

Faith&Thought



Relating advances in knowledge to faith within society
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In this issue:

- **Scientific Insight into the Causes of Same-sex Attraction**
- Eleanor Whiteway
- **Homosexuality: Biblical Aspects**
- Terry Griffith
- **Homosexuality: A Rapidly Changing Society**
- Stephen Keyworth
- **Homosexuality: Pastoral Aspects**
- Simon Woodman

FAITH and THOUGHT

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Contents

Editorial		1
Prize Essay		2
Faith and Thought Symposium 2015		3
Scientific Insight into the Causes of Same-sex Attraction	Eleanor Whiteway	4
Homosexuality: Biblical Aspects	Terry Griffith	18
Homosexuality: A Rapidly Changing Society	Stephen Keyworth	33
Homosexuality: Pastoral Aspects	Simon Woodman	40
Book Reviews		47
Letter to the Editor		51
Application for Enrolment		55

Editorial

Although the debate about the Christian attitude towards homosexuality has been going on for several decades, it was the passing of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act on 17th July 2013 that caused Christians in Great Britain to reconsider their attitudes towards homosexuality. We decided that our symposium for 2014 should be devoted to this topic and we invited a number of speakers to address the issue of **Homosexuality: Scientific, Biblical, Social and Pastoral Aspects**. One of the aims of the Victoria Institute, set out in its constitution was to 'Investigate fully and impartially the most important questions of Philosophy and Science, but more especially those that bear upon the great truths revealed in Holy Scripture' and so each speaker has been free to make his or her own contribution, which may not necessarily reflect the views of the officers and council. We include the papers in the journal and invite readers' comments and questions. The speakers were Eleanor Whiteway who is a researcher at the Faraday Institute in the University of Cambridge, the Rev. Dr. Terry Griffith who is the senior pastor at Trinity Baptist Church, Bexleyheath, the Rev. Stephen Keyworth who is Faith and Society Team Leader at the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Rev. Dr. Simon Woodman, co-minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London.

2 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Faith and Thought Prize Essay Competition

A prize of £500 is offered for the best essay on the subject

Designer Babies?

Closing date 30th. June 2015.

Competition Conditions:

1. Faith and Thought will own the copyright of the essay, though the author will normally be permitted to embody it in a later, more comprehensive work.
2. It should not exceed 7,000 words, excluding documentation, typewritten, with double spacing and 2 cm margins.
3. It should be submitted to the Honorary Secretary's address, accompanied by a brief synopsis of 200 words setting out which parts are claimed to be original, along with a sealed envelope with a motto outside, and the author's name and address inside.
4. As an encouragement to young writers, candidates, where applicable, may add to their motto the words, 'Under 25' or state their date of birth: neither is published.
5. Entries will be professionally refereed and if the referees consider the prize should be divided between two authors, the trustees' decision will be final.
6. If no submissions are deemed worthy, the right to withhold the prize and to publicise another competition thereafter will be exercised.
7. The prize is normally announced at the subsequent AGM.
8. Officers of the Victoria Institute may not participate.
9. Submission of an entry will indicate candidates' assent to all these conditions.

Guidance Notes.

1. The essay should be factual not (science) fiction.
2. It can be scientific, theological, philosophical or a mixture of one or more of these.
3. Ethical issues should be addressed e.g. What is the purpose of designer babies? Who would benefit from their creation? Would it herald a better 'brave new world'? What about human rights, individuality and autonomy? Who would most benefit and how might potential misuses be avoided?

Honorary Secretary: Dr. Alan Kerry. 3, Dukes Place, 19, Watford Road, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth, Herts WD3 3DP email APKerry@aol.com

Faith and Thought Symposium 2015
‘Dealing with Conflict – Christian Advances’

How can Christians be peacemakers in a violent world?
Four speakers will bring four different perspectives.

Saturday 10th October from 10:30am to 5:00pm,

**Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church,
235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8EP**

Millius Palayiwa, a lawyer by background, has just stepped down as the Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to go free-lance in the field of peacemaking, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. While working for International Alert he facilitated the talks between the Government of Sierra Leone and the rebel movement that culminated with the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in 1996.

Andy Dipper is Chief Operating Officer and Deputy CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide. He has led various organisations and spent many years living and working in Afghanistan, Nepal and Kenya and has considerable experience in the areas of Religious Freedom and Conflict Resolution.

