

REPORT TO THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

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## PREFACE

In the summer of 1986 the Standing Committee of the House of Bishops asked the Board for Social Responsibility to set up a working party to advise the House of Bishops on questions concerning homosexuality and lesbianism. The Board agreed the following terms of reference:-

1. To review current thinking about the nature and practice of homosexuality and lesbianism and how the Churches have responded to these matters.
2. To consider the method and content of Christian theology and ethics as they relate to these issues.
3. To advise the House of Bishops how to handle homosexuality matters in the Church of England.

From the start, it was agreed that certain limits would be set to this work.

We were asked to complete our task with some speed. The Working Party began its work in July 1987. We are conscious of the effect haste has had on our work. At some points all we have been able to do is outline what we believe to be priorities for future work. During this period, in November 1987, the General Synod debated the issue of homosexuality through a Private Member's Motion in the name of the Revd Tony Higton. You would expect us to regret that such a debate took place when a piece of work such as this was already in hand. We regret much more the sense of isolation it engendered in many homosexual people and the climate of distrust it created.

Our work was not in any way to repeat the ground of the Gloucester Report. We understood that we were not being asked to attempt to resolve questions concerning homosexuality. Rather our task was to consider where the Church of England is in relation to this divisive issue and to advise the House of Bishops as they seek to bring healing and unity. Indeed our work convinced us that none of us can speak of

resolution until there has been much greater engagement between the Christian loyalties to Scripture, tradition and experience. Our conclusions are mainly about strategies, future tasks and the leadership of the bishops as they address the issue and conflicts in both our Church and society.

We were asked to do our work in confidence and there was no public invitation to submit evidence. This left some people suspicious but protected us from the worst pressures of public attention. It also enabled us to model in our working together the methods we wish to commend to the Church at large. Between the seven of us we represented much of the diversity of Anglican response to homosexuality. We were frequently in disagreement, much of it complicated because we were in conflict within ourselves, always caught in the painful hope of holding on to the Christian realities of compassion and convictions. No-one was asked to dilute or compromise their respective allegiances. Yet we found that we could still live with each other. More than that, because we experienced the strength of what unites us we were committed to finding ways by which we could live with our divisions. It is that quest we wish to commend to the Church. We bring this report to you unanimously.

The Revd June Osborne

## ST. GREGORY NAZIANZEN

'Basil and I were both in Athens. We had come, like streams of a river, from the same source in our native land, had separated from each other in pursuit of learning, and were now united again as if by plan, for God so arranged it.

When, in the course of time, we acknowledged our friendship and recognised that our ambition was a life of true wisdom, we became everything to each other: we shared the same lodging, the same table, the same desires, the same goal. Our love for each other grew daily warmer and deeper.

The same hope inspired us: the pursuit of learning. We seemed to be two bodies with a single spirit. Our single object and ambition was virtue, and a life of hope in the blessings that are to come.

We followed the guidance of God's law and spurred each other on to virtue. If it is not too boastful to say, we found in each other a standard and rule for discerning right from wrong.

Different men have different names, which they owe to their parents or to themselves, that is, to their own pursuits and achievements. But our great pursuit, the great name we wanted, was to be Christians, to be called Christians.'

## SECTION I

### CHRISTIAN LOYALTIES

1. In Chapter 1 we consider what the Scriptures and the Church's tradition offer us and how we ought to handle these resources as we wrestle with the question of homosexual conduct in our own time. In Chapter 2 we look at what we know about homosexuality in the contemporary social setting and at what sort of questions and choices are put before us by homosexual people. We argue that these two poles for Christian thought - the tradition and the experience - need to engage with one another if we are to progress in finding answers to our questions.

2. In this opening chapter we are concerned with biblical theology and with establishing some guidelines for the proper exegesis and interpretation of the key texts. The Bible is used throughout the report. Indeed, the resources to which we draw the reader's attention in this opening section are the foundations for the rest of our work.

## CHAPTER 1

### SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

#### SCRIPTURE

3. There are two distinctive tasks for the commentator on Holy Scripture. First, there is the exegetical task - elucidating what the text is actually saying in its context. Secondly, there is the hermeneutical task - interpreting the text and drawing it into the questions the Church is faced with today. Neither task is simple nor easy. Since the subject-matter of homosexuality is of such sensitivity in the culture of the Church and wider society there is a persistent danger, from all perspectives, of reading the text in the way most convenient to our own view.

4. Both sides of the task - the exegetical and hermeneutical - have promoted a vigorous scholarly discussion over recent times. However, those who have sought to comment on the texts in a careful and dispassionate manner would seem to be agreed about four things. First, the subject of homosexuality is touched on in the Bible infrequently. It is not a major concern of the biblical authors. Second, with the possible exception of the legal provisions in Leviticus 18 and 20, wherever the subject is raised it is not the main subject of the passage. The topic is illustrative of other more fundamental concerns. Thirdly, great care needs to be taken in the exegetical task not to attribute to the text opinions which are not there. Fourthly, there is no escape from the interpretative task. We cannot jump straight from the text to the answers to our questions. Understanding the text is only the beginning of the Church's work on the subject.

5. There is further agreement that the scriptural references are, without exception, hostile towards the experience of homosexuality which they are addressing. There are no recorded incidents in the Bible which offer a favourable view of homosexual practice. That is not to say there are not many examples affirming deep friendships between people of the same sex. The classic biblical story of such

is that of David and Jonathan whose love for one another is said to be 'greater than the love of women' (2 Samuel 1.26). The New Testament records the particular love which Jesus had for the unnamed disciple often thought to be John, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 13.23). Nevertheless whenever the Bible talks openly about homosexuality it presents it in a negative light. There have been widely different responses to this. A range of authors, including Dr. Sherwin Bailey,<sup>1</sup> have sought to suggest that the texts are commenting on various homosexual perversions and are not therefore dealing with the question raised by those who find themselves to be homosexual by no choice of their own. Others have suggested that the biblical authors are merely reflecting the predominant mood of their culture which was deeply opposed to homosexual conduct. No-one thought to question it. In any case, there was no need to do so since their use of the subject was always in relation to other more fundamental theological and historical themes. The implication is that our obligation to Scripture as authoritative in the Church does not stretch to our having to accept its cultural perspective as appropriate for our own time. Critics of these views would question both the exegesis which suggests that only restricted and perverted instances of homosexual conduct are dealt with in the texts and the suggestion that the cultural context relieves us of the task of considering the meaning of these biblical authors' texts for our own questions.

6. The references to homosexuality in the Old Testament present particular problems of exegesis. There has been a lively debate, for example, about whether the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 is concerned with abuse of the custom and duty of hospitality and that its references to homosexuality are incidental to this, or whether the homosexual conduct here is nearer the heart of the sin described in the story. However, if one takes the more robust view that the passage is concerned with homosexual conduct it still does not offer direct help on the question which we face. Lust and licence, after all, are to be resisted in both homosexual and heterosexual persons. The condemnation of homosexual conduct in Leviticus 18 and 20 raises different questions. Here, in the Old Testament law, is clear opposition to homosexual practice. The way



we respond to these passages, however, can only be determined when we have decided upon the effect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon our obligations to the detail of Old Testament law. Few would suggest that the Christian is under obligation to the detailed provision of Old Testament law. We cannot carry Old Testament law across to the Church without it passing through an interpretative process determined by the word and work of Jesus Christ.

7. When we turn to the Gospels we find no recorded incident of homosexual conduct. There are references to Sodom and Gomorrah concerned with the effects of general wickedness and Jesus does comment on the status of eunuchs. These references, however, can only be brought into the discussion through a process of theological reflection on the texts. They offer little direct help to our discussion. Some would suggest that the silence of the Gospels on the subject is significant. The Gospel writers did not seem to consider the question at all important and those who press the cause of homosexual people in the Church believe it to be significant silence in the New Testament. That leads us on to the rest of the New Testament and especially to St. Paul. The heart of the debate about the biblical material on homosexuality revolves round St. Paul's comments on the subject.

8. There are three passages in the Epistles which deal with the subject of homosexuality. In I Corinthians 6.9-11 homosexuals are included in a long list of people whose conduct is deemed to exclude them from the Kingdom of God. The verses are part of an argument Paul is making in refuting errors in the Corinthian Church. These include the suggestion that Christian liberty is permission - Christians are free to behave as they please. Paul is arguing that, both for the sake of the Church and because of the characteristics of the new life in Christ, liberty is not to be equated with licence. Self-indulgence and immorality cannot be justified on the ground of Christian liberty. In I Timothy 1.8-11 homosexuals are included in the list of those who are in breach of the law. Such activities are contrary to sound doctrine and cannot be said to conform to the Gospel. We must be careful, however, to notice that homosexual practice is but one of a long list of activities which are

disapproved of in both these passages. It would be difficult to use these verses as a reason for a general attack on homosexual people. They are certainly disapproving of homosexual practice. We are not, however, offered any explanation as to exactly what sort of conduct is disapproved of.

9. The substantial questions are to be found in Paul's comments in Romans. In Romans 1.18-32 Paul is making a theological point concerning the relationship of the Gentiles to God. Gentile unrighteousness is the object of the wrath of God. They have no excuse because God's invisible nature is to be perceived in the creation. Instead of coming to honour God through what is revealed in creation, they have turned to idolatry, corrupting both the message of creation and the true worship of God. For this reason the wrath of God has been active against them and God has given them up to disordered life, to unnatural sexual conduct for instance and to all manner of base and improper conduct. Paul's description of homosexuality is therefore in the setting of a theological argument about the truth concerning God, creation and Gentile experience. This interpretation of the human condition leads on in the argument to the inescapable need for the action of God in Jesus Christ leading to the justification of human life through grace by faith. The passage, therefore, provides theological themes for use in an ethical context. It is difficult to argue that it enters directly into the ethical discussion or offers help in answering the moral choices posed by homosexual experience without a further process of theological reflection. The main thrust of the ethical outworking of the argument of the Epistle is to be found in Chapters 12 and following.

10. The exegetical discussion revolves around the exact meaning of physis-nature. The discussion has proceeded down two different routes. The first, presented by Dr. Sherwin Bailey and more recently by John Boswell,<sup>2</sup> would maintain that the use of the language of nature in the text indicates that Paul has in mind heterosexual people who have chosen to act against their nature by engaging in homosexual activity. Thus it would be argued the text does not talk about homosexuality in general. Perverted homosexual conduct

illustrates in human conduct the point of Paul's argument that God's wrath is revealed against the Gentiles because they have exchanged the true worship of God for idolatry. The second, held by the majority of commentators, believes that the text does not make this distinction between 'inverted' homosexuality and 'perverted' homosexuality. Paul is observing homosexual conduct as witness to human departure from the natural order of God's creation. It is unnatural, not in the sense of being unnatural in the experience of the person, but in the sense of being against nature in the order of creation (see also paras 108-114). Paul is appealing to creation which tells of human life being made by God as both male and female.

11. Both exegetical routes, in seeking to understand Romans I, would agree that this exercise is the beginning of a process. We need to proceed to interpret the biblical tradition in response to the questions posed by our experience. The difference between them would be that the first line of exegesis would be less inclined to make use of the text in Romans I because Paul's comment is not about the type of experience for which we need help. The second line of exegesis, however, would still leave the Pauline material in an important place in the interpretative task. Since, according to this line of argument, Paul's comment on homosexual conduct is inclusive, we have to decide on its meaning for our discussion.

12. From the material we have received it is clear that both lines of exegesis are deployed by those in the Church of England who wrestle with these issues. Homosexual Relationships<sup>3</sup> inclined to the first line of exegesis. Others, in response, have taken a different view. Our own group included people of both schools of thought. In considering the recent debate in General Synod, and by assessing opinions as we have encountered them, it would seem that the first line of exegesis is a minority view and that the mainstream of Anglican thought would incline to the second line of exegesis.

13. In the light of the temptation in sections of the Church to seek to resolve the issue by moving straight from the text to the answer to our questions, it is important that we stress that the exegetical task is only part of the wider theological task that needs to be

undertaken if we are to find responsible answers to our moral dilemmas. The majority of commentators accept that Paul's comments are inclusive and not restricted to perversion. They would accept that his comments are an unambiguous indictment of homosexual behaviour as contrary to what God intends for people in the created order. Such commentators go on, however, to suggest that this is where the task begins rather than ends. We still have to decide how to interpret what Paul said in the context of our own discussion today. We cannot rely on proof-texts as settling the issue. We have to decide how the Bible is to be used in settling moral questions. For example, the New Testament has many statements about what is acceptable or not. On a range of issues, such as the question of slavery, the Church has had to accept a process of theological interpretation in seeking to decide the issue.

14. Paul's argument is a theological one which means that we are bound to consider the question in the context of broader theological themes. The theme of creation features strongly in the argument in Romans I. We are therefore to consider the creation theme of male and female in human life and its implications for sex and sexuality for questions of gender and role and for questions concerning the account to be given of different possible lifestyles. Paul's letter to the Romans deploys the argument in Chapter I as part of a wider theological concern for grace, sin and justification. These themes are pertinent to our understanding of human life, its choices, its growth and development. Paul was concerned for the well-being of the Church as a witness to the Gospel. Disorder, licence and disregard for others in the Church brought the message of Christ into disrepute. Everyone has to give thought to the impact of their chosen path upon the Church. Things which are lawful are not always expedient. Moreover, we need to consider the implication of the basis of Paul's approach which is that baptised Christians have entered a new life in Christ. 'You, who once were ... are now ... in Him' (Colossians 1.21ff). In subsequent sections of this report we will pursue some of these theological themes in an effort to interpret the Christian tradition and we will be offering comment on how the Church and its members need to consider their conduct and procedures in the light of our common duty to bring honour to Christ in the world.

15. In seeking to interpret passages such as Romans I we have to decide what weight is to be given to the use of the example of homosexual conduct in the passage. If we accept the exegesis that suggests that Paul's comment on homosexual conduct is inclusive and is not just about heterosexual people who choose to engage in homosexual activity, we still have to decide on the importance of the example for our purpose. It might be suggested that Paul was simply reflecting the predominant mood of his culture which saw homosexual conduct as unacceptable and immoral and therefore used it as a good example of the point he is making linking distortion of the truth about God to distortion in human conduct. His basic point would remain unaffected if, in later generations, people, set in a different culture and with a different perception of their experience, did not believe that any basic damage was done to the great truths of the faith by recognising the needs of this minority group. Thus the question of homosexual conduct and its legitimacy might be seen as having parallels with other ethical issues on which the Church has changed its mind down the centuries. A recent example would be over contraception where the pressure of experience led to a reconsideration of a hostile tradition and the Church came to see that no damage was done to its basic conviction concerning the link between union and procreation in marriage by allowing contraceptive protection to couples. If this sort of parallel is to be used its success depends on a clear demonstration that the acceptance of homosexual practice within loving and trusting personal relationships for that minority of the human community who are homosexual is not going to do damage to the given male/female character of human existence. It would set such conduct within the Christian understanding of the creation of human life as male and female whilst recognising the particular needs of this group of people. It would mean that such relationships could not be given the status of marriage or seen as equivalent to marriage and it would, for both the homosexual persons and the rest of the community, imply the need to resist a ghetto approach. The community would have to be open to and acknowledging of homosexual people and homosexual people would have to seek mature and appropriate relationships with the wider male/female society of human life. Thus it might be argued that no basic damage is done to Paul's argument about creation and about its

essentially male/female character by recognising the needs of that minority who, in their sexual experience are predominantly drawn to their own sex.

16. If, however, more weight is laid on the example Paul uses and it is accepted that the fundamental implications of his remarks are that homosexual conduct is immoral, the Church would then have to consider how homosexual people are to make moral sense of their lives given that the biblical tradition is clear that homosexuality belongs to the fallen and disobedient character of unredeemed human experience. Again, the Church has had to face this question in other related areas. Divorce and remarriage would be one such example. Some sections of the Church say that the break up of a marriage whose obligations are supposed to be lifelong, is sinful. This does not, however, prevent us recognising that sinful fallen human beings still have to make moral sense of their lives after the experience of the break up of their marriage. Thus many Christians recognise the need for divorce, 'for the sake of the hardness of your hearts', and its implications that people are free to marry again even though their former partner is still living. Thus it might be judged that loving committed and trusting relationships between homosexual people, whilst in some respects they are to be considered sinful and falling short of the pattern for our life as revealed in Scripture, make the best moral sense of a situation which is, of itself, flawed. It is better for people to be able to grow and develop in relationships than to suffer the burdens of isolation and the constant temptation and threat of seeking relief through clandestine and casual relationships.

17. These attempts to interpret the biblical tradition, whilst they may diverge on important points, have certain basic common features. They are all committed, for example, to arriving at choices which can, in good conscience, be seen as keeping faith with the tradition. They are all attempting to interpret the theological themes of creation, sin and redemption towards the moral choices that need to be considered. They are all committed to encountering the contemporary experience as an essential aspect of the task. To quote Richard Hayes' article in the Journal of Religious Ethics<sup>4</sup>

The experience of some Christians in our time surely may function at least to raise questions about the authoritarian role of scripture and tradition in our deliberations about the morality of homosexual relations. If there are individuals who live in stable loving homosexual relationships and claim to experience the grace - rather than the wrath - of God therein, how are such claims to be assessed? Was Paul wrong? Or are such experiential claims simply another manifestation of the blindness and self-deception that Paul so chillingly describes? Or, beside these irreconcilable alternatives, could we entertain the possible emergence of new realities that Paul could not have anticipated? Could God be doing a new thing in our time? Does the practice that Paul condemns correspond exactly to the phenomenon of homosexuality that exists in the present? If not, does the authority of present experience eclipse the authority of Paul's understanding of God's intention for human sexual relationships? These are the sorts of questions that we must grapple with as we seek to assess the place of Romans I 16-32 in shaping normative judgements about sexual ethics.

#### OUR METHOD OF WORKING

18. This leads us into talking about method in dealing with these matters. From the start of our discussion we have accepted that there are two distinctive poles to any serious Christian discussion of the issue. All our subsequent reflection has only served to underline the point: namely, that we have to treat both the tradition and experience in their own right and with depth and seriousness if we are to be faithful to the task. This has meant using both poles as starting points for approaching the other. We have, therefore, unashamedly started with Scripture and moved towards the experience. Similarly we have sought to engage with the experience and see how this affects our understanding of the tradition. We therefore reject both a simple moving from the text to the moral answers and an uncritical acceptance of the experience. The difficulty of the task in this particular instance is the apparent distance between the poles. We have on the one side a biblical tradition which has been developed and used to counter homosexual lifestyles in the history of the Church. On the other side we have the homosexual Christian people who have been on the receiving end of a negative use of the tradition who struggle to make some sense of their lives in a way which is possible for them and which sustains and feeds their human dignity.

19. One of the reasons why we believe that this is not the moment for the Church of England to appear to have reached a definitive

conclusion on this matter, is the distance between these two poles and the history of the Church's attitude and practice which lies between. We have taken encouragement from the experience within our group. We have had to work on the painful aspects which arise from both polar starting points. That we have deepened our understanding and our sense of common life in the process encourages us to believe that the Church may be able to make the same journey in its own way. We do not believe, however, that there is any escape in serious work on the issues from allowing both the tradition to speak in its own right and the experience of homosexual people today similarly to speak for itself. The authority of both the tradition and the experience must be given space in the discussion. The agenda for persistent work in the Church is set both by the points of convergence and divergence in this process. The debate which we have set out in this chapter indicates a lot of common life on the tradition. It also points to the important divergences among us. These divergencies need to be continually evaluated in the light of the Gospel. These have served to make us want to continue in the journey of mutual exploration. In no sense have they threatened our sense of koinonia. We therefore see no basic reason why a Church which contains people who would adopt different approaches on this matter should feel its basic sense of common life under threat. It would be disastrous, however, if those who prefer to stay at one pole or the other felt they could do without each other in the theological and ethical task confronting the whole Church on this matter.

#### WHAT THE CHURCH HAS MADE OF THIS

20. A great deal has been written on the history of the response of the Church to the question of homosexuality. A thorough examination of this history is given in Peter Coleman's Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality, SPCK, 1980. We wish to draw attention to the work done there. Our task is to comment on some of the broad themes raised by this history which have implications for our own situation.

21. The tradition, until very recent times, has been almost without exception, negative towards homosexual practice. This may be seen in two ways. First, from the viewpoint of theology and discipline in



the Church the tradition has built on the Biblical foundation a history of rejection of homosexual conduct and often homosexual persons. It is seen as against nature, a sign of moral disorder and one of the areas of sinful conduct worthy of disciplinary action by the Church. Second, from the point of view of homosexual persons the tradition has seen the use of the growing power of the Church in taking action against those found guilty of homosexual practices. At first, this concerned the internal discipline of the Church. Later, as the power of the Church grew, it embraced the whole social order of Christendom. Thus homosexual people have been on the receiving end of a process which has brought together a negative tradition in a culture growingly affected by that tradition with powerful institutions committed to upholding it.

22. Many aspects of the tradition are distinct from the biblical material. It is not so much that they have lost touch with the biblical record but that they have sought to interpret and extend the tradition in particular ways. The New Testament writers, for example, give no indication that they had considered what penalties, if any, should attach to those in the Church involved in homosexual practices.

23. In relation to this it is clear that the way the Church's tradition developed was affected by both the intellectual and the social climate in which it was set. The experience of the issue in both Greek and Roman culture is in the background of the references in the New Testament to homosexual conduct. The influence of aspects of Greek thought in the development of an ascetic approach to all matters affecting our bodily life and especially our sexuality influenced some of the comments of the early Fathers. Tertullian's trenchant and negative comments are related to his Montanist sympathies. Montanists thought all sexual conduct was of the flesh and corrupt.

#### THE EARLY PERIOD

24. There are a number of features to the comments made in the early documents of the Christian Church. First, these distinguish Christian conduct from the prevailing sexual mores in classical

society. There is implacable opposition, for example, to the use of children in prostitution and especially for sodomy. Second, there is stress on monogamous stable marriage. Fornication, adultery and all forms of unchastity are to be avoided. Thirdly, there is a growing asceticism leading in the direction of upholding virginity and celibacy as the higher way of Christian life.

25. As the Church grew and became established in the ancient world so it began to develop disciplinary procedures for dealing with those who flouted its moral codes. Penances were laid down for those found guilty of homosexual conduct. Thus theological comment began to be set alongside a developing disciplinary practice in the Church.

#### THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

26. The developments which had taken place in the early centuries of Christian history formed the basis on which the medieval Church extended both theological comment and disciplinary practice. Indeed, it is in this period that John Boswell maintains the Church developed a powerful and structured hostility to homosexual people which has left its mark on Christian attitudes ever since. Western Councils, Canon Law, and the Penitentials all combined to provide a systematic exclusion of all forms of homosexual conduct, including lesbianism. It was even possible for people to face the death penalty for the more serious offences.

27. Alongside this went the development of moral theology. If the roots of contemporary ecclesiastical attitudes to homosexual conduct were laid in medieval disciplinary systems, the basis of much modern moral response by the Church is to be found in the work of Aquinas. He argued, following Aristotle and Augustine, that homosexuality was both contrary to reason and to nature. He went on to argue that not only other people but God Himself was injured by such conduct. Thus he established an argument both from natural law and from theology for an exclusively negative view of the subject.

28. Thus the medieval period brought together the growing power of the Church with the development of both theology and disciplinary practice to exclude homosexual conduct. It had the double effect of

driving conduct out of sight and encouraging the development of a hostile culture in the Church to homosexual people.

#### THE REFORMATION

29. In spite of the freedom which the Reformation brought to clergy and to members of monastic communities to marry and the new stress on personal liberty and responsibility, the Reformation did not produce any fresh developments on the subject of homosexuality. Whenever the subject was broached, which was not very often, the Reformers continued the line of condemning homosexual practice. Nevertheless, much of the previous structures of Canon Law and Penitential Regulations were abandoned. The Anglican Church took over the system of Canon Law but greatly reduced and adjusted to its new situation.

#### TO SUM UP THUS FAR

30. It is clear that the commentators are negative in their approach to these issues but there are varying degrees and types of response to be found among them. A lot of comment is minimal - as with Calvin and Luther. Some of it is extreme as with those who want to ban any sign of affection between people of the same sex. Some of the comment is predominantly concerned with conduct - what conduct is or is not acceptable and what sort of disciplinary response should the Church make to it. Other comment, as with Aquinas and Augustine, is much more concerned with theology and the establishment of the mind of the Church on the questions. What is missing is any serious dialogue on the theological and moral issues. The subject appears to be too sensitive for this or the Church of a mind to think that its predominantly negative approach precludes open discussion.

#### THE ANGLICAN TRADITION

31. Anglicanism has developed its own distinctive style in handling matters of faith and order. This is often described as a careful inter-relating of Scripture, tradition and reason. The mind of the Church on particular issues is formed by the dialogue between these three sources. Anglicanism tests all things against the teachings of Scripture, in the light of the credal statements of the early Church which set forth the Christian faith and in the face of the most

reasonable understandings of our experience available to us in each generation. It does not, therefore, accept that everything the Church has said is to be accepted by Christians. The 39 Articles in the Book of Common Prayer claim that Councils of the Church have erred and do err. Furthermore it accepts that its own theological and moral understanding is open to re-evaluation in response to the growth of human understanding and experience. This is particularly important in areas of moral theology. Statements of Christian theology about the beginnings of human life have had to develop in the light of changing understandings about the way life develops before birth. Thus we could not accept the understanding of the human embryo held by Aquinas (who took it from Aristotle). The attempt at interpreting biblical texts in the light of Aristotilian formulas on embryology collapses in the light of the more extensive knowledge we have today. A new formulation of the tradition is necessary. That formulation, however, like its predecessors, needs to be a careful weighing of Scripture and tradition in the face of the reasonable knowledge and experience we now possess. In terms of the question of homosexuality we are bound to consider contemporary understandings and experience of homosexuality and bring them into dialogue with the Christian tradition rooted in Scripture if we are to form responsible judgements about the contemporary moral dilemma in this issue.

