objections concerning Contemporary Culture

8. *A significant minority shouldn't be precluded by a homophobic and prejudiced majority from full acceptance in the church.*

Taking a moral stance is not homophobia or prejudiced. The missional **commitment to include** cannot be separated from the **call to transform**. Many Christians *experiencing* same sex *attraction* hold traditional views of God's purposes for us as sexual beings and reject same sex *relationships*.

9. *It's a generation thing; the church should move with the times.*

The fact of **social change** is never a sufficient reason for **theological change**. **Embracing social movements as the work of the Spirit**, is dangerous for **the distinctiveness of the church's discipleship and witness** and downplays the wisdom of Scripture and Christian tradition. A post-Christendom missional context requires the church to wrestle with the issues theologically, guided by the authority of Scripture and respectful of Christian tradition, so that a vision of human flourishing is offered providing hope and life.

Chapter 2: Same Sex Science:

Misconceptions shaping our culture (with some responses):

- *Homosexuality is an illness*

This has been proved wrong on the facts and harmful in effect.

- *Homosexuals are just as psychologically healthy as heterosexuals*

Not according to exhaustive Harvard research in 2001: "Homosexual orientation . . . is associated with a general elevation of risk for anxiety, mood, and substance-use disorders and for suicidal thoughts and plans." (A view supported by more recent studies in the Netherlands.)

- *Orientation is due to a gay gene and so determined at birth.*

No 'gay gene' found. Recent studies have shown that familial, cultural, and other environmental factors contribute to same sex attraction.

- *It can't be changed as personal identity is centred around sexual identity*

Change is sometimes possible, mostly for those motivated by their core understanding of who they are as a person before God.

- *Homosexual relationships are equivalent to heterosexual ones in all important characteristics.*

It is difficult to establish boundaries of what constitutes homosexuality.

History:

1. Pre-20th C: 'sodomy' disapproved of by society as a 'sin'
2. Early 20th C: a psychiatric model of homosexuality viewed it as an 'illness'
3. Mid/Late 20th C: the 'illness' view led to overturning societal opposition to homosexual acts
 - a. Kinsey report: various homosexual behaviours termed 'normal'
 - b. 1973: American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a 'mental illness'
4. 21st C: 'Same sex marriage' advocated by UK and Scot. Governments

Achilles heel of research: unrepresentative samples used by early researchers who sampled from homosexual-associated groups.

Today's findings: 1.8% are bisexual men and women, 1.1% are gay men, and 0.6% are lesbians.

Conclusion:

- Many beliefs about homosexuality shaping our culture are unsustainable
- The social sciences cannot settle the moral status of homosexuality.

Surveying the secular gay community reveals both a libertarianism in some (“Gay liberation was founded . . . on a sexual brotherhood of promiscuity”) and an HMSO survey found “most homosexual men have several partners – on average seven per year.”) and a desire for a ‘committed’ relationship in others.

David Randall sees all homosexual *relationships* as intrinsically insecure and observes that the *practice* of homosexuality is dangerous and life-shortening. “While abjuring all pleasure in grim figures, it remains true that the practice of homosexuality is dangerous and life-shortening. It may be said to be another indication of why our Creator has proscribed homosexual practice.”

He points out that few have taken up the Civil Partnership option (in Scotland only 465 in 2010), yet the speed of societal attitude change has increased raising alarming projections of what might become acceptable in the not too distant future.

Q 1: Gay Times claimed in 2000: “We don’t have to promise sexual exclusivity or to share our worldly goods if we don’t want to.” Does this suggest the campaign of ‘mutually committed’ homosexuals for a right to ‘marry’ if they so choose is not supported by all homosexuals?

Q 2: “The implication that marriage is open for... redefinition is a striking instance of human arrogance.” Do you agree with this assessment of the Scottish Government’s consultation on re-defining marriage? Can you suggest several ways in which society will be changed if this redefinition of marriage is enshrined in law? For example, what will be taught in schools?

Q 3: Does it make any difference what the proportion of homosexuals is to heterosexuals? Do you think the media present a fair balance in their coverage of sexual and moral themes?

Q 4: The traditional expression of what constitutes normative sexual values is frequently reviled by officialdom as ‘homophobic prejudice’, even leading at times to sacking. How can traditionalists be frank and realistic about the dangers of a homosexual lifestyle without appearing ‘homophobic’ either to their gay friends or to officialdom?

Q 5: What reasons, outside of the Bible, have been expressed for opposing homosexual practice? How valid do you think they are?

Embracing Truth

Homosexuality and the Word of God

It is suggested that for group discussion members select the questions to which they wish to respond.

Part 1: Clearing the ground

Introduction

David W Torrance introduces *Embracing Truth*, in the cause of promoting Christian unity, as a positive contribution to a debate where there is much uncertainty and confusion within the church.

He pleads for a deeper Christ-centred view of Scripture, a closer examination of what the Bible teaches about human relationships and sexuality, a more sympathetic attitude to those with a homosexual orientation, a recognition that restraints affect heterosexual singles and married couples as well as homosexuals, and an insistence as Christians that we find our identity in Christ rather than in any sexual grouping.

“Sadly, it can be because people have too often not found themselves affirmed by the gospel that they have clung to an identity outside it.”

He also makes a call to resist pressures from a secular society to change our traditional view of marriage to conform with its revisionist view, and from within the church to conform to such secular pressure out of sympathy with friends and family members with homosexual desires.

Q 1: How can focusing on Christ help us to understand what the Bible teaches about sexuality and our identity as human beings? In talking with someone of same sex orientation have you ever discussed how they identify themselves?

Q 2: Does your church distinguish between affirming a person on the one hand and having a view about their behaviour on the other? Can one be both truly supportive of the person and censuring of their actions at the same time?

Chapter 1: **Confusion and clarity**

Andrew Goddard argues for a Christian position that, rather than being *against* homosexuality, is a stance *for* positive things, namely guidance revealed in the Scriptures, a two gendered human race created in God's image, sexual union in marriage, and chastity to enable marital loyalty.

He responds then to nine objections commonly raised against the Church's traditional teaching on homosexuality. (See *Digest*)

Q 1: How do you respond towards those who experience same sex attraction? Do you know any in your social circle?

Q 2: Before addressing from a biblical perspective the negative consequences of homosexual practice what positive statements about marriage and human sexuality can you make first?

Q 3: Which objections to traditional teaching on homosexual behaviour do you find hardest to answer? What positive vision of hope can be offered?

Q 4: How can a traditional stance that is counter-cultural convince today's youth? Can Revisionists go beyond pragmatic considerations to address the theological concerns of Traditionalists?

Chapter 2: **Same sex science**

Stanton Jones describes the belief that homosexuality is a mental illness caused exclusively by psychological or spiritual factors as both wrong on the facts and harmful in effect.

He shows how this misconception led to different, far more influential, and no less harmful falsehoods - each attributed to the findings of 'science'. These falsehoods have dominated political discourse today and put orthodox Christians on the back foot as they defend themselves against charges by secularists of discrimination and intolerance.

Alfred Kinsey's claim that homosexuality was a 'normal' variant of human sexuality suggesting 1 in 10 men are homosexual, was based on poor sampling. Contrast recent estimates of 1.1% gay, 0.6 % lesbian. and 1.8% bisexual.

