

Ethics and Agreement

Sermons on the Subjects of the Day (3)

The third in a monthly Fulcrum series of seven sermons for the web by Oliver O'Donovan

[Discuss this Web Sermon on the Fulcrum Forum](#)

Can two walk together unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3)

The creed-making labour of the churches of the fourth and fifth centuries left a series of statements to measure orthodox Christian belief, but no authoritative moral concepts or norms. For the classic liberal theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this feature of its legacy was disturbing. The concerns of the first-century Council of Jerusalem, the concerns, indeed, of Jesus's own teaching, spoke loudly enough, it seemed, for the priority of ethics. The Kingdom of Heaven was not the iota difference between *homoousios* and *homoiousios*, but righteousness and peace and joy. The best that could be said for the creeds, perhaps, was that moral definitions might prove intrusive. The principles of behaviour pleasing to God were perfectly well known, to unbelievers as well as believers; but the circumstances of each age required fresh applications of them, not to be obstructed by decisions of past ages.

Recent mutations in the liberal tradition have effected a re-positioning.ⁱ We now hear it urged that the grounds of Christian communion are simply credal, not moral at all. A universal morality, once the solid rock on which the liberal critique of theology was built, has now been swallowed up in the shifting sands of change; moral differences can, and should, be accommodated.ⁱⁱ This is a fairly radical shift of view, and it might seem that the only thing to connect the new liberal pluralism and the universalism it replaced is that they both challenge a reigning ecumenical consensus. This consensus holds that doctrines and moral practices are deeply intertwined, and to agree on the one is to agree on the

other.ⁱⁱⁱ Communion is itself both a moral practice and the *idiôma* of the third person of the Trinity. It would be hard to imagine a morally pluralist Christianity that had not lopped off the Third Article of the creed - which would mean lopping off the church, lopping off the common life in the harmony of God's will which is better than toleration. Civil societies are necessarily tolerant to a degree and intolerant to a degree; they punish what they cannot afford to tolerate, tolerate what they cannot afford to punish. But the communion of the Spirit is harmony; and a church that understands its identity embraces the gift and task of moral agreement from the start. The very concept of *belief*, moreover, involves moral commitment. "Fully to grasp Christ's teachings and to relish them takes an effort to conform the whole of life to him," as Thomas à Kempis says.^{iv} Belief is never neutral in respect of practice; the Epistle of James declared that faith without works is dead. With whatever latitude or rigour, a Christian communion must surely have some idea of its specific moral shape: *these* works attest a living faith, *those* indicate that faith is dead.

The two liberal poles seem to oscillate on either side of this ecumenical consensus, the one insisting that morality is primary and universal, reaching even beyond the community of belief, the other that it is plastic and diverse, even within the church. But they have more in common than at first appears. Both maintain a certain distance between moral and doctrinal belief; both insist that ethical judgments are subject to a certain variability. In each of these two respects, it would seem to me, they have a measure of right on their side. But so does the ecumenical consensus. To reconcile them effectively, to secure the ecumenical consensus and to restore the lost strengths of liberalism, we need some further clarity on the underlying issues: the relation of ethics to doctrine and the kinds of difference that can be sustained within an underlying agreement.

This demands a short digression into the formal characteristics of ethics. And here is a call for patience – it will have its reward at the last.

"Ethics" is not the name of a descriptive science, like "chemistry" or "sociology". There is no slice of reality in which it specialises. Ethics is the explication of the logic of practical

reason that directs our conduct, individual and collective. It terminates not in a descriptive judgment about how the world, or a slice of the world, lies, but in a practical judgment for conducting ourselves in a certain way. But since any practical judgment belongs to the same “here and now” as the thinker does, its conclusions may differ from one day to the next, even though the train of reasoning is essentially the same. The historian who told us on Tuesday that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066, is expected to say the same on Wednesday, barring new evidence that has come to light in the intervening hours.. But the *same* train of practical reasoning by which on Tuesday I decide to post a letter, may lead me on Wednesday to pay a personal visit rather than post another one. This implies no revision of my thinking; it is simply that the successive situations require their own decisions.

