

Homophobia

Extended Article of Fulcrum Newsletter, May 2006

by Andrew Goddard

tutor in ethics at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and a member of the Fulcrum leadership team

for the four page newsletter edition of this article, [click here](#)

The notes in the text are hyperlinked into the end notes; to return to the text, click on the end note number

Dear Fulcrum friends,

'Homophobia' has been back in the news recently with a particularly horrific reminder of just how serious an evil this is in our society. On [12th May](#), two men pleaded guilty to the murder of 24 year-old gay barman Jody Dobrowski as he walked across Clapham Common in October 2005. The prosecution spoke of a "premeditated plan to attack a gay man" and "a murder aggravated by sexual orientation". Mr Dobrowski died after sustaining severe head, neck and facial injuries. He had been so severely beaten even his own family did not recognise him and he had to be identified by his fingerprints. [Valerie Grove](#), writing in *The Times* after the attack reminded readers that "queer-bashers (usually white men in gangs), remain the greatest danger in gay life, even though it is now 48 years since the Wolfenden report and 38 years since the liberalisation of the law on homosexuality".¹

Faced with such events, all Christians – whatever their views on sexual ethics – need to find ways of making absolutely clear their total rejection of all such conduct and of all attitudes and patterns of speech and behaviour that encourage or condone it. The challenge this presents is particularly serious for those who nevertheless also wish to affirm traditional Christian teaching that homosexual practice is sin. As the recent coverage surrounding Ruth Kelly demonstrated - echoing the earlier treatment in the European Commission of Rocco Buttiglione - simply to hold such views (or even to be suspected of doing so) is liable to lead to criticism and opposition in some quarters. The suggestion is even made that someone who will not speak positively about homosexuality is therefore homophobic or at least unable to stand against homophobia: "What we need, what we're crying out for, is someone in government who is an active champion of lesbian and gay equality. Not some Catholic technocrat who holds her nose while implementing policies she loathes, but a true believer. Someone who, yes, promotes homosexuality and homosexuals. Someone who speaks out against homophobia, particularly homophobia in schools, where it does the greatest damage. Ruth Kelly, obviously, is not that person" ([Colin Richardson](#)).

So, how then should we respond to 'homophobia'?

Responding to 'homophobia': IDAHO

Wednesday May 17th, 2006 was the 2nd IDAHO - International Day Against Homophobia. The date for this International Day was chosen because it was on May 17th 1990 that the General Assembly of the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from their list of mental disorders. Since its launch last year, the campaigning group has gained support both [world-wide](#) and in the [UK](#). Unfortunately, although it has the support of some Christians, the driving force of the movement is clearly a rights-based philosophy and its political campaigning is for full acceptance of homosexuality and strong opposition to traditional religious teachings opposed to homosexuality. It is, therefore, not surprising that the UK co-ordinators are the [Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association](#) and that last year's meeting focussed on the impact of religion on homophobia. Speakers included [Peter Tatchell](#) (on the influence of the Vatican), Richard Kirker of [LGCM](#) (speaking on the work of the [Christian Institute](#)) and a Quaker (examining the American "evangelical right").

The official position of the Church of England, the Anglican Communion, and [Fulcrum](#) ("In the much-contested area of sexual ethics this means that the proper context for sexual expression is the union of a man and a woman in marriage") clearly makes it impossible for them to support IDAHO. That, however, does not justify doing nothing about 'homophobia'. It is important to realise that opposition to homophobia has been clearly and repeatedly stated by leading evangelicals, the Church of England, and the Instruments of Communion.

Evangelicals rejecting 'homophobia'

Among evangelicals who have written in defence of traditional sexual ethics, four prominent examples can be cited:

John Stott, back in the late 1990s, in his *Same-Sex Partnerships?: A Christian Contribution to Contemporary Debate* wrote of the Christian call to love in the following terms:

Yet love is just what the church has generally failed to show to homosexual people. Jim Cotter complains bitterly about being treated as 'objects of scorn and insult, of fear, prejudice, and oppression'. Norman Pittenger describes the 'vituperative' correspondence he has received in which homosexuals are dismissed even by professing Christians as 'filthy creatures', 'disgusting perverts', 'damnable sinners' and the like....The attitude of personal antipathy towards homosexuals is nowadays termed 'homophobia'. It is a mixture of irrational fear, hostility and even revulsion...No wonder Richard Lovelace calls for 'a double repentance', namely 'that gay Christians renounce the active lifestyle' and that 'straight Christians renounce homophobia'. Dr David Atkinson is right to add, 'We are not at liberty to urge the Christian homosexual to celibacy and to a spreading of his relationships, unless support for the former and opportunities for the latter are available in genuine love'. I rather think that the very existence of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement is a vote of censure on the Church.²

Thomas Schmidt, in his *Straight and Narrow?*, is also quite clear:

Our heterosexual sin includes sins of hatred toward homosexuals. I have written almost nothing in this book about the victimization of homosexuals, because I do not think that it is directly relevant to the morality of the homosexual act. But it happens. I do not mean

discrimination in a traditional economic sense...but in the attitudinal sense. Whenever we initiate or tolerate slang terms, demeaning jokes or derogatory offhand comments, we send a strong message that these people for whom Jesus died are, in civil rights terms, *niggers*, or in biblical terms, *Samaritans*. In so doing we make a lie of the slogan, 'Hate the sin and love the sinner'. That slogan, known and despised by homosexuals, is tired and in need of replacement. We should try something like 'Look in the mirror before looking out of the window'.³

Stanley Grenz's book *Welcoming but not Affirming*, is also emphatic that homophobia must be named as a sin and rejected by those who hold traditional views on sexual ethics:

Rightly understood, homophobia is a prejudice. In certain respects it is somewhat akin to racism and anti-Semitism. Hence, the homophobia Christians ought to combat is hatred or devaluing of persons for no other reasons than because they are sexually aroused by persons of the same sex. As we noted earlier, Christians simply cannot countenance such attitudes. Instead, patterning our lives after Jesus leads us to love and value all persons – including gays and lesbians – as persons whom God loves and values. Unfortunately, an improper prejudice against homosexual persons is prevalent in the church...Patterning our lives after Jesus' example includes adamant support of fair treatment for all persons in our society, including gays and lesbians.⁴

Finally, among evangelicals, the Evangelical Alliance report [*Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*](#), confessed,

We acknowledge with sadness that within the evangelical community, as in the wider church and society as a whole, there is still a significant degree of fear, misunderstanding, prejudice and even openly expressed hostility towards homosexual people. Where homophobia means 'irrational hatred or hostility' towards such people, we condemn it in the strongest possible terms and see it as a cause for repentance.⁵

Among the EA's recommendations were the following:

We affirm God's love and concern for all humanity, including homosexual people

We repudiate homophobia insofar as it denotes an irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals.

