

A Response to the 2017 “Take Note” Report of The Church of England Bishop’s Reflection Group on Sexuality.

Susan Gilchrist¹

SuH0226b

2 February 2017²

This article is extracted from: Gilchrist, S. (2017): “No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice”. <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>. This paper should be referred to for a more complete discussion of the issues involved³

On the 27th January 2017 the Church of England’s Bishops’ Reflection Group on Sexuality presented a report on: “*Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations: A Report from the House of Bishops*”⁴. The Pilling report (2013)⁵, proposed two years of “facilitated conversations” to enable the different sections of the Church to understand one another better. The formal process of Shared Conversations, as they became, was completed in July 2016. The Conversations were not intended or designed to achieve agreement but to assist the careful listening that would support clear and open exchange of views and embody the principle of disagreeing in a Christian manner. The Bishop’s 2017 report identified two aspects of the emerging consensus within its working party which they considered to be particularly important. First, there was little support for changing the Church of England’s teaching on marriage and sexual relationships. Second, there was a strong sense that existing resources, guidance and tone needed to be revisited. The report advocated compassion but no changes in the Canons, or regulations, of the Church. It describes this as: “*Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church*”. Clause 32 also notes that: “*It would also need to be acknowledged that some deep-seated questions are likely to come to the fore in addressing these matters. In particular, issues of identity that are both controversial and profoundly personal would need to be faced..... Can the Church of England establish a consistent tone and culture when it encompasses those who hold to some sharply differing moral judgments about those choices in this case?*” Clause 33 notes: “*This is therefore a critical and highly challenging area for further work. Tackling it well will be crucial for everything that follows*”.

Apart from these clauses there is no other reference to the impact of science in this report. Its scope instead is entirely confined to issues of culture and theology. It is astonishing that the issues of science are not at the forefront of any report, in which the principles of the theology it uses can be tested by the principles of scientific research. This is even more important when the psychology on which the Church teaching is based is determined by the influences of history, theology and

¹ Personal Biography <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² Issued 2 February 2017: This paper is available online at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-ResponseToThe2017CoEBishopsReport.pdf>

³ Gilchrist, S. (2017a): “No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice”. <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>

⁴ Church of England (2017): *Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations. A Report from the House of Bishops*. General Synod Document 2055 <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3863472/gs-2055-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations-report-from-the-house-of-bishops.pdf> :See also: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/229P-GS2055.pdf>

⁵ Pilling Report. (2013): “*Report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party on human sexuality*”, GS 1929, Nov 2013 https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1891063/pilling_report_gs_1929_web.pdf

tradition, instead of the independence and objectivity that is required any scientific approach. That refusal to engage in these issues is of long standing, and this author has highlighted it in a paper: *"Controversy and Challenge: Issues of Gender and Sexuality in the Present Day Christian Church"*⁶. This author has been advocating the proper consideration of science for some time. The outputs of this have included a written submission to the Pilling Report⁷ and a series of articles offered to the Church of England, before the start of the "Shared Conversations" process⁸. Access to all of this material is available on the website: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>. As well as these articles two more recent ones are also of relevance. They are: "Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?"⁹ And: "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life"¹⁰ These documents combine scientific and theological analyses. They adopt an independent approach to Church history and tradition. Some may disagree with the conclusions they reach. However disagreements pale into insignificance when the arguments presented in these and papers by other authors are neither heard, nor acknowledged, nor listened to by the Church. Clauses 32 and 33 of the Bishop's 2017 report seem to demand that this listening should now occur. However by making it clear that all future discussions must take place within the context of the traditional teaching of the Church, this report denies from the beginning the fundamental depth of listening that is needed. This is after two years of a "Shared Discussions" process whose stated aim was "to enable the different sections of the Church to understand one another better". Many LGBTI people contributed to these discussions, some at considerable cost to themselves. It may be presumptuous of the author to presume that clauses 32 and 33 refer to her own work, but the results and the progress of her investigation have been reported and made available to the Church of England at all stages these its discussions from the Pilling report onwards.

The 2017 Church of England Bishop's report is an interim report, which is scheduled for discussion in a "Take Note" debate in the General Synod of the Church of England on the 15th February 2017. By its action of directing that all future discussion must take place within the context of the traditional teaching of the Church it is denying the possibility of any change to that teaching. It is applying exactly the same restrictions as those which were imposed by the Roman Catholic Church and Pope Francis during the "Synod on the Family" discussions. The consequences of this are that the outcomes can only be the request to "be nice to LGBTI people", without any consideration of the fundamental issues that need to be addressed. That is a totally inadequate response. Therefore it is appropriate to re-iterate the results of this investigation, the outputs of other research and the experiences of LGBTI people themselves.

