

**Submission to the Church of England
House of Bishops Sexuality Review
Susan Gilchrist 29 May 2012**

The Sibyls and the LGB&T Anglican Coalition are or have made submissions in response to the request by the House of Bishops Sexuality Review Group.

As a member of both groups I have contributed to these group submissions. However I have also been engaged in independent external research and it is therefore appropriate for me to make a separate personal submission. This means that the views expressed in this submission are my own personal opinions. They must not be considered the opinions of the Sibyls, the LGB&T Anglican Coalition or any other organisation in any way.

Introduction

In societies where men and women did not have equal status there was always the potential for significant social disruption should gender atypical behaviour be encountered. The changes of the last 50 years, with the widespread use of contraception, the legalisation of homosexuality and the recognition of gender equality have greatly altered present day perceptions and these are destroying the framework of male supremacy on which many structures were based.

This part of the submission is drawn from the analyses presented in the papers on "Self Identity, Gender, Sexuality and Religious Belief"¹ and "Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships"². The first of these papers takes an exclusively analytical approach - in it all faith dimensions are excluded while the second paper examines religious concerns. Both of these papers are currently being prepared for publication and copies can be made available in due course. A major focus is the extent to which particular prohibitions which today are regarded as sexual taboos were instead primarily adopted for the preservation of social order. Old Testament Judaism made no distinction between the sacred and the secular, so changes in social order can have a profound impact on the theology of religious belief.

First Century Attitudes

It is symptomatic of ancient Greek society that it was assumed that love as a serious emotion ordinarily meant love between two males. Plato further argued that the highest form of love and the only type of real love is the love between two men. There was no boundary placed between strong heterosexual friendships on the one hand and on the relationships which resulted from homosexual attraction on the other. Indeed the latter was preferred for the depth and intensity of the commitments it provided. A host of

¹ Gilchrist, S. (2012). "Self Identity, Gender, Sexuality and Religious Belief". In Preparation

² Gilchrist, S. (2012). "Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships". In Preparation

writers demonstrate that this understanding was common not just to Athens but throughout the Greek world. The issue of immediate concern is how this was matched in the Jewish tradition and an examination of the contemporary first century Jewish literature also shows that a similar outlook to same sex relationships was taken. For example, in the Avot de-Rabbi Hathan, it is recommended that a friend should be someone with whom one can “Eat and drink, read and study, sleep, and share secrets of the Torah and personal secrets”³. The Jewish tradition has many other instances where intimate social pairing occurred and where high degrees of intimacy between two male rabbis were encountered. For a more detailed consideration of these topics, the book “Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition” by Steven Greenberg should be consulted⁴.

The reasons for the first century interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 which prohibited only anal penetrative sex are considered by Greenberg. This restricted interpretation is well attested by contemporary first century sources⁵ and modern Christian theologians⁶. Why it was subsequently expanded into interpretations which prohibit all types of same-sex acts is examined in the paper on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships⁷. Homosexuality as a separate condition was not recognised in the first century societies. The contemporary Greek and Roman attitudes to same-sex relationships are discussed in this paper and it is shown that that the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour was made between the noble pursuit of love and the carnal abuse of sex. With the exception of anal penetration this distinction was applied both to heterosexual and to homosexual relationships in the same way. Biology was much less important than the quality of the relationship itself.

Research and Analysis

One of the greatest concerns in relation to the Church of England’s present approach has been the tendency to adopt a dogmatic perspective that does not appear to be grounded in acquaintance with current research. The failure to take an impartial and critical account of the development, not just of the theological perspectives, but also of scientific research is unhelpful, it leads to inaccurate conclusions and it is possibly even offensive. Boswell opened the field of lesbian and gay Christian history with the publication in 1980 of his book “Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality”⁸, and there have been many other publications since this work was first issued. Boswell’s work

³ See Maimonide’s commentary on the Mishnah, Avot 1:6 aseh lekha rav

⁴ Greenberg, Steven; (2004), “Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition”. The University of Wisconsin Press, ISBN 10: 0-299-19094-3.

⁵ For example Philo of Alexandria, Abraham 134-136 ca AD 35 and Josephus, Antiquities 1.11.1,3 [2] - circa AD 96

⁶ See for example: Mein, Andrew; (2007) “Threat and Promise: the Old Testament on Sexuality” Chapter 2 in “An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church” Edited by Duncan Dormor and Jeremy Morris. SPCK 2007. ISBN -10; 0-281-05851-2.

