

# EMBRACING TRUTH

Homosexuality and the Word of God

## Extracts

*Compiled by Paul Burgess*

***Embracing Truth: Homosexuality and the Word of God*** is a Handsel Press publication of commissioned articles by 14 different authors (Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran and Roman Catholic) from Scotland, England and America, covering a wide range of issues concerning same-sex relationships written from a moderate traditionalist stance.

**Digests** of each of these articles, together with a two page **Synopsis** of the whole book, and a 20 page **Study Guide**, can be viewed and freely downloaded from [www.handselpress.co.uk](http://www.handselpress.co.uk).

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## Extracts from *Touching Truth*

### 1. Confusion and clarity: Andrew Goddard

*Dr Goddard is a writer on ethics and a former member of the Oxford University Faculty of Theology.*

**Chapter Theme:** Why traditionally the Christian position on sex, in the face of opposing social norms, argues first *for* what is good rather than arguing *against* what is bad.

**In the extracts following** Dr. Goddard lists four ‘goods’ involved in the theology of sexuality and warns against identifying current social movements as the work of the Holy Spirit.

This book argues that there is much wisdom in the Church’s traditional teaching about human sexuality, based on the witness of Scripture, and that it would be unwise to abandon this in the light of such rapid and untested social change. At the heart of this teaching is *not* a stance *against* homosexuality. The Christian position is rather a stance *for* a number of goods.

Firstly, the goodness of God’s will for human beings and their flourishing as revealed in Christ and the biblical witness of both Old and New Testaments.

Secondly, the goodness of humans being made male and female in the image of God as described in Genesis 2. In the words of Oliver O’Donovan, if the church is asked “to adopt some alternative myth of creation-order to replace that in which Adam acclaims Eve as ‘bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’, it can only refuse”.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, the goodness of marriage as a created institution in which one man and one woman pledge themselves to each other for life and give expression to and strengthen their love through their sexual union. This pattern of life is the best and proper context for procreation and the upbringing of children, provides wider society with a supporting structure of mutual society, help and comfort between the couple, and offers what was traditionally described as “a remedy against sin” and the destructive effects of sexual sin on both individuals and communities.

This leads to the fourth good which Christians seek to uphold and commend – the virtue of chastity through which we are enabled to direct our sexual desires in a manner that enables human flourishing through faithfulness to a spouse in marriage and abstinence from sex in non-marital forms of friendship....

The fact of social change is... never a sufficient reason for theological change. The history of Christianity contains numerous warnings of the dangers in embracing social movements as the work of the Spirit, especially when this involves abandoning, ignoring or down-playing the wisdom of Scripture and Christian tradition. In relation to various areas – not least in regard to other issues of sexuality such as pre-marital sex, cohabitation and abortion – the movement into a post-Christendom missional context seems to be requiring the church to become more intentional and distinctive in its patterns of moral formation and discipleship.

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver O’Donovan, “Homosexuality in the Church: Can there be a fruitful theological debate?” in Timothy Bradshaw (ed), *The Way Forward?* (SCM, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2003), 30.

## **2. Same sex science: the social sciences cannot settle the moral status of homosexuality**

**Stanton L. Jones**

*Stanton L. Jones is provost and professor of psychology at Wheaton College.*

*Dominant Theme:* In a culture polarized between those relentlessly advancing the full acceptance and normalization of homosexuality, and those resisting those moves, we are guilty of embracing the disease conceptualization of homosexuality. There is still much we do not know about the complexities of sexual behaviour.

*In the extract following* Stanton Jones argues that the social sciences cannot usurp the role of religion, theology and philosophy in adjudicating on what behaviour is right or wrong. On the other hand we have failed to anticipate the vacuum left by the timely demise of the disease explanation of homosexuality, and have been left with no thoughtful and pastorally sensitive understanding of sexual brokenness.

Meaningful consideration of the nature of personhood always involves moving beyond the analysis of human life to the broader valuation of this or that characteristic, this or that phenomenon, this or that outcome. The social sciences do not contain within themselves adequate resources to adjudicate among conflicting ways of understanding the good. Individual scientists, stepping beyond their professional bounds, may declare homosexual orientation positive, normal, and legitimate, but such science cannot make this judgment. Such judgments are the domain of religion, theology, and philosophy. The twin claims that science conclusively establishes that sexual orientation grounds human identity and that psychology as a science establishes the legitimacy of such a claim are too far a reach.

So where does this leave us? We know much more now than we did ten and thirty years ago about the emotional well-being of homosexual persons, the complicated interaction of nature and nurture in the causation of sexual orientation, of the complicated and difficult possibilities of sexual-orientation malleability, of the functional and descriptive characteristics manifest in same sex partnerships, and of the contours of the psychological identities of homosexual persons. The contributions of science to this area, however, remain sketchy, limited, and puzzling. It is remarkable how little scientific humility is in evidence given the primitive nature of our knowledge.

Nevertheless, our culture is polarized between those relentlessly advancing the full acceptance and normalization of homosexuality, indeed of all sexual variations, and those resisting those moves. As religious believers, we must confess our own culpability in creating the mess we are in.

We were complicit, even if ignorantly and passively so, in the cultural embrace of the disease conceptualization of homosexuality. 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. The best ecclesiastical, professional, legal, and social policy will be founded not on falsehoods or grotesque and indefensible simplifications but on a clearheaded grasp of reality in all its complexities, as well as on a humble recognition of all that we do not know.

### 3. Facts and Figures

David J Randall

*The Revd David Randall was parish minister in Macduff from 1971–2010, and convened the Church of Scotland Apologetics Committee from 1993–97, producing the 'What Can I Say' leaflet which has just been re-published by the Mission and Discipleship Council.*

**Chapter Theme:** statistical evidence regarding the stability or otherwise of non-marital sexual relationships (both homosexual and heterosexual) points to the conclusion that such relationships are intrinsically insecure and that only the traditional marriage relationship of man and woman in faithful monogamous commitment to each other offers hope of lasting stability for family life.

**In the extract following** David Randall quotes gay lobbyists to demonstrate the libertine character of their agenda in stark contrast to God's plan "for the welfare of human society, which can be strong and happy only where the marriage bond is held in honour".

This chapter will be mainly concerned with the statistical evidence regarding the stability – or rather instability – of non-marital sexual relationships (both homosexual and heterosexual). A suitable starting-point comes from an article in the *Gay Times* in the year 2000:

The fundamental advantage gay relationships have over marriage is that we can tailor them precisely to our requirements. We can make them up as we go along, change with the circumstances and go with the flow. We don't have to promise sexual exclusivity or to share our worldly goods if we don't want to.<sup>2</sup>

Much current debate surrounds the issue of committed relationships. Some people in active homosexual relationships (in society and now even within the church) wish to emphasise their desire for recognition of the permanent commitment of two same-gender people to each other and their right to 'marry' if they so choose.

Yet another writer – who has been described as "one of the leading gay intellectuals in the West" and whose book *Virtually Normal* has been described as "the most articulate case for gay marriage" – argues that homosexual partnerships have many advantages over heterosexual marriage. He claims, "There is more likely to be greater understanding of the need for extramarital outlets between two men than between a man and a woman . . . Their failures entail fewer consequences for others."<sup>3</sup> It was researchers sympathetic to homosexual rights who reported that most homosexual men have several partners – on average seven per year<sup>4</sup> – and against this background we will consider the evidence regarding the duration of such relationships. We will also consider the evidence regarding heterosexual cohabitation.

Our thesis will be that such relationships are intrinsically insecure and that marriage between one man and one woman is 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. It accords with what God has revealed and it has stood the test of time. Other chapters in this volume will deal specifically with the first (what God has revealed); this chapter is concerned with the evidence for the second – that marriage is God's plan

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<sup>2</sup> Terry Sanderson, quoted in *The Guardian*, 2 September 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal* (Picador, 1996), 202; quoted in 'Gay Marriage' in *all but name*, The Christian Institute, 2004, 23.

<sup>4</sup> *The Sexual Lifestyles of Gay and Bisexual Men in England and Wales* (HMSO, 1992), 19.

