

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



The Bishops' report

Sir, On 5 February the General Synod of the Church of England voted down a "Take Note" motion on a report issued by the "Bishops' Reflection Group on Sexuality". This directed future discussion to take place in the context of "Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church". That is despite inputs from the "Shared Conversations" process and other investigations.

A consequence of the vote means that the Church of England is now forced to consider a more fully inclusive approach. This is also a situation where the traditional teaching of the Church can be tested by science and psychology and this is an area where I have been active in my own research. In this study it is shown that there is a fundamental contradiction between science and the traditional teaching of the Church.

I take note of clauses 32 and 33 in the report. Clause 32 notes that: "It would also need to be acknowledged that some deep-seated questions are likely to come to the fore in addressing these matters. In particular, issues of identity that are both controversial and profoundly personal would need to be faced... Can the Church of England establish a consistent tone and culture when it encompasses those who hold to some sharply differing moral judgments about those choices in this case?"

Clause 33 notes: "This is therefore a critical and highly challenging area for further work. Tackling it well will be crucial for everything that follows". Yet despite these caveats it is made clear in Clause 22 that: "There was a clear (although not unanimous) weight of opinion in favour of the option framed in the following terms: Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church".

It would be presumptuous of me to assume that clauses 32 and 33 refer directly to the work I have undertaken. However, I also have reason to believe that the Bishops' Reflection Group have been aware of it. Not only have its results been fed into the Church of England at the highest possible level from before the Shared Conversations process, I happen to know personally one of the Bishops on the Reflection Group, and also her husband, who is a highly esteemed Vicar. Details of this work can be found at <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>.

The Bishops and you, the readers, may agree or disagree with the results of this research, but that is not the point. By declaring that there are to be no changes to the traditional teaching of the Church, while at the same time noting that challenging work still needs to be undertaken already identifies an inconsistency in the report. It also enforces preconditions on the future direction of work.

Three years of listening in the "Shared Conversations Process" should have told the Bishops that there is a moral duality inherent in gender and sexually variant behaviour, whereby gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities in ways that conform to the highest moral standards of their own

A worrying vote by the Synod

Sir, It is worrying that the report of the result of the vote by the Synod of the Church of England shows there is significant disagreement between members of the clergy and the rest of the Church, as represented by bishops and laity, about how to interpret Scriptural teaching about marriage. One would have hoped for clarity from church leadership.

One would have expected that clergy would know that marriage is about more than just love between two human beings; after all they remind us in every marriage service that one key purpose is the procreation and nurture of children, which does need a man and a woman. The Christian church is founded on the Bible, which clearly teaches God requires obedience as a prerequisite for his blessing.

J Longstaff,
Buxted

societies are to be highly regarded, while those who misuse these relationships should be severely condemned for their acts.

It should also have told them that much gender and sexually variant behaviour is about the search for love and identity; it is not for sex.

The scientific studies also confirm that the same moral duality must exist: and they further affirm the identity-driven nature of these conditions. Since that moral duality is inherent to gender and sexually variant behaviour it must be present in all societies at all times. Therefore changes in culture and doctrine can only reveal or hide the duality that is found.

For much of the last two millennia that moral duality has been hidden from view by the criminalisation and condemnation that has been enforced by secular society and the Christian Church. The social changes in the last 60 years have again allowed this moral duality to be observed. The same duality could be seen at the time of Christ.

While cultural and theological issues are extensively discussed in the report there is no reference to science or experiential evidence whatever. The mass of evidence from the major professional medical and psychological institutions is ignored. Indeed the use of the words "same-sex attracted" and "choices" in the report suggest a mind-set that seeks to dismiss these developments in science in an attempt to produce a continued justification for the traditional teaching of the Church.

Sadly this denial is not new. The thrust of the 2017 report of the Bishops' Reflection Group continued, and sought to strengthen that process. The refusal to sanction this report in the "Take Note" debate demands that change must be faced.