⁷ Gilchrist, S. (2012). “Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships”. In Preparation

⁸ Boswell, J (1980) "Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality." First published in 1980 and republished in 2005 by the University Of Chicago Press. ISBN 0226067114 (ISBN13: 9780226067117).

is commented on in the Church of England document "Some Issues in Human Sexuality"⁹. The statement in this document that "His controversial claim has not been widely accepted by historians" (Section 1.2.25) is quoted as a challenge to these views, but it is not followed up. The omission of transgender people's experience, and specifically Trans Christian voices, in the Evangelical Alliance report, *Transsexuality* (2000), and its treatment in "Some Issues" is inexcusable given the date it was produced. The response to both these documents is deficient, both from the perspective of practical or pastoral theology and in the failure to research or to survey the relevant literature. The result is that there is little or no dialogue or correlation between theological doctrines and the clinical approaches to the issues of transgender or of homosexual self-understanding or experience. There is also very little recognition of the need for transgender or homosexual people to be consulted, or for that matter, the clinicians who give them support. The arguments which are presented move towards the delivery of a pastoral 'judgement' while bypassing the important stages of research, analysis and reflection. The need to encompass such diversity of thought and belief are constantly played down in church policy statements. Even in the quoting of Lambeth 1.10¹⁰, the line about incompatibility with scripture is often repeated while other statements are either played down or ignored. For example, Lambeth 1.10 states: "We must confess that we are not of one mind about homosexuality... we have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions which are raised. There is much that we do not yet understand." Definitive judgements which are based on the confessed uncertainty of this statement do not easily gain respect.

Recent research in neuroscience and neurophysiology has opened up new insights into the fields of personality development, transgender experience and sexual orientation. These are fully described in the paper on "Self Identity, Gender, Sexuality and Religious Belief"¹¹ In humans the importance of timing in early brain development is emphasized in the delayed development of the pre-frontal cortex. This is regarded as the part of the brain responsible for cognitive thought. The emergence of its functional capability is not uniform across the domains of the cortex and different abilities emerge at different times. The overpowering drive for possessive imitation in early infancy leads to the rapid acquisition of un-coordinated concepts and thoughts, and it would be expected that the ability to develop channels of communication which link and co-ordinate these elements would develop as rapidly as possible. However, while this true for the development of the parts of the brain which are concerned with the for the sensory-motor, auditory and visual systems, the response to stimulation and the acquisition of knowledge in the parts of the brain which are responsible for the development of analysis and cognitive thought do not reach the peak of their capabilities until between the ages of two and three years. This delay in development is important since the effect of

⁹ Church of England 4 November 2003 *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Working Party of the House of Bishops*. Church House, Westminster ISBN No: 9780715138687

¹⁰ <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm>

¹¹ Gilchrist, S. (2012). "Self Identity, Gender, Sexuality and Religious Belief". In Preparation

delaying the onset of these cognitive processes is to maximise the acquisition expertise. The transition from the creation of an intuitive sense of self identity towards the more analytical separation begins at around the age of two years.

The core gender identity, in the sense of an awareness of being who one is, is one of the first global concepts to be formed and it provides a model which can be used to examine the transition between intuitive and cognitive thought. There are two major outcomes which need to be considered at this time. The first is to note that the goals which transgendered people seek are not defined in gender terms: they are instead defined by the rejection of their birth assigned gender and the need for people to be themselves. The second is to recognise that gender identity and sexual orientation are independent of each other. The foundations for the development of identity and orientation can be traced to intuitive processes, and moreover it can also be shown that the development of sexual desire depends on the later forming goal directed activities which require the possession of cognitive thought - and ultimately an adequate Theory of Mind. This means that identity and orientation are defined first in relationship terms. Therefore the primary focus in infancy is to establish the correct relationships with other people and not to set oneself apart.

In the case of gender variation and homosexual orientation the direction of development is atypical. However it is expressed entirely through relationship. The reasons for this atypical development may relate to genetic influences or to the development process which is tuned to maximise individuality. However the differential development patterns in the pre-frontal cortex in infancy also mean that goal directed influences and the expectations of rearing have a minimal effect. If these conditions are to be properly understood it is essential to distinguish and separate the drive which searches for relationships from the drive which searches for sex. It is essential to note that the development of transsexuality and homosexuality predates the development of sexual desires.