“for the welfare of human society, which can be strong and happy only where the marriage bond is held in honour”.<sup>5</sup> The Bible gives us the Maker’s instructions for our lives and it is folly to ignore them. Just as a railway track is extremely restrictive and yet it is that track that enables a train to be a train, so running along God’s guidelines is the way to human fulfillment.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. The Authority of Scripture: Is the Bible the Word of God or does it only contain the Word of God?**

**David W. Torrance**

*The Revd David Torrance is a retired parish minister, and was honorary president of the Scottish Order of Christian Unity.*

**Chapter Theme:** The Bible as the place of encounter with the living God who meets us in the human frailty of Scripture. Acceptance of the Word of God as the infallible rule of faith is foundational for a truly Christian understanding of all moral issues and a truly obedient submission to God’s loving will for his people in Christ.

**In the extracts following** David Torrance demonstrates the importance of submitting to Scripture as the Word of God to us today and the relevance of a view of the Bible that submits to the whole Word (rather than parts of it) for approaching the moral issues of today.

Issues concerning marriage, morality, same-sex relationships and education concern both Church and society and raise many questions. Can and should the Church speak authoritatively on these issues? If so, what is the Church’s authority? What is the authority of Scripture? What is meant by those who say that the Bible is the Word of God? What is the relation between Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God and the Bible as the written Word of God? If Jesus is the one eternal Word of God become man for us, and if his Word remains identical with his Person become flesh, in what sense is the Bible the Word of God? Was the Bible authoritative only for the days in which it was written or is it authoritative for us today? “The subject *of the Bible* is of lasting importance for Christians of all types and denominations . . . It is of the utmost importance that these questions should be answered rightly.”<sup>7</sup>....

Christian faith is dependent on the Bible, on the word of Holy Scripture. Without the Bible, the written word of God, we would have no knowledge of Jesus Christ, no knowledge of God and no faith in God, no knowledge of the resurrection, salvation and eternal life. The Church would have disappeared long ago. On the other hand, without the Church and the witness of prophets and apostles to the Word of God, to Jesus Christ, there would be no Bible. The Church and the Bible belong together in the Church’s faith.

It is very important to recognise that we can never prove that the Bible is the word of God. just as we cannot prove the presence and existence of God. Just as God alone can and does reveal God through his Holy Spirit, so the Word of God, the divine-human Word, to whom the written word of Scripture testifies, is self-authenticating through the

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<sup>5</sup> From marriage service in *Book of Common Order* of the Church of Scotland (OUP, 1965), 155.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John 8:32.

<sup>7</sup> John K.S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, 7-8.

testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. It is in the God-given assurance of the Holy Spirit that the Church believes and confesses that we encounter God and hear him speak through Scripture. "The Bible is the Christ book; not just a book which speaks of him, but a book through which he speaks to us."<sup>8</sup> That the Bible is objectively the word of God is a confession of faith on the part of the universal Church...

If we were able to prove the presence and existence of God, as theologians and philosophers in the past often tried to do, we would be positing between ourselves in the world and God a logical continuity in terms of which we could argue from the one necessarily to the other. That would mean that we were exalting ourselves to a position equal or even superior to God and we were able with human reason to prove that the Bible is God's Word. That would mean that we were actually above the Word of God, that we were superior to the Word of God and in a position to submit judgment concerning it. In that case it would not be the Word of God.<sup>9</sup>...

The position that 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 for today. Those who adopt a progressive position and wish to accept same-sex relationships, are generally willing to accept that the Bible is against same-sex relationships, but seek to insist that the Bible only "contains" the Word of God. Hence they argue that some things in the Bible, such as the prohibition of same-sex relationships, are not the Word of God.

Some of a liberal persuasion wish to say also that the Bible was the Word of God and authoritative for the day in which it was written, but it is not always and necessarily authoritative for us today. They say modern science has enabled us to understand much about creation of which the Biblical writers were unaware. They say it can guide us in our understanding of Scripture and help us to determine what is the Word of God and authoritative. Is this not to adopt the same position as those who say that the Bible only "contains" the Word of God?...

The Church owes her authority to the Word of God as witnessed to in Scripture. The Church's authority is the authority of a servant, commissioned to proclaim the Word of God. It has no independent authority of her own. "The church is called, empowered, and guided to her proclamation by Holy Scripture, and that involves the assertion that Holy Scripture is the Word of God".<sup>10</sup> If and when the Church questions the authority of the Bible and seeks to elevate herself to a position where she can determine what is and what is not the Word of God, she loses her empowerment. The Church loses her authority to speak to the world. She will inevitably speak with a divided voice, being uncertain about what is truly the Word of God. The Church will lose her identity in Christ. Society and the world will not be generally attracted to the Church or wish to listen to the Church. For the most part the Church will simply say what the rest of the world already thinks and says. The Church in these circumstances ceases to be "the salt of the earth", proclaiming to the world the mind of Christ.

While, in the Old Testament there is a gradual revelation of God, nonetheless God is always true, unchanging and faithful to himself. In Christ, in the New Testament, we have a full and final revelation of God for all generations. God's Word as witnessed to in the written word of the Bible, is authoritative for every generation. This was and is the

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<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Vogel, *The Iron Ration of a Christian*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> See C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Bible and Christian Life*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Part 1, 122.

## EXTRACTS

confession of the one Holy Catholic Church. To depart from that is to dissent from the faith of the historic Church. If the Church seeks to accept parts of the Bible and to reject other parts, as authoritative for every generation, then she is in a sea of trouble. This, sadly, is to a great extent the position in which the Church of Scotland and the churches of the West find themselves today in discussing, marriage, morality, same-sex relationships and education. As a result, the Church, in the eyes of many, has become irrelevant!

### 5. The biblical affirmation of sex Tom Smail

*Canon Tom Smail was a minister of both the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, and formerly principal of St John's College, Nottingham. Sadly he died on 15th February 2012.*

**Chapter Theme:** Any negative assessment of same-sex activity must be because it is inconsistent with the positive divine intention for marriage revealed in the pivotal verse in Genesis 2 (v.24) as the complementary roles of man and women in working and caring for creation, reflecting the creative and loving image of God himself. Where this complementarity is removed in individual relationships, society itself begins to disintegrate.

**In the extracts following** Canon Smail firstly affirms the priority of the positive over the negative in teaching about human sexuality; he goes on to show the need for both a unitive and procreative function in marriage based on God's own love and creativity. In the third extract Canon Smail defends himself against the charge of being idealistic in the face of so many failed marriages; Moses face the same problem in his day, as did Jesus and Paul. This is why the biblical positive does imply also the biblical negatives as expressed by Paul in Rom 1.

One thing I learnt in my Glasgow philosophy studies long ago is that a negative depends upon a prior positive; you can say No to something only because you have already said Yes to something else. You reject a false God on the basis of your ideas about the true God; you denounce something as wrong because it contradicts what you, perhaps only half consciously, already affirm to be right. Thus the positive always has priority over the negative, you are against something because you are for something else that is inconsistent with it. The right relating of positive and negative is important in our present context of the biblical teaching about human sexuality in general and same-sex relationships in particular...

The wedding services with which in our different denominations we are familiar all distinguish between the unitive and the procreative purposes of marriage and of sex within marriage. The tone and the quality of the marriage depend on the interaction of both. When the love that binds the spouses together fails, the children suffer. Where the marriage is childless, the spouses suffer, and both kinds of suffering are in evidence with their unhappy effects on family life and wider society around us every day.

Because in God's own life and activity love and creativity belong together, so in the human life that is made to mirror God, things are in good order when they go together as well. Faithful spouses make for happy families. Where a relationship lacks that publicly registered commitment of a man and a woman to stay together for richer or poorer, for better or worse, its future is uncertain and unstable. Because God is love, his purposes for

## EXTRACTS

his creation are reliable and unchanging and the married relationship mirrors both that divine love and that stability and reliability when a man and a woman reach the point of ultimate commitment when they are able to say to each other, "All that I am I give to you and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

It is important to see that the coming together of a man and a woman in the one flesh of lifelong marriage is not a matter of arbitrary divine interference with what would otherwise be sexual autonomy where everybody was free to make their own erotic arrangements. As we have already seen the covenant commitment that constitutes marriage reflects the inmost essence of the life of the Creator that characterises all his dealings with us. In New Testament perspective Paul in Ephesians 5 can see the relationship between husband and wife as mirroring the relationship of Christ and his Church. Furthermore the fact that marriage is introduced in the context of the creation stories of Genesis is an indication that this relationship, far from being an alien and external imposition, is in fact an essential and necessary component that enables the creation to run as it was meant to in a loving environment from which, from generation to generation, the human creation has its continuity and its possibility of fulfilment. In other words, when marriage is honoured and works well, society also works well and where marriage is relativised and replaced, society begins to disintegrate and its future stability and advance comes under serious threat. The negative evidence for that is around us on every side and the current proposals to count same-sex pairing as equivalent to marriage, a relationship that the biblical norm clearly shows to be incompatible with it, only make confusion worse confounded and future dangers even more threatening....