Philip Orr lives in Carrickfergus, a few miles north east of Belfast. He has been involved over the last ten years in community activism, dealing with the challenges of post-Troubles Northern Ireland by means of workshops, talks and encounter groups. He has also written about faith-based community projects in inner city Belfast and about the role of the church in pro-British working class communities.

Sheldon Thomas has an unprecedented insight into gangs through his own experience as a leading gang member in the 1970s. He founded ‘Gangline’ in 2007 to provide help and support to young men and women involved in gang culture. He is also one of the advisors to the Home Office on the ‘Ending Gang Violence’ Strategy (2011 - Present)

**The event is free to members of Faith and Thought (or those joining on the day).
Otherwise just £10 (£7 concessions).**

Scientific Insights into the Causes of Same-sex Attraction

Eleanor Whiteway

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to provide a whistle-stop tour of some of the scientific research that has been conducted in the past century and a half into the causes of same-sex attraction, from the biological sciences, medical sciences, psychology and social science¹. It examines three possible broad aetiologies (causal pathways) of same-sex attraction – choice, environment and biology, and reviews the empirical support for some of the dozens of potential causes which people have, at one time or another, suggested might be responsible for homosexuality.

Judged both as a social issue, and from within an explicitly Christian framework, this subject is important, because what people think about the causes of same-sex attraction hugely affects their attitudes to social, political and theological questions concerning the treatment of gay people in both legal and religious settings. In 2014, Uganda passed a draconian new law punishing homosexuality which was explicitly based on an understanding that homosexuality is a choice, that can be freely reversed. The Ugandan government promised that if new evidence came to light proving otherwise, they would rescind the law². In the US in the past few years, there has been a vigorous legal debate over whether same-sex attraction is immutable, because homosexuals cannot be granted special protection from discrimination as a ‘suspect class’ under the Constitution unless their same-sex attraction is unchangeable or outside their control. That debate is still legally unresolved. For a religious example, we can look at the catechism of the Catholic Church, which states that homosexual acts are ‘intrinsically disordered’. What causes same-sex attraction clearly matters in a variety of different ways, and an incorrect or overly simplistic understanding of the causes of same-sex attraction may well lead to conclusions that are ungrounded, impractical or logically invalid. At the same time, this debate is often not driven by a discussion of the science, but by agendas, such as the desire for legal protection. The annual Values and Beliefs poll conducted in the US by Gallup shows that opinion among the American public on this issue has changed markedly in the past 30 years. In 2013, 47% of Americans believed that being gay or lesbian is something you are born with, up from 13% in 1978³. Is this opinion justified by the science?

Defining same-sex attraction

Before plunging into the causes of same-sex attraction, it would be wise to first briefly give a few definitions. Although the terms are often used this way, same-sex attraction and homosexuality are not synonymous. Attraction is just one facet of sexual orientation, along with several other related but distinct concepts such as sexual behaviour and self-identity. These facets may not always overlap, and it’s important not to conflate them. A same-sex attracted person may not engage in same-

sex sexual behaviour, or define themselves as homosexual. Conversely, a person with no same-sex attraction may engage in same-sex sexual behaviour, due to social pressure or limited opportunity. Care must be taken when extrapolating theories about sexual attraction from work that didn't measure attraction directly.

Readers may be familiar with the 10% statistic – the claim that around 10% of the population in Western countries is gay. However, measuring same-sex attraction accurately is a lot more complicated than simply asking 'are you gay or straight?', or even asking 'are you attracted to people of the same sex, or not? Sexual attraction is not dichotomous, but exists on a continuum. This was first recognised by Alfred Kinsey⁴, who devised the Kinsey scale, a 7-point scale for measuring different degrees of sexual attraction, from exclusively opposite-sex at number 0, to exclusively same-sex at number 6. Kinsey scales are the best instrument currently available to capture the complexity of people's sexual lives, though many researchers use a reduced 3-point or 5-point scale to make their statistics easier.

