

**EGGS**

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**RESOURCES**  
FOR **SHARED CONVERSATIONS**  
AROUND **HUMAN SEXUALITY**

Evangelical Group  
of the General Synod

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### INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to this resource from the Committee of the Evangelical Group of the General Synod.**

The chances are you're reading this because, in one way or another, you are interested in finding resources to equip yourself and others to understand and advocate an orthodox view on human sexuality.

In the church and society at large there has been a "revolution" in recent years in the attitudes and beliefs of people regarding sexuality (Archbishop Justin, 2013). As a consequence, what has been called an 'orthodox' evangelical view can often feel under pressure and threat.

Over the next 18 months or so the Church of England is holding formal conversations to explore and address a range of issues in the area of ethics and sexuality, as raised and indicated in the *Pilling Report*.<sup>\*</sup> This process is an opportunity for evangelicals to engage in public debate and to offer a positive biblical anthropology, based on the richness of our inherited Christian tradition.

The committee of the Evangelical Group of the General Synod has therefore commissioned this 'library' of [Articles](#), suggested [Books](#) and useful [Web Resources](#). You can access an index for each type of resource by clicking the link on the sidebar. We hope they will be of widespread help and value :

- For preachers, teachers and speakers
- For small group leaders such as house groups/discipleship groups/others
- For personal reading and reflection
- For students in situations where an orthodox voice needs to be offered
- For any who find themselves involved in the formal conversations over the next two years.

We are enormously grateful to those who have written the articles and assisted in their compilation. They represent a large number of evangelicals who continue to be convinced by an orthodox view on God's rich gift of sexuality (sometimes called a 'traditional' or 'biblical' position).

We hope and pray that you will know God's strength and grace as you read and study these resources.

**The Committee of the Evangelical Group of the General Synod.**

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<sup>\*</sup> Formally called the 'Report of the House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality' (November 2013).

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## FOR PREACHERS, TEACHERS AND SPEAKERS

Many preachers, teachers and speakers do not feel confident when it comes to speaking about issues of human sexuality.

The following suggestions may help to resource you for the responsibilities of your role.

The following articles will give you an overview of the appropriate biblical texts and passages:

- [The goodness of sex and sexuality](#)
- [Marriage – is it necessarily between a man and a woman?](#)
- [Is the traditional position built on a small number of Bible verses?](#)
- [Are evangelicals unreasonably subjective in their selection of the Scriptures they keep and those they reject?](#)
- [Jesus’s emphasis in relationships was love – surely marriage is a quality of relationship not a prescribed shape?](#)

For any wishing to put together a short series of talks/preaching articles in a church magazine or talks for a midweek/monthly meeting, why not try using the following articles as your starting point?

- [Marriage – is it necessarily between a man and a woman?](#)
- [Is the traditional position built on a small number of Bible verses?](#)
- [Science and human sexuality](#)
- [Is the Church homophobic?](#)
- [How can we expect some people to remain single?](#)
- [Are Christians behind the times on marriage?](#)

If, despite the resources suggested above, you still do not feel confident about offering such talks yourself, why not show a video?

- For short, personal stories have a look at the Living Out website ([www.livingout.org.uk](http://www.livingout.org.uk)). There are more details in [Real-life stories from Living Out](#) in the [Articles](#) section.
- For more detailed teaching videos have a look at Robert Gagnon’s website (<http://www.robagnon.net/>), or any of the teaching videos listed in the [Web Resources](#) section.

**Please note: If you are planning to show a video it is always important to watch it through yourself in its entirety before showing it.**

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## FOR PREACHERS, TEACHERS AND SPEAKERS [CONT.]

### **Wise advice**

There are three particularly wise pieces of advice that all preachers, teachers and speakers should take note of when addressing issues of human sexuality:

1. It is not just a theological exercise – always remember that there are likely to be people listening to your sermon/talk who are struggling with some issue or other of sexuality.
2. The tone and tenor of your speaking/preaching are often as important as the substance! Anyone preaching a biblical vision for sexual holiness will have to – at some point – issue challenges and parameters from that teaching ... it is vitally important that this is done in a way that is gentle, compassionate, loving and thoughtful.
3. It is very important to preach and teach a positive, nourishing, wholesome vision for sexual holiness rather than the stereotypically negative call to 'just say no'.

## FOR HOME GROUP AND SMALL GROUP LEADERS

If you are a home group or small group leader in a local church or college/university you will be aware that it is not always easy to resource a discussion around human sexuality. The Bible does not have a single chapter with all the 'answers' about sex and sexuality ... there are just too many books and websites out there to know where to start ... and because of the sensitivities in this important area of Christian teaching and living many are nervous about agreeing to lead a discussion or study on the subject.

Can we therefore offer you the following suggestions if you feel that your home group/small group could benefit from holding such a discussion? These suggestions are not meant to restrict you in any way ... simply to give you some ideas as to how you might have a helpful and fruitful discussion.

1. Choose two videos on the Living Out website (see page 38 of this resource) – watch them together as a group – and then use the following questions to hold a conversation:
  - What was said that struck you?
  - What did you hear on the video that might help you in talking to family or friends who struggle with issues of same-sex attraction?
  - What do you admire about the individuals you have just watched on the video?
  
2. If you would like to have a closer look at a set of introductory Bible passages, please refer to the following articles in this resource:
  - [Marriage – is it necessarily between a man and a woman?](#)
  - [Is the traditional position built on a small number of Bible verses?](#)
  - [Jesus's emphasis in relationships was love – surely marriage is a quality of relationship not a prescribed shape?](#)
  - [Does the Bible have examples of same-sex relationships?](#)
  - [Jesus didn't condemn homosexuality – rather the rich, hypocritical etc. Why are evangelicals so obsessed with same-sex sex?](#)

Print out copies of the article for members of your group, and work your way through the biblical references in the article. List any questions that people have about the article/Bible passages referred to and then explore them together.

4. Your home group/small group can help people work out how best to respond to the questions that people might ask them in normal life. Why not have a couple of special evenings where you look

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## FOR HOME GROUP AND SMALL GROUP LEADERS [CONT.]

together at the following articles in this resource?

- [How do we welcome everyone without necessarily endorsing their beliefs or choices?](#)
- [How can the Church support single people seeking to live a godly life?](#)
- [Are Christians behind the times on marriage?](#)
- [Is traditional Christian teaching about sex a problem for mission?](#)

Focus the discussion on how you would explain the articles/arguments therein to work colleagues, neighbours, family and friends who are not committed Christians. Discuss which points would be difficult to make ... and what kind of words and language would help people understand an orthodox biblical position (even if they chose to disagree with it!).

### FOR CLERGY AND SENIOR CHURCH LEADERS

Amongst the many challenges facing clergy and church leaders are two particular issues relating to human sexuality. In the first instance, there is a need to preach, teach and communicate a positive biblical vision for human sexuality in such a way that people are clear about what it means to be called to biblical holiness, but at the same time encouraged and inspired rather than downhearted by this cause. Secondly, there is a need to know how to welcome, pastor and nourish individuals who struggle with various issues relating to identity, human sexuality and relationships.

For those wishing to explore further the first of these challenges we commend:

- the [Articles](#)
- the [Recommended Books](#)
- the [Critiques of Specific Books and Resources](#).

For those of you concerned with the more pastoral questions and implications of leadership, we recommend to you:

- the articles on pages 38-45
- the 'testimonies' in [Real-life stories from Living Out](#)
- the [Web Resources](#).

You will note that this 'collection' of resources addresses questions/ issues to do with more than just same-sex relationships. This is because we believe that a well-informed evangelical vision for well-being with regard to human sexuality must include issues such as:

- How to nurture a positive understanding of celibacy
- How to debunk the myth that we are defined by our sexual experiences
- How to help people enjoy friendship, closeness and intimacy without (if not appropriate) sexual expression
- How to support those who are struggling to live in accordance with traditional biblical teaching on sexual holiness.

We hope and pray you will find these resources helpful in your role as a church leader.

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## THE GOODNESS OF SEX AND SEXUALITY

Some say that the Church doesn't speak enough about sex – that is has a gloomy, negative attitude to the subject. Others complain that the Church has too much to say and should keep its opinions to itself! Christians should not be stuffy and uptight when it comes to sex, because the biblical view of sexuality is very positive, and is much broader than sexual intercourse itself.

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created the first man and woman and seeing what he had made, declared that it was 'very good'. Although the writer of Genesis (and indeed the Bible as a whole) does not go into detail about the distinctions between female and male, it is clear that each was an intentional creation and both were in 'the image of God'. They were made not to be identical but complementary. This is a good feature of our creation as men and women, and goes far beyond sex itself. Men and women who do not have sex are still sexual – because they are male or female. It is a good feature of how we are made.

In Genesis 2:18, God gives Adam an *'ezer kenegdô*: literally a 'helper like the opposite of him'. (The word 'helper' is often used for God helping humans, so carries no connotation of subordination but more of complementary cooperation.) When the man sees the woman for the first time, he waxes lyrical about her otherness and sameness. She is clearly like him, and unlike any other creature, yet she is intriguing and different – she is an equal partner. This is the original context for sexual intercourse, and shows that God has designed this wonderful thing to be expressed within a lifelong marital relationship between one man and one woman. Indeed, Jesus earths his teaching on sex and marriage in these words.

The divine image is expressed in both male and female and so the man and woman are equally human despite their physical, anatomical and procreative differences. As they are joined together as husband and wife their unity and diversity is expressed – and in some profound way they together reflect the image of their creator. However, the moral framework of the Bible is countercultural in our current context and so questions of identity, gender, sexuality and morality feature prominently in public discussions of faith. This is not a new development. The early Christians preached their faith and planted churches in the Greco-Roman world – a philosophical context far removed from the teachings of Genesis and Jesus. Likewise here in Britain discussions about God have for a long time gone hand in hand with questions about sex. Aldous Huxley wrote quite openly about his reasons for believing that life had no meaning and that there is no God:

'I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently I assumed that it had none. ... For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation ... from a certain political and economic system

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## THE GOODNESS OF SEX AND SEXUALITY [CONT.]

and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.'

So, the fact that we are all sexual beings is a good thing. Our sexuality (in the sense of being made male or female) is a good gift to be received from God. In this positive vision of sexuality, sexual intercourse is also a good gift. But, according to the teaching of Jesus himself, it is a gift given for a particular purpose, namely to unite wife and husband into one flesh in marriage. Living according to the way God has made us is ultimately the way to a meaningful life of freedom and flourishing.

## ACCEPTING OUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION WITHOUT LETTING IT DEFINE US: THE A B C OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

The debates about human sexuality often confuse and conflate three important and distinct things.

**A**traction: Am I attracted to men or to women? The science increasingly recognises that human sexuality is more fluid than we usually realise. Some people who are primarily attracted to the opposite sex also experience attraction to the same sex, and vice versa. Our sexual attractions seem to sit on a spectrum, which can change over time.

**B**ehaviour: Am I bound to act on my attractions? The Church has always taught (as with all appetites) that we should not always accede to our attractions. There are those who should not act on their sexual attractions, for example those who are unmarried, and those who are married (when attracted to someone outside their marriage). Indeed, the Church has taught that the only place in which it is right to act on sexual attraction is in a marriage between a man and a woman.

**C**ulture and Identity: Am I straight or gay? All of us form cultural identities around our experiences. For minorities, this is often shaped in response to rejection from the majority culture around them. To challenge the behaviour is therefore to challenge a culture from which people can draw a strong sense of belonging and identity. There can of course be positive things about this way of drawing our identity: the same process happens to Christians in a predominantly non-Christian culture!

### **An alternative vision**

Our attractions are part of our human nature: they are made good, reflecting the good of the God who created us, but we are also all fallen and broken. As the people of God we are called to behave in patterns of holiness, often in ways which are countercultural and self-denying, as a witness to the coming Kingdom of God. Our cultural identity is principally in Christ, becoming more like him by the transforming power of his Spirit. So, we can acknowledge our patterns of sexual attraction and accept ourselves just as God accepts us, without letting that define our identity.

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## REVISIONISM AND ORTHODOXY

Labels are often unhelpful, divisive and very imprecise. However, they can also be useful in helping us to identify the central tenets of an approach or methodology.

In recent times the label 'revisionist' has been used to describe the approach that some (including evangelicals) have adopted towards Scripture and its teaching on human sexuality.