But that does not mean that the use of reason to direct conduct is *independent* of description. St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of practical reason having its own independent starting-points, its own “axioms”; but that is a misleading picture. Practical reason is more like an *extension* of descriptive reason, going beyond telling how the world lies to judging how we may find our way through it. It builds on descriptive judgments; and if the descriptions it builds on are false, its practical judgments will be misconceived. The fool who says in his heart “there is no God” will be corrupt and do abominable deeds (Psa. 14:1). That is why practical disagreements are very perilous. Not all differences of practical judgment can be accounted for in terms of different situations.

Here are three formal coordinates for mapping differences of practical judgment, followed by a brief commentary on each:

1. Some differences of practical judgment are not ethical differences, others are.
2. Some ethical differences of judgment do not indicate underlying moral disagreements, others do.
3. Some ethical disagreements do not reflect doctrinal disagreements, others do.

1. Practical judgments differ *concretely*, simply as materially distinct events in history.
Different judgments are made in different situations by different actors simply

because the same river never flows under the same bridge twice. That means that in one sense *any* two moral judgments must differ. But that difference is quite banal, and does not constitute any kind of “ethical difference”. By “ethical difference” we mean that two judgments have features which can be *contrasted*. But that can only occur when they can be classified in kinds. Our deeds fall into moral kinds - there are honest deeds and dishonest deeds -and into material kinds – deeds that involve financial transactions, deeds that involve faithfulness in love, deeds that involve telling truth or falsehood, and so on. An ethical difference arises when two deeds alike in material kind differ in moral kind. Deeds of different material kinds cannot be contrasted ethically. If Renate gets married to her boyfriend this Saturday afternoon while Michelle is busy filling out her tax return, we can draw no conclusions about a difference in ethical outlook. There is a variety of things people properly set out to do, and the fact that different people are pursuing different projects does not entitle us to conclude without further ado that there is an ethical difference between them. But if Sven and Kostas both submit tax returns, and Sven’s is truthful while Kostas’s is untruthful, then, though everything else about the two acts may be different - different place, different laws, different time, different circumstances - we are also forced to recognise a difference we can only think of in ethical terms.

An apparent difference of this kind may, of course, melt away on further inspection. Two moral decisions may be alike in kind but have different specific features that make all the difference. In 1939, when both Greece and Denmark faced invasion from fascist powers, Greece, believing it had a trained army, defensible borders and alliances to call on, offered forcible resistance; Denmark, lacking all these things, capitulated. We may possibly think of the Greek decision as courageous, the Danish as uncourageous. Yet we will probably be right to hesitate over this judgment, since the question the two nations faced was only *in general terms* the same question. Their differing answers were explained, and perhaps

justified, by specific differences between their situations. We can quite reasonably think that each acted courageously “in the circumstances”.

2. An ethical difference is one that can be expressed in binary terms, as contradictory answers given to the same question. In practical decision there comes a point at which the multitude of options is reduced to two. The twenty-five possible houses we found on the estate agents’ websites have been reduced by elimination and we have identified our favourite; so now it comes to whether we go ahead and offer for it, Yes, or No? And we can test for an ethical difference by looking for the question to which two opposite answers are being given. (It is possible to exaggerate the importance of this binary moment, of course, just as it is possible to exaggerate the moment of decision in moral behaviour as a whole. I offer it only as a formal test to distinguish real from imaginary differences.) Sven submits a truthful tax return, Kostas an untruthful one. The answers they have given to the same question are opposed, like negative and positive values of the one integer. But does that mean they *disagree* about something? If Sven is simply acting morally, and Kostas immorally, what are they disagreeing *about*? Only on whether to be moral or immoral. On what counts as the moral course they may be entirely agreed. The binary difference seems to mean no more than the presence or absence of active moral responsibility. But lack of responsibility is not a *kind* of responsibility. What is not there doesn’t count. (Remember the logical parable of the three cats on the mat: the ginger cat, the tabby cat and the imaginary cat!) We should certainly not think that whenever someone behaves immorally there must be an alternative set of moral beliefs to account for it. Sin lacks the dignity of a point of view. Only if Kostas has a different way of understanding his situation, can we trace his difference with Sven back to a disagreement. He may, perhaps, believe that government documents do not require strict veracity; he may believe that tax laws are an unjust imposition; he may believe that his duty to his family is higher than his duty as a citizen. It doesn’t matter whether he is right; the point is, he must

believe *something*, justified or unjustified, if he is have a disagreement with Sven. A disagreement has more propositional content than a difference of judgment; it is a clash of reasonings, which arises from a difference in describing the way the world lies.

