



Select Committee  
on Human Sexuality  
in the Context of  
Christian Belief

# The Guide

A Resource to assist  
the Church in Listening,  
Learning and Dialogue  
on Human Sexuality  
in the Context of  
Christian Belief



*Guide to the Conversation on*  
**Human Sexuality**  
**in the Context of Christian Belief**



**The General Synod of the Church of Ireland**  
**Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief**

This document, *Guide to the Conversation on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief*, is one of three texts published by the *General Synod Select Committee on Issues of Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief* in January 2016. It should be viewed as being in conjunction with a study programme laid out as a series of three sessions for use either by groups or individuals. Also, for ease of access, an executive summary of the *Guide* is available.

The study of all three texts, it is hoped, will be undertaken in a prayerful spirit and the following Collect may be helpful:

**Most merciful God,  
you have created us, male and female, in your own image,  
and have borne the cost of all our judgments in the death of your Son;  
help us so to be attentive to the voices of Scripture,  
of humanity and of the Holy Spirit,  
that we may discern your will within the issues of our time,  
and, respectful both of conscience and of conviction,  
may direct our common life towards the perfection of our humanity  
that is in Christ alone,  
in whom truth and love are one.  
We ask this in his name. Amen.**

*This prayer is offered by the Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Richard Clarke, for use on occasions when this Guide is read and studied*

<i>Foreword</i>	'The Call to Holiness' by the Very Revd John Mann	4
<i>Prologue</i>	'Faithful Understanding' by the Revd Dr William Olhausen	5
<i>Prologue</i>	'Being Human, Being Christian' by Dr Andrew Pierce	10

# Contents

## **Part I. Introduction**

I. 1. 2013 General Synod Motion establishing the Select Committee	14
I. 2. Changes in Select Committee membership and the formation of an Advisory Panel	15
I. 3. The establishment, membership and work of the Select Committee	16
I. 4. A word about terminology	17

## **Part II. Anglican Approaches to Theological and Ethical Inquiry**

II. 1. Starting with Scripture	18
II. 2. The Anglican Way: Scripture, Tradition and Reason	18
II. 3. The Authority of Scripture: A Report of the Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine	19
II. 3. 1. Five Perspectives on Scripture, Tradition and Reason	20
II. 4. Reading 'through Christ'	24

## **Part III. A Changing Context: Society and Church**

III. 1. Human Sexuality and Social and Cultural Change in Ireland	26
III. 1. 1. (a) Sexual Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours	26
III. 1. 1. (b) The Science of Human Sexuality	28
III. 1. 2. Being LGBT in Ireland Today	29
III. 2. Human Sexuality and the Church of Ireland	
III. 2. 1. A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, September 2003	31
III. 2. 2. The Civil Partnership Acts: 2004 (UK) and 2010 (ROI)	32
III. 2. 3. Civil Partnerships and Serving Clergy	32
III. 2. 4. A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, October 2011	33
III. 2. 5. The Church of Ireland Bishops' Conference 'Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief', March 2012	33
III. 2. 6. The General Synod, May 2012	34
III. 2. 7. Subsequent Steps in the Human Sexuality Debate	35
III. 2. 8. Inter-Diocesan Tripartite Conferences	36
III. 3. Human Sexuality and the Methodist Church in Ireland	39
III. 4. Human Sexuality and the Anglican and Porvoo Communions	41

III. 4. 1. Human Sexuality and the Anglican Churches in England, Scotland and Wales	41
III. 4. 2. Human Sexuality and the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) and the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GFCA)	43
III. 4. 3. Human Sexuality and the Porvoo Communion of Churches	45
<b>Part IV. Select Committee Listening</b>	
IV. 1. The Select Committee Listening Process	46
IV. 2. Presentations to the Select Committee	
IV. 2. 1. Reform Ireland	49
IV. 2. 2. Changing Attitudes Ireland	49
IV. 2. 3. The Revd Sam Allberry	50
IV. 2. 4. Professor Patrick Morrison	51
IV. 3. Two Perspectives on the Conversation	
IV. 3. 1. Introductory remarks by the Chairman	52
IV. 3. 2. Presuppositions	52
IV. 3. 3. The need for renewal	54
IV. 3. 4. The need for reform	64
IV. 4. Some Personal Testimonies	71
<b>Part V. Dealing with Disagreement</b>	
V. 1. Understanding the Other	74
<b>The Conversation Continues – A further note by the Chairman</b>	78
Appendix A. A Time Line of Developments in the Anglican Communion	79
Appendix B. Glossary of Acronyms	84
Appendix C. Select Bibliography	85
Appendix D. Internet Resources	88
Appendix E. Other Helpful Resources	89
Endnotes	91

Deep within the heart of every Christian is a desire to imitate Christ. It is sown there as a seed in the water of baptism; it is a longing that we hold through life to its very end; it grows within us through prayer and study of the Scriptures; through pondering on the world around us and seeking the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to fulfil in word and action the love of Christ. The call to such a life is Christ's. How it is heard is a mystery; how we respond lies at the heart of what each of us seeks to become.

Crucial to our understanding of the pilgrim way is the acknowledgement that discipleship is rooted in relationship. Our relationship with Christ, both individual, and as part of a body of Christians forming a Church community in any one place, is formative to anything else that follows. We define that sacramentally and through the sharing of God's word. Both of these paths to holiness rely on the prayers with which they are encompassed about. United in such prayer, bringing us to the point of further understanding together the nature of the love of God, and how and why that was expressed in the death of Christ on the cross, does more than just refine our thinking: it refines the nature of our desire for forgiveness, mercy, salvation, justice and every other outworking of the longing within us for holiness of life.

So it is, that, whatever our outlook on the current process of reflection within the Church on individual Christian belief and our understanding of issues of human sexuality, we begin with what defines us as a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ, and all that that demands of us, as those who take up their cross and follow him. Relationship is, by its very nature, affected by not only how we view one another, which is very important, but by how we act towards one another, which is its outcome. Here we begin to find that the call to holiness is one that relies on personal engagement, and the depth and worth of that engagement is established through a willingness to place our life openly and vulnerably at the service of others, as they do the same to us, not out of formal agreement, but as an expression of mutual love.

As Christians reflect with and about those of different sexual orientation to themselves, the opportunities to walk further down the pilgrim path and share together the beauty and diversity of God's world are enticing, but the chances of causing pain and misunderstanding, just as we come closer together, are equally great. Even as I write these words I am conscious of how they will be received. Thus we enter this discussion in the knowledge that diversity of opinion will remain whatever the outcome to the Church of Ireland's debate; but in furthering the discussion there is the genuine likelihood that relationships will be strengthened and unity of mission and life enhanced within the Church that is our spiritual home.

This *Guide* comes at a particular point in the debate after several years in which Irish Anglicanism, in tandem with every other part of the Communion, has wrestled with itself. The original decision of the Select Committee to phase its work from a general consideration of matters of human sexuality to a more detailed study has been overtaken by the perceived priority to make same-sex attraction the driver of the first phase. This was noted at General Synod 2014, and the Select Committee had worked with a particular consciousness of this focus in preparation for that Synod and has continued to do so since that time. The work proceeds with an awareness that a cut-off point is inevitable, and that the call to holiness, though lifelong and indeed eternal, requires the Church, universal and local, to recognise its place as the womb of new life as formed, and continually transformed, in our constant guide and loving Saviour, Jesus Christ.

John Mann – Chair of the Select Committee, Epiphany 2016.

## Conflict in the Church

According to Genesis, sex was God's idea and as such is good in and of itself.<sup>1</sup> The traditional reading of Scripture, and so the received wisdom of the Church, has been to view sexual intimacy as something to be enjoyed solely within the institution of life-long monogamous marriage between one man and one woman. The question which is being asked with increasing urgency by a growing number of people in the Church is whether this traditional teaching is unnecessarily restrictive. Have our interpretations of the Bible been correct? Are they relevant for the way the world is today? Are there other relationships in which our sexuality can be explored and enjoyed with God's blessing? Might the Spirit be leading us into new truths about our God-given humanity? There are those in the Church of Ireland who believe that any change to the Church's current teaching on sexuality would represent wilful disobedience to the revealed will of God and threaten the very integrity of our place within the Anglican Communion. The stakes are therefore high.

This is the context into which the General Synod of the Church of Ireland has asked the Select Committee "to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue." In what follows, some of the more important elements involved in the practice of Christian moral reasoning are introduced so that an overview can be given of what might be involved if we are to reach understandings that are faithful to the character and purposes of God in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

## In the context of Christian belief: A special sort of conversation

The phrase 'in the context of Christian belief' alerts us to the fact that this conversation has a particular context: the Church. Positively, being Church gives to us an extended community, a rich heritage of Christian witness and a plentiful treasure house of resources, supremely the Scriptures. More challengingly, being members of the Church imposes certain restrictions on us, collectively and individually: as the Nicene Creed reminds us, we belong to 'the one holy catholic and apostolic church' (cf. 1 Corinthians 4: 17). So what does it look like for the Church to converse on a contentious matter of belief and practice? Can we discern a distinctively Christian approach to listening?

## How to be a good listener in this conversation

Being a good listener is much more difficult than we might imagine. We only need to reflect for a moment on the frustrations we feel in the home or at work when people are not listening to us or not taking us seriously. By the same token we have all been guilty of not listening properly to another family member, friend or work colleague. When this happens communication breaks down and consequently understanding cannot be reached. Careful listening demands that we cultivate empathy for the people with whom we are in conversation. When passions are raised it is easy to slip into less than loving conversational tactics! For instance, it is never helpful to characterise other people's position in simplistic terms. It is equally unhelpful to undermine the contribution of others by calling into question their motives or character. Consequently, it is all too easy to make counter accusations of a personal nature if we feel we have been attacked personally. Notwithstanding the very personal nature of the topic, irrelevant personal comments are rarely constructive and rarely facilitate a healthy listening process.

Therefore, within the context of Christian belief, empathy needs to be characterised by love. For the Apostle Paul, *agape* love has been revealed in the transformative events of Jesus' life and, especially, in the cross. In

---

<sup>1</sup> For the general principle see Genesis 2: 24, the principle apparently iterated by Jesus in Mark 10: 6-9. For a longer reflection on Biblical sexuality see Song of Songs.

<sup>2</sup> In this conversation we have a speech situation proceeding concurrently with the hermeneutical situation. In other words our conversation is *synchronic*, dealing with real time speech, and *diachronic*, taking into account written texts written through time.

chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians he expounds this uniquely Christian understanding of love.<sup>3</sup> In verse 4 we read: 'Love is patient; love is kind...' As an alternative translation, Anthony Thiselton suggests: 'Love waits patiently; love shows kindness'.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, participants in this conversation are called to embody the same love: loving restraint and interventions characterised by a selfless desire for what is best for the other.<sup>5</sup>

### Who is in the conversation?

As well as cultivating the art of listening it is also important to identify to whom we need to listen. Who is actually in this conversation? Are we primarily talking and listening to other members of the Church of Ireland? In a sense, yes, we are engaged in speaking and listening with one another in the Church of Ireland. However, the conversation is much more than that. Imagine a large round table with all the interested parties present. Alongside members of the Select Committee who else is at the table? I suggest that the following are essential 'voices' in the conversational framework:

- The Holy Spirit;
- the Scriptures to which the Spirit bears witness (all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments);
- the liturgy, patterns of worship followed by the Church;
- the great works of theology that have been written through the centuries;
- the mind of the Church expressed through Christian history (both the Anglican/Episcopal tradition and our sister churches);
- the experience of Christian people in and through time (including those Christians who identify as members of the LGBT<sup>6</sup> community); and, in broad terms,
- the contribution of science (relevant knowledge about human beings and the world).

Together, these different elements or 'voices' represent what might be thought of as the co-ordinates of Christian meaning. And amongst all these 'voices' the Anglican tradition has always privileged the place of Scripture understood as special revelation to the person and work of Christ. However, to continue the metaphor of the dinner table, we must allow ourselves to be introduced to all the guests, learning names and working out how someone fits into the gathered assembly. We need now to explore in a little more detail what the conversation involves.

### Learning to be reasonable

In the end, any contributions to the listening process must be understood as making a contribution to some sort of argument suggesting a particular course of action.<sup>7</sup> An argument has been defined as a conclusion *with reasons*. To promote understanding our reasons need expressing so that they can be open to scrutiny. This will promote understanding even if we advocate for different positions. In principle, any interested party must be able to follow the logic of a particular contribution and be able to identify the thought steps involved. Without this transparency it is very difficult to form judgements.

Being reasonable also means taking proper account of our best understanding of the world. This is a continuous process. What is important is that we endeavour to take seriously the experience of Christians and

---

<sup>3</sup> Whilst the immediate context is addressed to the abuse of spiritual gifts there are principles that can be extended to other aspects of the Church's life and witness.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2000, p.1026.

<sup>5</sup> What is actually best for the other is clearly part of the disagreement. However, the theological rationale for the principle is critical.

<sup>6</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

<sup>7</sup> This is the concern of Christian ethics. In conversation with the Tradition, Christian ethics has its own body of thought and methods of argumentation. My concern in urging reasonableness is simply to conduct the conversation in ways which make it relevant to the issue in hand and intelligible to the greatest number of people. As we hold our Anglican forms of worship in common, we endeavour to hold our various conversations in common.



the best science of our time, tasks which a healthy doctrine of creation encourages.<sup>8</sup> Our evidence must be open to investigation and particular lines of inquiry or research must not be prematurely foreclosed.

Finally, the reasoning process involves making appeals to experience, to history, and, especially, to 'authoritative' sources. Such appeals do not, alone, constitute a persuasive argument. In the current context, rational discourse will certainly involve these different moves but to reach faithful understanding they will need to be informed and disciplined by Christian theology or what is sometimes called 'the grammar of Christian belief'.

### **The role of Christian theology**

Whether we realise it or not we all have a theology; that is, we all have our own ideas about what God is like and what it means to be faithful to God in our journey of faith. Traditionally, Christian theology addresses questions about God under a series of topics which are referred to as doctrines (lit. teaching). These include, among many others, the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the Spirit, the doctrine of the Church and the doctrine of man (human being). Human sexuality in the context of Christian belief inevitably involves consideration of a number of these doctrines. For instance, we have to reflect on the doctrine of God: considerations of his love, his holiness and his purposes in history. Quite quickly we will have to turn to Christology, the doctrine of Christ. As Christians we believe that God is supremely revealed in the person and work of Jesus. We then find ourselves asking about our own humanity (the doctrine of human being): what does it mean to be made in the image of God? What difference has sin made? Why did Jesus have to die? We will want to reflect on what it is to be human: what is our essence? What are our capacities and potentialities? In what ways can we best promote Christian love and human flourishing?

### **How do we read Scripture today in order to understand what God might be saying to us?**

The primary source or starting point for Christian theology is the Bible, understood as Holy Scripture.<sup>9</sup> In recent times, a greater emphasis on story has given us a more dynamic way of understanding the biblical texts and, importantly, of understanding our own participation in the divine drama. How we actually make sense of Scripture's story and how we then understand our own story in that light is the concern of biblical and theological hermeneutics.<sup>10</sup> Given the time gap since these texts were written, the process of interpretation is not always easy! It involves holding two beliefs very closely together: the belief that the Bible is divine communication together with the belief that the Bible was written by human beings. We can fall into error when one or other of these truths is over-emphasised. If we exclude the human and historical nature of Scripture we are in danger of becoming fundamentalist. If we exclude the divine character of Scripture we can make our own experience, reason and culture the final arbiter of theological truth. In very general terms, the process involved can be broken down into three steps as follows:

#### ***1. What did the texts of the Bible mean when they were written?***

We need first to ascertain to the best of our ability what the text would have meant in its original context. The ideal goal is to recover the best we can the actual intentions of the author. The technical term for this task is exegesis. It involves all sorts of historical and linguistic investigations. Exegesis also involves sensitivity to genre, specific literary devices, intertextual echoes (especially the way in which New Testament authors draw consciously on the Old Testament) and, crucially, theology (what the text tells us about the author's

---

<sup>8</sup> For instance, Psalm 111 has been called the scientist's psalm and it provides an excellent starting point for theological reflection on the natural world.

<sup>9</sup> The word 'Scripture' carries it with Christian faith commitments that are outlined in the 39 Articles. This is why we often speak of the 'authority of Scripture'. For further reflection on the different understandings of Scripture in our context see *'The Authority of Scripture: A Report of the Church of Ireland Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine'*, Church of Ireland Publishing, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Biblical hermeneutics is the task of reflecting on the processes involved in interpretation of the biblical texts.

Theological hermeneutics in turn is the task of reflecting on the processes involved in interpreting who God is and what God might be saying to us through the Scriptures.

understanding of God).

## **2. What was God's word to the first recipients of the texts?**

We then need to discern what it was that God might have been saying through the text: what was God's word to the original recipients? This is the first move in the theological task. It is this task that is of particular interest and importance to the Church, to people who live their lives 'in the context of Christian belief'.

## **3. How does God's word speak to us now?**

Finally, we then have to do the hermeneutical bit, bridging the gap between then and now, and ask what God is saying to us today. We understand better than ever how our own traditions and prejudices (our own stories) can affect the way we read the Bible. Being reasonable in this context will therefore mean that we do justice to the complexity of biblical and theological interpretation.

Having now identified some of the key sources and methodologies involved in the construction of theology we turn back to the community who are engaged in this work: the Church. Who is in 'the Church'?

## **We belong to the Church catholic**

As we pursue this conversation we must also take account of the fact that we are members of the Church catholic. Catholicity in this context refers to the Church universal: the various expressions of Christianity that are spread throughout the world. Globalisation for all its challenges has reminded us that we have responsibility for one another and are, therefore, accountable to one another. 'In the context of Christian belief' therefore includes the worldwide Church. It also includes the Church in and through time. In other words, the Church to which all Christians belong is a Church made up of the communion of saints. This is where our hope in the resurrection plays a particularly important role. In Christ is every Christian that has ever lived. Our conversation therefore must include those Christians who have gone before us: sometimes referred to as the faithful departed. The accumulated wisdom of all the saints, living and dead, is referred to as the tradition of the Church about which Oliver O'Donovan has observed:

Traditional communion does not imply that there can be no radical correction of the tradition as received, such as was undertaken in the Reformation. Tradition is founded upon the authority of the prophets' and apostles' testimony to Christ, and so has a principle of self-correction built into it with the authority of Scripture. It does imply, however, that when there is a question about authentic terms of communion, tradition has a significant role in helping us answer it. Anglicans have understood the authority of tradition as running much wider and deeper than what has been thought and done by Anglicans. They have aimed to interpret and regulate Anglican practices in the light of an ecumenical tradition running back to the apostolic age.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman Catholic scholar Francis Martin captures the meaning of tradition well when he explains that someone 'is "traditional" when he or she is capable of locating the meaning of personal and collective contemporaneous existence within an inherited horizon of interpretation'. He continues: 'Traditional is not the same as "repetitive". Meaning is not found by dwelling on the past but by transposing it creatively to the present while, at the same time, transposing oneself to the past.'<sup>12</sup> In simple terms, we make sense of our own time in fellowship with successive generations of the Christian Church throughout the world. This is something quite different from tribal, ethnic or culture-specific tradition, although it has not always proved easy for the various expressions of the Church to see the difference!

## **Summary**

---

<sup>11</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008, p.22.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word*, Florida: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006, p.47.

Various important elements involved in faithful understanding have been identified and briefly introduced. These include the ability to cultivate the loving practice of listening that leads to understanding, to think and speak in a reasoned way, to integrate the language of reason with the grammar of Christian belief, and to expand our vision of Christian communion to include the Church universal in and through time. This multi-layered approach to our conversation might usefully provide the basis for a greater level of engagement and for more nuanced and theologically rich trajectories of thought. The sort of approach to Christian moral reasoning indicated here is a demanding one but one which will deepen our communion with one another and with Christ.

### **Questions for reflection**

1. Conflict is never pleasant, but what might be the benefits of engaging in the struggles that conflict brings?
2. What do you understand by the phrase 'in the context of Christian belief'?
3. The Church of Ireland is engaged in a detailed conversation over the question of sexual ethics. What does it mean to be a good listener in this conversation?
4. What does it mean to refer to the Bible as the Word of God?
5. How do you understand the phrase 'the tradition of the Church'? What are the implications of the Church's tradition for our current listening process?

Current debates over human sexuality have focused attention on how we understand what it means to be human. This short paper considers some aspects of this discussion: the question of self and other; the sheer range of significantly conflicting interpretations of who we truly are; some of the insights offered by the Christian traditions; and, finally, what issues are being raised by current debates in Anglicanism.

### I. *Self, Other and Engaging Otherness*

Christian theology addresses these kinds of issues under the heading of theological anthropology; but questions about the identity, possibilities and limitations of persons are far from being of academic interest only.

As persons, we negotiate our world by thinking, feeling and forming judgements in various ways. Some of our worldview we share with others, but much of it we do not. We disagree, a lot.

Negotiating our world involves negotiating other people. How we respond to alternative interpretations – and to alternative interpreters – of the world leads us out over deep ethical waters. 'Otherness' – the simple not-the-same-as-me-ness of our fellow human beings – has long intrigued our species, and has become an especially urgent issue in our own day. Emmanuel Levinas, for example, urges us to take seriously the otherness of the other as a pivotal point in ethics; Paul Ricoeur reminds us that not only do we find otherness in the other, but in ourselves too – where it may be less obvious to us and subject to denial and projection. So, how do we – and how should we – engage with otherness in ways that do not seek simply to annihilate the other along with their possibly-threatening otherness?

A basic step, perhaps, is simply to acknowledge and honour the ubiquity of difference and otherness in our experience. Even an apparently trivial expressions of otherness (e.g., musical taste), insofar as it expresses something of our identity as a person, points towards the unsettling matter of another person's difference from us. A further stage in engaging with otherness may be dialogue; yet any dialogue worth its salt does not seek primarily to minimize or eradicate difference and otherness – it aims to relate with the otherness of the other, and to attend to new insights about both self and other that may (or may not) emerge in a context of dialogue. Dialogue is thus a profoundly ethical matter; it involves willingness on the part of participants to enter into another's worldview and to empathize creatively with another's subjective judgements.

Selfhood, therefore, presupposes otherness. We spend much of our time differing from other human beings, and trying to find ways of coping with this difference. And, although examples are legion where people have found themselves unable to engage creatively with difference – and where they have even claimed divine sanction to justify responses of sexism, racism, or sectarianism – there are other examples where difference has been honoured and engaged, and where the relationship of self and other has been transformed as a result.

### II. *Who do we say that we are?*

Our species' fascination with itself has created a stockpile of labels to describe what makes us *us*. Biology calls us *homo sapiens*, highlighting our cleverness to distinguish our branch of the *homo* family. Socrates and Plato also valued human rationality – the unexamined life is not worth living, they claimed – yet, as Plato's Myth of the Cave made clear, acquiring an examined life results in painful challenges and perhaps even martyrdom in the pursuit of truth. Aristotle called us the *zoon politicon* – rendered awkwardly into English as 'political animal' – thereby drawing attention to social expressions of human intelligence as we seek ways in which to live together.

Not only do we think ourselves rational; we are also playful creatures – *homo ludens*. But nor are we exclusively playful – Marx saw humans essentially as manufacturers – *homo faber* – alienated from the work that we produce, with political revolution as the only means of restoring us to our rightful minds. And, lest we overstate the significance of our identity – Richard Dawkins presents us as essentially transportation devices for the all-important selfish gene.

Most attempts to-date to name the human condition have at least some merit; and, as a species, we continue to pose the question: what makes us *us*? It is significant that we both ask and answer this question in ways that accentuate our solidarity with one another. The Roman playwright Terence famously declared: 'I am a human being; I consider nothing that is human alien to me'. Faced with horrendous evil perpetrated by our fellow human beings, or confronted by something so other that we baulk at accepting or understanding it, we may sometimes claim that the perpetrator or the other is 'inhuman'. Morally, this judgement is too easy; factually, it is incorrect. Pascal calls us the glory *and* the scandal of the universe. Similarly, the theologian Gabriel Daly remarks that our species builds both hospitals and concentration camps.

Solidarity, therefore, characterizes the human condition; so too does ambiguity and even ambivalence. We attribute contradictory or almost contradictory qualities to ourselves: scandal and glory, hospitals and concentration camps. Ambiguity is often unsettling. The philosopher Maurice Blondel criticized some of his opponents because – he claimed – they saw too clearly to see well. C.S. Lewis, likewise, criticized those who denied grey areas of experience, and who peremptorily presented the world in absolute alternatives of either black or white: of course God likes grey, declared Lewis, God made it. Blondel and Lewis here highlight the extent to which people are also often impatient with human ambiguities and ambivalences. Ambiguity easily fuels a gnostic desire to see more clearly than we actually can, grounded in a wish that far less grey had shaped the world of our experience.

### III. *The Human Condition in Christian Traditions*

Christianity, too, has distinctive ways of understanding the human condition. The Eastern Orthodox churches – drawing on the Greek Fathers of the Church – offer a sunny estimate of human nature and speak of deification (= becoming divine) as God's will for human creatures: Athanasius of Alexandria (c.298-373) famously declared that God became a human being so that human beings might become God. In the Western Church, by contrast, the influence of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) on both Catholic and Protestant traditions has ensured a greater focus on human limitations: here, the Christian way of understanding human being invokes a notion first articulated by Augustine, namely 'original sin'.

Augustine's *Confessions* is a classic of Christian literature, in which we follow the young Augustine to school and college, through his years as a teacher of rhetoric, to his quasi-monastic post-conversion experiment, and back to north Africa where – almost by accident – he becomes successively priest and bishop. In hindsight, the old Augustine sees that the twists and turns of his earlier life – painful and confusing as they were at the time – were always attempts, however inadequate, to respond to the grace of God that continued to draw him towards the Church of Christ.

A familiar line in the *Confessions* reads: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you' – but 'for yourself' is a weak translation of *ad Te*. Augustine is saying to God 'You have made us in a *you-wards* direction.' For Augustine, human beings are characterized fundamentally by their will and desire which orientate them towards God – there is a hunger in us, and, although it continually latches onto things that are not God and that may eclipse God in our lives (for Augustine, sex), our deep hunger cannot be satisfied by anything less than God's grace. Observing his own psychology, Augustine learned that human will is weaker than human desire – hence his fury against those who tried to reduce the Christian Church to a moral and spiritual elite: the Augustinian church – at its best – is a church of the walking wounded, who have to learn, and continually re-learn, how to live in this world with the experience of unfulfilled longing.

In deciding that a defective will lay at the heart of the human condition, Augustine set the terms in which western European Christianity fractured in the sixteenth century. According to Augustine, all human beings are born in a state of original sin inherited from Adam. Baptism washes away the stain of original sin – but its legacy remains in our state of concupiscence, or misdirected will. Augustine taught that, although it gives rise to sin, concupiscence is not sinful in itself – our desires, in other words, articulate a craving for God, even when they miss their rightful target. In the sixteenth century, a number of Reformers, including both Martin Luther and John Calvin, radicalized Augustine's insight and claimed that concupiscence is itself sinful – an insight awkwardly accorded apostolic status in Article 9 of the Thirty Nine Articles of 1562. The term 'concupiscence'

is undoubtedly alien to many people; yet the existential reality that it names, together with the continuing debate over how this reality should be interpreted, provides an extraordinarily vivid case of theological rubber hitting the road of human experience. Augustine's experience, together with his consequent claim that human desire – however improbable this seems at the time – is ultimately pulling us homewards to God, is simply turned on its head by Luther, Calvin, *et al*: human desiring, they claim, is fatally compromised by original sin and by the fallen-ness of the human condition – desire pulls us away from God and leads us away from grace.

Christianity, thus, exhibits a spectrum of theological understandings of the human person; some stress our possibilities (deification, in the east), some dwell more on our liabilities (original sin, in the west). The western churches differ over the extent of human fallen-ness: the Roman Catholic Church presents fallen-ness as a weakening of human nature rendering us more prone to sin; some Protestant churches have positioned themselves at an opposing extreme, and preach the total depravity of the human person. Anglicanism, concerned to comprehend both Catholic and Reformed, has not expressed a dogmatic view on the nature of the human person, and lives with an occasionally-uneasy internal pluralism which is pregnant with consequences for other areas of potential and current division.

#### IV. *Anglicanism, Human Self-Understanding and Sexuality*

Anglican disagreement over homosexuality did not appear out of nowhere in 1998; it had been placed clearly on the record at Lambeth 1988. Indeed, disagreements at Lambeth Conferences about sex could hardly be considered novel.

The reports of successive Lambeth Conferences from 1867 onwards, acquaint us with the many men – and latterly women – who have thought, prayed and worshiped together, who have agreed and disagreed with one another, and who have tried – together – to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the gospel. Some issues that were live in 1867 – the subordination of certain synods to certain other synods, for instance – seem quaint in retrospect. Other issues retain prominence over the ensuing century and a half – notably the pursuit of peace, the imperative to work for visible Christian unity, the churches' missionary responsibilities, and the need to engage with the changing moral landscapes in which the churches work.

Significantly, the bishops sometimes reach a common mind, which they express with great clarity as the traditional teaching of the church; yet, within a decade or two, they change their mind and reverse their position. This is particularly dramatic in the shift from an alarmed condemnation of artificial contraception in 1908 'as demoralizing to character and hostile to national welfare' (Resolution 41), to their growing acceptance that there is no divinely-sanctioned obligation that sexual intercourse in marriage be either procreative in intent or, at least, not exclude the possibility of conception. But this acceptance took time to grow: and before that change took root, the bishops had reiterated, time and again, that the top priority for a married couple was to generate citizens for the state and saints for the church (and in that order). Up to and including 1930, Lambeth conferences discussed sex in the context of a notably time-conditioned Christian understanding of marriage. Sex was presented largely as an arena of ethical problems: Anglican bishops took until 1930 to acknowledge that sex might be pleasurable and of benefit to the marriage relationship. Albeit limited, this move *was* revolutionary: a pamphlet written after Lambeth 1930 by Bishop Charles Gore, a pivotal thinker in modern Anglicanism, indicates the depth of moral outrage provoked by the bishops. Lambeth conferences provide evidence that – painful and difficult though it may be – thinking about sex, and thinking about sexual human beings, is open to change.

Lambeth's sexual revolution was consolidated in 1958, when the Conference moved away from confining sex to the realm of *ad hoc* marital and social problems, and began its reflections with a 'Theology of Sexuality and the Family' – perhaps the first time that the word 'sexuality' had appeared in a Lambeth report. A paradigm shift is evident in Lambeth 1958 in its clear acknowledgement of the intrinsically sexual nature of human being; the report still merits attention for its careful and understated attempt to treat sexuality as intrinsic to every human being's – and therefore every Christian's – social and personal life. Resolution 112 states: 'The Conference records its profound conviction that the idea of the human family is rooted in the Godhead and that consequently all problems of sex relations, the procreation of children, and the organization of family life

must be related, consciously and directly, to the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying power of God.'