This destroys the legitimacy of any attempts by the Church and others to use homosexuality as a scapegoat for abusive or inappropriate sex - for this could only work if it could be shown that homosexual orientation is derived not from identity, but from the results of sexual desire. However the consequence of the suppression of all types of same-sex relationships by the Christian Church for over one thousand years has meant that the ability to make those distinctions has been lost. The consequence of this is that the assumption that homosexuality is exclusively about promiscuity and sexual immorality would become universally accepted. The denial of these distinctions has also led to the belief that it is entirely driven by desire and that it is a lifestyle choice. For as long as the Christian church could retain its social monopoly there was no possibility of change, and there can be little doubt that same-sex relationships have been considered the focus for abusive or improper sex. Promiscuity is often considered to be rife in homosexual relationships, but while there are those who do pursue sexual climaxes with many partners recent studies have confirmed that many do not¹². Before the advent of widespread contraception

¹² For a full account see Gilchrist, S. (2012). "Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships". In Preparation

same-sex intercourse could provide safe heterosexual sex. As with gender there is a vast range of experience encountered and distinctions between the different types of behaviour must be based on the motives involved.

Contemporary Issues

In the last fifty years the loss of Church authority, the widespread introduction of contraception, the legalisation of same sex relationships and the enactment of anti-discrimination legislation has meant that most people now have personal direct experience of relating to homosexual couples and others in same sex relationships. These observers do not need to have any special knowledge to distinguish between the behaviour of two people in as same sex heterosexual friendship and the behaviour of an equivalent couple in a homosexual partnership, even when there is a total absence of sex.

The distinction between sexual relationships which are given in love and those engaged in for lust is equally easily made. Despite this, with the notable exceptions of some senior clergymen¹³, the response of many in the Christian church has been to retreat into traditional values. As a consequence of that retreat, the ability to relate to and to minister honestly and conscientiously to many people who are in same-sex relationships, which include its own clergy, has been lost.

Even though the direction of affection may be different the process of forming heterosexual and homosexual identities develops in the same way. The quality of relationship in a homosexual partnership can therefore be of the same intensity and character as that of a heterosexual marriage, with the same degree of commitment and loyalty being expressed. In any relationship of love as close as this it is also reasonable to expect that it would find its fulfilment in sex. However this is sex that comes from the outpouring of love and not engaged in for improper acts. While this has been accepted by society, it has not been accepted by the Church, which has used its traditions and theological interpretations to deny the legitimacy of these relationships and to make homosexuality a scapegoat for all types of abusive sex.

The imposition of the discipline of celibacy has meant that these issues have been of constant concern to the Roman Catholic Church for it is well known that heterosexual men will engage in same-sex activities when no other outlet is available. The lack of reproductive consequences also allows a culture of promiscuity to develop for heterosexuals and homosexuals alike. The Rabbis

¹³ See for example the report of the interview given by the Anglican Bishop of Salisbury in the Times Newspaper on the 3 February 2012 and his Presidential Address to the Salisbury Diocesan Synod, 18 February 2012: <http://www.salisbury.anglican.org/whos-who/bishops/the-bishop-of-salisbury>. The full text of the Bishop of Salisbury's address to the Cutting Edge Consortium can be found on the LGB&T Anglican Coalition Website at <http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/documents/SuC0422a-BishopOFSalisburyAddressToCECConf-21apr12.pdf>. The text of a letter to the Times written by a number of bishops can also be found on the website at: <http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/documents/SuC0421a-TimesLetter17apr12-Same-sexMarriage.pdf> as can the interview with the Archbishop of Wales published in Wales Online on Apr 18 2012 at <http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/documents/SuC0418a-Archbishop%20of%20Wales%20gay%20marriage.pdf>

of the First Century disapproved of same-sex relationships for four main reasons. The first is that same-sex relationships cannot result in procreation: and Jews were expected to use the seed of Abraham to populate the world¹⁴. The second reason was stability in marriage: in a society where arranged and early marriages were the normal practice the sexuality of each of the partners was not taken into account and the condemnation of all homosexual behaviour was a way of ensuring that the marriage remained intact. The third reason was the disruption of the social order: in a society where men and women are treated unequally the gender based power structure is broken by homosexual and transgender acts. The fourth reason comes from the debasement of citizenship and the use of same-sex rape to humiliate a beaten enemy.