“Ethical disagreement”, then, does not mean the same as “sin”. If we think of sin as sheer wilful disobedience, there can be no overlap at all between sin and disagreement; the very fact that someone has reasons for a contrary judgment means he is not wilfully disobedient. But this voluntarist definition of sin is too narrow; there are culpable faults of thought, too, misunderstandings for which we are at fault. Some moral disagreements, perhaps most of them, are a matter for blame. Yet there is such a thing, as moral theology has long known, as “invincible ignorance”.

3. Ethical disagreement may be talked about, then, when two conditions are met: (a) opposite practical judgments about what to do derive from (b) differing descriptive judgments about the way the world lies. But descriptive differences are also of various kinds. There are differing judgments of fact; there are differing judgments of circumstances; there are differing estimations of consequences. A special kind of disagreement arises when there are differing views, or interpretations, of some fundamental truth about the world, a “doctrinal” difference in the theological sense. And these are the disagreements that raise painful questions about our unity in the faith of Christ. One church may think that the colonial period of Africa’s history was a disgrace to the European churches, another may think it was an honourable phase of Christian mission. Such a difference in the interpretation of history, however large its practical implications, may be tolerated with charity and good will. But if one church affirms that God created the material world, another that it was made by Satan, that will produce something worse than a major difference of practical judgment; it will constitute a disagreement that can hardly be sustained within Christianity.

*

All this raises the question of what is meant when it is said that a moral disagreement, such as that over homosexuality, is too small, too unimportant, for the churches to divide over. In the face of potential schism in the Anglican Communion, it invites immediate sympathy to ask, in bewilderment, how such a destructive outcome could derive from such a trivial cause.^v

There is more than one way in which the concepts “small” and “large” may be applied in this context. In the casuistic moral-theological tradition it used to be said that moral offences might be discounted when they concerned “small” as opposed to “grave matter”. If one unwittingly pocketed a large sum of money not one’s own, one was obliged to make every effort to restore it; if one unwittingly pocketed a penny, one could cheerfully congratulate oneself on one’s good luck. If one *deliberately* stole a penny, of course, an act of contrition was required, for theft is theft; yet even so, returning the penny might not necessarily be the highest priority among one’s duties. “Scrupulosity”, preoccupation with small matters, was thus recognised as a vice in itself.

Some points of moral disagreement among the churches may be settled by an appeal to small matter. Suppose that in a Roman Catholic parish in Northern Ireland a well-known republican gangster regularly receives communion from an obviously complicit parish priest - what an irritant to the Protestant neighbours! Yet the Catholic bishops have made their position quite clear. It is a single case, and an irregular one. So it may be small matter in the context of ecumenical relations, and everyone would be wise not to make a *cause célèbre* of it. But this illustration does nothing to illuminate our kind of problem. Nobody bothers to argue that the fuss over the New Hampshire consecration was overdone because, after all, it was only *one* gay bishop! The whole point was that a precedent was set, and meant to be set.

Much more potentially fruitful is the paradigm of “heavy” and “light laws” propounded by the rabbis to arrange the laws of the Pentateuch in some kind of moral ranking-order. In the New Testament, we find Jesus himself taking up the rabbinic tradition of

distinguishing between “heavy” and “light” commands of the law: the tithing of mint and dill and cumin is less important than justice, mercy and faith; the supreme command is love of God and neighbour. Before we embrace this model with too much enthusiasm, however, we have to answer a difficult question about how to apply it. Once we have said that the law of love is architectonic, and that ritual performances are subordinate to moral actions, how much more does the New Testament tell us about differences of gravity? Do our assumptions about the ranking-order of moral principles correspond to anything in the Scriptures, or is it simply imported from the common intuitions of our own time? Christians in any period of history, whatever their disagreements, often seem to agree with one another about moral priorities more than they agree with Christians of other ages. Doctrinal preoccupations tend to be diachronic, linking past communities with present, while moral preoccupations are synchronic, characteristic of their day. The moral profile of Christians today is generally recognisable across most varieties of church and churchmanship. They believe in international aid and fair trade; they believe in care for AIDS victims; they do not believe in racial discrimination; they believe in families; they tend to think of the more abstract forms of capitalist finance as morally perilous; they regard making money out of sex as debased, and so on. They have their major disagreements, it goes without saying, and perhaps these appear more ominous from the striking uniformity of their background. But this very uniformity marks the Christians of our day off from Victorian Christians, from early-modern or medieval Christians, and from the Christians of the New Testament era. If we ask why there should be such historical differences, the answer is simple: the priorities we hold are the result of shared judgments about the age in which we live and act, and that is as true for us in our time as it was for the New Testament writers in theirs.