#### THE LAST 40 YEARS

32. The Church of England, along with many other Churches, has made a number of attempts at responding to these matters. The work we do stands in a contemporary tradition. In this report we have concentrated on the way the Church of England has tackled these issues. There is, however, a wealth of work and documentation both from the ecumenical field and from other parts of the Anglican Communion. Examples of this work are listed at the end of the chapter.<sup>5</sup> Public interest in these matters was raised in the late 1940s and early 50s as the result of research and a growing distaste for the state of the law of our society on this matter. The report by A. C. Kinsey et al Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male demonstrated the extent of homosexual experience in contemporary American society. Here was an issue which affected a much wider section of the

population than many had hitherto thought. Homosexuality was not just the depraved behaviour of a small deviant and criminal group. The second was the problem of the state of the law. The law which criminalised homosexual behaviour was causing problems, not only to homosexual people but to all those who had the distasteful task of trying to enforce it. The first piece of work done by the Church of England was in fact, a contribution to public debate about this issue. The evidence submitted by the Church of England Moral Welfare Council to the Wolfenden Committee later published as Sexual Offenders and Social Punishment, distinguished between the concepts of sin and crime. The Revd. Dr. S. Bailey made a major contribution to this. His own book on Homosexuality and the Western Tradition was another important Anglican contribution. He attempted to demonstrate the distinction between inversion and perversion and held that it was the latter at which the New Testament was directing its comments. Dr. Bailey, therefore, opened the way for a different interpretation of both the texts and the tradition which would be more sympathetic to homosexual people. Since that time there has been a considerable debate in the Church and Dr. Bailey's exegesis has been widely questioned. At a formal level this led to the production of the report, Homosexual Relationships: A Contribution to Discussion, from a Board for Social Responsibility Working Party chaired by the present Bishop of Gloucester. The immediate background to this lay in a request from the Conference of Theological College Principals for help with the subject.

33. In summary, we can detect four broad viewpoints in the Church.
1. Those who wish to uphold the tradition in a way which is hostile to homosexual people involved in any homosexual practice.
  2. Those who uphold the tradition but who recognise the need for pastoral care and sensitivity in meeting the needs of all homosexual people in the Church.
  3. Those who believe the tradition needs to be developed to be more accommodating of what we now know about homosexuality and those who are homosexual people.
  4. Those who want to make a positive affirmation of homosexual relationships including those which involve all aspects of

human interaction, including the physical, and who therefore wish to question large parts of the tradition and its use in the history of the Church.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Homosexuality and the Western Tradition, The Revd. Dr. S. Bailey, Longmans, 1955.
- 2 Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality, John Boswell, University of Chicago Press.
- 3 Homosexual Relationships: a Contribution to Discussion, CIO, 1979.
- 4 Relations Natural and Unnatural: a Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans I, Journal of Religious Ethics 14/1, 1986. The article offers a thorough and detailed refutation of Boswell's approach to the text.
- 5 Examples of recent work and statements from other Churches include:-
  - a) The letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986).
  - b) The General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the USA included a section on 'Homosexuality and the Ordination of Homosexuals' in its 1979 report.
  - c) The British Council of Churches produced a report, God's Yes to Sexuality, in 1981.
  - d) The Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility produced a report for the 1979 Conference which the Conference received and requested further study.
  - e) One of the earliest documents was the Quaker report of 1963, Towards a Quaker View of Sex.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPERIENCE

#### INTRODUCTION

34. In reflecting on the task of interpreting Scripture we set forward what we believe to be a critical method of working. This involves our having to take both the tradition with seriousness in its own right and experience with seriousness in its own right. There can be no hope of relating tradition and experience until both poles have been encountered in their own terms. We have to see the world through the eyes of all the participants in this area. We need, therefore, to enter into the perspectives of our social culture, of professional contributions and of homosexual people, as part of the task of deciding the issues. We begin by looking at the wider social context within which these matters are experienced and which needs to be understood if we are, in our turn, to understand the challenge we face.

35. The following illustrates the broad areas of change which affect our attitudes and our choices and offers a brief insight into three interrelated areas of social change.

#### CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

36. The late 50s and the 1960s saw a radical shift in public attitude and in public policy in matters affecting personal relationships. There seemed to be a growing agreement that, provided no demonstrable harm was at stake, what people did in the privacy of their own lives, homes and relationships was their business. It was no concern of the law or of the public. The law could not be seen upholding morality in the private and personal sphere if there was no demonstrable public reason for doing so.

37. These broad attitudes had their impact on policy. The law on prostitution was reformed in 1958 to drive it off the streets but to leave it alone in private. The Wolfenden Report of 1957 set out the principles on which it believed the law on homosexuality should

proceed distinguishing between the private and public sphere (see Chapter 5 on Public and Private Issues).

38 A greater liberalisation of the law on many areas of personal life took place in the 1960s. The reform of the Abortion Law in 1967 provided for women to have abortions under certain agreed circumstances and, in effect, ended the practice of back-street abortions. Divorce Law Reform removed the concept of guilt from the law of divorce, establishing a new principle of the irretrievable breakdown of relationships as its basis. It was widely seen as a 'no fault' divorce law. The Church of England made a substantial contribution to this change through the report, Putting Asunder, from the Archbishop of Canterbury's group.

39. In this context the reform of the law on homosexuality in 1967 fitted the general pattern. It all seemed to be a recognition of changing attitudes and of the need for social provision to come to terms with the plurality of values and perceived needs in our society. The sense that the law could uniformly impose one set of moral values across the whole of our society had effectively collapsed in the face of a growing diversity of lifestyle and of actual need in personal relationships.

#### CHANGES IN PEOPLE'S LIFESTYLE

40. A multiplicity of things joined to affect the choices which people make regarding their style of life. Widespread economic prosperity increases people's independence and their choices. Changing patterns of household life have a deep effect. Patterns of marriage, divorce and cohabitation have altered considerably in recent decades (see An Honourable Estate, CIO, 1987). The number of single people and their personal circumstances of life affect patterns of living. The effect of two major world wars in this century has had a considerable impact on the balance of the population. Choices in lifestyle are affected by the climate of values. The growth of the women's movement has had a deep effect on the expectations people have of institutions such as marriage and the family, let alone on the whole pattern of the way men and women perceive one another and their place in society. We live in a highly



mobile and urbanised society in which people form a multiplicity of different types of community - or none at all.

41. In matters concerning sexual lifestyles people's attitudes have been affected by the development of cheap and safe contraceptive methods. Sex is no longer so closely tied to child-bearing and to the family. In more recent times the threat of AIDS has had a profound impact on sexual lifestyles emphasising the need for safer sex.

42. The immediate family environment in which we are brought up is of crucial significance. The sort of society we are living in means that people are brought up in a plurality of forms of family and household life. People may have been brought up in traditional nuclear families, in traditional extended families, in reconstituted families, in care, in single-parent homes - or indeed a mixture of these at various points in individual histories. The experience we have as children of our own parents is formative of our expectations for our own adult relationships in later years.

43. All these factors need to be born in mind in understanding the variety of lifestyles adopted by different individuals and communities today.

#### CHANGES IN SOCIETY

44. The way a society is organised in terms of its power structure, its class structure, its economic and political experience, affects attitudes and the development of social policy. These, in turn, are bound to affect the Church because all its members are themselves influenced by such forces.

45. Patterns of employment and experiences of unemployment affect the way people perceive and press for their rights and place in the community. The expectations and cultures which people experience in the working context influence other areas of their living including their expectations of their personal friendships and relationships.

46. The framework of law with its view of what makes for healthy social life influences our attitudes. What do we choose to stress:- the rights and freedoms of individuals; the duties and obligations of social membership; those things which make this society unique and distinctive? These matters affect the way we view minorities, their self-understanding of their place in society and the way people choose to shape their lives as a consequence.

47. We are considerably affected by contemporary possibilities in communication. Not only may we travel with greater ease around the world and so encounter different cultures and social settings, but we may also have the world brought into our homes through the modern media. Our views, expectations and possibilities are formed in the light of these encounters as well. It is not so possible to close our society off from the experiences which people are having elsewhere.

48. The commitment to develop our society into an educated and articulate society is crucial. What is education about - is it more about fitting people for certain economic and social roles, or is it more concerned with developing their capacity to form judgements and to make their own choices with regard to the future pattern of their life? Giving people information, the necessary tools to use it and the confidence to make choices is a highly liberating and maturing activity.

49. In addition continued research and the development of the social and personal sciences open us up to new insights and fresh information which will affect our view, our expectations and ultimately the way we organise our communities.

50. The driving motor in these forces for social change is very powerful and will continue to operate irrespective of whether Christian theology and pastoral organisation show a willingness to respond or not. Thus Christian contributions and values are seeking to react to change as well as seeking to influence future developments.

## THE AETIOLOGY OF HOMOSEXUALITY

51. In considering contemporary professional understandings of homosexuality we are dealing with attempts at both describing and understanding it from within particular disciplines. The judgements formed are not necessarily moral ones. Indeed, professionals stress that they are not making judgements of what is morally right or wrong in describing various experiences which they encounter in homosexual people.

52. We did not consider it our task to provide a substantial definition or definitions of the aetiology of homosexuality. We do not have the resources for that task. Furthermore, we are not aware of any major contribution to the subject which alters the shape of the professional debate since the writing of the Board for Social Responsibility's Working Party report, Homosexual Relationships: a Contribution to Discussion (CIO, 1979). Our task is to remind the Church of this debate and to ensure that its insights are integrated into the Church's perceptions and practice. This task needs to take account of the tendency in some professional circles of holding to one view to the exclusion of all others. We are aware of how little is known about homosexuality and its roots in human life and development. There is much, therefore, to be said for an attitude which is ready to see the possibilities as well as the boundaries in the variety of approaches present in the professional world.

53. In view of the great diversity in this area it might be better to talk of 'aetiologies'. (Indeed, such is the range of homosexual experience that we might also talk of 'homosexualities'.) This may well reflect the diversity of homosexual experience and militate against the need to choose one aetiology as opposed to all the rest. Accepting one description and understanding to the exclusion of all others runs the danger of absolutising particular theories. There is much to be said for treating these views as relative to the evidence and to the climate of professional opinion. Moreover, to choose one view might lead on to the acceptance of one set of solutions or responses thereby closing the door to the possibility that different people might get help from a range of sources.

54. We are particularly concerned to get at the ethical questions which are raised by different approaches. The way, for example, we think about personal responsibility is affected by the nature of the choices which it is thought homosexual people have to face. Some views restrict the range of choice much more than others. Moreover, the way such choices are exercised is bound to be influenced by the path of help suggested by those involved professionally. These differences become clearer as we look at the range of the aetiological discussion.

#### CAUSATION

##### (a) PHYSICAL CAUSES

55. There are a variety of approaches suggesting that in some way, being homosexual is rooted in the given life of the person. That may be, as for example set out in Homosexual Relationships paras 43-63, due to a persons genetic make up. It could be that biochemical and hormonal factors at work from an early stage in utero have affected a persons sexuality. Thus a minority of people find themselves to be predominantly homosexual because of something to do with their own make-up as human beings. For them the condition is rooted in nature rather than nurture.

##### (b) EMOTIONAL CAUSES

56. A whole range of psychological models look to emotional factors in human development as the key to understanding homosexuality. There are two broad schools within this grouping. There are the behaviourists who see homosexual behaviour as a learned way of life - gained in early life. There are the psycho-analytic theorists who believe that early relational experiences have produced intra-psychic conflicts in the person and the homosexual option has its roots in these.

57. There has been a considerable debate about the impact of different experiences of the relationship of child and parent. Some have suggested that homosexuality is a problem associated with difficulties in separating from the mother. This may be because the relationship is over-tied or because the separation has been made too quickly. The roots are in the negotiation of

the separation both of the child from the mother and the mother from the child.

58. A particular version of this has been propounded by Elizabeth Moberly who has been influential in Christian circles. She sees the roots of the issue in the relationship of the person to the parent of the same sex. Thus male homosexuality is about the relationship to the father and lesbianism about the relationship to the mother. She sees same-sex love as a normal part of everyone's development. The goal for development, however, is heterosexual relationships. It is a proper part of development, on route to this, to negotiate a stage of same-sex love. In this sense it is legitimate. People can get stuck in this stage of development because of difficulties experienced earlier in the relationship to the parents of the same sex. The fact that this stage is not the goal is demonstrated in the ambivalence experienced in the same-sex relationship. This is therefore a proper but not a permanent stage or the ultimate goal. Only therapy dealing with the underlying same-sex ambivalence can meet the homosexual condition and has the aim of helping that person in the developmental process to the goal of heterosexual life.

59. As a Christian and a therapist, Elizabeth Moberly rejects both the liberal and traditional positions. She rejects the liberal position because it implies there is no problem in homosexual relationships. She rejects the traditional position because it identifies the problem in the same-sex love. Blocking same-sex love is to block the path to the solution.

(c) SPIRITUAL CAUSES

60. Elizabeth Moberly provides a good bridge into this area. As a Christian she seeks to interpret her insights gained from a therapeutic model in the light of Christian faith. Some would wish to postulate spiritual causes arising out of early hurts. These need the help of a healing ministry designed to close the wounds of these hurts. Others go further and see connections with demonic forces and are committed to deliverance ministries.

(d) SOCIAL CAUSES

61. One of the powerful forces in the background of homosexual lifestyles concerns the experiences people have of male/female power relationships in society. This is particularly evident in the background of lesbianism in our society. The poor experience some women have had in relation to the way men exercise power in society and its institutions, including marriage, has been a contributory factor in the way the women's movement has developed in our own time. Many women look to community with other women as a way of preserving a sense of dignity and developing an alternative identity in the face of the way society functions on the basis of male power and perceptions. For some this leads to the rejection of community with men and an affirmation of sexual relationships with other women. In other words an inability in society to strike a co-operative and mutually affirmative culture between women and men in the way it is organised renders some women unable to experience a sense of mutuality and interdependence in personal relationships. The Church ought not to consider the questions raised by lesbian experience in isolation of the wider social issues. Neither ought it to consider how to respond to lesbian lifestyles and choices in the Church without considering its own social culture of male/female power relationships in the Church.

62. There are connecting themes here with male homosexuality. A poor social experience of women at crucial developmental stages of growth can contribute to men moving into lifestyles which involve a positive rejection of women. A predominant experience in early years of having to relate only to people of the same sex - as, for example, in single-sex boarding schools or other institutions - in addition to difficulties in the family setting may well contribute to encouraging people to find themselves only in relation to others of the same sex. Again, the Church is not exempt from some of the features of these cultures in its own organisation and history.

63. The different understandings lead to different responses and treatment. They tend in one of two directions. The homosexual

condition is seen at one extreme as a pathological condition which should be open to treatment. At the other end it is seen as one style of living and not at all pathological. Any pathology arises not from the condition but rather from the person's acceptance or otherwise of it and as a result of the responses of family and society to it.

64. These extremes represent the outer borders of professional opinion. In between people may place themselves at different points on a continuum. Exactly how they balance their perception of the nature of homosexuality as this presents itself in different people affects both the sort of help that might be offered and the way the ethical question will be addressed. There are other extremes and continuums between, which interact with each other. The first is the continuum of sexual orientation. The second is the continuum of professional aetiological opinion in which different schools would place themselves at different points on the continuum from nature to nurture as an explanation. The third is the continuum of response to the ethical questions which are raised for everyone concerning how individuals are to behave as responsible human beings. These would range from those who believe the choices are wide and considerable to those who see much more restricted options available to homosexuals. It is important to distinguish these three continuums if they are to be properly interrelated.

#### TREATMENTS

65. Many of those who depend on genetic views of causation do not believe that there is any treatment which may be given. Any counselling help would need to be directed at enabling homosexual people to live comfortably with their condition.

66. Treatments will vary according to theory. Treatment always starts from where the client is. The direction of that treatment has to be chosen by the client. This is a basic principle of all good professional work. We have already indicated the way some might go. Those who look to emotional causes as the predominant way of understanding may see the following aims which their client might seek:

- i) to help homosexual people come to terms with their orientation and so be better adjusted;
- ii) to work with the possibility of change or orientation in mind;
- iii) to work with change of orientation as the looked for outcome.

It would seem that if there has been any change in recent years it has been to move therapy towards (i) - helping homosexuals live more comfortably with their orientation. At the same time we should note the work done by some counselling groups in the Church to support those coming out of a homosexual lifestyle. The work of True Freedom Trust, Exodus, and Turnabout are particular examples of this.

67. The sort of relationship experienced by people of the same sex and the way they both experience and view the place of sexual activity within that relationship may differ significantly from the experiences and attitudes of heterosexual couples. This is not a judgement about whether one is better or more morally acceptable than the other. It is to say that same sex relationships are not the same as heterosexual relationships and therefore present different questions and problems for both the professionals who offer help and the moralists who are seeking to interpret the experience within a value based society.

68. Throughout the professional world there is a strong distaste for seeing homosexual people as criminal, deviant or promiscuous by nature. Therapists faced a great range of experiences, many of them from people in stress who were worried and even confused. It is crucial, if people wish to be of help, for them to try and see the world from the position of homosexual people. We need the perspectival world of the other. The Church does not always find this easy.

69. It is worth noting that the ethical questions which arise out of these models vary from one to the other. If we are faced with an unchangeable condition the questions are bound to look different than if this is not the case. If we are talking of the unchangeable the predominant questions about personal responsibility for developing an



attainable and acceptable Christian lifestyle have a particularly sharp flavour to them. We need to remember what we are asking of homosexual people when we suggest that a celibate life involving abstinence from genital sex is the only way forward for them. If change is possible then the questions will concern the sorts of responsible choices which can be made on the way to the goal of a different orientation.

70. We have already indicated a reluctance to come down heavily for one model and in rejection of all others. It is possible that different individuals benefit from different approaches. The Church needs to be very careful lest it opt for those insights which seem to match its own tradition and abandon the possibility that it may have to learn from insights less amenable to such an easy marriage with Christian views. We need to keep clearly in mind that if what we stand for makes no connection with the real dilemmas and questions experienced by homosexual people we are in danger of failing in the basic pastoral task. Thus there is much to be said for an eclectic and open approach involving a willingness to learn from a variety of contributions and to seek to find ways of understanding which connect with the great diversity of homosexual experience.

#### HOMOSEXUAL PEOPLE

71. Homosexuality is about homosexual people. We should never lose sight of the painful and stressful journey many homosexual people have to make in the Church and in society - often with little understanding from either. There is the inner struggle to come to terms with self. This may involve periods of denial and of seeking to escape from being the person one is. There is the outer struggle of conformity to what is expected by family, Church and community. Does one pretend to be what one is not lest in being honest one experiences the rejection and hurt which has been the way for so many in the past. How does one live as a Christian with a Church which seems to proclaim a way of life which does not seem practical or possible? So often the choices seem to be between loneliness and the risks of casual clandestine relief and living in what the Church sees as sin but is experienced as companionship and love.

72. It is important for the Church to listen to homosexual people and hear the painful story in its own terms. Too often it seems the Church has decided its theology and its pastoral practice in the absence of and without the help of those to whom it is directed. To believe that we can resolve the dilemmas without a process of listening, engagement, and response is a denial of our own methodology. Anglicanism has always held that it arrives at its theology and practice by a careful process of engagement with scripture, tradition and reason. Part of the material of reason is the actual experience of human life in the world of which we are a part. One of the reasons why the Church is a long way off resolving the dilemmas over these issues is that it has not yet done the necessary work of engagement with the stories of homosexual people in its membership. For these reasons we must move on to a more direct encounter with the choices made and dilemmas faced by Christian homosexual people.

73. In the rest of this chapter we will be 'listening' to homosexual people and the choices they make. We shall do this in two ways. First, by a series of personal stories which are rooted in actual life histories. Second, we have set out the range of options with which Christian homosexual people are struggling as they seek to make some sense of their lives as Christians.

74. In setting out both the stories and the options we are not necessarily approving or disapproving, condoning or condemning the different choices made here. We are simply setting out the experiential facts - the realities which responsible Christian moral reasoning is dealing with. We are also trying, however disturbing people might find these facts to be, to ensure that the discussion faces up to what actually happens.

#### THE HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE - STRUGGLES AND HOPES

##### FIRST, THE HUMAN STORIES

These stories are based on actual experiences. The details, including names and places, have been changed.

TONY

75. Tony is 35. He discovered he was homosexual when he was 15 and a nominal Christian. He became quickly involved in the 'gay scene' with some guilt but was reassured by the group of friends he made. While at University he became much more deeply committed to Christianity and first encountered the idea that he be celibate rather than have any kind of sexual encounters. He struggled hard with this issue but after a considerable time decided that this was the obedient thing for a Christian homosexual. Though he had some sensitive pastoral help while at University, the shock of settling into his first job and local church was tremendous. Gone were the intimacy and support of friends who knew he was homosexual, were encouraging him to be celibate, but also giving him warmth and friendship. He became very lonely, increasingly frustrated sexually, started drinking heavily and ran into difficulties at work. He was on the point of returning to his former lifestyle when he met a young Christian man who was involved in a charismatic prayer group. He was deeply attracted to him and so very willing to be involved in his group. To his amazement he discovered that one its members, Jim, ran a counselling service for Christian homosexuals. This was based on two assumptions: the one, that homosexual practice was not an option for Christians, was familiar to him; the other, that it was possible to be healed from a homosexual orientation and become heterosexual was a totally new and stunning idea. However, he heard story after story which seemed to indicate that this was not impossible. Jim seemed warm and approachable, in touch with his own sexuality, yet able to be celibate in an attractive way. He seemed to have found ways of containing, harnessing and expressing his sexuality. He made no idle boasts about this but seemed to have found resources in his relationship with God and in his Christian friendships which Tony had never experienced. He attributed this in part to his experience of the release of the Holy Spirit in deeper ways through his involvement in the charismatic renewal. He also stressed the help he got from other Christians, both homosexual and heterosexual with whom he could talk openly and regularly about the ups and downs of his life. So, after initial incredulity, Tony began to take similar steps to Jim. Neither he nor Jim claim to have experienced a total shift of orientation. However, Tony is convinced

that his orientation is connected with some deep problems in his family. His relationship with both parents were and are very troubled. Through counselling, and prayer counselling he has seen considerable improvement in his relationship with his parents and has experienced some unscrambling and freedom from hurts from the past. He is also finding it easier to relate to women than ever before.

#### FRED

76. Fred is 34 and has been deeply involved in his church for as long as he can remember. Both his parents were elders. His father died when Fred was 21 and so once he completed his course in mechanical engineering he returned home to live with his mother and work nearby. The church he grew up in had a very strong and puritanical approach to sexual morality. When one of the girls in the youth club became pregnant she was told to resign because she was 'unrepentant'. All Fred can remember learning about sex at church was that it was not allowed unless you were married. He began to have an agonising adolescence coping with his emerging sexual feelings and the sense of dirtiness they left him carrying. Then to his horror he started to have fantasies about sexual contact with an older boy in the youth club. He could not bear the thought that he might be homosexual. He began to work harder and harder, to get as involved as he could in as many as church activities as possible and became very condemnatory of any lapse from the strict stance his church took. It was not long before he became a leader both in his church and in the neighbourhood. He was promoted at work and though he had few close friends his mother and he got on well enough. She was very proud of him and very supportive. Then, to his horror, one of his fellow church leaders announced that he was leaving the church to set up a gay partnership with another church member of about his age.

77. Fred was so outraged that after a long and stormy discussion with him he went home and was physically sick. From that moment he began to be dogged by blinding headaches and shooting pains in his arms and legs. Thorough physical investigations revealed no cause for these and after some time Fred reluctantly agreed to be referred for counselling. It was not long before the therapist suggested that

there might be a connection between this crisis and the onset of the symptoms. At this Fred exploded and opted out of further sessions. He is however, finding it increasingly difficult to sustain his busy schedule because of the pain he is in. He has also become very actively involved in campaigning against civil rights for homosexual people though these activities too are constantly interrupted by his physical limitations. He sees this as simply part of the moral stand Christians must take today. His grandmother, an outspoken old lady, on a recent visit, suggested to him that he was becoming hard and unforgiving. He laughed at the absurdity of this idea and lectured her for some time on the importance of his stand. She was so incensed that she ended her visit abruptly and threatened not to go again.

#### WILLIAM

78. William is 23 and serves in a shoe shop. He has been a devout Christian since birth, as his parents attended the local Anglican Church and are on the PCC. When he was 16, he met another teenager at a Gay Youth Group when he was spending the weekend with an older gay man whom he had met previously. He says he has never had any problems with being gay and in fact told his parents when he was 17, just before he moved to London to share a flat with two other gay men. The parents were shocked but understanding and asked him to see a psychiatrist. They hoped he would grow out of this phase. The psychiatrist helped William to adjust to his sexuality. The parents come to stay with William and his partner, John.