We deeply regret the hurt caused to lesbian and gay men by the Church's past and present hatred and rejection of them.

Similar statements can also be found from leading Anglican sources discussing issues of sexuality.

Anglican opposition to 'homophobia'

The Church of England

Within the Church of England, the bishops in *Issues in Human Sexuality* spoke in the following terms:

The phenomenon of homophobia is very real, and is not confined to those who actively persecute homosexuals. Repugnance at homophile behaviour (actual or imagined) and fear of the danger to others from tolerating or seeming to encourage it can combine even in the reasonable and charitable to foster underlying feelings of hostility toward gay and lesbian people....

The bishops then made clear the Christian calling, warning us not to be blind to

The clear, simple and fundamental responsibility of Christians to reject and resist all forms of homophobia. This carries with it the duty to be active in protecting those who are victimised, since it is sadly true that members of the gay and lesbian community are all too often not only verbally disparaged and abused or made the targets of cruel so-called 'humour', but are also physically assaulted.⁶

The theological basis for this was given in one of two fundamental principles 'laid upon us by the truths at the very heart of the faith':

Homosexual people are in every way as valuable to and as valued by God as heterosexual people. God loves us all alike, and has for each one of us a range of possibilities within his design for the universe. This includes those who, for whatever reason, find themselves with a homophile orientation which, so far as anyone at present can tell, cannot in their case be changed, and within which therefore they have the responsibility of living human life creatively and well. Every human being has a unique potential for Christlikeness, and an individual contribution to make through that likeness to the final consummation of all things.⁷

Returning to the subject in *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* the bishops there begin the chapter on homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals in the life of the Church by noting that 'gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in the Church...can be subjected to homophobia – violence, and unkindness and exclusion based on prejudice...Any consideration of this whole issue has to take this reality into account, and make it a central pastoral concern'.⁸ Having defended the Church's current position in relation to its teaching and practice on homosexuality the bishops went on to say that 'a number of other initiatives also seem to be required'. These included:

There needs to be continuing work by the Church to combat homophobia and homophobic violence both within the Church and within society as a whole. This can be a difficult area given the way in which the label 'homophobia' is sometimes used as a political slogan to attack any opposition to homosexual equality on issues such as the age of consent, but nonetheless all Christians must necessarily oppose discrimination and violence against homosexuals as people and join with all others of good will in preventing this happening.⁹

The Lambeth Conference

The Anglican Communion as a whole has also clearly taken a stand in this area through its Instruments of Communion. The 1998 Lambeth Conference in its famous resolution I.10 picked up the report of the group on sexuality and included the following statements:

Recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ.

While rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex.¹⁰

The Primates of the Anglican Communion & The Windsor Report

The Primates, meeting in Lambeth in October 2003, issued a [statement](#) where they said of the 1998 Conference and its resolution on sexuality, 'We commend the report of that Conference in its entirety to all members of the Anglican Communion, valuing especially its emphasis on the need 'to listen to the experience of homosexual persons, and...to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ'.¹¹ The Commission they set up at that meeting did not have in its remit issues surrounding sexuality but they did make clear in their [report](#):

Any demonising of homosexual persons, or their ill treatment, is totally against Christian charity and basic principles of pastoral care. We urge provinces to be pro-active in support of the call of Lambeth Resolution 64 (1988) for them to "reassess, in the light of...study and because of our concern for human rights, its care for and attitude toward persons of homosexual orientation".¹²

After discussing that report at [Dromantine](#), the Primates of the Communion, in their [communiqué](#), offered the most powerful and significant statement on the subject to date, going so far as to declare an anathema:

We also wish to make it quite clear that in our discussion and assessment of the moral appropriateness of specific human behaviours, we continue unreservedly to be committed to the pastoral support and care of homosexual people. The victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us. We assure homosexual people that they are children of God, loved and valued by him, and deserving of the best we can give of pastoral care and friendship.¹³

Archbishop Rowan Williams

The Archbishop of Canterbury, himself, at a number of points in recent years, has particularly focussed on the issue of the Church's attitude to homosexual people and the reality of 'homophobia'. In his [statement](#) on the withdrawal of Jeffrey John from his nomination as Bishop of Reading Rowan Williams included the following strong words:

Let me add that some of the opposition expressed to Canon John's appointment has been very unsavoury indeed. A number of the letters I received displayed a shocking level of ignorance and hatred towards homosexual people. Our official policies and resolutions as Anglicans commit us to listening to the experience of homosexuals and recognising that they are full and welcome members of the Church, loved by God. Not everyone, it seems, takes equally seriously this element in the teaching of the Anglican Church; and some letters that came from non-believers suggest that the level of foolish and hurtful prejudice in our society is still uncomfortably high. Christians who collude with this are simply not living out their calling.

Following the publication of the Windsor Report in his discussion of the need for repentance in his [Advent Pastoral Letter to Primates](#) of 2004 he included the following words, referring to yet another homophobic murder in London

And we should not forget those questions that may make us most uncomfortable. In the heat of this controversy, things have been said about homosexual people that have made many of them, including those who lead celibate lives, feel that there is no good news for them in the Church. Remember that in many countries such people face real persecution and cruelty; even where there are no legal penalties, they suffer from a sense of rejection. Young people are driven to suicide by the conviction that no-one will listen to them patiently; many feel that they are condemned not for their behaviour but for their nature. As I write these words, I have in mind the recent brutal and unprovoked murder of a homosexual man in London by a group of violent and ignorant youths. The 1998 Lambeth Resolution on this subject declared plainly that the Anglican Church worldwide did not believe - because of its reading of Scripture - that it was free to say that homosexual practice could be blessed. But it also declared that violence in word or deed and prejudice against homosexual people were unacceptable and sinful behaviour for Christians. Earlier Lambeth Conference Resolutions had made the same point. Any words that could make it easier for someone to attack or abuse a homosexual person are words of which we must repent. We are bound to ask, with the greatest care, how we best communicate the challenge of the gospel to homosexual persons and how we may free ourselves from unreasoning fear or even hatred.