There are additional complications too. Which number you assign yourself to on a Kinsey scale depends not just on your 'true' sexual attractions, but on how the original question was phrased, how many different options are available, and the degree of anonymity guaranteed. After all, poorly anonymised surveys in countries with restrictive laws against homosexuality are always going to return lower figures for same-sex attraction. A particularly critical issue is the time period assessed. Most studies ask about either lifetime occurrence of same-sex attraction, or just a recent period, like the last year, but sexual attraction is a dynamic trait in a sizeable minority of people. Around 10% of individuals will change their sexual attraction at some point in their life. This change can be from opposite-sex to same-sex, and vice versa; from exclusive to non-exclusive or back again. Polling done by the Pew Research Center⁵ in America suggests that most same-sex attracted people first felt that they were 'other than straight' at puberty, but there is a substantial minority for whom that realisation happens later in life.

All these factors⁶ mean that there is no one figure for how many people are same-sex attracted. Different surveys will produce different numbers, sometimes dramatically different numbers. Three surveys across three countries – the US, Australia and Norway – where the legal and social attitudes to homosexuality are broadly similar, found strikingly different results for the percentage of the population who experience same-sex attraction, ranging from 1.8% to 11%⁷. Which is correct? The answer is both, and neither. The best we can do is provide a qualified average, and, more usefully, identify trends. Consistently across all surveys, experiencing any degree of same-sex attraction is more prevalent than being exclusive, unsurprisingly. Being same-sex attracted is also more common than engaging in same-sex behaviour, or having a homosexual identity, again unsurprising. More interestingly, women report a higher rate of any degree of same-sex attraction than men, but a lower amount of same-sex behaviour; women are much more likely to define themselves as a little bit

6 FAITH AND THOUGHT

same-sex attracted (1-3 on a Kinsey scale), while men tend to be either exclusively opposite-sex (0), or exclusively same-sex attracted (6). This finding suggests that the aetiology of sexual attraction in men and women may be different, a theme that will be of relevance throughout this paper.

Choice as causation

Before discussing either biology or the environment, it is necessary to consider a causal pathway that is often either forgotten or dismissed by scientists, particularly biologists - that of personal choice. This aetiology suggests that sexual attraction is an act of conscious will, and that a person who is same-sex attracted can choose to be attracted to the opposite sex instead. This hypothesis has been endorsed by a variety of different groups over the years, often for very different reasons. For instance, during the 1980s some radical feminists argued that women should choose to become lesbians, as an act of rejection of patriarchal oppression. In the US, it is very common to hear that homosexuality is a 'lifestyle choice', or that all gay people choose to be gay. Polling over the past three decades has found that between 30% and 40% of respondents to American surveys state that homosexuality is 'just the way some people prefer to live'⁸. The question of whether same-sex attraction is an act of will has stirred often intense media debates, reflected in stories like the one published by Matthew Parris in *The Times* in 2012⁹. Parris argued that at least some same-sex attracted people view their attraction as a conscious choice. This view is shared by a small but vocal sub-culture within the gay community known as 'queer by choice', who advocate for acceptance of the idea that some same-sex attracted people have chosen to be that way, for reasons of personal politics, socio-cultural factors or as a form of revolt against cultural norms.

Unfortunately, there exist almost no empirical data that directly address this hypothesis. No systematic survey has been done asking same-sex attracted people whether they believe they made a conscious choice to feel that way. However, what little data do exist from anecdotal evidence and informal surveys suggest that only a very small minority of homosexuals feel that they made a choice, with the vast majority saying that their same-sex attraction just happened, or that they were born that way. In addition, as highlighted earlier, most same-sex attracted individuals first feel that way during their early teenage years, and to suggest that all these teenagers are choosing a sexuality which they may have seen derided by society and in the popular press seems unreasonable to say the least.

Whether it is even possible to choose a sexual attraction is a point that's still debated by theorists. Many sexual psychologists would argue that an experience of sexual attraction, by definition, cannot be consciously chosen or willed, as attraction is a fundamental mental state that is not controlled by the conscious mind. So while it is important not to deny the voices of homosexual individuals who do feel they made a choice, it is going contrary to a deal of other evidence to suggest that most or all

same-sex attracted individuals have made such a choice, or that it is the only possible aetiology of same-sex attraction.