By contrast, Lambeth 1998 is hard to interpret. The previous conference, in 1988, had signalled that the bishops were not of one mind on homosexuality. Before the 1998 conference, tensions over this issue were evident. At the conference, a working group produced a report on human sexuality, acknowledging, again, that they had not reached a common mind on homosexuality. A first resolution on the report (1.10a) commended it 'to the Church'; subsequent resolutions, especially 1.10d, e and g, however, sit awkwardly with 1.10a. Once the resolutions were passed, approximately 180 bishops (including 8 Primates) issued a Pastoral Statement to Gay and Lesbian Anglicans, seen by many as an apology for the tone adopted by the Conference towards LGBT Anglicans throughout the Communion.

A charitable account of Lambeth 1998 might see it as a worked example of the 'much confusion in the area of the Church's doctrine and teaching about sexuality', noted by Lambeth 1988. What, then, does Lambeth 1998 tell us about Anglicanism and human sexuality? The answer is that it says different things and therefore tells us different things; the lack of coherence between the resolutions clearly embodies the ambiguous legacy of Lambeth 1998. Traumatized, Anglicanism now faces the therapeutic necessity of engaging with all that led into and out of the meltdown of Lambeth 1998. Time alone will tell whether the churches of the Anglican Communion can negotiate this path together in integrity, or whether they will opt for the lesser grace of regionalism or some other form of elective affinity.

In its important reflection, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (2008), the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission explored the significance of Anglicanism's description of itself as a 'communion' of churches – and posed the question: is the communion that we receive in Christ able to sustain us in the differences and disagreements that are part and parcel of Christian discipleship?

This question connects with the profound insights offered by the distinctively Christian doctrine of God the Holy Trinity. The three persons of the Triune God relate with one another in the freely committed love of communion; we are called to enter this relationship in baptism; the sacrament visibly signifies that God has claimed us, not *vice versa*. Communion is a gift that we have received. An awkward gift, perhaps. Because not only does it bring with it the delights of communion with God – Father, Son and Spirit – it also brings with it those others called into communion with us by the same God, in whose image and likeness they are created and loved by God. Communion names the healing solidarity of God with us, overcoming the alienated human solidarity that St Augustine called original sin.

Taking seriously the gift of communion may help us to re-frame fundamentally our disputes with one another, rooted in the distinctively Christian accounts of what it is to be human. We – ourselves and our others – are required to attend to what we can learn from scripture, tradition and reason; we are no less required to listen to one another and look to the ways in which our communion with one another transcends our differences of conviction. We are obliged to witness that – though they are real and painful – in communion we have more in common than our theological or ethical differences.

A concern with communion and otherness, solidarity and difference, marks our lives as human beings. In Anglicanism, the history of the Lambeth conferences provides a worked example of how experiences of communion and otherness gain structural expression, and enable the shaping of a common mind on important matters – albeit a common mind that is prepared to change as it continues to weigh and sift competing truth claims. And, as Lambeth conferences have now drawn attention to the breadth of experience implicated in human sexuality, for the foreseeable future, communion and otherness will remain challenging realities for Anglican Christians.

## **Part I. Introduction**

### **I.1. 2013 General Synod Motion establishing the Select Committee**

#### **SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF**

That, pursuant to the resolution adopted by the General Synod in 2012, the General Synod appoints the following as members of a Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief:

The Rt Revd Kenneth Good  
The Rt Revd Trevor Williams  
The Revd Patrick Bamber  
The Revd Darren McCallig  
The Very Revd John Mann  
The Very Revd Sandra Pragnell  
The Revd Pat Storey (from 2013: The Most Revd Pat Storey)  
The Revd George Davison (from 2013: The Ven George Davison)  
The Revd Dr Trevor Johnston  
The Revd Alison Calvin  
Mr David Bird  
Mr Greg Fromholz  
Mrs Phyllis Grothier  
Mrs Hilary McClay  
Mrs Helen McClenaghan  
Mrs Thea Boyle

The Committee may co-opt up to two additional members of the General Synod.

The Select Committee remit is to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue. The Select Committee may address any issue under the heading 'Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief'.

The Select Committee is appointed for an initial two year period, which may be extended for a further two years by the General Synod on the recommendation of the Standing Committee. The Select Committee shall report to the Standing Committee twice per year at the meetings in November and April.

The Select Committee is empowered to bring whatever motions it deems appropriate via the Standing Committee to the General Synod and to consult as widely as possible.

Any casual vacancies that arise in the membership of the Select Committee may be filled by the Standing Committee.



## **I.2. Changes in Select Committee membership and the formation of an Advisory Panel**

The Committee elected the Very Revd John Mann as Chairman and Mrs Helen McClenaghan as Vice Chair. The Ven George Davison served as Interim Chair until January 2014, when a decision was taken regarding chairmanship.

A Select Committee is of its nature restricted to membership drawn from the Church of Ireland General Synod. It was felt, however, that a wider range of voices and experiences should be heard and this resulted in the Select Committee forming an advisory panel to assist with expert input during phases of its work.

During the course of the Select Committee's work, membership changed due to the resignations of Revd Darren McCallig and Mrs Thea Boyle and retirement of the Rt Revd TR Williams and Mr David Bird. Standing Committee appointed four new members in their place, the Revd Brian O'Rourke, Mrs Joan Bruton, Mr Damien Shorten and Mr Leo Kilroy. Following his retirement in 2014, the Rt Revd Trevor Williams moved from a position on the Committee to the Advisory Panel.

In January 2015 the Select Committee also welcomed as an observer Dr Fergus O'Ferrall, the Convener of the Methodist Church in Ireland's Faith and Order Working Party on Human Sexuality. The Chair of the Select Committee, the Very Revd John Mann, sits on the Methodist group.

### **Chair**

Very Revd John Mann

### **Vice Chair**

Mrs Helen McClenaghan

### **Resignations:**

Mrs Thea Boyle (July 2014)

Revd Darren McCallig (January 2015)

### **Retirements:**

Rt Revd Trevor Williams (July 2014)

Mr David Bird (May 2015)

### **Appointments:**

Mrs Joan Bruton (Appointed January 2015)

Mr Damian Shorten (Appointed January 2015)

Revd Brian O'Rourke (Appointed January 2015)

Mr Leo Kilroy (Appointed June 2015)

### **Advisory Panel:**

Revd Dr William Olhausen

Dr Andrew Pierce

Rt Revd Trevor Williams (Appointed September 2014)

Ms Pam Tilson

### **Methodist Observer**

Dr Fergus O'Ferrall (January 2015)

### I.3. The establishment, membership and work of the Select Committee

On Thursday 9 May 2013 the General Synod of the Church of Ireland passed a motion establishing a Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief.<sup>1</sup> As Archbishop Michael Jackson noted in his speech proposing the motion, the membership of the 16-person group was drawn from “a broad range of human sympathy, life experience and geographical belonging in the complex organism that is the Church of Ireland of today”.<sup>2</sup>

The remit given to the Select Committee was “**to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue**” and it was stipulated that the group may address any issue under that general heading. With an initial appointment for two years (which may be extended by Synod for a further two) the Select Committee was empowered to bring whatever motions it deems appropriate via Standing Committee to the General Synod and to consult as widely as possible. The Committee was given the power to co-opt two additional members of General Synod.

At its second meeting (in November 2013) the Select Committee adopted a planning paper which outlined how the group intended to fulfil its remit. The paper proposed that the work be undertaken in two phases. In the first phase, the Select Committee would work towards producing a *Guide to the Conversation on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief*. This document would provide a framework within which particular issues relating to human sexuality could be engaged in the second phase of the Select Committee’s work. The place of LGBT persons in the life of the Church would be the priority issue to be addressed in that second phase.

This present publication is the outcome of the first phase of the Select Committee’s work. The *Guide* has three main aims. Firstly, it attempts to outline some of the contours of the current debate on human sexuality. This includes developments within the Church of Ireland and the Anglican and Porvoo Communions, as well as in society generally. This is done largely through bringing together in one volume the contents and findings of selected reports, statements and other documents. Secondly, the *Guide* aims to give some indication of how the three traditional sources of Anglican theology – Scripture, Tradition and Reason – are understood and applied in theological and ethical inquiry. Thirdly, it explores – in a section entitled “Dealing with Disagreement” – how, given the diversity of views within the Church of Ireland on human sexuality, we might respond to that diversity in a theologically responsible manner.

The published material in relation to the topic of human sexuality in the context of Christian belief is vast and the very volume of material can mean that those wishing to engage in the debate find it difficult to “get their bearings”. We hope that this *Guide* will provide some landmarks – in many cases, landmarks from specifically Church of Ireland sources and resources – to assist the interested navigator. Where electronic copies of documents cited are accessible online we have sought to provide web addresses in the endnotes. We have also included in a bibliography a number of publications which those who wish to undertake further reading may find informative and helpful.

Finally, a word should be said about process. As our chairman Dean John Mann noted in his remarks at the 2014 General Synod, “Our first task, as members of this committee, was to enter this debate with an openness to receive and a willingness to give.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, our first priority was (and is) to create and sustain a trust-filled space where the delicate work of sharing heart-felt opinions can take place. Our meetings, therefore, have been held in the context of common worship, shared meals, and (in most cases) time-away together. It is perhaps this fellowship, more than any other factor, which has fostered mutual respect and understanding among members of the Select Committee.

As Dean Mann also observed at General Synod, “the Select Committee is clear that its remit is to include other aspects of human sexuality, than those which divide the church”. However, as he also noted “it is also conscious of its timeframe and the need to respond to the very understandably insistent voices that may view its progress”. Moreover, it should be noted that other committees and bodies within the Church of Ireland are tasked with and in a position to progress various other issues under the general heading of “human sexuality”.<sup>4</sup>



## I.4. A word about terminology

The authors of the Church of England *Pilling Report* noted:

We are very aware that issues of language and terminology on matters of sexuality are fraught with difficulty. We recognize that we may be perceived as a group of people, holding authority in the Church, who are unilaterally defining the terms by which other people are described.<sup>5</sup>

The approach adopted by that group, therefore, was to (a) exercise as much care as possible in their choice of language (b) recognize that people have the right to choose how they describe themselves, and (c) use expressions that reflect common usage. Those same principles have been adopted by the Select Committee and so, as far as possible, the terminology employed in describing the reports and research findings cited in this *Guide* have been those chosen by the respective participants and authors themselves.

The members of the Select Committee have also been cognisant of the clarification of terms provided by David de Pomerai in his contribution to the publication *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*:

Homosexuality (HS) is used here to describe sexual attraction *exclusively* to members of the same sex (whether male-male or female-female); however, this need not necessarily imply overt sexual activity, which is a matter of choice. Bisexuality (BS) denotes sexual attraction to members of *both* sexes, where choice must obviously affect a person's behaviour. Finally, same-sex attraction (SSA) is a wider term used here to encompass both HS and BS, as well as many heterosexuals who may feel attracted towards members of the same sex, for instance during an adolescent phase or as a repressed urge in adult life. There is confusion and potential bias in much of the literature caused by differing definitions of homosexuality.<sup>6</sup>

It is the Select Committee's hope that those using this *Guide* for discussion and study will likewise attempt to show care, caution and consideration in their choice of language.

## Part II. Anglican Approaches to Theological and Ethical Inquiry

### II. 1. Starting with Scripture

In 2002 the Association for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (APCK) issued the first of its leaflets on Church of Ireland teaching and belief. The series, which now runs to a total of 12 published pamphlets, was begun in response to a demand from clergy and others for resources to recommend to those enquiring about Irish Anglicanism. Each pamphlet addresses, in an accessible question-and-answer format, some of the common queries people have about the Church of Ireland.<sup>7</sup> The very first pamphlet in the series was entitled “The Bible” and in response to the question “What is the Bible?” it states:

The biblical texts provide a ‘normative record of the authentic foundation of the faith. To these the Church has recourse for the inspiration of its life and mission; to these the Church refers its teaching and practice.’ (ARCIC Final Report, p.52). Because scripture is uniquely inspired it conveys the Word of God in human language.<sup>8</sup>

After engaging questions about the number of books in the Bible and the various genres of those writings, the pamphlet then asks “How should the Bible be interpreted?”

The Bible tells of God’s relationship with God’s people through the centuries. This record always needs to be interpreted in the context of the church’s faith, prayer and worship, and in such a way that what scripture said for its original audience is faithfully re-expressed for the modern world.

The final question is “How does the authority of the Bible relate to human reason and the church’s tradition?”

Christians must keep returning to the Bible as they continue to explore the truth of God, for scripture ‘containeth all things necessary to salvation’. (Articles of Religion; 6).<sup>9</sup> The Church of Ireland believes that the church’s teaching must be founded on and consistent with scripture. We also have a responsibility to use our reason in understanding the Bible in the context of tradition, which is how the Church’s interpretation of scripture has developed.

It is to that relationship between Scripture, Tradition and Reason – often considered to be a characteristically Anglican approach – that we now turn.

### II. 2. The Anglican Way: Scripture, Tradition and Reason

The 1997 Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission – commonly called the *Virginia Report* – was the product of a group of Anglican theologians and church leaders chaired by the then Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Robin Eames. The group’s task was to respond to a call from the Lambeth Conference of 1988 to consider in some depth the meaning and nature of communion. Chapter three of the report, which considered “What Binds Anglicans Together” included a section entitled “The Anglican Way: Scripture, Tradition and Reason.”<sup>10</sup> It stated:

3.5 Anglicans are held together by the characteristic way in which they use Scripture, tradition and reason in discerning afresh the mind of Christ for the Church in each generation. This was well described in the Report of the Pastoral and Dogmatic Concerns section of Lambeth 1988.

3.6 Anglicans affirm the sovereign authority of the Holy Scriptures as the medium through which God by the Spirit communicates his word in the Church and thus enables people to respond with understanding and faith. The Scriptures are “uniquely inspired witness to divine revelation”, and “the primary norm for Christian faith and life”.

3.7 The Scriptures, however, must be translated, read, and understood, and their meaning grasped through a continuing process of interpretation. Since the seventeenth century Anglicans have held that Scripture is to be understood and read in the light afforded by the contexts of “tradition” and “reason”.

The report's authors then went on to offer definitions of "tradition" and "reason." Tradition, they noted, "in one sense ... denotes the Scriptures themselves, in that they embody 'the tradition', 'the message', 'the faith once delivered to the saints'. In addition, by tradition is meant "the ongoing Spirit-guided life of the Church which receives, and in receiving interprets afresh God's abiding message". In terms of specifics, the *Virginia Report* understood "the living tradition" as including the ecumenical creeds and the classical Eucharistic prayers "which belong with the Scriptures as forming their essential message".

As regards "reason" the authors understood its meaning in two "perspectives". Firstly, reason "means simply the human being's capacity to symbolise, and so to order, share and communicate experience".

It [reason] is the divine gift in virtue of which human persons respond and act with awareness in relation to their world and to God, and are opened up to that which is true for every time and every place. Reason cannot be divorced either from Scripture or tradition, since neither is conceivable apart from the working of reason.

Secondly, they understood reason to mean "not so much the capacity to make sense of things as it does 'that which makes sense', or 'that which is reasonable'. In other words, the appeal to reason can be understood as referring to what people in a given time and place "take as good sense or 'common' sense."

3.10 Anglicanism sees reason in the sense of the 'mind' of the culture in which the Church lives and the Gospel is proclaimed, as a legitimate and necessary instrument for the interpretation of God's message in the Scriptures. Sometimes Scriptures affirm the new insights of a particular age or culture, sometimes they challenge or contradict those insights. The Word of God is addressed to the Church as it is part of the world. The Gospel borne by the Scriptures must be heard and interpreted in the language that bears the 'mind' and distils the experience of the world.

## **II. 3. The Authority of Scripture: A Report of the Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine**

In 2004 the Bishops of the Church of Ireland established an Advisory Commission on Doctrine. The remit of the group, which was chaired by the then Bishop of Meath and Kildare, the Most Revd Richard Clarke, was to give guidance, as requested, to the bishops on matters relating to Church doctrine. The Commission issued its first report, entitled *The Authority of Scripture*, in 2006.<sup>11</sup>

In his "Introduction" to the volume, Bishop Clarke underlined the importance and also the complexity of the task faced by the members of the Commission:

It seems likely that the precise function and authority of the Holy Scriptures within the life of the Christian Church has never been a matter for complete unanimity. What is more certain is that the Church of today – within many different traditions – is finding any such enquiry almost too difficult to confront, such is its potential for sharp and destructive divergence. In this the Church of Ireland is no exception.

This report sets out, not so much to find a simple answer to the question as to recover a wholesome space for a mutual respect and courteous rapprochement between those differing approaches to biblical authority which are an inevitable element of our nature as Irish Anglicans.<sup>12</sup>

The report is comprised of five individual essays by the members of the commission and concludes with "Six Theses on Scriptural Authority" agreed by all the members as "markers" outlining the space where the dialogue on biblical authority is to be continued.<sup>13</sup> The Six Theses read as follows:

1. Holy Scripture is the inspired and definitive witness to the revelation of God in Christ. For Christians it is the supreme authority in all matters of faith, order and conduct. This normative authority was and

is not *conferred*, but rather was and is *recognised* by the Church.

2. The Church's dialogue with Scripture is to be understood in terms of the demands that it places upon us who 'sit under it', and not in the sense that it is under our control.
3. Holy Scripture is properly understood by the Church when the person and work of Christ is held as the interpretative key, and its authority is mediated to us via Christ and the apostles.
4. Holy Scripture is unified in its message, and the Church is called through the Holy Spirit to re-appropriate this message in every age.
5. With regard to Holy Scripture, we fully affirm the sixth of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion that:

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

6. The authority of Holy Scripture is neither diminished nor undermined by the full rigours of critical scholarship.

### **II. 3. 1. Five Perspectives on Scripture, Tradition and Reason**

The inevitable diversity of approach, spoken of by Bishop Clarke in his Introduction, is evident in the five individual essays in the Report. A close reading of the texts – and the Select Committee recommends their careful study – will give the reader a sense of the range of approaches to biblical authority and interpretation within the Church of Ireland. In particular, the different ways in which the individual authors understand the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and Reason is instructive and relevant to discussions on issues relating to human sexuality. While not attempting to describe in detail the respective positions, some selected quotations from the individual essays will give a flavour of that diversity.

The first of the five essays is by Dr Andrew Pierce and is entitled "Where are we now? The Contesting of Biblical Authority in Historical Perspective." He begins by noting that a good deal of contemporary theology is concerned with hermeneutics, by which is meant the theory of interpretation.

Texts do not 'contain' meaning in the same way that jugs contain milk; they require interpretation rather than simply being up-ended. This hermeneutical turn in theology is particularly important for the ways in which we appeal to biblical authority, as it has made us increasingly aware that 'we' - the interpreters of the text – interpret from within a context shaped by many prejudgements and value-commitments (some complementary, others conflicting), and that these inevitably shape our interpretation. Moreover, they always did. Every interpreter and every interpretative community operate both consciously and subconsciously from a particular perspective. Trying to interpret the biblical text obliges us to take seriously the ways in which our context shapes – and possibly skews – our interpretation.

Dr Pierce also cautions against setting up an either/or confrontation between Scripture and Tradition. Through a summary of the history of the development of the New Testament canon (i.e. the contested and prolonged process of deciding which texts to include in an authoritative list) he underlines the point that "the canonization of these writings *as* Scripture was a traditioning act of the Church." In other words, pitting Scripture and Tradition against each other is an "unhelpful dichotomy" as it denies "the dynamic inter-connection between these two key theological themes".

His conclusion, therefore, is that Churches of the twenty-first century would "do well to reflect on the unavoidability of conflict within Christian interpretative communities" and that such an awareness might present an opportunity:

Perhaps the anticipation of future friction will also provoke Christian interpretative communities to develop – together – ways to ‘stage’ conflict in which the participants are not allowed to forget that their conflict, since it is concerned with truth, is also an expression of communion.

The second individual essay, by the Very Revd Dr Stephen White, is entitled “Scripture and Experience: A Creative Tension”. He begins by offering a definition of the phrase, the “Authority of Scripture”:

Scripture is said to have authority or to be authoritative then, in the sense that it is something which can generally be relied upon and which is accurate and faithful in certain foundational ways. By this is meant that it reflects the story of humanity’s encounter with God and God’s with humanity, in ways which reveal to us insights and truths about the nature of God and about the appropriate human response(s) to that revealed nature. It does not mean that Scripture is verbally inerrant or ‘divinely dictated’; and it equally does not mean that we are forbidden to interrogate Scripture or even at times to argue with it on the basis of other human experience of God or the demands of reason. The authority of Scripture requires us to reckon seriously with it, but while it may make us a people of the book it does not make us prisoners of that book.

As Dr Pierce cautioned against pitting Scripture and Tradition against each other, so Dr White makes the case for a profound interrelationship between Scripture, intellect and experience. If the Scriptures are the product of successive communities of believers, and if those individuals and communities were guided by the Holy Spirit in their discernment, then this has profound implications for how we engage with those texts:

Our task is neither simply to submit to it nor to place ourselves above it, but rather to understand the processes of intellect and experience which in dialogue with God created the Scriptures, and then to ascertain as best we may, how much this witness faithfully reflects the nature and authority of God, how much of it is human interpretation (or even misinterpretation), and therefore how we respond to the witness of Scripture today. To do this we must apply our own intellect and experience to the witness of Scripture.

Such a task is never easy and must be undertaken afresh by each generation. Indeed, such ongoing dialogue suggests that “there can ... be no definitive and unchanging answer to the authority of Scripture”. What we have instead is a “demand for ... engagement (rather than any more specific criterion)” and it may be that such a demand is “arguably, the primary locus of scriptural authority”.

The third essay is entitled “Scripture and Revelation” and is by the Revd Dr Maurice Elliott. He seeks to answer questions such as “By what gauge ought Christians to measure the requirements of faith?”, “In practice how does God rule over his people, the Church?” and “In areas of ecclesiastical dispute wherein lies the final court of arbitration?” These questions are in essence, he says, questions of authority – “the single most important issue facing theology today”.

Dr Elliott turns to geometry as an aid in explicating his approach. Specifically, he includes in the text a diagram of a square which has been sub-divided into smaller sub-squares, as below.



The four sub-squares correspond to “the primary emphases in any typical approach to Christian theology”.



The question then is: which sub-square or source is to be accorded primacy? Dr Elliott considers each of the options in turn:

Reason then is the application of rational thinking to the fact that God has chosen to disclose himself. Clearly, theology cannot function apart from the faculty to think and reflect. In terms of authority, however, the human mind cannot be elevated above that which has created it. God is not an idea to be studied or a theory to be advanced. Rather he is a person to be known, and therefore reason must be subservient to revelation, for otherwise the whole basis of theology would be undermined [...]

Tradition represents the accumulated wisdom and inherited custom of the Church, both catholic and local. Properly understood, it is the historical and theological legacy of the interpretation of revelation, which in turn can only ever be justified with reference to the same authoritative corpus of revelation. In other words, revelation must again remain paramount [...]

Lastly, experience speaks of the need for theological thinking to impact the heart, the will and the conscience, as well as the mind. The theological task is not merely propositional or cognitive [...] Yet again, however, it is imperative that any acceptance of the need for genuine spiritual experience should not become the crucial, deciding factor. Were that to happen, theology would be reduced to pure subjectivity and rampant individualism.

Dr Elliott's conclusion, therefore, is that while Reason, Tradition and Experience are "essential for experiential fullness as well as academic rigour", there can, "in the last analysis be only one final authority, and each of reason, tradition and experience must therefore bow before revelation".

As then, for a definition of "revelation", Dr Elliott notes that while "in general terms God has revealed himself through creation and conscience" for Christians the pressing demand is for the recognition of special revelation:

According to this, it is asserted that God has revealed himself in three persons over the course of salvation history culminating in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, to all of which Holy Scripture is customarily viewed as the authoritative witness. For the health and well-being of the Church, therefore, it begins to become apparent that, because the scriptures have thus recorded the content of God's self-revelation, it is essential to submit to their primary authority, or, to be more precise, to believe in God's authority as thereby exercised through the scriptures.

The fourth individual essay in the collection is the work of the Revd Dr Sue Patterson and is on "Scripture and Community". Dr Patterson takes, as her opening statement, the claim by the theologian George Lindbeck that the relationship between Scripture and community (or Church) is one of mutual interpretation.<sup>14</sup> However, as Dr Patterson acknowledges, it must then be asked: "which community – the Christian community, or the wider community (or both)? And in any case, what do we mean by 'community'?"

As regards the latter question, Dr Patterson regards community in sociological terms as "a group of people who live in unity with each other" – the source or nature of that unity being found in, for example, blood relationships, ethnicity, common causes, geographical proximity or other factors. All such communities operate according to rules or laws (whether implicit or explicit) and all communities have leaders and processes for the appointment of leaders. Moreover, communities are "natural" in that "it has been empirically demonstrated that our ability to develop to our full potential physically, mentally and spiritually depends upon our being born into and raised within communities". Finally, communities can be good or bad, successful or unsuccessful and careful evaluation is needed to discern one from the other. "A community may, for example, be strongly united (cohesive) but through the repressive regime of a dictatorial leader or family dynasty".

What then of Christian community? For Dr Patterson, Christian community is "a community of people who define themselves as Christian, such as a local church or parish" and it "shares all the virtues and vices" of communities in general.

In more specifically theological terms, it is both a repository of the goodness of Creation and a participator in a 'fallen-ness' which may present as a disunity pretending to be unity ('living the lie' of community); or as coerced or imprisoned community (dictatorship); or as tribalism in which unity and communal identity are defined and protected through opposition and exclusion ('We don't have candles because we are not Roman Catholics').

This analysis suggests a complex relationship between the Christian community and the wider community. On the one hand, "secular notions of what constitutes the acceptable community may insidiously squeeze the Christian community into their mould". However, on the other hand, the Christian community must be "both of the culture and counter-cultural in being radically assimilative while retaining its distinctive identity".

The question is one of discernment and one may ask, as Dr Patterson does, "How does a community justify itself by the yardstick of the Christian Scriptures?" In reply, she cautions against assuming that we can have an "eye of God" view of both community and Scripture. We cannot "step out of our communal skins and relate to Scripture without the conditioning of communal tradition and likewise 'get at' Scripture similarly unconditioned".

Nevertheless, there are limits to local interpretation as "the partial and particular world of the local community not only needs to be redeemed, but also complemented by the perspective of other communities". What is needed, Dr Patterson suggests, is a "stereoscopic vision" of Scripture and community which enables the Holy Spirit "to do a new thing". Or, as David Kamitsuke puts it (quoting Lindbeck): "so long as the 'basic rules' for scriptural use remain the same, differing plain senses can be viewed [...] 'as the fusion of the self-identical story with the new worlds within which it is told and retold'".

Such an approach opens up the possibility of transformative "sitting under scripture across community boundaries".

[...] each community may be the agent of the others' redemption as differing perspectives are worked through in the light of Scripture. Exploring the 'why' of differences leads to greater mutual and self-understanding which in turn opens up new insights in reading together. The result is mutual respect even where there are irreducible areas of disagreement. The witness of true Christian community – or at least the beginnings of it – occurs through such a sitting under Scripture.

The final essay in the Doctrine Commission's Report comes from the Revd Dr Nigel Biggar and it concerns itself specifically with the ethical "use" of Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

Dr Biggar opens by noting that "before we use Scripture, Scripture forms us". In other words, before we even think about using the Bible to work out what we should and should not do, it has already "endowed us with beliefs that give us the elements of moral deliberation (e.g. objective goods or values), and attitudes of faith and hope that generate and sustain moral energy".

Having made that preliminary observation, Dr Biggar then goes on to make the case for what he calls the "responsible construction" of an ethical system.

Scripture is not a manual of ethics. It does not furnish us with a coherent ethical system that can be applied to ethical problems to produce the right answer. Rather, Scripture is a compendium of theological texts, written over a millennium by dozens of different authors in dozens of different situations. Of course, these texts contain ethical principles and rules, and morally exemplary stories; and sometimes what one text says about moral matters is the same or similar to what others say. But not always. Sometimes a biblical text presents the indiscriminate slaughter of a people – genocide – as commanded by God (I Samuel 15). Then another text enjoins the reader to withhold himself not only from vengeance, but from any violent retaliation against enemies at all (Romans 12:19-21). And then yet another assures the reader that the 'sword' has been ordained by God for use by public authorities

in the suppression of wrongdoing (Romans 13:4).

Biggar's point is that the "surface of the text of Scripture" does not provide us with an off-the-shelf, coherent system of ethics. If we want such a system then we will have to construct it. But does such an understanding not subordinate Scripture to human reason, logic and judgement?

His answer is to draw attention to the opening chapters of Genesis which "present(s) human beings as being graced with the special dignity of being made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1:26)". Such an understanding "implies that humans are not just puppets or robots or minions". On the contrary, we have freedom, within responsibility, to think and reason our way towards our own diagnoses and our own remedies.

And this will inevitably involve having to decide to give more weight to some parts of Scripture than to others. It might also involve having to contradict some parts in the name of others [...] Accordingly, to say that the need to construct an ethic out of Scripture involves the subordination of Scripture to 'reason' is to put the matter too simply and invite misunderstanding. The more complex truth is that it involves the subordination of Scripture to a 'reason' that has already been informed by Scripture itself.

Further complexity arises from the awareness that we never meet Scripture as *cartes blanches*. Rather we are human creatures "embedded in history, formed by historical traditions [and] moved by the concerns of the day" – with all this implies for our limitations, fallibility and sinfulness.

Moreover, as Biggar also notes, our engagement with Scripture is never a purely private affair. It inevitably involves "tradition" ("the voices of our forerunners in the faith") and also the "contemporary church" ("when we think sociably, we dialogue with the living as well as the dead"). But perhaps, in the end, what matters most is the manner in which we approach our task:

It [the truth] isn't an object waiting to be captured by the correct technique. By calling the truth 'the Word of God', we signal that we ought to approach it, not as miners approach a coal face, but as pilgrims approach a shrine. If we would know the truth about how we should live, then we must seek it in accordance with the kinds of beings we are: not mini-gods, but finite, fallible and sinful creatures; and yet not mindless puppets, but with creatures dignified with a commission to reflect the Creator in using their heads to manage to the world for its own good. We may not possess a certain method, but we have been given a suitable manner – responsible, honest, humble, and sociable. And if we adopt this manner as we reason about the text of Scripture, then we can be confident – since God is good – that in our reasoning we will hear yet more of his Word.

## II. 4. Reading 'through Christ'

As this brief summary of the five individual essays has shown, and as the Chair of the Commission noted in his Introduction, there is an "inevitable" diversity of approaches as to how the authority of scripture is understood in the Church of Ireland. However, two points should be made by way of conclusion to this section of the *Guide*. Firstly, there was agreement amongst the members of the Commission on the "Six Theses on Scriptural Authority" – an agreement which Bishop Clarke described as "open, sincere and [...] significant".

Secondly, within the diversity of approaches there were several common elements and one, in particular, warrants special mention – the centrality of Christ. As the Revd Dr Maurice Elliott put it in his essay:

In the final analysis, Christianity is a personal religion. It is not solely concerned with the reading of a book. Instead, it has to do with the unique revelation of God in the historical figure who stands as its very centre, namely Jesus Christ. As N.T. Wright has stated: 'the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls'.<sup>16</sup>

And as the Revd Dr Sue Patterson wrote in hers:

To read Scripture for its plain sense, without falling either into fundamentalist literalism or selective convenience, requires us to return to the classical way of interpreting Scripture which reads all through, and in terms of Christ who is its unity, according to a Trinitarian rule of faith. Thus, 'what is Scripture for *us*', with all its dangers of bias and partiality, is redeemed in being read 'through Christ'.