79. William joined LGCM two years ago, but feels they are too campaigning. He prefers to lead a fairly quiet life. John and he go together to a local church which is depressing and unwelcoming.

80. William feels he would like to be involved more with the Church and has asked the Inter-Faith Group of the Terrence Higgins Trust if he can be of more use. He has also been going to Buddhist meditation classes and feels very drawn to the serenity of a contemplative life.

ANN

81. Ann is 33. She comes from an Irish working class home and now lives near London. At 18, like most of her friends, she married and had two children, both boys, very quickly. She realised she had very close friendships with other women but did not identify this as in any way homosexual. Her husband, who came from the West Indies, worked very long hours so was rarely at home even at weekends. In her loneliness she turned to one of her school friends, Mary, who after a while revealed she was a lesbian. The latent lesbian feelings in Ann surfaced and became so strong that she left her husband, taking the two children with her and moved into Mary's house. Mary has her own taxi business. The husband, after an initial period of fury - consulting lawyers, etc - accepted the situation and still visits the two women today. He has remarried but is considering Mary's invitation to be the father of her child!

82. Ann was brought up as a Roman Catholic and went regularly to Mass with her mother until her marriage. She then went occasionally and had the children baptised. When she was divorced, she stopped going and felt very guilty indeed. No-one from the Church came to visit her. Today she and Mary go to the local Anglican church where the children's school has a link. They attend about once every five weeks.

83. Both children have a lot of teasing at school about their home life and rarely invite their friends home. Ann and Mary have no time or money to go to clubs and rarely have a holiday. They are very unsupported and are beginning to have violent rows. Mary wants a child but is worried about the morals of this. She dare not talk to her local Anglican vicar, so phoned gay switchboard who put her in touch with a gay priest. They have asked him for a service of blessing on their relationship, but he is doubtful as it seems to be a last resort to save their relationship.

84. The children like their local Anglican church and the eldest, has enquired about confirmation.

IAN

85. Ian lives with his wife Helen and their two children. He works as a chartered accountant and comes from a prosperous family who had no links with the Church at all. At public school he became aware of a strong homosexual side to his nature and indulged in all sorts of male sex play which he enjoyed.

86. After university and his professional training, he met Helen who was nursing at a local hospital. Very attractive and a convinced Christian, she fell deeply in love with Ian who was very flattered indeed. He married her 12 years ago and says the first six years of the marriage were happy - full of fun and business. They bought a house, started a family and Ian went to church with Helen each Sunday. She is training to be a lay reader and is already doing visiting in the parish.

87. About four years ago on a summer evening, Ian went for a walk on the Common and saw men trying to pick up other men. One man, attractive and of the same age, 34, approached Ian and they had sex in the man's car. Ian felt very guilty and dirty afterwards and wrestled with his conscience. After much heart-searching he decided this part of himself could be kept under control if he 'rationed' his visits to the Common to once a week. This he did for about two years, but he became very depressed and had to have much time off work. His relations with his wife were still deep and physical, but the strain of everything pulled him down. Eventually he had to leave his job. This made him tell Helen what was really happening. She was very shocked and went to see her priest, who referred them both to a counsellor. Ian is having analysis.

RICHARD

88. Richard, now 49, was born into a prosperous middle class family, educated at a State school and university (all coeducational establishments he is quick to point out). He says he has always known he is homosexual but first learnt about gay people from the Lord Montagu scandal of the 1950s. However he did not seek gay company in pubs or clubs. He kept his feelings to himself and anyway all his energy was used in training for the priesthood. He decided

he must be celibate and hoped to join a monastic order after a first curacy. 'God had other plans' he says. A few months after his ordination he was asked to speak to a man in the congregation who had just left the Army and was thinking of being a priest. This friendship evolved into a deep partnership and they have now been together nearly 20 years. Roy trained to be a priest, which meant that at first they were rarely able to be together. They served in separate parishes in an inner city area, then managed to live together only because Roy has got a teaching post instead of a full-time incumbency. They are now physically faithful to one another but each wonders secretly if the other has 'an occasional fling'. They rarely visit gay clubs but do have a number of male gay friends, some of whom are priests. 'They are our main support'. The subject has never been mentioned to the bishop.

89. They both feel very frustrated that they are unable to share their experience with others in the Church, although they have confided in about 20 people in the parish and they suspect the others 'know but don't want to know'. Because of the difficulties in the Church of the last six months, they are now wondering whether to stand up and be counted and be less secretive about their lifestyle. 'How much longer do we have to deny a large part of ourselves in order to follow Jesus?'

#### THE CHOICES MADE FROM SUCH EXPERIENCES

90. What sort of objectives do Christian homosexual people set themselves? It would seem that there are three broad routes which they might choose as the way in which they give form and structure to their lives in the light of their Christian convictions.

#### CELIBACY

91. Traditionally this has been the only lifestyle the Church accepts for a homosexual. Some Christian men and women believe themselves to be called to celibate lives and to serve God and people through joining a religious community. For many this fellowship, stability and support has enabled them to live creatively for the Kingdom. Others, often with great heroism, have led celibate lives 'in the world'. This may take a number of forms. For some there is



a clear sense of vocation to the celibate life, and some homosexual people as well as heterosexual people accept celibacy as their God-given vocation. For others, however, it is rather that the circumstances of their lives seem to indicate there is no other alternative, and sometimes with struggle and reluctance, they accept their homosexual orientation as requiring a celibate lifestyle.

92. For some, then, celibacy is a vocation: something positive that can free the person to be available to and share their love with more than one individual. That loving will have definite boundaries which will enable the giver and the receiver to know what the parameters of the relationship are. Sensitivity and support are needed for those who believe they are called to the celibate life. Celibacy, like a committed relationship, has its difficulties and needs to be learned. In order for celibacy to become a fulfilling lifestyle, the sacrifices entailed must be seen to have a meaning and purpose.

93. For others celibacy is not a clearly chosen lifestyle, and for them there can be particular difficulties. If it is simply a grudging conformity to the Church's traditional rule, it can be damaging because it may involve a denial and suppression of sexuality, and this can be associated with guilt and isolation. It is paradoxical that the more strongly the Church insists on celibacy for homosexual people, the less space it provides for people freely to accept this as their vocation.

94. Celibacy is not, of course, an asexual condition, unless sexuality is defined merely genitally. The life of our Lord and the history of the Church give us examples of the ways people following the celibate path are fully alive in every area of their lives including their sexuality but who channel their love in a way which doesn't compromise their celibate calling.

#### THE COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

95. A growing number of homosexual people are now saying that they would like to settle down with a lifelong partner. AIDS may be partly responsible for this, but it is also the case that gay people are emerging from the shadows and more role models of committed gay

relationships are visible. A Christian person may be attracted to this way of living because it offers stability and security in relationships. It is not easy for people to find partners, and those who wish to do so often find the Church, society and family against them. Nevertheless, it does seem increasingly that if a gay couple have the courage to be open about their lifestyle, very few people are likely to reject them.

96. One of the problems of a committed relationship lifestyle, especially for men, seems to be the difficulty of holding to physical faithfulness. Some couples, it seems, are not too concerned if one or other of the partners should engage in transient physical relationships with another.

97. The Church has traditionally shown disapproval of sexual activity between same sex couples, but individual Christians are often more accepting of this lifestyle among their friends than the Church has ever publicly been willing to be. Many Christians are content to accept that a homosexual acquaintance is living quietly with his or her chosen friend, and that relationship is no barrier to them to an effective Christian life.

98. Some homosexual couples often feel bewildered and even outraged that the Church should judge their relationship solely on the basis of 'genital acts'. Does this mean, they ask, that if the couple ceases to engage in physical sex that their relationship ceases to be sinful? Many homosexual Christians find this approach very hard to comprehend.

99. Some ask the Church to bless their relationships - some even thinking of such relationships as gay 'marriages'. They argue that all of us need affirmation, and the Church's ritual can sometimes provide that. Because the Church of England does not offer any such ritual officially (though sometimes individual priests do provide services of blessing privately), some couples seek this from 'gay Churches' such as the Metropolitan Community Church.

100. More work needs to be done on the question of services of blessing for such couples, and whether it could be right for the Church officially to encourage such a practice. Many Christians would be unable to endorse such practices, others believe that the way forward would be to allow quiet private arrangements to be made with co-operative clergy.

101. What is clear is the need for the Church to affirm the value and richness of same sex friendships, and to consider ways in which support and structures can be provided to enable friendships to flourish.

#### OTHER COMMUNITY-STYLE LIFESTYLES

102. Not all gay people are celibate or living in committed relationships. Some are exploring other lifestyles which some gay Christians find acceptable. Some gay Christians are experimenting in sharing homes and in building small communities. These experiments in community living need to be distinguished from uncommitted and casual lifestyles.

103. There is much about the gay world which is new and unclear to many within the Church. Patterns of life which have traditionally been regarded as sinful and unacceptable to Christian conscience are now being affirmed as fully acceptable to Christian people, and experienced as satisfying and fulfilling ways to live.

104. While the Working Party by no means simply endorses all these various lifestyles as morally and pastorally equivalent, we do believe that the experience of gay Christians learning to live their Christian lives in a variety of different ways needs to be heard.

#### CONCLUSION

105. The experience which we have described in this section is one of the resources needed for proper Christian reflection. We have not been seeking, at this point, to pass judgement on it. As the report unfolds it will become clear as to the sort of judgements Christians make on these matters. The crucial point to make at this stage is the inescapable duty of all who would engage in serious moral and

pastoral reflection to encounter to respond to the realities of the wider experience of homosexual people within the Church and within the wider society of which we are all part.

## SECTION II

### THREE CRITICAL THEMES

106. In the second section of this report we continue the theme by looking at a number of broad issues which are central to the debate. We need first to look at fundamental Christian convictions about God as these impinge on the choices we make. Secondly, we cannot avoid considering the implications of Christian faith for our understanding of human sexuality. Thirdly, we need to consider the proper balance between the right to privacy for the individual and the obligations of membership of the community. These will provide a basis for moving on in the final sections of the report to some specific matters in society and in the Church which, we believe, need addressing at this time.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE GOSPEL OF GRACE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

107. The commitments we make, as we search out the way of Christ, should always be understood as responses to God's commitment to us. 'We love because He first loved us' (1 John 4.19). Christian discipleship is undertaken in response to the love of God for us. What we understand of the nature and work of God is fundamental to discovering what it is right for us to be and to do.

108. Once we set out on this route of theological discovery it is not long before we realise that different understandings about God lead to varying conclusions about both the content and method of moral decision-making. If, for example, our predominant understanding of God is concerned with God's majesty and rule and we use the metaphor of Judge and Law-giver to express that, then there will be a tendency to see Christian life in terms of obedience to the moral claims of God's command. If we lay stress on the compassionate love of God and describe God in terms of being our Father, then there will be a tendency to emphasise the goals of Christian life and the immediate context of decision-making as the journey towards it. In this chapter we shall examine the three central characteristics of God, as understood in the Christian tradition; God as Creator, God as Saviour, and God as Sanctifier.

#### GOD AS CREATOR

109. The stories of creation set out in Genesis 1-3 are fundamental to the whole biblical understanding of God as creator and of the meaning of this for human responsibility as people created in God's image.

110. In the discussion about homosexuality the theme of God's creation has been used in two contrasting ways. On the one hand are those who stress that it is humanity and human persons who are created by God. It is people's humanity and not specifically their gender or sexuality to which the story refers when it speaks of the

image of God in all human life. Everything God made was good. Every person God made bears the divine image. Some homosexual people use this theme to suggest that their homosexual nature is part of God's creation. It is good and not wicked. It belongs to creation and not to the fallenness of human life.

111. The more traditional way of interpreting the texts has been to see the complementarity of male and female in God's creation as integral to it. Some of the major issues which arise here are discussed in the next chapter. Although we may disagree about the significance gender has in relation to biology, psyche or roles, we want to affirm that God's creation of human life as male and female is good. Each of us is set in a particular physical and sexual form which governs our path through life and our relationships one with another. It is that combination of two complementary sexes which bears the image of God. As women and men we are created as two kinds of mystery. Thus the very essence of life is relational.

112. This debate raises questions about what we mean by 'nature' in relation to God as Creator. There are two distinct ways of considering this. The first is rooted in human experience. The natural is that which we find in our own experience to be good and wholesome. Most homosexual people do not find being homosexual to be dirty and sinful. In affirming their own orientation they are affirming part of what makes life human for them. It is this first sense of the natural which they are affirming when they say that God has created them as the people they are.

113. The second way of understanding nature is rooted in what is given in the divine order of things. What we may experience as comfortable and natural may be against the natural order as God intends it to be (see Chapter 1 for a consideration of what Paul means by this in Romans 1). 'Nature' in this sense is given and becomes a test against which to consider our experience. We are living as is intended by God in the natural order when we conform our lives to its God-given pattern. Interpretation of what is natural may, however, vary. Few would now be carried by Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11.14 that 'nature itself teaches that flowing locks disgrace a man'.

114. Even though there are important differences of understanding in these two views of what is 'natural' for created life, there are positive points to be made for both ways of viewing the issue. We could not, for example, make any sense of the natural if our view required people to try and behave in a way which seemed to them to deny something basic to their human existence. Neither could we deploy the concept of the natural simply as a way of endorsing whatever gives people pleasure here and now irrespective of its consequences. A concept of the natural order implies that there must be boundaries to acceptable conduct.

115. The language of nature is powerful. It is tempting to assume that to describe something as 'natural' or 'unnatural' is sufficient to foreclose the debate. But whichever view we take it is not enough to stay at the level of what we consider to be natural in God's created order. The Genesis story goes on to describe the fall of human life and the consequent corruption both of the human and of the wider created order. The Christian vision has always pointed us to something fuller and more complete in Christ to which God calls us. Human life and all creation are in need of redemption. God inaugurates the Kingdom of Christ's rule in order to transform that which is natural. There is a new future to which the Gospel calls us all.

#### GOD AS SAVIOUR

116. At the heart of the Gospel is the conviction that, in spite of the disordered, sinful and fallen condition of the world, and of human life within it, God remains the same in His loving concern to bring us back into communion with Him and enable us to move towards His ultimate purpose in Christ. It is this pattern of God's love in Christ which acts while we are 'yet sinners' which Paul sets out in his letter to the Roman Christians. At the heart of God's purpose is Jesus Christ in whom God's love overcomes the sin, disorder and death of a fallen humanity. At the heart of the work of Christ is the Cross and Resurrection. Through the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus God breaks the bonds of sin and death which held human life captive and opens the way to a new future for the whole of creation. This is the demonstration of the power and depth of God's love for us.



117. Thus these central events in the Christian story open up a way to the future. They launch us on to a journey of faith and exploration. Death and resurrection become our normative pattern of life. We are called to discipleship, to continually die to the old and become reborn to the new.

'We were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead we too might walk in newness of life' (Romans 6.4).

118. There is always conflict between our old life which is buried in the death of Christ and our new life in faith. We press forward with penitence and faith, confident in God's ultimate victory. The courage continually to invest in the baptismal truth comes from our confidence about the end, that God is recreating us and that the time will come when we then experience the 'glorious liberty' of the children of God (8.21).

'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing ...' (Romans 8.18).

#### GOD AS SANCTIFIER

119. Christians believe that life lived in union with Christ has a transforming effect. It is a process of coming to wholeness. In this world that process can never be total, uniform or instantaneous but as we become people who experience the love of Christ we change our view of ourselves, our securities and our relationship with our neighbour.

120. It is the nature of that transformation that we are involved in a dynamic process. When we are growing into the likeness of Christ the future will not resemble the past. We are pilgrims who know that we pass different staging posts of faith. What is constant is our commitment to travel with Christ. We may also have to carry with us handicaps of our fallen condition all our life but we strive to maturity.

'We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ ...' (Ephesians 4.15).

121. This transformation of our lives is what God has promised. In Christ that promise has come true and the disorder of our world

through sin and death is overcome. These destructive forces in our lives have no future. In the present they may be powerful, confusing, and humiliating. Yet the mercy and grace of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives encourages us to trust in the promise of God which we have seen triumphant in human life in Jesus Christ. Thus we are not trapped in a changeless and fatalistic determinism fixed because of our past but are entering a new and liberating future in which our human life is made new in Christ.

'We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him ...' (Romans 8.28).

122. The gift of the Holy Spirit of God is the guarantee that the promise of this transformation is to take place. By the Spirit of God at work in us we are empowered to make the kind of choices and sacrifices which would be uncommon to us whilst living under the realm of 'self'.

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ... if we live by the Spirit let us also walk by the Spirit'  
(Galatians 5.22,25).

123. All of this demonstrates the importance of seeing Christian life under the grace of God, as a journey of faith. We are all, without exception, learning to be Christian and therefore need to be open to change, to growth and to new and unexpected experiences. The journey of growth in our knowledge of God as Creator, Saviour and Sanctifier, leads into the journey of growth in understanding ourselves and our relationships to others and to the wider world.

124. Homosexual people experience growth in Christian life in many different ways. There are people, often in the charismatic wing of the Church, who have experienced the complete transformation of their sexuality: a few immediately, others through a gradual process. For some of these the ministry of 'inner healing' has been an important feature in their change. Once sure about their homosexual preference, they are now settled and fulfilled in a heterosexual lifestyle. Various groups of 'ex-gay' Christians, outside and within the mainline Churches, are established as on-going support groups for Christian homophiles undergoing this process of change.

125. Other Christians would want to endorse the belief that life in Christ has the potential for authentic and permanent change of sexual orientation, but despite their prayer and struggle, they do not experience it. Instead they live with the tension between conviction and disappointment. Even many who are highly motivated find that no amount of prayer or therapy brings any change. From the experience of such people, we hear that a theology which insists on a direct causal relationship between conversion to Christ and sexual transformation has often been damaging, by requiring such Christians either to deny their homosexuality, or to conclude that their faith is deficient. The truth for them is, as for most Christians, that there are continuing struggles in the life of Christian pilgrimage.

126. Some Christians believe that the Spirit of God can be expected to work in the area of our sexuality, but experience this more as sustenance and development than redirection. It is the experience of many Christians that it is as the moments of greatest struggle with the conflicts of our lives, that the help of God is most evident. Many such Christians seek God's grace in the struggle to live as faithful disciples, while aware of the ever-present power of sin. Often such Christians benefit from counselling help with unresolved or destructive patterns of behaviour, and find the resources of prayer important in resisting temptation, and in searching for meaning in areas of distress.

127. Yet other Christians testify to the power of God at work in their lives, but see His influence in their ability to accept their homosexuality and affirm it. For them growth and Christian maturity means that they no longer, as they say, deny an important part of themselves. More than that, they begin to build a spiritual framework which incorporates it. Some such Christians accept their homosexuality as a calling from God to a life of celibacy, and seek His grace to sustain them in a celibate lifestyle. Others claim God's leading and blessing encouraging them in a loving homosexual partnership.

128. It is an age-old Christian testimony that when we are at our weakest, God's grace is most apparent to us; that the glory of God

most clearly shines through the frailties of our life. For God is no gold-digger, interested only in what is precious or presentable in our lives. The gospel is that he is committed to all that we are, dross and failure as much as excellence or achievement. We need to maintain a commitment to both realities, that God does heal and change us, but we also see His glory through the faithful wounds that people bear having struggled with life-long handicap.

#### THE GRACE OF GOD AND OUR STRUGGLE WITH SIN

129. The God who creates, redeems and sanctifies our lives is the God who first loved us (1 John 4.19). It is in response to this divine love that we learn the way of love for ourselves. This leads us into the second half of our exploration of God's grace which is concerned with the human journey in a sinful and fallen world. Here we are bound to begin by a frank acknowledgement that we are far from being what God calls us to be in Jesus Christ. We struggle against our old fallen nature and need to find Christian strategies for dealing with our sin. A great deal of pastoral work is concerned with helping people live in a sinful world as fallible weakened human beings.

130. The topic of sin leads to stress in the Church. On the one hand there are those who suspect the Church is far too weak in its condemnation of sin. On the other hand some reject as uncreative the severity of an over-judgemental and condemnatory attitude. We need to take the subject with much greater seriousness if we are to avoid these easy caricatures. So how are we to face the choices in dealing with sin? Here are four things to consider.

#### i) OUR CHOICES REFLECT OUR SPIRITUAL VALUES

131. The ordinary and extraordinary choices we make do not arise from random instincts. They are the fruit of our inner spirit and so reflect the preferences we are cultivating in our self. For the Christian that is a complex picture because the Spirit of God is always at odds with our old self. The Church may objectively define what is sin, and give boundaries of what is likely to be God-honouring behaviour but who knows the heart of a person and the reasons which lie behind any choice? Is the overwork of our

Christian neighbour arising from a dogged and admirable commitment to see a task through or is he avoiding other parts of himself and his closest relationships? The same action can lead us towards maturity in Christ or away from it; what matters is how it relates to all that God is doing in our lives.

ii) OUR CHOICES AND MORAL PRINCIPLES

132. Here we return to the theological stress on the importance of our understanding and experience of God. The moral principles as reflected, for example, in the law of God are an outworking of the character of God. In identifying that all our moral choices are rooted in the character of God we have ruled out the possibility of easy options or slack attitudes in relationship to our lifestyle. Jesus did not abolish the law but he showed us the way to its fulfilment through the road of discipleship which is both costly and lifelong. If our moral standards are rooted in the God we worship, then clearly they do not shift about. However, if we are to make use of moral principles in a way which connects with the realities of our sinfulness we need to consider the following three areas:-

133. First, we all have to judge our choices in relation to their personal intention and spiritual context. To do otherwise is to fail to do justice to the biblical witness which indicates the importance of motivation. At the very least, this means that we cannot judge all homosexual genital activities, whatever their context, as morally identical. Even those Christians who believe that objectively speaking, all genital sexual intercourse outside heterosexual marriage is wrong, need to recognise that not all is equally morally blameworthy. Homosexual promiscuity and lustful self-indulgence is one thing; homosexual activity in a young person's exploration on the way to maturity is another; deliberately chosen physical expression in a mature and long-standing relationship is yet a third.

134. Secondly, we need to recognise that our choices are often distorted by the hierarchy of sin imposed by forces with vested interests. Where society elevates one form of sinful behaviour, as it does with sex-related matters, there is the danger of hypocrisy and double-think. In the Church we are left with the difficult task

of not colluding with the promotion of sex into the unforgivable sin and yet recognising the impact that a sex-crazy culture has on us all.

135. Thirdly, in making decisions we cannot always escape from having to wrestle with the tension of conflicting moral claims. The New Testament itself points to Jesus' reference to a hierarchy of good values (the 'weightier matters of the law', Matthew 23.23). Christian ethics has always recognised the importance of lesser evils and greater goods, of conflicts of principle, and of the rightness of the least detrimental alternative or the best possible choice. Of course, this approach leads us into other dilemmas. To endorse what some might regard as the second best could seem to give permission for it to become the norm. Can we keep the ideal in focus while compassionately working with disorder, and with what might be an inevitable stage in human development but which falls short of the ultimate good? Christian counsellors are familiar with such situations. Such hard questions are crucial for they keep us straying too far into self-delusion. But they do not remove the possibility that God might lead a person by way of interim solutions on the way to finding an optimum morality (see also Chapter 10 on some of these matters).

### iii) OUR CHOICES AND OTHERS

136. We must be particularly careful about how our personal choices affect others, especially in a complex world like our own. Our freedom to choose is always limited by the needs of others: God made us for one another. The Christian needs extra caution, for our faith lays upon us certain additional demands:

(a) We are not to judge one another, for judgement belongs to God. Even when we are obliged to discriminate we are warned to beware of logs in our own eyes as we search out the splinters in our brother's or sister's.

(b) We need to ask to what extent it is appropriate for Christians to concern themselves with what others do. On the one hand we are our brother's and sister's neighbour, and bear

some responsibility for their welfare; on the other we need to respect their right to behave differently from ourselves.

(c) We need to find where we stand on the spectrum of possible approaches to a situation in which one Christian believes that another Christian's behaviour is sinful. The New Testament has some illustrations of possible responses in such situations. At one end of the spectrum, there is a rare instance in which blatant sexual sin is met with a public call to discipline within the Church (1 Corinthians 5). More usually, it seems, Paul's word in Galations 6.1 is appropriate:

'Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourselves, lest you too are tempted'.

At the other end of the spectrum is the recognition that there can be conscientious differences of opinion within the Christian Church (Romans 14 about those who eat meat and those who do not).

137. The Church is being called on to decide when these different approaches are appropriate, and whether the issue of homosexuality is one on which conscientious difference of opinion may be held.

#### iv) OUR CHOICES SET IN A FALLEN WORLD

138. Every choice which we make cannot be understood in isolation. The perfect choice is not available to us. We both strive for what we see and experience in Christ and acknowledge that we are part of a world still bearing the marks of its fallenness. Our own selfishness is present in every decision - as is the impact of our culture which frequently hides the weightier injustices of society behind a facade of sensuality and sensationalism.

139. All this means that we must take our choices very seriously, as reflections of our spiritual condition and as important factors in the resisting or reinforcing of our fallen state. They not only affect our own welfare but we carry an essential responsibility for how those choices impinge upon or influence our brother and sister.