This litany of moral teaching and condemnation of homophobia is clear and could be supplemented with examples from other evangelical and Anglican sources.¹⁴ However, evangelicals, including evangelical Anglicans, are much more known for their stance against 'homosexuality' than against 'homophobia'. What explains this reticence to be known as opposed to 'homophobia' and how can it be overcome?

Why do evangelical Anglicans not more strongly oppose 'homophobia'?

A number of possible reasons for evangelicals not making as clear and consistent stand against 'homophobia' as they should can be briefly noted.

First, the term 'homophobia' is one that is hard to define and is often used in political battles and polemic against orthodox Christian views. This is not only the case with secular groupings such as IDAHO. In late 2000, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) produced a [report](#) entitled *Christian Homophobia*. It began, inevitably, with a discussion of what it meant by the term and accepted the definition found in the new Encarta World Dictionary: "Homophobia is an irrational hatred, disapproval, or fear of homosexuality, gay and lesbian people, and their culture". LGCM go on to say, "It is this all-embracing meaning that we have made our yardstick in assessing the responses we have received to our request for homophobic experience to be made explicit".¹⁵ While this clearly includes reactions to homosexual people that all Christians must condemn and there may be room for debate as to what counts as 'irrational', the general thrust of this definition is indeed 'all-embracing'. It seems to make a presumption that any form of disapproval, including of gay and lesbian *culture*, is homophobic. This risks effectively rendering all aspects of homosexuality as beyond moral judgment and critique, something that no serious Christian can accept in relation to any phenomenon. As long as those opposed to traditional Christian teaching label its supporters 'homophobic' and portray all opposition to same-sex blessings or same-sex partnered clergy as simply 'homophobia', those who hold such views are liable to be less than forthright in clearly opposing 'homophobia'.

Second, as exemplified with IDAHO and in other political contexts, the language of 'homophobia' is increasingly interpreted within an 'equality' framework based on claimed human rights. This treats as immoral – and increasingly seeks to make illegal – any distinction between heterosexual conduct/ relationships and homosexual conduct/ relationships. It is this worldview that has led to recent changes in UK legislation such as equalisation of the age of consent and the creation of civil partnerships in a form equivalent to marriage. Many Christians will wish to at least question, often strongly oppose, such measures but in doing so they will often be classed as 'homophobic'. By classifying such stances under the same term that is used to condemn antipathy, fear, violence and abuse, those pressing for legal change fail to make important distinctions and make it harder for Christians to support movements opposing homophobia.

Third, some Christians holding traditional views on sexuality will be cautious or even hostile not only to the ambiguous term 'homophobia' but to accepting the language of 'homosexual persons'. It is, for example, interesting that the Primates' communiqué from Dromantine take case to speak of those "whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex" while Lambeth I.10 refers to those "who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation". Most evangelicals now accept the orientation/practice distinction, sometimes seeing it as similar to the temptation/sin distinction. There is, however, a proper caution about clearly accepting certain views about 'sexual orientation' or a strong essentialist interpretation of homosexuality, particularly as that is sometimes then used to claim 'God made me homosexual'. Such awareness of the complexities of describing both same-sex attraction and homosexual identity is important and it is vital that the Church takes seriously the argument that 'homosexuality' is to be understood as a particular social construction and not an essential attribute of certain human beings. Nevertheless, both the Primates and the Lambeth conference – and indeed the Roman Catholic church in various statements – use the language of 'homosexual persons' in places. That shorthand is really essential in addressing this subject. Whatever one's understanding of the nature of 'homosexuality', it is clear there is now a homosexual identity and that those who embrace that identity or are suspected of having a homosexual orientation are, as a result of that, subjected to abuse and ostracised in various ways. That treatment is what Christians must oppose and to mount a witness against such behaviour they must, with whatever qualifications

necessary, be willing to speak of 'homosexual persons' or 'gay' and 'lesbian' people as those who are under attack and need our support and solidarity. They must make that stand not because they necessarily recognise and accept there is some distinct gay or lesbian human nature that deserves to be honoured.¹⁶ They do so, rather, because they believe that we must honour all humans as created in God's image and likeness (and all alike as sinners) and thus see homophobia as a violation of the command to love our neighbour and an assault on the image of God.

Fourth, and much less honourably, those Christians who defend traditional teaching must acknowledge and repent of the fact that one reason they have not seriously addressed the issue of homophobia is that to do so is perhaps thought to be potentially damaging to their political campaigning within the 'culture wars' and the church debates about sexual ethics. While it would be foolish to think that only conservatives are homophobic (just as it is wrong to believe misogyny is not found among those who favour women's ordination), it cannot be denied that some of those who with voice and vote uphold traditional teaching – both in the UK and in the wider Communion - are in part driven by attitudes to homosexual people that need to be challenged. To do this, however, would be to attack one's 'friends' and 'allies' and might also be seen to accept one of the arguments advanced by one's opponents. While there is a certain pragmatic logic, therefore, in traditionalists not highlighting the problem of homophobia, to follow that course is ultimately to destroy our claim to be taking a stand on the basis of moral principle.

Fifthly, and totally unjustifiably, one reason we all do not challenge homophobia as much as we ought is that we are aware that we are, to varying degrees, guilty of it ourselves. Even though we would never ourselves attack homosexual people we are perhaps aware at times of other emotional reactions – of fear, revulsion, disdain, contempt, insecurity, withdrawal from relationship – that we know are wrong and can become the seeds that grow into the weeds of physical and verbal abuse. All of us – whatever our views on sexual ethics – need to be open to challenge from others and to scrutinise ourselves for attitudes to homosexual people that are dishonouring to God.

The serious issue behind some of these reasons for caution is the ambiguity of the phenomenon we are being asked to challenge. In short, we need to be clear what 'homophobia' is before we can be clear why and how all Christians should oppose it.

What is 'homophobia'? Towards a definition for Christians

In seeking to define 'homophobia' it is vital that the term is defined from a clearly Christian perspective. Here the communiqué from the 2005 Primates' Meeting is helpful: 'the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex'. Then, in language similar to that quoted above from the English House of Bishops, the rationale is also given in theological terms: 'homosexual people...are children of God, loved and valued by him...'. Our opposition is therefore not based on a claim about certain 'rights' in relation to patterns of sexual activity and relationships that must be recognised by church or society. What must be clearly rejected and opposed are attitudes and behaviours that represent a denial of the humanity of certain people because of their imagined or actual sexual attractions, orientation, relationships or identity.