This patient and faithful engagement with Scripture – centred on the person of Jesus Christ – is perhaps most eloquently expressed when, on the Fifth Sunday before Advent, the gathered Christian community prays:

Blessed Lord,  
who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:  
Help us to hear them,  
to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them  
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,  
we may embrace and for ever hold fast  
the blessed hope of everlasting life,  
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Part III. A Changing Context: Society and Church

As noted in the Introduction, the Select Committee's remit is "to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue". Therefore, much of this Part III will focus on issues of human sexuality generally. However, we are also cognisant of the fact that the place of LGBT persons in the life of the Church is of particular concern and so specific appropriate material is also included.

### III. 1. Human Sexuality and Social and Cultural Change in Ireland

The *Sexual Health Promotion: Strategy and Action Plan 2008 – 2013*, produced by Northern Ireland's Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, sets the scene for its recommendations with a brief outline of its understanding of the local context. It states:

In Northern Ireland many people attach great importance to stable and exclusive relationships as it is widely recognised that they are the safest place to engage in sexual activity. For many people marriage is also the preferred context for a sexual relationship and the best model for family stability and raising children. In addition many believe that abstinence or delayed sexual activity in young people are healthy and positive choices and are socially acceptable.<sup>17</sup>

The report then goes on to note that much has changed in recent years. In particular it remarks that "in contrast to even 15-20 years ago, there is much more media discussion about sexuality which is frank, detailed and explicit". Just how much has changed, and is changing, can perhaps be gleaned from surveys on sexual attitudes and practices.

#### III. 1. 1. (a) Sexual Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours

While the large-scale British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal)<sup>18</sup>, carried out most recently in 2010-2012, did not extend to Northern Ireland, a number of other pieces of research give an indication of sexual knowledge and behaviour in the region.

For example, a major survey of the sexual attitudes and lifestyles of 14–25 year olds undertaken by academics at Queen's University Belfast's School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work in 2000<sup>19</sup> found that about a third of young people had first had sex before 17, the legal age of consent in Northern Ireland at the time (now amended to 16), and over a quarter before 16. Nearly three-quarters (72.4 per cent) had used contraception when they first had sex.

As regards the reported gender of sexual partners, one in nine (10.9 per cent) men and one in 28 (3.6 per cent) women reported sex with a same sex partner on at least one occasion. About 2 per cent (2.4 per cent men, 1.4 per cent women) said they had only ever been attracted to the same sex.

More recently, the 2011 Young Life and Times (YLT) survey<sup>20</sup> of 1,434 sixteen year olds in Northern Ireland found that 26% of 16-year olds had had sex, with 81% of these respondents saying that they had used a condom when they first had sex. Other key findings showed that 16-year olds find it easiest to talk to their boyfriends or girlfriends and to their friends about sexual matters, although school was respondents' preferred way of receiving sex education. The three main reasons for having sex were: curiosity (54%), seeing sex as a natural follow-on to a relationship (46%) and being in love (37%). Overall, 62% of respondents said that their first sex came at the right time. 54% of those who had had sex only ever had one sexual partner, only 8% said they had more than five.

In terms of the Republic of Ireland, the most comprehensive piece of analysis on sexual health and relationships comes from the *The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships (ISSHR)*,<sup>21</sup> commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and the Department of Health and Children. This document, published in 2006, analysed the findings from a survey of 7,441 Irish people (aged 18 to 64) gathered in 2004/5. Despite the

fieldwork having been completed almost a decade ago, the report remains a useful starting point for understanding attitudes towards sexuality. It presents its conclusions in the context of a rapidly-changing Ireland.

The current patterns of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in Ireland can only be fully understood in the light of Irish economic, social and cultural history. Most Irish adults learnt about and experienced sex and sexual relations in a society still deeply influenced by a Roman Catholic moral framework, but this influence has weakened considerably over the last four decades or so. The changes have intensified in recent years as Ireland has become an increasingly multinational, multicultural and multi-faith society [...] sexual attitudes are still more conservative in Ireland (north and south of the Irish border) than in other Western European states. However [...] there has been enormous change.

Topics covered in the *ISSHR* include sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviours; attraction, sexual identity and sexual experience; heterosexual intercourse, partnerships and practice; homosexual partnerships and practices; risk-reduction practices and experience of crisis pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

In relation to sexual knowledge, one of the most significant findings in the study was that 92% of people supported sex education in the home and at school for young people on the subject of sexual intercourse, sexual feelings, contraception, safer sex and homosexuality. The survey also found that when parents talk to their children about sex, they increase the likelihood that their teenagers will delay their first sexual experience, that they will use contraception and that they will have greater confidence in negotiating sexual relationships.

The research showed that approximately 12% of women report having vaginal sex before age 17 and that these women are almost 70% more likely to experience a crisis pregnancy and three times more likely to experience abortion. Men and women who have sex before 17 are three times more likely to report experiencing an STI.

The report also found that younger men and women report substantially higher numbers of sexual partners than older respondents. 46% of men and 76% of women aged 55-64 have only ever had a single partner. In the 18-24 age group, 65% of men and 50% of women have had two or more partners in their lives to date.

Low proportions - 2.7% of men and 1.2% of women - identified as homosexual or bisexual. However, 5.3% of men and 5.8% of women reported some same-sex attraction. This led the authors to suggest that sexual expression may be characterized as a spectrum which includes a range of same sex and opposite sex attraction, rather than considering heterosexuality and homosexuality as two distinct categories.

In summary, the authors of the report concluded that:

Attitudes have become increasingly liberal on issues such as sex outside marriage, homosexuality and abortion. Present trends suggest, as with many other aspects of Irish life, that sexual culture in Ireland is moving closer to that of the UK and continental Europe. Depending on the observer, this could be viewed as a positive or negative development, but it is undeniable that Irish attitudes to sex and sexual relations are changing, and changing quickest among younger people. Across the age range, Irish people are now more accepting of a greater range of sexual behaviours and orientations.

The extent of further change in the relatively short number of years since the *ISSHR* report can perhaps be seen in the results of two other reports published more recently. The first of these is the UNICEF publication *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour*. It was published in 2012 and based on a survey of 508 sixteen to twenty year olds carried out in late 2010.<sup>22</sup>

It found that 63% of those surveyed, and 1 in 5 sixteen year old respondents, reported that they have had sex. In addition, 1 in 5 sexually active respondents reported that they did not use a condom the first time that they had sex while 2 in 5 girls who were sexually active reported that they had consumed alcohol before their first sexual experience, compared to 3 in 10 boys.

The slim majority of respondents (54%) reported that they had watched pornography on the internet, and more than one third of the respondents who had watched pornography on the internet believed that it was accurate or educational. Only 1 in 5 respondents reported that they ever speak to their parents about sex.

Finally, the young people surveyed were asked to indicate their interest in both boys and girls. 83% of female respondents reported that they liked boys while 82% of boys reported that they liked girls. 2% of girls and 6% of boys reported same sex attraction. 10% of girls and 8% of boys from the sample reported that they liked both boys and girls. Approximately 5% reported that they were unsure.

Noting “the broad spectrum from which young people living in Ireland draw down information about sex” the UNICEF Ireland report concluded that, “we must be sure that when a young person is making decisions about their sexual health and behaviour, every opportunity is afforded them in terms of open discussion, understanding, support, information and advice”.

The other report which should be mentioned is the 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland Report which was launched in April 2012.<sup>23</sup> The HBSC is a cross-sectional study conducted in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe. The 2010 Irish HBSC survey, carried out by the Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway is the fourth round of data collection. The study aims to increase the understanding of young people’s health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context. A total of 16,060 children aged 9-18 from 256 schools across Ireland participated in the survey.

In term of sexual health and behaviour, the research found that overall, 27% of 15-17 year olds report that they have ever had sex. There are statistically significant differences by gender and social class. Overall, boys are more likely than girls to report ever having sex (31% and 23% respectively), as are those from lower social class groups. Moreover, of those who report ever having had sex, 93% report using a condom the last time they had sex and 59% report that they had used the birth control pill.

### **III. 1. 1. (b) The Science of Human Sexuality**

The authors of the Church of England *Pilling Report* gave this summary of the debate on the science of human sexuality and specifically homosexuality:

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

They went on to note that this state of affairs makes it “difficult for non-specialists to make a judgement”. Nevertheless, they also noted that:

At the moment most experts seem to think that there is at least some biological influence involved in same sex attraction, although no one theory about what this influence is has yet been proved beyond reasonable doubt. The general consensus seems to be that the origins of same sex attraction are complex and probably due to a combination of biological, social and psychological factors.<sup>24</sup>

As the Revd Dr David de Pomerai, Associate Professor in the School of Life Sciences at the University of Nottingham and an ordained priest of the Church of England, put it in his contribution to the volume *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*:

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

can claim to hold the key to [homosexuality].<sup>25</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting, as Phil Groves does in his introduction to the David de Pomerai essay quoted above, that even if the science was unanimous and unambiguous it is not for that discipline “to have the last and determinative word on how we should then live as Christians or order ourselves as churches”.<sup>26</sup>

### III. 1. 2. Being LGBT in Ireland Today

Several pieces of research have been conducted, in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, on the everyday experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender (LGBT) people. For example, in 2001 the Rainbow Project and Cara-Friend issued a report entitled *Left out of the Equation* which highlighted the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people in schools in Northern Ireland.<sup>27</sup> The report, which was based on a survey of 133 respondents (74 male and 59 female), found that 98% of LGB young people reporting hearing homophobic language in school from pupils, teachers, non-teaching staff and visitors to schools. Moreover, 72% of survey respondents reported that when teachers heard homophobic language, they ignored it. Finally, 94% of survey respondents reported that they were taught nothing in sexual health education which was relevant to them as an LGB person.

A more recent piece of research – and one which looked at the LGBT community as whole – was published in December 2013 by the Rainbow Project. *Through our Minds* examined the emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT people through a combination of a self-completion questionnaire, focus groups and small group interviews.<sup>28</sup>

The research found that LGBT people have higher rates of self-harm, suicidal ideations, suicide attempts and depression than the wider population. It also found that these impacted differently amongst different demographic groups in the LGBT population. For example, LGB women (45.4%) and transgender men and women (40%) were most at risk of self-harm, while this was lowest amongst gay and bisexual men at 31.1%. Trans men and women were the most likely to have attempted suicide (43.5%), then gay and bisexual men (26.6%) and LGB women a slightly lower at 23.6%.

These findings are in keeping with the results of the “Northern Ireland Lifestyle and Coping Survey” which was sponsored by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education and published in 2010. Its anonymous survey completed by 3,596 pupils aged 15- 16 from secondary and grammar schools across Northern Ireland found, for example, that boys with sexual orientation concerns were at 10 times greater risk of self-harm than their peers.<sup>29</sup>

Turning then to the Republic of Ireland, the 2009 publication *Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People*<sup>30</sup> found that 80% of gay men and lesbian women had experienced verbal abuse, while one-quarter had experienced violence because of their sexual orientation.

The research, which was based on an online survey of 1,100 people and in-depth one-to-one interviews with 40 people, also found that some 40% had been threatened with physical violence because they were or were thought to be LGBT and almost 8% had been attacked with a weapon or implement of some kind, such as a knife, bottle or stick. Almost one in 10 (9%) said they had been attacked sexually on at least one occasion because of their LGBT identity.

In relation to school, 58% of the online participants and half of all current school goers said homophobic bullying was existent in schools, with 8% admitting that they had been subjected to name calling by staff. In work, one-quarter had been called abusive names, 15% had received verbal threats and 10% had missed work because they felt threatened or were afraid of being hurt by a colleague.

Overall, many of those surveyed had experienced depression and a “significant minority” had self-harmed at some point in their lives. Almost half of people who had self-harmed had attempted suicide on at least one occasion. Almost 18% of the online participants had attempted suicide at least once. The average age at first



attempt was 17. Over 60% attributed their depression directly to the challenges they faced as LGBT people, such as stigma, social isolation and a lack of integration with the community.

Finally, mention should be made in this section of recent developments in relation to civil marriage for same-sex couples. Marriage is a devolved issue in the United Kingdom and consequently the legal position differs in three jurisdictions (for this purpose): England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. While legislation providing for civil marriage for same-gender couples has been passed for England and Wales, and for Scotland, the Northern Ireland Executive has not introduced similar legislation for Northern Ireland, though five attempts, to date, have been made to do so, most recently on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015. On that occasion members of the Northern Ireland Assembly voted narrowly in favour of legislating for same-sex marriage in the province, but a "Petition of Concern", prevented the measure, although 53 Members of the Legislative Assembly supported the motion, against 51 who rejected it (a Petition is a mechanism by which legislation may be blocked unless a majority of both unionists and nationalists agree).

In the Republic of Ireland, the matter was referred to the Convention on the Constitution<sup>31</sup> and, at its meeting in April 2013, that body recommended (by a 79% vote in favour) that the Irish Constitution be amended to provide for civil marriage for same-sex couples. The Irish Government subsequently gave an undertaking to hold a referendum on the issue in the first half of 2015. This occurred on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015. The result was that the Republic of Ireland voted overwhelmingly to legalise same-sex marriage. More than 62% of people voted in favour of amending the country's constitution (of a turn-out of 61%) to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry. It was the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage through a popular vote. The Bill passed through the upper house of the Irish parliament, the Seanad, at the end of October 2015. With the presidential endorsement, the bill had then cleared its final hurdle and the first same-sex marriages in the country took place in the middle of November 2015.

## III.2. Human Sexuality and the Church of Ireland

### III. 2. 1. A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, September 2003<sup>32</sup>

In September 2003, the bishops of the Church of Ireland issued a pastoral letter. The document began by noting that “[s]ociety is experiencing the breakdown of national, community and inter-personal relationships on a scale that none of us has experienced before” and that “one aspect of life in which this brokenness is most personally and painfully experienced is in the realm of human sexuality”.

Referring specifically to homosexuality, the bishops acknowledged that “social attitudes range from complete acceptance through indifference to complete rejection”, while within the Christian tradition, “notwithstanding the pastoral care and compassion shown by many, the attitude has more often than not been one of non-acceptance and at times harsh condemnation”. This has meant, said the authors, “that a wholesome engagement with, and open discussion of, the issues surrounding homosexuality has for too long been side-stepped by the Churches” – a situation which they suggested could best be addressed by “the Church of Ireland as a whole” engaging the question “prayerfully, humbly, carefully and generously”.

The bishops made five joint affirmations in the Pastoral Letter:

Together the bishops:

- Affirm the centrality and authority of the Scriptures for all Christian discourse.
- Recognise that the interpretation of Scripture is itself an area of divergence among Christians.
- Hold that the study of Scripture must also engage with the God-given gifts of the cumulative insights of the Christian tradition, and of human reason.
- Remind the Church that since all people have been created in the image and likeness of God, no one should be understood solely, or even primarily, in terms of his or her sexuality.
- Encourage an attitude of respect for one another.

The bishops then outlined “four main viewpoints [which] may be identified within the Church of Ireland with regard to same-sex relationships” and noted that “the views of the members of the present House of Bishops are to be found across this spectrum”.

- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with a view that rejects homosexual practice of any kind, and that marriage between a man and a woman in life-long union remains the only appropriate place for sexual relations. This must remain the standard for Christian behaviour.
- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with a more sympathetic attitude to homosexuality than has been traditional, but this would not at present permit any radical change in the Church’s existing stance on the question.
- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with the view that a permanent and committed same-gender relationship which, through its internal mutuality and support brings generosity, creativity and love into the lives of those around, cannot be dismissed by the Church as intrinsically disordered.
- The witness of the Scriptures is consonant with the proposition that, in the light of a developing understanding of the nature of humanity and sexuality, the time has arrived for a change in the Church’s traditional position on affirming same-gender relationships.

The Pastoral Letter also acknowledged that the process of discernment in relation to human sexuality is “not simply an academic exercise” as “[i]t has long been tacitly if not formally recognised, that homosexual people have held positions of leadership, ordained and lay, within the Church. Their ministry has frequently been highly imaginative and characterised by great pastoral sensitivity that has deeply enriched the lives of those who have experienced it.”

Moreover, because of the “fears and insecurities that surround this discussion” the bishops advised that ongoing discussions and conversation be undertaken in “safe spaces” where “those who are most immediately affected by the discussion” could be heard. Finally, the Letter concluded with the following observation:

This is an area of life where deeply held views, powerful emotions and the potential for causing great harm hold sway. We may have to learn how or whether we will be able to live peaceably and with integrity with very different viewpoints within the family of the Church and the household of faith.

### **III. 2. 2. The Civil Partnership Acts: 2004 (UK) and 2010 (ROI)**

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 (UK) came into effect in Northern Ireland on 19 December 2005. In its report to the General Synod of 2006 the Church of Ireland Pensions Board noted that the legislation “has the effect of equating civil partnership with marriage in respect of the pension rights of civil partners who register as such”.<sup>33</sup>

Further consideration of the new legislation, and its implications for clergy pensions, was undertaken by the Pensions Board and in its report to the 2008 General Synod it stated:

Following consideration of the issue by the Board in January 2008, having received legal opinion from Queen’s Counsel in Northern Ireland and subsequent consideration by the Trustee in February 2008, it was agreed that pensions entitlements of registered civil partners must be the same as those of surviving spouses in the Fund.<sup>34</sup>

This Pensions Board report was received and adopted by General Synod in May 2008. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabitants Act, 2010 (with provisions broadly similar to the UK Act) came into effect in the Republic of Ireland on 1 January 2011.

### **III. 2. 3. Civil Partnerships and Serving Clergy**

On 7 September 2011, the then Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Revd Alan Harper, issued a statement following media reports of civil partnerships and serving clergy. It stated:

The recent civil partnership of a serving ordained Church of Ireland clergyman presents a new situation within the Church of Ireland. It is true to say that within the Church there is a range of views on same-sex relationships and there will also be a range of views and reactions to civil partnerships concerning clergy. I acknowledge that this issue has caused strong feelings and concern. While there are acknowledged differences of opinion within the Church, suggestions that it might split are, I hope, premature. In 2003 the bishops of the Church of Ireland issued a pastoral letter on human sexuality which reflected the varied spectrum of views within the Church. The General Synod of the Church of Ireland has not made any statement or decision in addition to that. The bishops will be addressing the matter again shortly. I trust that the Church and its bishops will continue to address this subject with mutual respect. The state has provided a right in law for same gender persons to have their partnerships recognized and specific rights conferred through civil partnership. This is not recognized as marriage by the Church of Ireland or by the civil authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Marriage is understood by the Church to comprise a lifelong and exclusive commitment by one man and one woman to each other. The Church has no provision or proposals for any liturgy for the blessing of civil partnerships and there are no authorized public rites of blessing for same-gender relationships.<sup>35</sup>

Then, on 20 September 2011, the Primate made a further statement on the matter at the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Church of Ireland. It read:

The fact that the Very Reverend Thomas Gordon, Dean of Leighlin, entered a Civil Partnership on 29th July last has created a new situation for the Church of Ireland. In many parts of the Church, the matter is seen as controversial. In such a situation it is important that great care be taken in anything that may be said.

The Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Ireland had planned to devote a significant amount of time in residential consultation on matters to do with same-gender relationships in the autumn of 2011. This decision was taken in the light of changes in the membership of the House of Bishops since the bishops last discussed these matters in 2002/03, the introduction of Equality legislation and Civil Partnership legislation in both jurisdictions in Ireland, and the progress on the discussion of these issues within the Anglican Communion which led to the Anglican Covenant which the General Synod agreed to subscribe at the May session 2011. The new situation and reactions to that situation have added urgency to the work that the bishops are taking in hand. I am, therefore, requesting that general discussion of these matters in the Standing Committee should be curtailed to enable the bishops to begin their discussions and suggest a framework for future discussion at representative level.

I wish to reiterate what I have said publicly in these past days, that the Church of Ireland does not regard a civil partnership as matrimony and that there are no proposals for the provision of rites of blessing for same gender relationships. I also wish to say that, as fellow human beings, homosexual people are entitled to be accorded the same respect and dignity as others. Many are 'members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of their relationships' (Lambeth 1.10) in exactly the same way as are all other members of the Church of God.<sup>36</sup>

### **III. 2. 4. A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Church of Ireland, October 2011<sup>37</sup>**

Some details of the "framework for discussion" mentioned by Archbishop Harper in his statement to Standing Committee were outlined in a pastoral letter from the bishops in October 2011. The letter began by reiterating Church teaching on marriage:

*The Book of Common Prayer* describes marriage as 'part of God's creation and a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh.' It is to be monogamous, with a publicly declared intention that it be life-long. The church's teaching has been faithfulness within marriage as the normative context for sexual expression.

Having noted the introduction of civil partnership legislation in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the bishops addressed what they described as "recent well-publicised events within the Church of Ireland concerning the issue of serving clergy and civil partnerships." These events, they said

[...] have caused considerable hurt and confusion to many. Others saw what had happened as a positive development. In the Church of Ireland as a whole, in consequence, this has led to a painful experience of disunity. We as bishops take very seriously our responsibility at this time to act in a way that will help to further the unity of the church in truth and love. These issues reflect the difficulties experienced within the wider Anglican Communion, which in recent years has found itself tragically divided by the debate concerning human sexuality.

Referring to the need for the church to engage with these issues and find a way forward, the bishops commended "a means by which the church can work through these issues and hopefully come to a common mind". In particular they announced that they would organise a major conference in Spring 2012, to which members of the General Synod and some others would be invited. The purpose of the conference, they said, would be "to assist the church in becoming more fully informed, and to explore wider issues related to human sexuality".

### **III. 2. 5. The Church of Ireland Bishops' Conference 'Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief', March 2012**

The conference envisaged in the October 2011 Pastoral letter was held at the Slieve Russell Hotel, Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan on Friday and Saturday, 9 and 10 March 2012. Entitled the Church of Ireland Bishops' Conference

on “Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief” it was attended by approximately 450 Synod members, along with a number of ecumenical guests.

The conference included sessions on some scriptural texts and, on the first evening, “storytellers conveyed generously their personal experiences from gay perspectives, in an effort to bring first-hand clarity to the debate in hand”. There was also a number of seminars on various topics including: “Handling conflict in the Church”, “Legal aspects relating to recent legislative changes”, “Scientific perspectives”, “Theological/Hermeneutical background”, “A pastoral response to welcoming gay people in church”, “Parental perspectives” and “Gay clergy – ‘can we agree to disagree agreeably?’”<sup>38</sup>

In their joint statement after the Conference, Archbishops Harper and Jackson expressed the view that the event had “been a substantial conversation reflecting strongly held convictions characterised by clarity of expression without judgmentalism”. They also noted that “there was a clear appreciation of the integrity and principled positions of those expressing different views. It has become clear that there is a breadth of opinion in the Church of Ireland on these matters but also a strong sense of the cohesiveness of the Church”.<sup>39</sup>

### **III. 2. 6. The General Synod, May 2012**

At its meeting in Christ Church Cathedral Dublin in May 2012 the General Synod passed a motion entitled “Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief”.<sup>40</sup> The motion was proposed by the Archbishop of Dublin and seconded by the Bishop of Down and Dromore. The full text of the motion was as follows:

*The General Synod affirms that:*

The Church of Ireland, mindful of the Preamble and Declaration, believes and accepts the Holy Scriptures as revealing all things necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ;

The Church of Ireland continues to uphold its teaching that marriage is part of God’s creation and a holy mystery in which one man and one woman become one flesh, as provided for in Canon 31:

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

The Church of Ireland recognises for itself and of itself, no other understanding of marriage than that provided for in the totality of Canon 31. The Church of Ireland teaches therefore that faithfulness within marriage is the only normative context for sexual intercourse. Members of the Church of Ireland are required by the Catechism to keep their bodies in ‘temperance, soberness and chastity’. Clergy are called in the Ordinal to be ‘wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Jesus Christ’.

The Church of Ireland welcomes all people to be members of the Church. It is acknowledged, however, that members of the Church have at times hurt and wounded people by words and actions, in relation to human sexuality.

Therefore, in order that the Church of Ireland is experienced as a ‘safe place’ and enabled in its reflection, the Church of Ireland affirms:

A continuing commitment to love our neighbour, and opposition to all unbiblical and uncharitable actions and attitudes in respect of human sexuality from whatever perspective, including bigotry, hurtful words or actions, and demeaning or damaging language;

A willingness to increase our awareness of the complex issues regarding human sexuality;

A determination to welcome and to make disciples of all people.

The Church of Ireland is mindful that for all who believe 'there is no distinction' and that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:22 - 23) and are in need of God's grace and mercy. We seek to be a community modelled on God's love for the world as revealed in Jesus Christ. We wish that all members of the Church, through the teaching of the scriptures, the nourishment of the sacraments, and the prayerful and pastoral support of a Christian community will fulfil their unique contribution to God's purposes for our world.

That the General Synod requests the Standing Committee to progress work on the issue of Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief and also to bring a proposal to General Synod 2013 for the formation of a Select Committee with terms of reference including reporting procedures.

Speaking immediately after the motion had been passed, the Archbishop of Armagh said that the debate had been emotional and contentious.<sup>41</sup> The report on the Church of Ireland website gives some indication of the strength of feeling which the motion engendered.<sup>42</sup>

For example, some contributors spoke of the hurt, distress and sense of betrayal experienced by parishioners for whom the issue had been a cause of deep distress. Many people, they said, felt they could not express their views for fear of being accused of being bigoted. Other speakers felt that the motion "demeaned" the Church and that the use of the word "normative" was problematic as it would be understood as being analogous to "normal". On the other hand, the view was expressed that the term "normative" called to mind the Latin word "norma" (meaning set square and builder's tool) and so provided an understanding which could be built upon rather than an understanding that was exclusive. Others were of the view that clear boundaries around sexual behaviour were necessary as they helped people deal with sexual temptation. Still others felt that it was crucial for the Church "to be realistic and not out of touch".

### **III. 2. 7. Subsequent Steps in the Human Sexuality Debate**

In the months after the General Synod of 2012, meetings of the Standing Committee continued to have "Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief" as an agenda item and in February 2013, the Rt Revd Patrick Rooke, Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry, gave an update on proposed "next steps". In a statement printed in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and also published on the Church of Ireland website, Bishop Rooke, outlined a process which included both diocesan and inter-diocesan events and conferences<sup>43</sup>

First, it [Standing Committee] is encouraging each diocesan bishop to initiate a local diocesan 'respectful listening/dialogue process' over the coming months. The formation of a number of small groups is recommended as the best way to ensure 'a safe space' for participants.

The purpose is to enable participants to become better informed and also to highlight the priorities for each diocese. Obviously these groups will operate differently from diocese to diocese; in some they may happen on one particular day, in others, over a period of months for a couple of hours at a time. Perhaps they will be within parishes, or broadened to rural deaneries, or wider still. Participants in some dioceses may be all who are interested in taking part, in others, those participating may be confined to diocesan synod members or parish vestries. For some people, participation may be the start of a process, others will come with a good knowledge; hence the importance of establishing where people are at and which issues need to be addressed.

The Standing Committee has been reluctant to direct dioceses on the content of these discussions but did recommend that the study of Scripture should be an important focus and involve hearing the views of those who understand the texts from conservative and liberal perspectives. It also felt that the stories and views of a spectrum of gay and lesbian people, and their families, should be heard and that facilitation should be informed and sensitive.

The next phase would be an 'Inter-Diocesan Tripartite Conference' to be held in the Autumn. With twelve dioceses, four such conferences are anticipated and the groupings will be Connor, Kilmore and Cashel; Down, Meath and Cork; Derry, Armagh and Dublin; and Clogher, Tuam and Limerick.

A committee of six will organise each conference – two from each of the participating dioceses. These committees, along with their bishops, will be responsible for the venues, programmes and participants at their respective conferences. At the request of the Standing Committee, some funds have been allocated to support dioceses in running these tripartite conferences. Internal diocesan funding, however, will also be required.

### **III. 2. 8. Inter-Diocesan Tripartite Conferences**

#### *The Inter-Diocesan Tripartite Conference between Armagh, Derry and Raphoe, and Dublin and Glendalough Dioceses*

This conference was held on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2013 in the Armagh City Hotel. It had been preceded by different local arrangements across the Dioceses: small group meetings; the issue of a questionnaire to Diocesan Synod members; seminars and group sessions involving Diocesan Synod members and those engaged in diocesan youth activities. The conference, entitled 'Living with Difference', was attended by about one hundred diocesan clergy and lay readers, Youth Council members and parish youth workers, and by laity who were members of Diocesan Synod.

The Revd Doug Baker acted as facilitator as attendees engaged in small group discussions, seminars and perception/reaction exercises in which coping with different beliefs and situations were explored. The concluding session posed questions about the continuing listening process, follow-up activities and identification of who should be involved and who given planning roles.

Responses included:

- regret at the absence of a speaker able to provide a same-sex attraction perspective;
- restatement of the centrality of God in all Christian discussion;
- emphasis on love and compassion being evident on all occasions;
- recognition of the implications of these issues as they affected family life;
- the significance of the involvement of young people;
- implications of and impact on the Anglican Communion of Church of Ireland decisions;
- emphasis on the Church of Ireland 'holding together' as an all-Ireland Church throughout the listening process and whatever resulted from it.

#### *The Inter- diocesan Tripartite Conference between Limerick, Tuam and Clogher Dioceses*

The conference was held in the McWilliam Park Hotel, Claremorris, Co. Mayo on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

In spite of very bad weather leading up to that day, 107 persons out of a possible 130 attended. It was suggested that the mid-term break in Northern Ireland might have had some effect on attendance.

The three diocesan bishops were present: The Bishop of Tuam gave a welcome, the Bishop of Clogher the opening devotion and the Bishop of Limerick closed the conference. The Revd Doug Baker was facilitator.

The morning session on "Living together while in disagreement", sought to answer the question "How do we find the resources to do so?" Three ways of dealing with conflict were outlined: managing, resolving and transforming.

Transforming conflict requires addressing feelings and relationships as well as the issues. The virtues required for living together – humility, patience, integrity, mutual respect and forbearance – were outlined, and

facilitated round table discussions then took place, to end the morning session. After lunch there were three speakers on a panel dealing with Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief.

These were:

1. Professor Sam McConkey – Presbyterian Elder and Head of the Department of International Health and Tropical Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. He spoke on a comprehensive spectrum of human sexual activity from the extremes of the violent abuse of systematic rape as a tool of war to the mutual vulnerability and joy of the shared actions of self-giving love.
2. The Revd Peter Ould – described himself as charismatic, reformed, post-gay; presently a Church of England priest licensed in Canterbury Diocese. He spoke about the mutability of same-sex attraction and suggested that the church has to reassess its pastoral approach.
3. Mr Malcolm McCourt – grew up in Belfast now retired from being a social statistician and an academic development specialist. He dealt with social changes that are evident today:
  - (a) Women have full emancipation
  - (b) 50% of all births are out of wedlock but both parents are on the birth certificate
  - (c) The arrival of the contraceptive pill.He opined that whilst the Church is challenged with deciding how to deal with sexuality, every effort should be made to retain its unity.