We are slow to judge about another's choices, respectful of his conscience even if we believe him to be wrong, but scrupulous about our own attitudes and behaviour. We look to ourselves, lest we too are tempted.

140. An individual's choices are very much affected by the 'moral temperature' of society. We looked at some of these forces in Chapter 2. Thus when a feminist in the 1960s stood against the mood of sexual liberation and was particular about her sexual choices, it was seen as quirky. Now with the advent of AIDS, the tide has changed and the sexually casual are beginning to be seen as social pests. Simply to condemn all sex outside a committed relationship as equally 'promiscuous' is to fail to recognise the extent to which a person's difficulties in making a commitment may result from the sense of hopelessness and lack of intimacy which come from the kind of society we are building.

141. Some use the term 'structural sin' to refer to the sinful powers at work within the institutions and machinery of our society, a corporate and institutionalised wrong which is larger than the sum of personal wrongdoings. This is a complex matter, since the very institutions which put pressure on people to think and behave in certain ways are often also the carriers of moral values in society. For example, it could be argued that the shape and expectancies of family life in our culture have contributed to the increase in homosexuality in our society; but then we use the stick of 'the family' with which to beat the homosexual. And the very advocates of more stringent measures against homosexuality are those most reluctant to question the present structure of the family.

142. We have been particularly concerned about the strength of homophobic forces in personal attitudes, our culture and in the Church. There is a double side to homophobia. There is the social aspect of it in which negative attitudes towards homosexuality are embedded into the culture and lead into various forces of social discrimination against homosexual people. Some of the outcomes of this will be examined in Chapter 8 on Civil and Legal Rights. There is also the personal aspect in which individuals express emotions of



rejection towards homosexual people. An irrational fear or hatred of homosexual people shapes the attitude of the individual. This becomes both rejection of the homosexual person and a use of that person to give personal certainty about our own sexuality: 'I'm not like that'. We need to recognise how powerful these personal and social forces are and how damaging they are to homosexual people. People need help in recognising these powers and emotions and to be provided with opportunities to work on them.

143. The Church has been much heard urging on homosexual people the need for repentance and the forgiveness of Christ with little acknowledgement that its own history, practice and attitudes of hostility are part of the problem. Repentance and the offer of forgiveness is God's word to all of us without exception. The Church has a long history of getting matters concerning sexuality out of proportion. It is in danger of seeing the question of homosexual conduct in the same way. Only a broad understanding of human sin and of the fallenness of the world and a wider vision of the grace of God in creation and redemption can rescue us from such misperceptions. The Church, as part of the institutional life of society, has both to acknowledge its own contribution to the issues and play a corporate role in working for a better cultural climate.

#### IN CONCLUSION

144. It is not until we have rediscovered a sense of balance and perspective that we will find greater agreement about the ways in which we all need to combat sin. In the present climate it is difficult for people to understand the distinction between the duty to support people's rights and the duty, as members of the body of Christ, to assume responsibility for their own living and an acceptance of all the choices which others make. Conscience is in danger of becoming the victim of a climate of fear. That can lead on to an abuse of morality when it becomes a stick with which to beat others. In institutions which refuse to face up to the power of homophobic forces, homosexual people are highly vulnerable.

145. In such a climate, the quiet detailed pastoral work of helping one another on, in the grace of God, in our several journeys, gets

swept aside in a demand for purity and perfection. The dishonesty of some, believing themselves to be in a position of moral strength from which to question the journey of others, threatens all effective pastoral care. The Church is in urgent need of returning to its central conviction in the Gospel if it is to make a more constructive contribution to the journey of faith to which all of us are called.

4

## CHAPTER 4

### HUMAN SEXUALITY

146. We are all sexual beings. Interpersonal communion is near the heart of being human. We are made in the likeness of the three in one God who is a community of love. We believe God made us to be sexual beings in relationship.

147. This divine image is for us both a calling and a task. We are 'human beings' - or 'human becomings' - persons on the way to becoming what they are meant to be. That calling is defined in the person of Jesus Christ - the true human being for us all. Our calling is to grow up into this shape of human life and our task is to work to this end.

#### CHRISTIAN TRADITION AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

148. The Christian faith has understood there to be at least three purposes to human sexuality: enjoyment, mutuality and creativity. All are rooted in and reflections of the goodness and self-giving love of God.

#### ENJOYMENT:

149. Christians lay great stress on the importance of the body for persons. That is how we are created. When Christ shared our human existence through the incarnation he became fully human - the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In the future we look, in faith and hope, for the resurrection of the body. God saw what he had made and called it good. That goodness of life includes the pleasure of our bodies. We are not, therefore, to think about our being persons in communion with one another in ways which deny pleasure or denigrate our bodily life.

150. Human life is inescapably physical and bodily. As such, in common with the pattern of creation, it is male and female. Individual human beings are either male or female. There are a tiny minority of people whose physical sexuality is ambiguous but their

experience does not require us to question the fundamental male/female shape of God's creation of human life. Thus our physical and bodily life is inescapably sexual. We express what it means to be a human person through our bodily life and through the way we respond to one another as sexual beings. This is particularly so in the feelings and fantasies we have about one another and in our physical encounters including sexual intercourse. In the Bible this is affirmed in the delightful poetry of the Song of Songs.

151. There are several dimensions to sexuality; all of which can express the joy and delights of persons in communion - all of which can become disordered or misused.

- anatomical: (sex organs, hormones etc; our bodies can become sexually aroused);
- affective: at the emotional level, there is a sexual dimension to our thought world (fantasies and fears), as well as a sexual dimension to our relation with other persons of the same and of the opposite sex;
- behavioural: we can give expression to the affective dimensions through our bodies - speaking, touching, caressing, hurting etc. Genital sexual intercourse is the most intimate and powerful mode of interpersonal encounter. In certain contexts a genital sexual encounter can be the most profound expression of love and commitment in other contexts, the most degrading and destructive of human experiences.

#### MUTUALITY:

152. The Christian model for relationships is a mixture of dependency and independency such that mutual service brings the fulfilment of both partners. One biblical phrase which points to that ideal is the one used in the Genesis story, and referred to both by Christ and St. Paul in the New Testament: 'one flesh'. Though often misused in a way which focusses on physicality, and even suggests that every sexual encounter effectively creates a marriage, the emphasis in Scripture is on the 'oneness' rather than on the

'flesh'. 'One flesh' points:

- first to a unity and a communion of one person with the other in mutual enjoyment and mutual enrichment. This is something towards which a marriage can aspire and grow towards through all the joys and pains of the pilgrimage of a marriage relationship. This oneness is symbolised by and can be deepened through the sexual union.
- Secondly, in all the contexts in which it is used in Scripture, the 'oneness' describes a coming together of a man and woman: it is a oneness of sexual complementarity.
- Thirdly, it arguably links the sexual relationship with procreativity in pointing forward to the union of man and woman in the 'one flesh' of their child.

#### CREATIVITY:

153. The Christian tradition interprets what it is to be human within the framework of the goodness of creation. To be human is to enjoy the physical nature of our sexuality. It is to use that capacity to build mutual attachments. Human sexuality also provides us with the potential for creative existence and expression in which we can reflect something of the creativity of God.

154. We express that creativity firstly in the relational. We start from the knowledge that our basic physical characteristic is that we are male or female. Indeed, so strong is this theme in the tradition that, following on from Genesis 1.26-27

'God said, "let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness ..." so God created humankind in His own image ... male and female he created them.'

Christians affirm that the complementarity of male and female human existence is an essential part of what it means to bear the image of God. An inescapable aspect of being persons in communion is living out that male/female character of human existence. Each needs the other for a sense of the wholeness of human life. Thus the Christian tradition has, at its best and truest, affirmed the equality, complementarity and mutual enrichment of the relationship of male and female. There is a proper sense that the one can never be complete without the other. We are at our most creative when we are in relationship with one who is mysteriously other than ourselves.

155. These important and inescapable truths have frequently been confused and compromised in Christian history. One of these confusions has been to identify particular culturally and socially determined gender roles with what it means to be male or female. Thus the truth has been corrupted by attempts at giving religious significance to social perceptions as to the roles of men and women in marriage, family and society. This has often led to justifications for the subordination of women and to support for certain kinds of authority roles for men. It is vital to distinguish the essential and humanising perceptions of the goodness of the creation of human life as male and female from these abuses of the tradition.

156. Some would also say that within each of us, male and female, there are dimensions of what we may call masculinity and femininity (animus and anima), and that personal growth and creativity is found in a proper integration of the different dimensions of our sexuality within each of us.

157. We recognise that creativity in relationship is not confined to the marriage bond nor even to male/female relationships. Many single sex friendships and homosexual partnerships are fine examples of 'creative' relationships. There is even complementarity in the sense that there are diversities of skills and interests which feed, stimulate and extend the relationship. The Christian tradition has, however, gone on to maintain that there is something distinctive about the male/female experience in human life and relationships. There is clearly a need for more work to be done on this. Our discussion was by no means conclusive. The issue concerns the way in which the encounter between two people of different genders is distinctive in kind from that of two people of the same gender. We struggled to find a way of understanding and expressing this particular experience of the mystery of human relationships. Christian belief presses this issue upon us without necessarily requiring us to deny the creativity experienced in same sex relationships.

158. This distinctiveness in understanding the creativity of the male/female relationship is very clearly symbolised in the place which the Christian tradition gives to procreation in these matters. The two creative aspects of human sexuality - the relational and the procreative - are held together in the tradition. Children are to be born out of and into loving committed relationships. One of the purposes of marriage is in providing a good and wholesome context for the bearing and nurture of children. This provides a further reason in the tradition for wishing to keep sexual union within the boundaries of marriage. The tradition has developed, especially within Anglicanism, in the light of such modern developments as the production and use of safe contraceptive devices. The Anglican Church accepted the rightness of contraception and of family planning on the ground that the keeping together of the relational and procreational aspect of human sexuality within marriage was not destroyed when some acts of union in a marriage were prevented, by contraceptive protection, from leading to the possibility of procreation. It is within marriage as a whole, that the relational and the procreational are held together. Modern developments have taken this a stage further with the possibility of fertilisation taking place outside of the act of union. Again, Anglicans have accepted, in principle, that such help can be given to married couples who would not otherwise be able to have a family of their own. (Additional ethical issues are raised when this involves the donation of either the egg or the sperm from a third party.)

159. This then is how the tradition has developed our understanding of human sexuality: enjoyment of being body-people, enrichment through mutuality and creativity in relationship and procreation. The realities of sexual behaviour, however, are often far from the ideals to which the tradition calls us. Like any other aspect of human life and experience, our sexuality is corrupted and open to abuse. For all of us, the sexual dimension to life which is intended to move us towards interpersonal communion in a way which reflects the nature of God, is often instead devoted to selfishness, lustful self-satisfaction and destructiveness. Our inner fantasy world can become obsessively disordered. The sexual dimension to personal relationships are more often marked by fear and harassment than by

fidelity and harmony. Many sexual encounters are not the expression of personal communion, but of loneliness and self-absorption. The continuing effects of disordered sexual attitudes continue from one generation to another through disordered families and damaging learning experiences. The question for Christians seeking to bring all parts of life, including sexuality, under the lordship of Christ, is to seek for ways in which growth in this area of life corresponds with what we know of God's purposes for human sexuality.

160. Thus we need another theological theme which helps us interpret our experience - the corrupting effect of the fallenness of human life upon human sexuality. Our bodily sexual life is not exempt from the effects of the fall. We are a long way from what we are called to be. We experience pain, abuse, and the spoiling of the truly human in all sides of our living. This is true for all human beings and not just for some, even though the hurt and the damage of the fall is often indiscriminately more evident in the lives of some than of others. Within the fallen world there is always the temptation to separate out what God has joined together. To seek for sexual enjoyment without mutual commitment is the road to selfishness; to seek for mutuality without creativity is to make sexual love inward looking. To engage in sexual activity as though such behaviour did not affect the whole of us is to live a lie. St. Paul felt the need to make this point to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6. Genital sexual behaviour, he argues, expresses the whole person in commitment to another person, no matter whether it is meant that way or not. Genital sexual relationships thus have a meaning over and above the intention of the couple, however casual they may be about them. That meaning has something to do with God's intention that human beings should grow towards the nature of God in whom joyful creativity and personal communion belong together. Where that meaning is denied, as in the Corinthian brothel, the sexual encounter becomes a caricature of the 'one flesh' it is meant to be.

161. Out of this understanding that the physical bond of sexual union should not be separated from the bonds of love and commitment the Christian tradition, rooted in scripture, speaks of two



lifestyles in which appropriate expressions of human sexuality can be explored: heterosexual marriage and celibacy.

162. 'Chastity' is the name given to those forms of sexual expression which the Christian tradition has regarded as consistent with its view of the purposes of human sexuality. Those who choose marriage or celibacy therefore still have the task of pursuing chastity.

#### MARRIAGE

163. We have said that the Christian Church has seen heterosexual marriage as the context in which the full genital expression of sexuality belongs, for it is in marriage that the three purposes for our human sexuality can best be expressed together. The physical union of two people belongs within the wider union of their two lives in the bond of love and commitment which is what we understand marriage to be. Sexual union which falls short of commitment in love and the male/female complementarity of life is not demonstrating the completeness of God's creation. Marriage alone, in the tradition, meets these fundamental requirements. By marriage is meant the coming together of one man and one woman by their own free consent in a life-long loving commitment to each other, to the exclusion of all others. Marriage is monogamous, heterosexual and life-long.

164. There are good psychological reasons undergirding this tradition, as Jack Dominian, for example, illustrates in his various writings. Part of the value of a committed sexual relationship is seen in its capacity to further the health, and growth towards maturity of the other. For such growth an environment of commitment, trust and reliability is needed, and that is to be found in the permanence which is the premise and promise of the marriage bond.

165. It is important to be clear what the tradition is not saying. It is not saying that the only way adult people can enter into significant personal relationships one with another is by getting married. It is not suggesting that marriage is an appropriate calling for all adults. It is not suggesting that all other relationships are asexual. We have already established that

sexuality plays its part in all our life and all our relationships. What it is suggesting is that the physical bonding of sexual union should not be separated from the bonds of love and commitment which draw a man and a woman to share their whole life together across its varied circumstances.

166. It would be easy, in the present climate, to see this commitment of the Christian tradition to marriage solely in negative terms by talking about the way this excludes all acts of sexual union which take place outside its boundaries. The tradition, however, is more positive because it is about establishing the rights and duties of the couple involved. Those who take on the obligations of marriage have a duty to give themselves to each other including an obligation, where they may, to come together in physical union. They are to give themselves each to the other in mutual love and service, including in their coming together in the physical bonds of love. Indeed, the failure to consummate a marriage is a ground for its dissolution. This is why the tradition has paid as much attention to conduct within marriage as to conduct outside marriage. Those who enter marriages are as much subject to moral responsibility as those who do not. It would be a travesty to give the impression that marriage takes people out of the possibilities of the corrupt abuse of their sexuality. We are particularly conscious of the continued abuses that take place within marriage and not least by men towards women.

167. The sexual bond a couple has is to be a demonstration of their mutual love and commitment to each other and a crucial way in which their love and relationship is strengthened and deepened.

#### CELIBACY

168. Alongside the gift of marriage for some, the New Testament recognises the gift of celibacy for others. This is the mode of sexual life affirmed for those for whom genitality is not appropriate. We need to be careful with our terms at this point. Some understand 'celibacy' as a particular divine vocation given to those who sense a specific calling from God to renounce the possibility of marriage in order to devote themselves to his service

more singlemindedly. Others use the term to cover the fact that, whether they like it or not, the circumstances of their lives mean that they will not marry or re-marry, and they see these circumstances as a requirement to avoid genitality in their relationships with others.

169. At certain times in Christian history, celibacy has been valued more than marriage. Certainly St. Paul wrote of the 'charisma' of celibacy alongside that of marriage. There are many throughout Christian history who affirm the joy of chastity in celibacy, finding their sexual needs met in warm and affectionate friendships, and in physical and mental creative activities which can sublimate their eros into agape within the acceptance of the family of the Church. Celibacy for them is not a denial of sexuality, but another mode of expression without the genital dimension. Celibacy, as the life of our Lord illustrates, sets a person free to develop creative friendships in love and service with many within and outside the Christian community, in which the loving and affective dimensions to a person's sexuality can find full expression. For others the experience of an unchosen celibacy is a heavy burden which feels at times like a denial of important parts of their humanity. For such people, the Christian tradition seems like an oppressive weight, not a liberty.

170. The Christian tradition, rooted in Scripture, thus speaks of two lifestyles in which appropriate expression of human sexuality can be explored: heterosexual marriage and celibacy. Clearly there are many today who do not find this Christian tradition acceptable. Partly through contraception, it is thought to be less hazardous to separate out the recreative from the relational and procreative aspects of genitality. Sex without relationship (in pornography), sex in transient relationships (in promiscuity) are widespread. Many use sex recreatively as a means of giving and finding pleasure without any personal commitment being desired. Others are involved in 'trial marriages'. Some others are unconvinced of the need to keep procreation within a committed love relationship. All these lifestyles pose questions for the Christian tradition, and require careful moral and pastoral evaluation. However, there is one on

which we must concentrate: the extent to which the homosexual experience calls in question the Christian tradition, and the ways in which Christians have sought to come to terms with the fact that a significant minority of people find their sexual affections directed towards their own rather than the opposite sex.

#### THE HOMOSEXUAL CHALLENGE

171. The fact that many people experience sexuality differently from the way the tradition presents it raises questions about the adequacy of the tradition and about the way we are to evaluate such experience. That there are practising members of the Christian Church among those whose experience does not easily fit into the traditional understanding only serves to sharpen the question for the Church. We are talking about how to describe and evaluate the living experience of members of the Church and, by implication, providing the foundation for their direct pastoral care.

172. But first we can at least establish some matters on which there should be widespread agreement. First, there need to be proper boundaries and limits to sexual behaviour. These are encompassed in social rules and customs. Such rules and customs change as the boundaries of toleration and acceptability change. This is also true for the Church which, to a measure, is bound to respond to the culture in which it bears its witness to the Gospel. Thus in every age and culture we are bound to ask how we witness to the truths we believe about human life and relationships in the culture of which we are a part.

173. Secondly, our behaviour needs to be consistent with the view that our sexuality is something to be affirmed as part of us. As embodied persons in relation to other persons, we need to find appropriate ways of rejoicing in and affirming the fact that we relate to each other as sexual beings. Our sexuality is meant to be woven into the whole of our characters and become part of our growth towards wholeness in the divine image. Different human beings are at different places on the journey to wholeness, both psychologically and theologically. The quest for personal integration which can connect up the sexual aspects with all the other aspects of life will

take different forms for different people. The pastoral task includes an awareness of such personal differences and varying needs.

174. Thirdly, our behaviour needs to be consistent with the view that it is not good for us to be alone. Healthily growing persons are 'persons in relation'. We need each other. We are part of each other. None of us can grow outside an environment of mutual acceptance, mutual nurture, mutual ministry. The biblical authors give us much encouragement to reaffirm friendships and love relationships between members of the same and of the opposite sexes within the body of Christ. Within such friendships appropriate physical expression of affection will, no doubt, be different for different people. A hug and a kiss might be appropriate signs of affection in one situation, not in another.

175. It is beyond this, however, that the points of disagreement arise. The Church is being challenged to take a more positive view of practising homosexual relationships. This brings to the surface two contrasting evaluations of homosexual conduct. On the one hand there are those who believe that it is time the Church positively recognised that human sexuality is, by nature, a spectrum of experience and that this should be seen as part of the kaleidoscope of God's creation. These differences are not a misfortune or an accident but part of the diversity of creation. On the other hand, in supporting the tradition as it has been understood thus far, are those who see all that falls short of the traditional understanding of marriage and sexual union, as part of our disordered life in a fallen world. The debate goes like this.

176. Many homosexual Christians affirm that their sexual orientation is unchosen: that God made them this way. They therefore wish to affirm this part of themselves as God-given, and see their orientation as but one among the many varieties of experience within the human community. There are many minorities within society, and within the Church - red hair and left-handedness, for example. The homosexual orientation, it is argued, is to be seen similarly.

177. Others reply that 'God has made them this way' need to be evaluated in the light of the biblical understanding of what God has made. In what sense has 'God made them'? The creation story of male and female in the divine image, and the negative stance towards homosexuality wherever it is mentioned in the Bible, lead these others to see the homosexual orientation not as something to be affirmed, but as something problematic; not as a gift of creation, but as one among many evidences of our fallen nature - a disorder, or a handicap, not blameworthy but not simply part of the goodness of creation. Here there is a basic difference between Christians concerning their understanding of creation, (which we have explained in the previous Chapter).

178. This leads to a further major difference. Many homosexual Christians reject the view that marriage and celibacy are the only permissible options. Within the whole range of creative and redemptive loving open to people, they claim the validity of same sex relationships which bear the marks of fidelity, respect, tenderness and intimacy. They argue that the call within Christian circles for compulsory celibacy or enforced marriage for homosexual persons is an outright denial of the freedom to respond to God with the full range of human emotions and resources that God has made available. They argue that there will be as many varieties of genuine response to God as there are individuals who respond, for the call to holiness is the call to become wholly the person God has created us to be.

179. Such Christians might accept the threefold purposes for human sexuality which we outlined earlier: enjoyment, mutuality and creativity, but would not see marriage or celibacy as the only contexts in which they are to be found. The capacity for mutuality and indeed some psychological complementarity between members of the same sex can be enjoyed, and though children are not a possibility (apart from adoption), there are many ways in which homosexual couples can express something of the divine creativity.

180. Others would reply: the tradition does not talk only about mutuality and psychological complementarity, but about male-female differentiation. To concentrate one's affections towards a person of

the same sex is effectively to deny the complementarity of the sexes, the mystery of the other, which is written into the created order. It may be that very concentration on 'the same' rather than acknowledging the need for the 'other' which made homosexuality an appropriate example in St. Paul's mind when he was arguing against idolatry in Romans 1.

181. Furthermore, the tradition does not talk only about creativity, but about procreativity. It is not an accident that reproduction is linked to the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. To deny the procreative capacity of a sexual relationship in principle is to fail to honour the fulness of our humanity as God has made us.

182. A third issue separating Christians is the significance of genitality. Many homosexual Christians believe that those who disagree with them are obsessed with genitality. What matters, they argue, is the quality of the relationship, not the fact of genital expression. Why has the Church made such an issue of genitality?

183. Others reply that this minimises one of the most powerful of human capacities, which every society has seen the need to regulate in some form, and does not correspond with the biblical understanding of 'one flesh' which we outlined earlier.

184. It is not always clear whether the replies arguing against homosexual genitality are based on a rejection of same sex loving (which then needs to make some sense of e.g. the story of David and Jonathan), or on a rejection of certain physical acts such as anal intercourse (which then needs to evaluate the fact that some - who knows how many? - heterosexual couples engage in such practices). Most likely, same sex eroticisation is thought to be inappropriate for a variety of reasons, theological, anatomical and psychological.

185. Fourthly, many homosexual Christians argue that they wish to concentrate on 'personal' values rather than on the traditional emphasis on male-female complementarity. What matters is the nature of personal communion between persons not their gender. This leads many to work with what has been called a 'personalist' ethic, in

which the priority of the person is stressed over and above particular moral rules of behaviour.

186. Others reply that for a faith which centres on the incarnation, our embodiment, and therefore our maleness or femaleness, are an essential aspect to our humanity. A 'personalist' ethic which minimises gender differences is on the road to a gnosticism which understates the importance of the body. Further, it is hard to see how an ethic built on 'fidelity, respect, tenderness and intimacy', could be sufficient guidance for sexual relationships, without some further moral guidance setting appropriate boundaries within which such values can flourish.

187. For example, a growing teenage daughter needs her father to acknowledge her emerging womanhood. This relationship acknowledges the sexuality of both and remains healthy and good whilst it continues to accept and remain within the boundary which excludes sexual intercourse and preserves their father/daughter relationship. To stray over the boundary would have potentially serious psychological and personal damage for her future capacity to form mature stable relationships with the opposite sex. The Christian moral rule about heterosexual marriage is an acknowledgement of an appropriate boundary.

188. Some homosexual Christians believe it is right to extend the traditional boundary to include stable homosexual relationships as morally equivalent to heterosexual ones. Others reply that to do so is to move beyond all the biblical guidelines the church has drawn on in formulating the moral rule called marriage.

189. Finally, many homosexual Christians argue that the biblical texts which traditionally have been held to rule out homosexual genital acts as contrary to the will of God, have now been shown not to mean that at all. John Boswell's book is frequently quoted in the context. However, many others remain unconvinced of Boswell's exegetical work, and find his approach to the New Testament unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup>



190. Within the last two decades, the ferment within the Churches can be summarised in terms of three general approaches:

(a) a reaffirmation of the tradition.

The homosexual condition is one mark of the fallenness of our human nature and homosexual behaviour is in all cases sinful and wrong. This view has sometimes been coupled with an attitude of hostility towards homosexual people, as though they were wholly responsible for what has been regarded as a self-chosen perversion. Thankfully increasing numbers within this traditional position have sought to uphold traditional morality but without the note of censure, hostility or homophobia which has marked some other writings, and with a constructive sense of Christian mission and ministry towards homosexual people within and outside the Church.

(b) a rejection of the tradition.