There are two parts to this investigation. The first is a neurophysiological and psychological analysis of the early development of personality and self-identity. The second is a historical and theological examination which considers the development of attitudes to gender and sexual variation in the Christian Church. This makes use of the results of the neurophysiological and psychological study. The results of that study shows that the development of gender and sexual identities begins at a very early stage. It demonstrates that they are identity driven. They are not behaviour driven. This means that as wide a range of moral attitudes commitments and behaviour are to be found amongst

⁶ Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Controversy and Challenge: Issues of Gender and Sexuality in the Present Day Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/018B-ControversoryAndCrisis.pdf>

⁷ Gilchrist, S. (2012): "Personal submission to the Church of England House of Bishops Working Party on Human Sexuality": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/004B-SGSubmissionToHoBSexualityReview2012.pdf>

⁸ Gilchrist, S. (2014): Articles Offered to The Church of England for use in its Process of Shared Discussions on LGBTI Matters: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/020B-OfferedPapersIntroduction.pdf>

⁹ Gilchrist, S. (2016j): "Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>

¹⁰ Gilchrist, S. (2016h): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>

gender and sexually variant behaviour as in the community at large¹¹. It follows that a moral duality must exist in which those gender and sexually variant behaviour who seek to live in ways that are true to their own identities while maintaining the highest moral standards should be commended for their behaviour, while those who do not may be severely condemned. This scientific result is contradicted by the theological doctrines of the Christian Church which condemn every element of gender and sexually variant act behaviour as invariably being disordered lifestyle choices, which are always engaged in for inappropriate purposes and illegitimate sex. There is clearly a conflict between science and theology. Therefore the next step taken in this investigation was to find out why this conflict between science and theology occurs. That is why an extended analysis has been conducted which examines the teaching of Jesus against these scientific results¹². This is then compared with the development of this teaching within the history of the Church¹³. It is shown that acknowledgement of this moral duality was present in the teaching of Jesus. There is no conflict between His teaching and the results of the scientific investigation. The relationship between Jesus and John is shown to match what may be expected of any rabbinic partnership of the time. However all sense of the duality inherent in gender and sexually variant behaviour disappeared in the adaptations the Church had to make, both to integrate itself into Roman society and also to counteract the gross abuses of sex, notably in same-sex acts, which any despotic society is able to create.

This investigation has emphasised the need for high moral standards to be maintained by gender and sexually variant people. However many other people, who today would be regarded as heterosexual, engaged in cross-gender and same-sex acts of sex. It was entirely accepted that this was the privilege of all male Roman citizens as long as they were the penetrators when same-sex intercourse took place. Acts involving this type of same-sex rape were endemic in many societies. In battle a victor could rape his beaten enemy to ensure his humiliation was complete. Counteracting this was a major task for the early Christian Church. It is not surprising that the sense of duality in gender and sexually variant behaviour was to become lost; and the intensity with which those battles were fought made passions greatly increase. These passions are still expressed in some measure by the strength of the condemnations of all gender and sexually variant behaviour which are imposed by the Christian Church. Therefore a result of this examination is the simple and direct conclusion which states that what today are considered to be the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church on sexual and gender variance are built on a false foundation. They were driven by the need to gain respectability and to counteract same-sex abuse in Greco/Roman society. They do not come from the teaching of Jesus himself. This means that change to the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church are needed. However these are not changes which depart from the Gospel message. They are changes which return to the full meaning of the Gospel texts.

The conclusions of this study are also in accord with the large degree of experiential scientific evidence that is now available and the policies adopted by the major professional institutions. They also represent the lived experiences of LGBTI people. There is now a great deal of anger amongst the LGBTI communities who feel that the contributions they made in good faith to the “*Shared Conversations*” process have been ignored. The results of this investigation have also been made available to the Church of England, from before the start of the “*Shared Conversations*” process. If the presumption the author makes about clauses 32 and 33 in the Bishop’s 2017 report are correct, these results were known to the working party as well. Obviously any academic study must be subjected to the rigours of a peer review process. However to foreclose on any investigation by

¹¹ Gilchrist, S. (2013d): “*Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach*”:
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf>

¹² Gilchrist, S. (2016): “*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus*”:
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>

¹³ Gilchrist, S. (2016): “*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church*”:
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

declaring that there should be no change in the traditional teaching of the Church, before all of the evidence that has been made available to the working party is fully considered, can have little justification. It is therefore very difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is an attempt to avoid the real issues that should be addressed. Presenting the report to Synod at this time in a “Take note” debate could be seen as a way to get Synod to stifle further discussion of the full range of factors that are involved.

These major issues still need to be addressed and Clause 33 in the report: *“This is therefore a critical and highly challenging area for further work. Tackling it well will be crucial for everything that follows”*, emphasises that point. It is also of note that the use of the word “choices” in clause 32 suggests that the Bishops are still thinking that these are issues which are determined by lifestyle choices, instead of objective results. The real issue is not that of finding ways to be nice to LGBTI people, as the report decrees. The demand that LGBTI people make is that the duality and identity driven nature inherent in gender and sexually variant conditions is recognised, and that transgender, transsexual, lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities in roles and activities that are true to themselves should be accepted as full and equal members of the Christian Church. In return the obligation that gender and sexually variant people accept is that the same standard of moral behaviour is required of them as it is of any other group.