Revisionists take Scripture seriously. However, their hermeneutical method is different from that of traditional evangelicals in a variety of ways. Whilst it is impossible in a short article to comprehensively explore and define 'revisionism', it is helpful to note its following characteristics.

Firstly, a revisionist position might consider something to be 'normal' in Scripture without necessarily being thereby normative for all time. Marriage – in biblical times – was between a man and a woman. Scripture does not tell us stories of people in same-sex relationships (see the article [Does the Bible have examples of same-sex relationships?](#) for an investigation of the relationship of David and Jonathan etc.). However, according to revisionist argument, these observations cannot be used to conclude that male and female marriage is the only form of marriage for all time (i.e. normative).

Secondly, revisionists consider that Paul (and other New Testament writings) do not address the issues of human sexuality that we face today – simply because they were not issues in their own time. By way of contrast, a traditional evangelical interpretation of Romans 1 and other passages would hold that Paul was thoroughly familiarised with the range of same-sex relationships being explored today. (For a fuller response to this argument, see the article [Does the Bible fail to endorse committed same-sex relationships because it had no awareness or knowledge of them?](#))

Thirdly, a revisionist ethic of human sexuality is built more on 'internal' considerations than 'external'. In other words, actions are evaluated and judged by their internal motivations and dispositions rather than their external *behaviour* or nature. Thus – in the area of same-sex relations – a relationship is legitimised by the quality, sincerity and genuineness of the love between two individuals rather than by whether it fits into any particular 'category' of relationship (i.e. revisionism does not accept that the 'category' of same-sex erotic relations is necessarily unscriptural).

Revisionism can be distinguished from liberalism in that it affirms the authority of Scripture but interprets it in a new and different way from traditional understandings. Liberalism – by contrast – is infused with questions about the authority of Scripture and is often (in shorthand) seen as describing Scripture as 'man's thoughts about God' rather than 'God's revealed thoughts about man'.

## MARRIAGE – IS IT NECESSARILY BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN?

Now that it is legally possible in England and Wales for two men or two women to marry, it is important to understand the Church's reasons for teaching that marriage is a union between one woman and one man.

Male–female difference is stressed in both creation accounts, in Genesis 1 and 2. In the first account (Genesis 1:26–27), emphasis is laid on the fact that men and women are both made in the image of God. Some Christians interpreters have read a reference to the Trinity into this (although this is not what the original writer would have intended directly) – the idea being that just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are different persons but one in their divinity, humanity *reflects* or *images* this by being truly different sexes yet truly one humanity. Either way, it is clear in this passage that it is only *together* that men and women reflect God.

Another feature of this story is its emphasis on procreation as part of what God intends for human sexual differentiation, although it is possible to over-emphasise this in a way which undermines the value of childless marriages. Such marriages are still marriages, of course, because what makes them such is the union of a man and woman. In the second creation account (Genesis 2:18–25) the point is made that the woman and man are suitable companions for one another. Significantly, sexual union should take place *in* marriage, because it joins the two into 'one flesh'. This is why in 1 Corinthians, Paul is so opposed to extra-marital sex with prostitutes: it leads in some sense to becoming 'one flesh' with the prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:16).

Throughout the Old Testament there is never any question that marriage can be between two men or two women, although there are plenty of examples of marriages which do not conform to the one man–one woman pattern (usually with very negative consequences; it is not possible to draw the conclusion that the Bible is actually recommending, for example, polygamy or concubinage). In the New Testament it is clear from the gospels that Jesus endorsed the understanding that marriage is an expression of God's creation of human beings as male and female (Matthew 19:3–12, Mark 10:2–12). This is why the church has taken the Genesis creation stories to be especially normative.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, a parallel is drawn between marriage and the union between Christ and the church. The differentiation between husband and wife is therefore essential: Jesus and his church are genuinely distinct from one another, yet utterly 'made for each other', and truly joined and united, just as a woman and a man are genuinely different and yet truly united in marriage. Indeed, it is their very physical differences which enable them to be united as 'one flesh'. It is for this reason that, whatever the excellent qualities of many same-sex relationships, and whatever the rights of providing such relationships with legal protection and support, they cannot be described as *marriage*, because sexual differentiation is inherent to its definition, biblically speaking.

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## WHY IS THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON SEX GOOD FOR SOCIETY?

The Bible's teaching is that sex is meant to take place in a sexually exclusive marital relationship between one man and one woman. In this context sex has three equally important functions. First, it consummates the union between a husband and wife. It is the physical means through which the two become 'one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). Secondly, it is a means through which, by the giving and receiving of physical pleasure, the love between a married couple is expressed and deepened (seen most fully in the Bible throughout Song of Songs). Thirdly, it is the normal and natural means by which a married couple can fulfil the God given mandate to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28). Just as the God given purpose of food is to satisfy our hunger and the purpose of drink is to satisfy our thirst, so the God given purpose of sex is to fulfil these three ends within marriage.

In debating with Jewish leaders about sex and marriage, Jesus pointed back behind the law specifically given to Israel to God's purposes in the creation of humanity (Matthew 19:3–12). Christians therefore believe that the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage shows us one way we flourish as human beings made in God's image. This means that it is not simply a set of rules for Christians but a pattern of life which non-Christians can recognise and experience as good. When people live according to biblical teaching it brings glory to God and helps us, as individuals and a society, to fulfil one of the purposes of our existence. In contrast, not abiding by this teaching harms members of society spiritually and potentially eternally. To put it another way, sinful sex (like all other forms of sin) poisons the soul. That is why Jesus warns against sexual sin in such drastic terms in Matthew 5:27–30.

In providing supporting evidence for this belief, care needs to be taken in appealing to anecdotal and survey evidence from specific social contexts, as conflicting accounts can be given. Furthermore, due to sin and what Jesus called our "hardness of heart", as in Old Testament Israel, it will not always be appropriate for human laws to reflect the creation patterns of God's best. Nevertheless, many people, both inside and outside the Church, can testify to the benefits of following the Bible's teaching on sex and marriage and to how disregarding biblical teaching has had negative consequences for them, their families and others. There is now a wealth of research into the impact of developments in western society which have increasingly departed from biblical teaching in this area. For example, one important recent survey of this research reached the following conclusion:

"Over four decades of social science research across western nations confirms one clear and unambiguous conclusion: A healthy marriage is the best source of physical and mental health,

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## WHY IS THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON SEX GOOD FOR SOCIETY? [CONT.]

emotional stability and prosperity for adults and children. It is also the best bet for attaining happiness and fulfillment ...The healthy pair-bond of a man and a woman is the greatest hope of humanity, not just because it is a historically ubiquitous institution, but also because its critical role is supported by mounting social science research."

*Maybe 'I do': Modern marriage and the pursuit of happiness*  
Kevin Andrews (2012)

## THE GIFT OF MARRIAGE

One of the lenses through which we can read the Bible is that of 'gift'. So when we come to reading Scripture it is helpful to ask 'What are God's gifts to humanity?' 'What does it mean for men and women to receive and enjoy the gifts of God'?

John 3:16 points to the gift of Jesus as the supreme gift of God to humanity over all time. However, we could also refer to many other 'gifts' that God has graciously given to us. These will include the gifts of the Spirit, of forgiveness and .... of marriage.

Marriage is given to humanity right at the start of the biblical story (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:22–24) as a framework within which the complementary union of the different genders is going to be both physically fruitful and blessed in the overseeing or stewarding of the earth in partnership with God himself.

In Song of Songs there is an extended celebration of the gift of sexual desire and marriage.

In the New Testament letters, Paul portrays this marriage gift as reflecting and indicative of the relationship between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:22).

The Book of Revelation uses the metaphor of marriage to describe the eventual union of Jesus and his Church (Revelation 21:2).

Thus marriage has some kind of 'specialness' (some might say it's 'sacred') in Scripture – not just in that it makes possible a unique relationship between a man and a woman, but also because of its spiritual 'overtones' and resonance.

Outside and beyond Scripture we can also note that the gift of marriage has throughout history provided men, women and children with dignity and protection, and society as a whole with a foundational 'unit' on which it has been able to build. (It is also true that marriage has been abused and become for some a 'prison' and a place of darkness/despair. But this is a product of the behaviour of fallen men/women and not inherent to marriage's nature.)

This does not of course mean that we should idolise marriage or consider celibate singleness to be in any way inferior, but it does mean that as evangelicals we should be 'talking up' the significance, role and contribution of God's gift of marriage.

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## COUNTERCULTURAL SEXUAL ETHICS

It is generally agreed that we no longer live in what has been known as Christendom. It has been suggested that a better biblical motif to describe the current time is that of exile. And in exile the voice of the faithful people of God is often at odds with the surrounding culture (cf. the book of Daniel as a template for exilic living).

This immediately raises two questions for evangelicals:

- Are we called to offer a counter-sexual ethic to our culture which is contrary to the prevailing narrative?
- Can a countercultural sexual ethic be good news for society?

Substantial parts of the Old Testament describe how the prophets brought the word of the Lord to God's covenant people. What we must note, but is uncomfortable to read, is that the countercultural voices of the prophets were more often rejected than received. The two consequences of this were that, firstly, God's covenant people were not the means of worldwide blessing he had intended them to be, and, secondly, the nations were not able to see the 'light' that God had planned would be offered through Israel (Isaiah 49:6).

Under the New Covenant, it is still God's intention that his people will speak his word into the cultures of their time. Peter writes: 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Jesus said: 'You are the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14), suggesting that his followers would bring a word that would penetrate darkness, bringing the goodness and grace of God into cultures the world over.

Returning to our original questions, it therefore appears that the challenge to God's people is always to be primarily listening to his voice rather than that of culture (this of course must not be understood to mean that we are somehow disconnected from the world God has given us to live in), even if – like the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles – we find that voice unwelcome and at odds with prevailing narratives.

And a voice that speaks this 'word' (God's perspective/narrative) into the lives and affairs of men and women is always good news even if it is at odds with contemporary culture.

None of the above tells us what God is actually saying to us at this time; rather it is offered simply to highlight the very real biblical calling that the Church may have at this time to live to a different 'drum beat' – one which challenges the cultural norms and the prevailing philosophies and values, even at the expense of its status/position in society.

It needs to be said – in case it is misunderstood – that the prophetic voice of the Church is not limited to the issue of sexual ethics. Jesus,

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## COUNTERCULTURAL SEXUAL ETHICS [CONT.]

Paul and Scripture as a whole speak prophetically to humanity about a whole range of life issues – and we would be doing Scripture an injustice if we focused only on sexual ethics. However, the prophetic voice of Scripture does speak into issues of sexual ethics and we will be doing an equal injustice to ignore that voice at this time.

### RESOURCES:

Chris Wright, 'Jeremiah' (Bible Speaks Today) IVP, 2014.

Patrick Whitworth, 'Prepare for Exile: A New Spirituality and Mission for the Church' SPCK, 2008 (see also introduction in [Books](#))

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## IS THE TRADITIONAL POSITION BUILT ON A SMALL NUMBER OF BIBLE VERSES?

It is sometimes suggested that the orthodox Christian position with regard to homosexuality is based on a very small number of Bible verses (Genesis 19:1–14, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:17–18, Romans 1:24–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 & 1 Timothy 1:10). It is also sometimes suggested that these ‘proof texts’ are negative in nature and (to some degree at least) are a product of their time.

Alongside these criticisms, it is suggested that much more (and positively) is written in Scripture about justice, hypocrisy etc., and that evangelicals would be better off concerning themselves with these latter issues rather than those of same-sex sexual activity. What do we say to these criticisms?

Firstly, it is important to recognise that the Church has not always taken seriously what Scripture has to say about issues including justice, hypocrisy etc. Where this has happened, it is fair to say that the Church has not been living a thoroughly biblical life. We need to repent of this and get it right.

Secondly, it is not acceptable to dismiss biblical texts simply because they are restrictive. There are plenty of biblical injunctions against lying, stealing and violence – all of which we would want to endorse and see as relevant to the 21st century.

Thirdly, that it is not good enough to dismiss the Bible passages referred to earlier simply because they are limited in number. Even though it is a relatively small number of passages we still need to take them as seriously as the equally small number of texts that refer to other issues, such as Holy Communion.