On the question of whether people can change their orientation Stanton Jones observes that "most of those who actually attain some level of change are highly religiously committed, and these individuals who believe in a God who intervenes in their lives are embedded in communities of care and are motivated by their core understanding of who they are as a person before God."

Stanton Jones concludes: "We off-loaded responsibility for the articulation of a thoughtful, caring, theologically rich, and pastorally sensitive understanding of sexual brokenness grounded in our various religious traditions by conceptualizing homosexuality as a disease, and so we were unprepared for the vacuum created by that explanation's timely demise."

Q 1: Why might one think of homosexual relationships as equivalent to heterosexual ones? Why would you agree / disagree?

Q 2: Why do you think homosexual teens have reported being two to three times more prone to suicidal thoughts and plans than hetero-sexuals? What fundamental aspect of the human condition does homosexuality cut across to cause so much distress?

Q 3: Why has a belief in a biological cause of orientation led some gay activists to a demand for the right to marry someone of the same sex?

Q 4: Why do people who believe in some mythical 'gay gene', ignore the familial, cultural, and other environmental factors that contribute to same sex attraction?

Q 5: Why was the change in viewing homosexual behaviour as 'sickness' rather than as 'sin' so crucial to the cultural change regarding homosexuality?

Chapter 3: **Facts and Figures**

David Randall deplores government interference in the definition of marriage. Arguing that 'same sex marriage' is as meaningful as a 'square circle', he presents marriage between one man and one woman as not only the divine design for human relationships but also the proven foundation for the good of individuals, the protection of children and societal wellbeing, pointing out that societies flourished where absolute monogamy had been practised. He likens the Maker's instructions to the restrictive lines of a railway that enable a train to function as a train.

Chapter 7: **Understanding Marriage**

Questions of marriage and same-sex relations impact on the core recognitions of the Christian faith. Thus Christian thinking about male and female involves a relational way of knowing, since we cannot know Jesus as an independent individual, only as ‘Son of the Eternal Father’ and anointed by the Holy Spirit. We understand humanity from our understanding of God, who lives in relationship.

In Rom 1 Paul draws attention to the root issue: the temptation to project ourselves onto God, rather than to receive him as he is. If we tamper with the image of God as it is imprinted on us, then we reap relational disruption of one kind or another.

Jesus did not depart from the teaching given in the Old Testament. Indeed, he applied it in even greater comprehensiveness – yet, with an immense compassion towards people in their individual circumstances.

God’s wisdom is given us for our protection. Thus there is much less divorce, child abuse, pregnancy outside marriage, and homosexuality among more orthodox Jews than is found even within the church.

Marriage is a covenant (an *unconditional* pledge), not a contract (based on both parties fulfilling certain conditions).

Chapter 8: **Same Sex Relations**

Equivalence of same-sex relations with marriage logically re-defines:

- ‘marriage’, as ‘contracted partnership’ (not ‘covenant union’)
- ‘covenant’, reduced to the level of ‘promise’ (not ‘unconditional pledge’)
- ‘gender’ becomes irrelevant (apart from procreation)
- ‘one flesh’ *union* of male and female reduced to ‘alliance of companions’ forming a social *unit*.
- ‘sexual encounter’, an expression of mutual attraction (not God’s seal upon a union) whose purpose is mutual pleasure (not procreation)
- what it means to be physically human in the image of God. Revisionist appeal is to the supposed givenness of ‘homosexuality’.

“Gay liberation does not just mean [legal] reforms. It means a revolutionary change in our whole society.” (GLF manifesto 1978)

Embracing Truth

Part 2 - **Christian belief**

Chapter 4: **The Authority of Scripture**

Sexuality issues raise prior questions about the place of Bible and Church:

How is Christian faith dependent on the Bible?

No Bible, no knowledge of Jesus; no prophetic, apostolic and church witness, no Bible.

What kind of authority has the Bible for us today?

Its authority lies in the Word of God to whom it bears witness. “The Bible is the Christ book; not just a book which speaks of him, but a book through which he speaks to us.”

Are all parts of the Bible God’s Word?

The whole Bible is the Word of God, even those parts which at first seem less important or even offensive, for they all have a part to play in the total testimony.

How reliable is the Bible? Don’t we know better than the Bible today?

The Bible’s infallibility lies, not in its fallible human words, as a set of propositions, but in its inspired and reliable witness to the Word of God, the living Person of Jesus.

How is Christian faith dependent on the Church?

When the Church today and its pastors go in obedience in prayer and faith and proclaim God’s message from Scripture so “God himself speaks about himself” challenging people to faith and repentance.

How should we read the Bible?

It should always involve prayer because the Bible, unlike any other book, is the place of encounter where we meet with God.

It must involve a new birth in the life of the reader. The ‘natural man’, having a veil over his mind and heart, can only see the *man* Jesus, not Christ, the Son of *God*.

It involves using converted reason, using our minds for faithful exegesis of the Bible, evaluating the findings of scholars and scientists in its light.

The universal church has never viewed the Bible as only ‘containing’ the Word of God. When the Church elevates herself above the Word, claiming to be able to judge what is and what is not the Word of God in the Bible, she loses her empowerment and authority before the world, having nothing distinctive or relevant to say to society.

Chapter 5: *The Biblical Affirmation of Sex*

A **negative** always depends upon a **prior positive**; you are only *against* something because you are for something else that is inconsistent with it. Thus you are *against* adultery only because you are *for* marriage. To understand the prohibition in Rom 1:24-27, we must look at the *positive purpose of marriage* (of which the homosexual activity it condemns is the contradiction and corruption) discoverable in the pivotal verse of Gen 2:24.

In the Genesis story of creation the forming of Eve out of Adam is followed by an explanation of the purpose for which man and woman were made and of how they are meant to relate to each other.

Gen 1: man and woman share a humanity that bears **God's image in both of them**. Gen 2: a) This image of God is reflected in different but complementary ways in the two sexes. b) In that **complementarity** both the man and the woman **need each other** to become fully human. c) Their differences are not differences of nature or of separate distinctive qualities, but of complementary calling. As God not only does mighty works, but also exhibits self-giving love, the distinctive calling of the man is the care of the garden, while that of the woman is the provision of loving relationships that man in himself lacks and longs for and that none of the animals he names can offer. The creation of Eve from Adam's side indicates that the man cannot be fully himself (there is something missing!) without **reunion with the woman**.

The sexual act is intended to be the bodily expression of **the self-giving complementarity of husband and wife** to each other. They fit into each other and *make* love. It takes both an ovum and a sperm to make a baby, and ideally at least it takes both a father and a mother to bring up a child.

The **covenant commitment** that constitutes marriage **reflects the inmost essence of the life of the Creator** that characterises all his dealings with us.

After the Fall the man and the woman are exposed to external influences and internal desires that urge them into relationships that challenge and contradict the purposes of God, in a world of casual sexual relationships, single parent families, oppressive and collapsed marriages and same-sex partnerships. In same sex activity sexual bonding is torn out of its ordained context in the rich and complementary relationship of husbands and wives.