Following discussion at the tables the following questions were put to the panel:

1. How is the church fulfilling its ministry with those who are struggling with their sexuality or those who are happy/confident with their sexuality?
2. What is the fundamental basis of a good human relationship?
3. What is meant by post-gay?
4. Is it the Church's role to lead society or respond to it?
5. How do we balance cultural change and scripture?
6. What in practical terms can parishes be or do that takes them forward?

### ***The Inter-Diocesan Tripartite Conference between Connor, Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, and Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh Dioceses***

This conference was held in the Emmaus Conference Centre, Swords, Co. Dublin, with 94 delegates attending.

The opening worship at the conference was led by the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Revd Alan Abernethy, with the Archdeacon of Belfast, the Ven. George Davison, acting as conference chairman and facilitator.

The invited guest speakers were Mr Jonathan Berry from True Freedom Trust, the website of which describes the organisation as offering “a confidential Christian support and teaching ministry that holds to authentically biblical teaching on sexuality”, and Mr Pádraig Ó Tuama, who works as a poet, theologian and conflict mediator in Belfast. He is a member of the Corrymeela Community and a friend of Changing Attitude Ireland which describes itself as “a Church of Ireland organisation with ecumenical friends, heterosexual and gay, lay and ordained, working for the full affirmation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons within the Churches in Ireland”.

The morning session consisted of presentations by both guest speakers, following which two questions, previously submitted by them to the organising committee, were discussed by delegates in groups of six or seven. Following lunch, the afternoon session comprised small group discussion of two further questions posed by the guest speakers.

Responses by all the groups were fed back to the conference which, in turn, led to further discussion, before final comments were made by the two speakers and summary given by Archdeacon Davison.

Closing prayers were led by the Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, the Rt Revd Michael Burrows.



The conference organising committee comprised Ms Maud Cunningham and Ms Brigid Barrett (Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh), the Very Revd Katharine Poulton and Canon Bob Gray (Cashel, Ferns and Ossory) and the Revd Alan McCann and Mr Robert Kay (Connor).

#### Conference Impressions:

Reflecting on the conference, one delegate said that "I felt the day went well overall".

The delegate continued: "At our table, there were five of us. Although we differed, I felt that we parted friends and with respect. I know from other tables that deeply-held, opposing views were felt, but I got the impression that there was very little support for the view that the Church ought to split over the issue. It was also interesting that, though not at our table, it was not a clear North versus South thing and that both views were represented on both sides of the border."

Another delegate commented: "I found the day worthwhile in that everyone was of the same view as regards the pastoral ministry to homosexual people. They must be accepted and loved; no one can point a finger. The Gospel, of course, must still be preached."

### III. 3. Human Sexuality and the Methodist Church in Ireland

In 2002 a Covenant was signed between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. The document opens with the statement that both parties “acknowledge one another’s churches as belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God”.<sup>44</sup> After also noting aspects of their common liturgical, spiritual and ecclesiological inheritance the Covenant goes on to commit the two churches to (a) the sharing of a common life and mission and (b) growing together so that unity may be visibly realized.

Those commitments were honoured when, in 2014, the Church of Ireland General Synod passed a bill to provide for interchangeability of ministry between the two churches. There is, therefore, a uniquely special relationship between the Methodist and Anglican Churches on this island and much to be learned from how the Methodist Church in Ireland has approached questions of human sexuality in the context of Christian belief.

An understanding of the corporate mind of the Methodist Church in Ireland on matters of human sexuality can be gleaned from the document “Methodist Belief” prepared by the Church’s Faith and Order Committee and available on its website. In relation to “Marriage, sexual relationships and sexuality” it states:

We recognise the family as the primary unit in society and all possible encouragement is given to ministers and congregations to support and strengthen family life. Marriage is a relationship, intended as permanent, between one man and one woman within which sexual intercourse establishes a unique intimacy. A loving marriage relationship is seen as the only appropriate relationship within which sexual intercourse may take place. The church advocates responsible family planning, with the use of contraception.

Modern scientific knowledge has no uniform view about the factors involved in sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. What is recognised is their complexity. In keeping with New Testament teaching, we are opposed to all debased forms of sexuality and sexual practice, whether heterosexual or homosexual. However, we plead for understanding and tolerance for those whose sexual orientation is towards those of their own gender. We encourage the Church to give a greater lead in the education of society, including Christians, regarding this issue, so that ignorance, prejudice and fear may disappear.<sup>45</sup>

Reference should also be made to the Methodist Church in Ireland’s Council on Social Responsibility. This body aims to understand and analyse a range of social, political, economic and constitutional issues on behalf of the Church and thereby provide realistic and practical recommendations for action. In 2011 it published a document entitled “Pastoral Responses regarding those of Homosexual Orientation” and these were subsequently adopted by the Methodist Conference held in Newtownards in June 2011.<sup>46</sup>

The “Pastoral Responses” text begins by noting that “the rule of faith of the Methodist Church in Ireland is the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments” and that “based on this understanding Methodists are inclusive Christians”.

We therefore believe that God loves everyone and Jesus died for all. We teach that people are made in the image of God but our lives have been tainted by sin; that sin has spoiled God’s original intention for us and that sin affects every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality. However we also emphasise that God’s grace is available to all and from the moment people respond to Jesus in faith, the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification, i.e. enables us to grow in grace.

The document goes on to acknowledge that there are differences of opinion within the Church in relation to issues of human sexuality. While, on the one hand, the Committee/Council is of a mind that homosexual

orientation is not, in and of itself, a sin; on the other hand, they are “unable to come to an agreed mind on the question of homosexual lifestyle”. This, they say, is because “in common with many churches” they find “two main streams of Biblical interpretation” in relation to homosexuality.

Accordingly, the publication exhorts readers to “respect the integrity of those whose interpretation of scripture is different from our own and continue to work together in Christian love”. It also commits the Methodist Church to an ongoing process of biblical study as they “search the Scriptures continually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”. The short document ends with twelve recommendations to enable the Church to “provide pastoral care to those who feel isolated and on the margins because of their sexuality”.

The Methodist Church in Ireland established in late 2014 a Faith & Order Working Party on Human Sexuality to undertake a fundamental review of Christian teaching on human sexuality and practice. The Working Party will have regard to the deliberations of other Christian Churches in relation to human sexuality; in particular it will seek to liaise closely with the Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief established by the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, in view of the Covenant relationship between the Churches so that the task of discernment in relation to issues will benefit both Churches. Dean John Mann is a member of the Working Party on Human Sexuality and Dr Fergus O’Ferrall, Convenor of Faith & Order of the Methodist Church is a member of the Select Committee.

1. The Methodist Church strongly condemns all forms of homophobia both within the church and the wider community. Recognising the subtle forms in which homophobia is expressed, it urges all our members to carefully examine our thoughts, words and actions before God so that we may not be guilty of any form of homophobia, either consciously or unconsciously.
2. We acknowledge that in the past, we have sometimes condemned and hurt those who are of homosexual orientation.
3. We acknowledge that we, often unconsciously, have reacted differently toward heterosexual and homosexual people.
4. All individuals, irrespective of orientation, should be encouraged to make responsible decisions regarding relationships and sexual practice.
5. We urge all in leadership to show compassion in our discussion, statements, preaching and teaching about people irrespective of their sexuality.
6. We encourage the careful use of language on this issue.
7. For various reasons and at various times in their lives, people may struggle with their sexual identity and with its rightful expression. We underline the need to listen more and say less, so those who experience such struggles know they are valued as persons.
8. We urge the rejection of none on the grounds of their sexual orientation.
9. We emphasise that sexual orientation is not a barrier to anyone becoming a member of the church.
10. We invite every Church Council and Circuit Executive to discuss how they can ensure that all know they are welcome to share in worship.
11. We affirm our belief that the Communion Table is the Lord’s and all who seek to be His disciples are welcome.
12. We do all that we can to encourage people to remember that every person matters to God and reaffirm our belief in the gospel of grace, forgiveness, healing and power available to all.

### **III. 4. Human Sexuality and the Anglican and Porvoo Communions**

The Church of Ireland is a member of both the Anglican and the Porvoo Communions. These families of Churches connect the Church of Ireland with over 100 million other Christians in over 150 countries. Even a brief summary of developments in each of those contexts would necessitate a very lengthy document and so what follows is necessarily highly selective and limited. Readers looking for further information are directed to Appendix B of this guide which gives a timeline of some developments in the Anglican Communion and to resources identified in the Select Bibliography.

#### **III. 4. 1. Human Sexuality and the Anglican Churches in England, Scotland and Wales**

The Church of England's most recent attempt to chart a way forward in the debate on human sexuality was the establishment of, and subsequent report from, a House of Bishops Working Group. The group – chaired by Sir Joseph Pilling – included the bishops of Gloucester, Birkenhead, Fulham and Warwick, as well as three advisers who were invited to join in the work.<sup>47</sup>

The “Pilling Report” (published in November 2013) considered the rapidly changing context within which the group undertook its work. It examined the available data about the views of the British public. The report considered homophobia, evidence from science, from scripture and from theologians. During their work, members of the group not only gathered evidence from many experts, groups and individuals but also met a number of gay and lesbian people, often in their homes, to listen to their experiences and insights.

The report offered 18 recommendations. The first recommendation was intended to set the context for the report as a whole. It warmly welcomed and affirmed the presence and ministry within the Church of gay and lesbian people both lay and ordained.

Three recommendations looked at the report's proposal for “facilitated conversations”, across the Church of England and in dialogue with the Anglican Communion and other churches, so that Christians who disagree deeply about the meaning of scripture on questions of sexuality, and on the demands of living in holiness for gay and lesbian people, should understand each other's concerns more clearly and seek to hear each other as authentic Christian disciples. Further recommendations called on the Church to combat homophobia whenever and wherever it is found, and to repent of the lack of welcome and acceptance extended to homosexual people in the past.

The recommendations did not propose any change in the Church's teaching on sexual conduct. They did propose that clergy, with the agreement of their Church Council, should be able to offer appropriate services to mark a faithful same-sex relationship. The group did not propose an authorised liturgy for this purpose but understood the proposed provision to be a pastoral accommodation which does not entail any change to what the Church teaches. No member of the clergy, or parish, would be required to offer such services and it could not extend to solemnising same-sex marriages without major changes to the law.

The report noted that the Church's teaching on sexuality is in tension with contemporary social attitudes, not only for gay and lesbian Christians, but for straight Christians too. In relation to candidates for ministry, it recommended that whether someone is married, single or in a civil partnership should have no bearing on the assurances sought from them that they intend to order their lives consistently with the teaching of the Church on sexual conduct.

The report included a “dissenting statement” from the Bishop of Birkenhead who found himself unable to support all the recommendations made by the group as a whole. The main part of the report was supported and signed by all the other members of the group, including the advisers.<sup>48</sup>

Continuing discussions on human sexuality are also taking place in the Church in Wales. At its most recent meeting (April 2014) the Church's Governing Body (GB) had its first opportunity to discuss same-sex partnerships, which it did through groups considering the following question:

A couple of the same sex come to worship in your parish. After a period of attendance, and enthusiastic participation in church life, they enquire if their relationship can be blessed. How can the Church in Wales respond to same sex couples – theologically and pastorally?

The reports from these group discussions were considered by the Welsh Bench of Bishops at their meeting in June 2014 reporting back to the following GB meeting in September. In the light of this, consideration was then given to what next steps the Church in Wales should take.<sup>49</sup>

Part of the context for the current discussions in Wales is provided by an agreed statement on same-sex marriage which was issued by that Church's bishops in 2012. It stated:

We abide by the Christian doctrine of marriage as the union of one man with one woman freely entered into for life. We acknowledge that whilst issues of human sexuality are not resolved, there are couples living in other life-long committed relationships who deserve the welcome, pastoral care and support of the Church. We are committed to further listening, prayerful reflection and discernment regarding same sex relationships.

Another backdrop to the Welsh discussions is the work of that Church's Doctrinal Commission. It was asked to examine the issue of same-sex relationships and a written Report was presented to the April 2014 meeting of the Governing Body to enable more informed discussion and debate. The Report looked at the historical context, the science of sexual orientation, and the place of scripture and doctrine; and then suggested three options for the Church in Wales:

1. A restatement of the traditional position, that marriage is only between a man and a woman.
2. The blessing of same-sex partnerships, which is now allowed in some Anglican dioceses in Canada and the United States.
3. Marriage between couples irrespective of sexual difference.

The Report concluded by setting out some principles for a pastoral response.<sup>50</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015, members of the Church in Wales' Governing Body voted 61 in favour of gay marriages in church, nine in favour of blessing gay partnerships and 50 for making no change. The result showed a majority in favour but this did not constitute a decision, and it seems, on this evidence, unlikely that a Bill will be drafted for gay marriage for the Church in Wales, as any such Bill requires a two-thirds majority of each of the three houses.

The Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), like its Anglican neighbours in these islands, is currently engaged in a process of listening, learning and dialogue on issues relating to human sexuality. As the statement on the Church's official website puts it:

The Scottish Episcopal Church serves all parts of the Scottish community and has members from a wide cross-section of society. In the area of human sexuality, the Church seeks to be an open and welcoming community, encouraging theological discussion and honest conversation while acknowledging the difficulties such conversation can cause. Within the membership of the Church there is a wide range of theological and doctrinal viewpoints.

On the specific question of same-sex relationships, discussion is ongoing and we endeavour to engage in a process of conversation, prayer and discussion in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Currently, a Design Group established by the General Synod's Mission and Ministry Board is working on a process to enable listening "across the spectrum" of views represented within the Church. It is expected that the General Synod will be involved in that process later this year [2014].<sup>51</sup>

In the interim, however, the College of Bishops issued (in November 2013) a short statement regarding the blessing of civil partnerships. That document, while in no way intending to pre-empt the outcome of the

process mentioned above, recognised that “the entering into of civil partnerships is a regular occurrence in Scottish society today”. It therefore gave the following guidance:

In a previous statement the College indicated that it was the practice of the individual bishops at that time neither to give official sanction to blessings of civil partnerships, nor to attend them personally. The Church does not give official sanction to informal blessings but each bishop would nevertheless expect to be consulted by clergy prior to the carrying out of any informal blessing of a civil partnership in his diocese. The College is of the view that a decision as to whether or not to attend such an informal blessing should be a personal decision of the individual bishop in question.<sup>52</sup>

In April 2014, the SEC’s whole church discussion of same-sex relationships moved into a new phase when an event entitled *Cascade Conversation – Listening across the spectrum* was held in Pitlochry. About 60 people attended the two-day meeting during which participants met in small facilitated groups. At the conclusion of the gathering, each group (there were six in total) offered a short statement they would wish to be communicated that would reflect their experience. A typical statement read as follows:

The design group has offered us a process of conversation to use in these two days which we fully commend to be used as widely in the Church as possible: for people to come together to speak and listen using appropriate language to grow in understanding. We feel that we came away from the conversation with some fears and negative feelings allayed and with a sense of hopeful optimism for the way in which the Church together can deal with this issue.<sup>53</sup>

The intention is that those who attended the *Cascade Conversation* return to their diocese to share the insights gained with their Bishop and others as seems best, and in particular to prepare their representatives who will be attending General Synod in Edinburgh in June. At General Synod, members will have an opportunity to hear back from the *Cascade Conversation* and it is hoped that there will be an opportunity to pick-up in further group discussion matters concerning same sex relationships and issues arising from *Cascade*. At its September 2014 meeting the College of Bishops of the SEC committed itself to an in-depth discussion of the views held within it on same-sex relationships in the life of the Church.

In the autumn of 2014, dioceses were encouraged to arrange further opportunities for *Conversation* – for example amongst diocesan, regional and local groups, in congregations and clergy chapters.<sup>54</sup>

On 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015, the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church voted to begin a process for change in relation to its *Canon on Marriage*. It instructed the Church’s *Faith and Order Board* to begin the two year process which may lead towards canonical change. That change would potentially allow the marriage of same gendered couples in Church in late 2017. General Synod also decided to add a conscience clause that ensures that no cleric would be obliged to solemnise a marriage against their conscience.

### **III. 4. 2. Human Sexuality and the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) and the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GFCA)**

The Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, the Primates’ Council (currently comprising 7 Primates) and the Global Anglican Fellowship Conference are networked bodies which have been formed in the years since 2008.<sup>55</sup> They emerged in response to what the founders regarded as tensions resulting from liberal revisionism on the nature, authority and interpretation of Holy Scripture have grown across the Anglican Communion. They hold that the presenting issue of today is the area of same-sex relationships and associated sexual ethics and that this in part reflects the prevailing western, secular, socio-political milieu. Further concerns are the relationships between Anglican Christians of the global East, West, North and South, faithful missional endeavour and the proclamation of the Gospel in a pluralistic world.

The list of interests identified by GAFCON include:

- the applied authority of Scripture;
- the content of the apostolic Gospel;
- the place, priority and definition of mission for the Church of Christ;
- Christian sexual ethics;
- the interaction of Western Anglicanism with post-colonial African Anglicanism;
- Anglican identity and the essence and limits of Communion.

GAFCON has held two significant meetings since the establishment of the GFCA. GAFCON 1 produced the Jerusalem Declaration.<sup>56</sup> The Confessing Anglican movement argues that:

- the place of Scripture is primary, and, where silent, tradition and reason are deployed - the historic Anglican approach;
- GAFCON expresses entire commitment to the contours and shape of the Apostolic Gospel as revealed in the whole of Scripture;
- scripture contains all things necessary to salvation;
- one part of Scripture cannot be interpreted above (or below) another - a basic hermeneutical commitment;
- scripture contains the essential doctrinal 'rules' for Christianity;
- the Church should live under the authority of Scripture.

GAFCON 2 saw itself as an effective instrument of communion (with the GFCA's and Primates' Council) in the "absence, ailing and stalling of the efficacy of the formal instruments of Communion". (GAFCON 2 - Conference Communiqué)

GFCA concerns around the issue of sexual ethics have been articulated in the form of calls upon Churches within the Anglican Communion to demonstrate their faithful and humble following of both Scripture and tradition by restating and applying the traditional teaching on marriage, prohibition of both same-sex practice and liturgical recognition of same-sex relationships, and adherence to traditional teaching on sexual ethics and also on the role of women particularly in respect of church leadership and ordination, although on this latter point, there is diversity among GFCA members.

The foundation of GAFCON's position is that Scripture establishes eternal principles on, among other things, sexual ethics, inherent in the creation of the world by God and fulfilling a required role in the natural order that must be sustained and defended throughout God's redemption of his world and to the end of time.

Churches and individuals who are identified by the GFCA position as not adhering to Scripture and tradition have been accused of preaching a 'false Gospel' (GAFCON 1 – Jerusalem Declaration 2008). The Jerusalem Declaration articulated the view of its signatories that they were out of Communion with those that they perceived to be now teaching a false Gospel. The new structure proceeded to establish a framework of GFCA parishes, churches and provinces in some countries, to provide ministry, order and discipline for GFCA members. This has resulted in disputes over authority, property ownership and other practical issues to do with Church life, largely in North America. In North America, the Anglican Church of North America has formed, seeing itself as the first 'Province' of the GFCA. In England, the Anglican Mission in England seeks to provide pastoral oversight to those who find themselves in sympathy with the GFCA's view.

Despite this, GAFCON does not see itself as breaking away from the Anglican Communion, but rather representing a more genuine expression of Christian doctrinal understanding. GAFCON asserts that it is the way in which other individuals, parishes/dioceses and Provinces have dealt with Scripture and have responded to issues (particularly related to sexual ethics) liturgically, doctrinally and in practical matters of faith and order, that has led to a situation where members of the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans regard communion as broken. The GFCA has attracted a broad coalition of Anglo-Catholics, Evangelicals and Charismatics, both clergy and lay.

### III. 4. 3. Human Sexuality and the Porvoo Communion of Churches

The Church of Ireland is a member of the Porvoo Communion – a grouping of 13 mainly northern European Anglican and Lutheran Churches with a combined membership of approximately 45-50 million. Within the Communion there is altar and pulpit fellowship as well as full recognition of each other's ordained ministries.

In recent years several member churches (Denmark, Iceland and Sweden) have moved to extend their understanding and practice of marriage to include same-gender couples. This has led to some significant tensions within the Communion.

In response, the Porvoo Church Leaders Consultation held a gathering on the theme "Churches Responding to Conflict" in Tallinn, Estonia in February 2011. The meeting noted that "serious tensions have arisen over issues of sexuality which have threatened communion". Over the course of several days of shared worship, Bible studies, thematic inputs and workshops, the participants sought to articulate "important building blocks" which could assist the Communion in responding to situations of significant disagreement and conflict. Twenty such "blocks" were identified, including the following:

- The Porvoo Churches listen to God's invitation to be fashioned by God into a new ecumenical reality;
- To stay together and address issues of concern was more valuable than hasty separation;
- Issues of faith remain the essential components of communion and keep us rooted in the apostolic witness. This received full agreement;
- Some moral issues over human sexuality proved difficult and received less agreement;
- Consensus on a specific issue in a particular church challenges other member churches which hold different opinions to exercise restraint in their responses. Any wider consensus requires time and patience, prayer and engagement;
- Mutual recognition of the sincerity and good faith of the other was an important factor in responding to conflict.

Then, in November 2011 the Porvoo Communion held a high-level consultation in Turku, Finland, on the theme of marriage.<sup>57</sup> As in Tallinn, the meeting included shared worship, Bible studies, thematic inputs and workshops. The Churches present agreed on a three-fold commitment:

- they can continue to address critical issues resulting from differing theological positions and pastoral practices;
- they are called to a sense of mutual responsibility as Churches in communion;
- they work towards wider consensus through prayer and engagement as well as with time, patience and a commitment to Spirit-led discernment.

Finally, the Consultation acknowledged in its findings that as regards the particular issue of same-sex marriage, serious differences remain; but it nonetheless affirmed the value of travelling the road together rather than deciding to walk apart:

The consultation made clear that differences over the introduction of same-sex marriage remain unresolved. It is clear that there is a variety of views and pastoral practices along a theological spectrum. Some believe same-sex marriage to be a legitimate development in the Christian tradition, whilst others see the potential for a serious departure from the received tradition. Nevertheless, the consultation affirmed the benefits of 'belonging to one another'. The value of honest encounter and strengthened friendship provides a platform of sustained communication in the face of issues which raise such difficulties for us.



## **Part IV. Select Committee Listening**

### **IV. 1. The Select Committee Listening Process**

*The following contains a distillation of the result of meetings brought about by an open invitation through the Church of Ireland Gazette for individuals to speak of their experience and views. The comments are not necessarily endorsed by members of the Select Committee, but are a record in summary of this part of the listening process.*

During September, October and November 2014 more than twenty meetings were held with those who responded to an invitation from the Select Committee to speak of their experiences of being, or living with, those in a local community and wider church who would describe themselves as gay or lesbian. These meetings were without exception helpful for the work of the Select Committee and the members of it who became part of this listening process. The chair or vice-chair of the committee was present at all but two of these meetings, usually with another member of that committee. The meetings were all either with one individual or with a couple, lasted an average of a little over an hour, and in most cases resulted in a written submission and/or an agreed record of the discussion taken in note form. A number of these occasions of engagement proceeded without any written record. On one occasion, by request of the individual concerned, it took place just with Dean Mann. Nonetheless the views expressed at this and on all other occasions are summarised below. There were also a number of written submissions made without personal contact. These too were taken into consideration in assembling this report.

The majority of those who offered to come and tell their story were gay men who either were or still are in a stable monogamous relationship. Witness from parents with children searching for their true sexual identity was particularly powerful; indeed, almost overwhelming. The strength of conviction from those whose Scriptural understanding was traditional and unwavering in the face of the apparent change in the Church's attitude to homosexuality brought deep reflection and the question that is easy to miss, namely, what is the starting point in this discussion? Do we begin with Scripture and apply its teaching to the situation of the gay community today? Or, do we begin with the individual or couple, declaring they are gay, openly or otherwise, and see how the Church, immersed in the Scriptures, should respond?

Whilst common themes emerged from the meetings, there were some sharply defined differences too, especially as to the experience of gay Christians in their local church. There was no simple definition of the fault lines either, or even where they should be placed. There was some commonality in supposing division of opinion on a north-south geographical/political difference, as well as those who saw a parallel in theological/biblical understanding following the same fault line, though none considered this as anything less than a complex pattern that was far from being consistent. Differences of opinion in the House of Bishops and the struggle of the leadership of the Church of Ireland to speak and act without the expression of unease, was seen by a number of the submissions as being reflected in the Church as a whole and deeply affecting the dynamic of General Synod.

Most, if not all, gay people who sought to be interviewed by the Select Committee, and having a chance to speak openly and confidentially of their experience, referred at some point, if not throughout their submission, to their expectation that they would be treated by the Church as they felt accepted under Christ: as one made in the image of God, loved and enriched spiritually through Word and sacrament, and their sexuality was part of the expression of that divine love that had given them life. They desired, in voicing this appeal, intrinsically and with understandable passion (declared in some instances with indignant anger) not to be seen as an 'issue' to be solved, or a potential cause of breaking church unity, or any other impersonal description that implied that their presence caused the Church a 'problem', but as a parallel stream and expression of God's loving gift to humanity such as may be seen in the life of any heterosexual man, woman or child.

It is important to note that, in a number of instances, this conclusion, whereby equality of intrinsic value and love in communion with Christ, shared by both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, may be recognised and understood by the whole Church, was reached through a lengthy process of prayer, self-examination and study of the Scriptures. In most cases the individual concerned was from a traditional Evangelical background and had struggled with an acceptance of their sexuality, which they were led to believe was not what it should

be as revealed in Scripture; hence suppression and denial, the natural consequences of such an internal tussle, became their accepted way of life. Some married, had children and later faced their inner journey again; though most avoided an honest coming-to-terms with their feelings until many years had passed. In all cases when an acceptance came there was an experience of relief and a sense of being blessed by God as they were, rather than what they had felt they needed to be.

It seems probable that some people, in coming to terms with their sexuality and place within the Church of Ireland, have not reached this particular conclusion and acceptance. It is also realistic to assume that such individuals are less likely to have contacted the Select Committee, though they may live with the conviction that their sexuality leads them to consider that celibacy is the right response. This is not necessarily out of a sense of calling to the religious life (such as is usually envisaged in the call to celibacy – this point was made), but from an essential understanding of what God wills for them, as declared clearly in the Scriptures and in traditional Church teaching, on the outward expression of sexual orientation. The tension between these two conclusions is considerable and difficult for a heterosexual person truly to assimilate, but it lies at the heart of the debate in the Church and our understanding of Scripture, as well as the nature of the call of God in relation to being what we are, at the same time as being drawn into a new place under grace.

Reactions reflective of a range of emotions, from sadness to forcefully expressed anger; surrounding covert discrimination in the Church of Ireland against gay people was articulated by more than one person. The waters are claimed to be somewhat muddied by those clergy who further claim that there are significant inconsistencies in the decisions and actions of individual bishops regarding gay ordinands and clergy on the one hand and those seeking reparation through heterosexual misdemeanour on the other.

Another twist to this testimony on how gay people are treated in the Church, was experienced as individuals (who had felt unwelcome in a previous parish or other faith community) spoke of the acceptance they received as a valued new member, as they were quickly assimilated into new roles on changing parish, if – and this is extremely significant – the incumbent was sympathetic and prepared to support and encourage them. A perceived openness in the Church of Ireland is seen by those who had previously been members of other Christian traditions that are more uniform than the Anglican Communion in terms of belief and practice. To be fair, this perception in itself is not seen as necessarily uniform, hence the ‘local’ debate appears to be casting a questioning glance at the national situation; some saying that the voice at the centre has no reference to them in their home parish, others feeling strongly that affirmation by the Church of Ireland as a whole for the legitimacy of the equality of ministry between both homosexual and heterosexual individuals is very important, and needed in any future guidelines for church membership and consideration for ordination.

Turning to testimony that gives a very different point of view, a substantial and carefully argued submission highlighted the need to challenge an obsessively liberal viewpoint that has gained credence, not through reasoned argument and Scriptural debate, but from a comfortable acceptance that is based upon the need for understanding acceptance more than truth; and, difficult though it may be, truth spoken in love and with conviction should not be seen as a personal attack upon an individual, but as a legitimate, in fact important, reflection on the scale and very real effects on personal lives of human sin. The presentation of this point of view comes with the claim that, though legitimate and thoroughly Scriptural to regard homosexuality as essentially a form of bondage from which an individual needs to be freed, amongst every other form of restraint common to our human condition, the proposition that there is a ‘gay’ gene or prenatal tendency to homosexuality must also be challenged, rather than simply accept it; a position apparently widely assumed. The claim being that evidence for a baby being born with an inner pre-determined homosexual bias is much weaker than is normally portrayed. Though acknowledged as not being entirely the most appropriate word, the opportunity for ‘healing’, embracing both heterosexuals and homosexuals, involves all sexual practice outside marriage and should be seen in this context.

Interestingly, from both extremes of viewpoint in this debate, comes the impression – which may be taken along a spectrum from real anger to a feeling sitting somewhere between sadness and mild contempt – that there are those in the Church who could be speaking out but are not, or might be doing things and refuse. It could be that this is happening either through caving in to pressure (one way or the other) or simply trying to

maintain peace with the majority of their Church members, but are ultimately doing the Church of Jesus Christ, as a whole, a disservice, not just the Church of Ireland. This by its very context targets many moderate Church leaders.

There is a certain amount of testimony in these submissions regarding views on what some describe as “the gay lobby”, highlighting what may be seen as the plight of individuals, as compared with the views of those purporting to represent them. This claim is not really borne out by the statements of gay people who were interviewed, but the point is noted that the Select Committee is unlikely to hear from those who might formally have described themselves as gay, but who have experienced a change and whose views would not be represented by those who are forwarding the rights of gay and lesbian people.

There were parallels drawn (by more than one person) in reference to the current debate over same sex relationships, to the changes that the Church has brought about in its attitude to women in leadership roles in the church and with the abolition of slavery and the remarriage of divorcees in church. It was considered by a number of those interviewed to be inconsistent of the church to be willing and able to change its view on some very important matters, but not on the place of homosexuals in the church.

Preaching and teaching against those with a gay or lesbian lifestyle is seen as creating a specific tension for young people with homosexual orientation to not only be part of the Church, but also to face their own life without revulsion at its extreme or, at the very least, confusion and a tendency to silence, anxiety and denial.

There is a crucial point of attitude that appears to require further and detailed discussion, around the point of acceptance by a congregation and parish of an individual that is known to be homosexual. Some witnessed to their full acceptance as a valued member of the congregation, with no bar on anything, save that of marriage (and even that may be only a matter of time away). A more conservative parish – and this may be one perceived as middle-of-the-road traditional, by no means extreme – finds itself accepting a homosexual member with love and recognition, but this comes with an objection to an openly gay lifestyle. This comes about on the basis of “loving the sinner, but hating (what is seen to be) the sin”. Many would see this as the nub of the matter, suggesting, however lovingly and carefully, that there is something wrong with being gay. So this attitude is denying the legitimacy of a gay relationship; it implies at the very best, that such a relationship is second class, and, it is claimed, is forcing gay couples into a secular lifestyle as they feel that their place before God is being denied by the Church.