Environment as causation

Environmental causes are influences external to a person. Under an environmental model, same-sex attraction is not inherent to an individual, but is acquired at some stage during their sexual development. A range of environmental causes of same-sex attraction have been suggested over the years, including drugs, smoking, alcohol, and war, but this paper will focus on the three aetiologies with the most empirical investigation: parenting, sexual abuse and socialisation.

Parenting

The idea that parents can cause homosexuality in their children dates back to 1940, when it was first developed by neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Sandor Rado. Rado attacked the established notion of the time - that same-sex attraction was a phase in normal sexual development - and instead postulated that male same-sex attraction resulted from abnormal and damaging parent-son relationships. Rado and his followers argued that the classic male homosexual was formed from what he called the 'triangular system'. The son was theorised to have a poor relationship with the father, who was emotionally distant from his son and hostile to his emotional needs. This in turn led to the mother 'smothering' her son to make up for the demerits of the father. Rado hypothesised that such smothering would lead to the son developing a phobia of close emotional intimacy with women and a desire for male affection.

Rado's model of homosexual development was entirely theoretical when he first proposed it in 1940, but during the 1950s and early 1960s a small number of empirical studies reported finding the triangular system in investigations of same-sex attracted males; the most famous of these was conducted in New York by Irving Bieber and colleagues and published in 1962¹⁰. The model became established orthodoxy in psychoanalytic circles, and was included in the first and second editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), the handbook of psychiatry.

However, critics at the time pointed out that Bieber *et al's* study and others like it were riddled with methodological flaws, small sample sizes (usually less than 50), and doubtful interpretation. For example, the homosexuals studied in the 1950s and 60s were almost always either in hospital with mental illnesses or in prison for homosexual offences. Sexologists such as Alfred Kinsey had already established that homosexuality was much more widespread in society than had been thought, and that many same-sex attracted people were in every other way well-adjusted and functioning members of society. In 1957, Evelyn Hooker conducted a pioneering study with a group of non-criminalised, non-institutionalised homosexuals in California¹¹. She subjected 30 same-sex attracted men to three sets of psychological tests, then asked two psychiatrists to try and distinguish between these and test results from control, opposite-sex attracted men. The psychiatrists did no better than chance.

8 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Attempts to replicate Beiber *et al's* study in the late 1960s and early 1970s with larger and more representative samples found no correlation between the quality of parent-son relationship and the chance of developing same-sex attraction, although there was a large correlation between poor parenting and the chance of ending up with a mental illness. The case for the triangular system collapsed, and in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the DSM-III, and retracted their argument that same-sex attraction is a psychiatric condition caused by poor parenting. This remains the situation today, with no evidence that parents can cause homosexuality by the way they treat their children.

Childhood abuse

A more recent environmental hypothesis, which has gained significant cultural currency, is the idea that same-sex attraction is a traumatic reaction developed in response to an experience of childhood sexual abuse. Cross-sectional data, mainly gathered in the US in the past decade, has found that same-sex attracted individuals retrospectively report experiencing significantly higher levels of sexual abuse as children, as much as two-or-three-fold higher¹².

Theorists have suggested that sexual abuse by a person of the same gender as the child could be interpreted by the child as 'confirmation' that they are homosexual, or act as a stigma that encourages further stigmatised behaviour. Abuse by someone of the opposite gender could perhaps provoke an avoidance of everyone of that gender. Unfortunately, these arguments are entirely theoretical. Cross-sectional data does not allow you to distinguish the temporal order of events, so we don't know if abuse *causes* same-sex attraction through one or more of these mechanisms. It is perfectly possible that same-sex attracted people are more vulnerable to abuse than are opposite-sex attracted people, perhaps because they are atypical in their appearance or behaviour. Or there could be a third underlying factor linking sexual abuse and same-sex attraction which we haven't yet discovered.

A lot more work is needed in this area before firm conclusions can be drawn. However, one thing is clear. If sexual abuse in childhood is a causal factor leading to the development of same-sex attraction, it is not a necessary and sufficient explanation for all same-sex attraction, as the majority of same-sex attracted individuals do not report experiencing any form of abuse. Other aetiologies are therefore necessary if we are to have a full understanding of sexual attraction.