If homophobia is defined in terms of dehumanisation then making a Christian stand against it will clearly result in a repudiation of all forms of violence, ridicule,

derogatory terminology, and abuse of people. Positively it will require us to relate to all homosexual people in such a way that, as a result of our conduct, it will make sense to believe our message that they are indeed loved and valued by God.

Such an understanding is not incompatible with negative moral evaluations of homosexual behaviour and relationships although it may be incompatible with certain *ways* of expressing such moral judgments and certain *attitudes* of some of those who hold them. All Christians should agree that bearing witness to people that they are loved and valued by God does not mean we are unable to call certain behaviour 'sin' or to preach a gospel that requires repentance and turning from sin.

In relation to 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality' some Christians are clearly firmly convinced that the criteria of what is 'sin' must be exactly the same for 'homosexuals' as 'heterosexuals' (eg sex outside a relationship of life-long, faithful love). The majority Christian view, however, is that there cannot be such a moral equivalence because of the normative status of 'heterosexuality' and/or the uniqueness of marriage as an opposite-sex institution. So, in *Issues*, the House of Bishops combine the principle quoted above¹⁷ with the principle that

Homophile orientation and its expression in sexual activity do not constitute a parallel and alternative form of human sexuality as complete within the terms of the created order as the heterosexual. The convergence of Scripture, Tradition and reasoned reflection on experience, even including the newly sympathetic and perceptive thinking of our own day, make it impossible for the Church to come with integrity to any other conclusion. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are not equally congruous with the observed order of creation or with the insights of revelation as the Church engages with these in the light of her pastoral ministry.¹⁸

It follows from this that Christians who hold to traditional Christian teaching may seek to put this into practice in ways that those who disagree with their views will find offensive and misguided. These ways might include supporting a different age of consent in law for homosexual and heterosexual activity, opposing 'same-sex marriage' (and the treating of civil partnerships as fully equivalent to marriage), exercising church discipline in relation to those in homosexual relationships, or offering 'healing prayer' for those experiencing same-sex attraction who wish to receive such Christian ministry. Once again it is important to acknowledge that any or all of these actions *may* be pursued out of an un-Christian antipathy towards homosexual people or implemented in a manner that denies their humanity. It is also clear that some Christians will genuinely believe such actions are wrong. However, such commitments are not necessarily and inherently homophobic. They are simply among the range of possible practical, reasonable outworkings of traditional Christian teaching on sexuality.

There can, however, hopefully be a Christian consensus that – despite our disagreements over these areas in Christian sexual ethics, pastoral practice and Christian witness – it is unjustifiable to treat homosexual people differently in at least three key areas. If it can be agreed that distinctions and discrimination in these three areas is theologically indefensible then it follows that different treatment here reflects unacceptable prejudice and so may, by extension, be classed as a form of 'homophobia'.¹⁹ At the very least, Christians who claim such practices are acceptable need to present a persuasive theological rationale for their views.

First, discrimination against homosexual people simply on the basis of their 'affections' or 'orientation' is in no circumstances justifiable. The fact that someone experiences homosexual desires must not be treated as a sign of their moral inferiority, personal corruption or untrustworthiness. Nor is the simple fact someone identifies as 'gay' or 'lesbian' a sufficient ground for differential treatment or a reason for negative reactions towards them. While the overwhelming majority of Christians opposing homosexual practice now accept this (and in that sense have perhaps modified or nuanced our position compared with many even in the very recent past) that acceptance is not universal.²⁰ Even among those of us who do accept this principle there are often still emotional reactions (perhaps based on our personal histories or related to our own sexuality) that deny it and which need to be transformed by the love of Christ.

Second, in many areas of social life not only a person's sexuality but their pattern of intimate relationships and/or sexual behaviour is (even if considered immoral and so critiqued from a Christian viewpoint) strictly irrelevant in making judgments as to their eligibility or suitability for particular tasks, privileges and positions. When that is the case then their sexual conduct should not be enquired into or taken into consideration.²¹ Christians should, therefore, be supporting rather than opposing developments that challenge such discrimination in areas such as secular employment and provision of housing.

The extent to which this applies within the Christian community is an area which needs continuing discernment and dialogue. While seen by some as 'hypocritical' a truly liberal and plural society must recognise that religious bodies with their own belief systems and expected patterns of conduct cannot be expected to view patterns of intimate relationships and sexual behaviour as irrelevant in their corporate life.²² The recent controversy over the reported sacking of the press officer of the Archbishop of Westminster highlights the question of at what level of public responsibility (or representative status) within the church and Christian organisations one's sexual conduct has a bearing on one's suitability for office or employment.²³ This question will become even more pressing as the church may have to defend its position in the face of legal changes outlawing discrimination on the grounds of 'sexual orientation' and as Christians face new proposed regulations in relation to economic life. In addressing such questions a further factor must be considered -

Third, as regards sexual relationships the fundamental stance of the church and individual Christians is not primarily to be a negative one. Rather it is to be a positive witness to the virtue of chastity,²⁴ the created good of marriage and the calling of some in Christ to a celibate life. If Christians are claiming a basis in their sexual ethic for responding differently to two couples in a sexual relationship then the grounds justifying a different response must be that one couple are married to each other and so the relationship is chaste whereas the other couple are not married to each other. Christians are therefore not justified in defending discrimination against people in partnerships simply on the ground that their relationship is homosexual.²⁵ The only justification is on the ground their relationship is non-marital, a category which includes homosexual relationships but also many heterosexual relationships.

If someone is treating a non-marital opposite-sex couple²⁶ more favourably than a same-sex couple then the presumption has to be that there exists an attitude towards homosexual people or a hierarchy of sexual sins that cannot be defended. So, for example, if someone running a hotel refuses a double room to two people of the same sex this can really only be defended from a Christian perspective if they require all couples booking a double room to confirm that they are married. Similarly, within churches, gay and lesbian couples should not find

themselves treated differently from unmarried heterosexual couples at any level in the life of the church.