Some have developed a theology which affirms homosexual practice between a committed loving homosexual couple as wholly within the purpose and will of God, and which says that homosexual actions between homosexual people, if they are to be judged at all, should be judged by exactly the same moral criteria as heterosexual acts in a committed heterosexual marriage.

(c) a range of mediating positions.

Christians of this persuasion see the homosexual orientation not as something blameworthy, but not as something merely to be affirmed. They see homosexual genital intercourse as morally wrong in an objective sense, but recognise that in a fallen world the question for the best choice within a flawed situation may lead to the acceptance of a homosexual relationship as the most acceptable option for some people at some stages of their life journey.

191. There is still a considerable journey of study and encounter to take place before it will be clear as to how these positions are to be either reconsidered or decided upon. In the meantime the Church will need to live creatively with the debate.

#### FOOTNOTE

<sup>1</sup> See David Wright's article in Sexuality and the Church, Ed. T. Highton, ABWON, 1987.

## CHAPTER 5

### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ISSUES

192. Many people in our society consider that what two people do in privacy in their personal relationships is no-one else's business. Intimate sexual behaviour carried out in private is not to be the business of the law, of the Church or any other public body interested in social behaviour. The present state of the law on homosexual conduct adds weight to this view. The report of the Wolfenden Committee maintained that what consenting adults do in private is not a matter with which the criminal law should be concerned. The report drew a distinction between the public realm where the law has a proper interest and the private realm in which, in general, it should not intervene:

The function of criminal law is to preserve public order and decency, to protect the citizen from what is offensive or injurious and to provide sufficient safeguards against exploitation or corruption of others, particularly those who are particularly vulnerable because they are young, weak in body or mind, or in a state of physical, official or economic dependence. It is not in our view, the function of law to intervene in the private lives of citizens or to seek to enforce any particular pattern of behaviour, further than is necessary to carry out the purposes we have outlined.

On homosexual behaviour the Committee further said:

Homosexual behaviour between consenting adults should no longer be a criminal offence (because of) the importance which society and the law ought to give to individual freedom of choice in matters of private morality.

193. The issue is, however, more complicated than that. Not everyone accepted the principled distinction drawn by the Wolfenden Report. Lord Devlin in a famous rejoinder maintained that, in principle, the law did have an interest in the private realm because it had a duty to uphold morally sound conduct. He was not suggesting that the law should intervene in private morality but rather that, as a matter of principle, it cannot be excluded from this sphere. Devlin says:

there must be toleration of the maximum individual freedom that is consistent with the integrity of society,

and thinks that the law should not intervene in acts committed in private when they have no tendency to injure others, and when their

performance is properly a matter of private judgment. But he thinks, for instance, that the State should protect monogamous marriage, 'because the law exists for the protection of society'. Indeed one of the basic principles to which the divorce law is meant to conform is the need 'to buttress rather than undermine the stability of marriage' (Law Commission 1966. No. 6, Cmnd. 3123). He was opposed by H. L. A. Hart who did not accept that the law had a function in upholding morality. Professor Basil Mitchell in a further contribution to this debate agrees with Devlin that the function of the law is not only to protect individuals from harm, but to protect the essential institutions of society:

The law cannot in all respects be morally neutral, but nor can its morality be beyond criticism and debate.

He advocates the fullest use of relevant social research. And finally:

The protection of institutions and the legitimate concern for the ethos of society may sometimes justify what I have called 'the enforcement of morality'. But the onus ought to lie heavily upon those who would interfere in private behaviour, even though a clear line cannot be drawn between public and private morality.

199. Matters which are considered to be private become public for a variety of reasons. They may do so because the parties concerned make it public. Homosexual people may not wish their relationships and lifestyles to remain private to them. Alternatively, they may talk about their life together opening up their conduct to some public response.

200. Persons holding public offices may be expected to adhere to certain standards of conduct in their private lives. It is not acceptable, for example, for doctors and social workers to engage in sexual relationships with clients and patients in the context of their professional relationships. Clergy are seen to be representing the Church and, therefore, may be expected to avoid relationships in private which are considered to be a breach of Christian standards of conduct. This principle is upheld in the pastoral Epistles which affirm that those who manage the Church should be those who can manage their own households (1 Timothy 3.1-7).

201. These matters are easier to deal with when the conduct concerned involves harm to others, an abuse of a professional relationship, or involves encouraging others to breach their covenanted obligations. It is, therefore, a matter of public interest when people engage in sexual conduct with those considered by society not to be of an age or condition to offer proper consent, i.e. children. The law offers protection against such conduct. It is a matter of public concern when a doctor abuses the professional relationship he/she may have with a patient when they entice that person into a sexual relationship. It is a matter of public concern when a person enters into an intimate relationship with someone who is married thereby threatening the integrity of the marriage. Such conduct provides evidence for divorce which could be used for that purpose by the aggrieved party. All these experiences may have deep and complex causes. Nevertheless, there is, in the nature of the case, a public interest in what happens in private in these cases. None of them, of course, are exclusively concerned with homosexual conduct.

202. The issue is much harder to determine where there is no perceived harm, no abuse of a professional relationship and no threat to commitments already contracted. Thus two persons of the same sex who consent to their relationships are bound to ask what business it is of anyone else to prescribe their conduct for them. If, in the terms of the life of the Church, their conduct gives no apparent cause for offence to the Church and seems to cause no scandal in the community, on what grounds do the Church authorities intervene?

203. We may be at an important moment of transition in this. Because of the historic attitude of the Church to homosexual conduct, homosexual people have tended to treat their personal lives with great caution and discretion in public. If the persons involved are clergy both their orientation and life-style may be known to a close group of trusted friends but not open to the local congregation or to the bishop. It is clear that a younger generation of homosexual people, including those who are ordained, are less willing to proceed in this way. They want the liberation of having their orientation and general style of conduct known. The burden of secrecy and the pressure to clandestine behaviour is thus taken off their shoulders.

There are those who think that this is the only way to press the Church to face up to the issue and help it move away from the double standard of colluding with the historic disapproval of homosexual conduct at one and the same time as not wishing to know what people are or do in the privacy of their own lives. More discreet ways of proceeding by homosexual people may be breaking down. This is one of the factors contributing to growing controversy in the Church, as well as in society, about homosexual lifestyles.

204. The Bishops are already having to respond to some very difficult situations not least those presented by clergy and ordinands who wish to be more open. Homosexual people face real dilemmas especially following the debate in Synod in 1987 and the subsequent mood of hostility in the Church. If the Church appears to reject homosexual people called to ministry or who are ordained and practising an effective ministry the pressure is increased on them in the present climate to keep their orientation and life style both private and secret. There may well be much less of an inclination to want to talk to the Bishop about these matters. The same will be true of ACCM selection procedures and of theological colleges. A sense of fear in the face of potential rejection will drive people either to protect themselves by not sharing these matters with those with the power to decide their future or to leave the Church and abandon its ministry. Can the Church be trusted to treat personal information both with respect for the liberty of the person who gives it and with a sense of professional integrity about how that information is to be used? (see Chapter 10). These experiences raise important questions about human rights and duties.

205. The debate about the principles which should underlie the attitudes of the state to individuals and major agencies such as Churches towards their members is taken further when we consider the impact which the concept and practise of human rights has on this matter. The Churches have given public support to the human rights movement. The recent 1988 Lambeth Conference reaffirmed the commitment of the bishops of the Anglican Communion to human rights. This is to be found both in the resolutions of the Conference and in the Social Order Section report. All the major statements on human rights contain a general commitment to the right of privacy:

No-one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 12.

1. No-one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Article 17.

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 8.

206. Statements on human rights also include provision regarding the protection of rights to marriage and family life:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

UN Declaration, Article 16.

207. All statements protect the right to freedom of religious belief, thought, conscience and opinion. These rights extend to teaching, practice, worship and observance:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and

are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

European Convention, Article 9.

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

European Convention, Article 10.

These are broad general statements requiring interpretation. At no point do they specifically relate the principles established here to the particular needs of homosexual people. It is the commitment to human rights which lies behind steps taken in democratic societies to guarantee in law equal rights for women, the disabled and for people who belong to ethnic minorities, all of whom may be subject to discrimination (see Chapter 8).

208. These matters raise important questions about the definition of privacy as it relates to public life in Church and society. We need to affirm the proper moral basis in the Christian understanding of the individual in society for the right of the individual to privacy. Privacy has traditionally been applied to those areas which fall within the individual person's responsibility. These are governed by liberty of conscience and the right to exercise personal choice. The emphasis is, therefore, upon those matters for which the individual has the primary responsibility. Those matters which are close to the personal life of the individual are clearly within this sphere. It would, therefore, be an offence against the integrity of the individual for others to intrude into these decisions against the will of the person involved. Public intrusion into matters which

properly belong to the individual person has to be justified on clear moral grounds which are of such seriousness that they are able to justify breaches of personal liberty. Thus, for example, if the individual chooses to exercise his/her own liberty by denying liberty of choice to others or by threatening their life and person, the public interest would have a clear moral ground on which to intervene - the protection of the other persons affected. My right to listen to the music of my own choice does not allow me to do so in a way which disturbs my neighbour.

209. Privacy is concerned with the protection of the dignity, responsibility and personal integrity of the individual. It is not, therefore, dependent on public approval. Its justification lies in the realm of personal and individual values not in the action of public policy or culture. The right of privacy is protected both by the values held in the wider community and by public policy. Thus all matters concerning the personal life and conscience of the individual are to be respected throughout the community.

210. This leads on to noting the implications of these principles for conduct. If the individual is responsible for decisions in these matters, unless grounds can be proved otherwise in the public interest, then they have a right to be in control of the information pertaining to their personal lives. Matters guarded by privacy should only become public with the consent of the individuals concerned. Where individuals share information of this nature, others who are entrusted with it have a duty to use it with discretion thereby witnessing to their duty to protect the dignity and rights of others.

211. It is clear from this that the public interest is concerned with protecting others from the abuses of personal liberty. Thus we cannot draw an absolute distinction between the private and the public. Neither can we offer an absolute right of privacy. The public does have an interest where there is abuse and does have a duty to protect privacy where there is not. If, for example, the individual uses the privacy of personal relationships to engage in conduct without the consent of the other parties, the public has a



duty to protect the injured party. It was with these principles and concerns in mind that the reform of the law on homosexuality was undertaken. It is founded on the principle that where two people enter into relationships with consent and are considered of an age to offer it, whatever others may think of the acceptability of their choice, there are no grounds for intervention. The law has a duty, irrespective of different views on the moral rightness of the conduct, to protect their personal right of choice. The Church has a duty to consider these matters as it approaches the question. How is it to relate its teaching on right conduct in personal relationships to its commitment to respect the personal liberty and integrity of the individual? Where does the concern for moral conduct come up against the individual's right of privacy and personal responsibility?

212. There is a long tradition of thought in the Church on the subject of conscience. This has certain parallels with the concern, in the human rights field, with the right of privacy. The need to respect the conscience of the individual, even where it may be misinformed or considered to be wrong, is rooted in the basic Christian conviction that God alone has a claim on the loyalty of our hearts. Commitment to God has always to be with consent. It is a contradiction of the Gospel to endeavour to force people to believe when in their hearts they are not willing to do so. Those occasions in the history of the Church where power has been abused in forcing people to accept baptism under duress are a blot on Christian history. If, therefore, the fundamental relationship of people to God is rooted in loving response and in liberty, Christians are bound to question the claim of any institution or individual to intrude by force upon another against their will. Thus, at its best, the tradition has laid stress on the freedom of the individual and their own responsibility for the choices they make about their own deepest relationships. The right of privacy is a way of publicly recognising the liberty of conscience and of heart of each person. We may persuade but not force. Where people choose another route than the one we would have wanted for them, we are called to respect their right of choice and to protect their liberty in it.

213. We need to draw a clear distinction, however, between privacy and secrecy. These are often confused. Secrecy involves the deliberate with-holding of information. It is concerned with excluding others from matters which it might be in their interests to know. Secrecy may be necessary in a community unable to cope with certain information. It is potentially destructive of good community life. In strict contrast to the notion of privacy it is not rooted in a commitment to the protection of personal conscience and liberty. It is concerned with power over information in a community which cannot be wholly trusted, as, for example, in times of war or international conflict. In the terms of this discussion, homosexual people are often forced to behave in secret and clandestine ways in Church and society because of their fear of what the consequences might be if the truth were known. Similarly, information about homosexual people may be held in secret files in Church and other bodies without those people being aware of the existence of this information. Thus bodies like the Church exercise power over the individual on the basis of knowledge they possess of that person without that person being aware of this situation. It is hard to justify such a relationship from a moral perspective. (We will be looking at questions of confidentiality in Chapter 10.)

214. This leaves us with important questions affecting the way Anglicanism balances its sense of corporate understanding of the moral obligations on individual Christians with a recognition of the responsibility of the individual to make decisions of their own especially with regard to matters of deep impact for them as individuals. There are matters which concern all the members of the Church. Different Christian traditions balance the need to uphold the liberty of conscience of individuals with the need to accept the obligation of corporate life in the Church in different ways. Anglicanism has often sought to do this by recognising that it needs to test out the rightness of its judgements against the way they are received by the whole Church. Thus the decisions that the members of the Church make for themselves are part of the way the Church affirms the tradition or comes to develop or adapt it. There can be little doubt, for example, that one of the reasons why Anglicans came to accept and support the use of safe contraceptive devices as a method

of family planning, was because the membership of the Church saw no moral or spiritual problem in using such devices. The consensus of practice was an element in the development of the understanding of the Church. In matters such as divorce or the use of new techniques for enabling people to have a family are issues in which the decisions of the faithful are as important in the development of the moral stance of the Church as the formal statements of Synods and episcopal bodies. In Anglicanism we have a good tradition of respecting the ways in which the members of the Church choose to order their lives. Thus the Church has been reluctant to approach matters of personal choice, even where they are controversial, through the route of disciplinary action. These matters are better dealt with as part of the continuing pastoral care of the Church than as issues of discipline leading to the exclusion of people from aspects of the life of the Church. This is a way of affirming that the corporate disciplines of the Church have always to be formed in response to the actual life decisions made, in good faith, by members of the Church. Thus, even where the Church at a formal level, makes a clear stand about what it believes to be right conduct, it still has to behave towards its members in a way which respects their right to make their own choices including choices which are in conflict with what has been formally stated. Thus, if homosexual Christians, and indeed others, do not find the formal statements of the Church about their lives at all helpful the Church needs both to behave in a way which recognises their liberty of conscience and provides space to test the matter out in pastoral and theological discussion. We believe there is much to be said for affirming the Anglican way of proceeding on issues of this sort in the specific matter of homosexual conduct.

215. These issues, however, raise sharper questions about what is required of those who hold office in the Church, and particularly of those who are ordained. In principle, those who hold public office in the Church may be expected to abide by standards of personal conduct thought necessary to maintain the witness and good name of the Church. It may well be of great concern to the Church that its clergy are making themselves into wealthy people by a clever manipulation of the stock exchange. It may not be fitting behaviour

for a clergyman to take part in blood sports. Even in this more demanding sphere the Church is still under obligation to balance the needs of the corporate life of the Church with the liberty of the individual person who is working for it. The report, Homosexual Relationships, struck this balance differently for lay and for clergy persons. It did not consider it desirable for practising homosexuals to be ordained. If that serves as a reminder to the Church that it ought not to let such matters go by default but should regularly think through, in the light of experience, what its stand should be, that would be a gain. A parallel issue which illustrates that it is not only in questions of homosexuality that the Church struggles with these matters concerns the question of divorce and the clergy. There are a number of parallels. These include the difference between what has, hitherto, been required for lay persons and for clergy. There is no question of discipline against lay persons who experience divorce. No one however has hitherto been allowed to proceed to ordination who is divorced while their previous partner is still living. However, as with homosexuality, clergy who met the rule at ordination may not continue to do so after ordination. Clergy who go through divorce during their ministry, continue to exercise ministry in the Church. Homosexuals, who enter the ordained ministry as celibates may not continue to be so as their life and ministry unfolds. These situations represents crisis points for balancing care and protection for the individual with the need to consider the public witness of the Church. The worst of all worlds for everybody is for the Church to offer no guidance and to try and avoid having to make decisions and set guidelines. In doing this the Church cannot escape from reflecting on the experience it already has and what the expectations are of its present and its future clergy. If the worst of all worlds is to have no policy, the next to worse is to have one that cannot be made to work in the face of what actually happens. We recognise the difficulty of these issues but we believe that there can be no escape from the leadership of the Church giving careful thought and time to them and to do so in a way which is faithful to the Anglican tradition which necessarily involves how such matters are perceived in the Church as a whole.

## SECTION III

### COMMUNITY ISSUES

216. In the last two sections of this report we look at some more specific matters. Firstly, we consider three issues which have given cause for concern in the community both among homosexual people and within the wider society. In recent times the question of what is taught about homosexuality in our schools has caused controversy. Similarly, questions have been raised about the care of children by homosexual people. This concerns adoption and fostering policy and questions concerning the future care of their children by lesbian women following divorce. Finally, we are aware of a growing concern about the civil rights of homosexual people in our society. All of these matters are of concern to the Church and need a careful, if brief, introduction.

## CHAPTER 6

### EDUCATION

217. The debate about the place of homosexuality in programmes of education for schools has become divisive in a number of our communities. It has become a focus of the way these matters are dealt with in society and raises important challenges to all of us. It is also important that we understand the debate.

218. There are a number of aspects of the case that is made for a more positive understanding of homosexuality to be taught in school. First, it would be argued, is the need to overcome poor attitudes to homosexual people which are deeply rooted in our culture. Society and culture, including the education system, are geared to negative attitudes to homosexual people, in addition to reinforcing traditional values about sex and marriage. In a world in which a significant minority of people are homosexual this needs challenging and schools have a part to play in this task. Second, it is important that children understand homosexuality since they may be in touch with homosexuals in their family and household, and may themselves one day be homosexual. Education needs to help people cope with their own circumstances and prepare them for the future. It is simply a 'head in the sands' policy to conduct an education policy on the basis that everyone either will or ought to be heterosexual and destined for marriage. Thus this argument concludes, there is a need for children, whatever their future style of life, to have positive models of homosexual people and lifestyles.

219. In opposing this argument it has been suggested that it is confusing for children as well as wrong to give them the impression that it is OK for them to opt for a homosexual lifestyle. It is important, during a time in which children are developing towards maturity, that they are offered positive models of committed heterosexual relationships. Society has a duty to affirm these as the predominant and right pattern for human conduct and to prepare future generations with such in mind. It is one thing to teach

people sensitivity towards others who may have a different experience. It is quite another to positively set about promoting such choices. A minority ought not to be allowed to dictate the character of education in schools especially if they encourage young people to mistake a transient stage for a fixed orientation. That leads on to the concerns that are sometimes expressed about homosexual teachers. These include assumptions that homosexuals are intrinsically paedophiliacs and that children are not safe in their care. More explicitly they are concerned with the possibility that homosexual teachers committed to promoting homosexual rights may seek openly to encourage positive responses from children to homosexuality.

220. Much of this passes many communities by. They hear of it in the media but these issues are not causing dispute in their own education service. In some, predominantly urban, communities, however, where there is an important and sizeable homosexual community the issues are inescapable. Children are bound to meet with homosexual people as part of the daily life of the locality.

221. It is important that the Church, especially in this debate, helps in distancing people from popular misconceptions. It would be easy to determine the question of the place of homosexuality in programmes of school education on the basis of media reporting on the efforts of some local authorities. The issue needs to be tackled in its own right. Similarly, it is vital that we do not muddle up questions concerning homosexuality and the education of children with concerns about paedophilia. Paedophilia is a separate issue affecting people from every point on the spectrum of sexual orientation. The suggestions that children are safe with heterosexual people but not with homosexual people or that they are always unsafe with homosexual people are seriously mistaken. All teachers have a duty to abide by proper professional standards of conduct in their relationships to the children they are responsible for.

222. It is also important to recognise the strength of homophobic forces in our culture. Homosexual people are discriminated against

(see Chapter 8) and persistently have negative images put upon them from outside. We have seen from the history of the Churches' attitude to homosexuality how rejection of a particular life style from a moral and theological perspective moves on to the establishment of disciplinary procedures within the Church and then to the use of the power of the Church in society to seek to enforce these disciplines on the whole community. Thus there is developed a powerful culture, reinforced with social rules, which attacks and punishes homosexual people. We need to take seriously the strength of the argument that education opportunities should be used to undermine the power of homophobia in our society.

223. The efforts which have been made by some local authorities to include a more positive approach to teaching about homosexuality have caused a considerable amount of controversy. Some authorities have issued guidelines for teaching and then withdrawn them under the pressure of public reaction. Most have opted for doing and saying nothing. The issues have been the subject of considerable political lobbying. In such a climate it is difficult to determine the genuinely educational questions.

224. Her Majesty's Government has taken two steps, in the past months, designed to place boundaries around the work of local authorities. On 1 September 1987 the Department of Education and Science issued guidelines for Sex Education at School. The paper, acknowledging the key role of parents in this matter, nevertheless recognised that schools have a duty to offer education in this field. It reminds schools that under the 1986 Act, sex education is the responsibility of the governing body. In particular it reminds Local Education Authority of their duty to ensure that pupils give 'due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life'. Pupils need to know the law of our country as it affects sexual relations. Schools cannot avoid controversial subjects such as contraception and abortion. Balanced information and a recognition of the ethical questions are needed here. It is also recognised that schools founded on religious principles will want their beliefs to affect the manner of presentation of these subjects. The paper then proceeds to deal with the question of homosexuality.



'There is no place in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the "norm", or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils. Indeed, encouraging or procuring homosexual acts by pupils who are under age of consent is a criminal offence. It must also be recognised that for many people including members of various religious faiths, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable and deep offence may be caused to them if the subject is not handled with sensitivity by teachers if discussed in the classroom'.

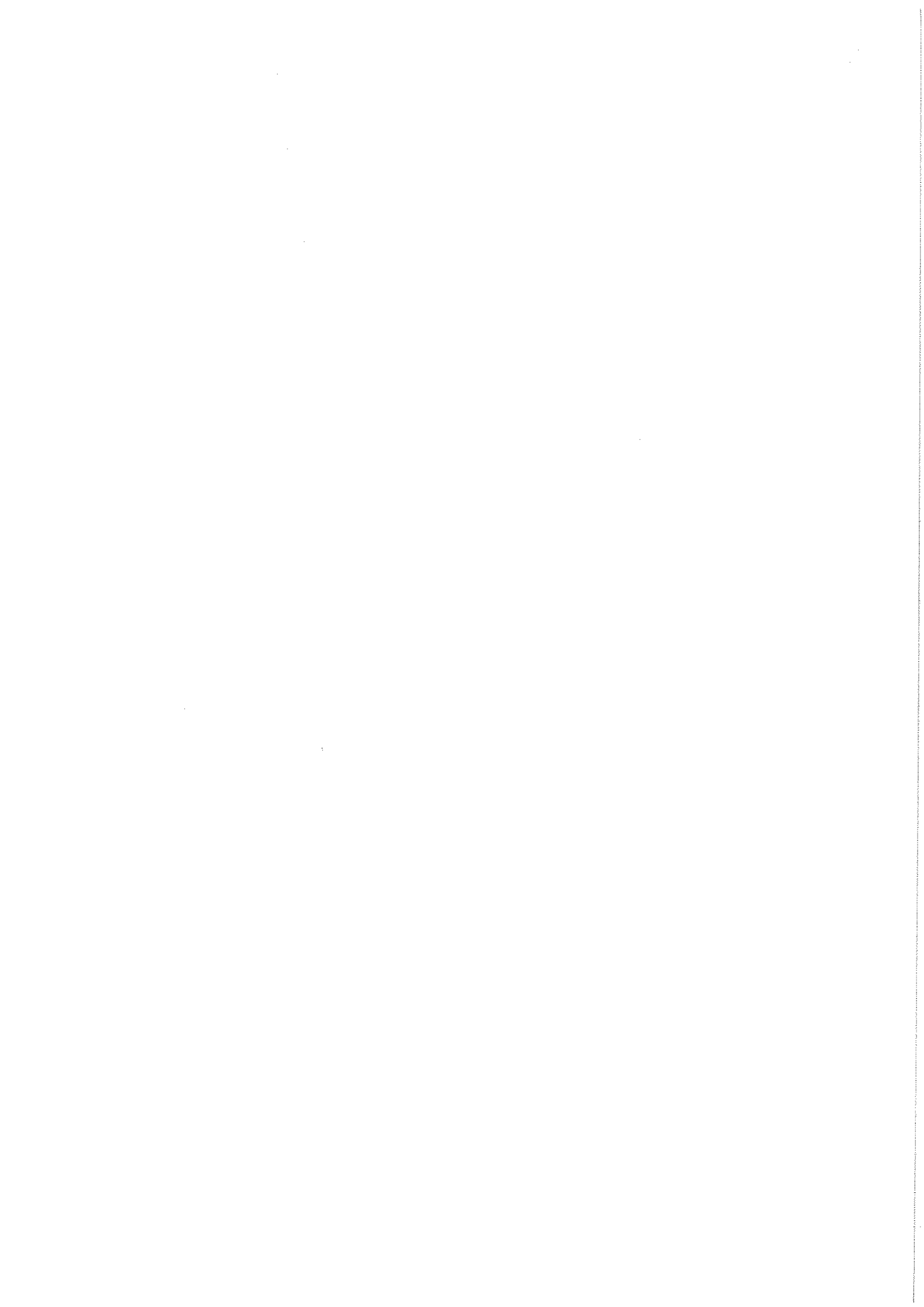
Although these guidelines do not have the force of law they do have the power of the Secretary of State and the DES behind them and may be said to represent the standard by which practice in schools will be judged.