Chapter 6: *The Church's Traditional View*

The authority of Scripture is Scripture properly interpreted. Heretics tend to interpret the Bible according to their personal agenda. **Orthodoxy** requires it being interpreted in ways its authors would approve. **Church tradition** since Apostolic times has read Bible texts in a certain way that identifies those who have kept faith with apostolic teaching.

Since the Reformation its hermeneutical (interpretative) approach has been the grammatico-historical method, which precludes modern 'pick and mix' hermeneutics or any privileging of one Biblical theme over the rest.

A traditionalist position entails **no discrimination** against homosexual people since *all* sexual practices outside marriage are off-limits. Nor does it take issue with people of homosexual *orientation* since all are **welcome** in both membership and ordained ministry of the Church. What is at issue is discipline regarding sexual *activity* outside of **marriage**, which is the proper **context for discussion** of these matters before the Church.

Ordained ministries should be concerned with the character of the church to keep it faithful to its nature and calling as part of the one catholic church.

Claims of individuals to an '**inner calling**' to ordained ministry do not have "the church as witness". Because such claimants **must also be checked for learning, gifting and piety**, congregations have a right to object to ministers on grounds of 'life and doctrine'. Calvin prioritised the gifts of being able to instruct the people in godliness and of exercising discipline.

Ordination, being into the one catholic church and not simply into a local or denominational body, must be done in way consistent with "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all." To do otherwise is to imperil that church's **claim to maintain an ordained ministry which stands in the Apostolic Succession**.

"A Church which ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, would thereby have ceased to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic." **"Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism."** (Wolfhart Pannenberg)

Chapters 7 & 8: **Understand Marriage and Same Sex Relations**

David J Torrance says Christian thinking about male and female involves a relational way of knowing, since we understand humanity from our understanding of God, who lives in relationship. We can only truly know ourselves as we encounter God; we can only know each other through encounter. In both cases a hidden longing for relationship arises from inherent loneliness.

We can never understand God simply from an understanding of our own humanity; rather, we understand humanity from our understanding of God. This means we must not tamper with the image He has imprinted on us, which is a relational image involving gender and otherness and which if abused reaps relational disruption.

From Jesus' teaching on divorce David J Torrance shows why **gender** is so significant for marriage: its **meaning** derives from the fundamental ordering of humanity as inter-related male and female; its **purpose** reaches far beyond procreation to the belonging togetherness of men and wo-men. It takes male and fe-male to make 'one flesh'.

David J Torrance, in discussing the implications of equating same sex relationships with marriage, argues that 'marriage' is thereby re-defined in six ways. (See Digest)

Where gender is made irrelevant for sexual relations, a 'container' view of the human body results in which the 'authentic individual' somehow inhabits a physical body having no ultimate relevance.

Q 1: Do you think of marriage as a (life-long) covenant or as a contract (terminable by mutual consent)? What difference does this make to one's approach to marriage? Can attitudes about this be changed? If so how?

Q 2: How essential is the concept of procreation to the nature of marriage? Isn't marriage primarily about love between two individuals? What is the essential difference between the state of homosexual partners and that of childless heterosexual couples?

Q 3: If same sex marriage is legalised what effects do you think it will have on society?

STUDY GUIDE

Embracing Truth:

Homosexuality and the Word of God

It is suggested that for group discussion members select the questions to which they wish to respond.

Part 2: Christian belief

Chapter 4: **The Authority of Scripture**

David W Torrance argues that the position people within the church take in regard to same-sex relationships and the ministry is determined by their view of the Bible as the Word of God, and its relevance today.

He believes that the Bible's authority lies in the Word of God to whom it bears witness. In pragmatic terms "God speaks to us through the Bible as we read or hear it preached. It is the place where we meet and encounter God and hear him speaking to us today in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit." However, this is not the same as claiming that the Bible only "contains God's Word". He is quite clear that the Word of God is the biblical text, not just some *ideas* emanating from it.

The Church's authority is not independent of the Bible's authority, as if she can decide which parts are relevant for today and which are relics of a bygone age and alien culture. This attitude leaves the Church speaking with a divided voice listened to by few.

Only when the Church and its pastors, in obedience, prayer and faith, proclaim God's message from Scripture so that "God himself speaks about himself" challenging people to faith and repentance, will the true authority of the Church be recognised as she is empowered to witness effectively again to an indifferent world.

Q 1: What does David W Torrance want us to understand by the Bible being the Word of God?

Q 2: Would you agree with this assessment of the chief cause of the Church's current lack of influence upon society? What is the remedy?

Q 3: Why should prayer be important in a proper approach to reading the Bible? How far is it an indication of whether we truly hunger for "the bread of life"? How DO we seek the living Word "beyond the sacred page"?

Chapter 5: *The Biblical Affirmation of Sex*

Tom Smail starts by making the point that a negative depends upon a prior positive. Thus it is marriage that makes adultery a sin. To understand why homosexual activity is condemned in Romans 1:23-27 one has to see it as a contradiction and corruption of the purpose of marriage depicted in Genesis 2:24. Tom Smail maintains that everything that both Jesus and Paul said about sexual relations is presented as pivotal to this verse.

The sexual act naturally expresses the self-giving complementarity of husband and wife as they give their bodies to each other in a complementary physical fit. As it takes an ovum and a sperm to make a baby, ideally it takes both a father and a mother to bring up a child. The Fall has resulted in a gap between things as God made them and things as they actually are, a fact demonstrated in the sexual lives of such central OT figures as Abraham, David and Solomon. Thus we are now in a world in which people are exposed to external influences and internal desires that urge them into relationships that challenge and contradict the purposes of God in the sexual realm as in every other. It is a world of casual sexual relationships, single parent families, oppressive and collapsed marriages and same-sex partnerships.

Tom Smail believes that nature and nurture in different combinations give people urges and orientations that, in the light of Genesis 2:24, expose them to sinful pressures not of their own choosing for which they nevertheless have to accept responsibility and make decisions about whether to resist or yield to them. That is why Paul lists erotic homosexual relationships as one of many areas in which our human condition is fallen from the purposes of God and therefore under his judgement and, like the rest of us, in sore need of his redeeming grace.

Q 1: How does a positive view of marriage as seen in Genesis 2 provide a perspective on homosexual behaviour? (See Digest notes on Genesis 2)

Q 2: Should a value distinction be made between the ideal (norm), the less than ideal (for some singleness, childlessness, etc), the disadvantaged (disability, special needs, etc) and the extramarital (adultery,) and perverted (paedophilia, etc)? Where would you place homosexual behaviour? Can any value distinction be made between different homo-sexual behaviours (e.g. promiscuity, and caring commitment to one person)?

Chapter 6: *The Church's Traditional View*

Angus Morrison presents a summary of the various 'traditionalist' arguments set out in the 2007 (C of S) General Assembly Report, 'A Challenge to Unity', a report which also repeatedly affirmed revisionist views that love can never be sinful and therefore when love is at the heart of such a relationship it cannot be wrong.

Ordination, being into the one catholic church and not simply into a local or denominational body, must be done in way consistent with "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all." To do otherwise is to imperil that church's **claim to maintain an ordained ministry which stands in the Apostolic Succession**.