Finally, it is important to note that the biblical texts which prohibit same-sex sexual activity are not ‘isolated’ texts but – rather – that they are consonant with and part of a bigger biblical picture in which God has created human beings as male and female and created sex as something which is meant to unite one man and one woman together in marriage (and potentially to result in the procreation of children). Any and all other forms of sexual activity that fall outside this pattern represent a rejection of this bigger biblical picture.

And so, in the same way that it is impossible to reject Scripture’s condemnation of hypocrisy, it is not possible to reject Scripture’s condemnation of same-sex sexual relationships. And in the same way that Scripture implores us to commend and pursue justice and mercy, so it implores us to commend and pursue the God-given pattern for sexual activity as inside male–female marriage.

### RESOURCES:

Ian Paul, ‘Same-sex unions’, Grove booklet B71 (See [Recommended Books](#))

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## ARE EVANGELICALS UNREASONABLY SUBJECTIVE IN THEIR SELECTION OF THE SCRIPTURES THEY KEEP AND THOSE THEY REJECT?

Evangelicals are sometimes criticised for their reading of Scripture in that they are seen to be 'selective' as to which passages they take as normative.

For example, there are passages in Leviticus that are widely agreed as non-normative for today's world (e.g. Leviticus 19 and its prohibitions on mixed-fibre clothes and particular haircuts). So – the criticism goes – why is it then possible/appropriate to take seriously/literally what Leviticus says about same-sex relations?

In response to this criticism, it is reasonable to argue that the 'selectivity' of evangelicals towards such parts of the Old Testament law is entirely justifiable. This is because Old Testament law is a composite mix of sacrificial law (e.g. ritual), legal law and moral law/teaching. The death and resurrection of Jesus meant that the religious requirements of the old covenant no longer have purchase on Christians. Equally so, the 'punishments' for crimes in the Old Testament were part and parcel of their legal system – something that is now superseded.

However – by way of marked contrast – there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that the moral and ethical foundations of Old Testament thinking have been in any way superseded. Indeed Jesus himself endorses the Old Testament law (Matthew 5:17).

A second criticism is sometimes made of the way evangelicals sometimes interpret Paul and certain New Testament passages. In a nutshell – the argument goes – evangelicals do not see Paul's injunction that women should 'stay silent' to be normative for the 21st century. So why should we take Paul's writing on sexuality as binding?

With regard to this, it is reasonable to suppose that the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34–38 and 1 Timothy 2:9–15 address specific cultural situations rather than being universally applicable. However – and by way of contrast – the reason evangelicals still abide by what Paul says about homosexuality in Romans 1:24–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 is because there is nothing to suggest that this teaching is culturally specific in the same way. Rather it is offered to its original readers as normative – and therefore to us in the same way.

The evangelical approach to Old Testament law and Pauline teaching is therefore neither as arbitrary nor as subjective as is sometimes made out.

### RESOURCES:

Wes Hill, 'Disputable Matters? Sex vs Food'

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/08/18/disputable-matters-sex-vs-food/>

## IS IT HYPOCRITICAL OF THE CHURCH TO PERMIT REMARRIAGE IN CHURCH AFTER DIVORCE, BUT NOT SAME-SEX MARRIAGE OR BLESSINGS OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS?

When questioned about divorce (Matthew 19:3–12, Mark 10:2–12), Jesus says that the provision for relatively easy divorce made in Deuteronomy 24:1 was a temporary concession to human 'hardness of heart' (Matthew 19:8) which has now been abrogated in the light of the coming of God's Kingdom.

In its place, Jesus asserts that the relevant norm or standard is the original created pattern for marriage in Genesis 2, which implies lifelong union between a woman and a man which cannot necessarily be broken by a legal decree. Jesus shows the seriousness of ending a marriage and marrying another person by describing such behaviour as adultery (Matthew 5:31–32, Mark 10:8–12, Luke 16:18). The implication of this is normally assumed to be that it is adultery *because the original couple are still truly married*, even if they have divorced properly in the eyes of the law. An alternative explanation is that Jesus meant that anyone who divorces their spouse *in order to* marry another is committing adultery. If so, this restriction would not apply to people whose marriage simply broke up, but not because they already intended to marry someone else.

In at least Matthew's gospel, Jesus allows a clear exception to the impossibility of divorce, namely when *porneia* (an act of sexual immorality) has been committed (Matthew 5:32, 19:9). (Sometimes this is taken simply to mean adultery, but it has wider connotations than that.) The explanation usually offered for this (although it is not made explicit by Jesus) is that sexual unfaithfulness has *already* destroyed the marriage, hence the victim is free to remarry. (Some scholars have argued that Jesus only permitted divorce, not remarriage, but this does not seem likely given that the very point of getting divorced was in order to be free to remarry.)

Paul also seems to allow remarriage when a Christian spouse is divorced or deserted by a non-Christian (1 Corinthians 7:15). The Christian is now 'free', which probably means 'free to marry'. Some have argued that the same freedom should apply in other circumstances not explicitly addressed in Scripture, e.g. to those who have been divorced against their will, even if their original spouse was also a Christian, or to those who divorced due to abuse.

The New Testament therefore does seem to permit remarriage after divorce in certain circumstances, in contrast to its teaching on same-sex sexual relationships. However, the New Testament does not seem to

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## IS IT HYPOCRITICAL OF THE CHURCH TO PERMIT REMARRIAGE IN CHURCH AFTER DIVORCE, BUT NOT SAME-SEX MARRIAGE OR BLESSINGS OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS? [CONT.]

recognise the possibility of 'no fault' divorce, where a couple separate simply because they feel the marriage is not working or has broken down. The Church of England's official position is similarly restrictive: "there are exceptional circumstances in which a divorced person may be married in church during the lifetime of a former spouse" (General Synod, 2002). It may be that in practice the church has become overly accepting of remarriage in church after divorce but, if this is so, the correct response is not to say that we should also perform same-sex marriages and bless same-sex relationships, but to adhere more faithfully to the biblical teaching over marriage and divorce.

## IF THE CHURCH HAS CHANGED ITS MIND ABOUT SLAVERY AND IS FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, ISN'T IT RIGHT THAT SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOW ACCEPTED?

This argument depends on the idea that there is some kind of trajectory that leads from the abolition of slavery through the recognition of the need to grant equal rights and status to women to the acceptance of same-sex relations. If we ask what this trajectory looks like the answer is that it consists of an awareness that Christ has given a new status to the socially oppressed and excluded by granting them an equal place within the new community he has created through his death and resurrection.

During his earthly ministry Jesus gave an equal welcome to everyone, including those who were rejected or marginalised by contemporary Jewish society such as the 'tax collectors and sinners' (Matthew 9:1–13) and those who had leprosy (Luke 17:11–19). Following on from this the Church that came into existence after Pentecost was a community that learned not to regard anyone as unclean and therefore to be excluded (Acts 10:9–48) and that gave equal status to Jews and Gentiles, slaves and those who were free and men and women on the basis of a common relationship with Christ created through baptism (Galatians 3:28). The abolition of slavery and the granting of equal rights to women in society and the Church are the expression of this inclusive trajectory and the same would be true, so the argument goes, of giving equal acceptance to those in same-sex relationships.

There are two problems with this argument. Firstly, whilst it is possible to trace a changing trajectory through Scripture with regards to slaves and women, the same cannot be said regarding same-sex relationships. So, from Genesis to Revelation there is obvious 'movement' in the status of slaves and the institution of slavery. Whereas slaves in Abram's time were essentially 'chattels', by Paul's time he is able to write of his friend and colleague Onesimus (Philemon) now a fully fledged member of the Church and people of God. Similarly, the experience of women from first Bible times to the time of the New Testament Church changes significantly such that Paul commends, appreciates and releases the ministry of women in the churches for which he has a responsibility. However, there is no parallel trajectory or 'movement' in regard to the exercise of same-sex sexual relationships.

Secondly, the argument identified in the title fails to make a distinction between people and behaviour. All sorts of people were welcomed by Jesus and the Early Church, but they were welcomed on the understanding that they were willing to die to their old way of life and embrace a new pattern of behaviour based on radical obedience to God (Mark 8:34–38, Romans 6:1–14). This new way of life included a

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## **IF THE CHURCH HAS CHANGED ITS MIND ABOUT SLAVERY AND IS FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, ISN'T IT RIGHT THAT SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOW ACCEPTED? [CONT.]**

rejection of all forms of sexual sin (Matthew 5:27–30, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8). This would necessitate and include the rejection of sexual same-sex relationships as incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Those experiencing same-sex attraction would still be welcomed as people into the community and life of the Church – but their behaviour (as with all those welcomed into the Church) would need to be consonant with the radical obedience and ethical framework demanded by membership of the Kingdom.

### RESOURCES:

Steve Holmes, 'Serious thinking does not always lead to the same conclusion'

<http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7210>

## JESUS'S EMPHASIS IN RELATIONSHIPS WAS LOVE – SURELY MARRIAGE IS A QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP NOT A PRESCRIBED SHAPE?

Songs, slogans and (more recently) tweets have often supported the widespread contention that 'All you need is love'. More recently, it has been suggested that Jesus's teaching on relationships had a priority and focus on the quality and nature of love and that, as such, our Christian ethic should be more concerned with the quality of relationships than their shape or pattern.

However, a closer look at Jesus's teaching suggests that two complementary understandings combine to undermine this simple (and sometimes convenient) assertion.

It is clear that Jesus saw marriage as being grounded in the creative activity of God who made human beings as male and female and then brought them together in a sexual union in marriage (Matthew 19:3–6).

Secondly, and into that framework Jesus advocated marital permanence and exclusivity, avoiding divorce (Matthew 19:6–9) and adultery (Matthew 5:27–30). There is no suggestion that the former of these – the framework for marriage – is either any more or less important than the quality of the relationship expected.

All this means that the quality of a relationship and its shape cannot be separated in a scriptural ethic. A relationship can only have the quality of love if the form of that relationship is appropriate within the order that God has created. This means in turn that a loving marital relationship can only exist in accordance with the nature of marriage as God has created it – a permanent and faithful union between one man and one woman.

### RESOURCES:

A particularly good video on Jesus and his teaching on sexuality from Robert Gagnon's website: <http://vimeo.com/71773619>

'Was Jesus "inclusive"?' by Ian Paul  
<http://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/was-jesus-inclusive/>

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## DOES THE BIBLE HAVE EXAMPLES OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS?

There is no doubt at all that the Bible does give us examples of loving relationships between people of the same sex. In the Old Testament there are the relationships between Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:9, 14–17) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1–3, 20:41, 2 Samuel 1:26). In the New Testament there is the relationship between Jesus and ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’, probably St John (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7 and 20).

The fact that these were loving relationships does not tell anything about whether sex was involved. Love and sex are not the same thing. The question is not whether these relationships were real and loving, but whether they were sexually active. And unless this can be demonstrated, then the mere fact of the existence of these relationships is irrelevant to the question of whether the Church should accept same-sex sexual activity as normative.

A closer reading of the texts indicates that there was kissing between Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:9) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:41). Kissing and sex do not necessarily go together and there is nothing in either of the verses just mentioned to connect the two. What would be required to show that the relationships were sexual would be statements to this effect and these do not exist.

Nothing at all is said about sex in the case of Jesus or the beloved disciple and in the cases of Ruth, Naomi, David and Jonathan all that is said explicitly or implicitly is that they engaged in heterosexual sex and had children as a result. It could be argued that they were bisexual and engaged in homosexual sex as well, but there is absolutely no evidence for this.

In short, the idea that the biblical examples of same-sex relationships can be used to support the acceptance of same-sex sexual activity is a classic example of trying to make bricks without straw. The argument is based on fantasy, akin to the claim that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had children.

### RESOURCES:

Wes Hill, ‘An Impatience with Biblical Exegesis’

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/08/27/an-impatience-with-biblical-exegesis/>

## DOES THE BIBLE FAIL TO ENDORSE COMMITTED SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS ONLY BECAUSE IT HAD NO AWARENESS OR KNOWLEDGE OF THEM?

The Greco-Roman world of the 1st century did not use the binary concepts of 'gay' and 'straight' that we use today. The Greeks and the Romans viewed human beings simply as sexual beings who expressed their sexuality in a variety of different ways, with members of the opposite sex, with members of the same sex, or with both (either at the same time or at different stages of their lives). The Greco-Roman world also differed from ours in that its view of sexual relations was shaped by its view of the importance of social hierarchy. Thus same-sex relations between adult males were regarded as acceptable among the Romans providing the dominant sexual partner was of a higher social standing.