[Some will protest] that what I have been saying may be exegetically justified but is hopelessly idealistic and out of touch with things as they are. It is not hard to produce example after example of marriages that have brought to those involved in them frustration rather than fulfilment, oppression rather than liberation, heartbreaking misery rather than exhilarating joy, where the experience of their own homes have made children wary of becoming involved in an institution which has brought such confusion into their lives. Even within the biblical record itself such central figures as Abraham, David and Solomon had dealings with women that were a thousand miles away from what is recommended in Genesis 2, and nevertheless God continued, while rebuking them, to love them and work through them. Even Jesus in the very act of confirming and indeed reinforcing the total claim that marriage imposes on husbands and wives nevertheless concedes that in the world as it is Moses had to make provisions for divorce as the far from ideal but the only available remedy for marriages that have become so destructive that the spouses need to be separated and their relationship dissolved.

All of which exposes within the particularities of sexual relationships the gap between things as God made them to be and things as they actually are with which we have to cope in very area of theological thinking and practice. After the story of the creation comes the story of the fall. The man and the woman have lapsed into a fundamental disobedience to the created purposes of God which has detrimental repercussions in the way they relate to each other and they are expelled from Eden into a far less congenial world which makes things hard for them both in the man's area of work and the woman's area of the birth and rearing of children. 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. Nature and nurture in different combinations give people urges and orientations that, in the light of Genesis 2:24, expose

## EXTRACTS

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.

It is here that it becomes clear that the biblical positive does imply the biblical negatives. In a fallen world people are tempted to sin in ways which are against God's purposes for men and women – against the fidelity of marriage in adultery, against the loving relationship that God intends for husbands and wives in the selfish exploitation and oppression of one partner by the other, against the vocation to parenthood in their failure to give to the needs of children the priority that they require. It should be clear that homosexual activity is neither the only nor indeed the typical form of our falling short in this whole area. But it is equally clear that, in the light of the biblical positive we have been expounding, it is a fundamental deviation from what God requires from and offers to his people. In it sexual bonding is torn out of its ordained context in the rich and complementary relationship of husbands and wives; it can no longer have its intended outcome in the generation and nurture of children and in very many cases it proves itself an insufficient foundation for the faithful relationship of the partners to each other so that when desire fades, the relationship founded upon it often breaks with it. With some honourable exceptions of long faithful and caring same-sex friendships that deserve appropriate respect, gay and lesbian relationships tend to be brief, unstable and constantly changing.

## 6. The Church's traditional view Angus Morrison

*Dr Morrison is minister of Orwell and Portmoak Parish Churches near Kinross, and a former convener of the Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council.*

**Chapter Theme:** The ordination of practicing homosexuals a theological issue whose justification is dependent on various false hermeneutics and whose adoption would affect the Church of Scotland's relationship with the Church universal.

**In the extracts following** Dr Morrison considers the role of tradition in deciding what is and is not a valid interpretation of scriptural teaching, before citing Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg who argues that love is not immune to perversion and so cannot be appealed to as trumping biblical indictments of homosexual behaviour, and any church that took the step of recognizing homosexual unions would be against the unequivocal witness of Scripture which views homosexual behaviour as an example of humanity turning away from God.

The question of whether the Church of Scotland should ordain practising homosexuals is one of the utmost gravity, since apart from questions of how this relates to past understanding, and to other Churches today, such a move from the historic and catholic position entails an overturning of the understanding of Christian marriage held by the universal church from its inception. On any reckoning, this is a matter of deep seriousness. This paper proceeds by first looking at the question of biblical authority and interpretation, before considering important aspects of biblical evidence. The question of ordination in this context is then addressed, before a conclusion attempts to draw the threads together....

The Bible is the church's book. At an early stage, the church recognized the imperative of reading Scripture in an ecclesial context in order to attain its authentic Christian interpretation. Our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit to lead into the fullness of truth has always been understood within this context. In the early church, with the rise of the Gnostic movement, the church found itself having to deal with some very strange interpretations of Scripture. Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – c.200), widely regarded as one of the church's greatest theologians, took note of the fact that heretics tended to interpret the Bible according to their personal wishes. The maintenance of orthodoxy, on the other hand, required that the Bible be interpreted in ways that their apostolic authors would have approved. Irenaeus recognized that a certain way of reading and understanding biblical texts had developed since apostolic times. This meant that the church was thereby able to identify those who had kept faith with apostolic teaching, a capacity understood to be of crucial importance.

Since at least the time of Irenaeus, the church has recognized the necessity, for its health and stability, of attending closely to the church's 'great tradition' in its reading of Scripture. Failure to do so makes it a prey to the ever shifting currents of the particular culture it inhabits; in our own time of what has aptly been termed a 'culture dominated by the ideology of the ephemeral.' A major weakness of the revisionist approach is its deep reluctance to handle Scripture in the way the church has always seen as essential to the 'communion of saints', to its continuity with its past, and to its stability in the present. ...

Wolfhart Pannenberg, one of the most respected theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, states that "the entire tradition of Christian doctrine teaches that there is indeed such a thing as inverted, perverted love." He goes on to show how Jesus' teaching about divorce makes clear what this means in the sphere of sexual practice.

Jesus refers back to the creation of human beings. It is here that he sees God expressing his purpose for these his creatures: creation confirms that God has created human beings as male and female. This, too, is found to be the reason why a man leaves his father and mother to be united with his wife, so the two will be one flesh. Jesus concludes from this that the unbreakable permanence of fellowship between husband and wife is the goal of the Creator's will for human beings. The indissoluble fellowship of marriage, therefore, is the goal of our creation as sexual beings (Mark 10:2-9).

This word of Jesus constitutes the foundation and criterion for all Christian pronouncements on questions of sexuality. The point here is not just marriage in particular, but quite comprehensively the creational identification of our existence as sexual beings. According to Jesus' teaching, human sexuality as male and female is intended for the indissoluble fellowship of marriage. This standard informs Christian teaching about the entire domain of sexual behaviour.

Jesus' perspective by and large corresponds to Jewish tradition . . . It was a Jewish conviction that men and women in their sexual identity were intended for the community of marriage. This accounts for the Old Testament's assessment of sexual behaviour which departs from this norm: fornication and adultery as well as homosexual relations."<sup>11</sup>.....

Pannenberg agrees [with Dr Robert Gagnon's clear and careful argument establishes beyond all doubt that the Bible contains a unanimous witness defining same-sex intercourse as sin.] "The Bible's assessments of homosexual practice are unambiguous in their pointed rejection, and all its statements on this subject agree without

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<sup>11</sup> All quotations are from an article by Pannenberg in *Church Times*, June 1996.

exception".<sup>12</sup> Pannenberg, for example, points out the complete clarity with which Paul in Romans 1 "includes homosexual behaviour among the consequences of turning away from God" (Rom 1:27); places in 1 Corinthians 6 homosexual practice alongside "fornication, adultery, idolatry, greed, drunkenness, theft and robbery, as the kinds of behaviour which preclude participation in the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9f), and affirms that "through baptism Christians have become free from their entanglement in all such practices" (1 Cor 6:11). He adds,

The New Testament contains not a single passage that might indicate a more positive assessment of homosexual activity to counterbalance these Pauline statements. Thus, the entire biblical witness puts practised homosexuality, without exception, among the kinds of behaviour which give particularly striking expression to humanity's turning away from God...

In the view of the Church, this is the case not only for homosexuality but for any sexual activity that does not intend the goal of marriage between man and wife, and hence in particular for adultery. The Church has to live with the fact that, in this area of life as in others, departures from the norm are not exceptional but common. The Church must encounter all those concerned with tolerance and understanding, but must also call them to repentance. It cannot surrender the distinction between the norm and behaviour which departs from it.