Heretics are distinguished as those who tend to interpret Scripture according to their personal agenda while orthodoxy requires it to be interpreted in ways its authors would approve. A church which ignores its traditional understandings of scripture soon becomes prey to the shifting cultural norms of the day.

Inclusiveness stops short at ordination of practising homosexuals since this involves sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman, a behaviour denounced by Scripture.

Regarding ordination of practicing homosexuals, if a church departs from the traditional teaching of the 'Holy Catholic (Universal) Church', it imperils not only the fidelity of its own local ministry but also its claim to maintain an ordained ministry which stands in the Apostolic Succession.

Q 1: What is the problem with a 'pick and mix' approach to reading the Bible and practicing its teachings? Why should we listen to how the church has understood Scriptural texts in the past? In a post-modern world can't we all decide for ourselves what to 'take to heart'?

Q 2: Isn't 'love' the over-riding theme of the NT? Shouldn't that be our test for deciding moral issues? Can't we trust 'love's moral compass'? What arguments (for and against) do you have for these questions?

Q 3: How concerned should we be about the possibility of schism (church separation)? Who would be breaking away from whom, locally and in the wider context of the universal church? How would such a break affect the inclusiveness of the church?

Chapter 11: *How Seriously does Scripture Treat This Issue?*

There is clearly a ranking of sins in the Old Testament. Jesus prioritised offences, referring to “the weightier matters of the law” and Paul’s attitude toward the case of incest in 1 Cor 5 also makes clear that he differentiated between various sexual offences. The Bible portrays homosexual practice as one of the most severe sexual sins because it contradicts the foundation of sexual relations, which is the complementary otherness of the creation ordinance, in a way that such sexual sins as adultery, ‘threesomes’, polyamory, incest, etc, do not.

Jesus’ silence on the subject cannot be taken to infer that he would be laid back about homosexuality, let alone that he would affirm it. A pro-homosex Jesus would require him at odds with his historical context: cut off from his Scripture, cut off from early Judaism, and cut off from the church that was established on his teachings. Jesus took sexual immorality very seriously, expanding the definition of adultery to include lust of the eyes. References to Genesis show that he recognised that same sex intercourse radically offends against God’s intentional creation of humans as “male and female” (Gen 1:27) and that marriage must be defined as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).

Jesus argued that the ‘twoness’ of the sexes ordained by God at creation was the foundation for limiting the number of persons in a sexual bond to two, whether concurrently (as against polygamy) or serially (as against repetitive divorce and remarriage).

Every text in Scripture treating sexual matters, whether narrative, law, proverb, poetry, moral exhortation, or metaphor, presupposes a male-female prerequisite for all sexual activity.

Every text on the issue of homosexual practice in Scripture treats it as a high offence abhorrent to God, shown in the stories about what Ham *did* to Noah, the story of Sodom, and that of the Levite’s concubine.

Even though ancient Israel was a male-dominated society, it imaged itself in relation to Yahweh as a female to a husband, so as to avoid the imagery of a man-male sexual bond.

Embracing Truth

Part 3 - Christian belief

Chapter 9: *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*

Those who claim the same-sex controversy is only a marginal issue in the Bible and therefore no fuss should be made about it confuse frequency with importance. At the heart of this controversy are different ways of reading the Bible. Involved are two questions that concern Biblical authority and Biblical interpretation.

- Do we now know better than the Bible? (So we don’t have to read passages that are culturally conditioned as binding upon us.)
- Does the Bible really say what we think it does? (So we can take a different message from its text.)

The exegetical task involves the preliminary question: From where in Scripture should one construct, on the basis of accurate exegesis, an ethic of sexuality that relates to the issues surrounding same-sex relationships today?

An important tenet of hermeneutics decrees that the reader must interpret a text according to its genre. Thus *narrative* material is to be taken as *descriptive* of the narrative’s events and incidents, not necessarily as *normative* for forming the reader’s own behaviour, while passages concerning *law* should be seen as either *prescriptive* or *proscriptive* and must be applied *according to the purpose for which they were promulgated* and *in the time frame for which their enforcement was intended*.

Robert Gagnon works with several genres: creation stories, historical narratives, legislation, gospel accounts, epistolary exhortation and exposition - using also extra-biblical sources to provide background contextualisation.

Starting with the creation narratives he argues that they reveal to us abiding truths about God’s design for human relations, in particular the essential role of complementarity in human sexuality. Thus the formation of the woman from the man’s rib leads to marriage as a re-uniting of these representatives of the two genders as “one flesh”, and is not simply a union of two individuals. The missing part of man is found in woman and vice versa.

It is often claimed that the legal texts in the Old Testament relating to homosexuality belong to a purity code that simply imposed rules for Israel's ritual purity and have no bearing on modern ideas about homosexual conduct.

However, different types of law had different provinces, depending on whether they were moral (and so abiding) or civil (and so applicable only to the Israelite nation in Old Testament times) or ceremonial / cultic (pointing to Christ's atoning sacrifice and so fulfilled by his death on the cross). Robert Gagnon believes that these purity requirements, while formulated to meet the challenges of the times, still reflect the same morality to be seen in the more obviously abiding moral injunctions. God's people should still be seen as 'different' in their moral behaviour from their godless neighbours.

Historical narratives require the reader to form his or her own judgement concerning the moral consequences of what takes place. Robert Gagnon believes the claim that David and Jonathan exhibited a 'committed consensual homosexual relationship' such as 'non-promiscuous' homosexuals advocate today is assuredly an example of eisegesis rather than sound exegesis, as is the suggestion sometimes made that Ruth and Naomi were involved in a lesbian relationship.

The Gospel narratives depict Jesus as upholding a stricter standard on marriage than that propounded under Moses. As a 1st century Jew, he would have accepted the monogamous stance portrayed in Genesis 1 and would have shared his countrymen's repugnance at homosexual practice of any stripe as being 'contrary to nature'.

Paul's letter to the Romans reveals a crucial connection between idolatry and all the various sins that emerge from it, including homosexual practice. His thesis is that people have suppressed the truth about God, even after they had formerly known it, which had led to idolatry (a lie concerning who God is), which in turn had encouraged same-sex immorality (a lie about what God had created), which in turn had resulted in spiritual death in the form of various 'pay-backs' of decadent behaviours. By exchanging the truth for a lie at each turn, they had violated nature and become unnatural in their behaviour and stood condemned and thus liable ultimately to exclusion from the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chapter 10: Accommodation and Pastoral Concern

Robert Gagnon identifies two trends regarding same sex attitudes. First western culture at large is moving steadily toward codifying opposition to homosexual practice as the equivalent of virulent racism and sexism.

In the church, sliding down a slope of accommodation to homosexual practice, are those motivated by a genuine desire to be 'pastoral' to persons in committed homosexual relationships.

Thus a new 'Third' or 'Middle' Way has emerged that views homosexual practice as something less than the perfect will of God but, at any rate, no worse than any other sin and thus within the realm of compromise.

But for neither Jesus nor Paul did 'being pastoral' mean toleration of unrepentant behaviours that Scripture abhors.

That Paul devoted himself to those under his care to a degree that has scarcely been equalled in the history of the church is beyond question.