However, these differences notwithstanding, the Greco-Roman world was like ours in that those in it were aware of a similar range of relationships and sexual activities between members of the opposite sex and members of the same sex, both male and female, to those we know about today. The range ran from multiparty orgies at one end of the spectrum to platonic love at the other with everything in between including casual relationships, prostitution, pederasty, and same-sex 'marriages' as well as marriages between people of the opposite sex.

It is clear from the pages of the New Testament that the early Christians were aware of the range of sexual activity taking place in their society and that this included awareness of consensual same-sex relationships (to which St Paul refers in Romans 1:26–27).

However, in making a judgement about this range of activity the criteria that the New Testament writers apply are not the ones that many people tend to make today. Today many people ask whether a sexual relationship is loving, committed and consensual. The key questions the New Testament writers ask are whether a relationship is in accordance with the order of things established by God at creation (as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2) and whether it is in accordance with the law God subsequently gave to Israel. The reason the New Testament takes a negative view of same-sex sexual relationships is that they fail on both counts. They are against the created order put in place by God (Romans 1:26–27) and they are contrary to the Ten Commandments and the teaching of Leviticus 18 and 20 (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, 1 Timothy 1:10).

For the New Testament writers therefore the question of whether or not a same-sex relationship was a committed one would have been irrelevant in the same way it would be in the case of an incestuous or adulterous relationship. For them, all such relationships would be inherently wrong in all circumstances.

## JESUS DIDN'T CONDEMN HOMOSEXUALITY – RATHER THE RICH, HYPOCRITICAL ETC. WHY ARE EVANGELICALS SO OBSESSED WITH SAME-SEX SEX?

It is sometimes suggested that evangelicals are obsessed with condemning various forms of sexual expression (including same-sex sex) and that this is in contrast to Jesus who did not talk so much about sex. He – the argument goes – was much more interested in condemning the rich and hypocritical, the religious and the unjust.

However, this is an unsubstantial criticism on two counts. Firstly, because it appears to suggest that evangelical ethics are only informed by the teaching of Jesus as against Scripture as a whole. The Canons of the Church of England confirm that the Pauline epistles and the Old Testament ethical writings are no more or less authoritative of Scripture than the gospels. Jesus certainly endorsed the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the Church throughout history has endorsed the authority of all the New Testament writings and not just those of the gospels.

Secondly – and with specific reference to Jesus's teaching – it is clear that Jesus was opposed to same-sex sex. The first piece of evidence is the statement of Jesus in Mark 7:21–22 about what makes a human being unclean in the sight of God: 'For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.' The word translated 'fornication' in this passage is the Greek plural noun *porneiai* which was used in the 1st century to refer to the sexual offences forbidden by Leviticus 18–20, among which is same-sex intercourse (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13). It follows that what Jesus is saying is that homosexual activity is one of the 'evil things' that come out of the fallen human heart.

The second piece of evidence is the fact that Jesus expressed his call to radical obedience to God in terms of a sexual ethic that was more rather than less strict in its interpretation of the Old Testament than that of his contemporaries, and was based on a reaffirmation of the teaching about lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual relationships in Genesis 1 and 2 (Matthew 5:27–32, 19:3–12). It is therefore impossible to conceive that Jesus would have endorsed homosexuality had this been an issue which had arisen during his ministry.

Finally, it needs to be noted that the Early Church was in a much better position than we will ever be to know what Jesus would have thought about homosexuality, and the evidence from the epistles suggests that it believed that he would not have affirmed homosexual activity. It is difficult to account for the Early Church's consistent rejection of such activity on any other basis.

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## JESUS DIDN'T CONDEMN HOMOSEXUALITY – RATHER THE RICH, HYPOCRITICAL ETC. WHY ARE EVANGELICALS SO OBSESSED WITH SAME-SEX SEX? [CONT.]

For all these reasons it seems clear that in opposing same-sex sex, evangelicals are simply following Jesus's example.

### RESOURCES:

'Was Jesus "inclusive"?' by Ian Paul

<http://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/was-jesus-inclusive/>

See also the article: [Jesus's emphasis in relationships was love – surely marriage is a quality of relationship not a prescribed shape?](#)

## SCIENCE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

When we talk about the morality of different kinds of sexual interests, the question of ‘what science tells us’ often comes into the conversation. The point usually being made is that we now know much more about human sexuality than in biblical times so we need to revise or update our thinking about the moral issues as well.

The question of how science relates to our understanding of human sexuality in fact has a long and controversial history. On one side of the debate, people have sometimes used labels of illness to pathologise and humiliate people considered to be different from them. Until 1973, for example, homosexuality was considered by psychiatrists to be an illness in need of a cure. On the other side, revisionist theologians have sometimes deployed science (without really understanding it) to imply that the Bible no longer has anything relevant to say on this issue. So we need to think carefully about how science works, and what it can actually contribute to serious theological debate and moral reasoning in this area. And we need to be especially vigilant to the way that science is used (on all sides) for political leverage and point scoring.

It is not possible here to review the vast number of (often contradictory) scientific claims about the complex area of human sexual interests. But we do need to consider the more fundamental questions that lie behind them.

### **The latest scientific discoveries often turn out to be wrong**

Science is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world based on painstaking observational evidence and repeated experimentation. The conclusions of scientific thinking are most reliable when they have been tested repeatedly under experimental (controlled) conditions. But in many areas it is difficult to carry out repeat tests under laboratory-type conditions. The vagaries of the ‘science’ of economics is a case in point. And in complex areas such as the study of human behaviour, individual observations have to be merged to create bigger theories, or stories, to try to explain what is going on, and these are extremely difficult to test experimentally under controlled conditions. That is why we get newspaper headlines of ‘study proves X’ one day, and then ‘study disproves X’ the next, each backed up with pie charts and professorial talking heads.

Science methodology has delivered enormous social and material goods for human civilisation. But when we hear about the latest science claims in the sphere of sexuality, we should retain a healthy scepticism: there is no substitute for checking the facts carefully for ourselves and asking: Are these claims really justified by the evidence? The popular notion that there is a ‘gay gene’ is a good example of how small unproven studies may be seized on, popularised and then used by media elites to shape a whole new cultural understanding of the way things work. But as we see in another article, the evidence for a ‘gay gene’ turned out to be very weak indeed.

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## SCIENCE AND HUMAN SEXUALITY [CONT.]

### Science and morality function in different categories

Even when a scientific discovery seems reasonably reliable, we need to be careful about using it to support a particular line of moral reasoning. Science can help us to map and investigate our experiences, but it can't interpret them or answer questions about moral value. Science can help us to understand factors that predispose us to experiencing certain attractions, and it can make predictions about the outcomes of different courses of action, but it can't tell us what we should actually do about our wants and desires. These are different categories of analysis and we shouldn't confuse them.

Take the case of promiscuity. Certain genetic profiles may turn out to be linked with a tendency toward seeking 'one-night stands', especially those genes, or groups of genes, that are associated with personality traits such as impulsiveness and novelty-seeking. But that doesn't absolve us from the need to test our desires against moral standards and beliefs and to control our behaviour in line with them. So when we hear the latest claims about science and 'what we now know', we should handle with care: science can't settle the moral status of different human sexual interests.

### RESOURCES:

Mark A. Yarhouse and Stanton L. Jones, 'Honest Sex-Science'  
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/10/honest-sex-science>

Stanton L. Jones, 'Same Sex Science'  
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2012/02/same-sex-science>

Glynn Harrison, 'Sexuality and the politicisation of science'  
<http://glynnharrison.wordpress.com/2014/07/09/sexuality-and-the-politicisation-of-science/>

'The Witness of Science' in P. Groves (2010), *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality* (chapter 8). SPCK

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## ARE PEOPLE ‘BORN GAY’?

The notion that people are ‘born gay’ provides a good example of how preliminary scientific findings can be seized upon, politicised and then embedded in culture as an indisputable fact that ‘everybody knows’ is true.

Twenty years ago a study claimed to have found a specific gene linked to male sexual orientation. It was never replicated but it helped to spawn the idea that there are just two groups of people – gay or straight – whose sexual interests and attractions are somehow fixed at birth.

Since then the evidence for a genetic cause has weakened considerably. Genes contribute to the development of our sexual desires and interests – just as they contribute to the development of personality traits such as humility and compassion. But whatever our attractions and instinctive interests, they are almost certainly the result of a complex interplay between genes and environment. And of course all kinds of factors come into play as we decide whether and how to act upon our attractions and desires.

The ‘born gay’ theory also implies that our sexual interests are fixed and inflexible. But the more reliable surveys (all of them have problems of accuracy) now suggest that bisexuality is the most common identity label chosen by women. And there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that for many men, too, sexuality can be experienced as more fluid and changeable.

This complexity does not diminish the reality that a minority of men and women experience same-sex attraction as a powerful experience throughout their lives. But we need to recognise that it is but one part of a larger, more flexible, picture of human sexuality and we should certainly think carefully before saddling children and young people with identity-fixing labels. Many faithful Christians, whether or not they believe they were born gay, prefer their given identity in Christ as the basis on which to order and discipline their sexual interests and desires.

### RESOURCES:

D. De Pomerio (2010), ‘The Witness of Science’ in P. Groves, *The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality*. SPCK

L. Diamond (a leading researcher on sexual fluidity)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=m2rTHDOuUBw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=m2rTHDOuUBw)

‘Generation LGBTQIA’ (2013), *New York Times*  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html>

P. Ould, ‘Can your sexuality change?’  
<http://www.livingout.org/can-your-sexuality-change->

Jenell Williams Parish – an anthropologist critiquing the gay/straight distinction  
<http://vimeo.com/40678343>; see also <http://vimeo.com/32986105>

## CAN SEXUALITY CHANGE?

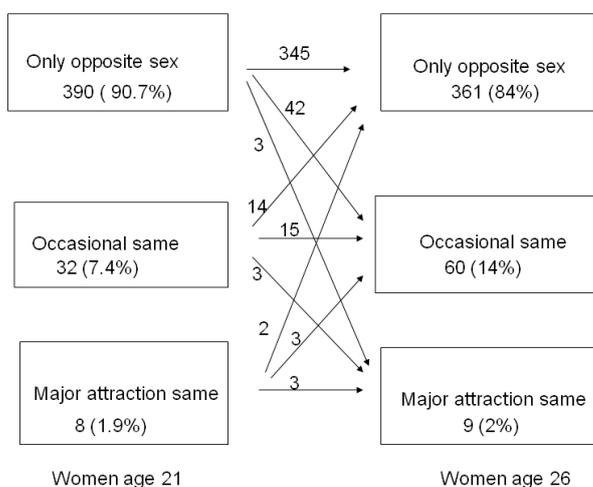
### Does sexuality change naturally?

Some people do experience a shift in sexual attractions from homosexual to heterosexual or vice versa. In a recent paper for the *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, Michael King (who is the chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Gay and Lesbian Special Interest Group and openly homosexual) and others looked at the correlation between how men and women described their sexual orientation, and alongside that gave a report of their sexual partnership status. Of the almost 3,500 participants who described themselves as 'entirely heterosexual' or 'mostly heterosexual', over 20 said that their choice for sexual partner was 'mainly same sex' or 'only same sex'. This constituted 0.6% of the population. However, when the same question was asked of the 44 participants who described themselves as 'mostly homosexual' or 'entirely homosexual', eight said that their choice of sexual partner was 'only opposite sex' or 'more often opposite sex'. This constituted almost 20% of the group of 44, or proportionally 30 times as many as those who were heterosexual but mainly had homosexual relationships.

However, when people were asked to describe themselves as gay or lesbian rather than homosexual, only one of the 29 people who described themselves as gay or lesbian said their sexual relationships were exclusively or mainly heterosexual (now only approximately 3%). This may suggest that around a third of those who experienced mainly or exclusively homosexual attraction did not *want* to describe themselves as gay or lesbian (a reduction from 1.2% to 0.8%).

Another significant study is the 2003 piece by Dickson, Paul and Herbison where, as part of a cohort study of women born 1972/1973, the researchers explored sexual behaviour over time. One of their findings is expressed in the diagram below.