Here lies the boundary of a Christian Church that knows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a Church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it 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, such a Church would no longer stand on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture.

A Church which took such a step would thereby have ceased to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."<sup>13</sup>

## 7. Understanding Marriage

David J Torrance

*The Revd David J Torrance is minister of Ormiston w. Pencaitland Church of Scotland*

**Chapter Theme:** humanity made in the image of God in relational terms with marriage as a covenantal union reflective of God in his triune inter-relations.

**In the extract following** David J Torrance explores the ground reality that there are 'marriages' and 'marriages': not all are 'made in heaven'; some unions definitely enacted despite God are 'from below', but each union has its relationships beyond the couple immediately concerned.

Questions of marriage and same-sex relations cannot be considered in isolation. They carry implications for other, more central matters of Christian understanding and it is because of this inherent interconnectedness of faith that these issues are so divisive...

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<sup>12</sup> From Pannenberg's *Church Times* article.

<sup>13</sup> From the same article.

There is a separate question about whether God always joins a man and a woman in every legal and socially recognised marriage. Quite clearly there are weddings to which God has not been invited. This passage [Matthew 19:1-12] should not be taken to suggest that our human decisions can somehow compel God to sanction what we have previously determined without recourse to Him. Jesus is speaking in a Jewish religious context in which it would have been unthinkable to pursue marriage except in relation to God. From a Jewish perspective, therefore, marriages are quite literally 'made in heaven'. Hence the joyful significance of Jesus changing water into wine for the happy couple in Cana of Galilee – the wine being a crucial symbol of God's blessing and His sealing of their union. No wine, no wedding!

Nevertheless, this does not imply that a couple who marry without referring to God as He is revealed in Christ, are anything less than married. He has given us a freedom to act without reference to Him, even contrary to His will, and He will still honour it. People who marry in this way are still 'married in God's eyes' and should be honoured as such by all. Our point is that their marriages are not 'made in heaven'.

Paul, in I Corinthians 6, when speaking of the sexual union of a man with a prostitute, also quotes from Genesis 2:24, "the two shall become one flesh." In addition to the phrase, "one flesh" (Gk: sarx), Paul immediately precedes it with the unusual designation, "one body" (Gk: soma). "Don't you know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, the two shall become one flesh," (v16). The context of the passage contains a clear emphasis on the use of the body in a way that is incompatible with our relationship with Christ. The implication is that such encounters do in fact still forge a union of some kind – a union which can exist quite outside the will of God – a union which may be forged without love, without any sense of personal commitment and without even knowing the other person's name. These are not of the same order as the marital union created by God's action in uniting a couple. Yet they are still unions of a sort – enacted despite God and 'from below', rather than 'from above'; unions formed by bodily action through physical consummation, and with attendant personal and spiritual implications for the people involved.

The passage also implies that one may become 'united' in some 'soulish' way to a multiplicity of people. Pastorally, it has frequently been observed that some of the most fragmented personalities are people with a history of numerous sexual partners. Yet, when these 'unions' are broken by the grace of God, a new level of freedom is experienced and a profound healing begins to take place. Similar observations can be made with people who have been the victims of rape and sexual abuse. When these 'soul ties' are broken in Christ's name, the resultant sense of freedom can be dramatic. Those proponents in the church, who advocate a so-called 'freedom' of sexual expression and experimentation, as if it has no effect on a person, are the naïve and unwitting agents of immense pastoral devastation. They have a lot to answer for.

We should mark well - the wisdom of God's gracious and loving commands is given to us for our protection and for the health and well-being of family, individuals and society. Despite the Jewish hesitation over Jesus as Messiah, their general adherence to the moral precepts of Old Testament teaching through many centuries of dispersion has spared their families and communities from many of the ills which afflict our contemporary Western cultures. There is much less divorce, less child abuse, less pregnancy outwith marriage, less incidence of homosexuality and a significantly greater marital and family stability among their more-orthodox communities than can be found in our society, or even within the church. There could be few greater testimonies to the practical wisdom of Scriptural injunction than that. We ignore it at our peril.

## 8. Same sex relations: some theological pointers

David J Torrance

*The Revd David J Torrance is minister of Ormiston w. Pencaitland Church of Scotland*

**Chapter Theme:** the impossibility of presenting same-sex relations as equivalent to marriage without a radical re-interpretation of the meaning of marriage, covenant, gender, sexual encounter and what it means to be physically human in the image of God.

**In the extract following** David J Torrance shows how attempts to redefine what it means to be human results in a 'container view' of the human person, a 'docetic' presentation of Christ, and a 'container view' also of Scripture, with the human body, the person of Jesus and the Bible all reduced to discardable vehicles of the divine purpose, a faith gutted of its belief in bodily redemption.

These attempts at the redefinition of what it means to be human are ultimately disastrous for Christology and the central affirmations of the Christian gospel – in particular, the incarnation and atonement. They promote a 'container view' of the human person, in which the 'authentic individual' somehow inhabits a physical body which has no ultimate relevance. When this is applied to Christ it means that His physical body was of no real importance, or that the Son of God never properly became human. These dualistic and 'docetic' views were solidly condemned by all the early church councils. For this reason the early creeds stressed both the virgin birth and the resurrection of the body.

If the birth of Jesus came about by normal human means then this baby was 'adopted' as the Son of God without God ever properly becoming a physical human being – He was just a 'Christ' which somehow inhabited the body of Jesus. If there's no resurrection of the body – Jesus somehow having discarded it after the cross – then, similarly, His body could not have materially belonged to His incarnation and He should also be seen as a 'Christ' inhabiting a body. In neither case did the Son of God truly take physical human flesh to Himself, nor is our physical flesh redeemed.

It is no accident that a significant proportion of those who propound a 'revisionist' view of marriage and human sexuality have also departed from these twin doctrines of the virgin birth and the resurrection of the body – despite both being clearly attested in Scripture. Nor is it any accident that they also have a similar 'container view' of the Scriptures themselves. Thus the actual words of the Bible do not ultimately matter, any more than the body of Jesus ultimately mattered. What counts is the 'Word of God' inside of it/Him.

This disconnects the Word of God from the words of Scripture in a similar way that the 'authentic' human person – whether ours or Christ's – is disconnected from the physical body. If the physical human body doesn't matter then the physical human words of Scripture cannot matter either. Instead, one must look for an interior, intuitive 'Word' within the words of Scripture. This, essentially Gnostic approach to the Bible, thus repeatedly makes claim to an interior and esoteric notion of 'love' as its justification for revising the more-obvious teaching of Scripture – yet a notion of love which is itself disconnected from how the Bible speaks about love.

Some might protest that they do indeed take the physical body seriously. Yet our point is that a disconnection has occurred and they 'take their readings' independently from any orthodox theological understanding. Almost without exception, every 'revisionist' appeal to what 'science' supposedly says is based on a completely materialist, anti-supernatural and deterministic understanding of science and psychology. Instead of beginning with the givenness of the Word of God or of man-woman in the Image of God,

such appeals commence their understanding with the supposed 'givenness' of homosexuality – and then revise their approach to humanity, marriage, sexual ethics, Scripture, theology, even God Himself, on the basis of it. They 'drink from another well'.

Both Christ and the Scriptures gave dignity, affirmation and value to the *whole* person, in *all* its relational and physical aspects, in a way which was lacking in the surrounding cultures of the day. Later on, as the early church engaged with these cultures and the challenge they presented to the faith, the church was forced to articulate the gospel in relational, dynamic and holistic terms, which avoided the essential dualism underlying those cultures. The church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century faces the same task. The ideas associated with contemporary questions about marriage, family and same-sex relations are merely a modern-day re-presentation of the same old issues as yesteryear – albeit in new guise. 'There is nothing new under the sun'.

It has often been said that an acceptance of same-sex relations, as the equivalent of marriage, poses no challenge to marriage, family or society. Yet, from the outset, gay activists have explicitly recognised that this is not the case. They have been very clear in stating that the full acceptance of homosexuality within church and society requires a radical reinterpretation of gender, marriage, family and sexual morality – and nothing less than a revolution in social terms. It is the thesis of this chapter that it also requires a radical reinterpretation of the church's understanding of God, humanity, Scripture and theology, which carries right to the heart of the Christian faith.