Yet for Paul, being pastoral sometimes meant temporarily suspending from participatory membership those who committed serious moral offenses such as incest, adultery and resorting to prostitutes. Homosexual acts would be no less serious in his eyes if only because such behaviours put the offenders at risk of not inheriting God's kingdom

Would Jesus accommodate gays? While he actively reached out in love to fraternize with sinners and tax collectors, he coupled this outreach with a call for repentance as an essential precondition for inheriting the kingdom of God.

Jesus prevented the crowd from stoning the woman caught in adultery – dead people don't repent – but clearly commanded the woman to "no longer be sinning". This command is combined elsewhere in John with the warning "lest something worse happen to you" (i.e., loss of eternal life). In Matthew's Sermon on the Mount the saying about cutting off offending body parts in order to avoid being sent to hell full-bodied is sandwiched in between two sets of teaching on the importance of sexual purity.

Augustine explained the meaning of his dictum "love and do what you want" by citing the example of a father who disciplines rigorously his child, while a "boy-stealer" caresses a boy. Which expresses love? The one who disciplines.

Chapter 11: **How seriously does the Bible treat homosexual practice?**

Robert Gagnon contends that homosexual practice is a more serious violation of God's will for sexual behaviour than even adult-consensual incest, adultery, plural marriage, fornication, and divorce because it violates the complementary 'otherness' of God's creational design for human sexuality. He points out that sexual bond by its very nature involves bodily integration of two discrete halves.

The idea that no one sin is worse than another is knocked on the head by those proponents of homosexual unions who recoil in horror at the thought of any comparison with adult-consensual incest or with adultery (to say nothing of bestiality or paedophilia) precisely because they operate with a notion that some sexual sins are truly more severe than others. Jesus himself spoke about 'the weightier matters of the law' as well as the 'two greatest commandments'.

When the world was first made, and mankind was formed, God made a male and a female. It was the uniting of these two, a man with his woman, that involved a man leaving his parental family to form a union that was not to be disrupted by any other human being but would become the means of reproducing the human race.

Tolerating homosexual behaviour would only convey to the perpetrators that the sin is 'no big deal', leaving unrepentant non-celibate homosexuals at risk of exclusion from an eternal relationship with God. (1 Cor 6:9-11)

Q 1: Even if we think homosexual practice is a sin, is this really an issue worth dividing the church over? Doesn't the church have more important things about which to be concerned? Would the apostle Paul agree?

Q 2: When Jesus was asked about divorce, was he arguing from Scripture (i.e. Gen 1:27 and 2:24), or from nature (inferences deducible from the fact of two genders) when he appealed to God's intention at creation in making human beings? (Mark 10:6-9 and Mat 19:4-6) Does his answer suggest to us a way of approaching also issues about homosexual behaviour?

Q 3 If no church would ordain anyone in 'committed' relationships involving either close blood relationships, or more than two other persons concurrently, or a child / adolescent, should homosexuals in sexual relationships, however 'committed', be ordained? Is such a relationship equally offensive? If so, why? If not, why not?

STUDY GUIDE

Embracing Truth:

Homosexuality and the Word of God

It is suggested that for group discussion members select the questions to which they wish to respond.

Part 3: The Bible and homosexual practice

Chapter 9: **Article review of Gagnon book**

Many people assert that homosexuality is only a marginal issue in the Bible and therefore no fuss should be made about it. **Robert Gagnon** says this logic confuses frequency with importance, hence this book that expounds those passages which do relate to the current debate.

Some revisionists, of course, question the relevancy of such passages, saying they only relate to *exploitive* same-sex acts and have nothing to do with contemporary *caring and committed* homosexual relationships.

Others take the line that, because the biblical writers were conditioned by their culture which, among other things, had no awareness of sexual *orientation* (as opposed to sexual *behaviour*), we cannot expect them to provide ethical guidance for us in the 20th century.

Robert Gagnon makes the case for heterosexual behaviour within marriage as the only legitimate sexual practice on the basis of the complementary nature of God's creational design for humanity. The coming together in 'one flesh' sexual union of man and woman reunites what was separated when God formed woman from man's side. The sexual act re-unites the one with the other, completing both.

Robert Gagnon also argues that whether or not biblical authors were aware of orientation psychology is immaterial to the discussion of the primary issue: the fundamental offence of homosexual behaviour.

From his intensive study of all the passages, Robert Gagnon concludes that the biblical proscription of same-sex intercourse, like those against incest, adultery, and bestiality, is *absolute* (encompassing all cases), *pervasive* (by both Testaments and within each Testament) and *severe* (mandating exclusion from God's kingdom).

Q 1: How crucial for a traditionalist reading of Scripture is Gagnon's argument that the exclusive complementarity of the opposite sexes is deducible from the creation account? Would the traditionalist case be convincing enough just to argue that certain texts of Scripture condemn homosexual acts?

Q 2: Can biblical teaching on same-sex relationships ever be reconciled with a covenanted, healthy, loving same sex relationship claimed for gay couples committed to lifelong partnership? Do 'faithfulness' and 'love' always imply 'morality'? Can you think of cases where this is not so?

Q 3: What part does cultural background play in determining the relevance of a biblical passage when applying its message to us today? What should we say to the argument that Jesus and Paul were 'men of their times' and therefore their views on sexuality are not relevant to us today?

Q 4: Why is it important, when looking in a text for ethical guidance, to consider the genre (literary form) of the passage being studied? Can one draw ethical conclusions from all genres, or only from clear commands (e.g. Moses' in the OT) and teachings (e.g. Jesus and Paul in the NT)?

Chapter 10: Accommodation and pastoral concern

Robert Gagnon addresses the issue of accommodation in the cause of pastoral concern for those experiencing homosexual pressures.

He discerns a slide by some church people that is partly motivated by:

- a) a genuine desire to be 'pastoral' to persons in committed homosexual relationships. But also
- b) some are equally driven by a felt need to find some compromise in order to be shielded from the verbal abuse and loss of status that comes with adopting the historic position. No-one wants to be labelled a 'bigot', least of all to be charged in court for discrimination. He also suspects
- c) a vigorous gay lobby of following a strategy to split the forces opposed to homosexual unions and move an otherwise resistant church to incremental and transitional steps in normalizing homosexual practice.

Robert Gagnon points out that the Bible portrays God's people as a remnant repeatedly called to leave behind sexual practices of the unbelieving world. Consequently moral standards should not shift because of the pressures of ridicule and persecution.

Jesus actively reached out in love to fraternize with sinners and tax collectors, but coupled this outreach with a call for repentance as an essential precondition for inheriting the kingdom of God.

Paul believed that 'being pastoral' included insisting that unrepentant incestuous church members not only be kept from leadership but also be suspended from participation in the life of the community until they repented. The reason for such severity was the very real risk such members took of not inheriting the kingdom of God.

Yet he equally insisted on love and unity within the church, exhorting that correction be done with gentleness, humility, self-introspection, and a desire to bear each other's burdens. He instructed churches to tailor the intensity of the correction to the offender's degree of recalcitrance. Moreover, he cautioned his churches to have in view not only the purity of the community but also the speedy reintegration of those who are disciplined.