Persistence and change in 'current attractions' (Dickson et al, 2003)



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## CAN SEXUALITY CHANGE? [CONT.]

Of the eight women who at age 21 claimed a major attraction to those of the same sex, five years later two of them (25%) now claimed to be exclusively opposite-sex attracted, and a further three (37.5%) claimed only to have occasional same-sex attractions. Meanwhile, three of the 390 women (< 1%) who reported exclusive heterosexual attraction at age 21 reported major homosexual attraction at age 26, and a further 42 (just over 10%) reported some homosexual attraction.

A ten-year US longitudinal study by Mock and Eibach also built up a picture of a bipolar sexual orientation spectrum with transition both ways. Transition was far more likely from homosexual/bisexual towards another orientation than from heterosexuality towards bisexuality/homosexuality. This effect is more pronounced amongst women than men.

More recent research by Lisa Diamond indicates that even amongst men and women who identify as exclusively homosexual, there are large proportions who also report sexual encounters with those of the opposite sex.

### Can sexuality change through therapy?

The main longitudinal study of so-called 'reparative therapy' was carried out by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse. This research used psychotherapy industry standard measures to assess whether sexual orientation of participants changed, and whether the therapy caused psychological harm to the participants.

*On average*, Jones and Yarhouse observed a small recordable orientation shift in those who participated, but not a significant one. However, for those who began the therapy self-reporting as almost exclusively homosexual in their attractions, there was a more noticeable shift in orientation that was significant. This seemed to indicate that therapy was more likely to be successful at helping those who had exclusive homosexuality to develop some heterosexual feelings, but it didn't provide anything like a 'gay to straight' outcome.

At the time, sexual orientation was usually measured on a single bipolar scale between exclusively homosexual and exclusively heterosexual (the so-called Kinsey Scale). But when participants were asked to measure homosexual attraction *and* heterosexual attraction on separate scales (i.e. not in relation to each other) then the change was more substantial. For the whole population there was a significant reduction in homosexual attraction. The more pronounced a participant's homosexual orientation was to begin with, the more pronounced the reduction in their

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## CAN SEXUALITY CHANGE? [CONT.]

homosexual attraction. However, there was no *significant* increase in heterosexual attraction, though on average participants did record some increase.

Jones and Yarhouse also asked participants to report what they felt were the results of the therapy. Over two-thirds of the participants reported a positive desired change with respect to their sexuality. NB this included now being able to live a chaste life, or feeling positive about continuing in therapy. One in eight of the participants reported that they had rejected the premise of the therapy and were definitely gay, or that they were confused about their sexual identity. Significantly, not only was there no clinical evidence that reparative therapy caused harm, there was a significant decrease in the distress reported by participants.

### Summary

So, studies of homosexuals who haven't sought to change their orientation show that for some people sexuality changes naturally over the years. Specifically, female homosexuality seems to be more fluid than male. This fits with the twin studies which suggest a potentially higher environmental factor for homosexuality amongst women than men.

Where people have tried to change, there is evidence that such efforts have some effect, and the best longitudinal study so far indicates no evidence that such therapy is psychologically damaging, even where it does not achieve the results the participant wanted, and it can have other benefits such as reducing the person's distress. At the same time, Jones and Yarhouse's work sounds a note of caution: many of those who undertook the therapy did not see any significant change in their sexual orientation. The idea that 'ex-gay' ministries are the right way forward for all those struggling with same-sex attractions is therefore not supported by the evidence.

### RESOURCES:

This article is an abbreviated version of a longer article by Peter Ould, available here (with full references and footnotes):

<http://www.livingout.org/can-your-sexuality-change->

'Why are some people same-sex attracted?' by Ed Shaw

<http://www.livingout.org/why-are-some-people-same-sex-attracted->

Lisa Diamond discusses her research:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2rTHDOuUBw>

## REAL-LIFE STORIES FROM LIVING OUT

[LivingOut.org](http://www.livingout.org) is a website set up by Christians who experience same-sex attraction, and who want to share their stories, answer questions, and recommend resources about Christianity and same-sex attraction. These are their [stories](#).

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Vaughan       | 'God's teaching about sex is marvellous and challenging for everyone.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/vaughan">http://www.livingout.org/stories/vaughan</a>                                 |
| Sean and Gaby | 'There has definitely been some change in my attractions and feelings.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/sean-and-gaby">http://www.livingout.org/stories/sean-and-gaby</a>                    |
| Mark          | 'I lived within the gay community for over 20 years, fully identifying myself as a gay individual.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/mark">http://www.livingout.org/stories/mark</a>          |
| Ed            | 'I can live without sex because sex isn't the only way for deep and meaningful relationships with other people.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/ed">http://www.livingout.org/stories/ed</a> |
| Sam           | 'The One who made me and knows me better than I know myself is going to know what's good for me.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/sam">http://www.livingout.org/stories/sam</a>              |
| Peter         | 'I don't see myself as straight, gay, ex-gay or halfway in between. My sexual identity is in Christ.'<br><a href="http://www.livingout.org/stories/peter">http://www.livingout.org/stories/peter</a>      |

## SHOULD CHRISTIANS DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS GAY?

Many Christians who are same-sex oriented identify themselves as gay, and the term does not automatically imply an endorsement of same-sex sexual relationships. For example, author and theologian Wesley Hill is a gay Christian who has been prominent in arguing that Scripture does indeed rule out sexual relationships between people of the same sex, and advocating celibacy as a fulfilling way of life. Others have found it helpful to use the term gay as a recognition not simply that they are attracted to people of the same sex, but that their attractions are exclusively so. That is, gay simply describes their sexual orientation.

However, some Christians who are same-sex oriented prefer not to use the term gay to describe themselves, not because they are ignoring or denying their sexual orientation, but because they do not regard their sexual identity as gay. Biblically speaking, sexual identity is defined in terms of male and female, not heterosexual or homosexual. Indeed, some heterosexual Christians have therefore chosen not to identify themselves as heterosexual or straight, for the same reason. This is not a denial of a person's sexual orientation as a fact about them. But gay is not their sexual identity – it is not who they are. Who they are is a man or a woman, created in God's image and redeemed by Christ. For some but probably not most same-sex oriented Christians, this has been a step towards enabling them to consider the possibility of a vocation to marriage to someone of the opposite sex.

Summary: because the term gay does not imply a view one way or the other about sexual ethics, there is no absolute reason to avoid it. For some people, it will be helpful pastorally to use the term to describe themselves, whilst others find it more helpful not to define themselves in that way.

### RESOURCES:

'A theological and pastoral reflection on my journey away from a homosexual identity', by Sean Doherty, in the journal *Anvil*  
<http://goo.gl/2YWfxJ>

Steve Holmes, 'Why it's WEIRD to be straight'  
<http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7303>

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## IS THE CHURCH HOMOPHOBIC?

The reality is that gay and same-sex oriented people have experienced a range of treatments and responses in the Church. Whilst some have not only been shown warmth and appreciation but encouraged into ministry and trusted with responsibility, others have been held back from ministry and even the sacraments because of their sexual orientation, even when they have been seeking to live faithfully according to the Bible's teaching regarding sex.

The reality is that for all of us our sexual desires can be distorted by sin and we are all equally in need of God's forgiveness and transformation. Thus treating a gay or same-sex oriented person differently to an opposite-sex oriented person because of their sexuality (as opposed to, say, how they choose to express it) is indeed homophobic. As well as direct discrimination like this, many gay people have reported hearing so-called 'jokes' and negative generalisations in the Church about gay people, which is clearly deeply damaging to them personally and a serious impairment to our witness. If we want gay people to trust the Church and feel safe as part of it, these behaviours must be acknowledged and challenged.

At the same time, there is a tendency in our wider culture to designate anything as homophobia which falls short of full acceptance and affirmation of same-sex sexual relationships. This is not credible, because the basis for not affirming such relationships is not a particular view about them as such, but the broader conviction that sex is only for marriage (and that marriage is between a man and a woman) – a conviction which is, of course, shared by many gay and same-sex oriented people.

So, there is indeed homophobia in the Church. This has made it harder for some gay and same-sex oriented people to be open about their sexuality and receive needed love and support. But upholding the historical teaching of the Church regarding sex as a good gift for marriage between a man and a woman is not itself homophobic, any more than being gay is itself to be in favour of same-sex sexual relationships.

### RESOURCES:

'Is the Church homophobic?' by Sean Doherty at <http://www.livingout.org/is-the-church-homophobic>

and see this constructively critical response:  
'The Church is homophobic – true or false?' by Wesley Hill at <http://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/01/31/the-church-is-homophobic-true-or-false/>

Jenell Williams Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are*, IVP, 2011  
From around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/O6bJQw>

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## HOW CAN WE ENSURE LGBT+ PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME IN OUR CHURCHES?

On the whole, the answer to this question is deceptively simple: the way we welcome LGBT+ people is the same way we should welcome everyone! We greet them warmly, we get to know them, we show them hospitality. It is important not to think that because of their sexuality, the situation of LGBT+ people is different or more problematic than anyone else's. They need and have the right to be treated with love and dignity.

So, LGBT+ people don't need to be welcomed differently because of their sexuality. But because of the way that at least some, perhaps many, LGBT+ people have been treated by the Church, there are some positive things which Church members and leaders can do. But these need to be done because of the situation of LGBT+ people with respect to the Church, not because they are LGBT+ as such.

Ask them how much they are willing to share their story and journey with you, and listen to what they are willing to share. This is always a privilege! If they have been hurt by the Church in the past, acknowledge this and take it seriously.

Ask them what they would find helpful. A gay couple wanted to do an evangelistic course at a church, and the pastor invited them for dinner beforehand. Without setting aside what he believed, he explained he wanted them to feel completely welcome and he asked if there was anything he could do to ensure that. He asked them to let him know if they encountered any homophobia on the course. In doing so, he acknowledged not only that they needed to feel welcomed, but that they already had something to offer and teach the church.

Be consistent. If you let unmarried opposite-sex couples share a room at the church weekend away, you should do the same with a gay couple. If you baptise members of or the children of cohabiting opposite-sex couples, baptise members of or the children of same-sex couples. And don't hold LGBT+ people to different standards when it comes to responsibility and leadership.

### RESOURCES:

A clear bullet-point approach from Sam Allberry: 'How can our churches support Christians facing this issue?'

<http://www.livingout.org/the-church-and-ssa>

'What makes a church safe?' by Kyle Keating

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/09/16/what-makes-a-church-safe>

See also:

[How do we welcome everyone without necessarily endorsing their beliefs or choices?](#)

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## HOW DO WE WELCOME EVERYONE WITHOUT NECESSARILY ENDORSING THEIR BELIEFS OR CHOICES?

The church is called to welcome everyone, just as God welcomes every one of us 'while we were still sinners' (Romans 5:8).

As mentioned in [the previous article](#), it is essential to welcome same-sex couples and single gay people who are not already signed up to the biblical teaching about sex in exactly the same way we would welcome anyone else. Most church leaders minister frequently amongst couples who are cohabiting and, especially if one or more of the couple are Christians, there will come a point for a gentle but honest conversation about how this relates to their following of Christ. But it is not the first or the dominant topic of conversation! The first priority is to ensure that they are welcomed, and treated with love and respect. This is what they need first and foremost, in order that as they meet with God, receive good teaching and grow in maturity, they will surrender their lives more fully to him.

Jesus obviously held his moral convictions consistently, yet he did not hesitate to respond differently to different individuals according to what they needed (needed, not in the sense of what they thought they needed, of course, but in the sense of what he could see they truly needed). One response for the rich young ruler (dramatic challenge to sell everything), another for the woman caught in adultery (saving her life and pronouncing forgiveness before enjoining her not to sin any longer), yet another towards the men who brought the woman to him (exposing their own adultery). Holding our convictions without compromise doesn't automatically imply pronouncing them at every opportunity.

So, if a gay person or same-sex couple are part of a church or start attending a church, their immediate need is almost certainly not to be confronted personally with the biblical teaching about sex (although it is something that church leaders should regularly teach on publicly). Because of media coverage, they will almost certainly be perfectly well aware of what most Christians believe and churches teach about sex! What they will primarily need is to be welcomed warmly, loved and accepted just as they are, and offered a safe environment in which to grow in their faith – not because we don't want them to live according to biblical teaching, but precisely because we want this for them.