## **9. The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Review of Robert Gagnon's book** **Paul Burgess**

*The reviewer taught hermeneutics at Gujranwala Theological Seminary in Pakistan*

**Chapter Theme:** The biblical evidence concerning homosexual practice is exhaustively and clearly presented by Robert Gagnon in his magisterial work to show such behaviour is condemned by Scripture as sinful and all attempts to prove the Bible capable of an alternative interpretation are flawed.

**In the extracts following** the reviewer distinguishes the issue of biblical *authority* from hermeneutical questions surrounding the *interpretation* of biblical texts to which the same sex controversy relates and to which area of discussion Robert Gagnon addresses his work; Gagnon's use of biblical genres for his argument is exemplified in the second extract. In the last extract Gagnon's expounds the so-called 'clobber verses' of Romans 1:24-27, arguing for a direct link between homosexual behaviour and idolatry.

At the heart of the same-sex controversy are different ways of reading the Bible. At issue are two questions:

First, there is the question of Biblical *authority*: what credence should be given to those parts of the Bible that conflict with conventional wisdom today? Are they to be taken as unquestionable revelation of how God wants us to live today? Or are there areas where we do indeed 'now know better than the Bible'? Granted the latter, then there is no more argument. Any 'hard-line' or 'difficult' text can be set aside and a code of practice be agreed based on a more selective approach to Scriptural passages, such as those expressing nebulous 'core values' in line with a supposed 'spirit of Jesus'. Thus many opposed to the Traditionalist position can accept that in the Bible all forms of homosexual practice are condemned, yet will dismiss as culturally conditioned those passages that

treat same-sex practice negatively. Obviously there is room here for a wide variety of conclusions about what is, and is not, acceptable practice.

But there is also wriggle room for a second category of readers who, while accepting in general the divinely inspirational nature of the Bible, emphasize that there is more than one way to interpret these Scriptures. This is the *hermeneutical* question. And this is the area of debate that Robert Gagnon seeks to address in his exhaustive apologetic work on *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* in the face of Revisionist re-reading of key passages in both Old and New Testaments...

### **The importance of genre in the debate: complementarity deducible in creation narrative**

An important tenet of hermeneutics is that the reader must interpret a text according to its genre. Thus *narrative* material is to be taken as *descriptive* of events and incidents, not necessarily as *normative* for forming the reader's consequent behaviour, while passages concerning *law* must 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*.

This is not to conclude that *no* principles of behaviour can be deduced from narrative texts. Far from it. Gagnon demonstrates that right from the opening chapters of Genesis the *creation narratives* (distinct from the *historical narratives* that follow) reveal to us truths about God's design for human relations, in particular the complementarity of man and woman and its role in human sexuality. In this way "even though the creation accounts are directed toward other purposes, they provide guidance for the interpretation of homosexual intercourse." (43) In a later chapter Gagnon expounds his intriguing 'restorative' understanding of Adam's union with Eve (Gen 2:18-24).

His side is split open in order to provide for him the companionship of a complementary being. Marriage between a man and a woman reunites these representatives of the two genders into "one flesh", and is not simply a union of two individuals. The missing part of man is found in woman and vice versa. Sexual intercourse or marriage between members of the same sex does not restore the disunion because it does not reconnect complementary beings. An alternate pattern of sexuality requires an alternate creation myth. (194)

Further, Gagnon argues, the male and female perfect anatomical fit also point to this divine design for complementary marriage....

### **Paul's condemnation: a violation of nature that exchanges God's truth for a lie**

The most explicit statement on homosexuality in the whole Bible is found in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. The so-called 'clobber verses', 24-27, have rightly been identified as containing the most severe condemnation of homosexual practice in all Scripture. This is partly because of the black picture Paul paints of sin which forms its immediate context. But more important is the logic Paul employs in his condemnation. The apostle is keen to show the 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.

## Common objections to a Traditionalist reading

Against this presentation of the Biblical view of homosexual practice, many objections have been raised by Revisionists who still want to appeal to a supposedly biblical silence on the issue of 'consensual monogamous homosexual practice'. Gagnon turns, under the heading of "The hermeneutical relevance of the Bible Witness", to some of the more common arguments made against the Traditionalist hermeneutic.

### 10. Do Pastoral Concerns for Persons in Committed Homosexual relationships Constitute Accommodation to Homosexual Practice?

Robert A. J. Gagnon

*Dr Robert Gagnon is associate professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

**Chapter Theme:** In the New Testament the pastoral concerns for sinners, that both Jesus and Paul demonstrated, did not negate their condemnation of sexual sins which would have included all homosexual practice.

**In the following extracts** Dr Gagnon describes any accommodation with homosexual practice as a dangerous slide with cultural consequences, and looks at the evidence for Jesus combining strong pastoral concern with stern warnings against sexual sin.

There are many in the church today who, though caring about Scripture and generally unenthusiastic about homosexual unions, are sliding down a slope of accommodation to homosexual practice in the life of the church. Undoubtedly this slide is partly motivated by a genuine desire to be 'pastoral' to persons in committed homosexual relationships. Equally clear, though, is that many also feel a need to find some compromise in order to shield themselves from the verbal abuse and loss of status that comes with adopting the historic (and, I dare say, scriptural) position. The culture at large in the Western world has been moving steadily toward codifying opposition to homosexual practice as the equivalent of virulent racism and sexism. The church feels the pressure of these developments, especially the elite of the church who crave respectability. No one wants to be labeled a bigot, much less have one's career jeopardized or be hauled into court on a charge of hate speech or discrimination...

**Jesus.** There is no strong evidence that Paul was significantly out of step with Jesus on the meaning of being 'pastoral'. For, while Jesus 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 (Mark 1:15 par.; 6:12 par.; Matt 11:20-21 par.; 12:41 par.; Luke 13:3-5). In the paradigmatic story of the woman caught in adultery Jesus prevented the crowd from stoning the woman – dead people don't repent – but clearly commanded the woman to "no longer be sinning" (John 8.11). This command is combined elsewhere in John with the warning "lest something worse happen to you" (i.e., loss of eternal life; John 5:14). 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 (Matt 5:27-32).

Jesus viewed rebuke of the recalcitrant as an integral part of what it meant to love one's neighbor (compare Luke 17:3-4 // Matt 18:15, 21-22 with Lev 19:17-18). Indeed, he

himself often rebuked others sternly (e.g., Mark 8:33 par.; Mark 11:15-19 par.; Matt 23:13-36). He repeatedly warned about the perils of the coming judgment for those who only hear his words but do not do them (e.g., Matt 7:13-27; for a long list of Jesus' judgment sayings in the Synoptic Gospels, minus material unique to Matthew, see pp. 6-14 in Gagnon, 2002b). Jesus combined such warnings with an intensification of God's ethical demands and a closing of loopholes in the Law of Moses (Matt 5:17-48). Finally, at least Matthew understood Jesus' teaching as necessitating standards for community discipline (18:15-20).

It is one thing to assert (rightly) that Jesus reached out to sinners but quite another to claim (wrongly) that Jesus would have accommodated to ongoing, self-affirming sinful practices of a severe sort among his company of followers. As with the woman caught in adultery, the "sinful woman" who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and who loved much because she was forgiven much obviously did not intend to continue her life of sin (Luke 7:36-50). Likewise, the parables of the lost son and of the penitent tax collector are stories about people who leave behind sinful lives, and do not continue in them (Luke 15:11-32; 18:9-14).

**Conclusion.** My point is simply this: The attempt to justify accommodation to homosexual practice (and thus to circumvent the witness of Scripture) by appealing to a 'pastoral concern' is just an excuse to avoid, first, the hard work of reclaiming believers for the kingdom of God and, second, the attendant abuse from the world.

What it means to be 'pastoral' in any given situation is determined by the severity of the offence and the willingness (or lack thereof) of the offender to repent. If the offence is severe and the individual is determined to substitute his or her will for the will of God expressed in the teachings of Jesus and the united apostolic witness, then the church's discipline ought to be invoked in a spirit of gentleness, humility, sadness, and concern for the offender. Certainly it ought to go without saying that the church should not be installing such offenders in a position of leadership or in any other way sanctioning the sinful behavior (e.g., by offering blessing ceremonies for unions that are constituted through such behavior).