225. The second is to include in the recent Local Government Act a clause designed to prevent Local Authorities doing anything which might be understood as promoting homosexuality. Clause 28 says:

'A local authority shall not promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.

However, some have suggested that because school governors are responsible for school programmes the Act technically does not apply to them. It is clear, however, that HMG intends to prevent any effort by local authorities in school which might be understood as promoting homosexuality. It is consistent with a general pattern of policies aimed at preventing some councils from pursuing active policies in support of homosexual campaigning groups.

226. A number of Church authorities have sought to respond to these issues. In January 1988, the Board of Education produced a Memorandum of Guidelines for Church School Governors on Sex Education. The Memorandum is based on the belief that Church Schools will need to include positive provision for sex education. It notes that dioceses may produce their own guidelines. It makes two crucial points. The first is the need for a caring climate in the school. 'Regardless of background, behaviour, and sexual orientation pupils are to be caringly accepted within the "Church School"'. The second is to emphasise the importance of the moral climate for such education. Governors must exercise their responsibilities so 'that sex education is given in the School within a 'moral, family oriented and Christian framework'. It concludes with a valuable checklist of questions for Governors.



227. The London Diocesan Board for Schools has produced a Memorandum for Teachers and Governors in Church Schools on Lifestyles and Sexual Orientations. This Memorandum begins by acknowledging the spectrum of sexual orientation in society and the position of homosexual people in the law and in our culture. It proceeds to note the historic rejection of homosexuality by the church and notes a more open attitude in recent times. The Memorandum believes that 'any good education programme must include some treatment of homosexual relationships alongside any treatment of heterosexual relationships'. Material needs to be accurate and objective. It seeks to strike a careful balance in style and approach. 'Since heterosexuality is the norm and the great majority of children will incline to it, attempts by extremists to persuade them that homosexuality is preferable should not be encouraged. On the other hand actions and attitudes that make homosexuals feel inferior, second class citizens, and attempts to persuade them to make an effort to be different are equally undesirable. The aim should be to "help pupils accept themselves for who they are"'. The document ends by distinguishing between the words 'heterosexism' and 'heterosexuality'.

'What those who promote "positive images" and challenge "heterosexism" are doing is to ask for non-heterosexual relationships to be accepted as valid and viable alternatives to heterosexual ones. They are not expressing the value-judgement that they are in any way preferable. But there is of course, a distinction to be made between describing equal value to all people as such, whatever their orientation or activities, and ascribing equal validity to the expression of different kinds of relationships'.

In a highly charged climate it is often hard to enable people to make such distinctions and use them as a guide to practice in a professional context.

228. The conflict which has been aroused by this issue is illustrative of the dilemma. On the one hand there are those concerned to promote a more caring and accepting climate of opinion towards homosexual people. They see the importance of the forming of attitudes in the development years of schooling. On the other is the concern to set the question of homosexuality within the framework of inherited values about marriage and family life. The pursuit of the one often seems to exclude the other. Thus the endeavour of creating more 'positive images' of homosexuality through programmes of

education is seen as undermining marriage and family values. The defence of inherited values surrounding marriage and the family is seen as working against creating a more accepting climate of opinion for homosexual people. The issue is by no means resolved. Nevertheless, the contributions made at national and diocesan level by Church education authorities give us some encouragement that it is possible to find a responsible way through this dilemma.

## CHAPTER 7

### ADOPTION AND FOSTERING

229. The 1975 Children's Act makes it clear that it is to be the interests of the child which are to determine decisions concerning its future through adoption and fostering arrangements. These matters, therefore, are not primarily concerned with meeting the needs of childless couples, or others who are seeking the opportunity to care for children. The careful selection of people who offer their help in these ways is concerned with ensuring that the best interests of the children concerned may be met.

230. The law sets out the procedure for adoption. Couples may jointly adopt a child only if they are married; a child being placed with a gay or lesbian couple would therefore be legally the adopted child of only one of the partners.

231. The section of the 1975 Children Act which requires local authorities to offer a service to all adoption applicants was implemented in January 1988. Some legal advisers in local authorities are apparently suggesting that this requirement may make illegal the ways in which adoption agencies have traditionally 'rationed their resources' (ie by automatically excluding people over say the age of 30 to 35, single people, gay people etc). It may mean that agencies have a duty to offer at least preliminary interviews with virtually everyone who applies rather than eliminating them at the very beginning of the process.

232. On the other hand the implications of Clause 28 for a local authority seeking to make policy about gay/lesbian adopters is at present uncertain. Some believe that Clause 28 will make local authorities even more wary than they already are about homosexual applicants, and would make positive action in support of homosexual people virtually impossible.

233. There were just under 9,000 adoptions registered in Great Britain in 1986, an increase of about 5% on 1985 but still less than half the number registered ten years ago. The decrease between 1976 and 1986 has been particularly marked for adoption of legitimate children whose numbers fell by 60% compared with the decrease of 49% for illegitimate children. The proportion of all children adopted who were illegitimate has increased in the last decade from 52% to 56%.

234. The proportion of children aged ten or over at adoption has increased considerably since 1976, from 20% to 28% in 1986. There was actually a small increase in the number of adoptions of 15 to 17 year olds, from 553 in 1976 to 572 in 1986 although these figures fluctuate considerably from year to year. The proportion of infants under two years adopted has fallen slightly from 26% of the total in 1976 to 25% in 1986.

235. Much adoption and fostering work is concerned with the needs of what are sometimes called 'hard to place' children. These are special needs children who, for a variety of reasons, will need particular skills in those who take on parental responsibility for them. They may have had very difficult and disturbing experiences in their childhood. They may be severely handicapped. They may be older children who have gone through periods of great uncertainty and disruption in their parental experiences thus far. Local authorities and licensed agencies concerned to place for adoption often have to work extremely hard to find people who are both willing and able to offer the right sort of home life for such children.

236. We ought also to note how little data, published material and basic research there is about the question of homosexual people being chosen to adopt or foster children. This is an area of practice influenced by complex values and professional judgements, differing theories about what makes 'a good parent' and differing views about how children achieve sexual identity. There are many blurred edges and it seems important to be modest in claiming that we know much about the health or pathology of families. For example it is easy to diminish single parent families by speaking of the need for children

to have strong male and female role models in the home, while forgetting all the fathers in 'traditional' families who have been virtually absent from their children's lives. It is also easy for the tabloids to take a parent's sexual orientation as the central issue, when what may be much more important for a child is how safe he or she feels with that adult, where his or her best friends live and whether brothers and sisters are around.

237. In fulfilling their obligations in placing children for adoption to 'meet the best interests of the child' social workers have a number of duties to fulfil. They assess people who wish to adopt by carrying out lengthy and quite intensive explorations (often partly in a group setting) into the applicant's history, and potential parental skills. The assessment generally includes discussion of attitudes towards racial and sexual matters. The aim is to recruit stable adults who will be able to offer a permanent, positive environment to a child who may have been severely damaged in his or her early years and who may have particular physical and emotional needs.

238. It is not possible to estimate how many children are adopted annually by gay or lesbian people; records do not include this information. Social workers generally believe these placements to be rare and only made with the utmost care and in strict accordance with the principle of 'being in the best interest of the child'. Given the very small number of healthy babies who are free for adoption and the large number of infertile couples seeking to adopt, it seems highly unlikely that a healthy baby would be placed with a single person, whether heterosexual or gay/lesbian. Most of the examples quoted of placements with gay/lesbian people were 'special needs children' i.e children with handicaps or older children.

239. How social workers, and the courts who make the final adoption order, decide what is in the best interests of the child is, of course, a difficult matter. All involved inevitably carry with them an image from their own experience of what makes an 'ideal' family. They must assess very intimate areas of people's lives and recognise strength and potential as well as the longing and vulnerability which

often accompany the strong desire for a child. Further, it is not possible to separate professional judgements from the political and moral climate. There are many shades of the spectrum at the moment. At one end are a number of gay and lesbian groups whose members are confident of their ability to bring up children, who may speak of their 'right' to a child and who feel that present child care practice denies them opportunity. At the other end are groups who believe that for the state to offer anything other than a heterosexual couple as parents is to fail in its responsibilities to the children entrusted to its care.

240. Those local authorities that have discussed the issue seem to have come to the conclusion that where possible children should be placed with heterosexual parents. Sometimes the language of minorities and majorities is used. One agency, for example, argued that their duty was to give a child the experience of belonging to a socially acceptable majority rather than to a stigmatised minority. They urged great caution about gay/lesbian applicants since they feared that a child placed with them could be given additional burdens.

241. Nevertheless, it is clear that in some cases placement with a gay/lesbian parent is in the best interests of the child and that some placements are being made. It is likely that in these cases some of the following factors apply:

The applicant has something extra to offer a child i.e. an existing relationship with the child.

A small minority of children are so skilled at driving heterosexual couples apart that it may be better to live with a single parent or a gay couple where the dynamic is different.

Some profoundly handicapped children may be given the chance of family life when they would otherwise have to live in residential establishments.



242. In conclusion, social workers and courts are required to meet the best interests of the child in placing children for adoption. The present position is that while in principle many adoption agencies would acknowledge that homosexual people have much to offer a child, in practice few placements are being made.

243. Questions concerning the placement of children for fostering or adoption should continue to be answered in terms of their own interests. The needs of childless people, whatever their sexual orientation and lifestyle, must be subordinate to these considerations. It is also important that the needs of children who may have had a poor experience of parental care thus far, should not become the centre of controversy between conflicting lobbies. The interests of the children may well be the first thing that is sacrificed in such public controversies.

## CHAPTER 8

### CIVIL AND LEGAL RIGHTS

244. The reform of the law on homosexual relationships, following the Wolfenden Committee Report, was based on the principle that what consenting adults do in private is not (in general) the business of the criminal law. For the purpose of this law the age of consent was taken to be the age at which people attain their full political right as voters, which, at that time, was 21. There was no suggestion, in this change in the law, that homosexual relationships were to be approved of or seen as outside the boundaries of moral comment. This was rather a statement about the boundaries of the concern of the criminal law. What people did in the privacy of their own relationships provided they gave their consent and were of an age to do so, was not the business of the law however offensive or morally repugnant such acts might be to the public.

245. It would seem, therefore, that in the law there is little suggestion that homosexual relationships are to be seen as similar in status to other relationships of a personal nature. Thus a homosexual partnership is not, in any sense in law, on a similar standing to the relationship to which marriage witnesses and for which there is positive provision in both civil and common law.

246. It is important for us to understand this because some of the claims made in campaigns for homosexual rights are not asking for an extension of the present law but for a basic change in the understanding of the law concerning homosexual relationships. The request (for example) that the age of consent be lowered from 21 to 18 for consenting homosexual relationships in private is not a demand for a basic change of principle. It is a request that the present law be adjusted to keep pace with other changes. The request, however, that the law makes positive provision for homosexual relationships in such matters as inheritance implies a demand for a more radical shift.

247. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the starting point in present law on these matters is a position, in law, which offers no positive affirmation of homosexual relationships. There is no suggestion in the law of approval for such. This sets both the background and the agenda for those who look for change - be it in educational practice or in social provision.

248. Thus it is clear that the only union for which the law makes clear positive provision is marriage as historically understood. No other bonding has the protection of the law - be it polygamous marriages, period contract relationships or homosexual partnerships. Indeed, the new 1988 Immigration Act will take away the rights of those settled here, who lawfully entered into polygamous marriages in other parts of the world, from having their partners join them. Britain is not, therefore, going to recognise other nations' law. Much of this inheritance would claim a Christian foundation.

249. To an extent the law reflects the culture and experience of the society it is meant to protect. The challenge of the call for rights for homosexual people is one of a number which, in the area of marriage and family law, are asking that account be taken of changed attitudes and experience. That challenge implies a demand that the basis of the law shift from its exclusive commitment to marriage and its accompanying self-denying ordinance on adult homosexual behaviour to a more positive defence of homosexual lifestyles alongside traditional marital ones.

250. Against this background we can see and evaluate three levels in the claims of homosexual people for their civil and legal rights to be properly established:-

- a) The minimal call for the law to be brought up to date. This would involve such matters as reducing the age of consent to 18 to bring it into line with changes in the age of majority which have taken place in recent times. There would appear to be no strict logic, in law, to the present age of 21 for consenting homosexual relationships. Other grounds have been suggested which relate to the personal maturity of individuals. On this issue, it would be argued, people at 18 might be considered in need of some protection.

- b) The call for the law and general social processes to come to the defence of homosexual people and enable them to attain what is just and fair.
- c) Those matters which come under a broad heading of equal opportunities issues. Here we are dealing with matters which require a related strategy between actual civil protection and the education of institutions and individuals to carry forward an equal opportunity commitment.

251. The experience of homosexual people in society is at the heart of the demand for formal protection in the law and more positive provision for them and for the community aimed at undermining homophobia and reducing discrimination. There can be little doubt that homosexual people are vulnerable to considerable discrimination against them in society. In particular they would draw attention to:-

- a) **THEIR EXPERIENCE AS EMPLOYEES.** Homosexual people have no redress in law against employers who dismiss them because of their sexuality. They have no protection from harassment at work or from employers who refuse to promote them solely on the ground of their sexuality. Homosexuals often live in fear that if their sexual orientation became known to their employer they would be liable to dismissal or to the adverse development of their career.
- b) **THEIR EXPERIENCE IN HOUSING.** The people who are most vulnerable here, as in other respects, are those from the poorer socio-economic groups, and black homosexual and lesbian people. The double edge of discrimination resulting from both racism and homophobia is particularly sharp. The provisions of the Housing and Homelessness Act do not stretch to single people. Local authorities have no statutory duty to provide accommodation for single homeless persons. Homosexual people are often made homeless. They are evicted from their family home or their private rented accommodation because of their sexual orientation. There are particular needs of homosexual people in this area. Both in the private rented sector and in local authority housing there is a need for recognition of joint tenancies so that, should one of the partners die, or leave, the

- other is not automatically removed from the accommodation. Some local authorities have made some advances in this direction.
- c) **THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE POLICE.** There are various criticisms made by homosexual people about the attitudes and behaviour of the police. There are complaints about the prosecution of people for importuning or for committing acts of gross indecency. Both the manner in which evidence is obtained and the distortion of it are persistently questioned. Also condemned are the harassment of homosexual and lesbian people taking part in demonstrations, police trawls of homosexuals, surveillance of individuals and organisations and the raiding of homosexual clubs, organisations and meeting places. The effect of such experience has been to undermine the confidence of homosexual people in going to the police to seek redress for harassment and violence which they have experienced in the community. Into this climate has come the added dimension of AIDS which has introduced new fears into those who deal with gay people in the community. There is a real need for steps to be taken to increase confidence in the police among the homosexuals. In particular training institutions such as the Police College at Hendon might include these needs in their training of police.
- d) **THE EXPERIENCE OF LESBIANS IN SEEKING CUSTODY OF THEIR CHILDREN FOLLOWING DIVORCE.** Lesbian mothers seeking custody via the courts sometimes face judges who see their role as protecting the children from their own mothers. Thus the issue of what is in the best interests of the child becomes clouded by perceptions about lesbianism. An added complication can be the tension between male and female in this context. Male judges often make judgements concerning women who seem to have rejected men. Clearly this issue needs a considerable amount of work on it if the individual women involved, the children involved, and the community at large are to be satisfied that justice has been done and seen to be done.
- e) **THEIR EXPERIENCE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES PROVISION.** There is no formal provision in Equal Opportunities law designed to protect homosexual people. The legislation on equal opportunities deals with the needs of people who may be discriminated against on

grounds of race or of their sex but not on grounds of sexual orientation. A number of equal opportunities statements and policies made by employers include sexual orientation in their list of categories. The British Council of Churches statement is a notable example in the Christian context (see Appendix). Homosexual people are concerned to obtain such protection and the necessary training and monitoring procedures which go with it to enable employers to make the policy effective. Much of the concern to promote positive education about homosexuality is to do with the need to create a less discriminatory environment of understanding in the whole community. Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill has aroused considerable anxieties. Its generally worded statement preventing local authorities from promoting homosexuality may have the effect of hindering local authorities from providing any serious encounter in the community with the concerns and experience of homosexual people.

252. These five areas illustrate the character of the issues of civil and legal rights which are raised by the contemporary homosexual community in our society. They are by no means exhaustive. We cannot, however, let this section pass without commenting on the lack of consistent comment from the Churches and Church leaders on the need for homosexual people to have their civil and legal rights established and protected. We note that our sister Churches in places like the United States have been more active in this field. Whatever view the Church may take of the theological and moral justification of some homosexual and lesbian lifestyles we believe that there is a strong case for a clear commitment by the Church to speak for homosexual people and communities whenever they are subject to the abuse and to press for adequate protection to be offered to them by the law and by all who have power over such matters as employment, housing, law enforcement, family matters and equal opportunities.

## SECTION IV

### MATTERS FOR THE CHURCH

253. We move from issues in the wider community to three matters of concern in the Church. We have already had cause to comment on the presence of lobbies in the present situation. We need to look at their role in greater detail. Throughout this report we have stressed the importance of the pastoral responses made by the Church to the people most directly affected. We wish to offer some more substantive thoughts on how the Church should conduct its responsibilities in fulfilment of its pastoral tasks. Finally, there can be no avoiding the subject of conflict and how this is to be dealt with in the Church. We have some suggestions for ways in which the Church might be more successful in managing sensitive and divisive issues which might help to create a more constructive climate for the future.

## CHAPTER 9

### LOBBIES

254. One of the features of the debates on homosexuality within and outside the Church in recent years is the extent to which opposing viewpoints have hardened into pressure groups and lobbies. Lobbies are groups defined by a common task: that of persuading public opinion and especially those with power to endorse the particular viewpoint of the lobby and to exercise power accordingly.

255. Within the Church, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement for example, is known as an organisation which, alongside its quiet and often unreported work of pastoral care, is committed to campaigning for the recognition of homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle within society and within the Church. In particular it seeks to promote the acceptance of gay and lesbian people on exactly the same terms as heterosexual people within the Church and its ministry. The group ABWON (Action for Biblical Witness to our Nation) to give another example, seeks to encourage local churches to be radically renewed by the Holy Spirit and restored to 'biblical principles'. This includes 'proclaiming the biblical teaching that fornication, adultery and homosexual practice are sinful, whilst encouraging a compassionate approach to those tempted in these areas'.

256. Lobbies exist in the context of our post-Enlightenment heritage of freedom of speech within our society. This valued freedom in our culture is the basis on which particular interest groups are able to form themselves and operate. Nevertheless, lobbies provide a point of tension with that other bequest of the Enlightenment - toleration. Lobbies want to persuade people to accept their view and so they mark the crossroads between freedom and toleration in a plural society.

257. Lobbies exist because of perceived injustices, wrongs or errors. They want to draw attention to things which they believe have been forgotten or not properly done. Thus they question the status quo



and call for particular forms of change - be it of opinion, policy or procedure.

258. There are many different types of lobby. There are those centred on a single issue e.g. getting rid of nuclear weapons. There are those centred on the interests of a defined group - an ethnic group, homeless people etc. There are those concerned with forgotten perspectives and values - religious groups campaigning for a recovery of values from the past.

259. Lobbies are there to press their particular concerns. They are single issues or single concern groups. As such they are quickly identified. They often have the strengths of a straightforward set of claims and the weakness of not seeming to come to terms with other needs and interests which have to be taken into account.

260. Lobbies are interested in power. They often perceive themselves to be a minority excluded from the formal structures and therefore in need of organising themselves to press their case by speech, by demonstration and by the development of an organised body of opinion.

261. Lobbies try to influence those with power. And there can be a tendency for power, especially when linked to financial resources, to be used in a coercive, even manipulative way. Public opinion cannot only be persuaded; it can be bought. The ever present danger that lobbies become not factors in, but manipulators of the system, is thus magnified and can become powerfully coercive.

262. Because lobbies confront power and seek to use it, they create or uncover conflict in pluralist societies. The demand for change leads to a measure of struggle as different and sometimes conflicting interests try to come to terms with each other.

263. How is the Church to respond to the existence of lobbies? First, by recognising the context of post-Enlightenment Western culture in which lobbies are possible. The Christian Church needs, as Lesslie Newbiggin has reminded us, to be willing constantly to

call that culture in question in the name of the Gospel of Christ. Our culture, he argues, is one in which 'the nation state has taken the place of God as the source to which we look for happiness, health and welfare'. He outlines our culture in terms of the growth of individual autonomy, the separation of facts from values - the latter becoming merely a matter of subjective preference - and the consequent split between public and private worlds. It becomes easy for the Church to accept the notion that Christian faith and Christian morality should be relegated to the 'private world' of individual choices - just one among a pluralist variety of options.

264. Lobbies serve a purpose in reminding us that the split between public and private is less straightforward, and that public life is subject to moral judgement under God. They also serve a purpose in reminding us that there is a difference between sin and crime. Our relationships with one another within the Christian Church are not only a matter of law but of growth in grace.

265. However, by the way they work, lobbies seek to enforce morality in a way that is often inconsistent with the Gospel of grace. First, we need to hear again Newbiggin's call to the Church to see our culture as a missionary situation. And that means that not only in content but also in method we need to find ways of showing 'the awesome and winsome claim of Jesus Christ to be alone the Lord of all the world'.

266. The Church must be ready to test the prophets. While recognising and endorsing the freedom of speech, and recognising that God calls some to stand as prophets against the rest of society and indeed against the rest of the Church, we need to be ready to test both the content and the process of any claimed prophetic movement by the 'awesome and winsome claim of Jesus Christ'.

267. The Church needs to recognise afresh that all of our society, not least those with power, are accountable to God for their decisions, and it is part of the Church's task to bear witness to that accountability. Sometimes lobbies are most effective in holding

issues before the public consciousness - and Christian lobbies can set such issues within the context of the Christian gospel.

268. We need to remind each other of the temptation to build up Babel-like power structures of our own for selfish ends. The hidden task of any group is to survive as a group; there is thus an in-built tendency within any lobby for self-justification.

269. We need to evaluate the claims of any lobbies in the light of our Christian calling to neighbour love, and its associated obligation of seeking justice in all human affairs. Neighbour love will take seriously the claims of the consciences of those with whom we disagree, and will recognise the necessity and benefit of living with a degree of pluralism and variety. There are 'varieties of gifts' from 'the same Spirit'.

270 Finally, the Church needs to take more seriously its obligation for settling conflict in a way that is compatible with the Gospel of Christ (see our section on Conflict). We should refuse to be railroaded by lobbies, though will need to listen carefully to aspects of truth for which they stand and which may have been neglected. We are to retain critical distance from self-styled prophets, while listening to them to discern what may be from God. We ought to give each other space to speak, and especially space to hear. It is often through critical listening within the Body of Christ that a consensus fidelium can emerge. This is the task which, we believe, has yet to be fully undertaken in the Church.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE EXERCISE OF PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

271. The Church of England has important responsibilities which it needs to fulfil in its pastoral ministry. It is unlikely to succeed in these, particularly as they impinge on the questions and dilemmas raised by the presence of homosexual people in the Church, if it does not give careful thought to the principles and procedures of such work. Those who carry responsibility for ministry in the Church need to consider a number of matters. Bishops, clergy, directors of ordinands, and college principals all have opportunities for exercising a caring and a teaching ministry in this context.

#### UNDERSTANDING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

272. We are conscious that the climate within which the Church gives thought to these issues is threatened by fear, confusion and uncertainty. These forces paralyse the Church and prevent its members from growing in their faith and their discipleship. Overcoming them requires prayerful and reasoned thought about the different roles of ministry and their meaning for the relationships which these create. A great deal of damage can be done to the Church as a whole and not just to homosexual people when there is confusion about roles and lack of agreed standards of pastoral conduct. For example, the relationship that exists between a confessor and the person seeking their ministry of absolution is very different from that between a bishop and one of his clergy. This affects the way confidentiality works in these different relationships. To confuse them could lead to trouble and the undermining of pastoral relationships.

273. There are a multitude of different roles and types of pastoral relationships in the life of the Church. A diocesan bishop, for example, has a particular role in relation to the clergy of the diocese. A college principal has responsibilities for all ordinands in training in that institution. Youth leaders have duties towards the members of their organisations. An incumbent has a particular

type of role which affects how he relates to assistant staff on the parish team. Many more such roles and relationships could be spelt out.

274. In all these ministries everyone needs to be both clear and agreed about the expectations of the way they conduct their business. Misunderstanding can cause considerable hurt. For example, a parish priest and the member of the church seeking his help and guidance may have very different expectations of what they are seeking to achieve. The same may be true for bishops in relation to their clergy. In such a sensitive and potentially explosive matter as the needs of homosexual people seeking the ministry of the Church these misunderstandings could be very damaging both for the individual and for the Church. There are four broad areas whose consideration may offer ways forward for the Church to be more effective in its whole ministry in these issues. These can help us answer the questions:  
What ministry are we involved in?  
What strategy are we working to?