See also:

[How can we ensure LGBT+ people feel welcome in our churches?](#)

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## HOW CAN WE EXPECT SOME PEOPLE TO REMAIN SINGLE?

Singleness has an image problem, both inside and outside the Church – but it can be especially daunting for Christians who believe that singleness entails celibacy. In our culture, the idea that someone could live their entire life without sex is regarded as preposterous, even dangerous. Inside the Church, especially the evangelical world, many single Christians feel that the Church regards marriage as ‘normal’ and therefore feel marginalised and not supported – how many churches run a ‘Living Well as a Single Person’ course alongside the myriad courses for married couples and parents? (This is not the same as a ‘relationships’ or ‘dating’ course – these are good, but can add to the impression that the goal of singleness is to stop being single and get married.)

And yet many of our most respected and admired Christian leaders now and in the past have lived without sex and marriage. Although the New Testament has a very positive view of marriage and sex which is affirming of bodily life (against some in its context who regarded the material world as unspiritual), they are not needed in order to live a completely fulfilling life. As far as we can tell from the biblical evidence, Jesus was not married (and therefore never had sex), and he taught that there would be no marriage in the new creation, yet we obviously believe that Jesus lived the most truly human, fulfilled life that is possible. This was even more radical in a 1st century context than it is now. Similarly, at the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he was unmarried and committed to remaining so (some scholars speculate that he had been married previously). He is clear that marriage is good, and that sex should be part of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:2–5). Yet he regards singleness as better and wishes that everyone else could be single like him (v7). The reason Paul gives for this is that single people can devote themselves more fully to ‘the Lord’s affairs’ (vv32–35). His conclusion is therefore: ‘he who marries ... does right, but he who does not marry ... does better’ (v38).

Conclusion: singleness – like marriage – can be a hard road to walk. Being single requires that we live a celibate life. But it is not second best. The Church needs to invest intentionally in singleness as a challenging but fulfilling way of life, just as it offers a great deal of support for marriage.

### RESOURCES:

Ed Shaw on ‘How can you live life without sex?’:

<http://www.livingout.org/how-can-you-live-life-without-sex->

A good introduction to the history and theology is Kathryn Wehr, *Singleness and the Early Church* (Grove, 2012).

See also:

[How can the church support single people seeking to live a godly life?](#)

## HOW CAN THE CHURCH SUPPORT SINGLE PEOPLE SEEKING TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE?

It's all very well to say with St Paul that singleness is 'better' than marriage (see [previous article](#)). But, just like marriage, singleness is a challenging calling, especially for those who believe that singleness entails sexual abstinence. We can live a fulfilled life without sex, but very few people can live without intimacy – not everyone is called to be a hermit! Jesus himself needed friends with whom to share his life. And, just like marriage, singleness requires careful preparation and ongoing investment in order to ensure that it is a life of intimacy and deep relationships. We all instinctively recognise that a healthy marriage doesn't just happen. Similarly, a healthy and fulfilling life as a single person does not just happen.

Here are just a few suggestions how churches can support single people to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

1. Be a place of healthy, appropriate physical touch and affection between friends and in church (in one survey, twice as many single people identified lack of touch as one of the hardest things about being single rather than lack of sex).
2. Consider living together in intentional communities (which may include couples as well as single people).
3. Teach biblically on the value of singleness, as well as practically on how to live a fulfilling and godly single life, and providing space for discussion of how this can be done well in your context.
4. Don't use language that makes it sound as if singleness is second best (e.g. 'Are you still single?' or offering platitudes such as 'It's not too late' which send the signal that the person is waiting for something else to happen, as opposed to enjoying life and serving God right now).
5. Don't assume that single people have lots more free time to serve in church or less stressful lives than married people.
6. Teach about good friendships and not just about sex and romantic relationships – everyone needs friendship, not just single people.
7. Intentionally ensure that staff and leadership teams (or equivalents) contain a mixture of married and single people, and never speak in terms which assume that leaders need to be part of a couple.
8. Encourage couples (especially those with children) to visit single people at home rather than expecting single people to come to them.

This article draws on suggestions made by Kate Wharton in her book

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## HOW CAN THE CHURCH SUPPORT SINGLE PEOPLE SEEKING TO LIVE A GODLY LIFE? [CONT.]

*Single Minded: Being Single, Whole and Living Life to the Full* (Monarch, 2013). Find it with Bookfinder.com, around £10: <http://goo.gl/LyL0mB>

### RESOURCES:

East End Fellowship –Traditional sexuality, radical community  
<http://goo.gl/OnNI3v>

Interview of Luigi Gioia OSB by Nicky Gumbel at the HTB Leadership Conference 2014 (6 May 2014, London) exploring celibacy and community  
<http://goo.gl/jiQthx>

Some recommended pieces from Spiritual Friendship

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/09/19/surprised-by-celibacy/>

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/10/07/when-singleness-isnt-loneliness/>

## ARE CHRISTIANS BEHIND THE TIMES ON MARRIAGE?

Legislation to allow same-sex marriage came into force in March 2014. For some, this watershed amendment to the legal definition of marriage represented a victory against discrimination. For others, it represented an alarming case of 'social engineering' by the state of an institution whose existence precedes the state and is therefore beyond the state's legitimate authority to redefine.

Christian voices were among those who expressed concern over changes to the legal definition of marriage. Why is that? Is it simply because the church is 'behind the times' on important issues such as equality and human freedom, as some have suggested?

From a public relations perspective things would be much easier for the Church if it kept its views on marriage to itself. However, it is precisely because Christians are concerned with notions of equality and human freedom that they have something to say about marriage.

Social theorists recognise that the ideals of equality and individual freedom must always be balanced against the need for societal flourishing and stability without which equality and individual freedom cannot exist. Stable societies rest on strong foundations and Christians believe that the most fundamental building block underpinning a stable society is a healthy marriage between a man and a woman. Marriage allows for the creation of children in a loving environment in which each gender has an irreplaceable role to play in the nurture and development of the child. Even secular studies agree that children thrive best in loving homes with a mother and a father; and although the best is not always possible in a complicated world it is something we should all aim for, particularly on behalf of our children. A compassionate society must ensure that the importance of adult desires does not take precedence over children's needs.

In addition to its social utility, Christians also believe that marriage is a sacred thing. The lifelong partnership between a man and a woman reflects something of the mystery of the triune God in whose image we are all created, male and female. It demonstrates a strong and beautiful symbiosis of unity in diversity in a way that same-sex relationships cannot.

The essayist G.K. Chesterton wisely cautioned that one should never take a fence down unless one knows the reason it was put up. Christians are of the view that the institution of marriage as between one man and one woman exists for good reasons; reasons that are obvious to anyone whether or not they believe, as Christians do, that marriage is a sacred gift from God. That is why throughout history and in virtually all human societies marriage has always been about the union of a man and a woman.

### SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE TRYING TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY WITH GOSPEL VALUES?

Secular influence in society means that orthodox Christian faith is increasingly different from the values and beliefs of the majority of non-churchgoers. What should we do with our gospel message and our understanding of God's standards? Keep them to ourselves? Or perhaps share publicly what we believe about Jesus, but keep what he taught about behaviour inside church, except where it coincides with the secular view (e.g. care for the poor)? There are strong arguments for the view that we should continue to share with the whole of society God's values and instructions for living.

The most loving thing to do is give the full message of God's good design for human creation, including what happens when we transgress those boundaries. Christians are the best equipped to deal with the complexity and pain of human frailty and failure because we know the One who forgives, redeems and restores. Does that mean we 'force' our views on others? Even as the Lord respects our free wills, so we too must do the same. So we never coerce, but that is very different from presenting a winsome articulate Christian argument in the public realm. Others do so from a variety of viewpoints; why must we remain mute?

Moreover, the notion that we should 'just preach the gospel' while forgoing engagement elsewhere fails to appreciate that there is actually no neutrality now; secularism is a 'faith' and increasingly hostile to others' faiths. We can see this happening in what is taught to our children in schools.

If we self-censor on 'PC' issues now in order not to 'offend', it is only a matter of time before we start self-censoring on the gospel of Jesus. In fact, we are starting to hear reports of how the noose is tightening and Christian witness to Jesus himself is becoming risky: see, for example, <http://goo.gl/LsrLUB>.

Though it is vital that our witness is sensitive and grace-filled, not to speak to pressing public issues by self-censoring actually denies our Lord and his Lordship over all creation.

## IS TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING ABOUT SEX A PROBLEM FOR MISSION?

The statistics make depressing reading. The Church is in decline. It seems more difficult by the year to do effective evangelism and win people to Christ. The culture appears to be hardening in many places against the gospel. Some versions of secularism hold that faith is not only weird and irrational but potentially dangerous or 'toxic'.

According to some, the diagnosis of the problem and its cure are simple. The fault is Christianity's failure to adapt to modern ideas, and in particular its old-fashioned and offensive views about sexual morality. No one will listen to our message – the argument goes – if we appear to be anti-gay.

So how do we go about mission?

Firstly, there are some who suggest that we need to be more in step with contemporary philosophy and culture. In other words we need to adapt the historical teaching of the Church and to allow the understandings of the times to refresh it.

Others suggest what might be seen as a head-in-the-sand approach: namely, not to talk about sexual ethics from the pulpit.

A better – and third – approach is to recognise two facts and then to respond to them with appropriate and biblical teaching.

Fact 1 – there are plenty of evangelical churches around the country who are teaching an orthodox Christian ethic about sex and sexuality and still seeing many people coming to living faith in Christ. This suggests that teaching an orthodox biblical view on sexuality does not stop people coming to faith.

Fact 2 – Enormous amounts of robust evangelical scholarship are still convinced that an orthodox interpretation of sexual ethics is entirely biblical. We therefore have no choice but to teach in keeping with it. The question is ... how best can we do this?

### Tips

Here are four suggestions that may help you to teach about sexual ethics without undermining the missional impact of your church.

1. Be honest in your teaching/preaching about sexual ethics (as you would be with all subjects). It's helpful for preachers and teachers to be honest and (appropriately) transparent in talking about their own experience. None of us is perfect. Our imperfections and struggles need to be shared in ways that are appropriate so that people wrestling with very real issues have safe spaces in which to discuss under Scripture their experience and struggles.

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## IS TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN TEACHING ABOUT SEX A PROBLEM FOR MISSION? [CONT.]

2. Teach positively. It is important that we derive our teaching on sexual behaviour from a doctrine of marriage and sexuality that is 'good'. God's gift of sex, sexuality and marriage to humanity was a good gift – and our teaching needs to be offered in such a way that that is made apparent. Evangelicals have sometimes focused too much on the 'Thou shalt not ...'.

3. Our teaching on sexual ethics needs to include a range of related and important issues, not just sexual intercourse. Singleness and fulfilled celibacy are two obvious examples.

Paul understood that the gospel itself was offensive to the Jews and incomprehensible to the Greeks. But he never withdrew from its presentation – even when its ethical implications were demanding and countercultural. We must do the same – in love, with respect and sensitivity and with urgency.

### RESOURCES:

Real-life stories from Living Out: Sean and Gaby  
<http://www.livingout.org/stories/sean-and-gaby>

### SHOULD WE AGREE TO DISAGREE ON SEXUALITY?

The claim is sometimes made in relation to the Church's response to same-sex relationships that we should 'agree to disagree'. Well-intentioned Christians genuinely reach different conclusions regarding the interpretation of Scripture in many other areas, and we accept those differences of opinion as legitimate, acknowledging the integrity of people on both sides. Is this an approach which we should adopt with respect to sexuality too?

Of course, people do have different points of view on this issue, not least in a context in which there is enormous cultural and emotional pressure to shift to a more accepting view of sex of same-sex relationships. And we can learn a huge amount from listening to and engaging with different views from our own, especially by hearing the personal stories of same-sex attracted and gay people, so we can continue to improve our pastoral practice (although, of course, SSA/gay people themselves have different views on this issue).

As well as listening to and learning from one another, we can also 'agree to disagree' in the sense that everyone is entitled to their opinion. As a Church, we teach and practice infant baptism. But there are plenty of Anglicans who believe in 'believer's baptism'. We do not think that this makes them unfaithful Christians, even if we might think they are wrong! In one sense, as a Church, we agree to disagree with them.