The character of 'homophobia' as sin

Once we have clarified what is meant by 'homophobia' the next step is for Christians to be quite clear that 'homophobic' attitudes, and behaviour which expresses them, are both forms of sin. They are a failure to obey the fundamental command to love our neighbour as ourselves and, as John reminds us, "If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4.20). The character of homophobia as sin can be seen particularly in three areas: its deadly effects, its fuelling of hatred and its use of deceit.²⁷

First, as demonstrated by the horrendous examples with which we opened, homophobia in its most extreme forms is literally lethal and murderous. But it is important to recognise that milder forms of unloving behaviour can also have a deadly impact on people's lives. The sad fact is that many people, including many Christians, who struggle with homosexual feelings – especially young people – become suicidal because of their experience.²⁸ While there are various interpretations and explanations that can be offered for this reality,²⁹ it surely cannot be denied that a factor in at least some cases must be the reality and/or the expectation of hostility experienced by those who come to understand themselves as homosexuals.

Second, even when its consequences are not lethal, homophobia is 'the contradiction of love and the embrace of loathing'.³⁰ Very few Christians will admit to loathing homosexual people and yet the practical test here is whether our language (including our body language) is indicative of a lack of love and so incapable of witnessing to God's love. It must of course be possible still to call 'sin' what one believes Scripture to declare to be 'sin'. However, often the language used in relation to the 'sin of homosexuality' is especially emotive or vituperative. This is particularly strange given that this is a sin that most of the population are rarely if ever tempted to commit. Sometimes the language appears to appeal to Scripture. I always squirm when I hear Christians condemning 'sodomy' and 'sodomites'. Even if not intended, it alludes to an act of sexual violence and the implication will be drawn that those who are in any way encompassed by the critique (and it is usually rhetorically taken - and intended - to be synonymous with 'homosexuality' and 'homosexuals'³¹) deserve to have fire rained down on them from heaven. Such phraseology is even less justifiable when the overwhelming majority of even conservative scholars now recognise that the relevance of Genesis 19 to the contemporary debate is minimal compared with its prominence in Christian tradition. Even strong language authorised by Scripture (such as 'abomination' in Leviticus) can fuel hatred towards homosexual people. Its contemporary use must be suspect when the term is rarely used today in relation to any of the other many sins condemned in these terms in Scripture.³² More controversially, we need to be aware that even certain passages of Scripture can be used and read publicly in a way that gives little thought to their context (in Scripture and in contemporary life) and to how they may be heard.³³ Christians defending traditional sexual ethics often claim to 'hate the sin but love the sinner' (though I have heard some in their enthusiasm to defend themselves against charges of homophobia get it the wrong way round!). The difficulty is that – however erroneously – many homosexual people cannot make that distinction. That serious problem is only compounded if the language of 'hate' is disproportionately used in relation to homosexual sin compared with other sins.

Third, as a sin, homophobia takes the form of distorting the truth and thus is a violation of the commandment against bearing false witness. It is famously said that the first casualty in war is truth and in the 'culture wars' and indeed 'church wars' surrounding sexuality that maxim also applies.³⁴ Christians must therefore take great care not to be caught in this sin of misrepresenting those with whom they disagree or bearing false witness about the reality of homosexuality. That is not to deny that there are sometimes unpalatable truths that need to be addressed and uncomfortable questions that need to be asked.³⁵ However, faced with those advocating full acceptance of homosexual relationships, one common approach of traditional Christians is to paint a very dark picture of homosexual relationships and tend to portray same-sex relationships as loveless, promiscuous, disease-ridden, short-term, unfaithful or abusive.³⁶ Another temptation is to perpetuate negative caricatures and stereotypes of homosexual people and relationships rather than dealing with real people. Such practices not only impact those who find themselves experiencing homosexual attraction but their families. In the words of one Christian parent whose child 'came out', many Christian parents in that situation need to learn not to project onto their children their images of 'the gay movement' and 'the gay lifestyle' gained from certain conservative Christians. Rather, they have to learn to look at all homosexual people in the light of the truth they already know about their child whom they love. A final area where there is the risk of fuelling antipathy to homosexual people by speech that is less than truthful is in drawing parallels between homosexuality and paedophilia, bestiality or other forms of sexual behaviour that are primarily cited because of the strong emotional reaction against those behaviours which is then tied also to homosexuality.

Examples of 'homophobia'?

One of the difficulties is that once one moves away from the most extreme forms of physical violence and verbal abuse, even if there is a broad agreement on the definition of 'homophobia' (and some of the implications of it suggested above) then there will be different assessments of whether or not the terminology of 'homophobia' or 'sin' is to be applied in particular situations. As I think back on incidents that have had the most impact on my own thinking in this area what comes to mind are examples such as hearing from a friend about the whispering campaigns and false accusations against him (by Christians) in his (secular) workplace because he was an openly gay evangelical Christian. Or suspicions and concerns on the part of the vicar that two male visitors who appeared one week and attended church together may have been a gay couple. Or the over-reaction of a Christian community to someone struggling (secretly) with homosexual attraction who 'fell' and had a homosexual encounter. Or the use of derogatory and slang terms for homosexual people by Christians. More publicly I recall, at a deanery Synod, someone standing up in the Q&A and discussion time and asking the panel to confirm him in his view that it would be quite rational and acceptable for him to be concerned if he knew that one of the male teachers at his son's school was a homosexual.³⁷ Most recently there was the sad fact that the authors of the recent excellent Grove pastoral booklet on a gay-straight dialogue had to write under pseudonyms.³⁸ Here – and in numerous other, some seemingly minor instances – is evidence of a mix of ignorance, fear, suspicion, anger and antipathy towards homosexual people that must be acknowledged and repented.

Even more difficult is to judge when the term 'homophobia' is an appropriate concern to raise in relation to complex social and ecclesial situations that transcend individual actions and attitudes, what might be called by some 'institutional (or societal) homophobia'. This is especially so because those involved often experience and understand the situation in a manner quite different from those watching from a distance and the motivations and culpability

of individual participants will vary. As someone who was actively involved in raising concerns about the appointment of Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading and urging him to step down I am painfully aware that in the eyes of many people I had, as it was recently put to me in conversation, participated in a 'witch-hunt' which was inherently homophobic.