#### MAINTAINING MORAL STANDARDS

275. Some of the contributions made from across the spectrum of opinion within the Church could be seen as giving the impression that homosexual persons are undermining the moral commitment of the Church. Homosexual people, for example, may seem to suggest that they are going to do as they wish irrespective of the corporate wisdom of the Christian community. This is one of the dangers of being treated or of seeing oneself as living on the fringes of the Church's life. Those who are integrated into the life of the Church are called to accept the disciplines of corporate life. On the other end of the spectrum of opinion are those who, from a position of moral distance, seem to want to instruct homosexual people about what they may or may not do. There is little sense of shared life and communion within the Church. Neither of these ways of approaching the Church's moral task is satisfactory.

276. The challenge to uphold the moral standards of Christian faith applies to all members of the Church. The Church has a duty to all its members, without exception, to help them to respond to this

challenge. Homosexual people are neither exempt from the challenge of Christ nor are they to be singled out for special attention in this respect. If we are to succeed we need a deep commitment to helping and supporting one another. The standards of moral judgement are given to us in Christ and all of us are called to the same journey of growth into Him.

277. The following three areas might help in this.

i) CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE

278. No serious work on moral growth can be achieved in an atmosphere marked by a judgemental and fearful spirit. When people think they have nothing to learn and that their duty is to make others conform to their views it is very difficult for growth to happen. This applies to all who may have an interest in these matters. Groups of the like-minded meeting to reinforce opinions already settled in their minds may be reassuring for its members. It can hardly be described as the way of moral challenge and growth.

279. An atmosphere of humility and forgiveness is fundamental to the possibility of growth and development. In such a setting everyone can accept their own need of help and may, with love and discretion, seek to help others. It is important to offer people the space to consider their own lives and to have the liberty to make choices for themselves. If this type of spirit is to prevail in the Church, synods and leaders of the Church will need to set the tone by the manner in which they address the issues.

ii) ENCOUNTERING THE TRADITION AND THE EXPERIENCE

280. It would be easy to be dismayed at the poor level of moral insight in the Church on this and on other matters. The content of moral education in the Church can be very thin. Members of the Church need help and support in the use of the Bible and in the teaching of the Church. This is particularly true where people are tempted to believe that the quoting of selected texts answers all the questions about what is to be done. When this happens people are let off the hook of serious engagement with the biblical record and so lose out on the possibility of learning and growing through their

study. The same is true for our encounter with experience. That involves thinking about our own sexuality and also seeking to understand the life and needs of people who have a different sort of experience from us. Leaders in the Churches need to regularly consider:

When these matters were last considered in depth in our teaching ministry?

What opportunities have been given for group study and discovery work to be done on questions of personal morality?

What skilled help has been sought and used in doing this task?

Have opportunities been given for members of the Church to think about their own sexuality?

What encounter has there been with members of the Church who are homosexual in orientation?

As we suggested in the early chapters of this report progress in understanding is more likely to happen when we bring our encounter with the tradition into relationship with our encounter with experience. The courage to explore both the Bible and personal experience is crucial to moral development.

281. We believe that congregations can, with the right help, engage in this task. That will need careful planning and the development of good educational resources to assist. The leadership of the Church should be encouraging educational bodies at diocesan and national level to provide resources for this task.

### iii) MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER MATTERS IN HUMAN LIFE

282. Many people find the whole subject of homosexuality very difficult. That of itself prevents learning. This in turn hinders moral development. Help may be found in this by setting the question in its wider human context. This is why some have suggested to us that we focus not so much on homosexuality alone but on human sexuality as a whole. Sexuality is integral to our being human. All people have, therefore, to consider their attitudes and behaviour in the sexual aspect of their living. This is one of the reasons we have given over a whole chapter to this subject. It helps us set the question of homosexuality in context. This leads us on to make connections with other issues. Attitudes towards sexuality are

deeply influenced by past experiences in the family, by our culture and by our social values. To call a person a 'homosexual' may tempt us to view that person exclusively in terms of their sexual orientation rather than to see their orientation in the setting of who they are and where they have come from.

283. Moral reasoning needs to be consistent. We can easily fall into the trap of talking about one set of issues in one way and another in an entirely different and even contradictory manner. The search for a path of Christian obedience through the complexities of our fallen and compromised human living is well known to us in all sorts of contexts. The choice of the greater good or of the lesser evil and the virtues of prudence and of practicality have been part of the tradition of Christian moral reasoning down the ages. They are no less relevant in the area of personal relationships which, like any other area of human experience, is usually complex and often confused. It is not much help telling people what they ought to be like if we cannot offer help with making sense of their present experience. In the question of homosexuality it sometimes seems that the Church is confident about the oughts in the subject but has little to offer to help with immediate and painful choices homosexual people have to make. Moral discussion which helps people to make connections with other complex areas where we all face difficult and seemingly impossible choices may serve to deepen our understanding of the moral dilemmas facing homosexual people.

284. Only by these sort of means - the creation of a healthy climate, the hard work of serious study and engagement, and the setting of the issue in its wider setting - will the Church be seen to be upholding and strengthening moral standards for the benefit of all its members.

#### ESTABLISHING CONFIDENTIALITY

285. If people are to be helped to find their place in the life of the Church and to grow in faith it is vital that those who have a pastoral responsibility for them know how to handle information of a personal and confidential nature. The principles of confidentiality are concerned with protecting people's rights and responsibilities.



This enables them to do the work which they need to achieve in their relationship. Because of this the principle of confidentiality works differently for different pastoral relationships. The confidentiality of the seal of the confessional enables the individual to have total freedom to share the most sensitive information about themselves. These truths remain locked in the confines of this relationship and may not be shared anywhere else by the person who has been given it. The confidentiality of the relationship between an ordinand and the college principal is concerned with ensuring that the information shared is used only in those places with a proper concern for that person's future ministry. It is not public property and can, therefore, only be made available to people such as the ordinand's bishop or future vicar. Once in receipt of such information these people are bound by similar obligations of confidentiality. The confidentiality of the relationship between a pastor and a member of a congregation is there to allow help to be given in private on matters which are not to be shared with the rest of the congregation unless the person concerned freely permits this to happen. Confidentiality, in all these settings is acting as a guardian of good pastoral practice. We can begin to understand its claims by looking at three central themes of confidentiality.

286. First, a commitment to confidentiality provides clarity in the relationship. In this respect it is the opposite of secrecy. The parties involved in confidential business are both clear about what is going on. There is understanding about what will happen to information and how it will be kept. If a confidential file is kept on a student for ministry that student should know of its existence and what sort of material it contains. Confidentiality is a way by which the authorities who keep the file guarantee to the person it concerns that it will not be made available to any other than those who have a right to see it. A secret file, by contrast, is one which the person concerned is unaware of and has no idea what it might contain. It is a deliberate act by those in authority to exclude the person from knowing what is going on. (See the chapter on Public and Private Issues for a discussion of the moral questions raised in this area.) What we are talking about is confidentiality and this should

not be confused with secrecy. Indeed, such confusion can lead to a loss of trust in confidential systems - the very thing it is meant to create and preserve.

287. Secondly, confidentiality provides boundaries. This has a double effect. It both sets limits and provides space. The rules of confidentiality establish who has access to information which has been shared and who has not got access to it. This is vital for the protection of both the parties involved. An ordinand may, for example, share with their college tutor the fact that she is seriously in debt. As the conversation develops it becomes clear that there is quite a history of an inability to manage financial resources. This is confidential information shared in the context of training for ordained ministry. In addition to agreeing with the student how the matter is to be handled in terms of help to be given, the tutor will need to consider how such information is used in any reports and references given to the principal and placed on record in the college. In due season the college authorities may want to ensure that those who will be responsible for the future ministry of the person involved are aware of these issues. They will ensure that the student both knows what is being done with this information and how it is being used so that the opportunity is given to comment on this and respond if need is felt. The information is not, however, for sharing in general staff meetings or with the wider college community. The establishment of these boundaries enables students to share matters with those responsible for their training and enable the college to build up the necessary picture of the person for recommending the future needs of their ministry. Confidentiality thus allows information to pass from the person to the institution without abuse of their right to privacy.

288. Boundaries protect people from the evils of gossip. Gossip - the inappropriate use of information - is often the result of a lack of support systems for those who have to handle difficult information. Because they have no-one appropriate with whom to share it anxieties are created and the information is used unhelpfully as gossip. In matters of personal relationships this is especially sensitive. The functioning of a human community depends on its

members recognising that there are boundaries in relationships. This is why we need to attend to the ethics of professional conduct in all situations where people are subject to the disciplines of an institution involved in the care and support of its members. The community should expect the seal of the confessional to be kept. A congregation should expect its clergy to exercise great discretion in the way they talk about their pastoral ministry. Students should be confident that their files are not being made available to people who have no business with them. Unless these boundaries are held to and the community looks for this it will not be possible for people to share matters concerning themselves which they need to share and which it is in their and the community's interests to share in this way.

289. The third aspect of confidentiality is that it seeks to protect the dignity of the individual person. Built into systems of confidentiality is the recognition that matters pertaining to the personal life of the individual are to be respected as belonging to them. Institutions have a responsibility to protect individuals by protecting information concerning them. In matters affecting homosexual people in the Church the temptation always exists to forget their right to have their personal dignity as individuals made in the image of God affirmed in the way in which they are treated. Respecting confidences and protecting them is one way in which this is achieved.

#### MAINTAINING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

290. Some of the practical work relating to the unity of the Church is set out in the chapter on conflict. The management of conflict is an important topic in this area and should be studied in partnership with what follows here.

291. The question of homosexuality raises into sharp focus the issue of unity in diversity in the Church. Are there any boundaries to the inclusiveness of the Church? If so, how do we discover them and uphold them? Those who want to stress the inclusive character of the Gospel and, therefore, of the Church, can appear to be suggesting

that anything goes in the Church. The Gospel welcome seems to be an invitation to licence. On the other hand there are those who seem to be saying, in effect, we would rather not have fellowship in Christ with homosexual people. Life in the Church would be more comfortable without them. That is how homosexual people hear what much of the Church appears to say to them.

292. We reject any policy which suggests that unity in the Church is based on similarity of life experience. The glory of the Gospel is in its bringing together people from different and even conflicting cultures and life experiences into one body in Christ. This, of course, has been a source of stress in the Church throughout its history. We have had to work very hard to give substantial and meaningful witness to the peace of Christ across the very real divisions between its members. The divisions and prejudices of the world find their way into Church life all too often. So it is nothing new for us to be faced with a new struggle for the unity of the Church when homosexual people claim their place in the life of the Church.

293. Commitment to one another in Christ in the Church places obligations on all of us. Inclusiveness ought not to collapse into self-assertiveness in the Church. This is why we have been cautious about the role of lobby groups. They have their place but there must be strict limits to their influence. In the end membership of the Church involves a sense of obligation to the disciplines of our common life. We may not all do as we please if we are serious about corporate responsibility. Furthermore we have a duty to ensure that the name of Christ is not brought into disrepute through the behaviour of the Church and its members. A great deal more work needs to be done on the disciplines which all need to accept as part of the fact of belonging to the Church. All new points in this discussion have got to make a constructive contribution to this. There needs to be a common acceptance that we cannot have everything we want. For the sake of the Gospel and the unity of the Church we need to be ready to accept that what we want may not always be expedient. It is in that spirit that we need to approach the complex issues of the disciplines needed in the ministry of the Church and the way in which pastoral ministry is to be carried out in our time.

296. All strategies for pastoral care need to give careful thought to their likely outcome. In many cases the future well-being and reputation of the persons involved may well depend on a clear understanding of where different choices lead. ACCM, college principals, directors of ordinands, and bishops need to bear this in mind when dealing with sensitive situations involving care and discipline of ordinands and clergy. These become particularly sensitive where matters of personal conduct are under question. Such situations are, of course, not just concerned with homosexuality.

295. As far as we are able to determine the following sorts of strategies are widely followed.

- a) When an ordinand or one of the clergy discloses their sexual temptations, support and spiritual encouragement is offered and more thorough counselling advised if appropriate.
- b) When an ordinand or candidate for ordination discloses a homosexual orientation, s/he is advised that if s/he chooses to promote the homosexual cause or to live openly in a sexual partnership s/he will seriously impair their range of ministry and that s/he might better seek some other form of vocation. If the person declares their intention to remain very discreet in their sexual activities, those in authority have to judge whether this seems a likely option and to assess whether a clandestine sexual life will be detrimental to their moral and spiritual life and ministry. Likewise if s/he declares an intention of celibacy those in pastoral charge need to consider the sort of support necessary to sustain this vocation.
- c) When there is a case where sexual behaviour has been unprofessional, say with a consenting adult in their pastoral care, discretion and discipline work together. The priority is to search for the best way forward for all concerned. Penitence and purpose of amendment and the acceptance of care and counselling to help the process of change are essential. If such are not forthcoming resignation may be required.
- d) When the sexual behaviour of clergy causes scandal, they are asked to explain themselves. If this behaviour or talk is thought to be essential or unavoidable by the person involved, the bishop might ask whether it is reasonable to expect his

congregation or parishioners to go along with such behaviour if it offends their conscience and judgement. Other work might be considered if things reach an impasse, otherwise a resignation with no alternative Churchwork might have to be required.

- e) When such behaviour involves breaking the law, eg by sexual involvement with a minor (especially one in his pastoral care) and there is no reason to suspect that the case is known to any but the two of them, the person concerned is warned of the great danger that they and their ministry are in, be moved to penitence, and be advised to terminate the relationship gently but swiftly and to go on leave of absence prior to moving parishes. The provision of pastoral care for the minor is discussed. Immediate resignation may be required of such clergy.

#### STRENGTHS OF THIS APPROACH

296. The present way of handling such pastoral matters:

- a) upholds the principle of the sinfulness of homosexual genital acts, but is compassionate towards lapses, especially when there is evidence of penitence, faith and the desire to amend.
- b) recognises that sin cannot be abolished, but that it has to be left behind, and that an individual may need help in growing past his sins.
- c) keeps sexual sins in the private area as much as possible.

#### DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

297. The present methods may be perceived to lack clarity. From one side it may be suggested that there is not enough toughness in opposing homosexual conduct. On the other it may be seen to be discriminating against homosexual persons.

298. It runs the risk of inhibiting clergy and ordinands from being open to the bishop. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that homosexuals are very cautious about how much they feel able to share with their bishop. All of this can lead to deception, hypocrisy and concealment which are detrimental to spiritual growth and healthy adult relationships.

There are two broad alternatives to the present policy:

i) THE EXERCISE OF STRONGER DISCIPLINE

299. A number of arguments, both pastoral and theological, are used to press the bishops to take a stronger and more conservative line. One of these is that homosexual clergy constitute a greater risk. There is always the risk both of lapses by celibate clergy and of public concern over homosexual clergy known to be living with partners. Some argue that the present policy contributes to indiscipline among the clergy and undermines public confidence. Again there is complaint about lack of clarity in selection procedures and in the task of colleges during the training period. Theologically, it is argued that a policy which lacks public clarity gives the impression that the Church is sitting loose to the teaching of faith and morals. The tradition offers no support to homosexual practice and there is no good reason, it is argued, to amend or abandon the tradition.

STRENGTHS OF A 'STRONGER DISCIPLINE' POSITION

300. The no-nonsense 'know where you stand' position can be a moral strength to those who are tempted to homosexual sins, and can support them to resist temptation. Likewise if ordained people find that such sexual sins become habitual, uncontrollable or public, they recognise from before they are ordained that this will mean resignation.

301. Those laity who are disconcerted or scandalised by the apparent range of possibilities at present open to the clergy on these matters will be reassured that 'sin means what it says' and that the consequences are being accepted by bishops and clergy. They will be helped to have more confidence in the Church's ministry.

302. No longer will the popular press and the majority of 'right thinking' citizens be able to accuse the Church of hypocrisy and double think: they may even look to the Church for the moral lead they say they want.

DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

303. The Church will be deprived of those sensitive and creative gifts which for centuries homosexuals have brought to ministry and

pastoral care. The particular single-minded dedication which celibates have brought to ministry may be jettisoned because in a more sexually-conscious and overt world they may be considered too much of a risk.

304. The pressure of secrecy will be greatly intensified, and the door will be closed to effective co-operative work between bishops and clergy in these matters. All the disadvantages of deceit and subterfuge, fear of authority and the rest will be increased. If this leads to self-deception the risk of irresponsible sexual behaviour will also be increased.

305. The Church will be discriminating against one particular form of sin, and that which is arguably less damaging to society or an individual than some others. If homosexual behaviour is sin, then there needs to be consistency by responding to it in the same way as other failings would be dealt with among the clergy. Non-judgemental attitudes should apply to this as to any other. That lapses in this area must always lead to resignation seems clearly unjust.

306. The policy might be seen as undermining the central claim of the Gospel of redemption and forgiveness. Many both outside and inside the Church are very prone to seeing religion as offering support for morality and little else. The Gospel is that 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for us', and we sinners, by His grace and the promise of the Holy Spirit, are seeking to co-operate with him until the redemption includes every part of our behaviour and attitudes. Rigid moralistic attitudes in the Church put at risk the right understanding of God's promise for the Church and its mission.

307. Many Christians today look towards a Christian Church which allows more individual freedom of conscience rather than to one that is so tied to past formularies and attitudes that it cannot give a Christian voice and a moral lead to the issues of our time in secular society. These Christians who believe that a positive attitude to sexuality in general and minority expressions of it can claim the support of current psychological understanding. They will not tolerate a Church which refuses to incorporate new insights into its tradition.



ii) MOVING THE APPROACH IN THE DIRECTION OF A MORE POSITIVE  
AFFIRMATION OF HOMOSEXUAL PEOPLE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

308. A change towards open recognition that homosexual people can live responsibly in settled partnerships would clear the way for recognising this as a responsible choice for homosexual people in the Church's ministry. It would clear the Church of charges of hypocrisy and double-standard. It would clarify the distinction between responsible and irresponsible sexual behaviour. It would avoid confusion when irresponsible sexual conduct had to be disciplined. Theologically it would be argued as interpreting the Church's teaching in terms of contemporary society. The Church could be clear about sexual responsibility. To focus on the quality of a relationship rather than on particular sexual acts within it would be moral gain. The celebration of the diversity of sexual expressions also a gain.

STRENGTHS OF THIS POSITION

309. Many, especially among the young, are quite clear in conscience that love expressed between committed partners of the same sex is not sin, but rather a cause of celebration and liberation in Christ. Damage is done to such relationships, it is argued, by the rejection and negative feeling and discrimination which such attitudes attract. A conscientious couple can be pushed to negative and guilt feelings to the detriment of the relationship and their public life. Above all they want to be able to live together publicly and be accepted. This policy would enable them to do so.

310. There are those who believe that rather than adjusting itself to changes in society, the Church is properly a 'change agent', offering to lead society into new understandings. Such a policy would be a very moderate step in that direction.

DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

311. Such steps may be the last straw for those who can only just tolerate a comprehensive Church which they believe to be shaky on scriptural authority and outside the Western Catholic moral discipline. They and many nominal Churchgoers may depart from the Church of England.

312. 'If it is unacceptable for clergy to live with a partner to whom they are not married how can the Church accept a couple of the same sex living together?' The moral norms - the family, sexual intercourse only between married people etc - will be further eroded and the Church will have great difficulty in finding sound ground for an ethical norm.

313. A lack of consensus at this time on many of these matters should not hinder the painstaking work of dealing with these issues step by step. Nor should it drive us to adopting inflexible policies which betray the pastoral task.

#### GROWTH IN CHRIST

314. We recognise that there are two different ways of approaching questions of discipleship. They are summed up in two different types of Christian person - the settler and the pioneer. In terms of the Christian tradition it might be interesting to ask whether we view St. Paul as a settler or a pioneer! The settlers are those Christians who see their discipleship at the present time as obliging them to stand firm over scriptural principles and/or the Catholic tradition of faith and morals. Even at great cost they will maintain the loyalty which they see as being to Christ. This may involve them in standing against current fashions either in the Church or the world and to oppose those of their fellow Christians who seem to be at variance with the revealed mind and will of God. They will stress the images of salt in the lump, or the light on the lampstand and will recognise that the majority view is not necessarily the right view and that unpopularity may be a necessary price to pay. Some would go so far as to say that modern psychological insights are to be kept subordinate to the revelation, so that an individual may have to bear great psychological pain to maintain, for instance, the chastity which the Gospel and his or her sexual condition requires. Both on a personal and a public level, therefore, Christians will pay the price of fidelity to Christ. Pioneer Christians also seeking to be loyal to the tradition will feel more at home with the concepts of growth and the journey of faith and will see in change, with all its cost, the way to which Christ calls them.

315. Throughout our discussion of this subject we have returned again and again to dynamic understandings of Christian life. Moral development, providing structures for the sharing of information in the setting of ministry and maintaining the unity of the Church are all ways of helping both individuals and the Church to negotiate change. Again, when we talk the language of movement we are not just thinking about one group within the Church: All Christians and the whole Church are involved in the dynamics of Christian life and of responding to the changing patterns of life in the world. We wish to suggest three images which, if taken at all seriously, might draw the Church together in a sense of common life and purpose across the diversity of the actual life experience of its members.

#### I GROWTH

316. All Christians are called to grow according to the measure of human life offered to us in Jesus Christ. He is the pattern of human life for which we strive. The Christian tradition has used the language of human growth to offer us insight into our growth as members of Christ. The New Testament uses the pictures of new-born children, young children and adult life to picture different stages of Christian growth. The implications of this are that all are to grow and that the processes of growth are to be permanent features of everyones life in the Church. Pastoral and educative work in the Church has therefore to connect with where people are. People need encouragement on from where they are. Different people will have different needs. This is as true for people's personal relationships as it is for any other aspect of their development in the faith. What is necessary for some may be quite unhelpful for others. The common measure for growth is in the person of Jesus Christ.

#### II JOURNEYING

317. Christian life is a form of pilgrimage - both personal and corporate. There is the journey of personal discipleship - of growing in personal knowledge of God and of oneself. There is the journey of our life with one another in the community of the Church. This image presents us with the need to choose the way with the unknown character of what lies ahead and with the consequent need to live in faith and trust in the one who has made the journey before

us. This image helps us to face up to the need to make choices about the way our lives are to develop. One of the crucial tasks of Christian ministry is in helping individuals and communities at the point of their making choices. Whatever our sexual orientation or history we have choices to make about the route forward in the journey of faithful Christian living. The image of journeying also helps us with the need to face the unknown future. We have been struck by the fact that people do change and are sometimes surprised by where they find themselves to be at any one time in their life in terms of their sexual development. Christian ministry has to take account of the unexpected. The other feature of this image of journeying and pilgrimage is the duty of those involved in ministry to help people see, as far as they can, what sort of path they have chosen. The path of 'not telling' has different sorts of possible futures from one of 'disciplined openness'. The path of celibacy leads to different joys and problems from that of committed relationships. Even if we cannot predict the future, we can share the wisdom of previous travellers.

### III CHANGE

318. This image is also present in the Christian tradition. Belonging to Christ involves us in the possibility of transformation in our lives. The glory of God, reflected through the person of Christ, transforms us (2 Corinthians 3.18). Christian life is about facing and negotiating change in human experience. This is something which God effects in human life through Christ by the Spirit. The Christian community should, therefore, expect to see its members experiencing change in their lives. The way we view and experience our sexuality is part of this and cannot be exempt from it. Again, this is not a matter for homosexual people alone - as though the aim of ministry is to enable them to change whilst everyone else remains the same. It is part of the experience which all the people of God are called to because of their being Christian. What is happening to them is set in the widest possible vision of transformation - the recreation of all things in Christ.

319. These themes of growth, journeying and transformation, offer a sense of mobility to us in a matter which threatens rigidity in the

Church. They remind us that all Christians share together in the search for faithful discipleship - which in honouring the order and tradition of the Church is able to manage change - and all need help and support in this.

320. That drives us back to underline the need for resources for this task, for the proper training of those involved in pastoral care, for programmes of education and methods of working which will be appropriate and helpful, and for open and agreed processes for the professional conduct of ministry. We need a commitment to turn an issue which threatens to hinder the life and work of the Church through fear, into one which can enable us to find new levels of unity and new horizons in pastoral care.

## CHAPTER 11

### DEALING WITH CONFLICT

321. There can be little doubt that questions concerning homosexuality have aroused more interest in the community in recent times. The threat of AIDS and its association with homosexuality has played an important part in this. Because of AIDS it is easy for people to believe that homosexuals are closely associated with the threat of death. In the Church the temptation is there to see AIDS as a form of judgement from God on a wicked lifestyle.

322. On top of this, homosexual people have shown themselves less and less inclined to keep their orientation and lifestyle hidden from the community and the church. There has been a growing demand for recognition and for the whole of our society to be helped away from homophobia and ignorance to a more sensitive understanding of homosexuality. Hence the pressure for including explicit teaching about homosexuality within the education system. Homosexual people are asking for an equal place in our society with their civil and human rights defended.

323. This has led to conflict, both in the wider community and in the Church, about our response to the needs and claims of homosexual people. A particular symbol and focus of the conflict in society has been the debate about Clause 28 in the new Local Government Act which prevents local authorities from doing anything to promote homosexuality. There are deep divisions of opinion, both in the population and in Parliament, about this law and what it is saying about public attitudes to homosexual people.