This is even more poignant when considered from the point of view of a parent with a gay or lesbian child. The sense of outrage that is felt in these situations as to the attitude of the Church is acute. The church is seen as alienating their child; their own faith is severely tested; they are forced to oppose the Church’s teaching or be separated from their own child, but above all they are highlighting just how the Church needs to ‘grow up’ or it will continue to leave its homosexual children in crisis. Love should be at the heart of the Church’s mission and attitude and this should lead to inclusion and acceptance of gay people as they are rather than to pressure to conform and ‘fit in’.

There is some Biblical analysis in these submissions, generally from heterosexual people commentating on the debate rather than being a living part of the situation as a gay or lesbian individual or couple, but not exclusively; there is self-analysis of the gay position from an academic who is himself gay. He describes at one point what is necessary for the church to minister to gay people and identifies specific ‘pressure points’ that should be borne in mind and clergy and others trained to understand: the public ‘coming out’ experience; ‘coming out’ to oneself; being a minority; dealing with homophobic attitudes in both public and private spheres; reconciling homosexuality with faith; mental health and drugs. These things need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency, whatever the state of the debate in the Church.

There is some mention in these submissions concerning visibility and invisibility. Openly gay and openly acknowledged may or may not be openly welcomed and accepted; but a cloak of invisibility cast over a gay person or couple ultimately favours no one. For authenticity and integrity there must be equality, openness, visibility and acceptance to fulfil and vitalise the lives of gay and lesbian people and celebrate their God-given

gifts for the Church. It was said that the issue is not an issue about human sexuality; it is an issue about honesty.

*In concluding this summary, the Select Committee members express their sincere thanks to all who have taken part in the listening process, not only in this discrete section of the work in response to an invitation to contribute their views and speak of their experience, but to all groups and individuals whose witness has been sought and much valued.*

#### **IV. 2. 1. Reform Ireland**

The Select Committee invited Reform Ireland to send representatives to address it on 5 January 2015.

The following were the representatives: the Revd Tim Anderson, the Revd Eddie Coulter, and the Revd Dr Alan McCann.

In their presentations they directed members to:

- Scripture references to sexuality as rooted in God's created order and sexuality as wonderfully positive but also being capable of being 'horribly negative and destructive'. Taken very seriously by Jesus Christ himself and a sign pointing towards a perfect and permanent union with God in the new created order;
- personal experiences in Christian ministry which confirmed a gap in the training of clergy, leaving them ill-prepared to deal with the extent and range of sexual 'brokenness';
- a mistaken perception in the wider Church of evangelical disengagement with the LGBT community;
- an absence in the Church of Ireland of resources for biblical teaching about sexuality;
- the required emphasis on a person's identity being in Christ in contrast to a generally held view that a person's sexual outlook constitutes his or her deepest identity;
- a number of practical issues such as the absence of local support organisations for young gay people and means of 'pastoring' such young people;
- confusion of the pastoral concern about practising the redeeming love of Jesus Christ and obedience to the Scriptures with homophobia;
- the inclusiveness of evangelicals towards homosexuals;
- their deep concern that Church of Ireland recognition of same-sex partnerships would mean it had departed from Biblical tradition, from its Anglican roots and from world-wide Anglicanism and, consequently, resulted in a failure to bring people to Christ;
- a loss of Christian values in society resulting in a loss of moral values also;
- a sense in 'people in our constituency' of being in impaired communication with the Church of Ireland as a result of current uncertainties about the Church's response to civil partnerships involving clergy, the Republic of Ireland referendum on same-sex marriage and developments in the United Kingdom and United States along the same lines.

#### **IV. 2. 2. Changing Attitudes Ireland**

Changing Attitude Ireland (CAI) responded to an invitation from the Select Committee to make a presentation to members on the remit given by General Synod. Three representatives of CAI – Canon Ginnie Kennerley, Ms Pam Tilson and Canon Mark Gardner – attended a meeting of the Committee and spoke to their notes and subsequently made those notes available to members.

They asked the Select Committee to:

- focus on whether LGBT individuals and their committed partnerships with one another can be accepted and respected within the Church of Ireland;
- consider the widening gap between traditional Church teaching and State law;
- reflect on the journeys taken by individual non LGBT members of CAI and others outside this organisation from (possibly) positions of ignorance to states of understanding and compassion which would serve as examples of changed attitudes and behaviour and encourage reassessment by the Church;
- at the level of the individual committee members, listen respectfully to diverse views;
- organise listening events at parish and diocesan levels;

- provide a Bible study course to promote mutual listening to the Holy Spirit;
- monitor work carried out on human sexuality to share statements and resources;
- recognise that vulnerable people including gay people can be targeted and that their Christian ministry can be rejected;
- examine the composition of the Select Committee and recognise the deficiency from which it suffered from being without LGBT representation;
- understand the benign characteristics of a local church community that is understanding of and welcoming to LGBT people;
- comprehend the commitment of church members in sustained same-sex relationships and the affirmation and support they seek from the Church at local and national levels.

### IV. 2. 3. The Revd Sam Allberry

The Revd Sam Allberry is Assistant Minister at St Mary's Maidenhead in the Church of England and the author of several books: *Is God anti-Gay?*, *Connected: Living in the Light of the Trinity* and *Lifted: Experiencing the Resurrection Life*. Mr Allberry spoke to the Select Committee in June 2014.

His introduction, based on St Matthew 19:4 and St Mark 1:15, set out his beliefs on human sexuality: 'We are not defined by our desires, they are part of what I feel but not the sum of who I am. We are created male and female - not in terms of our sexual desires which are not necessarily eternal but are part of our existence within the human state. Society puts sexuality ahead of the person so that people feel their sexuality must be fulfilled. That does not fit with my understanding of God's creation of people.'

He spoke of:

- A Gospel Church providing a safe place to talk about same-sex attraction;
- his understanding that marriage between a male and a female was a first order issue;
- a generational difference in attitudes as older people tended to regard sexual matters as taboo and younger people were willing to talk about anything;
- an understanding of The Fall that was *recognised as* and *interpreted as* possessing aspects of our nature which are not endorsed by the Bible;
- the need for everyone to recognise 'brokenness' in themselves and to repent of it;
- his understanding that there cannot be pastoral accommodation of homosexual sexual activity;
- a consequence of Church deterioration should it succumb to the spirit of the age as represented by a change in its approach to same-sex attraction;
- pressures in contemporary society against the elevation of 'gay' matters (an elevation which he believed was unhelpful);
- the contrast of current emphasis on one's sexuality and cultural history not attaching such significance to sexuality and sexual desires;
- his questioning any therapy purporting to 'cure' same-sex attraction which might make marriage rather than Christ himself the goal;
- a failure to see 'singleness' as a gift and an opportunity in itself in pastoral ministry;
- the importance to marriage of gender complementarity making the doctrine of marriage the framework for it and the implicit importance of marriage as the symbolic expression of Christ and the Church;
- the impossibility of judging anyone, and indeed, the importance of a refusal to judge if the fruits of the Spirit were evident in the lives of people living in same-sex relationships;
- exercising caution about change as there would always be ways in which the Church is not consonant with the surrounding culture.

#### **IV. 2. 4. Professor Patrick Morrison**

The Committee anticipated that the ongoing dialogue could give rise to queries about the basis in genetics for same-sex attraction. Prof. Patrick Morrison MD DSc, Consultant in Genetic Medicine and Honorary Professor of Human Genetics, Queen's University Belfast, was invited to speak on this topic.

Prof. Morrison advised the Committee that, while genetic knowledge on male sexuality was not currently extensive, research on female sexuality was significantly less developed. He reviewed the outcomes of existing research and also gave examples of other genetic issues which have a gender dimension as a means of demonstrating how genes operate. He explained that as people live longer there was growing awareness of genetic issues associated with gender in population groups.

Prof. Morrison postulated that if sexuality is determined genetically it was also likely to be true that modifier genes and lifestyle would have an impact on the expression of the gene. Male sexual orientation, he said, was less complicated than female sexual orientation, with males tending to feel they were strongly gay or strongly not gay and that this aspect was somewhat borne out by genetics.

Prof. Morrison spoke of some 5-8% of gay men genetically orientated towards same-sex attraction possibly having a highly penetrative gene, not identified as yet although research indicated that such a gene was likely to exist on the X chromosome and on Chromosome 8. Other genes, birth order and environment, he indicated, might all be influencing factors, as might the 'in utero' effect. There were definite indications, he believed, that genetic influences were at work in defining male sexual orientation. Prof. Morrison spoke of a small number of same-sex attraction genes affecting boys which (i.e. those genes) were carried by their mothers.

Prof. Morrison issued a number of caveats: against a belief that treating genetic components identified as same-sex attraction would work; the paucity of research until recent years into genome sequencing; a field of study now developing significantly accompanied by social acceptance which should result in an increase in information derived from such research. Clearly there are genes that make us attracted to other people, generally of the opposite gender. However, some of these genes 'do not work' and this may be of the order of 5-10% of people. In cases where the genes were not so strong other factors might influence expression but strong genes exerted an overwhelming influence; research is drawing on studies largely of Europeans and white Americans because it is in such populations that genetic issues tend to be recognised; restrictions on research associated with problems carrying out group research which could lead participants becoming the focus of a community had to be recognised.

## IV. 3. Articulations by two members of the Select Committee

### IV. 3.1 Introductory remarks by the Chairman

The Committee has been united in its commitment to a thoughtful process of understanding the many issues of human sexuality in the context of Christian belief. This has entailed modelling conversations, exploring views and discerning facts. Part of our journey has been to seeking to understand the various conclusions members of the Church have reached: conclusions articulated by individual members of the Committee. Consequently, we have tried to avoid unhelpful half-truths offered as sound-bites, resulting in unavoidably labelling others as either conservative or liberal and so polarising members. Nor did we wish to create a series of blueprints with which readers of the Guide might associate and find comfort in believing a case had been made for their own positions. Our desire is to encourage discussion, not to stifle it.

I write conscious (of an admittedly unsubstantiated personal view) that there are a good number of Church of Ireland people who may feel drawn one way or another in the debate, but who are, nonetheless, uncomfortable with the ultimate conclusions of those positioned at either of the perceived extremes. Is it possible, for example, to hold a generally conservative theological position, but assume a more liberal outlook on this issue; in fact, to *process* one's Evangelicalism liberally? How does the interpretation of Scripture impact what we can or cannot accept? Can a parish, or indeed a diocese or province accommodate those of a wide spectrum of different viewpoints? When does respect become accommodation: living with difference become concession; silence, compromise; a principled stand, prejudice? As the House of Bishops indicated by its statement in 2003, there are at least four possible standpoints on this issue alone, and every reader and student of Christian moral reasoning is to be wary of misrepresenting another.

With this in mind we offer, with some hesitation, two detailed and very different interpretations of Scripture to help in the understanding of how we reach conclusions from Scriptural exploration. Both are written by members of the Select Committee who would describe themselves as 'Evangelical' and have the respect and support of the whole group; both model Christian moral reasoning, but reach different conclusions. Every member of the Select Committee, irrespective of their theological understanding, is grateful to these two people, whose work they have read avidly and from which we have all benefitted. As a result they form part of this *Guide*, not to polarise, but to lead to further understanding. It is intended that they be read 'critically' in the sense of 'thoroughly, closely, gently'; in other words, not to bolster one's own views, but to challenge and enrich.

As chairman of the Select Committee, who has spent some hours in the company of both authors and heard their careful and respectful, but firm and committed words in committee meetings and outside them, I am not only grateful to them, but ask you to receive their work positively and prayerfully, without dismissal or disdain; with humility, discernment and with the recognition of the effort and work they reflect.

John Mann

### IV. 3.2 Presuppositions

#### Introduction

How can people who claim to be members of the Church of Ireland hold such very different views on the status of same sex relationships? The suggestion here is that part of the answer has to do with the differing presuppositions that each of us hold. In this context, presuppositions are those basic, often unconscious, beliefs about the world *upon which* we form a range of specific beliefs about our own church tradition, in this case the Church of Ireland, and Christian teaching. The suggestion here is *not* that all beliefs, presuppositions or assumptions are equally helpful, valid or true;<sup>13</sup> rather, that enabling people to bring properly to consciousness what they actually believe and why might better promote mutual understanding.

---

<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding our inherited assumptions and presuppositions (worldview), Christian moral reasoning strives for rational discourse and is, therefore, open to critical evaluation.

## Where do our presuppositions come from?

The tendency in our modern Western culture to emphasise individualism has left us with what is sometimes called a 'subjectivist illusion'. This illusion gives the impression that individual people come to their beliefs or practices in isolation from their history or socialisation. Such an understanding forgets that beliefs and behaviour are not always the product of the individual and that the range of 'choices' that any given person is able to make will depend on a wide range of social, cultural, and environmental factors.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, many of our deepest held beliefs develop out of ways of thinking, and being in the world, that are formed in much more unreflective, organic, ways than we might at first imagine.

Our socialisation rests in part on our own unique genetic makeup. However, environmental factors make a significant contribution to the sorts of attitudes and beliefs we hold. Our basic anthropology will be conditioned by our family, the place where we spend the formative years of our life, our religious tradition and our education. This is sometimes called in the literature our particular 'form of life' or 'habitus'. One theorist has given us this punchy definition of habitus: 'the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product.'<sup>15</sup> In addition, we belong to a complex network of relationships based on family, friendships and work. In these ways, we develop practices and beliefs that continue to shape us and provide us with the raw materials from which we learn to tell stories about our own lives and the world in which we live. All this does not mean that we are socially determined without remainder but it does mitigate the extent of what we sometimes refer to as 'free will' or, more popularly, 'choice'.

This complex dynamic between our habitus, our relationships and our beliefs is at work in every member of our church and we need to recognise it if we are to understand how it can be that people hold strongly to very different views on particular topics. Two broad areas are especially relevant to the current conversations surrounding the status of human sexuality in the context of Christian belief: the nature of Anglicanism and approaches to Christian teaching.

## Differing approaches to Anglicanism

Part of the complexity of Anglicanism concerns the ways in which a wider range of different presuppositions are represented. Whilst this is not dissimilar to other mainstream Protestant denominations (Presbyterianism, Methodism etc.), Anglicanism was, historically, also a political movement. The Elizabethan Settlement (and later the Restoration) was an ambitious act of reconciling Roman Catholic and Protestant sensitivities with the task of statehood. Therefore, Anglicanism is not simply a worshipping community but it also represents a way of doing politics. Our synodical government is indicative of this. In the established Church of England synodical government is an organ of Parliament (so political and legal). An important emphasis of Anglicanism has always been the need to serve the common good. This history has important implications for our current listening process. For many more liberal minded Anglicans, there is no real sense of a sharp divide between 'culture' and 'church'. Rather, the two are always in a mutually enriching dialogue. Anglican Evangelicals (the inheritors of Puritanism) tend to view the claims of the Gospel as being inherently counter-cultural (oppositional).

## Differing approaches to Christian teaching

In *very* general terms, Evangelicalism is a coherent theological system which supposes a close correlation with 'the plain meaning' of the Bible taken as one linear story. It works with strong assumptions about biblical authority and the Bible's apparent plot line of creation, fall, election, redemption and judgment. Another way of putting this is to say that Evangelicals take very seriously the idea of revelation which means that the bible, understood as God's revealed communication with the world, is something that comes into human history from outside of human history. Consequently, Evangelicals are very reluctant to depart from this revealed truth on the basis of human experience, wisdom or reason. Conversely, Liberalism is not so systematic and is more disposed to taking a general principle such as Christ's command to love God and one another and allowing experience and human reason further to guide in forming matters of belief and practice. To put this

---

<sup>14</sup> Ken Turner, 'W<sub>x</sub> = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R<sub>x</sub>': Notes Towards an Investigation', *Revue de Sémantique et Pragmatique*, Numéro 13, 2003, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, (Trans.) R. Nice, *The Logic of Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 56.



another way, liberal theology uses Scripture as a starting point from which various trajectories of theological reflection can be pursued in conversation with historical critical scholarship and the resources of reason.

### IV. 3.3 The need for renewal

#### INTRODUCTION

“The Christian Church [...] that changes the norm of its teaching on (human sexuality) [...] is promoting schism. If it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the Biblical norm, and recognised homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, this Church now stands [...] against the unequivocal witness of Scripture [...] and ceases to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”<sup>16</sup>

- Wolfhart Pannenberg

Sobering words: to change the teaching on human sexuality forfeits our right to be considered part of the universal Church. Yet is Pannenberg right? The stark question is this: is it time to revise the Church's teaching on human sexuality?

The argument of this paper is that changing the Church's teaching on human sexuality is silencing Holy Scripture - its obvious, consistent teaching and ruling authority. Silencing Scripture is silencing God and bowing to worldly systems of belief. It is an acquiescence to 'the spirit of the age' and the relentless sexualisation of Western culture. The body is undervalued but God notes how we use our bodies, for they are his gift to us. They will be resurrected and, unlike some of the ancients, we don't extol the soul over the body.

Furthermore, to affirm, to call holy and to bless what God does not sanctify is the Church ceasing to be a faithful witness in and to God's world. Holiness is not piety nor spirituality. Rather, holiness is living as God intends, as he has revealed in Holy Scripture - not amorphously or in a self-determined way. It is time for the Church to *renew* her commitment to God's revelation, fulfilling her Christ-given mission as a "pillar and bulwark of the truth"<sup>17</sup>. To change the Church's teaching on human sexuality causes the Church to cease to belong to Christ.

#### 1) POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Society's landscape has changed and ignorance of the last half-century is unwise. It is in this context that the Church is being pressed to revise basic commitments around sexual ethics. Holding the current discussion a few decades ago would have been unthinkable. Half a generation ago, the acceptability of same-sex relationships was social taboo, but now, a social imperative. The "love which dare not speak its name... is the love that can not bear to be quiet"<sup>18</sup>. To avoid being considered a social pariah, wholesale acceptance of the new status quo is essential. For some in their (early) teens and twenties, attitudes towards same-sex relationships are almost the final apologetic, the tipping point between wholesale acceptance or rejection of the Christian witness. The digital age<sup>19</sup> has aided our culture's 'hyper-sexualisation'.

Sigmund Freud, an adherent of the German Romantic movement, which embraced a turning to 'the self', wrote extensively on what is now considered to be a modern understanding of 'homosexuality'. Personal experience was considered a key means of discerning truth - thus, how one *feels* is how one *is*. Later sociologists saw a need to balance the importance of personal experience by developing hypotheses about social structures on a wider basis including ideas of how social norms are established. In the absence of convincing Biblical argument, some deploy personal experience, presenting it as finally authoritative. Butterfield writes that:

---

<sup>16</sup> <sup>16</sup> 'Should we support gay marriage? No!' Wolfhart Pannenberg, Originally translated by Markus Bockmuehl for publication in the Church Times, this article also appears on the Holy Trinity, New Rochelle, New York, website (<http://www.holytrinitynewrochelle.org/> - accessed 11/10/15)

<sup>17</sup> 1 Timothy 3v15, NRSV

<sup>18</sup> Charles Sociades - cited in *Pure sex*, Jensen & Payne (1997, Sydney: Matthias Media), p110

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, [http://www.cfuw.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/Hypersexualization\\_Handout.pdf](http://www.cfuw.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/Hypersexualization_Handout.pdf) - accessed 9 November, 2015

“the nineteenth-century category of sexual orientation reflects Romanticism’s claim on epistemology, redefining men and women from people who are made in God’s image with souls that will last forever to people whose sexual drives and gender identification define them and liberate them and set them apart [...] ideas shape worldview and worldview shapes culture.”<sup>20</sup>

Michel Foucault, the French historian of ideas, traced the origins of the word ‘homosexual’ in his multi-volume study, *A History of Sexuality*<sup>21</sup>. Michael Hannon comments that Foucault noted, “‘sodomy’ had long identified a class of actions, suddenly, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the term ‘homosexual’ appeared alongside it”<sup>22</sup>.

He (Hannon) continues,

“this was a category mistake [to a previous generation]...this European neologism [new word/concept] designated people, not actions, and its counterpart and foil ‘heterosexual’. Secular society rendered classical religious beliefs publicly illegitimate, pseudoscience stepped in replacing religion as the moral foundation for venerable norms [...] sexuality moved from verb (practice) to noun (people)”<sup>23</sup>.

Following Freud, sexual orientation and preferences became paramount. The natural end-point of this thinking, in the twenty-first century, is the transgender movement. “Gender is between the ears, not between the legs”<sup>24</sup>. On this trajectory, sexual orientation is venerated, being unchangeable. The body may be altered physically, but same-sex attraction is unalterable.

The 1960’s sexual revolution espoused ‘free love’ - the term defining the decade. Monogamy was limiting and boring; the emerging post war generation sought release. “Make love, not war”<sup>25</sup> captured the mood, yet the homosexual wasn’t fully embraced during these changing sexual times. The 1970s saw a growing awareness of homosexual relationships, with ‘free sex’ (without the constrictions of heterosexuality) defining that decade.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) changed its view that homosexuality was an illness. This represented a significant milestone. The debate was full of political fury, and, in the end, a postal ballot was held to determine the position, as meetings had been disrupted by activists. Over one third voted and just over half of those who voted agreed to the change. The change was made, and homosexuality was treated as a normal variant of human sexual expression in the absence of new significant evidence<sup>26</sup>.

The causation of same-sex attraction remains inconclusive. In 2009, the APA stated that,

“despite much examination of genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on orientation, nothing has emerged that permits scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think nature and nurture both play complex roles.”<sup>27</sup>

The book, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90’s*<sup>28</sup> was published during the first AIDS epidemic. “As cynical as it may seem, AIDS gives us a chance, however brief, to establish ourselves as a victimised minority legitimately deserving of America’s special protection and care”<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>20</sup> Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne, *Openness unhindered*, (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant publications), p 89

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, Michel, *History of Sexuality*, (1976)

<sup>22</sup> Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne, *Openness unhindered*, (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant publications), p 97

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p95

<sup>24</sup> Chaz Bono, in an interview on *Good Morning America*, 2009

<sup>25</sup> A phrase coined to express opposition to the Vietnam conflict. See *Make Love, Not War - The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History*, David Allyn (2001, London: Routledge)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2015/is-the-homosexual-tendency-a-complex-reality>, accessed 1/10/15

<sup>27</sup> ‘Answers to your questions for a better understanding of sexual orientation & homosexuality’ (www.apa.org), cited in *The Gospel and sexual orientation* an RPCA report, 2015, p10

<sup>28</sup> Kirk H & Pill M, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90’s* (NYC: Doubleday, 1990)

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p14

Essentially, this book was a political manifesto deploying the language and ethos of the 1960's American civil rights movement. The strategies were: positively portray happy and committed same-sex couples; avoid discussion of sexual practice; win the 'middle ground'; maintain 'outrage'; and, attack conservative Church attitudes, as these were "the last bastion of homo-hatred"<sup>30</sup>. Each strategy was to desensitise, 'jam'<sup>31</sup> and then convert.

The societal pressure exerted to change the Church's teaching is great. In May 2015, the Republic of Ireland's legislature approved the removal of the two-gender basis for marriage, through referendum. The first same-sex marriages have taken place. The Northern Ireland assembly has debated the issue multiple times, with no agreement.

## 2) SCRIPTURE

### a) Authority

For Anglican Christians, faith comes from the canonical Scriptures. They are, "God's word written"<sup>32</sup>, "containing all things necessary for salvation"<sup>33</sup>. Scripture has both divine and human qualities<sup>34</sup>. Christ understood that "what Scripture said, God said"<sup>35</sup>. Since they came from God, they were authoritative for God the Son and are for the people of God<sup>36</sup>. Tradition and reason (experience being a subset of reason) are 'secondary authorities'.

Richard Hooker (1554 – 1600), the Anglican divine, writing against the Puritans<sup>37</sup>, argued that tradition and reason must be brought into play when Scripture is silent on a matter. Hooker's definition of reason was 'understanding shaped by Scripture', not the untethered entity of today's scientific rationalism. Human tradition and experience remain human and subject to error. Only Scripture is free from error. The Rt Rev Dr Rowan Williams conjectures, "that it is unlikely that he [Richard Hooker] could have entertained any idea that the moral law set out in Scripture was anything other than lastingly valid"<sup>38</sup>.

### b) Interpretation

There is debate around Scripture's interpretation. On human sexuality, multiple interpretations exist amongst those who read it. However, that varying opinion exists does not validate all opinions, making each correct, justified or consistent. Are all opinions considered equal or truthful in any other discipline? Each must be weighed accordingly.

No single method of interpretation will always and "unerringly elicit the 'right answers' from the Scriptures"<sup>39</sup>. Yet, whilst our interpretation may be incomplete it does not follow that we must suspend judgement permanently, learning to live with opposing interpretations<sup>40</sup>. Thus, we 'read Scripture in the company of others', across the generations. The Church of Ireland's foundational documents<sup>41</sup> bind us to do this.

---

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p52

<sup>31</sup> "As the name implies, Jamming involves the insertion into the engine of a pre-existing, *incompatible* emotional response, gridlocking its mechanism as thoroughly as though one had sprinkled fine sand into the workings of an old-fashioned pocket watch. Jamming, as an approach, is more active and aggressive than Desensitisation; by the same token, it is also more enjoyable and heartening." *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> Article 20 of the 39 Articles

<sup>33</sup> Article 6 of the 39 Articles

<sup>34</sup> 2 Peter 1v 20-21 "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (NRSV)

<sup>35</sup> Wenham, John cited in p9 CEEC summary report

<sup>36</sup> A false dichotomy is created between Jesus, the word of God, and Scripture, the word of God.

<sup>37</sup> Hooker, Richard, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

<sup>38</sup>- See more at:

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2107/the-richard-hooker-lecture-richard-hooker-c1554-1600-t-he-laws-of-ecclesiastical-polity-revisited#sthash.1Zo6nuq9.dpuf>

<sup>39</sup> Davie, M. *Summary of CEEC*, p9

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> Excerpt from the Preamble and Declaration of the Church of Ireland: (*italics added*)

We also read the *parts* of Scripture balanced against the *whole* of the Scriptures. The basic methodology is reading from the whole, inwards. We dare not set one part of Scripture *against* another. Professor Oliver O'Donovan says,

“unless [...] Scripture is readable as a whole, communicating a unified outlook and perspective, we cannot attribute to it (any) doctrinal authority [...] only to some of it [...] a Church (that) offers an unharmonious reading may be supposed to have in mind an indirect challenge to its authority”<sup>42</sup>.

For example, some conclude that the essential qualities of marriage are love and commitment, finding their reasons in Scripture, but if these replace the two-gendered basis of marriage, which is explicitly specified in Scripture, it is doing what O'Donovan warns against. Also, it denies a principle of the 39 Articles of Religion:

“[...] it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.”<sup>43</sup>

### *c) Presuppositions*

#### Scripture's supposed ignorance of sexual orientation

A presupposition is a set of assumptions or ideas with which one approaches a certain topic or subject. It is a background belief relating to an issue, whose truth is taken for granted in debate. All must admit their presuppositions.

One such presupposition is that the Bible writers don't know of 'homosexuality' nor of sexual orientation. Victor Paul Furnish says, “The question, 'What does the Bible say about homosexuality?' is misleading in several ways [...] it fails to take into account the fact that the ancient world had no word or concept of homosexuality”<sup>44</sup>.

It is true that the Bible writers do not write in late nineteenth century psychology categories - this would be forcing anachronism<sup>45</sup>. However, Jesus addresses inner disposition or 'orientation', in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). For example, he emphasises the *inner* attitude which spawns murder: “anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment”<sup>46</sup>, the attitude is in the same category as the action. Similarly, when Jesus deals with adultery: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5v28). The Scriptures deal with the complex, internal attitudes which *underpin* certain actions.

Robert Gagnon outlines evidence that philosophers in the ancient world were aware of desires warranting characterisation as innate orientation<sup>47</sup>. Bernadette Brooten finds that, “some ancient writers saw particular

---

1. The Church of Ireland doth, as heretofore, accept and unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as given by inspiration of God, and containing all things necessary to salvation; and doth continue to *profess the faith of Christ as professed by the Primitive Church*.

3. The Church of Ireland, as a reformed and Protestant Church, doth hereby reaffirm its *constant witness against all those innovations in doctrine and worship, whereby the Primitive Faith hath been from time to time defaced or overlaid, and which at the Reformation this Church did disown and reject*.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* p.7

<sup>43</sup> The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation. -

Article 20 of the 39 Articles

<sup>44</sup> Furnish, Victor Paul *Homosexuality In The Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) p.18

<sup>45</sup> We don't expect Jesus to make reference to driving a car or charging a device!

<sup>46</sup> Matt 5v 21-22

<sup>47</sup> Gagnon, Robert *The Bible and homosexual practice* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2001), p384-385

same-sex acts as symptoms of a chronic disease that affected the entirety of one's identity" <sup>48</sup>.

The writers of Scripture are supposedly ignorant of faithful, permanent and stable same-gender relationships  
The contemporary Graeco-Roman world *was* aware of committed same-gender unions. Hubbard<sup>49</sup> notes these unions were condemned by secular moralistic writers. The Biblical authors *were* aware of faithful, stable and permanent same-sex relationships, also.

Some claim that Jesus didn't say anything about homosexuality, but Jesus taught the Hebrew Scriptures, tightening the regulations around divorce and used Genesis 2 to answer the Pharisees (Matthew 19, Mark 10), reaffirming continuity with traditional, two-gendered marriage.

### Scientific materialism

Human beings are material without any immaterial soul; merely, 'flesh and bone', fully subject to chemical process and environmental factors. Thus, there is no supernatural dimension or concept of morality. When approaching sexuality, the scientist's prior commitment is to seek some kind of biological explanation. This is evidenced by searching for the ever-elusive, 'gay gene'. One is bound by biological impulses - 'my genes made me do it'. Yet, should a kleptomaniac gene be found, would stealing become accommodated?

Christians must be aware of this prior commitment within the scientific community. The insights and discoveries of science are crucial, but do not determine morality. To do so is asking science to stray into disciplines which scientific endeavour is not intended to reach or to comment upon.

Reading the Scriptures with a humble or listening posture, ensures that the above presuppositions are recognised. To claim a significant chasm between the horizons of the Bible writers and twenty-first Century reader does a disservice to God's eternal word. Assuming that the two are so far apart that the former cannot speak to the latter, calls into question the relevance (and authority) of all Biblical teaching, including the teachings of Christ. In effect, a 'pick and choose' approach to the Bible, "God's Word written".

### **3) Passages of Scripture where same-gender relationships are addressed - a brief examination**

#### ***a) The Bible's own trajectory***

The Biblical, two-gender aspect of marriage is incontrovertible, since it points to a greater reality: the relationship Christ has with the Church<sup>50</sup>. Marriage, as an analogy, is brought into play in Scripture when adultery or polygamy (incidentally, never commended in the Old Testament and forbidden in the New) are considered. For example, when Israel sins by loving idols in the place of God, the terms employed in the text of Scripture are 'marital' in analogy. She commits 'adultery' with other gods. For example, the entire narrative of Hosea, especially chapter 3v1. Also, Malachi 2v14. Same-sex relationships deny this basic nature of marriage.