Attempts to treat homosexuality as though it was the result of desire or a lifestyle choice prove disastrous. Because it is driven by rejection some relief can be gained by creating a sense of euphoria which transcends its demands. This is the approach taken by some religious groups who claim that a “Cure” has been found, but this only lasts for as long as the euphoria can be sustained. After it is lost it is not something that willpower can regain. The problem with many such groups is that anyone who does not conform to their rules of behaviour may be ejected from membership. These people may be told that God still loves them but to be practicing or non-practicing is not the real issue. The act of rejection becomes a personal attack of the self identity of that individual and not of their practice. The hurt, guilt and self loathing caused by this can be enormous. It is also extremely destructive since any attempt to fight or suppress the conflict drives people deeper into distress. Whatever opportunity there is to rejoin the group or to keep control of the conflict is either diminished or destroyed.

In whatever century the interplay between religion, identity and sexuality can be a contentious topic. The principal text in the Bible condemning same-sex activity is that of Leviticus 18:33 and 20:13 and it is well attested from independent first century sources that the interpretation of this passage was that it only prohibited anal penetrative sex. Same-sex relationships which did not contravene the rabbinic restrictions were otherwise endorsed, and there is no prohibition in the Bible of oral sex. Several times in the Epistles Paul refers with disapproval to same-sex activities. However he always refers back to Leviticus for the source of his disapproval and he was very careful about the words he used¹⁵. He endorses the rabbinic position and his concerns are not about homosexuality: they apply to immoral acts¹⁶.

¹⁴The argument that the bible considers this to be the focus of the sexual act may sometimes be cited but the biblical justification for this is not clear. See Gilchrist, S. (2012). “Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships”. In preparation.

¹⁵ This is dealt with at length in Gilchrist, S. (2012). “Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships”. In preparation.

¹⁶ See for example Walker, William O. Jr. (2008). “What the New Testament Says about Homosexuality”. Westar's membership magazine—The Fourth R 21,3 (May-June 2008) http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/homosexuality.html

Today, in societies where gender and social inequality exists between men and women the restriction on anal penetration still applies, and it is imposed with considerable force. However this is for the social reasons that are still cloaked with the canopies of religious belief. In Western societies where gender and sexual discrimination is outlawed and has largely vanished, many of these social prohibitions that a gender unequal society had relied on have disappeared. There is now no reason for the prohibition of anal penetration in loving relationships within gender equal societies. However the need to act responsibly still remains and it would seem appropriate for the Church, without differentiating between heterosexual or homosexual relationships, to apply the same codes of moral behaviour to everyone, irrespective of sexual orientation, and this does not require any diminution of its moral demands.

Conference on Sexuality and Human Flourishing

On Saturday February 6th 2010 a conference on “Sexuality and Human Flourishing” was held Church of the Ascension, Stirchley, Birmingham. The aim of the conference was to “explore and celebrate our relationships with God, with each other, and with our inner selves”. The event was organized by members of The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality, Inclusive Church, Changing Attitude, LGCM, The Sibyls, and Church members in Norwich and Birmingham. There were 106 participants. Attendance at the conference was almost equally split between people who labelled themselves heterosexual and people who labelled themselves lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered. A copy of the full proceedings can be accessed through the LGB&T Anglican Coalition Website¹⁷ and a hard copy is attached.

Within the conference, severe instances of rejection of people by churches were described. During the discussions the heterosexual group felt at least as strongly about the same issues around acceptable sex. It was considered that it is a lack of understanding that imposes the greatest threat. Issues of sexuality (apart from rejection) tend not to be addressed and ignorance amongst clergy and congregations is high. Homosexuality is perceived as a desire to pursue the sexual act, and the core issues of relationships are ignored.

The Church of England states that it is engaged in a listening process with Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgendered people. For this to happen the conference agreed that the Church must come to recognise that most Lesbian Gay and Bisexual people in the Church seek loving and faithful relationships with their partners, and that they wish to engage in relationships where their sexual acts are expressed in fulfilment of that love. It must also listen to those in heterosexual relationships as well.