Q 1: Which of the three accommodating groups do you see operating in the church - the pastorally concerned, the wary, the gay activists? With which group do you have most sympathy?

Q 2: If Paul devoted himself to those under his care in a way and to a degree that has scarcely been equalled in the history of the church, why would he be so severe in his condemnation of what outsiders might see as peccadilloes?

Q 3: Does love and commitment at least moderate the severity of homosexual practice to a point where the church can tolerate committed homosexual unions among the laity and even ordained officers of the church? Or are there other considerations that forestall such toleration?

Q 4: Do you agree with Augustine when he says, "Do not imagine that . . . you then love your son when you do not give him discipline, or that you then love your neighbour when you do not rebuke him. This is not love, but mere feebleness." Does such a verdict apply in the case of those involved pastorally with practicing homosexuals?

Q 5: When should disciplinary steps be taken against sexual immorality in the church today? What difference does it make if leaders are involved? Are any forms of 'tough love' possible today? Or is a judgement better left to God and people's conscience?

1. Same sex marriage will change the nature of **parenting** with negative implications for the sexual identity of children, which will further damage marriage and family, and be to the detriment of the common good.
2. The introduction of same sex marriage into law will have detrimental effects on **education**, when the new models of sex education, of marriage and of parenting become mandatory in public schools.
3. Once the definition of marriage is changed to accommodate same sex unions on account of equality and human rights, Government will have no good reasons not to **extend the definition** of marriage to other combinations, such as polygamous marriages.
4. This redefinition of marriage will bring with it State-sponsored **penalties** in the courts and workplace against any who dare question the rightness of same sex marriage, thereby riding roughshod over freedoms of speech, religion and conscience.

Chapter 15: Compassion and Community

The homosexual issue cannot be dodged as if it were unimportant, especially if it might, as Paul claims, have eternal consequences.

Yet exploration of what it means to be compassionate in the present debate is as essential as it is to understand not only what the Bible really does say, and what it doesn't, but also why the Bible says what it does.

Those who take the Bible seriously know that Scripture is unfavourable to homosexual practice. For them, regarding sexual behaviour, the only authentic choice open to anyone is the biblical one between heterosexual marriage and celibacy. Homosexuals deserve our compassion.

Those who do not have a high regard for the Bible (because they think they know better than the Bible now) may argue that, since Jesus told us that the love of God and our neighbour is supremely important, how we interpret what love means is up to the individual, irrespective of other commands found in the Bible. Homosexuals deserve our respect.

In the early church unity was important. The issue facing the church at the Jerusalem conference recorded in Acts 15 was soluble because each party listened to Scripture and listened to each other's experience.

Embracing Truth

Part 4 - Wisdom and Obedience

Chapter 12: The Celibate Path

Personal experience of a celibate homosexual:

Callum MacKellar describes his **troubled** childhood, involving suffering and despair because of his homosexual orientation, as made worse by fears of rejection by Christian parents and church. "My homosexuality was then, and continues to be, the cause of an incredible amount of **suffering** and **despair**." The question that never went away. "What was the cause of this deep suffering and despair?" Trying to **change his orientation** brought only further despair at his lack of success, even bringing into question his relationship with God: should love between two homosexual people have priority over love for God?

Church:

Many homosexual people still feel **angry** towards the churches, viewing them as largely responsible for their condemnation & rejection by society. Callum MacKellar confesses: "I often long for the physical and emotional **closeness** and affection that I see in couples and families, and to be part of something so positive and full of love." However he does have a lifeline: "I can contact some Christian brothers and sisters at any time when the **storm** in my mind becomes unbearable, who remain with me when I fall and everything goes wrong." He also realises: "I, too, have a **responsibility** to seek to love others with the sacrificial love of God and be a brother to all around me, including those in my 'Sunday' church even if this is not always easy."

Sexuality:

Accepting that homosexual orientation has a biological element should not affect how we view the morality of homosexual practice, just as the fact that a tendency for aggressiveness in a person can sometimes be shown to have a biological root does not mean that it should be viewed as morally acceptable by society.

"I now believe that my homosexuality is most likely to be the result of how my biological brain was **wired-up** and that I may now be constrained to a life of celibacy. But even if the whole world accepted homosexuality as

morally acceptable, including the established church, I know that **homosexual feelings of attraction** would still be a **cause of suffering** to me although I do not know why. I also know that, whatever the consequences of the 'wiring-up' in my head, only **the love of God** is deep enough to fill whatever I am really **seeking!**"

Eikon:

The relationship between **a man and a woman** is an *eikon* (picture model) of the relationship between **Jesus and the church** and in ancient thought, the *eikon* was not considered only a copy of the reality being portrayed, but was thought somehow to **participate in the very substance of the reality it symbolised**.

It is the relationship that is central to **the 'one flesh' experience**, while the physical aspects are expressions of the relationship. **Holy Communion** expresses this relationship through the physical **bread and wine**. These elements literally **become part of the flesh and blood of church members** and symbolically reflect Jesus' body which he offered.

A strong **inter-dependence** exists between the husband-wife and the Jesus-church relationships. Also both relationships of love have a sort of **'direction'** between the female actors (the woman or the church) and the male actors (the man or Christ) which are complementary. It is not only the identity of the two different actors that form a complementary unity but also the different directions of their loving relationships.

But in a homosexual relationship, there is no longer a 'direction' because the two individuals have the same gender, and so it would be trying, in a mysterious way, to either make the church take the role of Christ, a form of **idolatry**, or make Christ take the role of the church, whereby he would **lose his deity**. And this could only be a complete distortion of who God really is. Idolatry in the Bible always involves a strong element of role-reversal (Rom 1:21-32); the creature perverting nature by making the Creator in his own image.

Callum MacKellar sees an **intimidation campaign** going on which has made some homosexual Christians deeply afraid of stating publicly that they are opposed, for reasons of conscience and faith, to homosexual relationships.

Chapter 13: Matters of the Heart

James E. Loder was a theologian, psychologist and therapeutic counselor. In his therapeutic work dealing with homosexuality, he saw in the homosexual condition a human spirit that had been deeply wounded. A key question was:

Is a life transformation possible which renders homosexual inclination reversible? And if so, what facilitates that transformation?

Following Freud's view that "analysis does not set out to make pathological reactions impossible, but to give the patient's ego *freedom* to decide one way or the other," Loder believed a person under therapy is given the ability to live in the light of a transforming insight which reconfigures the self and the world.

When probing the anger of the wounded human spirit that had become distorted, twisted, and was interpreting everything very differently than would otherwise be the case, Loder often found a deep sense of yearning for intimacy with another human being, together with a terrible sense of frustration that that yearning was not fulfilled. Ultimately that yearning could only be satisfied by receiving grace and healing from the Spirit of Christ. But this should never be forced upon anyone, nor should anyone be coerced to change.

Loder also thought it important to separate the person's identity from their sexual preference, so that homosexuality is something a person *has* rather than something he/she *is*.

Chapter 14: Pastoral Letter

Philip Tartaglia, Roman Catholic Bishop of Paisley wrote:

Same sex unions are different in nature and purpose from marriage. Same sex marriage is therefore not an issue about equality or human rights. It is an issue about the nature and meaning of marriage in our society. The issue is about equivalence, not equality.