Socialisation

Socialisation refers to the idea that pre-pubertal children are 'blank slates' when it comes to sexual attraction, and that attraction can develop equally easily towards either sex, depending on socio-cultural cues and interactions. These cues could come from parents, siblings, peers, mentors, role models and/or the wider culture and media. Under this model, sexual attraction must be subconsciously 'learned' during a

period of sexual development like puberty, with the implication being that same-sex attraction occurs only when it has been taught to a child through example, imitation or direction. The socialisation model is the hypothesis that underlies laws such as the former Section 28 in the UK, and the more recent Russian law banning gay 'propaganda'. These laws don't make a lot of sense without this explanatory mechanism.

As with the personal choice aetiology, there is still a theoretical debate about whether sexual attraction can be learned in this way. And again there is little empirical work that sheds light on the issue, as it's tricky to design a robust study that will hold all other factors constant while allowing you to look at the social factor of interest.

A single study of male homosexuals with gay brothers, conducted in the year 2000, found that 83% of the boys had experienced some feeling of same-sex attraction before becoming aware of their brother's orientation, suggesting that, in males at least, sexual attraction is not acquired from siblings¹³. That conclusion is supported by a study released in 2014, which took advantage of a long-running survey of California schools where participants are asked to name their siblings and their three closest friends, who also complete the survey¹⁴. This allowed the researchers to construct networks of friendship groups, and ask whether having a homosexual friend makes it more probable that you will be homosexual yourself. The answer is a resounding no – neither peer influences nor sibling influences had any effect on same-sex attraction, although they had a big effect on sexual behaviour.

There have also been attempts to study whether the children of same-sex parents can learn by example from their parents, and are more likely to be same-sex attracted than the children of heterosexual couples. Many of the studies in this area are qualitative and narrative, rather than quantitative and statistically robust. The current consensus is that the children of lesbian parents are not more likely to display same-sex attraction or behaviour during adolescence and young adulthood (children of gay men have not been studied). However, there are big demographic shifts currently underway in lesbian and gay parenting – in some US cities in 2014 over half of all same-sex couples are parents. Good quality longitudinal research carried out with this emerging cohort will be more informative than speculation using previous studies¹⁵. The work with siblings and peers encourages a fairly strong scepticism when considering socialisation as a cause of same-sex attraction.

Biology as causation

The third category of causes are biological factors, such as genes, hormones, neurology and birth order. Biological causes are normally thought to be inherent to the person, and generally unchangeable.

The gay gene

The gay gene has become a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon in modern society. It appears in much online discourse about same-sex attraction, and is frequently cited by survey respondents when they are asked about the cause of same-sex attraction. The meme has appeared on posters and T-shirts, in popular books and in comic strips. Responses to the idea of the gay gene have been both serious and mocking, and the potential social consequences of a gay gene have been debated in science fiction.

The source for most of the ‘gay gene’ discourse of the past 20 years is the paper published in 1993 in *Science* by Dean Hamer and colleagues from the NIH National Cancer Institute¹⁶. This study took 40 pairs of brothers where both of the brothers self-identified as homosexual and looked at the DNA sequence in 22 locations along the X chromosome. Hamer theorised that when the brothers had the same sequence, or marker, at a particular location, then that was good evidence that the gene at that location was potentially contributing to their shared homosexuality. And the study did indeed find that five markers in a region of the X chromosome called Xq28 were commonly shared in both brothers.

However, and it’s a big however, Xq28 is not a gene. It is a spatial signifier indicating a region that is millions of base pairs long. There are over one hundred genes within the Xq28 region, any one of which, or more than one, could be the gene of interest. It is completely false to say that this paper discovered ‘the gay gene’, or that Xq28 is the gay gene. Indeed, we can be pretty certain that there is no such thing as a single gay gene. As mentioned above, sexuality is complicated and multi-faceted, not dichotomous. It isn’t a simple binary distinction which could be controlled by a gene with two variant types, like the ability to roll your tongue. If sexual attraction were under the control of a single gene, we would expect to see it passed down in families like eye colour or cystic fibrosis, with a recognisable pattern of inheritance, but this does not happen. We would also expect identical twins to always match each other (known as concordance), either both gay or both straight, but in almost all studies they match less than half of the time.