A similar challenge is now being raised within the Communion in relation to Nigeria. Here there are the added complexities of evaluating at a great distance a particular church's response to secular legislation being proposed in a cultural, legal-political and religious context unfamiliar to us.³⁹ Nevertheless, if we are serious about being a Communion then there must be mutual accountability and a willingness to challenge those churches and church leaders whose actions appear to be un-Christian in their response to homosexual people as well as those whose actions commend homosexual relationships. As [Anglican Mainstream](#) have recently pointed out, in response to the [critique of the Nigerian Anglican church from the Canadian bishops](#), some of the criticism in the West of the Nigerian church's support for recently proposed state legislation is unfounded as there is no human right to same-sex marriage. There are, however, a number of other concerns that must be respectfully raised about recent events in Nigeria and the apparent response of Anglicans there to them. In relation to the proposed legislation, given that homosexual acts are already criminalised (with strong penalties of up to 14 years imprisonment) it is difficult to see why legislation specifically prohibiting same-sex marriages in Nigeria is a pressing need. It is, however, not difficult to see why such legislation is experienced by homosexual people in Nigeria as intimidating and hostile. That sense of being persecuted is even more strongly substantiated by other [clauses in the legislation](#) which seek to limit what are generally accepted human rights of assembly: "Any person who is involved in the registration of gay clubs, societies and organizations, sustenance, procession or meetings, publicity and public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly in public and in private is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a term of 5 years imprisonment". These elements of the legislation also have a direct impact on Anglicans in Nigeria as they potentially severely limit their capacity to adhere to Lambeth I.10 and listen to the experience of lesbian and gay Christians. The responses of some in the Nigerian hierarchy to the founding of [Changing Attitude](#) Nigeria and, in particular, the personal attacks on that group's leader Davis Macllyalla, must also raise serious questions about whether their stand for biblical sexual ethics is not in danger of being seriously compromised and undermined by the presence of unbiblical 'homophobia'.

Why does it matter?

Given the complexities in the language of 'homophobia' and the difficulties and dangers of addressing this issue leading to accusation and counter-accusation in an already divided church, the temptation will be to treat this whole subject as secondary, a distraction from Church's mission and the defence of biblical truth. As we have seen, evangelicals and Anglicans have already made clear in numerous statements that they reject real 'homophobia' and so some will claim there is no need to draw attention to this subject. That would, I believe, be a major mistake for at least five reasons.

First, if we are serious that in both church and wider society there are widespread views about homosexual people, and patterns of behaviour in relation to them, that are wrong and in error *then* it is a Christian duty to make a stand against these and to witness for righteousness and truth. To do so only in relation to sexual ethics but not in relation to the treatment of fellow human beings made in God's image and loved and valued by him will rightly lead to accusations of

hypocrisy. Such a position can only cast doubt on the motivations behind defending biblical teaching in this area. Orthodox belief about homosexual practice must be combined with orthodox practice in relation to homosexual people or it is worse than worthless.

Second, if we are committed to the teaching of the Anglican Communion then, as the earlier quotations from Lambeth, Primates and the Archbishop of Canterbury have made clear, we must take this subject with the utmost seriousness. We cannot really be committed to continue to listen and learn about the reality – in all its diversity and complexity - of homosexuality unless we are willing to turn away from prejudices, stereotypes and theoretical constructs and enter into real relationships of Christian love with homosexual people.

Third, if we are genuine about the desire to offer godly, biblical pastoral care and support to those who experience homosexual attraction and also to their families then we must speak up on their behalf when they are victimised, slandered and abused. We must create in all our churches a recognisably safe space for them to be honest and open without being subject to rejection and scapegoating. When, as often happens, Christians feel they have to hide behind masks or even create fictional situations (such as when a man has to create a 'girlfriend' in order to talk to fellow Christians about issues raised in relation to a male friend he has fallen in love with) there is no possibility of genuine pastoral care or of Christian love and acceptance being received.

Fourth, on a horribly pragmatic level, if we are serious about persuading people that the church's traditional teaching is good and true then we need to be willing to assess ourselves and also at times to critique our 'allies' in relation to homophobia. In my experience a major reason people cease to be convinced by the traditional Christian teaching is that it is expressed in ways they quickly discern are un-Christian and/or it paints a picture of homosexual people and 'the homosexual lifestyle' that becomes totally implausible because it is so far from the lived reality most people experience when they get to know gay and lesbian Christians.

Fifth, if we are concerned to bring the gospel to lesbian and gay people and have a Christ-like mission to gay communities then it is absolutely imperative that we address the issue of 'homophobia'. For reasons already noted, simply upholding the traditional Christian teaching on homosexuality will often create a barrier in evangelism and have us labelled as 'homophobes'. The harsh reality therefore is that if there is even so much as a hint of real 'homophobia' among us then we will lose any seriousness in our claim to be bearers of good news and any credibility as witnesses to Jesus Christ who welcomed and ate with sinners and outcasts.

Conclusion

The challenge for Fulcrum, wider evangelicalism, and indeed the whole Christian church is to be clearer in taking a stand on this issue and putting into practice the good, and often strong, words opposing 'homophobia' from evangelicals and Anglicans which were noted at the start of the newsletter. One example of how this could be done is the excellent web resource [Justice and Respect](#) which grew out of the important [Bridges Across the Divide](#) internet community. Such resources are a start but ultimately this cannot be kept at an intellectual level of newsletters and in the realm of 'virtual reality'. The problem with 'homophobia' is that it damages real people in 'lived reality' and so challenging it must bring healing to real people and change 'lived reality'.

As evangelical Anglicans we need honestly to examine ourselves individually and as Christian communities. We need to ask whether at times, in removing specks from the eyes of gay and lesbian Christians, we may be missing the beam in our own eye. Any recognition of where we are guilty of 'homophobia' is most likely to come in dialogue and putting into practice that part of Lambeth I.10 which calls on us all to listen to the experience of homosexual people. Only by doing that will we hear from those who suffer the effects most directly about how elements of what we say and what we do prevent us from being able to fulfil our desire to assure them that they are loved by God. But doing that will mean being willing to be corrected and rebuked, hopefully in love, by gay and lesbian fellow-Christians, including those we disagree with over sexual ethics.