So, yes to listening and learning, and yes to agreeing to disagree with an opinion. But it does not follow from this that we should agree to disagree on official Church teaching, pastoral and liturgical practice, and ministerial discipline. To return to the example of our 'Anglican Baptists', we can accept them as faithful Christians and agree to disagree with their views. But if they seek rebaptism, clergy will politely refuse (and probably take the opportunity to explain to them the Church's teaching on baptism). In our teaching and pastoral practice, we uphold the faith we profess in one baptism, and we refrain from acts which would undermine it. The Church stands in a particular tradition, even if some of its faithful members disagree with that tradition.

As with baptism, so with marriage. We must listen to and learn from one another. That may even lead us to agree to disagree in the sense that we recognise that those with whom we disagree are godly people who have come to their conclusions in good faith. But all of that is quite different from settling the question of whether as a Church we should marry same-sex couples, publicly celebrate same-sex unions, or ordain those in sexual relationships other than marriage between a man and a woman. We can disagree together about what we should do but as a Church we either do something or we do not.

A final point to make is that in this matter we are not starting from a position of neutrality. The Church has a clear, well-established practice in this area. That practice is authorised by Scripture, theologically rooted, shared with the Church across time and denominations, and supported by the Anglican Communion. The fact some disagree and wish it to change is not sufficient basis to change it. Any change needs to be defended theologically and demonstrated to be authorised by (or at least consonant with) Scripture and one which will not damage the unity and mission of the body of Christ.

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## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Sam Allberry

***Is God antigay?***

The Good Book Company, 2013

This book addresses some of the really important questions that people ask including 'surely a same-sex partnership is ok if it is committed and faithful?' and 'Can't Christians just agree to differ on this?'

From around £5. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/PFqj4C>

Andrew Goddard

***God, Gentiles and Gay Christians: Acts 15 and Change in the Church***

Grove booklet (E121), 2001

A reply to the suggestion that Acts 15 (the incorporation of Gentiles into the early Jewish church) is a 'model' for doing the same with same-sex relationships.

£3.95 direct from Grove: <http://goo.gl/VKYz3j>

Andrew Goddard and Don Horrocks

***Biblical and Pastoral Responses to Homosexuality***

Evangelical Alliance, 2012

A superb combination of theology and sensitive pastoral thinking. The ten 'affirmations' may be of help for PCCs and other groups wishing to articulate their position.

£7.00 direct from Lulu.com: <http://goo.gl/jAjqCe>

Andrew Goddard (theologian) and Glynn Harrison (psychiatrist)

***Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction: Issues of Pastoral and Counselling Support***

Christian Medical Fellowship, 2011

A brief review of the evidence around the question of whether people can change their sexual attractions through therapy and counselling. The authors argue that because sexuality is flexible and fluid for some (although not all), many people have reported experiences of change in their sexual attractions as part of their life experience. However, because no high quality trials have been carried out we do not have evidence for (or against) specific counselling interventions designed to encourage change in the direction or strength of unwanted sexual interests. A similar lack of reliable and robust evidence makes it hard to evaluate claims that such approaches cause harm. The authors conclude that although the uncertainty around the evidence calls for great caution, and the need for better studies, this lack of trial evidence need not prevent people seeking counselling support for unwanted attractions if that is their choice, provided they are able to give extended and fully informed consent.

£2 direct from CMF: <http://goo.gl/qUvlp6>

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## RECOMMENDED BOOKS [CONT.]

Wesley Hill  
***Washed and Waiting***  
 Zondervan, 2010

A powerful and beautifully crafted apologetic for the orthodox biblical position seen through the eyes of somebody who experiences same-sex attraction. Contains important insights into the emotional as well as the intellectual struggles involved, rooted in a faithful and intelligent exploration of scripture. Strongly recommended.

From around £8. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/l12Fys>

Ian Paul  
***Same-Sex Unions***  
 Grove booklet (B71), 2014

A helpful and careful look at the seven key biblical texts concerning same-sex unions in which he contrasts 'traditional' and 'revisionist' interpretations of them.

£3.95 direct from Grove: <http://goo.gl/hjzu9V>

Jenell Williams Paris  
***The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are***  
 IVP, 2011

This is an easy to read book that explores issues of gender and Christian identity and that challenges us to move beyond some of the unhelpful categories that we all too easily import from the world. One reviewer suggested that Paris has produced an astute diagnosis of our times in suggesting that we live in an over-sexualised culture with an under-sexualised spirituality. A very helpful book in stretching and maturing the way we think and talk about identity.

From around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/O6bJQw>

Christopher Roberts  
***Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in and for the Moral Theology of Marriage***  
 T & T Clark

An historical study of the theological significance of sexual difference – the biological difference between male and female – throughout the Christian tradition. His argument is that this is foundational for a contemporary sexual anthropology and an adequate moral theology of marriage.

From around £30. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/ZHr4l8>

Patrick Whitworth  
***Prepare for Exile: A New Spirituality and Mission for the Church***  
 SPCK, 2008

Most of us agree that we no longer live in Christendom. Some are

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## RECOMMENDED BOOKS [CONT.]

suggesting that we are moving into what might be called an exilic period, where the church, in holding on to its beliefs, values and ethics will be increasingly at odds with the dominant culture. This book traces the experience of Christians in exile over the last 2000 years and offers a rich challenge in suggesting that exile might just be the Church's best friend! A well written book and an engaging read.

From around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/F0i0zs>

Mark A. Yarhouse

***Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors and Friends***

Bethany House Publishers, 2010

The author, a professional psychologist and academic with extensive experience in the research, teaching and counselling of issues of same-sex attraction, has written this guide for parents, pastors and friends.

From around £8. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/2lXb48>

Mark A. Yarhouse

***Understanding Sexual Identity: A Resource for Youth Ministry***

Zondervan, 2013

Another contribution from the same author, this book covers many of the critical questions in a thoughtful and balanced way, and is especially useful for those working with young people and youth groups.

From around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/qexKcD>

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## JEFFREY JOHN'S *PERMANENT, FAITHFUL, STABLE*

Jeffrey John is perhaps best known as the person who was appointed to be Bishop of Reading, a suffragan in Oxford diocese, in 2003, only to withdraw at the request of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, following protests. He wrote the booklet *Permanent, Faithful, Stable* in 1993 as one of a series for the liberal catholic group *Affirming Catholicism*. It was reprinted in an updated form in 2000 by DLT.

The booklet presents his argument in three sections, dealing in turn with the scriptural texts, moral questions, and whether the affirmation of same-sex unions would work in practice. Two issues stand out.

First, John's treatment of the scriptural texts, notwithstanding its brevity, is very poor. The texts are 'sparse and ambiguous' and really can tell us nothing about the contemporary question. He contrasts this by proposing that the prohibition on divorce is 'unambiguous', despite the fact that there are differing accounts of Jesus's teaching in Matthew and Mark, and that the New Testament teaching on gender roles is 'plainly degrading' to women, which ignores all the scholarship and discussion on these texts.

His treatment of the texts on same-sex activity are similarly broad-brush and simplistic; the texts in Leviticus are concerned with social distinction which does not concern us – and besides, we don't look to these laws for moral guidance any more. He ignores the possible implication of Jesus's teaching on 'sexual immorality', and is clear that Paul could not have imagined 'equal, adult' same-sex relationship when expressing his prohibitions. In Romans 1, Paul is criticising those who act against their own 'nature', i.e. their sexual orientation, which numerous commentators have demonstrated is a misreading.

Second, the overall thrust of John's case is that it is the *qualities* and not the *form* of a relationship that matters – hence, as long as a relationship is 'permanent, faithful, stable' then it does not matter which gender the partners are. This could, of course, be offered as a perfectly good defence of polyamorous, incestuous and inter-species relationships, as is happening in some countries today. It ignores the fact that Scripture sets out healthy *patterns* of relationship, and not just healthy qualities.

Jeffrey John

**Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Partnerships**

Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000

From around £6. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/wD8fkA>

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## DAVID RUNCORN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE *PILLING REPORT*

David Runcorn wrote a reflection on the biblical texts which was included as Appendix 4 of the *Pilling Report*. He had not intended its publication, so offered a further reflection on how we use Scripture, which was published on the Fulcrum website. He is wary of common labels for the different positions, and instead proposed his own labels of 'conserving' and 'including' evangelicals for the two 'sides'. These are really no less problematic, since they suggest that those taking an orthodox view are not including of people.

In his *Pilling* piece, he cites N.T. Wright and Dick France in articulating how we should approach the biblical texts – though of course both came to the opposite conclusions from David as a result. He looks at a number of the key texts, focusing particularly on the creation accounts in Genesis 2, and does this mostly by raising questions. Is this passage about marriage? Is it not embedded in a patriarchal culture? Do any of the key texts correspond at all with what we know of current same-sex relationships? All the questions he raises are important, but by presenting the questions alone, he suggests that there are no convincing answers to them. On Romans 1, he offers a common misreading of the text being about particular individuals who burn with passion and reject their natural heterosexuality, rather than (as Richard Hays shows clearly) being an adaptation of Jewish polemic against pagan culture as a whole.

In his Fulcrum piece, asking questions continues to feature strongly. David offers a useful critique of the dangers of being overconfident in one's own position or in a particular history of interpretation. But because these questions are never resolved, he leaves us with uncertainty as a virtue – almost the ultimate virtue – and questioning as the only option. This sits oddly with the New Testament picture of Jesus as someone who was both humble but also confident in the truth about God.

*The House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality: The Pilling Report* (2013), Appendix 4

<http://goo.gl/LjWp4Y>

From around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/eVH35X>

## STEVE CHALKE IN *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*

The now well-known article by Steve Chalk in *Christianity Today* magazine was responded to in a full and thoughtful article by Steve Holmes, Baptist minister and senior lecturer in Theology at St Andrews University:

<http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/homosexuality-and-hermeneutics.cfm>

## BISHOP ALAN WILSON'S *MORE PERFECT UNION*

For critiques and responses, see:

*Topical Tuesday: More Perfect Union?* by Peter Ould  
<http://goo.gl/IK96w7>

*More Perfect Union?* by Ian Paul  
<http://goo.gl/xEazyP>

*Review of 'More Perfect Union?: Understanding Same-Sex Marriage' by Bishop Alan Wilson* by Andrew Goddard  
<http://goo.gl/yHs3Hw>

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## MATTHEW VINES'S *GOD AND THE GAY CHRISTIAN*

Matthew Vines's *God and the Gay Christian* has been described as a 'game changer' and a 'contribution to scholarly conversation' on this issue, but on closer examination it is not clear that it is either. It has made a significant impact at a popular level, since it makes some of the arguments accessible to those who would not read more academic texts, and many have watched Vines summarise his argument in a YouTube video.

Vines's approach has two strengths which have made it persuasive for many readers. First, he integrates his arguments with personal stories, and draws attention to the pastoral consequences of some aspects of the Church's teaching on this question. Second, he brings to the foreground some historical information which many will not have encountered before. Vines is, by his own admission, not a scholar, and he is not even in fact studying theology. This leads to two corresponding weaknesses in his argument.

First, he often takes quite a narrow view of what past teaching has been. So in the discussion about celibacy, he only deals with quite a narrow range of experience of what 'forced celibacy' might look like. Second, and more broadly, his account of scholarly discussion of the key texts is very partial, since he mostly appears to be trying to find people who will agree with him, rather than critically examining the different arguments. On Genesis 2, he notes how commentators emphasise the 'sameness' between Adam and Eve and not the 'difference', without noting that, for most of the history of interpretation, the 'difference' has been so obvious as to not require comment. He locates the texts of Leviticus 18 and 20 within a context of patriarchy, even though the texts contain no suggestion that this is the reason for the prohibition on same-sex activity. And he follows Boswell's discredited reading of Romans 1, and Dale Martin's implausible explanation of 1 Corinthians 6:9.

This kind of cherry-picking approach to the texts does not take the argument forward – though many of his readers will be unaware that this is what is happening.

Matthew Vine

**God and the Gay Christian: the Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships**

Convergent Books, 2014

From around £12. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/1ACh3r>

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## JAMES BROWNSON'S *BIBLE, GENDER, SEXUALITY*

James Brownson wrote his book *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* in response to his son coming out as gay. It is an unusual book in that it gives detailed attention to the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 where many other studies focus on the texts in Genesis 19 and Leviticus 18 and 20, passing over the creation stories.