So the question boils down to this: how serious is the Bible's stance against homosexual practice? No one can claim to know what it means to be pastoral to persons engaged self-affirmingly in a homosexual bond until and unless one can answer this question.

## **11. How Seriously Does Scripture Treat the Issue of Homosexual Practice?**

**Robert A. J. Gagnon**

*Dr Robert Gagnon is associate professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

**Chapter Theme:** biblical writers on the subject treat homosexual practice as one of the most serious sexual sins abhorrent to God because it radically offends against his intentional creation of human beings as male and female.

**In the following group of extracts** Dr Gagnon argues first that the violation of foundational matters is worse than the violation of structures built on the foundation. In the last extract he argues that true love requires stating the truth, not accommodating the false.

## EXTRACTS

It is my contention that *homosexual practice is a more serious violation of Scripture's sexual norms than even adult-consensual incest, adultery, plural marriage, fornication, and divorce.*

### **B Why homosexual practice is one of the most severe sexual sins**

Having established the principle that some offences are more heavily weighted than others, the question arises: How big a violation does Scripture view same sex intercourse, particularly among sexual offences? I will argue that Scripture itself, understood in its historical context, indicates that homosexual practice is a more severe violation of God's will for sexual behaviour than polyamory (multiple-partner sexual bonds), incest, and adultery. Here are three main reasons why, in no particular order of significance.

#### **B.1 The male-female prerequisite is the foundation or prior analogue for defining other critical sexual norms**

.....  
**Adultery.** We have argued above that homosexual practice is a worse offence than committed, adult polysexual unions and, of course, divorce and remarriage, since the violation of foundational matters is worse than the violation of structures built on the foundation. We have also argued that homosexual practice is a worse violation of God's will than committed, adult incestuous unions, on the following principle: among two things related by analogy the violation of the one that more deeply embeds the principle upon which the analogy is based is more serious than the violation of the other. A similar argument can be made that homosexual practice is a worse offence than even adultery.

Adultery at least cannot be a *worse* offence than incest and thus homosexual practice since adultery becomes an applicable offence only when the sexual bond that the offender is cheating on is a valid sexual bond. Needless to say, it would be absurd to charge a man in an incestuous union with adultery for having sexual relations with a person unrelated by blood outside the committed incestuous bond. To do so would wrongly presume the validity of the incestuous bond. The same point applies to cheating on a homosexual bond; especially, for example, as regards a man in a homosexual relationship 'cheating' by having sex with a woman. One can't cheat against a union that is structurally invalid, and thus immoral, from the beginning – or at least the notion of cheating must be considerably diluted (much as the idea of 'cheating' on a mistress must, by definition, be diminished in significance).

So, in summary, it is evident that the male-female prerequisite is the foundational prerequisite for defining most other sexual norms.

#### **B.2 Same sex intercourse radically offends against God's intentional creation of humans as "male and female" (Gen 1:27) and the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (Gen 2:24).**

Jesus himself defined these texts as foundational for matters of human sexual ethics (Mark 10:6-8 par. Matt 19:4-6), Jesus' church must treat an offence against them as a major violation of Christian sexual ethics....

### **C Why emphasize the severity of homosexual practice?**

#### **C.1 Love in truth**

My first purpose is to insure that the church inform its practice of love with knowledge of the truth so that we truly do the loving thing for those who participate in homosexual practice. In Paul's words, what matters is "faith working through love" and

“obeying the truth” (Gal 5:6-7) and “keeping the commands of God” (1 Cor 7:19). “Love does not rejoice over wrongdoing (or: unrighteousness, *adikia*) but rejoices in conjunction with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). Paul often prayed for his converts that their love “would abound still more and more in a deeper knowledge and in full insight” (Phil 1:9; cf. Phlm 6). Many Christians have attempted to respond in love towards persons who act on homosexual urges, including ordained officers, by either tolerating the behaviour or, worse, affirming it. If, however, same sex intercourse is a high offence in the sexual realm toward God, then there can be no question of viewing toleration or acceptance of homosexual bonds as an act of love. Augustine was right when he 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 (*Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John 7:8*). He later elaborates:

If any of you perhaps wish to maintain love, brethren, above all things do not imagine it to be an abject and sluggish thing; nor that love is to be preserved by a sort of gentleness, nay not gentleness, but tameness and listlessness. Not so is it preserved. 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. Let love be fervent to correct, to amend. . . . Love not in the person his error, but the person; for the person God made, the error the person himself made. (7.11; *NPNF*, slightly modified)

Tolerating or accepting the behaviour would only convey to the perpetrators that the sin is ‘no big deal’, leave the individual exposed to the wrath of God, and put such a one at risk of exclusion from an eternal relationship with God – not to mention the harmful effects of undermining the community’s resolve to resist sexual impurity (1 Cor 5:6-7: a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough) and provoking God’s judgment on the community as a whole.

It would also short-circuit whatever work God was doing in the person’s life *through the experience of hardship or deprivation*. Mainline denominations mostly appear to understand grace as a power that licenses believers to carry out their desires without the imposition of ‘legalism’. But Paul viewed grace as a power that freed people from the gratification of sinful desires and enabled God to form Christ in them through difficult experiences. Thus, as Paul learned from God in the case of his “thorn in the flesh”: “My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is being brought to completion in circumstances of weakness.” Grace here meant not deliverance from deprivation and hardship but a fuller experience of Christ’s power and blessed presence in and through difficult times. “So”, Paul concluded, “I will all the more gladly brag in my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ might dwell [*or*: set up its tent] on me” (2 Cor 12:9). In seeking to accommodate the gratification of homosexual desire among some the ‘third’ or ‘middle’ way is undoing the opportunity God is granting of a deeper experience of his presence.

## **12. The celibate path: an experiential journey with homosexuality**

**Calum MacKellar**

*Dr MacKellar holds a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Stuttgart in Germany and is both a visiting professor of bioethics at St Mary’s University College in London and the director of research of a medical ethics charity in Edinburgh. He is also an elder in North Leith Church of Scotland.*

**Chapter Theme:** personal experience as a homosexual person struggling with the homosexual condition within the fellowship of the Church.

**In this opening extract** Dr MacKellar recounts with great openness his own wrestling with his own incredibly overwhelming feelings of attraction to other men.

### **Early years as a homosexual**

The first ever thoughts that I can recall were homosexual ones. At the age of three, I remember being completely overwhelmed by my feelings of attraction at the sight of some young men (and not other boys my own age). I still do not understand how these feelings came about.<sup>14</sup> All I know is that my homosexuality was then, and continues to be, the cause of an incredible amount of suffering and despair.

My teenage years in the 1970s were probably the worst, as I felt that if anyone, (including my parents) learned about my orientation, I would be completely rejected since having a homosexual orientation was considered completely unacceptable in those days. Things were especially difficult when I was an older teenager and many of my high school friends seemed to be growing into male models. The torment of the attraction and the loneliness which resulted were very profound. And 'falling in love' with some of them just multiplied the problem!

But I also grew up in a Christian home and was fortunate to become a Christian when I was a child. Looking back, I do not know how I would have survived without God. In a way, he was always there and I was never too afraid to throw all my despair and suffering on to him. I was convinced that God loved me and wanted to be my friend no matter what went on in my head. And though I could not speak to my Christian parents (or my robustly heterosexual brothers) about what was going on inside, I knew that I could always cry out to God.

Slowly, through learning to read the Bible, I realised that God was also averse to homosexual relationships. At the time, this did not surprise me, and it still doesn't. How could a God of love and goodness be in favour of the deeply painful feelings I experienced of being overpowered by another person? Is this what the world calls love? But why was there so much suffering? This was a question that never went away. What was the cause of this deep suffering and despair?

I was 24 years old when I first felt safe enough to speak of my homosexual struggles to a Christian counsellor. And this was only because I knew he had also experienced difficulties in this area. I now know that waiting to speak about my struggles until this age was far too old to 'come-out' but in those days, neither society nor the church accepted any form of homosexual orientation.

At first, when I first started discussing this, I was encouraged to pray for my orientation to be changed, something which I very much wanted. But nothing happened – at least, not yet. As a result, I went into a deep depression which lasted for a number of years. I did not understand God or the lack of progress, and this compounded my deep suffering and resulted in despair. All this, moreover, was not helped by some Christian psychotherapists who, becoming frustrated by the lack of success in changing my orientation, eventually criticised my faith and my relationship with God.