If the Church is to move forward on the issues of sexuality and human flourishing, the conference concluded that there are additional objectives that must be addressed. Four priority areas were identified from the post-it notes created during the discussions. These are expressed in terms of need:

¹⁷ <http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/events/Conference6feb10/proceedings.htm>

- The Need for Communication: The current lack of communication means that negative attitudes about the “Other” grow in ignorance and fear. Therefore without the ability to be open and honest with each other prejudices and misconceptions develop and are reinforced.
- The Need for Understanding: This can work both ways. The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community wants to be understood, but it must also take note of the signals it gives. Any minority group has a particular responsibility to ensure that its position is known, and that its views can be clearly separated from other groups with similar interests who do not follow its path.
- The Need for Interpretation: The conference made a clear distinction between acceptable and unacceptable sex. The distinction is based on relationships given in love. For this to be understood it is necessary to examine the Old and New Testament texts in the light of this perception and in the context of the societies within which they were written
- The Need for Authenticity: Many referred to the hypocrisy of a church which takes a moralising attitude on sexual relationships and attempts at the same time to hide itself from its own situation by silencing people within it who possess dissenting views. The discussion of this topic raised the greatest anger. The refusal of the church to engage with these issues of honesty and authenticity gave the greatest concern.

The discussions made it clear that there is an urgent need for the Church of England to come to terms with the reality of its own situation and to adopt a pattern of engagement which deals with the issues involved in an atmosphere of trust and love. This requires a process of disclosure and honesty. The pretence that these issues do not exist, and the resulting hypocrisy must be avoided. This engagement has to be both in our own minds and with each other. It demands that we acknowledge our weaknesses and our strengths. Storytelling must take place in which people of all sexualities and gender identities (including people in the heterosexual community) can be heard and be listened to. There is a need to establish a range of “Safe Places” in which this can happen.

The implications of these considerations raised a number of issues which extended beyond the lectures and discussions in the conference itself. The refusal of the church to engage with these issues of sexuality and human flourishing eliminates the possibilities of openness and reinforces prejudices which associate homosexuals only with promiscuity and sexual licence. Labelling becomes a means of control and minority groups can be made scapegoats for other ills. Recent statements¹⁸ by some senior Vatican clerics suggest this. An illustration of what can happen is seen in the opposition by the Bench of Bishops in the United Kingdom House of Lords to the sexual and

¹⁸ in 2010

gender measures included in the recent Equality Bill¹⁹ and their effect on the legislation. In addition to permitting discrimination on the grounds of sexuality it impugns the integrity of the people against whom it is directed. In a society where the loss of secular authority by the Church means that it can no longer conceal the misdemeanours of the past, it is not just the issues of sexuality that are involved, it is the integrity of the church.

The Listening Process

In November 2003, the House of Bishops of the Church of England had published the report on “Some Issues in Human Sexuality” which was intended to set the framework for the debate. Many of the presumptions made in that document date from the time of St Thomas Aquinas onwards. The document accepts that the statement on homosexuality, taken from the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church has become recognised as the traditional teaching on homosexuality. However in the analysis contained in this report it has been shown that the doctrines which are expressed in it do not represent the original understandings of the early Church²⁰. They reflect instead the position of the Church just after the end of the first millennium. Even though Aquinas relaxed some of the more severe requirements of the previous Augustinian doctrines there is a continuous tension in Aquinas’ writing which comes from the need to reconcile the cardinal virtues of reason with the theological values of the Church. Aquinas writes that any act which includes fornication, adultery or even rape is not considered a sin at all if it is performed under the command of God²¹. When Aquinas uses logic based on the cardinal values of reason, he provides answers which do not preclude the validity of certain types of loving same-sex relationships. However any more movement in this direction is then trumped by the arguments which Aquinas derives from the doctrines of his contemporary Church.