Genesis 1 and 2 (discussed below) construct two-gendered marriage. Genesis chapter 3, however, outlines ruination. Eve and Adam invert the true order of things by submitting to a creature, not the creator. Consequently, everything is affected, including marriage. All theological outlooks must incorporate the doctrine of the Fall. Our desires, affections, and actions are tainted by self-love and serving. We must read our experiences through the lens of this brokenness, including our sexuality. We are all "sexually broken"<sup>51</sup>, regardless of its particular manifestation. This sinful nature is 'de-creative' (not life-creating), 'deicial' (murdering God) and 'disoriented' (around self, not other or God).

---

*Plato famously satires the sexual practices of his fellow Greeks, with a myth depicting the creation of humanity in three types: a conjoined man-woman being, a conjoined man-man being, and a conjoined woman-woman being; and that an offended Zeus cut these beings in two, leaving some men perpetually longing to be rejoined to their female counterpart, while others long to be rejoined to their same-sex counterpart. Plato's myth for the origin of sexual dispositions represents an ancient perception of sexual identity on some level akin to an "inner orientation." Likewise, Aristotle believed that some men who are sexually attracted to other men are so disposed "by nature," while others are so inclined "from habit" (that is, from some stimulating event). cf Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1148b, 28–34. Note, however, that Aristotle regarded the natural disposition toward same sex desire as being a disorder "contrary to nature".*

<sup>48</sup> Peterson, D (ed) *Holiness and Sexuality* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), p42

<sup>49</sup> Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome*, p383

<sup>50</sup> Ephesians 5

<sup>51</sup> <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2012/09/26/vaughn-roberts-on-same-sex-attraction/> - accessed 30/11/15

Christ did not seek another Christ (implying *same-ness*) with whom to have a relationship. Rather he sought an entirely different other - namely, the Church - with whom to have an eternal relationship. He loved, served and has saved eternally his Church, not another Christ. Marriage is its eternal illustration being rooted in the inter-dependant, eternal relationships of the triune God. Paul outlines this in Ephesians 5. Redefining marriage is not changing a mere social institution, it is redefining God and his eternal Gospel. Homosexual relationships are 'same-ness' - type relationships. Gender, psychological, physical/anatomical differences are unachievable.

### **b) Genesis 1 and 2**

#### *Gender distinction (Genesis 1)*

First, in Genesis, humanity is created with gender. There is no suggestion in the texts that humanity is without gender difference. Genesis 1v26 - 28: "God created them [...] male and female"<sup>52</sup>. Gender *distinction* is intrinsic to the order of creation. There are only two genders. Had God ordered same-sex sexual relationships, there would be four sexes - heterosexual male, heterosexual female, homosexual male and homosexual female.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Gender complementarity (Genesis 2)*

Secondly, the genders *complement* one another. Richard Davidson notes that God created the "bipolarity of the sexes from the beginning"<sup>54</sup>. In Genesis 2v7, Adam (**אָדָם** - *a.dam*) is made from the dust of the earth (**אֲדָמָה** - *a.da.mah*), - his name echoing his substance. In chapter 2v23, gendered terms are used: **אִישׁ** (*ish* - male) and **אִשָּׁה** (*ish.shah* - female), again, her name echoing her origins. Adam needs 'a helper', one who is 'suitable for him' or **עֵזֶר** (*e.zer*). This word conveys being 'equal but different'. The animals are not considered suitable - they are different, but not equal. Another male (*ish*) is not suitable, for he would have been equal, not different. Thus, God creates 'flesh of my flesh' (2v23), a phrase incorporating 'equal but different'. This is marriage's basis: man 'unites' with woman, becoming "one flesh" (Genesis 2v29). The 'femaleness' of Eve appears to be *the* necessary prerequisite for her marriage to Adam - the pre-fallen, prototype for all God-sanctioned marriages.

#### *'Flesh of my flesh' (Genesis 2)*

Some, however, reduce 'flesh' to metaphor, meaning 'kinship circle' or 'family' and implying that Eve was suitable because she *bore similarity or relationship* to Adam - the gender difference being insignificant. This, however, is to misunderstand how the words work. Built into the notion of 'flesh' is physical complementarity and procreation. Ian Paul suggests "to make 'flesh' metaphorical, limiting the reference to family ties...is a bit like concluding that 'brother', used in certain subcultures to mean 'friend', no longer means 'male-sibling'"<sup>55</sup>!

### **c) Genesis 19 vv 4-8 - Sodom and Gomorrah**

Is the principle sin of Sodom and Gomorrah inhospitality? Some suggest, 'yes'. This conclusion is a recent development. Sherwin Bailey developed the idea in 1955. Yet, "the [conclusions] created by Dr Bailey have travelled more widely than the reasons he produces for it"<sup>56</sup>.

Davidson<sup>57</sup> rejects this theory, in three ways:

- 1) The immediate context indicates that Sodom's wickedness goes far beyond issues of hospitality. Sodom's inhabitants are, "wicked, great sinners against the Lord"<sup>58</sup>. Kennedy, McArthur and McGowan suggest that these "words can't be directed against a breach of hospitality"<sup>59</sup>. This is an exaggerated way to describe being 'short of manners';

---

<sup>52</sup> NB: v28 is an *explanation* of v27. Hebrew parallelism is at play, mirroring and explaining what is said in v27 by means of v28

<sup>53</sup> An idea attributed to Oliver O'Donovan: <http://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/our-bodies-our-sexuality/> (accessed 26/11/15)

<sup>54</sup> [https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/davidson\\_sexgen1\\_auss.pdf](https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/davidson_sexgen1_auss.pdf), - accessed 19/10/15

<sup>55</sup> Davie, M *Church of England Evangelical Council - Studies on the Bible and same-sex relationships since 2003* ( p190:

<sup>56</sup> Kidner D, *Genesis (Tyndale commentaries)* (Leicester: IVP, 1975) p137

<sup>57</sup> Report p207

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 13v13

<sup>59</sup> Report

- 2) The verb 'to know' (יָדָע - *yad.ah*) has undoubted sexual connotations: to know, *carnally*<sup>60</sup>. Subsequent writings, both those of the inter-testamental period and the New Testament, consider the 'sin of Sodom' as sexual. Lot's offer of his daughters in place of the 'visitors' is shocking and would be inappropriate were the men not interested in sex. To non-21st Century Western ears, the request 'to know' sexually the male visitors would have been even more shocking than the offer of Lot's daughters;
- 3) The wider story line of Genesis is such that "each episode in Genesis 18-20 is to do with a thwarting of God's purposes through sexual sin"<sup>61</sup>. The Sodom and Gomorrah story (Genesis 19) fits the same pattern. However, in this case, homosexual activity (and its inability for procreation) poses a threat to the fulfilment of the Genesis 12v1-3 promises to Abraham - through *his descendants*, all nations would be blessed.

Others suggest that it was an unloving, sexually abusive relationship which characterised the request of the men, not its homosexual aspect. Thus, the Sodom story is not addressing committed and loving same-sex relationships. In this vein, 'to know' (יָדָע *ya.da*) ought to be interpreted as 'to rape'.

However, the word (*ya.da*) is *never* used like that elsewhere. Furthermore, other Hebrew words express 'rape'. For example, 'to force' (Deut 22v25-27 - קָזַח (*cha.zaq*)). Also, 'to know' implies sexual relationships, in general. Otherwise, we are forced to place the words, "rape my daughters" in Lot's mouth<sup>62</sup>. Robert Gagnon concludes that in the Pentateuch where opposition to homosexual *practice* of any sort was explicit, "homosexual intercourse *per se* added to the dimension of horror for the old man, the Levite and the narrator of the story".

#### **d) Leviticus 18 v 22 and 20 v 13**

Set within their Biblical-theological context, the Leviticus holiness codes were written for the people of God, living in the promised land and witnessing amongst and to the surrounding nations. They were to be holy. Holiness meant separation. The prohibitions exemplified this. For example, mixed food was forbidden, as their diet reflected the holiness or 'separateness' of God. This was a witness to the mixed peoples around them. Christ fulfilled the principle of these prohibitions (e.g. "Jesus declared all foods clean" - Mark 7). Yet, the moral prohibitions remain, having never been rescinded by Christ, instead explicitly reaffirmed in other parts of Scripture.

In Hebrew, 'abomination' is תּוֹעֵבָה (*to.e.vah*). Some 'abominations' appear trivial. For example, carving idols<sup>63</sup> or recycling an idol's metal<sup>64</sup>. Some actions were innocuous, yet *culturally* abhorrent. Eating with an Israelite was detestable to an Egyptian<sup>65</sup>. Some animals were hateful as food to the Israelites<sup>66</sup>. Here, there is no moral import. However, the word also 'refers to acts that are detestable going against the moral fibre of God's created world. They are either a denial of God as creator or of the value of those created in God's image. "Homosexual activity belongs in this second category, since it is a denial of the Lord's created intention for sexuality"<sup>67</sup>.

Some insist that 'abomination' describes forbidden ritual prostitution. However, Sam Allberry disagrees saying the *unspecific* language is used: "if a man lies with a male as with a woman" - a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Imagining that only religiously motivated same-sex sexual behaviour is condemned is a misreading. It is not giving full weight to the words or their context. Various sexual behaviours (e.g. bestiality, adultery) outside male/female married relationships are prohibited. "None of these have any connection with pagan temples of idolatry. These things are morally wrong, irrespective of who is doing them and where they are happening"<sup>68</sup>. For Ian Paul, homosexual sex rejects God's created order, not because it is cultic worship, marital unfaithfulness or an offence against patriarchy<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> See also Genesis 4v1, 17, 25; 25v16

<sup>61</sup> De Young

<sup>62</sup> p209, *Report*

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 27v15

<sup>64</sup> Deuteronomy 7v25

<sup>65</sup> Genesis 43v32

<sup>66</sup> Deuteronomy 14v3

<sup>67</sup> p215, *Report*

<sup>68</sup> Allberry, Sam *Is God anti-gay?* (Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2013)

<sup>69</sup> p224 *Report*

### e) *Romans 1 v 24-27*

Romans 1-8 trace the contours of the apostolic Gospel and its implications. The first three chapters outline humanity's rebellion against God, both Gentile (law-ignorant) and Jew (law-familiar). The *obvious* evidence for God ("what can be known about God is plain to them", 1v19) has been ignored or 'suppressed' (1v18).

Some suggest it is the idolatrous sexual practices of the Gentiles, which Paul has in mind, exclusively. However, these words do not refer only to pagan sexual rituals - if Paul intended this, he would have been specific, only criticising religiously motivated homosexual unions. Instead, humanity serves, worships and (ultimately) mistreats God's creation by not worshipping its Creator. As a result of this 'truth-suppression', God has handed people over to their desires: life without God. *Same-sex sexual relationships, far from being evidences of God's grace are symptomatic of God's wrath.* With Ian Paul<sup>70</sup> et al, homosexual sex is against the obvious physiological purpose of the human body. The anatomy of males and females 'fits' together, complementing each other. The other sins listed in the next verses (Romans 1v29-31 - e.g. envy, gossiping, adultery and approving perpetrators of evil) are not at all associated with cultic rituals.

St Paul is not saying homosexual sex is wrong if only associated with idolatry - there is no suggestion of this. Nor is St Paul saying it is wrong only when in an extreme, abusive (e.g. pederastic), promiscuous or illegal relationship. The category in view is all same-sex sexual relationships, in the broadest possible of terms. Committed non-cultic homosexual unions ("marriages") were widely known in the Graeco-Roman world, and Paul makes *no* exceptions. It must be considered, he was a well-travelled, erudite and cosmopolitan missionary to the Gentiles.

On the question of 'against nature' (i.e., *their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women*), some suggest the homosexual is 'naturally' attracted to their own gender. For them, there is no issue (or sin) raised by this text as being homosexual is a fixed orientation. Thus, Daniel Via: "what Paul is condemning as contrary to nature is homosexual acts by people with a heterosexual nature"<sup>71</sup>. However, this view fails to take into account the Genesis 1-3 basis of Romans 1, where, in creation, God determined the nature of humanity's physical and sexual design. The Greek word translated as 'nature' is φυσικός (fusikos) means the regular and obvious order of nature, acknowledging distinction between the genders. RB Hays notes, "[Paul] singles out homosexual intercourse because...[it was] a particularly graphic image of the way in which human fallenness distorts God's created order"<sup>72</sup>.

United Methodist scholar, Dr Ben Witherington, notes Romans 1v26 - 27 is "a condemnation of homosexual and lesbian behaviour as exists in the New Testament". First-century Jews precluded and rejected every form of homosexual practice, as did the early Church Fathers, "[they] rejected non-cultic same-sex marriage as inherently unnatural"<sup>73</sup>. "Whilst some might experience strong same-sex erotic attractions, God's people must know...that while these temptations are real and perhaps even biologically influenced, they are not objectively natural but the result of the wider context of humanity's condition, requiring redemption"<sup>74</sup>. William Loader and Bernadette Brooten (amongst many) argue that the Biblical witness is against homosexual practice, without exception, whilst being themselves personally supportive of same-sex unions.

### f) *1 Corinthians 6 v 9-10*

Paul used ἀρσενικοίτης (arsenokoites) and μαλακός (malakos) to describe homosexual sex. They have been variously rendered in different Bible translations. The diverse translations may have more to do with the political maelstrom around these issues, rather than the words themselves. For example, recent translations (which have high distribution levels) the NRSV (1989) and the NIV (1984), render the first word "male prostitutes" or "sodomites", with the NIV 1984 translating the second as "homosexual offenders".

---

<sup>70</sup> p246

<sup>71</sup> p 51 *RPCA*

<sup>72</sup> cited in *Holiness and Sexuality*, p.68

<sup>73</sup> Gagnon, (notes taken from lecture, May, 2014): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyehH\\_SjHzM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyehH_SjHzM) - accessed 30 September, 2015

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*



Recent translations, espousing an 'essentially literal' translation practice, e.g. ESV (2001), translates the two words together as "men who practise homosexuality" with an explanatory footnote stating, "The two Greek terms refer to the passive and active partners in consensual homosexual acts". The NIV (2011) operates similarly, translating them together as "men who have sex with men". The Rt Rev Dr NT Wright states, "the two words which have been much debated, but which, experts have now established, clearly refer to the practice of male homosexuality. The two terms refer respectively to the passive or submissive partner and the active one"<sup>75</sup>.

Robert Gagnon<sup>76 77</sup>, begins discussion of this text by placing it in its context. Beginning at chapter 5, he names three groups of offenders which fill out the meaning of πορνεία (*porneia* - those who are sexually immoral). They are μοιχός - *moichos* (adulterer) and those represented by the above two words, *arsenokoites* and *malakos*.

*Arsenokoites*: comprising two words from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint - writing their New Testament in popular Greek). *Arsen-* men and *koite-* bed, at its most literal rendering, is 'men-bedders'. It occurs twice - 1 Corinthians 6v9-11 and 1 Timothy 1v10. This describes the active or penetrating role in homosexual sex. Prostitution (cultic or otherwise), committed same-sex relationships or pederasty are not narrowly in view.

*Malakos*: some suggest this word (occurring four times in the New Testament) equates to boy or young man, thus Paul is condemning pederasty (sexual activity between a man and a boy). However, its context does not allow for such a narrow rendering. The word, in the ancient world, has various cognates: e.g. in Philo of Alexandria, 'to describe men who actively feminise themselves for the purpose of attracting other men'. Surely, "Paul had in mind those who were lain with as though 'with a woman'(cf Leviticus 18v22 and 20v13)? Issues of exploitation and orientation were besides the point"<sup>78</sup>. It is used to mean "unmanly," "womanish," and "effeminate". The word in adjective form is also used to describe a woman's clothing (soft clothing) in (e.g.) Matthew 11v8. In 1 Corinthians 6, refers to males who match the woman's part in physical sex.

To narrow the meanings of these two words down to homosexual practice of a specific kind (e.g. pederasty, rape, religious/cultic, even committed, 'married' relationship) is to distort the words, and do injustice to their immediate context within 1 Corinthians 6 and, indeed, the context of the whole of Scripture.

"And such were some of you" (6 v 11, ESV) is the life-changing, behaviour-altering, Gospel of Christ's grace in action. Those who repent and cease sinful behaviour are included in the kingdom of God. Those once called adulterer, fornicator or thief, are now God's children by his adoption and grace. Those who want change in the Church's teaching about sexual behaviour are denying this possibility to others. Corinth was renowned for its prostitution, cultic and secular, gender 'mixing' and other behaviours in which the members of the Church there had once participated.

Paul didn't limit his criticism to a single behaviour, excusing certain permutations. Instead, he spoke in general terms. "Issues of sexual orientation would have been irrelevant to Paul because the Spirit of Christ was present within to counteract the sinful impulses operating in the flesh"<sup>79</sup>. Paul sought to rid the Corinthian Church of sexual immorality or *porneia* (any form of sexual relationship outside marriage). Holiness was adherence to apostolic teaching, warning (also) the Thessalonians to maintain sexual purity, equating control of their bodies to be God's sanctification and holiness (cf 1 Thessalonians 4v1-8). Same-sex sexual behaviour contradicts this.

---

<sup>75</sup> NT Wright, *Paul for everyone*, (London: SPCK Publishing, 2002)

<sup>76</sup> Gagnon, *The Bible and homosexual practice* (2001: Abingdon Press),

<sup>77</sup> Robert Gagnon and Daniel Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two views* (Pittsburgh: Augsburg Books, 2003), p82 (cited in *Report*)

<sup>78</sup> "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."

<sup>79</sup> Gagnon, *ibid* p83-84

#### 4) CONCLUSION

In light of Scripture, were the Church to change her teaching on human sexuality, accepting homosexual unions or practice, she will cease to be a faithful vessel for the work of Christ. Toleration of sexual immorality and dishonouring the marriage bed bring judgement and criticism from the risen Christ<sup>80</sup>. Any change is redefining the terms in which the Gospel is cast.

Pluralism, or holding together divergent views, is an impossibility. Agnosticism, or being uncertain on this question is listening to the world, not to Christ. Revising the Church's teaching is silencing God, who has spoken clearly in Scripture. Authentic Anglican comprehensiveness is based upon the received norms of Scripture. Absorbing society's current norms is impossible for the faithful Church.

The Rt Rev Dr NT Wright argues that Paul aspired for unity<sup>81</sup> within the Churches which included an assortment of people from different classes, cultures and genders. Paul permitted diversity in secondary matters where forbearance and love were to characterise their relationships. However, diversity on the issues of sexuality and marriage was never permitted. Instead, these behaviours "belonged to the dehumanising, anti-creation world of sin and death which could not be maintained in the reconciled family of the new creation"<sup>82</sup>.

It is time to *renew* our commitment to Christ's Gospel, and to proclaim it to a fallen, hungry and lost world. The 1998 Lambeth Conference, resolution 1:10, faithfully captures the teaching of Scripture and godly pastoral consideration. It expressed the overwhelming view of the Bishops, at the largest gathering in recent years. Those who have acted against the wishes of the majority of the Communion have brought schism. Change would be missionally disastrous.

In 2001, the Diocese of New Westminster formally authorised blessings for same-sex couples. In response, the Rev Dr JI Packer protested. He explained his reasons for doing so:

Why did I [oppose this decision]? Because, taken in its context, this decision falsifies the gospel of Christ, abandons the authority of Scripture, jeopardises the salvation of fellow human beings, and betrays the Church in its God-appointed role as the bastion and bulwark of divine truth.<sup>83</sup>

Christ asks us to remain faithful to him - nothing less.

#### Questions for consideration

- 1) What is the role of Holy Scripture in the life of the Church and the individual Christian?
- 2) What is your view on the origins of Holy Scripture?
- 3) Are the two opposing views reconcilable?
- 4) How will the Church pastor those for whom their same-sex attraction is unwanted?
- 5) Should the Church to bless same-sex unions?
- 6) What other aspects or principles of belief are open to revision should the Church change her mind on the issue of same-sex relationships?

---

<sup>80</sup> cf Revelation 2, 3 and Hebrews 13

<sup>81</sup> Atherstone A and Goddard A (edit), *A Good Disagreement: Grace and Truth in a Divided Church*, (London: Lion 2015)

<sup>82</sup> Atherstone A and Goddard A (edit), *ibid*, p70

<sup>83</sup> Packer, JI *A no to same-sex unions* (Oxford: Latimer Press, 2002)

## IV 3.4 The need for reform

### Introduction

The referendum on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015 amended the Constitution of Ireland to provide that marriage is recognised irrespective of the sex of the partners. The first such marriage took place in Clonmel on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015. Same-sex marriage legislation came into force in England and Wales on 13 March 2014 and Scotland on the 16 December 2014. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015 the Northern Ireland Assembly voted in favour of introducing legislation allowing for same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, but this was halted by a 'Petition of Concern' from the Democratic Unionist Party.

Among our friends and within our families we are likely to find those who wish to accord the same rights and privileges to all couples regardless of gender. Within the Church of Ireland there are couples of the same sex, who profess the Christian faith, are committed to their Church and live in a loving, caring, committed and faithful relationship with their partner.

Anecdotally, it is almost always true that if your sexual orientation is other than heterosexual, you will have suffered homophobia, discrimination and abuse. The choice for such people is to live in the closet, or suffer for being who you are. The Select Committee in its listening process heard from Church members who have endured deep hurt from Church authorities and members because of their sexual orientation.

As long ago as 1957 the Wolfenden report concluded that homosexuality was "compatible with full mental health". Although the scientific understanding of sexual orientation is incomplete, it is now generally accepted that for some people their attraction to people of the same sex is not a matter of choice but it is permanent and unchangeable.

Our Church is facing a profound challenge. There is a strong demand that the Church should change its teaching. There is a strong insistence that the Church's teaching on marriage is Biblical and should not be altered because it has become unpopular in wider society. The controversy has caused deep division within the Anglican Communion and within the Church of Ireland. Our tradition in the Church of Ireland, asserts that Scripture is the primary source of God's revelation as stated in Article Six of the Thirty-nine Articles.

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

In summarising the Church of Ireland publication *The Authority of Scripture*, Part II. p12ff of the Resource Guide, there is a helpful discussion on the Anglican Communion's tradition of using Scripture, Reason, Tradition and Experience to discern God's truth. In that paper a variety of views and emphasis are represented. However, because of the importance given to Scripture in the Church's foundational documents, the centrality of Scripture in every aspect of the Church's liturgy, and of Scripture's place in the private devotions of Church members it is essential that we examine carefully what the Bible teaches.

### Interpreting Scripture

"Texts do not 'contain' meaning in the same way that jugs contain milk; they require interpretation rather than simply being up-ended." (p20 above). We need to know more than what the text says. We need to know what the text means. This means taking time to discover what the 'text' meant to the original audience, in the cultural and religious context of that time and place; only then can we begin the process of understanding what the 'text' means to us today. Care must be taken by all sides, that we are not looking for proof texts to support our dearly held beliefs. All must approach the Scriptures humbly praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit who guides us to all Truth.

### The Texts

There are six or seven Biblical texts that speak about sexuality between people of the same sex. We will look at

each of them briefly. We will examine each text and ask what they mean for two people of the same sex who are 'in love', wish to make a life-long, exclusive commitment to one another, for better for worse, and would deeply wish that they could make that public covenant in Church, in the presence of God and the wider Christian family.

When we turn to the Scriptures you will not find an explicit affirmation of same-sex erotic unions. In fact wherever such activity is mentioned in scripture it is in a negative context. We need to understand why this is so.

1. Sexual orientation was a concept that simply wasn't present in Biblical times. As a consequence there is no word for homosexuality in the Bible. It was as late as the 1860s that different sexual orientations were first described. A German, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, was first to declare that homosexuals were a distinct class of individuals with a similar attraction to members of the same sex as heterosexuals had to members of the opposite sex. Prior to that it was generally assumed that people were heterosexual and homosexual behaviour was a deviant behaviour of heterosexual people.
2. Cultural differences are immense when we apply texts, some of which are thousands of years old, to contemporary society.
3. The world of the Old Testament was strongly patriarchal. Women were subordinate to men. Men's honour was esteemed and protected. This heavily influenced relationships between the sexes.
4. Scientific understand of biology, psychology, sociology anthropology etc. have a bearing on how we conduct human relationships and talk about them.

It is time to re-examine the Biblical texts.

First we should look at the Biblical account of creation in Genesis 2.

## 1 The creation stories

The creation of humankind is the pinnacle of God's creative work. The texts say nothing about homosexuality as such, but they are frequently referred to in discussions on human sexuality.

Genesis 1.26-31

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them". (v27)

What does it mean to be created in God's image? It can't be to do with sex as the Biblical understanding of God does not dwell on God's gender.

"Be fruitful and multiply [...] and have dominion." (v28) Creativity and stewardship of the created order are aspects of being made in the image of God. Clearly procreation is one aspect of creativity. However, procreation cannot define our God-likeness. Otherwise, those unable to have children, those who choose to remain single, or choose not to have children are somehow second-class human beings. The Bible illustrates how the single, childless life can be an honourable vocation. For Paul, being single was a vocation, and Jesus recognises a place for the single lifestyle devoted to the kingdom of God (Matthew 19.12b).

## GENESIS 2.18-25

The second creation story shows us that humankind is created for partnership. Being created in God's image means that humankind is essentially relational, created for relationship with God and with one another. The partnership of male and female is the means chosen for the continuance of the human race. God-given sexual desire and the longing for intimacy means it is "not good for the man to be alone" (v18) so God searches for a partner. No suitable partner was found among the rest of creation so God creates a woman. Adam's response is relief; "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (v23). This is the discovery of sameness, not of difference. Together they became 'one flesh'. The union of male and female is not to address 'incompleteness' but the problem of 'aloneness'. It is interesting that the word 'flesh' used here (the Hebrew term 'basar') means kinship circle and should not be taken to refer to the anatomical complementarity of Male and Female. The desire referred to here is to 'be family'. That is why a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh (family).

We need to remember that it is only recently (mid-nineteenth century) that homosexuality as a permanent

orientation was recognised. Sexual relations between two people of the same sex is not addressed in the creation stories. If 'it is not good for the man to be alone', who is the appropriate partner for the gay man, or lesbian woman?

## **2 Genesis 19.1-14 and Judges 19.1-30. Sodom and Gibeah**

### **Genesis 19 The Story**

God has decided to destroy Sodom because of its wickedness. Two messengers visit the city to see if there is a reason to reconsider. They plan to spend the night in the street but Lot offers them hospitality. Lot is not a citizen of Sodom: he is a 'resident alien'. The men and boys of the city hear that there are foreigners visiting Lot. They surround Lot's house insisting that Lot bring out his guests so that they may 'know' them (19.5). Lot is so upset that he offers to let the mob instead molest his two virgin daughters. At that time the honour of a woman was not as important as the sacred duty of hospitality. Just in time, the guests intervene and the mob is made blind. God's decision to destroy Sodom stands.

Scholars have argued whether the verb 'to know' means to find out information, or to have sexual relations. In either case no homosexual act took place. In the most extreme interpretation what was threatened was homosexual rape. This has nothing to do with what we know as same-sex loving, caring and faithful relationships.

It is interesting to note that Ezekiel 16.48-49 gives the reason for God's judgement on Sodom. 'This is the sin of Sodom; she and her suburbs had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not help or encourage the poor and needy. They were arrogant and this was abominable in God's eyes.' There is nothing said of the threat of homosexual rape.

### **Judges 19. A very similar story**

A Levite, escorting his runaway concubine back home to Ephraim has to spend the night in Gibeah. An old man, also from Ephraim and a resident alien in Gibeah offers the Levite and his concubine accommodation. The men of the city demand that the old man bring out his guest that they might 'know' him. The old man is so upset he offers to let them molest his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine rather than release his guest to the unruly mob. The men of Gibeah persist until the man pushes the concubine out the door. They 'know' her and abuse her all night. Next morning she is dead. The abomination was so appalling that the people of Israel went to war against Gibeah over the incident.

What do these stories say about a 'committed relationship of love freely entered into by two gay or two lesbian partners?' I suggest nothing at all.

## **3 Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13**

These verses fall within what is known as the Holiness Code (chapters 17-26). Some of the commands and promotions are for the entire people of Israel, and some are just for the priests. They prescribe the pure life that is required to worship God.

Ch 18 verse 22: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.'

Chapter 20 verse 13: 'If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.'

Let us look at the word "abomination" (to 'ebah). This is a technical word and refers to behaviour connected with the worship of other gods. Leviticus 18.3 clarifies this point. "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes". To 'lie with a male as with a woman' represents the lifestyle and worship of the Egyptians.

An "abomination" may be morally wrong or be what we would consider a 'rubric' (a rule for worship) which had significance because of their particular circumstances and experience. In the case of circumcision and

dietary practices for instance the biblical witness offers unambiguous theological rationale for declaring the law obsolete. So an abomination may not always be an abomination.

There are problems about the meaning of the phrase “If a man lies with a male as with a woman”. The phrase describes an impossibility. It may be an euphemism for anal intercourse or have some other meaning. However such behaviour (whatever it is) is forbidden. But if this part of the Holiness Code applies to Christians is for discernment. Some scholars suggest that Paul’s ‘creation’ of the word *arsenokotai* (men-sleepers = lie with) was to refer to these verses.

#### 4 Romans 1.24-27

##### The general context of Romans Chapters 1-3.

God has been generous to all people but they turned away to worship other gods (1.20-23). These idolatrous people are left to their own devices without God, and they become enmeshed in sinful acts and destructive behaviour. Paul lists examples of such behaviour (vs26-32), and he surprises the reader by saying “you are no better than they” (2.16) - “There is no one who is righteous, not even one (3.10). For all people, Jews and Gentiles there is only one escape: the grace of God freely offered to undeserving people and received through faith. A central point Paul makes in these chapters is found in these words “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others” (2.1).

Paul lists the ways in which humanity has ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie’, which results in a life dominated by uncontrollable lust and desire.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

<sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, <sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. <sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, <sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. <sup>32</sup> They know God’s decree, that those who practise such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practise them.

What are the ‘degrading passions’? (v26) Reference to women does not necessarily refer to lesbianism. It could refer to other forms of non-procreative sexual acts with men. The spilling of semen for any non-procreative purpose – in *coitus interruptus* (Onan in Gen. 38.1-11), male homosexual acts or male masturbation – was seen as tantamount to murder. Wasting of ‘the seed’ was condemned in scripture because in pre-scientific culture it was thought that it was the semen alone contained life. Women’s bodies were merely the nurturing environment for life received from the male partner. Jewish Biblical scholar and conservative Rabbi Jacob Milgrom explains that although lesbianism is attested in an old pre-Israelite Babylonian text, “there is a fundamental difference between the homosexual acts of men and women. In lesbianism there is no spilling of seed. Thus life is not symbolically lost, and therefore lesbianism is not prohibited in the Bible.”

What Paul is condemning in this passage was current in Roman society: heterosexuals consumed with passion, who were slaves to excessive lust, and seeking every possible means of self-gratification, no matter what the cost including homosexual acts of prostitution, child abuse and promiscuity. This does not apply to loving, committed, faithful relationships between a couple who share same-sex orientation.