Brownson makes his approach explicit: he wants to seek the 'deeper logic' of the text, rather than just stay with the 'surface meaning'. At one level, this looks like a good strategy for reading; after all, we often want to understand *why* a text says what it says, and not just *what* it says. But implicit in this assumption is either that the surface meaning does not address the 'why', or that the obvious meaning needs to be set aside. In the case of the creation account in Genesis 2, this means setting aside the central meaning of the text, that humanity was created in God's image male and female, and there is a unique significance to the unification of these genders in sexual union.

Brownson offers four critiques of the 'traditional' reading of Genesis 2. First, he thinks that the traditional view assumes that Adam starts out as two people in one body, which is not in the text – though it is not in most 'traditional' readings either! Then he argues that the main point of the creation of Eve is that she is a 'suitable helper', meaning she is *like* Adam, not *different from* him – which you could only think by ignoring the main point of the narrative. Third, he suggests that the 'traditional' reading leaves no place for single people – but that is not addressed in the text. Finally, he argues that the relationship is one of family kinship – but this ignores the clear focus on sexual union. As a result, this is not a persuasive attempt at a re-reading of the text.

James V. Brownson

***Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships***

Eerdmans, 2013

From around £15. Find it with Bookfinder.com : <http://goo.gl/7Qo7sY>

A fuller review by Andrew Goddard, Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics, Cambridge, UK, will soon be available at:

[www.klice.co.uk](http://www.klice.co.uk)

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## ACCEPTING EVANGELICALS

Benny Hazelhurst is chair of Accepting Evangelicals, ‘an open network of Evangelical Christians who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life’. He sets out his position in an article published in the March 2014 edition of *Anvil*.

He starts by rejecting the ‘false binaries’ that we experience in life and theology, and argues that Jesus, too, rejected ‘false binaries’. This is only part of the story, of course, since there were many issues on which Jesus appeared quite happy to offer binary alternatives.

He then looks at the key biblical texts. He argues that the ‘abominations’ of Leviticus 18 and 20 referred not to same-sex sexual acts in general, but only that of cult prostitution. In doing so, he cites Robert Gagnon’s observation that ‘There is good evidence of homosexual cult prostitution in Israel during the period of the divided monarchy’ but comes to the opposite conclusion from Gagnon: if even this context of (possibly acceptable) same-sex activity is forbidden, these verses represent a comprehensive rejection of same-sex sexual unions.

Like many other ‘accepting’ commentators, Hazelhurst assumes Jesus says nothing of relevance, ignoring his sayings about ‘sexual immoralities’ and turns to Paul. He follows the largely discredited idea that in Romans 1 Paul is referring only to cult, or excessive, or ‘inverted’ same-sex activity by heterosexuals. He agrees that *arsenokoïtes* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is probably Paul’s coining of a term based on Leviticus 18, but since he has decided this is a cult reference, the term now has no relevance.

His conclusion is that people matter more than rules, and we can see God’s blessing in faithful same-sex relations amongst Christians. Ironically, this approach sets a binary opposition between welfare and regulation, and between the work of the Spirit in the contemporary world and the Spirit’s speaking through Scripture.

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## MUST-VISIT WEBSITES

- 1. Living Out**  
<http://www.livingout.org>  
A website set up by Christians who experience same-sex attraction, and who want to share their stories, answer questions, and recommend resources about Christianity and same-sex attraction.  
See also: [Real-life stories from Living Out](#)
- 2. Ian Paul – Psephizo**  
<http://www.psephizo.com>  
The website of Ian Paul – formerly on staff at St John's Nottingham. A range of articles on all kinds of topics including some material from his latest Grove booklet. The site includes a particularly good video on Jesus and his teaching on sexuality:  
<http://vimeo.com/71773619>
- 3. The Bridge**  
<http://www.thebridge-uk.com>  
A website with articles written by and for young people – a range of topics including some very honest/blunt/practical writings on porn, masturbation and other real sexual issues.
- 4. Evangelical Group of the General Synod (EGGS)**  
<http://www.eggscofe.org.uk>  
This website will soon have a library of short articles written for local church leaders and other who wish to explore/defend/teach an orthodox evangelical position on issues of human sexuality.
- 5. Robert Gagnon**  
<http://www.robgagnon.net/>  
Gagnon is a theologian and academic and there is much on this website of a weighty and substantial nature. However, it is accessible and well worth reading with lots of video teaching links.
- 6. Spiritual Friendship**  
<http://spiritualfriendship.org/>  
As the welcome section on this website explains, its purpose is to provide a Christian alternative to either political campaigning against same-sex relationships or the 'Freudian psychology behind reparative therapy'. A very helpful website for anyone wanting to explore issues of celibacy and spiritual friendship.
- 7. True Freedom Trust**  
<http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>  
The True Freedom Trust is 'a confidential Christian support and teaching ministry that holds to authentically biblical teaching on sexuality'. It offers support to individuals who experience same-sex attraction but who choose not to embrace a gay identity or to pursue a same-sex relationship because of convictions of faith.

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## SOURCE MATERIALS

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Living Out – Resources and interviews with those dealing with their own same-sex attraction:

<http://www.livingout.org/> and see also [Articles](#)

*General Synod motion* passed on 11 November 1987, reported here: <http://goo.gl/81RpW6>

*Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops* (1994)  
From around £4. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/pOku5c>

*The Lambeth Conference, Resolutions from 1998: Resolution I.10 'Human Sexuality'* (1998):  
<http://goo.gl/vLhWTF>

*Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate* (2003)  
Extract available from Church House Publishing: <http://goo.gl/IHMveB>  
In full from around £5. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/mrCBmt>

*House of Bishops Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships* (2005):  
<http://goo.gl/YVJZga>

*General Synod motion* passed in February 2007 concerning lesbian and gay Christians:  
<http://goo.gl/74Cnsz>

*The House of Bishops Working Group on Human Sexuality: The Pilling Report* (2013):  
[https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling\\_report\\_gs\\_1929\\_web.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf)  
Also available in hard copy from around £10. Find it with Bookfinder.com: <http://goo.gl/eVH35X>

A critique of the *Pilling Report* by Oliver O'Donovan, Professor Emeritus, Christian Ethics and Practical Theology (Edinburgh University) (2014):  
<http://t.co/Ewsa56MnNK>

*House of Bishops Pastoral Guidance on Same-Sex Marriage* (2014):  
<http://goo.gl/UN1qyM>

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## USEFUL WEBSITES ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY

### The Bridge

<http://www.thebridge-uk.com/index.php/sex.php>

A website with articles written by and for young people – a range of topics including some very honest/blunt/practical writings on pornography, masturbation and other real issues.

### Christian Medical Fellowship

<http://www.cmf.org.uk/>

The Christian Medical Fellowship is the support organisation for Christians in the medical profession. The 'sex and relationships' section of its website has a range of articles which look at the 'medical and moral' issues relating to homosexuality, relationships, sexuality and transsexuality from an orthodox Christian perspective. The articles are primarily aimed at those involved in health care, but they will also be of interest to non-medics.

### Living Out

<http://www.livingout.org/> and see also [Articles](#)

A website set up by Christians who experience same-sex attraction, and who want to share their stories, answer questions, and recommend resources about Christianity and same-sex attraction.

### Mercator Net

<http://www.mercatornet.com/>

A website that covers issues to do with the family, sex and society, bioethics, human rights, news and politics, human dignity, life and religion, technology and culture from the perspective of a Christian understanding of the inherent dignity of human beings.

### Spiritual Friendship

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/>

As the welcome section on this website explains, its purpose is to provide a Christian alternative to either political campaigning against same-sex relationships or the 'Freudian psychology behind reparative therapy'. Those who set up the website believe in an orthodox Christian sexual ethic, but also believe 'that marriage is not the only way of life God calls us to, and so we seek to explore [different ways of serving God in celibacy](#). And [Christ-centered friendship](#) is, we believe, essential to that task. In trying to create a new approach to homosexuality, we have drawn on the wisdom found in the broader Christian tradition. We explore [God's calling](#), the nature of the [Church](#), [celibacy](#), our nature as [embodied souls](#), and related topics.' A very helpful website for anyone wanting to explore issues of celibacy and spiritual friendship.

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## USEFUL WEBSITES ABOUT HUMAN SEXUALITY [CONT.]

Other recommended pieces from Spiritual Friendship:

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/08/21/all-the-celibate-ladies-a-different-question-about-labels-and-language/>

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/04/22/a-review-of-god-and-the-gay-christian/>

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/10/30/understanding-sexual-identity/>

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2013/09/24/orientation-change-vs-mixed-orientation-marriage/#more-1289>

<http://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/08/18/disputable-matters-sex-vs-food/>

### True Freedom Trust

<http://www.truefreedomtrust.co.uk/>

The True Freedom Trust is 'a [confidential](#) Christian support and teaching ministry that holds to [authentically biblical teaching on sexuality](#)'. It offers support to individuals who experience same-sex attraction but who choose not to embrace a gay identity or to pursue a same-sex relationship because of convictions of faith. It also support [families](#), friends and [church leaders](#) of those who experience same-sex attraction. Its website contains information about the Trust's work and a range of up-to-date resources on same-sex attraction from an orthodox Christian viewpoint.

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## BLOGS AND PERSONAL SITES

### Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

<http://rosariabutterfield.com/>

This is the website for Rosaria Butterfield, the American feminist and lesbian scholar whose conversion to Christianity is recorded in the book *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. The site contains video and audio presentations as well as articles by Dr Butterfield.

### Dr Robert A. J. Gagnon

<http://www.robgagnon.net/>

Professor Robert Gagnon is the leading conservative scholar on the biblical material relating to homosexuality. His website, which is regularly updated, contains new articles by Professor Gagnon, responses to criticisms of his work, and reviews of material from revisionist scholars. Well worth looking at regularly to keep up to date with the scholarly debate on the biblical material.

### Ian Paul – Psephizo

<http://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/creation-and-sexuality/>

The website of Ian Paul – formerly on staff at St John's Nottingham. A range of articles on all kinds of topics including some material from his latest Grove booklet. The site includes a particularly good video on Jesus and his teaching on sexuality: <http://vimeo.com/71773619>

### Melinda Selmys

<http://sexualauthenticity.blogspot.co.uk/>

Melinda Selmys writes from the perspective of a lay Catholic who converted from convinced atheism and a long-term lesbian lifestyle. Now married and a mother, she tells her story with disarming honesty, authenticity and a sharp wit. Her book 'Sexual Authenticity' is a compelling read (her video interviews also introduce more of the person behind the writing), displaying a unique ability to communicate how, in God's grace, she was captured by the 'better vision' of the Biblical understanding of relationships and human flourishing.

Watch her testimony here

<http://vimeo.com/65313389>, also (shorter) here

<http://vimeo.com/58919432>

### Eve Tushnet

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/evetushnet/>

Eve Tushnet describes herself as an 'openly lesbian and celibate Catholic' who, much to the surprise of friends and family, also converted from a non-believing background. Although evangelicals may differ over her use of identity labels, and aspects of Catholic theology and spirituality, they will be fascinated by her determination to live faithfully within the historic Christian teaching on sexuality. Her insights on friendship and celibacy are challenging and stimulating; she presents an

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## BLOGS AND PERSONAL SITES [CONT.]

inspiring vision of the way personal struggles in the sphere of sexuality can bring a special kind of grace to friendships, fruitful service and to authentic Christian community.

### **A Queer Calling**

<http://aqueercalling.com/>

Reflections on the experiences of a celibate, LGBT, Christian couple. See especially <http://goo.gl/rKqgnl>

## DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS

Rob Bell and Andrew Wilson: *Homosexuality and the Bible: Unbelievable?*

[http://www.premier.tv/media/t/1\\_oz90iuru](http://www.premier.tv/media/t/1_oz90iuru)

Steve Chalke and Andrew Wilson: *Bible Debate #4*

[http://www.premier.tv/media/t/1\\_6tcl33uz](http://www.premier.tv/media/t/1_6tcl33uz)

Steve Chalke and Sean Doherty: *An Open Conversation about Sexuality*

<http://goo.gl/yL5jYu>

# EGGS

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of the General Synod

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