As the Anglican Communion and Church of England continues to teeter on the brink of division over issues of sexuality we face a situation in which there are already developing two increasingly distinct groups who may be heading towards becoming two distinct churches. Some Anglicans, often under the tag of 'inclusivity', are already welcoming and engaging with openly gay and lesbian people but failing to uphold biblical and church teaching and so not supporting people in the disciplines of Christian discipleship entailed by that teaching. They are usually strong in their opposition to 'homophobia' but can risk making it primarily an insult to hurl at those with whom they theologically disagree. Others – and here is where most evangelicals are found – are clearly presenting and defending biblical and church teaching. They are, however, often part of worshipping communities where openly homosexual people do not feel welcomed and valued. As churches they are not known for engaging respectfully with the real experience of gay and lesbian people and their struggles. As a result, they often fail to provide the context of unconditional love, acceptance and mutual learning in which homosexual people can become Christians and be supported as they seek to be faithful disciples of Christ. The root spiritual problem for those in this second group may turn out to be one of many strains of that dis-ease which, for want of a better word, can be called 'homophobia'. If that diagnosis has any truth in it then it is absolutely vital for our health and unity and mission as the body of Christ that we recognise that painful reality. And, having confessed the reality, the only ethical response is repentance and a genuine commitment to learn how to give ourselves and our Christian communities a regular health-check in order that we may become genuinely 'welcoming' to all homosexual people even when we cannot in conscience 'affirm' any sexual relationship other than marriage between a man and a woman.⁴⁰

Yours in Christ,

Andrew Goddard

The [Revd Dr Andrew Goddard](#) is tutor in Ethics at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and a member of the Fulcrum leadership team.

End Notes

The notes in the text are hyperlinked into the end notes; to return to the text, click on the end note number

¹ Other recent horrific examples could be cited just from the UK such as a [Kent man kicked and beaten to death because he was homosexual](#), the [killing and dismembering of a college lecturer in a homosexual attack in Coventry](#), [a gay man bound, gagged and dumped in a river in Leeds](#). In the US the reality of this evil came to prominence with the brutal murder of gay youngster, [Matthew Shepard](#).

² Stott, *Same-Sex Partnerships?: A Christian Contribution to Contemporary Debate* (Marshall Pickering 1998), pp 45-46. The book is also a chapter in his *Issues Facing Christians Today*

³ Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow?* (IVP, 1995), p 172. See also pp 54ff.

⁴ Grenz, *Welcoming but not Affirming* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), pp 149-50. Grenz includes a story of a pastor, listening to a homosexual member of his congregation, and having to confess his sin of homophobia – ‘a pastor who sought freedom from a fear and from a revulsion that had invaded his soul’.

⁵ EA, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality* (1998), p 12.

⁶ House of Bishops, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church House, 1991), p 34 (para 4.8)

⁷ *Issues*, p 41 (para 5.4)

⁸ House of Bishops, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church House, 2003), p 253 (para 8.1.1)

⁹ *Some Issues*, p 282 (para 8.4.84)

¹⁰ Lambeth 1998 Resolution I.10, paras c and d. The report (commended in para a of I.10) included the even stronger statement – ‘We call upon the Church and all its members to work to end any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and to oppose homophobia’.

¹¹ Statement by the Primates of the Anglican Communion, 16 October 2003.

¹² *The Windsor Report* (ACO, 2004), p 73 (para 146). At the [press conference](#) launching the report, Archbishop Eames was even more emphatic – “The debate called for in 1978, 1988 and 1998 still has to continue and beyond that it should be stressed there is absolutely no room for homophobia in the life of the Christian Church, no room, no contemplation of it and no support for it... But the Commission feels, and I must stress this, Resolution 1.10 must be observed as a whole. It calls for an ongoing process of listening, discernment and the Christians of goodwill need to be prepared to engaged honestly and frankly with each other on issues relating to human sexuality. Again, I will underline the total opposition to homophobia in any form and refer you to paragraph 146 of the Report”.

¹³ Communique by the Primates of the Anglican Communion, 24th February 2005 (para 6).

¹⁴ The Canadian Anglican group [Essentials](#) includes in their [1994 Montreal Document](#) not only a commitment to traditional teaching on sexual ethics but also the clear statement that “Homophobia and all forms of sexual hypocrisy and abuse are evils against which Christians must ever be on their guard” (para 14).

¹⁵ LGCM *Christian Homophobia* (LGCM, 2000), p 4.

¹⁶ In one of its most important statements, quoted at length at the end of the Lambeth Conference report on human sexuality, the St. Andrew’s Day Statement rightly states ‘At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as ‘a’ homosexual or ‘a’ heterosexual; there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation’.

¹⁷ See footnote 7.

¹⁸ *Issues*, p 40 (para 5.2). Lambeth I.10 states that the Conference ‘in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are

not called to marriage' (para b) and rejects 'homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture' (para c).

¹⁹ In many ways, given the problems with 'homophobia' noted above, it would be best if the term could be avoided but there is no alternative shorthand and the term is so widely used that it is perhaps necessary simply to define what is meant by it.

²⁰ This viewpoint, if no other justification or clearer definition is given to defend such discrimination, places at least a strong question mark against the recent Roman Catholic decision concerning the unsuitability for the priesthood of those with 'deep-seated homosexual tendencies'. For details see ['Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders'](#).

²¹ It could be argued that because sexual misconduct is never simply private, should not be encouraged, and can damage the social good, there are legitimate forms of public expression of disapproval which may be legitimate. That argument is often applied in relation to 'scandal' in the 'private lives' of public representatives. The statement here is not intended to suggest that sexual behaviour is never a matter of legitimate concern but a tendency to focus on personal sexual conduct, and within that on homosexual conduct also needs to be guarded against.

²² In the Oxford Union debate on 'gay bishops' that involved Gene Robinson, the lead student speaker *opposing* the motion that 'a homosexual lifestyle is no bar to becoming a Bishop' was a black, gay non-believer philosophy graduate from South Africa who cogently argued for the legitimacy of such a bar within the church while fighting for full equality within secular society.

²³ Although not commented on at the time the story of journalist [Michael-de-lay Noy](#) and his relationship to the Anglican hierarchy presents an interesting comparison. The problems are illustrated by ['Gay man denied job as chaplain to seafarers'](#).

²⁴ For a recent discussion of this from a traditional Roman Catholic understanding see Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue* (CUA Press, 2003).

²⁵ Some may dispute this claim on the grounds that at least non-marital heterosexual relationships are – because heterosexual - in conformity with the created order and so merit more favoured status than homosexual relationships. While I believe there is some truth in this argument it is difficult to defend such a different reaction because the logic of it is inevitably (a) to treat homosexual sin as in some sense inherently more sinful (something the argument of Romans 1 & 2 should warn against), (b) to ignore the qualities of the relationship totally so as to treat even the most loving and faithful homosexual relationship as morally inferior to even the worst heterosexual relationship, and (c) not only to tell those who experience homosexual attraction that they have no legitimate form of sexual relationship but also that if they nevertheless create one for themselves then they are to be treated in a worse way than those who, being given such a form of legitimate relationship in marriage, reject what God has instituted and instead establish their own form of non-marital heterosexual relationship. The more problematic area is perhaps long-term 'non-marital' cohabiting heterosexual relationships. A case can be made that these are, in effect, marriages in a way that could not be true for similar same-sex relationships. The alternatives here seem to be either this is indeed a marriage (in which case the couple have fallen short by not declaring their marital intention publicly) or that its ambiguity means that it is better understood as an intimate friendship (in which case, if it is sexual, it falls within the same category of unchastity as a similar same-sex relationship).