#### 5 1 Corinthians 6. 9-10

The wider context of 1 Corinthians 5.1 - 6.20

Paul has heard that a man is living with his father’s wife (5.1). He is shocked at the immorality in the Corinthian Church. They are living in a very immoral society (5.9f) but Paul does not judge society, because

that is God's prerogative (5.12-13). But, says Paul, the Christian Church must have higher standards than pagan society and should expel from their congregation people who are guilty of immorality or greed, idolatry, drunkenness, or robbery (5.11 & 13). Paul then speaks of the disgrace it is for a Christian to take legal action against another Christian in a non-Christian court. (6.1-6). They should prefer to suffer injustice rather than do that (6.7-8). Christians are free people, but should not use their liberty for license (6.12). They should remember that they were washed, sanctified and justified (6.11). Their bodies are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit (6.19). They should avoid anything that would disrupt their union with Christ. Paul specifically warns the Corinthians against consorting with a prostitute (6.16f).

<sup>9</sup> Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, <sup>10</sup> thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (New Revised Standard Version)

However, the list in the Revised Standard Version speaks of 'homosexuals' rather than the NRSV's 'male prostitutes' and 'sodomites'. The difficulty is in the translation of two words in the Greek, 'malakoi' and 'arsenokoitai'. 'Malakoi' in Matthew and Luke's Gospels refers to soft clothing. What does Paul mean when he calls someone 'soft'? In secular Greek literature 'malakoi' had another meaning and referred to men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually. Hence the NRSV translated 'malakoi' as male prostitutes. Paul is rejecting the selling of sex and the exploitation of the young. 'Malakoi' certainly doesn't refer to a caring, loving, committed same sex relationship.

A second word is even more confusing. Paul is the first person to use the term "arsenokoitai". Literally it means "men-sleepers". Some suggest that as 'malakoi' and 'arsenokoitai' appear in this passage together Paul is condemning 'pederasty' when an older male (arsenokoitai) enjoys the sexual favours of a young male (malakoi). In this case it does not apply to loving, committed and faithful relationship of a same-sex couple.

## 6 1 Timothy 1.9-10

Here we find a list of vices which are contrary to 'sound teaching'. They are threatened with 'the law', not with exclusion from the kingdom as in 1 Corinthians 6.9 and Galatians 5.21

<sup>9</sup> This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> fornicators, sodomites, slave-traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching.

The list contains the word sodomites / arsenokoitai – see above.

### Conclusion of the Biblical Texts section

Whatever specific behaviours and relationships the Bible is condemning in the "seven passages" cannot be used to condemn committed same-sex unions today. These ancient texts are speaking against pagan practices, against pederasty and abuse, and against violations of commonly embraced standards of decency and "normality" that were part of the ancient world. As such, they cannot speak directly to committed, mutual, and loving same-sex unions in the contemporary church.

### The witness of Science

Reference should be made to the submission to the Select Committee from Professor Patrick Morrison at p 51 of the *Guide*. In addition to what has already been mentioned above we need to add the following:

Although scientific understanding of the precise reasons for sexual orientation of LGBT orientations is not known, recent research seems to point to the hypothesis that there is a genetic factor involved among others.

- There is probably a complex "biology of sexual orientation", but there are also developmental and psychological processes in early childhood, as well as culturally bound determinants throughout life.

- evidence that some 471 animal species exhibit various forms of same-gender sexual activity, including, in some cases, mating for life.
- We know that at least one in a thousand infants are born annually with a physical anatomy that cannot be clearly designated male or female.
- The professional psychiatric bodies have stated that homoerotic desire is not a mental illness or disorder, but internalised homophobia is a problem.
- Research has demonstrated that, for a certain small percentage of people, a same-gender sexual orientation is experienced as a given rather than a straightforward choice.
- Psychiatrists have shown that even the most severe aversion therapies are incapable of permanently and reparatively (as opposed to conscious decision making) altering minority sexual identities to heterosexuality (Beckstead, 2012; Dickinson et al, 2012).
- There is probably a complex “biology of sexual orientation”, but there are also developmental and psychological processes in early childhood, as well as culturally bound determinants throughout life.

It seems likely that science will gain more and more evidence that homoerotic sexual orientation for certain people is not a choice, but a permanent disposition.

### **What now?**

#### **A question**

- Have we as a Church imposed on our interpretation of scripture (1) an inadequate analysis of human sexuality, including the cultural complexity of homosexuality, and (2) an idyllic vision of modern family life imposed on Scripture?

#### **A finding**

- The moral logic underpinning the negative portrayal of same-sex eroticism in Scripture does not directly address committed, loving, consecrated same-sex relationships today.

#### **An Agreement**

- The vast majority of Church members on both sides of the debate agree that the behaviour that Paul speaks of in Romans 1 is rightly rejected and identified as an expression of sinfulness and idolatry, even if we disagree about the reasons Paul has for rejecting the behaviour.

#### **A Challenge**

- As the Church has changed its views on slavery, women’s ministry, remarriage of divorced persons in Church, contraception etc., can we welcome members of the LGBT community as full members of our Christian community?

### **The way forward**

- We acknowledge that we have difficulty in living with difference. We label ourselves and others Protestant/Catholic, Unionist/Nationalist, Men/Women, Gay/Straight etc. As individuals and groups we need an identity declaring who we are and who we belong to. But as studies on sectarianism have shown it is when we harden the boundaries so that we consider those who are different as less respectable, less worthy, of less significance than ourselves we are heading for blatant prejudice. When we stereotype others rather than seek to know them we are in danger of damaging our own Christian profession.
- We need to meet across the boundaries of difference to engage in the difficult conversations as we discern God’s will for our Church. Resources have been created to show how we can create a safe space and non-judgemental context where we can really listen to one another.
- We need to bear in mind the deep suffering and trauma that some Church members (and others) have suffered because of the present teaching of the Church and how it is presented.
- We need to acknowledge the hurt we have caused, intentionally or through our ignorance to members of the LGBT community.
- We need to remember that as Christians our identity is not in who we are, or what we have done, or how much we have achieved. Our identity is ‘in Christ’, as recipients of God’s grace we know we are accepted and loved, and nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord



(Romans 8.39).

It is in this faith, that we are released from a search for identity over against others. We are released from our instinct to win people's approval. We are free to be ourselves, 'in Christ'. That is the miracle which the Church potentially can demonstrate in its membership and life.

'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' Galatians 3.28

Our LGBT Church of Ireland members are asking us to do no more.

## IV.6. Some Personal Testimonies

I was born into a Christian family, my mum being a housewife and my father is a Pastor in an independent evangelical Pentecostal movement based in Africa. I grew up with a strict conservative Bible-based teaching, one being that homosexuality was wrong. At 12/13 I was going to conferences where people would stand up and say they had been healed and set free from homosexuality. That God didn't love gay people, that they were demonized by the devil etc.

I knew from a young age that I wasn't like everyone else, and it was only when I kissed a girl I realized what it was, this made me hate myself. Suddenly at all these meetings I was enthralled by every word spoken, looking to many ex-gays as a role model, I read all ex-gay ministry/healing books I could get my hands on – I didn't want to be that sexually broken person. I prayed, and then prayed some more, I decided I was the ultimate girly girl, I had my bedroom painted pink and became the epitome of a 'good Christian girl' but still my feelings didn't go away and I was starting to hate myself, I couldn't understand why God wouldn't take these feelings away and in child-like innocence I started to believe that God hated me and was punishing me.

Shortly after my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday I came home from school and I looked in the mirror and hated what I saw looking back at me – a queer, a sinner someone doomed for the pits of hell. I broke a photo-frame in my bedroom and took a shard of glass to my face. This is when I decided to see a Christian "Therapist". For almost 3 years I saw this man and his wife; they prayed, they exorcised but there was no change – I still liked girls. So I came to the only conclusion I could – God made me this way, after all he knew my plans since the beginning of time. It was only when I accepted myself that my relationship with God started to become a reality.

When I came out, my family cut me off and I was asked to leave the church. After a time of seclusion and wondering where I was going to worship I came across St George's and I found a new family who embraced me for everything I was (including being a lesbian) and while it wasn't a church of my original tradition, it is a church where I have grown spiritually and was subsequently confirmed, and I am now privileged to call my home amongst family and friends I cherish.

## *No Greater Love*

### *Introduction*

I am a believer and committed Christian who loves the Lord, His Word and His Church, but I am also a woman who struggles with same-sex attraction, and have done so for most of my life. This has caused me much pain, depression, shame, brokenness, despair, isolation, loneliness and disappointment.

### *The journey of acceptance*

This struggle has been a long process for me and I am learning the secret of being content in my circumstances, through Christ's strength working in me. I have known the peace of God which surpasses all understanding and I am thankful to the Lord for He has been so gracious, loving, kind, patient and faithful to me, teaching me truths from His word and helping me understand my identity in Christ. Knowing that I belong to Him, that I am loved, accepted, chosen and called for a purpose helps me to understand my real identity.

### *Life in the Word*

For me personally, in God's Word I have found strength, grace, power, faith and hope but most of all I have encountered the Saviour in a deeper way in the midst of everything I have been through. His Word sustains me, challenges me, transforms me, renews me, restores me, prunes me and carries me to this very day. God's Word has to be the final authority in any believer's life and it has been my constant light and guide, despite my struggle.

### *Life by the Spirit*

I believe that God has given Christians the Holy Spirit to empower us to live lives that honour and glorify Him. We are overcomers and conquerors in Christ. There also needs to be a 'taking off' of the old and a 'putting on' of the new – as Paul talks about in Ephesians 4.22. Renewing the mind is vital for that is where the battle begins. Taking thoughts captive transforms our thinking. Dying to self and to our fleshly desires should be a daily request of every Christian as well as asking the Holy Spirit to fill us and to help us live a Godly life that pleases the Father. Jesus himself said that we are to take up our cross and follow Him. The Christian life is a life of sacrificial living. Dying to self is only possible when we keep in step with His Spirit - Galatians 6.25.

### *Real Christian friends you can be real with*

It is a great blessing to me to have two or three friends that I can be real with – no masks needed. I can share my heart with them, especially when I am struggling and feeling down. They can pray with me and for me. If you are in that place of struggle, I would recommend that you find someone whom you can trust. The Lord will direct you and show you who you can open up to. It's always a weight lifted when you can bring things to light, as the secret silence will no longer have a hold on you.

### *The Church – compassionate but must never compromise on the truth*

The body of Christ and its leaders must never compromise on the truth or the authority of God's Word in its teaching on homosexual practice as the Bible is very clear about what is wrong and is very clear about God's design for marriage. However, the church needs to edify those who struggle with same-sex attraction but who have chosen to remain celibate out of their love for Christ. Biblically, same-sex attraction is unnatural, unlike other struggles that Christians face. However, I believe that the church body must display compassion to those who are struggling in this area and draw alongside them. Church on a Sunday can be the hardest place to be for those with this struggle, as it's full of families, couples and children, which is great but also a difficult reminder that this is something you will never experience yourself. In those times, I try to fix my eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith.

### *Conclusion*

As Christians, we are all called to live holy, upright lives. The truth must always be spoken in love and compassion without compromise must be shown. There will be some people with this struggle who God will transform from their desires and they will therefore end up marrying someone of the opposite sex. There will be some who will choose to remain celibate and, with God's grace, live only for Him. There will be some who will live a double life, with one foot in the Church and the other in homosexual practice. I have chosen the celibate life. The Psalmist reminds me in Psalm 62 that 'my soul finds rest in God alone. My salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress and I shall never be shaken.' This truth helps me deal with my struggle every single day.

To be honest, I never thought that I would be the person chosen to support friends struggling with same-sex attraction. Well, not Christian friends anyway. But over the past number of years that is exactly what God has called me to do. Four close Christian friends of mine have 'come out' to me, admitting that they are confused about their sexuality. To say that each revelation was easier than the one before would be dishonest. I was shocked to my core. Strangely though, in each case I had my suspicions. Small things that they said and done struck me as being unusual. However, to me, Christianity and homosexuality were polar opposites. In my mind I could not contemplate that a true, lifelong Christian would be struggling with this issue. Clearly I was wrong. Each of these four individuals deals with their struggle differently. One lives a celibate, Godly but lonely life. One has a secret, same-sex partner whilst still attending church and living a lie. The other two seem to dip in and out of the homosexual lifestyle when the struggle becomes too much to bear. All four struggle with their identity and personal relationships. They all fail to get close to anyone for fear of being found out. My role as their friend has been sharpened, challenged and changed since the revelations. After an initial period of feeling shocked, and in some cases feeling fooled and deceived, I had to learn to rely on God to support me as I supported them with this struggle. Details of one night stands when they 'fell' were discussed. Details of their feelings of despair, anger, frustration, shame and suicide attempts were discussed.

The more I heard, the more I felt pulled down and the more helpless I felt. Do I listen and support my friend? Would that be condoning their behaviour? Should I try to point out biblical truths and try to turn them from their sinful ways? Should I tell someone else who may have more expertise in this area even though my friend had sworn me to secrecy? Their depression and feelings of self-loathing seemed to impact on me nearly as much as it did them. Eventually God showed me very clearly that I was to love them. Full Stop. Not judge them or avoid them or try to fix them or change them. Simply love them. And Pray for them. The rest God would do. Only God could do.

I still struggle at times when I hear details about how they have 'fallen'. I struggled particularly when I had to meet the same-sex partner of one friend. Would it mean accepting his sin if I was accepting his partner? As a friend, I want my friends to be happy, content and free. For some, living the celibate, lonely life was killing them. They felt like frauds in the Church. For others, celibacy and total reliance on God was the only way to go. From my point of view, the ones who live the homosexual life in secret are causing themselves more and more damage and they are growing further and further away from God. Some blame God of course. Why has He made me this way? Why won't He take these feelings away? Those are questions I can't answer so I just listen. And pray. It helps when we discuss the truth that the Bible does not only call homosexuality an abomination. It condemns all sexual sin. This helps but it doesn't stop my friends from feeling that their struggle is somewhat more offensive and unforgiveable to God.

As someone who supports Christians with same-sex attraction, I feel that there is no support within the Church. The Church seems to have turned a blind eye to this growing problem. I have heard no sermon on the topic. I see no attempt to challenge or even speak with those who are very clearly living a homosexual lifestyle. It saddens and worries me. And there is no support for someone like me who carries the burden of supporting people with this struggle. I feel helpless and often useless. However, God gives me the love, grace and peace to continue. Jesus paid the price for ALL sin, including sexual sin. So I will continue to love and support my friends, trusting that God will do the rest.

## Part V. Dealing with Disagreement

### V. 1. Understanding the Other

#### When Christians disagree

The fact that Christians disagree shouldn't surprise us. From the earliest days of the Church, and throughout the pages of the New Testament, we read of Christians disagreeing with one another. The fact that members of our Church disagree is almost inevitable, but as faithful followers of Jesus Christ we will speak the truth in love<sup>84</sup> and our disagreements will be characterised by mutual love.<sup>85</sup>

Frequently when I am told of a dispute or argument, I immediately feel the need to take sides and quickly am convinced what needs to be done! But often on such occasions, initial perception of the problem and the solution were wrong. Bitter experience has taught me that before I make a decision I need to listen to all those involved. Almost always there is much more to the problem than I first realised, and the resolution is very different from my 'instant solution'.

Scripture encourages us to be peacemakers,<sup>86</sup> to love our enemies,<sup>87</sup> to maintain our unity as Christians<sup>88</sup> and to seek reconciliation.<sup>89</sup> It follows then, that when a disagreement arises in the Church, much more is at stake than just winning an argument. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus requires more of us than knowing what we believe, and refuting those who have another opinion. As Christians we are called to respect deeply those with whom we profoundly disagree. A good test as to whether we truly understand 'the other' is being able to take their place and argue their stance convincingly. This requires an act of generous love particularly if our opponents' perspective is one with which we profoundly disagree and makes us feel very uncomfortable.

'Understanding the other' takes an investment of our time, courage and self-control in equal measure and generosity of Spirit. Our attitude, words and actions should express our love for the enemy and our obedience to Jesus who instructed his followers to do just that. That will also involve keeping confidences, refusing to bully or dominate others, while genuinely seeking what is best for those we oppose.

Listening to another requires self-awareness on our part, paying attention to feelings within us such as anger, impatience, the impulse to judge, and our feelings of fear and powerlessness. What is happening within us can be so powerful that it is impossible to hear the other person at all. To truly understand the other requires empathy; putting aside our thoughts and feelings in order to pay full attention to the person's words and tone of voice, body language, and their emotions. It requires getting in touch with *their* interior world, what it means *to be* that person, here and now, in *this* conversation with you.

Resolving difficulties in the Church will include meeting with all those involved, listening, praying, and openly sharing together in a spirit of mutual respect, as we discern how the Holy Spirit is leading us to the truth.

#### The Church of Ireland Listening Process

Civil partnerships, and more recently the provision of legislation for same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland and in Great Britain, have highlighted a diversity of views on the subject within the Church of Ireland community. General Synod was faced with the question of how to respond to the diversity of views within the Church when it was clear that discussing the appropriate expression of human sexuality can arouse deep emotions. In November 2011 the Standing Committee met and welcomed the decision of the Archbishops and Bishops to hold a conference and authorised the Honorary Secretaries to invite members of the General Synod when requested.

---

<sup>84</sup> Ephesians 4.15

<sup>85</sup> 1 John 4.21

<sup>86</sup> Matthew 5.9

<sup>87</sup> Matthew 5.44

<sup>88</sup> John 17.22

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 5.23-24

This is how the conference was announced.

*The conference will examine the teaching of scripture, the current stance of the Church of Ireland, and contemporary understanding of the nature of human sexuality. While conference proceedings are not open to members of the media or the public – to facilitate a free exchange of views, to encourage respectful listening and at the personal request of some of the contributors – an update and any conference statement will be made available at [www.ireland.anglican.org](http://www.ireland.anglican.org) on Friday and Saturday evenings.*

*The conference programme will include round-table discussions; Biblical explorations on the Old Testament, the Gospels and texts of St Paul; worship; a storytelling session where individuals will share from their personal experiences; and a range of seminars. These seminars will examine: scientific perspectives; parental perspectives; handling conflict in the church; the issue of gay clergy; legal aspects relating to recent legislative changes; pastoral responses to the welcoming of gay people in the church; and the theological/hermeneutical background to the issues. No formal decisions will be taken at this conference as that business belongs properly to a meeting of the General Synod.*

The conference took place in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Co Cavan in March 2012 over 24 hours, and 450 members of General Synod participated. Despite the large number of participants and the shortage of time the report of the conference was positive.

*The climate was one of respectful dialogue, all the more valuable for its structured mixing of people who have not before come together or conversed in such depth...In conclusion, we ask those who have attended to reflect on what they have heard and experienced and to continue the process of talking to each other in their homes, parishes and communities.*

Clearly more needed to be done. The wider Church needed to be involved. It was decided that the Dioceses of the Church of Ireland should take the discussion forward. Dioceses from different parts of Ireland were grouped into threes, and following work within each individual diocese, a tripartite conference would be held to further the conversation throughout the whole Church. (*Reports of three of the four tripartite conversations can be found above, on pages 36-38*)

In 2013 General Synod established 'The Select Committee on Human Sexuality within the Context of Christian Belief' to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process on all issues concerning human sexuality in the context of Christian belief to continue.

### **General Synod**

At some point the discussion on human sexuality will have to take place on the floor of the General Synod. The outcome of this discussion is of great importance to all in the Church. But how can General Synod deal with such an emotive subject where there is a wide diversity of belief, opinion, experience, and opposing criteria for 'success' for such discussions? This is no easy task. Many people find discussion of sex and sexuality deeply uncomfortable. The subject is also very personal and involves deeply held beliefs. For some this discussion revives experiences of deep hurt from the past. Can General Synod provide the safe and supportive space for such intensely personal conversation? When we are ready to put this item on the Agenda of General Synod we may well need to prioritise listening and discernment more than the cut and thrust of debate.

We could learn a lot from the experience of the Church of England General Synod which I attended in July 2013. Many members came to this meeting with great apprehension. At their previous meeting the debate on the consecration of women bishops became so heated and personal that some members were deeply concerned about what would happen at the July 2013 meeting. Many feared that grave damage would be done to individual relationships and there could be lasting damage to the unity of the Church. However, following a suggestion from the Archbishop of Canterbury, during the three day meeting in July, Standing Orders were suspended and for a whole day, General Synod members met in small groups with a trained facilitator listening to what each person wished to say about the agenda item and the wider context of the episcopal ordination of women. In the small group discussion, assisted by a facilitator, opposing views were able to be expressed while maintaining mutual respect. The result was remarkable. When General Synod resumed its

business, the contributions were sensitive, factual, and constructive. A way was opened for the Synod to move forward avoiding catastrophe.

Members of the Church of Ireland General Synod may well need such careful preparation before proceeding to vote on such sensitive issues.

### **Lessons on how to have positive results from difficult conversations**

Care needs to be taken to create a 'safe space' where each person feels free to speak what they hold true.

We should move from speaking *about* the other and to real engagement *with* the other.

It is helpful to share as openly as possible while respecting those who differ.

Fear should be acknowledged. Sex and Sexuality can be difficult to discuss. People may feel very vulnerable. They may fear conflict or the possibility of change. They may feel out of their depth on ethical or biblical matters, and fear being coerced or pressurised.

Sensitivity is needed in how we express ourselves, being aware of the implications of what we are saying for a person of a different sexual orientation. Insults should be avoided and if they occur should be attended to thoroughly.

Generalisations should be avoided (*we all believe...*) and each person should accept personal responsibility for what they contribute (*I believe....*). This enables a real encounter between different individuals and different views.

We must avoid offensive terminology, and allow each person to define how they wish to be referred to.

Taking care of time is important. Making sure that the discussion is not dominated by one or two members is important – this can effectively silence others in the group.

A trained facilitator can be of great assistance in enabling good conversations.

### **Group Contract for difficult conversations**

For a small group to work positively on contentious issues it is necessary that the members agree some ground rules. These can be summarised as agreeing 'to relate to others in the way you wish others to relate to you'.

At the Cavan Conference the members of the Small Table groups were invited to give the following commitment to each other:

I will contribute to an atmosphere of trust and openness in the group.

I will listen to the other members of the group.

I will speak for myself, and not use generalisations about others.

I will respect each person in the group, whether I agree with them or not.

I will ensure that everyone has enough time to speak.

I will observe Chatham House rules for conversations during the conference and what I say after the conference (i.e. I can share what was said in the group, but not who said it).

I will not use Twitter, Facebook or other media to update friends during the conference.

Jesus summed up the law by emphasising relationships.<sup>90</sup> As a Christian Church it is not only important that we come to the right conclusion, it is also important how we get there.

Over recent years the study of conflicts and how to move beyond them has developed.

#### *Conflict Resolution - Problem Focused*

In the late 1960s and 70s Conflict Resolution focused on bringing an end to the conflict. However, it became apparent that although some aspects of the conflict may have been addressed, other contentious aspects remained. Also 'ending conflict' as a goal is short-sighted as conflict can provide opportunities for learning and growing. 'Conflict resolution' focusses on the 'problem' dimension of the conflict, finding resolution to the actual issues.

---

<sup>90</sup> Mark 12:30-31

### *Conflict Management - Process Focused*

In the late 1980s the development of Conflict Management focused on limiting the damage caused by a conflict, and keeping the expression of conflict within 'acceptable' limits. It did this by exploring the patterns of conflict and relationship that led to the conflict and sought to predict future patterns and adjust them. However, in human interaction, predictable patterns of behaviour are only of limited value.

'Conflict Management' focuses on the 'process' dimension to find ways to work through conflict.

### *Conflict Transformation - Relationship Focused*

More recently 'Conflict Transformation' has built on the methods already learnt and extends the goal beyond ending something destructive to include also building something desired for the future. It explores what happens in conflict, what we want to happen and how we can work together for mutual benefit. 'Conflict Transformation' begins with and focuses more heavily on the *people* involved and on their 'relationship' with each other.

### **Conclusion**

It seems that *Conflict Transformation* is what we should aspire to, keeping to the fore our relationship with others holding a different view. Difficult conversations need *prayer*, a reminder of God's love, for us and for the other. It is in loving God and our neighbour as ourselves that we will behave how God wishes, and we will grow together more fully into the image of Christ.

Words spoken by Jesus in the context of a conflict remind us "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."<sup>91</sup> It is helpful to seek a continual awareness of the presence of Christ in the midst of conflict.

+Trevor            5th February 2015

---

<sup>91</sup> Matthew 18.20.



## **The Conversation Continues – A further note by the Chairman**

As this *Guide* reaches its conclusion, members of the Select Committee who have worked on it for two and a half years are deeply aware that it is not a conclusion as such. Equally, we are conscious of its inadequacies and its failure to satisfy what many people may hope that it would provide for the Church of Ireland, namely a *guide to where the Church of Ireland goes from here*, rather than what it is: a record of submissions and contributions, the totality of which represent views to which no one member of the Select Committee could possibly agree in their entirety. It is intended as a response to the remit given to the Select Committee, ‘to enable the listening, dialogue and learning process’; a remit that the committee has been conscious of at each meeting and in the preparation of all documents.

In view of the concern that the *Guide* is not misinterpreted in either its nature or in its intention, this conclusion indicates that it (i.e. the *Guide* itself) should be seen as part of an on-going process. It reflects the fact that we have listened to each other, but it does not consciously relate the interaction – indeed how could it? The points of personal and heart-felt sharing are not there, nor the difficult times when we have attempted to evaluate or test one another’s assertions, nor the strained moments of seeking to say things in love that we know may hurt, or upset, or offend. It does not, and cannot, speak of the laughter and tears, the anger and incomprehension, the sighs, and moments that hold both the depression and exhilaration; the pessimism and the optimism that we as feeling, emotional beings, prayerfully struggling with matters that trouble us, look in hope, trust and faith, for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of Scripture.

We are concerned, lest the inclusion of material in this document is perceived by the wider Church as indicating that the members of the Select Committee accept the validity of the position contained in each included piece of work. That cannot be the case. There are contributions here which provoke a variety of responses in all of us, ranging from submissions with which we fully identify, through those which challenge us, but make what we perceive to be valid points, to those with which we would reject as wrong thinking. Yet, in all of this, our fellowship has been strengthened and our understanding increased.

We have learned much from this process. It has given us the opportunity to hear directly from men and women who belong to the Church of Ireland and of their experiences as same-sex attracted members of our Church, but it could be interpreted that the overall tone of this document creates the sense that the task of the church (and the Christians who make it up) is *simply* to listen, and then to find ways of living with the diverse range of opinions which exist. It has been suggested that our task is to learn to ‘disagree agreeably’ and indeed this is a point of view that could be justifiably represented, but others feel strongly that whilst we *should* listen to each other, indeed we *must* listen, ultimately, to listen alone is insufficient. Our listening enables us to speak with care, thought and compassion, but nonetheless to speak Christ’s gospel which calls all of us, not simply to be ourselves, but to experience God’s grace as we turn to Him in repentance and faith.

This *Guide* contains material which reflects various views on Christian human sexuality. In that respect it should be useful in informing our understanding, but its contents need to be read carefully and evaluated critically by all who seek to be faithful followers of Christ. This comment, in itself, may be made by people in very diverse places on the spectrum of axiomatic starting-points on same-sex issues and the Church.

The *Guide* provides information, but little analysis of that information; valuable records of contributions which groups and individuals have made, but largely without comment, evaluation or response. The Select Committee has sought to model how Christian people ought to respectfully engage with one another when considering matters of contention in the field of human sexuality; has assembled these submissions, and arranged them in such a way that they provide a consistent and balanced account of how and why the Church of Ireland has reached the position of examining its teaching on same-sex issues, including marriage. Beyond that is beyond the remit of the Select Committee. Further reflection and detailed study, for the Church of Ireland is inevitable and it is to be hoped, such reflection and study will be helped by this *Guide to the conversation* [...] and, perhaps, General Synod may, in due course, direct its Select Committee to take further steps and undertake a more critical examination, but until that time, this work is offered with the prayer that the light of Christ will continue to illumine our way.

John Mann

## Appendix A

### Anglican Communion Events and Documents

1948 [Lambeth Conference](#)

'Marriage always entails a life-long union and obligation; [this Conference] is convinced that upon the faithful observance of this divine law depend the stability of home life, the welfare and happiness of children, and the real health of society.'

The Bishops called for education programmes to reduce divorce, forbade remarriage of divorced people in church. The Bishops also warned Anglicans not to marry Roman Catholics.

1958 [Lambeth Conference](#)

Bishops were asked to offer relationship guidance in their dioceses emphasising forgiveness and participation in worshipping life to limit the number of divorces. They understood that while some were divorced in the eyes of the secular state, they were still married in the understanding of the church and others married in the eyes of the state were not married in the eyes of the church. They recognised the complexity of this.<sup>92</sup>

They recommended planned parenting, supporting the use of contraception.

1968 [Lambeth Conference](#)

Bishops politely, but firmly, rejected the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and encouraged family planning through contraception. They clearly and firmly rejected compromise on polygamy.

1978 [Lambeth Conference](#)

Commended to the church 'the need for theological study of sexuality in such a way as to relate sexual relationships to that wholeness of human life which itself derives from God, who is the source of masculinity and femininity.'

'While we reaffirm heterosexuality as the scriptural norm, we recognise the need for deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality, which would take seriously both the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research. The Church, recognising the need for pastoral concern for those who are homosexual, encourages dialogue with them.'

1988 [Lambeth Conference](#)

They identified strains on Christian marriages – including clergy marriages – young people engaging in pre-marital sex and 'the life-styles being adopted by many people today.'

The Bishops endorsed monogamy, but offered rules that allowed polygamists the opportunity to be welcomed as full members under strict conditions. It was seen as a liberalising move.

They endorsed Lambeth 1978 and called for homosexuality to be understood in a human rights framework and called for study.

1978 to 1998

Both the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACoC) responded to the calls for study of homosexuality taking into account scientific study and studies of Scripture. Few, if any, other Provinces took these Lambeth Conference resolutions seriously.

1995 [The St Andrews Day Statement](#)

The Church of England Evangelical Council sought to establish principles for good debate and a firm statement of where the church was in that debate.

1997 [The Kuala Lumpur Statement](#)

A statement of the Second Global South Encounter, affirming marriage between a man and a woman as the only Biblical norm, and listing a number of 'pastoral problems.' These were 'sexual promiscuity, including homosexuality, rape and child abuse.'

1998 Pre-Lambeth Conference Official Paper '[Called to Full Humanity](#)'

It affirmed traditional marriage, asked for a moratorium on the blessing of same sex unions and on ordaining those in active homosexual relationships. However the committee said: 'We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical,

---

<sup>92</sup> The 1958 resolutions are of interest as it shows that this is not the first time that the state definitions of marriage have diverged from church laws. In the future churches in Ireland may have to grapple with pastoral contexts where a man and a woman come for marriage and one has previously been married in the eyes of a state, but to a same sex partner. Are they divorced in the eyes of the church, or was their previous relationship not a marriage?

and scientific questions which are raised.'

1998 Lambeth Conference

A considerable majority rejected the idea that the Scriptures were 'unclear.' They also rejected the Kuala Lumpur Statement and amendments from Nigeria and elsewhere that said homosexuality was a sin.