If this observation seems to support a historical relativism in regard to ethics, let us correct the impression by stressing its limits. It has to do with the issues we *prioritise*. It does not mean that the church in each age has to conduct its moral thinking in isolation from the traditions it received, learning nothing from them and acknowledging no authority. It

does not mean that there are no moral lessons to learn from the New Testament. It does not mean that the only lessons to be learned from the New Testament are highly general moral categories (“justice, mercy, faith”), and that all its more detailed discussions may be set aside. The New Testament can and should exercise authority over our moral thought at both general and specific levels. Yet there remains a work of moral judgment that is properly relative to agents and situations, and this shapes the priorities that prevail in given periods. That is why it is more difficult for us to sympathise with the moral attitudes of earlier Christian generations than it is to share their doctrinal convictions; for it is with our contemporaries that we share a common world, with its own urgent questions and moral challenges. The logic of human historicity is that to live in a given age is to have a distinct set of practical questions to answer, neither wholly unlike those that faced other generations nor mere repetitions of them. It is to be neither superior to nor independent of the past; but it is to be answerable for our own space of time and its peculiar possibilities of vice and virtue.

Where does this leave the proposal about the light and the heavy? It leaves it in the awkward position of begging the question. In warning us not to make light matters into communion-breaking disagreements, it trades on common priorities that we all assume, and offers the good, if undramatic, advice that we ought not to let ourselves be deflected from priorities we agree on. But what when we disagree? If disagreements did not arise, there would be no reflective way for Christians to respond to changing demands. They would just go on stressing what they had always agreed to be most important, and take no notice of how new challenges were shaping up. So when some Christians see a more ominous threat in a new development than others do, the advice to concentrate on the most important things is no advice at all.

The problem with the proposal to solve our disagreement by dismissing the issue as “light” and not “heavy” is that it has latched on to the rabbinic rather than the Christian version of the hierarchy of values. I do not say this to disparage the achievement of the rabbis; their discovery of the difference between the light and the heavy was a great

discovery, and without it Jesus's development of the theme would have been inconceivable. Nevertheless, Jesus and the early Christians did develop it, and they did carry forward the proposition of some rabbis that the highest law was not merely the weightiest of the laws, but in some sense *enveloped and contained* all the others. That is to say: the hierarchy of moral principles was not merely a matter of preferring A to B. The law of God had an organic logic, in which the varied and diverse subject-matter of the laws was brought under the hermeneutic control of a unifying and regulative demand, the law of love.

What follows from this is that the moral weight of any area of moral concern – let us say, the sphere of any one of the commandments – will be relative to the way in which its demand interacts with others and concentrates the regulative command of love upon a particular constellation of historical events and circumstances. The specific moral commands do not present sequestered and self-contained demands. They are different matrices for *one* demand, distributing the way it encounters us within the complex order of the created world. The essential task we face in relation to the differences of moral judgment in our own age is to map those differences very carefully, in order to establish their true dimensions. We face a task of moral description, in which we shall need to call upon not one but all the categories of moral judgment offered us, in the Ten Commands and elsewhere, for a variety of relations and interactions in the service of love.

From this we can see how inadequate it is in any actual disagreement to exclaim, "But this issue is not such a very great matter, after all!" There are, indeed, smaller and larger differences; but - and the point is crucial – their size is not determined by the *matter* of the difference as such, but by the *relation* in which it stands to wider agreements and disagreements. The *point at issue* – whether homosexuality, or something else - is never the whole of what is at issue. Nobody has to make a decision about that and that alone. The question is always, what does it *mean* for us to approve or disapprove of this in our context? What relations are present to us in and through it? How do the various refractions of the demand of love within the moral law come together to form an

understanding of the situation in which we stand? So what looks “small” at first glance can become the subject of the day, the focus of everyone’s attention, the test of where every person stands, the divide between old friendships and new ones. From outside the historical context it may be hard to understand why; but it is part and parcel of learning to understand history that we should recognise how one issue acts as a conduit for others. The struggle in the fourth century can appear to be about an iota, but it seemed to those engaged in it to be a struggle over false gods. If we cannot see how that was so, it does not mean that it was not so, but simply that we have not entered into the intellectual dynamics of the time and seen how the largest of alternatives was shaping up for the church. Large alternatives always present themselves in petty choices.