From each of the theological, social and scientific standpoints it is established in this investigation that identical criteria in relation to use and abuse should be applied to heterosexual and same-sex acts of sex. An extended study of the biblical texts has been undertaken. This shows that in line with the teaching of Jesus in the New Covenant, all such acts should be guided by love, the promotion of wellbeing and the purity of intention. There is no automatic condemnation of any sexual act. There is no attack on family values and there is absolutely no condonation of any form of inappropriate or abusive sex. In place of using theology and tradition to define the psychology of gender and sexually variant conditions, it is shown that this psychology should be defined by science itself. Therefore: instead of centuries of making homosexuality the scapegoat for all sexual abuse, it is demonstrated in this investigation that the correct objectives for the Christian Church should be those of combatting all forms of abusive sex.

The social consequences of these Christian doctrines are considerable. Part of clause 34 of the 2017 Church of England Bishop’s report states *“There was some support for the view that the teaching document [the report proposes] should include penitence for the treatment some lesbian and gay people have received at the hands of the Church”*. Penitence is not enough for it does not remove the slur, as it is expressed in the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church: *“Tradition has always declared that “Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.” They are contrary to the natural law. They choose the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.”* By extension transgender experience may be included in this as well. The existence of this doctrine enables others to use it to condemn all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour no matter how welcoming or accepting Pope Francis and the Bishops of the Church of England attempt to be. Severe condemnations are seen most strongly in many African nations, where extreme legal penalties are being applied to homosexual people, in fundamentalist churches where families and lives are destroyed by the rejection that occurs, in the denial of the legitimacy of transgender identities by the Catholic Church, fundamentalist Churches and state legislatures in the United States¹⁴. There is no recognition of the identity driven nature of these conditions. All of these condemnations are predicated on the presumption that they are in pursuit of sexual experience which involves illicit or inappropriate sex.

¹⁴ See: Gilchrist, S. (2017): “No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice”. <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>

The actions of the present president of the United States illustrate how easily this scapegoating can occur. Instead of recognising the moral duality which is inherent in gender and sexual behaviour, without exception all of these people become the scapegoats for abusive sex. Since this article was first released the administration of Present Trump in the United States has removed the federal guidance which protected transgender children from some of these attacks.

These are not just issues of religious doctrine, for they combine with the secular prejudices, social discrimination and the tribal identifications which are used to condemn any minority group. The traditional Church doctrine gives strong ammunition for that social discrimination and it leads elements of the Church to collude with the harm that this creates. This is a time when Britain, the United States and many other countries are rejecting reasoned arguments in pursuit of narrow, nationalist and protectionist policies, which place self-interest first. For Christianity and the Churches to refuse to consider even the possibility of any change to its traditional doctrines on these matters is only tampering with the issues that are involved. Instead of colluding with these condemnations and prejudices, a clear moral stand by Christianity and the Churches is needed. Therefore changes or reconsiderations of the traditional teaching of the Church are urgently required. This is a time when Christianity most needs its faithful and committed gender and sexually variant members to stand as beacons of light against the secular scapegoating by society. It is also a time when gender and sexually variant people most need the full and unwavering support of the Christian Church.

It is important that any decision taken during the “*Take Note*” debate in the General Synod of the Church of England on the 15th February 2017 is made in full knowledge of the information that was presented to the Bishops, and what is presented in this account.

Context

This investigation adopts a new and innovative approach to the development of personality, identity, gender and sexuality. There have been multitudinous studies on these issues. Broadly they break down into two camps. The first are the neurophysiologically based studies on early development which examine the growth of these capabilities in terms of brain maturation and neural function. The second are the traditional social learning and psychodynamic theories: these begin by considering mature brain functioning, from which constructs are created which seek to explain the relationships between the conscious and unconscious mind, and how learning and development takes place in early life. The first type can be described as “bottom up” studies. These can be contrasted with the “top down” approach taken by the traditional psychodynamic and social learning theories. A major deficiency to the present time has been the inability to provide an adequate link between the two processes. That omission is addressed in this analysis where, because of their early origins, the development of atypical gender identities can be used to provide the link that is required. Therefore it becomes possible to trace a continuous pattern of identity and personality development which extends from infancy to adult life. The timing and nature of the transitions between these two processes can also be mapped. It is shown that the fundamental, or core, elements of personality and identity are first driven by the search for identity, and only afterwards, by the search for reward. The social, historical and theological consequences are all important. Therefore an extended neurophysiological and psychological analysis is undertaken to examine the natures and origins of these physiognomies. A second historically and theologically based analysis is conducted which examines the social impact and the theological consequences of this new research. Fresh insights are explored through the adoption of this new and original approach.

Full references to sources are given in the more detailed papers referred to in the text. A full bibliography is available on: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>

© Susan Gilchrist 2017.

Contact: spap4144@gmail.com

Gilchrist, S. (2017). “Response to the 2017 “Take Note” Report of The CoE Bishop’s Reflection Group on Sexuality”.

First Issued: 2 February 2017. Last update: 26 February 2017.

Draft: Printed: 10/04/2017 11:31

Access via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

spap4144@gmail.com 5