Now, I remain convinced that God can change my orientation but have also learned, over the years, to accept God's will even though I often do not understand where he is taking me. Even when I cried out to God in despair, I never lost my love for him. I found it difficult to rebel against a God who had died such a horrific death on a cross, out

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<sup>14</sup> The incredibly overwhelming feelings of attraction to other adult young men have always been present since the age of three to the same extent including in kindergarten, primary school, high school, university and beyond.

## EXTRACTS

of love for me – a God who also continues to love and suffer with me, and who helps me to love him.

But being a Christian while also being affected by homosexuality is not easy. 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. And these battles are often very lonely experiences since being a homosexual person is still a very difficult 'state' to be in for many churches.

### **My own reflections on homosexuality**

The following short sections reflect some of my own personal journeys over many years with respect to the manner in which I see the church, the origins of homosexuality and the theology relating to it. I would, however, like to emphasise that I come to these questions as a scientist and ethicist affected by homosexuality, and not as a person who has studied theology.

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

**Mark S. Koonz**

*Mark Koonz has been involved in pastoral ministry for over twenty years, and is currently serving as pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Walla Walla, Washington. His journal articles have appeared in Theology in Scotland, Princeton Theological Review, CSL, and Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology.*

**Chapter Theme:** in every homosexual person's life there is a deeply wounded spirit seeking meaning from their identity, not as *being* homosexuals (which they are not), but as persons *having* homosexual desires creating a conflict from which state they can be successfully helped by therapy not by being rendered incapable of *choosing for* a neurosis, but rather by becoming capable of *choosing against* it.

**In the extracts following** Koonz notes Loder speaking about the weakness of the human spirit which requires healing from the Spirit of Christ, and about how his views on the necessity for such transformation changed.

Loder worked with a variety of people who met with him about their homosexuality, and he came to realize that in every person's life there was a deeply wounded human spirit. For him, the connection could not be ignored. The human spirit searches for meaning in our lives. The spirit is involved in all self-interpretation. The strength or weakness of the human spirit tremendously impacts the meaning-making process that includes self-identity. When the human spirit is wounded in the depths, it becomes distorted, twisted, interpreting everything very differently than would otherwise be the case. Therefore, in its wounded and distorted form the human spirit must receive grace and healing from the Spirit of Christ.

Loder said, "And in every case my concern, if I'm talking to a homosexual, is *not* to say, 'Well now look, you're a sinner. Unless you change you're going to hell. And I love you. But if you don't change its goodbye.' Now the reason I don't want to do that is that . . . in all the cases I've worked with in terms of persons who are homosexual (not all from the seminary, some from the outside), they have all become homosexual because – (and there are other cases that we could talk about, types of cases) – but they became

homosexual because there was a *cruelty* administered to their human spirit. It was twisted.”<sup>15</sup>....

In Loder’s understanding, transformation is facilitated wherever the Spirit of God establishes an intimacy between Holy Spirit and human spirit. This liberates and leads to transforming reconfigurations that impact one’s self understanding and identity. “A careful examination of sexuality reveals that no one’s identity is ultimately determined by sexuality; rather it comes from their walk in the Spirit of God. Whatever permits Spirit-to-spirit intimacy in that walk is gracious, and it empowers and truly liberates the human spirit. Moreover, that intimacy works toward the transformation of the whole person, including the sexual aspect of identity.” In such a transforming context sexual orientation can change. Loder saw it happen more than once and testified to this in both public lectures and in his books.

Insofar as some were set free of homosexual inclinations in Loder’s counseling much sooner than the two year average in the Spitzer study, in many of these instances Loder would have pointed (as in fact he did) to one chief reason: when the Holy Spirit visits a human spirit bearing the gift of God’s love and healing presence, the Holy Spirit brings to the human spirit the deepest and richest sense of intimacy the heart has ever longed for. It is that experience of intimacy that liberates and makes all things new, for other proximate and inadequate forms of intimacy cannot compare or hold greater power. Former attractions can diminish or disappear. That divine gift of intimacy with the human spirit is truly liberating and life-enhancing....

Shortly before his death, he referred to one of the ways his thinking had changed: “In the course of counseling, I have worked with some persons to help them come to an acceptance of their homosexual feelings and with others to help them change their lifestyle. What I discovered, in my counseling experience, was that those who continued to practice homosexuality were not truly content even after accepting the practice. They continued in despair, though it was pushed down deeper. Later in my practice, I realized that helping them to accept this condition was not doing them a favor, and I had to take it up from a more profoundly spiritual standpoint.”...

## 14. A pastoral letter in defence of marriage

### Philip Tartaglia

*Bishop Tartaglia wrote this ‘pastoral letter to the Clergy, Religious and Faithful’ of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Paisley in October 2011, in response to the Scottish Government Consultation on Same Sex Marriage.*

“God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him,  
male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27)

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Scottish Government has launched a consultation in which they propose that same sex marriage should be introduced in Scotland.

The Catholic Bishops of Scotland have expressed their unanimous opposition to this proposal. I have made public my own submission to the Scottish Government. You can read it on the website of the Diocese of Paisley at [www.rcdop.org.uk](http://www.rcdop.org.uk)

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<sup>15</sup> Interviews.

## EXTRACTS

I have also given radio and television interviews in which I have defended the institution of marriage as uniquely the union of a man and a woman, and stressed the foolishness of the Government's proposal to re-define marriage to accommodate same sex unions.

I now ask you to respond individually to the Government Consultation and say that you are against the introduction of same sex marriage.

### **Same sex marriage is wrong in principle**

Nature, reason and religion concur that marriage is uniquely the union of a man and a woman, which, by its very nature, is designed for the mutual good of the spouses and to give the children who may be born of that union a father and a mother.

For obvious reasons, a same sex union cannot do that. A same sex union should not therefore be called marriage. 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.

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. It is therefore wrong and foolish to undermine this understanding of marriage.

## **15. Compassion and community**

### **Jock Stein**

*Jock Stein is a retired minister and erstwhile warden of Carberry Tower; he has looked after the Handsel Press in his spare time for the past twenty years.*

**Chapter Theme:** exploration of what it may mean to be compassionate in the present church debate on homosexuality.

**In the extracts following** Jock Stein reflects on how 'compassion' often trumps 'morality' when personal experiences come into play, before offering some suggestions for how we may show compassion in our congregations to those who struggle with their homosexual orientation.

When the General Assembly is debating moral issues, I have observed that, often, all it takes to win a debate is for someone to produce a story of pain which is resolved by someone breaking the rules, whereupon people take the side of what is presented as compassion. Indeed Jesus is often presented as a campaigner for freedom against the wicked rule-bound Pharisees; however, this is a caricature – the best example of his balanced attitude is shown by how he treated the woman taken in adultery, where he prevents her being stoned, makes her accusers face their own guilty lives, but also tells the woman to "go and sin no more".

Ministers are trained to be pastors rather than prophets, so perhaps it is unsurprising that 'compassion' trumps 'morality' in debates. But is it really compassionate to say that anything goes, as long as it doesn't seem to harm other people? Also, the Church of Scotland is used to being 'chaplain to the nation', and so finds it hard to grasp any nettle which might threaten that cosy relationship, and thereby disturb the comfortable position of the parish minister from whom we ever expect a show of compassion.

One of the reasons why some traditionalists have moved to the other side of the debate is their family experience. If you have a daughter who says she is a lesbian, and moves in with a female friend, how do you react? Do you invoke the sanctions of 1 Corinthians 5:2 (directed against incest), or 1 John 3:10 (directed at false teachers) and break off your relationship? Do you say, 'You are still my daughter, but don't bring your friend back here'? Or do you carry on as if nothing had happened?

This not a unique problem. In different contexts, it is faced by the Jewish parent whose son or daughter 'marries out', it is faced by the parent whose son does something which is either criminal or regarded as highly anti-social, indeed it is faced by the parent whose child enters any relationship which is judged to be extremely foolish if not outright wrong. These situations can all result in much pain and misunderstanding. Yet we love someone because of who they are, not because of what they have done or not done. And we share in the pain of God who knows more than any of us what it is to watch and wait for a wayward human race...