#### [Resolution I.10 - Human Sexuality](#)

This Conference:

- a. commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality;
- b. in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;
- c. recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;
- e. cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;
- f. requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;
- g. notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.

1999 – 2002 [International Conversation of Bishops on Human Sexuality](#)

The Archbishop of Canterbury commissioned a consensus process that included leading figures from North America, the UK and Africa that proposed a consensual way forwards.

2002 Diocese of New Westminster, ACoC

Concluded a 'listening to homosexual persons' by the bishop authorising a limited number of parishes to bless same sex unions.

2003 Diocese of New Hampshire, TEC

Gene Robinson – a divorced man in a partnered same sex relationship – was elected as Bishop in New Hampshire in June 2003 and the decision confirmed at General Convention. After a hastily convened Primates' Meeting (below), he was consecrated Bishop in November 2003.

2003 Alternative Episcopal Oversight in North America and Recife (Brazil)

During this period some parishes and even dioceses in the USA and Canada sought oversight from overseas bishops and primates they considered 'orthodox'.

2003 [Church of Ireland Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality](#)

2003 [Primates' Meeting](#)

The 2003 Primates' Meeting recognised the autonomy of the provinces of the Communion but made a special plea that if the consecration of Gene Robinson went ahead: 'the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy' and 'tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level'.

They asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to extend a commission considering 'his own role in maintaining communion within and between provinces when grave difficulties arise' to 'include urgent and deep theological and legal reflection on the way in which the dangers we have identified at this meeting will have to be addressed.' Lord Eames was asked to chair that commission.

2004 [The Windsor Report](#)

The Lambeth Commission on Communion proposed a moratorium on the blessing of same sex unions, the ordination and consecration of gay clergy in active sexual relationships and on the crossing of provincial and diocesan boundaries. TEC and the ACoC were asked to voluntarily step down from the Instruments of Communion, but also asked to report urgently to the same Instruments.

A 'Covenant' was proposed to order Communion life and a design group began work in 2006.

They called for all provinces actively to participate in processes of listening to 'homosexual persons' and to

enter into serious study of science, scripture and tradition. A Facilitator was appointed in 2006.

2005 Church of Uganda [Position Paper on Scripture, Authority, and Human Sexuality](#)

The Church of Uganda issued a clear and thorough argument in preparation for the ACC.

2005 [Anglican Consultative Council](#) (ACC – 13), Nottingham

TEC was invited to set out a theological basis for the inclusive welcome of LGBT Christians and did so in [To Set our Hope on Christ](#) which focused on the reasons for encouraging the ordination of gay people perceived to be faithful and called. The complaint that they had ‘short-circuited’ the process was met with the observation that all provinces had had 25 years to engage in such study.

The ACC resolved to appoint a facilitator to monitor the work of all provinces and to enable them in their own processes of listening to gay people and expressly to enable mutual listening across provinces.

2005 Church of England Bishops [Pastoral Statement](#) on Civil Partnerships

The statement confirmed church teaching but allowed prayers to be said for civil partners and clergy to enter into civil partnerships that were not sexually active.

2006 [Global South Primates’ Meeting](#), Kigali

The Primates or representatives of 24 provinces called for the formation of a separate ecclesial structure in North America to replace TEC, with a single leader and temporarily under the wing of Global South Primates. They called themselves the Anglican Communion Network.

2007 [Primates’ Meeting, Dar es Salaam](#)

The Primates approved of the [Don’t Throw Stones](#) statement and commissioned a book called [The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality](#).

One side demanded a binding commitment on all to cease both the blessing same sex unions and the ordination of partnered gay people permanently, but reserved the right to intervene in North America. Others reserved the right to make decisions on such matters of theology and liturgy themselves, but demanded that there was an end to episcopal oversight from churches outside North America.

2008 [Global Anglican Futures Conference \(GAFCON\)](#), Jerusalem

Attended by six Primates, 300 bishops and 800 others, it was billed as a pilgrimage and marked by excellent worship. The delegates were presented with a confession of faith called the [Jerusalem Declaration](#).

2008 [Lambeth Conference](#)

Many voices, with Bishop Thabo Makgoba leading the way and promoting [Indaba](#), called for a resolution free Lambeth Conference. [Bishops spoke](#) in positive terms of developing relationships and being prepared for mission and ministry.

Four provinces – Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda – boycotted the conference completely or nearly completely, but the ‘Network’ bishops from North America attended.

2009 [Primates’ Meeting](#), Alexandria

The Primates’ Meeting was not boycotted. The Primates strongly endorsed The Windsor Continuation Group’s (WCG) call for enhanced mutual listening. The WCG had been meeting from 2008 and their desire for processes based on the Lambeth Indaba for mutual listening was amplified.

2009 [ACC-14](#), Jamaica

ACC 2009 endorsed [Continuing Indaba](#) as a response to the call of the Primates in Alexandria. It was to seek process models from across Africa, Asia and the rest of the Communion in accord with Scripture and the traditions of the church, especially emphasising the world views of non-western peoples. It was also commissioned to run a pilot programme.

The Covenant was delayed until the revised Section 4 had been reviewed.

2009 [Rt Revd Mary Glasspool Elected Bishop in Los Angeles](#)

The first partnered lesbian Bishop.

2009 [Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion \(SCAC\)](#)

The SCAC defeated by a decisive majority motions excluding TEC and ACoC from the Communion, condemning their actions and reaffirming calls for a moratorium of the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of gay clergy and bishops.

2011 [Primates’ Meeting, Dublin](#)

The Primates prayed and studied the Bible together, sharing their concerns. The Primates of Burundi and

Congo<sup>93</sup> had asked for gender based violence to be considered and the Primates encouraged significant action that has been followed up.

They also took time to describe [the essence of being Primates in the Anglican Communion](#):

‘In our common life in Christ we are passionately committed to journeying together in honest conversation. In faith, hope, and love we seek to build our Communion and further the reign of God.’

Seven Primates expressly boycotted the 2011 Primates Meeting with others staying away because of declared sickness or sickness of relatives and one with a visa issue.

2012 [General Convention TEC](#)

Convention passed a resolution calling for the preparation of liturgies for blessing same-gender relationships.

2013 C of E House of Bishops [Statement Regarding Clergy in a Civil Partnership as Candidates for the Episcopate](#)

The House confirmed that clergy in civil partnerships, and living in accordance with the teaching of the Church on human sexuality, can be considered as candidates for the episcopate. This was [condemned](#) by Global South Anglican.

2013 [ACC – 15](#)

There was no boycott of the 2013 ACC and TEC and ACoC were in full attendance. In his final [Presidential Address](#) Archbishop Rowan set out the complexity of the dialogue between autonomy and mutuality.

The ACC did not discuss human sexuality and this was a deep frustration for a few, with one Kenyan Bishop demanding an Indaba on the issue at the conference. This was ruled out due to a lack of time.

2013 [ACoC General Synod votes for the preparation of a change in canon law](#).

General Synod passed a resolution directing the drafting of a motion ‘to change Canon XXI on marriage to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in the same way as opposite-sex couples, and that this motion should include a conscience clause so that no member of the clergy, bishop, congregation or diocese should be constrained to participate in or authorize such marriages against the dictates of their conscience.’

[This will be voted on in Synod 2016](#).

2013 [GAFCON 2](#), Nairobi

The second GAFCON endorsed the Jerusalem Declaration as the focus of a confessional communion and the launch of the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans. They also recognized the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE) as an expression of authentic Anglicanism both for those within and outside the C of E.

2013 C of E [Publishes the Pilling Report](#)

The report calls for pastoral responses and renewed effort in mutual listening. From this [Grace and Disagreement](#) is published.

2014 C of E House of Bishops statement of [Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage](#)

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York issued a response to the change in English law enabling same-sex marriage (but not in Anglican Churches).

2014 Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia General Synod

The synod passed a resolution offering a [‘Pathway to same-gender blessings’](#), while upholding the traditional definition of marriage.

2014 Six Primates issue [Transformation through Friendship](#) statement

Five African Primates engaged in conversations with the Presiding Bishop of TEC and together issued a statement that ‘We have made a conscious decision to walk together in order to go the distance.’

2015 [GAFCON Primates condemn the Transformation through Friendship statement](#)

Five GAFCON Primates called the Chair of CAPA to repent over his participation in the Transformation through Friendship conversations.

2015 Archbishops and Bishops of the C of I [Statement Following the Result of the Marriage Referendum \(RoI\)](#)

The archbishops and bishops of the C of I affirmed that the people of the RoI, in deciding by referendum to alter the State’s legal definition of marriage, have acted fully within their rights, but further commented that the C of I continues to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

2015 Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil (IEAB) [publishes new Prayer Book](#)

The new IEAB prayer book establishes gender neutrality in the marriage service that [the Primate says](#) is ‘a

---

<sup>93</sup> The Primate of the Congo found significant difficulty in getting an Irish visa. When (with government assistance) he did get one he was refused a place on the plane because he did not have a UK transit visa. He regretted not being present at the Meeting.

significant step of inclusivity. This change does not require us to celebrate matrimony between people of same sex, but we're open to the future and new pastoral requirements from our time.' Their process of discernment continues.

2015 Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) [begins process of change on marriage canon](#)

The General Synod of the SEC voted to begin a process for change in relation to its Canon on Marriage and instructed the Church's Faith and Order Board to begin the two year process which may lead towards canonical change. That change would potentially allow the marriage of same gendered couples in Church in late 2017. General Synod also decided to add a conscience clause that ensures that no cleric would be obliged to solemnise a marriage against their conscience.

2015 [TEC General Convention approves marriage equality](#)

General convention approved canonical change eliminating language defining marriage as between a man and a woman ([Resolution A036](#)) and authorizing two new marriage rites with language allowing them to be used by same-sex or opposite-sex couples ([Resolution A054](#)).

2015 TEC – Concern, Condemnation, Commendation and Dissent

[The Archbishop of Canterbury](#) expressed concern at the changes to marriage canons. [GAFCON](#) and nine Primates of [Global South Anglican](#) expressed their condemnation. The [Primate of Brazil](#) commended the action. [22 TEC bishops](#) issued a statement of dissent.

2015 The Church in Wales [discerned no clear mandate](#) to change the Marriage Canon

Following an extensive discernment process the Governing Body of the CiW indicated a slight preference for gay marriage over the options of no change or the blessing of same sex unions. The consensus has been that the small majority is not enough to enable change at this time.

## Appendix B

### Glossary of Acronyms

#### *Acronyms – by occurrence in text*

p.6 – LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

p. 18 - APCK – Association for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge

p. 18 – ARCIC – Anglo Roman Catholic

p. 26 – YLT – Young Life & Times

p.26 – ISSHR – The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships

p. 28 – HBSC – Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (Ireland) Report (2010); Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Office for Europe.

p. 30 – MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly (NI)

p.42 – SEC – Scottish Episcopal Church

p. 43 – GAFCON – Global Anglican Future Conference

p. 43 – GFCA – Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans

p. 49 – CAI – Changing Attitude Ireland

p 55 – APA – American Psychiatric Association

p. 61 – NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

p.61 – NIV – New International Version

p. 78 – TEC – The Episcopal Church

p.78 – ACoC – Anglican Church of Canada

p. 80 – ACC – Anglican Consultative Council

p. 81 – IEAB – Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil

p. 82 – CiW – Church in Wales

#### *Acronyms - alphabetical*

ACC – Anglican Consultative Council p. 80

ACoC – Anglican Church of Canada p.78

APA – American Psychiatric Association p 55

APCK – Association for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge p. 18

ARCIC – Anglo Roman Catholic p. 18

CAI – Changing Attitude Ireland p. 49

CiW – Church in Wales p. 82

GAFCON – Global Anglican Future Conference p. 43

GFCA – Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans p. 43

HBSC – Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (Ireland) Report (2010); Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Office for Europe. p. 28

IEAB – Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil p. 81

ISSHR – The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships p.26

LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender p.6

MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly (NI) p. 30

NIV – New International Version p.61

NRSV – New Revised Standard Version p. 61

SEC – Scottish Episcopal Church p.42

TEC – The Episcopal Church p. 78

YLT – Young Life & Times p. 26

## Appendix C

### Select Bibliography

#### *Printed Resources*

- Allberry, Sam, *Is God anti-gay? (Questions Christians Ask)*, The Good Book Company, 2013.
- Allison, James, *Faith beyond Resentment*, DLT, 2001.
- Atkinson, Peter, *Friendship and the Body of Christ*, SPCK, 2005.
- Biblical and pastoral responses to homosexuality*, Evangelical Alliance, 2012.
- Bray, Alan, *The Friend*, University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Brown, Terry (ed.), *Other voices, other worlds*, DLT, 2006.
- Burridge, Richard A., *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics*, Eerdmans, 2007.
- Cheng, Patrick S., *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, Seabury Press, 2011.
- Davidson, Richard M., *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Hendrickson, 2007.
- Dormer, Duncan and Morris, Jeremy (eds), *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, SPCK, 2007.
- Evangelical Fellowship of Irish Clergy, *Faith and Sexuality in the Church of Ireland*, EFIC Press, 2012.
- France, R. T., *A Slippery Slope – the ordination of women and homosexual practice – a case study in Biblical interpretation*. (Grove Biblical Studies No. 16).
- Gagnon, Robert A. J. and Via, Dan O., *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, Fortress Press, 2003).
- Gagnon, Robert A. J., *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Goddard, A., and Harrison, G., *Unwanted Same Sex Attraction*, CMF, 2011.
- Guest, Deryn, *When Deborah met Jael*, SCM Press, 2005.
- Groves, Phil, (ed.), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK, 2008.
- Hays, R. B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, T&T Clark, 1996.
- Himbaza, Innocent, et al., *The Bible on the Question of Homosexuality*, Catholic University of America Press, 2011.
- Hooker, Richard, *Of The Laws Of Ecclesiastical Polity*
- Humphrey, E., 'The New Testament Speaks on Same Sex Eroticism,' NEAC 4, 2003, [http://www.edithhumphrey.net/neac\\_article.htm](http://www.edithhumphrey.net/neac_article.htm)
- Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, 1991.
- John, Jeffrey, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same Sex Marriage*, DLT, (2nd ed) 2000.



- Joyce, A. J., *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology*, OUP, 2012.
- Kennerley, Ginnie and O'Leary, Richard, *Moving Forward Together*, Changing Attitude Ireland, 2012.
- Kingston, Mervyn (ed.), *Share your Story: Gay and Lesbian Experiences of Church*, Changing Attitude Ireland, 2010.
- Loader, William, *Sexuality in the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*, SPCK, 2010.
- Marshall, William, *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A View of Anglican Theology through the Centuries*, Columba, 2010.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue, A Study in Moral Theory* (2nd Ed), London: Duckworth, 1985.
- Marriage*, Church House Publishing, 1999.
- Martin, Dale B., *Sex and the Single Saviour: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Moore, Gareth, *A Question of Truth*, Continuum, 2003, pp. 127–33.
- O'Callaghan, D., *Beyond Critique*, Core Issues Trust, 2013.
- O'Donovan, Oliver, *Church in Crisis: The Gay Controversy and the Anglican Communion*, Cascade Books, 2008.
- Roberts, Christopher *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*, T & T Clark, 2007.
- Rue, Ken (ed.), *Living Diversity: A Discussion Document. A Dublin and Glendalough Contribution to 'Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief'*, The United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough, 2013.
- 'Same sex relationships and the nature of marriage: a theological colloquy', *The Anglican Theological Review*, Vol 93, No.1 Winter 2011.
- Sanlon, P., *Plastic People – How Queer Theory is Changing Us*, Latimer Trust, 2010.
- Sax, Leonard, 'How Common Is Intersex?', *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol 39:3, 2002.
- Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, 2003.
- Suggate, Alan M., 'The Anglican Tradition in Moral Theology' in, Oswald Bayer and Alan Suggate (eds), *Worship and Ethics*, Walter de Gruyter, 1996).
- The Church of Ireland Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine, *The Authority of Scripture*, Church of Ireland Publishing, 2006
- The Home Office, *Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People*, Home Office Communications Directorate, 2000.
- The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004*, The Anglican Communion Office, 2004.
- Torrance, D.W., and Stein, J. (eds), *Embracing Truth*, Handsel Press, 2012.
- Webb, William J., *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*, Intervarsity

Press, 2001.

Wink, Walter, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, Fellowship Bookstore, 1996.

Wright, D. F., 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes?', *Vigilae Christianae*, 38, 1984.

## Appendix D

### Internet Resources

[www.acceptingevangelicals.org](http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org)

<http://www.aco.org/ministry/continuingindaba/about.cfm>

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/reports/index.cfm>

[http://gafcon.org/news/gafcon\\_final\\_statement/.](http://gafcon.org/news/gafcon_final_statement/)

<http://www.dontthrowstones.info/>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyehH\\_SjHzM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyehH_SjHzM)

Conversation on the Bible, Belief and Human Sexuality, Bishop Michael Burrows and Prof. Robert Gagnon, 10 June 2014.

[www.livingout.org](http://www.livingout.org)

## Appendix E

### Other helpful resources

#### Facilitating Dialogue

Discussion of contentious issues is usually about opening up dialogue rather than engaging in debate. The two are not the same

In DEBATE participants...	In DIALOGUE participants....
1. adopt the goal 'to win'	1. adopt the goal 'to understand'
2. listen to find flaws in the other's argument  <i>In debate, people listen to find what is wrong, incomplete or otherwise flawed in the other person's statements. Dialogue focuses on listen for understanding.</i>	2. listen to understand the other's belief, perspective and experience  <i>It aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas and information about a common concern</i>
3. critique the other's views as invalid	3. accept the experiences of others as real  <i>In dialogue understanding why people believe what they believe is central.</i>
4. appear determined not to change their own views	4. are open to expanding their understanding.  <i>When we participate in dialogue we discover new information about each other's interests and needs In fact, a primary goal of dialogue is to help participants gain greater insight into their own perspectives, values, beliefs and biases</i>
5. make assumptions about the other's positions and motivation	5. speak primarily from their own understanding and experience
6. oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong	6. work together toward common understanding and action.  <i>Dialogue aims to build relationships between people as they address a common concern It helps people communicate with each other as they constructively search for creative solutions to issues, challenges, problems, needs facing them collectively.</i>
7. sometimes use emotions to intimidate the other side	express emotions when they convey the intensity of a belief or experience.

## Healthy vs. Unhealthy Conflict Index

HEALTHY	UNHEALTHY
<b>ATTITUDE.</b> Conflict is inevitable. It is a chance to grow	<b>ATTITUDE.</b> Conflict is wrong or sinful
<b>IMPERSONAL</b> Disputants are clearly able to see the difference between the people and the problems - and do not mix the two.	<b>PERSONAL</b> Disputants quickly mix people and problems together and assume that by changing or eliminating the people, the problem will be solved.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b> is open. People speak directly to one another and everyone has the same information	<b>COMMUNICATION</b> is diminished, with people speaking only to those with whom they already agree. Third parties or letters are used to carry messages
<b>THE BALANCE SHEET</b> is short. The principals address the issue at hand, not what happened months or years ago.	<b>THE BALANCE SHEET</b> is long. The list of grievances grows and examples are collected. People recall not only what they think was done to them but was said or done to their friends
<b>INTERACTIVE</b> There is give and take, an exchange of ideas, and a spirit of cooperation and openness. There is careful listening and through-out statements.	<b>REACTIVE</b> Problems cannot be “touched” without exploding. I write a memo to you and you immediately fire back a nasty letter to me
<b>ACCEPTANCE</b> Disputants acknowledge the existence of a problem and the need to solve it	<b>DENIAL</b> Disputants tend to ignore the real problem and deny what is going on.
<b>TIMELINESS</b> Resolution takes as much time as needed. The parties take the time to go through the journey together, to experience the pain, and to come out together on the other side.	<b>LACK OF TIME</b> There is a stringency to solve the problem too quickly. People are very solution oriented and seek to avoid the pain of conflict by saying “Let’s get it over with.”

Adapted from *Mediation: The Book: A Step-by-Step Guide for Dispute Resolvers* by Sam Leonard (Evanston, Ill.: Evanston Publishing 1994)

## Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> The full text of the motion establishing the Select Committee, which includes the list of the initial 16 members, can be found in Appendix A.
- <sup>2</sup> The full text of Archbishop Jackson's speech proposing the motion to establish the Select Committee can be found here: [http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Synod/2013/speeches/Motion4\\_P.pdf](http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Synod/2013/speeches/Motion4_P.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> <http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Synod/2014/speeches/SelectCommHumanSexP.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> Following the publication of this report, the Select Committee is to liaise with other bodies, such as the Church of Ireland Marriage Council, and the House of Bishops, within the Church of Ireland, to avoid duplication of work.
- <sup>5</sup> The Church of England, *Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality*, p. 20. This report, commonly called "The Pilling Report", is published by Church House Publishing in paperback and ebook formats (ISBN 978 0 7151 4437 4, 224pp, £16.99) and is also available to view online: [http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling\\_report\\_gs\\_1929\\_web.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Groves, Philip (ed.) *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*, SPCK, 2008, p. 271.
- <sup>7</sup> The full text of the twelve published pamphlets can be accessed on: <http://ireland.anglican.org/information/4>. Printed copies may be obtained from the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Office.
- <sup>8</sup> ARCIC, The Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission was established by Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI in 1967. Its terms of reference were established by the Malta Report in the following year and it has worked in two phases - 1970-1981, and 1983-2005. The first phase of work was completed with the publication of the Final Report in 1981, dealing with three topics: The Eucharist, Ministry and Authority. For further information see: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/>
- <sup>9</sup> The full text of the Articles of Religion can be accessed here: <http://ireland.anglican.org/worship/14>
- <sup>10</sup> The full text of the Virginia Report can be accessed online: <http://www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-1.pdf>  
It should be noted that the report was not uncritically received by the Church of Ireland. As the "Preliminary comments from the group set up by the Standing Committee at its meeting on 20 April 1999 to consider the Anglican Consultative Council Virginia Report and submit comments to the Standing Committee for consideration at its meeting on 15 June 1999" stated: "when the Report in its later stages moves towards the idea of creating centres of authority able to produce what would in effect be edicts *ex cathedra*, the component of diversity would be threatened, as would the entire character of our Anglican inheritance." See: <http://www.ireland.anglican.org/Archives/pressreleases/prarchive1999/scvirrepprelim.html>
- <sup>11</sup> The members of the Commission (and their positions at the time) were: The Most Revd Richard Clarke (Bishop of Meath and Kildare), Canon Dr Nigel Biggar (Professor of Theology and Ethics Trinity College Dublin), Revd Dr Maurice Elliott (Rector of Shankill Parish Lurgan), Very Revd Dr Susan Patterson (Dean of Killala), Dr Andrew Pierce (Lecturer in Ecumenical studies, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin) and Very Revd Dr Stephen White (Dean of Killaloe). For a report of the launch of the Commission's first report, see: <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/859>
- <sup>12</sup> The Church of Ireland Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine, *The Authority of Scripture*, (Dublin: Church of Ireland Publishing, 2006), Introduction.
- <sup>13</sup> Dr Andrew Pierce writes on the historical background to discussions on the authority of the Scriptures. This is followed by further critiques - from the different perspectives of Revd Dr Maurice Elliott, Very Revd Dr Stephen White and Very Revd Dr Susan Patterson, respectively - on how a doctrine of revelation, human experience and the life of the Christian community all contribute to a reasoned understanding of how the Scriptures are pivotal to the life of the individual Christian disciple and of the Christian Church. The final contribution is from Professor Nigel Biggar, who considers the use of the Scriptures in ethics.
- <sup>14</sup> The phrase comes from George Lindbeck's "Scripture, Consensus and community" in Richard Neuhaus (ed.), *Biblical interpretation in crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp 78-101.
- <sup>15</sup> It should be noted that Biggar's essay includes two "illustrations" of "encountering scripture" in relation to (i) the question of homosexuality and (ii) questions around war and peace. Although not included in the present summary of his essay, the two extended examples are recommended reading.
- <sup>16</sup> N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), p. 31.
- <sup>17</sup> The report goes on to state: "Moral or religious attitudes in Northern Ireland may discourage some people from talking about sexual issues. Some people therefore may receive mixed messages about sex and sexuality from an early age, resulting in confusion between sexuality and morality. For young people in particular, perceptions of sexuality can become distorted, especially if parents or teachers are too embarrassed to discuss sexual issues openly and honestly. The combination of secrecy with the scale of information and sometimes misinformation in the media places young people at risk and makes it harder for some people to develop a healthy attitude to their sexual health in adulthood." A copy of the report can be downloaded from: [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dhssps\\_sexual\\_health\\_plan\\_front\\_cvr.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dhssps_sexual_health_plan_front_cvr.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> Natsal is one of the largest and most detailed scientific studies of sexual behaviour in the world. See: <http://www.natsal.ac.uk/>
- <sup>19</sup> Schubotz Dirk et al, *Towards better sexual health: a survey of sexual attitudes lifestyles of young people in Northern Ireland*. Research report (FPA, 2003).

---

<sup>20</sup> YLT is an annual study of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland, undertaken by ARK (Access, Research, Knowledge, Northern Ireland). ARK is based in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast Every 16-year old born in February and March of the survey year who is resident in Northern Ireland and is registered to receive Child Benefit is invited to take part in the postal YLT survey. In 2011, 1,434 respondents completed the survey, a response rate of 37 per cent. A copy of the report referred to here can be accessed at:

<http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update80.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> A copy of the main report, and its three sub-reports, can be downloaded from the Crisis Pregnancy Website:

<http://www.crisispregnancy.ie/pubtag-category/isshr/>

<sup>22</sup> The report completes the "Changing the Future" series published by UNICEF Ireland which presents a holistic snapshot of the lives of young people living in Ireland from their own perspective, and in their own words. The first three reports focused on Happiness, Mental Health and Drugs and Alcohol. Copies of the reports can be downloaded from the UNICEF website: [www.unicef.ie](http://www.unicef.ie)

<sup>23</sup> Further information on HBSC and copies of reports, can be accessed on: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/hbhc/>

<sup>24</sup> *The Pilling Report*, 61-62.

<sup>25</sup> Groves, *Anglican Communion*, 290.

<sup>26</sup> Groves, *Anglican Communion*, 267.

<sup>27</sup> The report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.cara-friend.org.uk/assets/docs/left%20out%20of%20the%20equation.pdf> The evidence used to support the findings of this report was sourced from reports by The Rainbow Project, Stonewall, Youthnet, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Human Rights Watch, peer-reviewed journal articles and case law from the European Court of Human Rights.

<sup>28</sup> Data was collected via an online and paper questionnaire which received 571 responses, including 179 from LGB women and 29 from transgender people. The full report is available here:

<http://www.rainbow-project.org/assets/publications/through%20our%20minds.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> The full report is available at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ni-lifestyle-and-coping-survey-2010.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> The study, which was carried out by the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin and the School of Education at University College Dublin was commissioned by the BeLoNG To Youth Service and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Glen). Participants ranged in age from 14 to 73, with an average age of 30. Just over 80% described themselves as gay or lesbian, just over one in 10 were bisexual, 4% were transgender, while the remainder were unsure of their sexual orientation, used different labels or did not want to be labelled at all. The full text of the Report can be downloaded from: <http://www.belongto.org/pro/page.aspx?subsectionid=4623>

<sup>31</sup> The Convention is a forum of 100 people, made up of 66 citizens, randomly selected and broadly representative of Irish society; 33 parliamentarians, nominated by their respective political parties and including an elected representative from each of the political parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly which accepted an invitation from the Government. Its brief is to make recommendations to the Oireachtas on future amendments to be put to the people in referendums. For more see: <https://www.constitution.ie/>

<sup>32</sup> For the full text of the Pastoral Letter, see: <http://ireland.anglican.org/information/85>

<sup>33</sup> Item 14 on page 104. For the full report of the Church of Ireland Pensions Board to the 2006 General Synod, see: <http://synod.ireland.anglican.org/2006/docs/pdf/reports/04PBrpt.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Items 12 on page 98. For the full report of the Church of Ireland Pensions Board to the 2008 General Synod, see: <http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Synod/2008/Reports/04%20pension.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Source: <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/3730>

<sup>36</sup> Source: <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/3749>

<sup>37</sup> For the full text of the Pastoral Letter, see: <http://ireland.anglican.org/information/217>

<sup>38</sup> A report on the conference can be accessed here: <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/3988>

<sup>39</sup> <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/3989>

<sup>40</sup> For the full text of the motion see: <http://synod.ireland.anglican.org/2012/index.php?do=news&newsid=206>

<sup>41</sup> See <http://synod.ireland.anglican.org/2012/index.php?do=news&newsid=206>

<sup>42</sup> <http://synod.ireland.anglican.org/2012/index.php?do=news&newsid=205>

<sup>43</sup> <http://ireland.anglican.org/news/4462>

<sup>44</sup> For the full text of the Covenant see: <http://ireland.anglican.org/about/47>

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/news/practical\\_expressions\\_of\\_methodist\\_belief.pdf](http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/news/practical_expressions_of_methodist_belief.pdf) The paragraphs quoted are preceded by the statement: "The Council on Social Responsibility is the body appointed by the Conference to undertake study and analysis of social, political and moral issues. It has northern and southern committees as well as meeting on an all-Ireland basis and over the years, it has issued reports and statements on a wide range of matters. These are issued to stimulate debate, to guide thinking and to state the church's considered judgement on certain issues. The following paragraphs indicate some of the issues on which statements have been issued and action taken, but they are by no means an exhaustive summary of the church's work and thinking in relation to Christian citizenship."

<sup>46</sup> The full text can be downloaded here:

---

[http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/csr/csr\\_council\\_amended\\_pastoral\\_responses\\_12.pdf](http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pdf/csr/csr_council_amended_pastoral_responses_12.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> The three advisers were: Professor Robert Song, the Ven Rachel Treweek and the Revd Dr Jessica Martin. The Report of the *House of Bishops' Working Group on Human Sexuality* is published today by Church House Publishing in Paperback and ebook formats (ISBN 978 0 7151 4437 4, 224pp, £16.99) and is also available to view online:

[http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling\\_report\\_gs\\_1929\\_web.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf)

<http://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/marriage,-family-and-sexuality-issues/human-sexuality/pilling-report.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> This summary is drawn from:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2013/11/pilling-report-published.aspx>

<sup>49</sup> For a report on April 2014 meeting of the Church in Wales Governing Body, see:

<http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Highlights-April-2014.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> The Report of the Doctrine Commission as well as other relevant papers can be accessed on:

[www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/doctrinal-commission/#sdcdocs](http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/faith/doctrinal-commission/#sdcdocs).

<sup>51</sup> Source: <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/news-and-issues/issues-in-society/human-sexuality/>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Blessing-of-Civil-Partnerships-Nov-2013.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/cascade-conversation-listening-across-spectrum/>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Whole-Church-Discussion-Same-Sex-Relationships.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> <http://gafcon.org/>

<sup>56</sup> The Jerusalem Declaration can be downloaded from: <http://fca.net/images/uploads/jerusalemdeclaration.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> An extensive report on this Consultation can be accessed here:

<http://www.porvoocommunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Marriage-consultation-consolidated-PDF.pdf>