²⁶ The term 'non-marital' here refers to the Christian understanding of marriage as God's gift in creation and so would still include homosexual relationships even were these, as in some countries, to be given the legal status of marriage.

²⁷ Although applying the analysis in a different manner, this three-fold categorisation is similar to that advanced in David Field's account of sin (and application of this to homosexuality) in David Peterson (ed), *Holiness and sexuality: homosexuality in a biblical context*, pp 63-87 which argues that 'as the rejection of the God who is life, love and truth, sin is the embrace of death, loathing and falsehood' (p 86-7).

²⁸ "Suicidality in homosexuals, particularly among adolescents and young adults have been consistently reported to be higher over the past 25 years. In a recent overview, it has been concluded that gay youth are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people which may comprise up to 30% of completed youth suicides annually" (Lut Tamam *et.al.*, '[Homosexuality and Suicide](#)', *Ann Med Sci* 2001; 10: 41-44). See also Jeremy Townsley (a young gay Christian), '[Health Risks of Gay Teens](#)' and '[Articles relating to suicide by GLB Youth](#)'.

²⁹ I vividly recall a conversation many years ago with a leading conservative evangelical in which he cited the high number of attempted suicides among homosexuals as evidence that homosexuality was fundamental disordered.

³⁰ Field's description of sin in Peterson (ed), *Holiness and Sexuality*, p 69.

³¹ This equating of 'sodomy' and homosexuality is of course false given that it refers to a particular sexual act that is impossible for lesbians, not practised by many gay couples, and present in some heterosexual relationships.

³² Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (Abingdon, 2001), pp 117-20 discusses the meaning of *toeba* and notes it is used in the Old Testament for a wide variety of offences including idolatry, adultery, intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period, remarrying one's divorced spouse after remarriage to another, habitual lying, oppressing the poor, treating one's father and mother with contempt, profaning the Sabbath, marrying someone who worships a different god. While most of the arguments against appealing to Leviticus today (concerning shell-fish, poly-cotton shirts etc) show a remarkable lack of ignorance about how Christians have traditionally appealed to the Old Testament law in moral reasoning and the whole canonical witness on homosexuality, I did warm to the testimony of one gay evangelical who told me how he had silenced an angry fellow-evangelical (who strongly insisted that Christians must take a firm stand against homosexuality because the Bible called it an abomination) with a question along the lines of 'and what other lessons has God taught you from Leviticus that have shaped your own discipleship and growth in holiness and which you think the church is in danger of downplaying in its contemporary witness?'. There are good answers that could be given to the question but probably most of those eager to speak of homosexuality as 'abomination' are unable to provide them.

³³ This struck me most powerfully at the end of a deanery Synod debate in which I had proposed a gentler statement of the traditional church teaching than that in the original motion. The proposer of the original motion, after a debate in which some had questioned that teaching but most appeared to welcome my amendment, rose to respond and simply read out a few carefully chosen verses from Romans 1 (needless to say he did not read on to the end of the chapter, let alone to Rom 2.1). I remember finding myself in the strange position of fully agreeing with what he said – after all it was Saint Paul speaking ! – yet feeling very strongly that even though it spoke the truth it was far from the whole truth and would not be heard in that context – particularly by any gay or lesbian Christians – as speaking the truth in love. The problem is, of course, even greater with some translations of other texts such as 1 Cor 6 which appear to declare to 'homosexuals' that they are excluded from the kingdom of God. The contrast with how we often use and read this compare to other biblical texts powerfully hit home when at a church I heard an evangelical minister when preaching on Ps 15 deal with v5 by the simple joke that it was tough luck on a bank manager in the congregation.

³⁴ Among conservatives the study which most addresses this and attacks what it sees as lies on the part of those pushing to accept homosexuality is Jeffrey Satinover's aptly named, *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* (Baker 1996).

³⁵ Serious questions must, for example, be asked of those Christians calling for acceptance of homosexual relationships as to what 'chastity' and 'holiness' means in relation to these. The current attempts to answer this (eg the document ['Sexual Ethics: A Report from the Lesbian and Gay Clergy Consultation Group'](#)) are very far from reassuring. Likewise, the studies of even gay-supporting writers such as Andrew Yip on gay male Christian couples (or, to a lesser extent, Jeffrey Heskins, *Face to Face*, SCM, 2005) demonstrate that challenges must be offered concerning how close the exclusive, life-long relationships commended by many gay Christians are to the reality of even Christian gay relationships.

³⁶ In addition to Satinover's work, Schmidt's chapter on health risks and Gagnon's closing sections in his book are examples which exhibit this tendency. Of course, some argue that where these characterisations are valid they are, in part, due to the lack of social recognition and support for faithful same-sex relationships and to homophobia in society that leads to transient, furtive patterns of sexual relating. While this is theoretically plausible, I am unaware of evidence that in more tolerant societies that recognise stable same-sex relationships the situation is significantly improved.

³⁷ I was grateful that, as the 'conservative' speaker, I was able to respond first and assure him that I could see no reason for him to be any more concerned than if he knew one of the male teachers at his daughter's school was a heterosexual.

³⁸ 'Michael' and 'Chris', [A Gay-Straight Christian Dialogue: A Little More Conversation, A Little Less Reaction, Please](#) (Grove Pastoral Series 104).

³⁹ The same caution that there may be major misunderstanding applies of course in relation to other parts of the world responding to the church's response to the changing legal structures in a Western context. This must be kept in mind when Global South leaders raise questions and object to the response of the Church of England to the Civil Partnership Act. I have offered analysis and critique of the Act and the church's response both for [Fulcrum](#) and [Anvil](#) and, more recently and fully, in [Friends, Partners or Spouses? The Civil Partnership Act and Christian Witness](#) (Grove Ethics 141).

⁴⁰ One vital resource if we are to follow this path is the excellent work of Martin Hallett and [True Freedom Trust](#).