In 1998 the Church of England initiated a review which was designed to listen to the experiences of gay and lesbian Anglicans around the world. However it is no secret that the listening process in the Church of England has been, by the most generous estimate, patchy. There are parts of the church where listening has taken place and has been fruitful, but many parts of the Church have failed to engage in any meaningful way. LGB&T people have often felt that they were listened to but not heard. Even where genuine listening and engagement has taken place, that process has not led to a greater openness

¹⁹ in 2010

²⁰ Gilchrist, S. (2012). “Issues on the Sanctity of Same-Sex Relationships”. In Preparation

²¹ Summa Theologica I-II, question 94. Article 5, reply to objection 2. “All men alike, both guilty and innocent, die the death of nature: which death of nature is inflicted by the power of God on account of original sin, according to 1 Samuel 2:6: “The Lord killeth and maketh alive.” Consequently, by the command of God, death can be inflicted on any man, guilty or innocent, without any injustice whatever. In like manner adultery is intercourse with another’s wife; who is allotted to him by the law emanating from God. Consequently intercourse with any woman, by the command of God, is neither adultery nor fornication. The same applies to theft, which is the taking of another’s property. For whatever is taken by the command of God, to Whom all things belong, is not taken against the will of its owner, whereas it is in this that theft consists. Nor is it only in human things, that whatever is commanded by God is right; but also in natural things, whatever is done by God, is, in some way, natural”....

within the national church. There is a reluctance to face the real issues and Bishops and others still feel constrained from openly expressing their own views. The document "Some Issues in Human Sexuality" was intended to be an impartial reference document that would set the framework for the debate. It fails on two counts. The first is lack of adequate independent and critical research, (even at the time it was written). The second is the reliance on the doctrines of Aquinas rather than those of the first millennium. Aquinas was writing at the time when the church was seeking to recover from the scandals of power, corruption and priestly sexual abuse. He was also writing at a time when many church documents show that homosexuality was being made the scapegoat for abusive acts.

To establish the correct framework for the debate it is necessary to get back as far as one can to the outlook of the early Church

Conclusions

It is well understood that the brief for the House of Bishops working party is to examine current attitudes on sexuality and same-sex relationships within the traditional teaching of the church.

This is also the same restraint that Aquinas was forced to apply. Therefore the first question to ask of the working party is about how it can ensure the validity of the result of its deliberations, if it continues to follow this demand. It is also within the remit of the working party to reject this submission as being outside its terms of reference. However there are important issues on sexuality that need to be addressed.

Currently the Anglican Church is being driven apart through arguments and disagreements about homosexuality. This is at the expense of disregarding the need for the Church to consider and examine the changing attitudes to sexuality as a whole. A lot of this arises from a lack of understanding of the true natures of homosexuality and transsexuality. However much of this misunderstanding arises from the attempt to impose celibacy as a discipline of the Church. From the time of the Council of Elvira and the Council of Ancyra onwards, which ratified the rule of celibacy on all who served as religious or priests, this became an ever more restrictive demand. There is a sad litany of documents, written over the centuries, which describe the penalties for priestly sexual abuse. One prominent example of this can be found in the translations of the 11th Century book by Peter Damian, "Liber Gomorrhianus [Book of Gomorrha]²²". In modern translations of this book the references to sodomy or sexual abuse are often replaced with the word homosexuality instead.

The celibacy of the priesthood also gave the church opportunities to develop complementary power structures and empires which did not threaten the hereditary dynasties. The Dominican Order was set up in order to counter the abuses of power and sexuality which took place within the Church, and which

²² Pierre J. Payer (ed.): (1982) Book of Gomorrah: An eleventh century treatise against clerical homosexual practise, Waterloo, Ont. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

led in part to the Cathar revolt. As a member of the Dominican Order, it is against that background that Aquinas was writing. It is therefore not surprising that there is a disjuncture between the teachings of Aquinas on sexuality and sexual relationships and those which were found in the first century church.

The retreat of members of the Church to what is regarded as its traditional teaching on sexuality, together with the scapegoating of homosexuality and the attitude of Clergy hierarchy to the current scandals of priestly sexual abuse, notably within the Roman Catholic Church, has already destroyed a great deal of the moral authority that was previously held by all the churches, particularly as seen by those outside its ranks. The decision by the United Kingdom Government to enact legislation allowing Civil Same Sex Marriage irrespective of the views of the Church is a measure of how the Church has already lost its voice.

In the opinion of this author it is essential for the working party to produce a report which is credible not only to those inside the Church but those outside it. It is also hoped that the content of this submission will give guidance for future action. However it is also noted that the briefs for the working parties of the House of Bishops are only to produce reports for a later consideration and this means that an already long timescale has the danger of growing even longer. The requirement is not just that the Church of England acts promptly on these issues. It must also be seen to act and that requires full and open publication of all of the deliberations entered into by these working parties and Church consultations as well.

Susan Gilchrist

29 May 2012.