324. In the Church the growing conflict around the issue is felt at both personal and corporate levels. We have been made aware of the strength of personal feeling which people exhibit on this question. The debate in General Synod in November 1987 on the basis of a private member's motion which attracted a large number of signatures is evidence of the expression of corporate anxiety on this. It would seem that this conflict will persist for some time to come.

325. It is clear, therefore, that there are deep levels of disagreement between members of the Church at all levels on this issue. There is the risk that the Church will divide on this matter resulting in considerable damage to some of the people most closely involved. This is intensified by the deeply personal character of the matter making it hard for people to find the necessary distance for forming judgements. This is particularly difficult for a church which seeks to be inclusive and comprehensive. It is, of course, not the only issue over which we experience deep conflicts. It is one, however, which tests out the nature and doctrine of the Church. This is why we have been concerned lest lobby groups exercise such power in the church that they, in effect, drive their opponents out. The Church is called to proclaim Good News to the whole community, across the range of its pluralism and diversity. Painful and difficult though it may be we are called to resist the comfortable path of having the church made up only of those who happen to fit its predominant mood. Both ends of the debate have got to take each other with much greater seriousness if we are to affirm the unity which is ours in Christ and in the Gospel. This means we have to deal with conflict, finding ways of managing it and turning it to creative possibilities. This has a particularly sharp edge for the episcopacy as the focus of the unity of the church. How are bishops to affirm the unity of the church without excluding particular groups of Christians whose state and way of life raises controversy in the rest of the Church?

326. One of the most difficult tasks is to decide on the level of importance of the issue. For some it is treated as a basic item of faith often out of a concern to hold the Church faithful to the authority of Scripture as the final authority in all matters of faith and morality. Others see it primarily in terms of staying within the discipline of the Western Church and its teaching authority. Others again do not see the question primarily in authority terms. The issue belongs rather to the choices of Christian living - the outworking of a commitment to Jesus Christ in the relational decisions of human life. It is a matter of moral principle and has implications for the pastoral practice and discipline of the Church.

327. It is important to put the issue in its right place and to get it in perspective. Once we have allotted it to the arena of moral deciding what is its significance here? Is this a matter of fundamental value or a matter for liberty of conscience? Even to begin to put our minds to these sorts of procedural issues helps in gaining some leverage on the conflicts experienced around it.

There are three ways of responding to conflict:

i) DENIAL

328. It is possible for Christians either to deny that there is conflict or to behave in a way which refuses to face up to it. Denial may be a tactic used to keep the peace. That may lead to other problems not least to driving people to inconsistencies. This could be the case for bishops in trying to hold together their public role and their private responses. In public they affirm the tradition. In private they hope they will not have their attention drawn to what people are doing in denial of it. The refusal of the heterosexual majority to face the issues presented by homosexual Christians leads to the latter experiencing growing isolation, secrecy and resentment. The Church, for the sake of a quiet life, refuses to face up to the conflict in its midst. Another tactic of denial is to concentrate on other issues which present less stress and conflict.

329. Denial is destructive. It involves a lie because the issue is still present even if smothered or hidden. Things hidden and suppressed have an unhappy habit of coming to the surface in unplanned ways when they are unexpected and unwelcome. Then an ill-prepared Church is made to face them in circumstances not of its choosing.

ii) CONFRONTATION

330. Some within the Church see the issues as so vital to their perceptions of the well-being of the Church, that they treat them as issues over which it is legitimate to confront the Church. This is the style of conflict management preferred by the politically minded in the Church, and by those whose structure of authority is narrowly and exclusively defined.



331. This is the mode employed by lobbies, those pressure groups which emerge in the life of a community and focus on aspects of the truth which the lobbies feel are being ignored by others. Lobbies thrive on the fact that our culture welcomes freedom of speech; they do not, however, themselves always welcome the pluralism of views which freedom of speech implies.

332. Sometimes lobbies act as a prophetic voice within the Church, calling the establishment to face up to issues that otherwise would be denied. Sometimes they go further, and seek to coerce the community into legislation which will affect the whole group.

333. Lobbies play the political process, and are essentially manipulative. They are built on a model of society which depends on social conflict for social change. The Church needs to evaluate the rationale and methods of lobbies to determine the extent to which they are compatible with the Gospel of Christ.

334. Confrontation, especially over an issue involving personal sensitivities and personal hurts such as homosexuality, can be counter-productive and destructive. It is also a tactic designed to enable one group to crush the other. It can be sectarian in type leading to the exclusion from the Church of whoever has lost the battle.

### iii) CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT

335. A third possible approach for the Church is to find a way of handling conflict in which different viewpoints are shared in an atmosphere of trust, and willingness to learn and grow. Such environments are not natural to the heart of sinful people, but are required by the New Testament understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness is a willingness to recognise wrong held together with a refusal to allow the wrong to destroy the relationship. It sets aside the law of retaliation, and refuses the way of destructive confrontation.

336. Creative engagement is possible only when adversaries can understand themselves both to be in the role of learners, or as the

New Testament has its 'disciples'. Only as each is willing to listen to the other as a brother or sister in Christ, and to learn from the other as one who has been gifted by God, can Christ be our peace, and the dividing walls of hostility be broken down (Ephesians 2).

337. This does not lead to a 'fudging' compromise of agreement at the lowest common denominator. It is the recognition that one Christian can withstand another to his face as Paul did to Peter at Antioch. It requires one Christian to bear another's burdens to the point of restoring a brother who is 'overtaken in a trespass' (Galatians 6.1ff). It can even in extremity lead to effective exclusion from fellowship for gross and blatant sin (cf 1 Corinthians 5). It will certainly take seriously the requirements of restraint in one person's behaviour for the sake of the consciences of those who he regards as 'weaker brethren' (Romans 14). But its motivation will be the speaking of truth in love, so that the whole Body of Christ may grow into maturity (Ephesians 4).

338. What sort of tactics and perspectives do we need to enable the conflict that exists to happen in a more creative and less destructive manner?

#### CREATING SPACE

339. By creating space we mean enabling the church to face conflict and to be willing to create cultures within its own life for dealing with it. People need permission in the Church to be in conflict and not to feel that this is necessarily a bad experience. They can do this out of an acceptance of the duty to take one another with seriousness. In this report we have stressed the need for real communication between homosexual people and the rest of the church and between groups who disagree at a whole variety of levels. The task is to engage with what others think and experience with whom we disagree. It is possible to create experiences, e.g. workshop designs, to enable this to happen.

#### CREATING RESPECT

340. People involved in working on the conflicts between them need to respect one another. That is possible when they agree to the basic

norms for the work to be done which all will adhere to. These agreed rules and procedures are not just about the rules of debate but about how the whole person can be engaged in the task. Thus theological, pastoral and experiential aspects can be brought into play. Educational skills are needed for these activities.

#### CREATING WISDOM

341. To provide space for all to grow in wisdom and so to have a deeper understanding and be better resourced for making decisions, may require the proper exercise of authority in group work. Those who hold positions of authority in the Church need to be willing to exercise power in leadership to enable groups to function. Indeed the protection of the group and their sense of permission to share their own convictions and experience may well depend on the willingness of those in authority setting the pace and the boundaries. The process needs structure and leadership to hold people to the agreed structure and process. By such means space is provided for all to encounter truth in a new and refreshing way and to grow in wisdom in the knowledge of God and of one another.

#### CREATING COMMON GROUND

342. There is a crucial task in discerning what is being said and experienced as people work on the issues which have brought them into conflict with each other. In our own group we have often been in disagreement. There are clear and contrasting approaches among us. Yet, in the process of honest engagement, we have discovered a sense of common life in the Gospel and considerable common ground without muddling the distinctive approaches which each has brought. There is a key role for the leadership of the Church in holding on to the issues, in being present in the midst of the necessary conflicts which have to take place if movement is to happen, and then using their office to point the way forward in both understanding and pastoral practice.

343. We believe it possible to create workshops in which the leaders of the Church can be helped to work on these matters in preparation for their initiating a process of work throughout the Church. There can be no denying the conflict which this issue has aroused in the

Church. Unless there are clear strategies for dealing with it it is likely to go on being a source of division in the Church and destructive in the lives of the people involved. The bishops need to give serious attention to the way in which they want the Church to handle this conflict.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND FUTURE TASKS

### SOME GENERAL MATTERS

344. We believe the bishops and other leaders of the Church will find help in their ministry in response to these issues in continuing to distinguish between the different levels of the Church's work: the theological task, the pastoral task, and the task in the public realm.

345. We commend to the Church the method which we have used ourselves in working on these matters. We believe it to be in keeping with Anglican methodology to allow both the resources of the tradition and the resources of contemporary experience to dialogue with each other. Both ends of this task need to be taken with great seriousness in their own right. We have indicated the boundaries for continued theological work and have provided some signposts which may help in the task. Much of our work has been, by nature, provisional. Our report indicates a number of unresolved questions which need a great deal more work done on them. We have encountered areas where we have not been able to make progress because no-one as yet has the necessary knowledge to build secure frameworks. The Church needs to equip us to live with this kind of 'not-knowingness' rather than allowing people to feel it always necessary to pursue ultimate conclusions. We believe it is important that safe opportunities be created for work to be done on the theological issues by people who will bring the integrity of both the tradition and the experience to the discussion.

346. We believe that the bishops, as the focus of the unity of the Church, need to affirm the catholicity and inclusiveness of the Church. The bishops have an important role in helping the Church live with unresolved issues. The way to resolve the conflict and tensions between groups is not by the exclusion of one or more minority groups.

#### SOME SPECIFIC MATTERS

347. All of these considerations place heavy responsibilities on the Church's leadership in the present climate. We recommend that the bishops make use of their programmes of in-service training to work on the issues, both at a personal level and in terms of the development of corporate strategies. They may be helped in this by making use of their regional meetings to carry forward a structured programme of work on these matters. We would recommend the use of professional help in this task and are aware that there are people in the Church with the skills to assist.

348. The lead the bishops give in committing themselves to do their own work will strengthen their capacity to initiate programmes of education and reflection more widely in the Church, giving the whole Church opportunity to connect with the issues in a more creative manner.

349. It is important that the bishops are clear in their expectations concerning the selection, training and ordination of people to the ministry of the Church. Are they supportive of the present guidelines and procedures laid down by ACCM? Candidates, ACCM, and the colleges need to be clear on the expectations of the bishops and also need to be aware of how the bishops will handle the consequences of the policy they adopt. It is, therefore, vital that the bishops not only consider their policy but also before settling it, reflect on its likely consequences for everyone involved.

350. We have been made very conscious of the poor experience of the Church encountered by many homosexual people. The Good News of Jesus Christ is for all people including homosexual people. Attitudes of rejection make it hard for those who seek to represent Jesus Christ to this part of the human community to be taken with any seriousness. The Bishops, as the chief pastors of the Church, have a particular responsibility to set a tone of welcome and acceptance in these matters. There is a need to publicly affirm those in the Church who are engaged in projects and work with homosexual people.

351. The Church also has a critical role in the public realm of bearing witness to the Gospel by seeking to defend the civil rights of homosexual people against those who would discriminate against them. We do not need to share other people's convictions and lifestyles in order to defend their human dignity as members of a particular society. We believe that it is both possible and essential for people of all theological and moral persuasions on this issue to unite in opposing the forces of homophobia in society and all attempts at denying homosexual people their basic civil rights.

352. In a number of places in our report we have identified matters where we believe there is a need for more work to be done. These include:-

- the whole issue of complementarity and creativity in human sexual relationships set in the context of the Christian tradition.
- the different understandings offered in the debate about the aetiology of homosexuality.
- the implications for the Church of England of the work done by other Churches on these questions.
- the response to be made by the Church to the civil rights issues.
- the strengthening of the process and content of pastoral care in relation to homosexual people.

353. The bishops need to decide on a procedure for continuing work. Boards and Councils of the Church should be ready to take on tasks assigned to them by the bishops so that a process of work can be undertaken in pursuit of a strategy aimed at working on the tensions and conflicts at stake in these issues.

354. The Working Party wishes to underline the importance of the way things are done as well as the content of the issues themselves. Throughout we should not lose sight of our calling to be the Church proclaiming and living out the welcome which God offers to all people in Jesus Christ.

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

APPENDIX I

THE BISHOPS' RESPONSES TO THE REQUESTS OF THE WORKING PARTY

355. In 1987 the Working Party wrote, in confidence, to each of the diocesan bishops requesting their views and comments on the issues being addressed by the Working Party. In particular the Working Party asked for information and comment on matters falling within their responsibilities and, not least, with regard to clergy, other employees and ordinands. Comment was invited on the social and cultural context in which they carried forward their work and on any matter within our terms of reference on which they wanted to offer us information or views.

356. Replies were received from 36 bishops (some diocesan bishops had consulted their area bishops). We are particularly grateful for this response. The majority took care to set out their own thinking and some had discussed it with their immediate staff. Many raised theological questions that are unresolved for them. Almost a third explicitly started from a clear conviction that homosexual orientation was morally neutral but homosexual practice was incompatible with Christian discipleship. There was very little support for the position that the Church should come out in open support of permanent partnerships.

357. Their responses indicated the following range of opinion and concern:

- i) Most bishops who commented directly on the question of ordination indicated that they would not sponsor or ordain anyone whom they knew to be homosexually active. Whilst there was a predominant desire to exercise care and compassion towards homosexual clergy, the bishops indicated that they were opposed to homosexual practice.



- ii) There was a significant level of concern about scandal. Some commented on the way they approached cases involving public disquiet. Others appeared to take the line that, provided individuals were discreet, they either did not wish to know what they did in their private lives or felt it inappropriate to get involved unless invited.
- iii) A small group said that it was not an issue in their dioceses - meaning that to their knowledge they did not have any practising homosexuals among their clergy.
- iv) A minority took a more liberal view indicating their concern to judge people according to their maturity and attitude and expressing concern for the poor experience in the Church of homosexual clergy.

358. We noted that the bishops did not comment, possibly because of the way we asked our questions, about lay experience on the one hand, or about their attitude to homosexuals in the House of Bishops on the other. The issue seemed to be at a distance from them and mainly about clergy problems.

#### SOME ANXIETIES

359. The bishops replies suggested that they felt to be under some pressure on the issue. A number of matters were mentioned. The spread of AIDS and concern about this in and out of the Church, concern about the conservative attitude of lay people and the effect this would have if they took a different line, concern about scandal and its effects on opinion, the lack of an agreed policy was seen as both a good and a bad thing, and the general climate of the present times - all these were quoted as matters of concern. Some bishops felt themselves to be in the public eye at the present.

#### THE PREDOMINANT PASTORAL CONCERN

360. Many bishops commented on the outstanding contribution made by homosexual priests. Some saw this as a result of the struggle such priests had had with their own sexual identity. This was directly related to their growth to maturity and to the development of skills for the work of a priest.

361. There was considerable concern about the need for support for homosexual clergy. There was an awareness of the loneliness which many experienced and a lack of serious opportunity for spiritual guidance. There was a distaste for gossip and rumour and of unfounded assumptions concerning single-sex friendships. Bishops deplored the climate that meant that people who lived together were under constant suspicion.

362. Some questions were asked about theological education for the ministry. Some had been faced with the question of the ordination of a practising homosexual just before the ordination itself. Questions were raised about the advice offered to selectors for ACCM conferences.

#### QUESTIONS REMAINING

363. Bishops recognised that questions concerning the interpretation of scripture and its use in developing moral theology for human sexuality were, in some crucial respects, unresolved.

364. There were a variety of assumptions about aetiology. Some used the language of stunted relational development, others of 'handicap'. Several wanted to resist the uniqueness of this question. The comment 'we are all handicapped' illustrates this.

365. A major theme emerging from the bishops' responses was the relationship between the public and private aspects of the question. On the one hand the bishops stressed that clergy needed to recognise the public nature of their office. On the other hand they spoke of the need for discretion, implying that homosexuals should keep their orientation private and even secret.

366. There was widespread recognition of the dilemmas in which this placed bishops. A blanket condemnation of homosexual practice might make it difficult to make a proper distinction between stable partnerships and casual promiscuity. A hard line position may lead to deceit. A more liberal one is open to abuse. Some bishops clearly feel that they are colluding with deception and encouraging dishonesty which are themselves morally corrupting.

## THE BISHOPS, CLERGY, ORDINANDS - AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

367. There are a number of ways in which the attention of the bishops may be drawn to these issues:

i) WHEN QUESTIONS ARE RAISED ABOUT CLERGY BEHAVIOUR

These may include incidents involving possible breach of the law - soliciting or indecency charges, concern raised by the parish about clergy conduct - someone has moved in with the vicar or allegations of homosexual behaviour following marriage breakdown.

ii) WITHIN THE SETTING OF THE EPISCOPAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLERGY AND ORDINANDS

ACCOM or colleges may draw the attention of the bishop to the homosexual lifestyle of an ordinand. A clergy person may, in the privacy of their regular pastoral appraisal by the bishop, declare their orientation and lifestyle.

iii) AS A RESULT OF PUBLIC DEBATE

Concern about AIDS has undoubtedly contributed to a wider public debate inside and outside the Church on sexual ethics. Bishops, as public leaders of the Church, may feel under considerable pressure to declare both their view of the issues and their procedures for pastoral discipline in the Church.

## HOW ARE BISHOPS TO DEAL WITH THESE QUESTIONS?

### WORK ON PERSONAL ATTITUDES

368. It is important that bishops, if they are to offer pastoral help to individuals and guidance to the Church, should have done their own personal work on the questions. The understanding of ourselves, as far as we may, is crucial to the task. Attitudes to matters of sexuality and specifically to homosexuality may be rooted deep in personal training and development. There may be a considerable contrast between the attitudes which prevailed in the generation in which the present episcopate was brought up and those which prevail for younger clergy. The relationship between 'feeling' and 'thinking' is crucial to this question. The capacity to reflect on personal development is vital in those who wish to offer help to others in their personal relational growth. This is one of the reasons why we believe that bishops need to provide themselves with good opportunities for finding training and support.

#### THE FORMING OF A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

369. Bishops have a particular responsibility to guard the faith and interpret it for the Church and to the world. The report, in the setting of work previously done, is designed to help bishops identify the basic theological themes at stake in the face of the contemporary challenge. Bishops may find it valuable, even in the face of diversity of view on the particular issues, to assess the Anglican tradition in moral theology, to reaffirm it and to state its method afresh in the modern context. To agree on method would be a major step forward. Thus the bishops are bound to consider the character of the relationship between scripture, the tradition and reason (within which we include experience).

370. It would seem that, on the whole, the bishops take a conservative view of the tradition and its meaning for the question of homosexuality. Very few seemed willing to countenance homosexual practice as an acceptable option for Christians. Nevertheless, there is a real debate among bishops about the position which the Church should adopt and that reflects a wider debate in the Church as a whole. This issue is therefore a further example of something on which conflict exists in the Church. Bishops need to help the Church develop strategies for the management of conflict. We have suggested ways of making progress in Chapter 11 of the report. This is particularly crucial for bishops who see themselves as the foci of the unity of the Church. That unity needs to be demonstrated in clear and agreed ways for the management and, where possible, resolution of conflict.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPLE AND PASTORAL PRACTICE

371. Here a distinction needs to be made between the personal view of the bishop and any corporate position taken by the Church. Bishops need to be clear as to what is determining their pastoral policy - is it their own view of the subject or are they acting in a role as custodians of the mind of the Church? Just as there is a need to distinguish the exegetical task from the interpretative task in handling scripture, so we need to distinguish the task of establishing fundamental moral values from their use in pastoral care and discipline. The pastoral task has to have its base in both

theological principle and experiential reality. There is no escape from the building up of a fund of experience in actual case-work. Here, again, attention needs to be paid to the training and support of bishops' in the doing of this work. Clear principles and procedures for pastoral practice are vital - ones which those who encounter the pastoral situation can both understand and identify with.

BISHOPS WHO REPLIED:

Bath and Wells	Bradford	Bristol
Canterbury	Carlisle	Chelmsford
Chester	Chichester	Coventry
Dunwich	Durham	Ely
Exeter	Europe	Guildford
Leicester	Lichfield	Lincoln
Liverpool	Manchester	Newcastle
Norwich	Oxford	Portsmouth
Ripon	Rochester	Sheffield
Sodor and Man	Southwark	Kingston
Woolwich	Stepney	Truro
Wakefield	Winchester	York

## APPENDIX II

### BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

#### POLICY STATEMENT

1. The British Council of Churches is an equal opportunities employer. The aim of this policy is:
  - (a) To ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the ground of sex, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, colour, or national or ethnic origin or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable;
  - (b) To ensure that, so far as the law allows, positive action is taken to promote equality of opportunity.
  
2. Although the British Council of Churches and Christian Aid are separate employers, this policy statement covers the whole of the Council except when otherwise stated.
  
3. The Council may delegate to committees or to its employees (including the General Secretary's Meeting and the Staff Management Team of Christian Aid) any of the tasks referred to in this statement except the receipt and consideration of the annual report referred to in paragraph 12 or the proposals referred to in paragraph 13.

#### RECRUITMENT

4. The Council will consider, seek and use the most effective ways of bringing job vacancies to the attention of persons who may be disadvantaged on the grounds mentioned in paragraph 1 (e.g. advertising in the ethnic minority press, notifying particular job centres, informing particular Church networks).

#### SELECTION

5. In preparing job descriptions, profiles of post-holders, required qualifications, etc., the Council will take care (subject to paragraph 6) to ensure that no requirement or condition is included which will disadvantage any member of a particular group.

6. The Council believes that all members of its staff should be in sympathy with its aims. For certain posts, the Council believes that this justifies the requirement that the post-holder should belong to a member Church of the Council, or to some Christian Church. The Council is mindful, however, that such a requirement could lead to indirect discrimination if it were imposed in situations where it was not relevant to the job concerned. In order to minimise the risk of such discrimination the Christian Aid Board (in relation to Christian Aid posts) or the Executive Committee (in relation to all other posts) will consider for each existing or new post to which such a requirement is applied whether it is justified.

7. Within three months of the adoption of this policy statement by the Executive Committee of the Council, the Council will review its appointment, short-listing and interviewing procedures to ensure that they meet the aims of this policy and will, from time to time thereafter, continue to review such procedures (together with grievance and disciplinary procedures) to ensure that they continue to meet those aims.

#### TRAINING

8. The Council recognises the crucial importance of training in sustaining an effective equal opportunities policy. The Christian Aid Board (in relation to its members, members of its Committees and Christian Aid staff) or the Executive Committee of the Council (in relation to its members, members of Boards and Committees and other staff) shall each year determine what amount shall be available to be spent on:

- (a) Training which will, so far as the law allows, enable employees from disadvantaged groups to fulfil their highest potential;
- (b) Training to enable those responsible for the selection and promotion of staff or the operation of disciplinary or grievance procedures to act in a manner which minimises the risk of discrimination.

#### DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

9. The Council is determined that no employee should suffer any form of sexual or racial discrimination or harassment. Any such

discrimination or harassment by an employee which is established after proper investigation will be regarded as gross misconduct for the purposes of disciplinary procedures.

#### POSITIVE ACTION

10. Before advertising any posts, the Christian Aid Board (in relation to Christian Aid posts) or the Executive Committee (in relation to all other posts) shall consider whether, in the light of the number of persons currently employed who are likely to be disadvantaged by the matters referred to in paragraph 1(a), the advertisement should state that applications are particularly welcomed from a specified group of people.

#### MONITORING AND RECORD KEEPING

11. The Council will keep records of the gender, ethnic origin and disability (if any) of each staff member, job applicant and interviewee. Such information shall be kept solely for the purpose of monitoring this policy and the information relating to any individual shall not (subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1985), without the consent of that individual, be disclosed to any person other than persons designated by the Council to keep such records.

12. The Christian Aid Board (in respect of Christian Aid posts) and the Executive Committee of the Council shall receive and consider annually a report on the matters mentioned in paragraph 13 and indicating the number of persons who have been employed by the Council during the period covered by the report, broken down by age and grade, and by gender, ethnic origin and disability.

13. It shall be the duty of the persons referred to in paragraph 15 to report through the General Secretary or the Director of Christian Aid to the Christian Aid Board or the Executive Committee of the Council (as the case may be) any situation in which discrimination or lack of opportunity is occurring and to propose any steps which may be taken to remedy the matter and it shall be the duty of the Board or Committee to consider those proposals. This shall be done in the report referred to in paragraph 12 or earlier in cases of urgency.



#### IMPLEMENTATION

14. It shall be the duty of all employees of the Council to give effect to this policy. A copy of this policy shall be given to each existing staff member as soon as possible after its adoption and a copy shall also be given to each person who is invited to be interviewed for a post with the Council. Particular responsibilities relate to those (including members of the Executive Committee) involved in the selection and recruitment of staff and the operation of disciplinary and grievance procedures.

15. The Personnel Officers of the Council and of Christian Aid shall have a general oversight of the monitoring of this policy to which end they are not to be regarded as part of the line management of the Council but as being directly responsible to the General Secretary or the Director of Christian Aid (as the case may be) and through them to the Committee or Board.

#### RESOURCES

16. The Council undertakes to review from time to time and, in particular when each annual budget is drawn up, what resources are required to make this policy effective.

#### CONSULTATION

17. As part of the monitoring of this policy and before making any changes to it, the Council will consult with the bodies representing staff members of the Council and any trades unions recognised by the Council and shall consider any representations made by such bodies or trades unions.



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