And it is no different with our own age. Understanding the times we live in can be especially difficult. Our initial familiarity with them may be a positive hindrance; it is hard to gain perspective. We must first of all, therefore, take *seriously* the fact that homosexuality has become a dividing issue among us. There is no point in expressing scornful wonder. It is part of the shape of the history we have been given to live through – no more rational and no more irrational than any other history. We must cope with the history we have been thrown into, and reach such understanding of it as we can. To do so, we must ask what great issues this apparently “little” issue mediates, how what is fought over can have become the question of “strange gods”. But once we press forward resolutely along that path, we may begin to untangle the knot of associations, identify the strange gods, flush them out of their cultural hiding places and leave the question of homosexuality disenchanted of them, ready to be seen precisely for what it is and not as the bearer of some wider cultural decision. That cheerful rationalist Joseph Butler thought that “every thing is what it is and not some other thing”.^{vi} It would be truer to say that everything is something other than what it is, everything is charged with borrowed significations, alien references to things contiguous. A patient work of interpretation is needed. To try to handle the question peremptorily is to deny what it is we face, which is

the culturally shaping force of systems of reference. And to deny that is to refuse the ancient challenge, "Know thyself!"

*

We return to the question from which we began: what room is there for a "pluralism" in the church's moral beliefs and practices, *i.e.* the acceptance of tolerable but ethically significant difference? Such an acceptance will not be possible, we must assume, when moral difference reflects significant doctrinal disagreement, bringing the common Christian faith into question. With this negative in place, can we now identify a positive possibility for moral pluralism?

As a definitional baseline, we may say that to recommend moral pluralism is to find not just moral difference but moral *disagreement* respectable. Until the final perfection of the church there will always be moral difference there in the sense that there will always be sin as well as righteousness. But what there need not always be is disagreement about whether a given practice counts as sin or righteousness. And pluralism aims to find such disagreement *respectable*, not merely to license it. In a civil political order some moral disagreements are licensed without being commended. When the state permits people to sex-select their children or plunge themselves hopelessly into debt by addictive gambling, no one has to approve of any of these actions. (Whether we approve of the state's permitting them is a separate question.) We may accept people's freedom to perform them, and yet disapprove wholeheartedly. We may think that gambling-addiction should lie outside the scope of the criminal law, and yet not hesitate to suggest to any addict with whom we have a pastoral relation that his addiction is bad for him and for all connected with him. But to advocate pluralism, we must paradoxically maintain a kind of approval of moral judgments of which we disapprove. On the one hand, it is not merely a question of recognising that in different situations different judgments will be appropriate; for in that case there is no disagreement. To advocate moral pluralism is to say that something that should in principle not be done should continue to be done all the same. And to advocate it plausibly is harder than may at first appear.

Let us take a paradigm case. Western liberals are inclined to view arranged marriage with disfavour. That young adults should be wholly responsible for finding and choosing their own marriage partners, they are likely to think, is undoubtedly better. There is always a risk of immature judgment, of course; yet the fact that the individuals take responsibility for their own decision at this critical juncture in their lives is morally fitting to their personal dignity, and offers a better prospect that a couple will be committed to each other over the long term. What space does this leave for Western liberals to speak in favour of the system? They can admit that it fits other expectations within societies that traditionally practice it - *e.g.* with respect to education, breadth of social contact, the role of affines-groups in providing cultural and economic opportunities, and so on. They can admit that when operated conscientiously it may serve the best interests of young couples *as they actually find themselves* in those societies. They can see that reform could not be achieved on this one point without renegotiating a whole range of other social conditions, so that a sudden breach in the tradition could be very difficult; considerate and consultative ways of operating the system, on the other hand, might produce a slow and healthy evolution towards freedom. The Western liberal can grant all this without doubting that the modern Western policy is superior. On these terms Western liberals can be genuine moral pluralists in respect of the question.