It is very important to realise that opposition to the introduction of same sex marriage is not, as some so stridently assert, 'homophobic bigotry', but is the assertion and defence of the nature and meaning of marriage which has been universally recognised by all cultures and all the great religions, and which has sustained humanity since time immemorial.

Chapter 15: *Compassion and Community*

Jock Stein observes that “Love your neighbour as yourself” is popularly understood as “Do for others as you would wish them to do for you, were you in their position” – but unfortunately this simply begs the question, since a revisionist thinks of the homosexual as seeking a natural relief which we can give simply by telling him, “Homosexual behaviour is OK”, while a traditionalist thinks of him or her as seeking a false dawn which will be good neither for him or her nor for society.

Compassion is not simply a matter of caring for an individual. It goes beyond social justice and duty of care to ask: Do these laws reflect also God’s will? And here traditionalists and revisionists clash. To revisionists compassion means allowing people the liberty to ‘do what they feel they need to do’. Traditionalists, however, see liberalisation of sexual norms over the past fifty years as not only contrary to God’s design, but as also having brought huge damage to the health and social well-being of the nation. For them this is not an outcome that compassionate people should welcome.

Jock Stein makes the point that people who choose to remain celibate all their lives are today considered positively strange. Furthermore, when civil partnerships were introduced, it left long-term friends who shared a house or flat (but not a sexual relationship) in an ambiguous position. Though they might be sharing for a variety of reasons, not least for financial advantage, they certainly would not wish to be thought of as engaging in any sexual relationship. In our over-sexed society, few seem to imagine that people can live together in a celibate manner.

Q 1: Why is ‘doing to others as you would like them to do to you’ not a sufficient ethical principle for a follower of Jesus?

Q 2: Why is allowing people to do what they want ultimately not compassionate? Can you think of examples in your own experience where this has been shown to be the case?

Q 3: Can either celibate homosexuals or heterosexual friends sharing accommodation avoid church ‘talk’ in today’s world? How can church members react in a constructive way to such gossip?

Q 4: Which suggestion for practical action do you consider most helpful? Do you have any additional suggestions?

STUDY GUIDE

Embracing Truth:

Homosexuality and the Word of God

It is suggested that for group discussion members select the questions to which they wish to respond.

Part 4: **Wisdom and Obedience**

Chapter 12: The Celibate Path

Callum MacKellar is a celibate gay Christian. Describing his troubled youth as a person with homosexual orientation, he states that only his faith in God sustained him then. Even today he says:

“My mind sometimes feels like a battlefield, with my loving relationship with God on one side, and sometimes overwhelming feelings of homosexuality on the other. These battles are often very lonely experiences since being a homosexual person is still a very difficult ‘state’ to be in for many churches. Recently Christian churches have begun making a serious attempt to understand homosexual people better,.... not because they finally woke up to the deep suffering and pain in their midst, but because of growing pressure from the secular homosexual lobby at the end of the 20th century and beyond.”

Homosexuals do not fit an (exclusive) church family model which provides love and **belonging** to family members but in which they have no part, increasingly feel abandoned, lonely and unloved by anyone.

Churches *can* grow into being “a real family united by the communion of **unconditional love**.”

Callum MacKellar explains his intellectual struggle with some of the issues that the homosexual condition raises for a Christian:

“I have tried to understand why God is against something which, from the world's perspective, can only be seen as positive, pleasurable and good with no negative consequences.

It is far easier to resist homosexual practices if there is clear evidence that it causes suffering to other people (including God) than if one is just following Biblical precepts.”

Q 1: Why do you think churches have been so unsympathetic to homosexuals in the past?

Q 2: What steps can be taken to try and understand more the deep pain experienced by those struggling with homosexual feelings?

Q 3 What is it that the homosexually orientated person wants to find more than anything else in a church congregation?

Q 4: How would you describe the make-up of your local church membership? What might be involved in showing 'unconditional love' to anyone who does not fit this general description?

Q 5: Why is not just following Biblical precepts usually not enough to resist the temptation to disobey these precepts? What else is needed?

Chapter 13: Matters of The Heart

In all of the vast modern discussion on homosexuality, the work of **James E Loder** serves to remind us that matters of the human spirit often play a key role, and cannot be ignored by the counselor, priest or minister of the gospel. Loder's reflections on his counseling work led him to affirm that the logic (or pattern) of transformation may operate even where homosexual inclinations seem deeply entrenched in a person's life. He saw homosexual orientation as a conception of reality constructed by the person rather than an inescapable biological inclination within that person.

He found in all his cases involving homosexuality a common thread: their human spirit had been wounded. The power of the physical or emotional absence of parents to wound a young person's spirit indicates that we are into something more profound than trying to pinpoint some aspect of 'poor parenting'. In every person's life there was a deeply wounded human spirit.

Significantly in the Netherlands, with societal acceptance of homosexual inclination and practice, homosexual males have a high rate of inner turmoil and depression. Yet Loder saw that helping homosexuals accept their condition does not alleviate their personal despondency.

The U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in a study on homosexual lifespans, concluded that diseases, organ failures, psychological and mental problems associated with homosexual sex develop early and hit hard among participants. Not surprisingly homosexual persons live 20 years less on average than heterosexuals.

Q 1: Why should a homosexual want to change his orientation? Is it possible and if so how? Should we encourage this, or not? Why?

Q 2: Why might so many homosexuals be unhappy? What is your experience of working with homosexuals? Do you find them excessively unhappy people? How do they find you? What can we say to those who struggle with themselves to alleviate their anguish?

Chapter 14: A Pastoral Letter (Roman Catholic)

The RC Bishop of Paisley has major concerns about the same sex marriage proposals, relating to the devaluation of parenting, what will be taught in schools, the likely further extension of 'marriage' definition, and penalising of those adhering to orthodox views of marriage.

Catholic apologist Peter Williams points out that the debate is about whether we should change the definition of a fundamentally important natural and social institution to accommodate the desire of some members of one particular sexual minority for state-led affirmation of their sexual relationships.

Regarding the idea of same sex marriage, while love and commitment are essential elements of marriage, they are not sufficient elements of what constitutes the conjugal union that is Marriage.

The law, by the force of its authority, changes the way that society thinks. By abandoning marriage as currently understood, the state would no longer privilege the husband-wife context in which to rear children, thereby affirming a public view that children do not need the femininity of a mother to protect *from* the world and the masculinity of a father to show how to take appropriate risks to prepare *for* the world.

Q 1: Do civil partnerships meet all the legitimate needs of same-sex couples? Why do gay activists insist on the need for gay marriage also?

Q 2: Is the conjugal union of husband and wife (providing the possibility of producing children) the only valid form of a loving relationship that constitutes marriage?

Q 3: Insofar as re-definition of marriage changes culture, and has the capacity to threaten rights of conscience and religious freedom, where might those opposing same-sex marriage who try to operate in the public square find themselves being penalised?

objective scientific truth no longer deemed to be a 'moral' matter but one of physics and chemistry ('just how I am made'). Politicians now speak of it as 'normal and healthy' (when it is neither!) Dissent cannot be a moral choice, only immoral prejudice.