You will, I hope, understand the great level of anger and betrayal felt by LGBTI people when the Bishops' Reflection Group, which does not contain (at least as far as we know) even one person who identifies himself or herself as LGBTI, gives a verdict on these issues that dismisses, ignores or fails to understand the message that many of the LGBTI participants in the Shared Conversations process have sought to give. This has often been at a considerable cost.

At issue are the fundamental contradictions between science and the traditional teaching of the Christian Church, which presumes that gender and sexually variant behaviour is invariably a falling from grace, and a lifestyle choice that forsakes the pursuit of committed loving and fulfilling relationships for the likes of sex.

Discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is also a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief. The transformation needed to gain acceptability in the Greco/Roman culture brought the Church to collude with these secular demands rather than to challenge them. Not only has this consent reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still continues to give religious legitimacy to them.

In many African countries extreme penalties against homosexual behaviour are being advocated or applied. There is no doubt that there was a great deal of sexual abuse in first century society, where the blatant abuses of power gave permission for extreme abuses of same-sex acts. However to condemn all gender and sexually variant behaviour for the abuses of some, is akin to saying today that all members of a minority community are terrorists because some engage in terrorist acts.

In the US at the present time, senior members of the Catholic Church have been using its traditional teaching to collude with the conservative Christian right when they condemn all transgender people as invariably being in pursuit of illicit or depraved sex. The actions of the present president illustrate how easily this scapegoating can occur. Instead of recognising the moral duality that is inherent in gender and sexual behaviour, without exception all of these people have been made the scapegoats for abusive sex. Harm has been done by the medical misdiagnoses that have been, and continue to be made.

The persecution and slaughter of gender- and sexually-variant people, not only in Christianity but in all other religions, states and cultures that have drawn their teachings from this has been enormous, and repentance is needed for these acts.

The aspiration by the Church of England to atone for past injustices is fully accepted. The desire expressed in the Bishops' reflection group is welcome within the limits it sets. However, repentance and a change of tone is not enough. If there is no move to reconsider the Christian doctrine that has led to or supported this discrimination, the same misuses will continue to occur.

My concern is therefore not just about LGBTI issues, it is about how the Church of England and the Catholic Church in particular are destroying the credibility of the whole of Christianity through their resolute pursuit of a doctrine that has been disproved in scientific terms, rejected by the great majority of the relevant professional institutions, the lived experiences of LGBTI people, and by others who know how LGBTI people live their lives.

I welcome the rejection of the Bishops' Sexuality Report in the "Take Note" debate. This is because it totally ignores many of these issues. The arguments it presents are based entirely on theology and culture, without reference to the other concerns.

If the Synod had voted to accept this report it would have been putting a straitjacket on any further discussion of these serious matters, which by the report's own admission still need to be addressed. To people outside the Church its acceptance would have been seen as yet another refusal of the Christian Church to face up to the self-evident problems of its own creation, and an act of unjustified discrimination against a group of people, many of whom are trying to live open, honest, faithful and committed Christian lives.

Susan Gilchrist,
Via email

Rome's views

Sir, Robert Williams accuses the Church of England of having revised St Paul on women's ordination and headship. I assume he refers to those passages in Titus and Timothy that state that an Elder or Bishop must be a man married to one woman. Has not Rome varied this by insisting a Bishop is barred from being married? This is at variance with the teaching of the Catholic Church from whom Rome broke away in 1054. The Old Catholics are still waiting for Rome as well as the Church of England to return to the fold.

In the above passages there is no full-stop after 'must be a man'. This means they can, though not necessarily should be, read as concentrating on the qualities rather than the gender. What is tragic is that people seem to want to set aside these qualities as well.

Colin Bricher,
Northampton

Write to The Church of England Newspaper, 14 Great College Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3RX.
or you can send an E-mail to letters@churchnewspaper.com. Tweet at [@churchnewspaper](https://twitter.com/churchnewspaper)
If you are sending letters by e-mail, please include a street address. NB: Letters may be edited



www.churchnewspaper.com



cen@churchnewspaper.com



facebook.com/churchnewspaper



[@churchnewspaper](https://twitter.com/churchnewspaper)