This example draws our attention to a necessary condition for any appeal to pluralism. It can be made only on behalf of practices embedded in cultural contexts, contexts in which they serve to secure recognisable social goods. Pluralism, in effect, can only be made sense of in relation to cultural totalities, modes of social existence taken in their entirety. There is a range of different possible patterns for negotiating the challenges of human social existence as a whole. We by no means have to maintain our neutrality in respect of the various features of these; yet we may still recognise that the troubling features play a structural role within their systems. But this has an implication of major importance: the appeal to cultural pluralism can never support experiment or innovation. It demands

deference for established traditional differences, those related to broad patterns of social organisation.

Imagine a Western visitor in a society where arranged marriage prevails asking a young woman why she permits her parents to choose a husband for her. If she is articulate, she may rehearse the virtues of the practice in relation to the society she belongs to: "I only know dull uneducated village boys, but my father has contacts with educated families in the city", and so on. If she is reflective, she may concede the virtues of a system of free choice. And yet, "it is the way it is done here." Pluralism means accepting the validity of this last move, acknowledging a certain authority to embedded practice. But no innovation can be defended in that way, and we are curiously absent-minded if we don't find it odd when such a defence is made on behalf of innovations or experiments whose long-term effects are quite unknown.

Societies may, of course, sometimes be asked to engage in experimental change. But this requires reasons, and the reasons must be strong enough to bear the burden of proof. If the arguments offered are insufficient, the case for innovation is not made, and there is no question of the innovation's commanding respect. If, on the other hand, the burden of proof is met, its success consists precisely in undermining respect for a faltering practice. The most that can then be offered defenders of the *status quo* is the respect and forgiveness due to those who are wrong in good faith. But that is not pluralism either. Which is why I say that pluralism is difficult to argue for successfully. A plea for variety of moral practice very easily turns an undermining of existing practice. Apart from culturally embedded practices, moral plurality quickly becomes self-contradictory, an assertion of p and $\sim p$ at the same time – or perhaps a delaying tactic while one clears one's throat and gets ready to swallow!^{vii}

To assert the right of plural moral judgment requires a careful account of the systemic social differences that make that right intelligible. So explanation of difference is the essence of a policy of mutual forbearance. It risks adding insult to injury to demand forbearance while at the same time refusing explanations. The sharp response to the

innovations of Western Anglican churches from the churches of the ex-colonial territories owed much to the fact that the innovating churches had no programme of mutual explanation in view. And here, perhaps, the churches of the South and East made a mistake. They attributed the North American uncommunicativeness to racism. It is, on the whole, more likely that the North American churches merely acted, in default of a thorough deliberative process of their own, under the force of strong cultural pressure, the reasons for which they never explained even to themselves, since an ill-conceived doctrine of pluralism persuaded them that thinking was an unnecessary labour. They may have suffered something worse than a bout of racism, if such a thing can be imagined; they may have suffered an implosion of their powers of practical reason, the result of long habits of irresponsibility. And since theology is nothing if not a discipline of common reasoning about God and our life together, unless they recover it, their days of being churches of any kind are numbered.

ⁱ In the first of these *Sermons on the Subjects of the Times* I drew attention to these mutations and suggested some reasons for them.

ⁱⁱ For this point of view see Marilyn McCord Adams' contribution to *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, ed. Andrew Linzey & Richard Kirker, Winchester: O Books, 2005, pp. 70ff.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Thomas E. Breidenthal, *Ibid* p. 190 : "communion names our willingness to embrace unity within the household of faith...not so much a formal relationship as a moral practice".

^{iv} *De imitatione Christi* 1.1.2, echoing Jn. 7:7: *Qui vult plene et sapide verba Christi intelligere, oportet ut totam vitam suam illi studeat conformare*

^v For this reaction, see Christopher Lewis's contribution to *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism*, entitled "On Unimportance".

^{vi} *Sermons*, preface §33.

^{vii} And Professor Adams does not in fact succeed in carrying through her pluralist intentions with any consistency. She concludes her advocacy of live-and-let-live with a rousing call for everyone "to own up to the spiritual violence we have done to gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons" (p. 78). The Church of Nigeria will manage things its own way, to be sure; but the rest of us are to apologise loudly for the Church of Nigeria!