One good outcome of this controversy has been that traditionalists have been faced with the acute lack of compassion, and indeed hostility and persecution, that people with a homosexual orientation have faced for generations. Speech and attitudes have begun to change for the better. Given traditionalist conviction that homosexual behaviour is wrong and not to be encouraged, are there practical ways of showing compassion? Here are a few suggestions:

1 Create a culture in congregations where people are not shocked by personal struggles. Most congregations have people who are struggling with addictions to pornography and alcohol, and it is a disgrace that often organisations like Alcoholics Anonymous are the only places where they can find real fellowship and 'tough love'. Congregations have people who are struggling with loveless marriages, and with singleness, as well as with same-sex attraction. Are there families and groups who give safe, caring space to such strugglers?

2 Give positive but balanced teaching about healing and change. Because not all those who are sick are healed, many ministers are afraid to talk about healing – yet it was a large part of Jesus' ministry. Likewise, because many who have sought change in their sexual orientation have been disappointed, ministers are afraid to pray positively for such change, even if the person is seeking it.<sup>16</sup>

On both sides of the debate, ministers often want their teaching and pastoral practice to be 'cut and dried', perhaps under the guise of being 'professional'. Jesus cared for people, and took risks. We can of course take refuge in saying "but we are not Jesus", yet that is evading the issue, since we are called to minister "in his name", and we have a model in the gospels of disciples who themselves were scared about going out "to preach and to heal".

3 Find good one-to-one mentors for those who may find that helpful. Train pastoral care groups in care for single people.

4 Give honour to single people who remain celibate, whatever their orientation, whatever their circumstance. Never make single people the butt of any joke.

5 Create a culture in which single people are invited to join families for meals, holidays, whatever.

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<sup>16</sup> The Christian Medical Fellowship recently produced a booklet, *Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction*, by Goddard and Harrison, which looks in a professional way at issues of pastoral and counselling support.

## Summary

Sadly, the Church of Scotland is no more likely to find a satisfactory solution to this controversy than other mainline Churches. It may be reduced to finding ways of maintaining 'fellowship at a distance', if such is possible.

No Christian can take delight in this outcome. We still have a duty of care for those with whom we disagree. It is God who removes lampstands, not we, and it is not for us to mentally or practically 'unchurch' those on the other side of this debate. We are not debating whether Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

We all live before God only because he is merciful and kind. While we disagree on what it means to be 'kind' to someone with a same-sex orientation, we happily recognise that the Bible does not label people in this way, and that our identity is found in being made in the image of God, and having that image restored to us in Christ. Every person deserves our respect. We are called to "do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10), and to live in peace with all, "as far as it depends on us" (Rom 12:18)...

## **Epilogue. Drawing a Line in Shifting Sands** **Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh**

*The author is a retired art teacher, writer and Gaelic poet*

**Chapter Theme:** the subterranean dynamics that have so strikingly transmuted the philosophical landscape of Western Thought and led to the reversal of morality whereby the virtue of homosexuality is no longer in question, that of Christianity most certainly is.

**In the extract following** Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh recounts his own awakening to the illusion of reciprocity in a changing moral landscape.

Suddenly I find myself stumbling along a storm-smudged strand of churning, crashing waves and windborne, stinging sand. What am I doing here? This was not on my itinerary. Yet here I am. Squinting into the horizons. Leaning into the squalls. Time defeating me. One *volte face* already . . .

I thought my proposed answer to the Scottish Government's *Consultation on Same Sex Marriage* was settled. It was to be 'Yes'. And for good reasons. 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. I had made a serious category error. 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. I think 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. ....

#### 4 Nature-Freedom

The fourth [ground-motive] is that of Nature and Liberty, introduced by modern Humanism, which originates in an insoluble conflict between the religious cult of human personality in its liberty and autonomy and the desire to dominate reality by modern natural science, which seeks to construe it as a rational and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects. This humanist motive has absorbed into itself the three earlier fundamental motives, secularising the Christian motive and the [Thomistic] Catholic motive.<sup>17</sup>

We now enter strikingly familiar terrain. In the wake of Ockham, modern Humanism is born. Autonomous humanity harnesses natural laws. But if Man himself is a product of deterministic laws, whence his freedom? Enter **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804) with his 'fact/value distinction'. A sensory realm of Science (*phenomena*) is sharply distinguished from a suprasensory realm of Freedom (*noumena*). The latter is the domain of ethics. Freedom is not provable by Science, but is a 'reasonable idea' in which 'to have faith'. Dooyeweerd summarises: "In Kant's thought the chasm dividing science and [humanistic] faith runs parallel to the chasm separating nature from freedom."<sup>18</sup>

Let us now relate this more closely to our discussion. Christianity, which still in the second half of the twentieth century retained at least a tenuously formal status as 'Fact', has in our day been re-assigned to the subjective 'Value' side (in a ragbag labelled: 'Faith Groups'). In contrast, homosexuality has been re-categorised from the 'Value' side, i.e. from being a subject about which public opinion could legitimately differ, to the 'Fact' side of objective scientific truth. In other words, it is no longer deemed to be a 'moral' matter but one of physics and chemistry ('just how I am made'). Any attempt to treat it as if in the 'ethical' arena (i.e. as a subject for debate) is an anachronism which State legislation must therefore address forthwith. In the run-up to the last Westminster general election, Liberal leader Nick Clegg stated that homosexuality is "normal and healthy". On which basis dissent cannot be a moral choice, only immoral prejudice. But note also that the current campaign is about far more than the normality of homosexuality. It is about the normality of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and everything in between (i.e. every transgender condition and transvestite whim)<sup>19</sup>. The Fall is of course forgotten. And with it the perspective that 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. Dada revisited. Historicism. Heraclitus. 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 and

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<sup>17</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *Introduction to a Transcendental Criticism of Philosophic Thought*, Evangelical Quarterly XIX/1, Jan. 1947.

<sup>18</sup> *Roots of Western Culture*, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> Cf a recent *France Culture* radio discussion citing a 2009 international athletics gender-testing case as evidence of the "arbitrariness" and "absurdity" of sexual norms ("Qu'est-ce qu'un test de féminité?"). It is "very difficult to submit all our bodies, all our ways of existing, to only two categories defined in opposition". The suicides of young homosexuals suggest "an inability to define themselves in terms of these dominant norms". Imposition of this problematic "binarité", or bi-categorisation, is an impoverishment which neglects "la plasticité de nos corps, la perversité de nos désirs". (*Les Nouveaux chemins de la connaissance: Transgression 2/4 : la norme du sexe - travestissement et transgenre*, France Culture, 06.12.2011)

## EXTRACTS

Surrealism ensued, Truth sought in dreams, the subconscious, drugs. Then followed World War 2. The Holocaust. Hiroshima. Vietnam. *Apocalypse Now*.

Film is '*dunamis*'. Broadcasting is spellcasting. From Neo-Classical versus Romanticist painting, to the machine versus human in the *Terminator* and *Matrix* trilogies, the Nature-Freedom motive pervades. The Nature polarity generates cinematically jaw-dropping but insistently materialist television. The Freedom polarity interrogates normativity via postmodernist multi-narrative labyrinths, as in *Reservoir Dogs*, *Inception*, *Source Code*. Electronic mediation (screening) of reality fast approaches 'total immersion'. Humanism's reductionist materialism, internalized by society, is 'lived' as default actuality. Through the media it has *become* the arena, the very 'boxing ring' of life. There is no 'pluralism' in this sense. To be allowed to 'slug out' ideas on mainstream radio or tv, participants must bow and enter the confines of humanistic ropes and accept the arbitration of humanistic referees. These are the rules. The alternative is marginalisation. Off mike. Off air. Talked about rather than to, by gurus and guests who DO respect the rules. 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. As for Dooyeweerd, he bids us find footing within a Christ-rooted, non-dualistic reality; within a creational normativity deeper than self, than society, than physics:

The ground-motive of the divine Word-revelation is an indivisible unity. Creation, fall, and redemption cannot be separated . . . Did God reveal himself as the creator so that we could brush this revelation aside? I venture to say that whoever ignores the revelation of creation understands neither the depth of the fall nor the scope of redemption.... Whoever holds that the original creational ordinances are unknowable for fallen man because of the effects of sin, does basic injustice to the true significance of God's *common grace* which maintains these ordinances. Sin changed not the creational decrees but the direction of the human heart.<sup>20</sup>

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

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<sup>20</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p. 59.