Note: Not just about normality of homosexuality, but the normality of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and everything in between. Also the significance of the Fall is forgotten: in the light of creational normativity we all without exception struggle with personal 'abnormality'.

If nothing can conceivably be abnormal, normativity vanishes. Society becomes entirely self-referential. This is post-modernism. Reality is but a flux of shifting sands. Dada was an irrational ('Freedom') reaction to the authoritarian and mechanistic ('Nature') carnage of the First World War. Freudianism ensued: truth sought in dreams, the subconscious, drugs. From Neo-Classical versus Romanticist painting, to the machine v. human in the *Terminator* & *Matrix* trilogies, the Nature-Freedom motive pervades. Today's society has internalised humanism's reductionist materialism which has become the default actuality. This is evident in the media where no 'pluralism' is allowed. Any discussion of ideas on mainstream radio or TV must be arbitrated by humanistic presenters. Scripture is unacceptable. Incomprehensible. Offensive. Out of kilter with society not just in terms of content, but also as a category of discourse. Thus the virtue of homosexuality is no longer in question. That of Christianity most certainly is. These are the rules. The alternative is marginalisation.

"The shoreline seethes. The dunes are browbeaten, winnowed by the winds. But eventually we all must reckon with the rock beneath the sands."

Dooyeweerd bids us find footing within a Christ-rooted, non-dualistic reality; within a creational normativity deeper than self, society, or physics.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Q 1: What truth does the writer's image of the "storm-smudged strand of churning, crashing waves and windborne, stinging sand" convey to you?

Q 2: *How should we respond to political correctness regarding the 'normality' of homosexuality? How would you explain your position to your 'politically correct' MP?*

Q 3: *Is marriage an institution of the State or of the Church? Or neither? Or both? Does it depend upon which 'ground-motive' one is operating in?*

Embracing Truth:

Homosexuality and the Word of God

DIGEST and STUDY GUIDE

Epilogue: Drawing a line in shifting sands

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh explains why his intended answer to the Government's *Consultation on Same Sex Marriage* became unsettled. *He begins imagining himself, to his surprise, on a storm-swept beach leaning into the squalls, churning waves symbolising a revolution...*

"Scripture censures homosexual practice, sure, but a democratic Christian should nonetheless concede space to diverse groupings. Anticipating reciprocity, of course. Our pluralist society is in various stages of theological freefall. Some spectacular. So what's new? Why attempt a 'line in the sand' on this fraught issue in particular?"

What changed my mind? The realization that my notion of 'reciprocity' was an illusion... This was no exercise in pluralism. Far from it. This was liberalist despotism. The proposed law would not reinforce choice in society but reduce it. That was its entire, if *sotto voce*, point. Ecclesiastical opt-out clause? As well inscribed on tidal sand. And a diversion from the real deal on the street where opt-out would be outlawed. So do I fault our politicians? Not really. By-and-large they are being honourable and high-minded. They are simply doing what politicians do. Conforming to a changing landscape. Democracy in action, folks. The bigger question then is: what subterranean dynamics have so strikingly transmuted our landscape? Ah! The fascinating 'plate-tectonics' of Western Thought! How deep does it all go? Very."

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh takes as his 'speleological' guide the Dutch Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977). Dooyeweerd coined the term 'ground motives' to express the deep motivating forces that have influenced Western thinking about God, the cosmos and human experience, since the the days of ancient Greece. 'Ground motives' reflect a communal orientation of thinking (what society as a whole believes) rather than any personal beliefs.

All thought is ultimately 'religious' in the sense that man himself is committed either to God or a false god. Dooyeweerd identifies four major ground motives:

1. Matter - Form

First is the fractured bedrock of Hellenistic thought creating a **dualistic** ground motive with its irreconcilable polarities of **'Matter' and 'Form'**.

The nature religion of life and death deified the ever-flowing stream of organic life which originates from mother earth (**matter**). As one corporal form of life gives way to another, there is an inescapability about the fate of each as the life of the one is the death of the other. The religious **form-**motive, on the other hand, is the central motive of the younger Olympian religion of form, measure and harmony, wherein the cultural aspect of the Greek *polis* was deified. Greek tragedies reflect the conflict between these two religions. This Form-Matter polarity even suggests 21st century cinema's genres of *superhero* (neo-Olympian 'deified cultural forces') and *zombie* (pitiless, dreadful, *inescapability*).

Note: The Aristotelian view of nature was no more independent of religious presuppositions than any other philosophical view.

2. Creation, Fall and Redemption

The second ground-motive which shaped the landscape is the **non-dualist** one of **'creation, fall, and redemption through Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit'**.

The Christian religion stands in radical antithesis to the religious ground-motive of Greek antiquity. Its integrality embraces all things created. Its radicality penetrates to the root of created reality. God, the creator, reveals himself as the absolute, complete, and integral origin of all things. No equally original power stands over against him in the way that *Inescapability* and *Blind Fate* stood over against the Olympian gods.

Hence, within the created world one cannot find an expression of two contradictory principles of origin, though historically Christian thought has struggled to escape the prevailing dualistic ground-motive of society at large.

3. Nature - Grace

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) attempted a synthesis of the two preceding ground-motives, believing that truth is truth wherever it is found, in particular finding it in natural theology as well as in Scriptural revelation.

Note: In Thomas Aquinas' synthesis of Greek thought and Christian teaching the state was the total, all-inclusive community in the realm of nature. But both the individual and marriage (in its sacramental superstructure) belonged also to the supranatural order, where the jurisdiction of the state did not extend to overlap grace's domain.

The general Thomist **synthesis** was challenged by the English Franciscan **William of Ockham** (c. 1280-1349) who **denied any point of contact between nature and grace**, thus exposing the deep **rift** between the Christian religion and the Greek view of nature.

Like the Greek form-matter motive, the ground-motive of **nature and grace** made a **separation of reality**, this time **between the natural and the supranatural**.

The naturalistic attitude summoned the ecclesiastical truths of grace before the court of natural reason, and a supranatural mysticism attempted to escape 'nature' in the mystical experience of 'grace'. Ultimately this dialectic led to an unbridgeable gulf between nature and grace; nature became completely independent of grace.

Western culture was presented with **two options**: it could either **pursue the 'natural' direction** which ultimately would lead to a complete emancipation of man from the faith of the church, **or return to the pure ground-motive of Scripture**, namely, creation, fall, and redemption through Jesus Christ. The Renaissance movement, the forerunner of humanism, followed the first path; the Reformation followed the second.

4. Nature - Freedom

Modern humanism introduced the fourth ground-motive: Nature and Freedom, arising from the conflict between **natural science**, with its chain of causes and effects, and the cult of **human autonomy** which attempts to harness natural laws. But if man himself is a product of laws determined by nature, whence his freedom? Enter **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804) with his 'fact/value distinction'.

Christianity, which up till the mid 20th century was generally considered 'Fact', is now seen as a subjective 'Value', belonging to a ragbag of 'faith groups'. In contrast, homosexuality has been re-categorised from the 'Value' side (about which people could differ) to the 'Fact' side of