Since Hamer *et al’s* initial paper was published, there have been three independent attempts to replicate his results using the same methodology, none of which have confirmed the result, although one was suggestive¹⁷. It is possible that the original finding was an artefact of the sample used. There have also been a number of studies that have tried to detect an association between same-sex attraction and various other specific genes or regions within the human genome, none of which have produced any results that are highly significant or have been reliably replicated. Thus, at this stage, it is entirely false to say that any particular gene is known to contribute causally to same-sex attraction.

Genetics and twin studies

However, just because there is no single 'gay gene' is not to say that there is no genetic influence on same-sex attraction at all. There might in fact be a significant causal genetic component to attraction, involving hundreds or even thousands of genes. The amount of genetic influence on same-sex attraction can be calculated by using a methodology known as a twin study, which facilitates the separation of genetic and non-genetic factors potentially contributing to a trait by comparing sets of twins. In brief, the way it works is to compare sets of identical twins, who have all their genetic sequence in common (as they come from a single fertilised egg), with sets of fraternal twins who share on average only half of their genetic information. When same-sex attraction is assessed, it turns out that identical twins are more likely to be concordant than are fraternal twins, which suggests that there is a genetic component acting on the trait. With the concordance data from both types of twin, it is possible to quantify just how big that genetic component is. The resulting value is called the heritability value, and is usually expressed as a percentage.

There are a couple of important points to note about twin studies. Firstly, they give you no information about individual genes. Knowing that there is a genetic component influencing a trait doesn't show which genes are involved. Nor does it reveal which causal pathways might be important, or how they work. Secondly, the heritability value is a population statistic. It doesn't apply on an individual level. If same-sex attraction is reported to be 20% heritable, that doesn't mean that an individual person can attribute 20% of their attraction to genes and 80% to their upbringing, for instance. Rather, 20% of the variance in sexual attraction that exists within a population is influenced by the different genes that are also present within that population.

The first twin study on sexual attraction was published in 1991, and there have been a small number, around seven, completed since then. Two influential early studies¹⁸ produced heritability values of between 40% and 70% in male and female samples, and these figures were reported 50% in much of the subsequent media coverage. However, the studies were almost certainly biased by the fact that the researchers recruited their twins via gay-friendly publications, making it much more likely that they would get twin pairs who already knew they were concordant. Subsequent twin studies have recruited from the large population-based registries that now exist in many countries. Australia, Finland, Sweden, the US and the UK have all contributed.

Overall, twin studies conclude that there is a significant genetic influence on sexual attraction¹⁹. Every study returns a positive significant result. However, there are substantial differences in the specific values reported between the different studies and no consistency. In both men and women, the heritability value ranges anywhere between around 15% and 50%, which is a big difference. While some studies report high heritability for men and very low for women, in other studies it's completely the reverse. In addition, the confidence intervals (the range within which the true result is

95% sure to be) often include 0 as the lower boundary, which means that a supposedly significant result may not be significant at all. It is possible that genetic influences are more causally significant in men than in women, but that remains very speculative. What is notable from twin studies is that even if same-sex attraction is (for example) 40% heritable, that leave 60% of the variance unaccounted for. 60% of the variability in sexual attraction is associated not with genes, but with other factors. So genes are in no way a sufficient explanation as the cause of same-sex attraction.

Sex and gender atypicality

There is a widely-held theory among the general public, reflected in popular stereotypes, that same-sex attracted males are feminised, while same-sex attracted females are masculinised. It's sometimes called the 'intersex' hypothesis of same-sex attraction. This is probably the oldest scientific hypothesis on the cause of same-sex attraction – it was first proposed in the 1850s by the German biologist Karl Ulrichs, who is often regarded as the father of the scientific study of homosexuality. Ulrichs proposed that male homosexuals contained a 'female essence', although he left the nature of the essence undefined²⁰. The idea was picked up by the first sexologists writing at the turn of the 20th century, such as Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld, and it only really fell out of fashion as Sigmund Freud's theories of abnormal psychosexual development took over. The intersex hypothesis has been investigated in adults, children and at the foetal stage, using measure of both physical and behavioural atypicality.

Considering physical differences, there is very little evidence that the vast majority of same-sex attracted individuals are in any way different from the norm in their physical development. Same-sex attracted people are not hermaphrodites or genitally abnormal except for a tiny minority. Studies of height and weight have been equivocal. So physicality doesn't particularly support the intersex hypothesis. On the face of it, behavioural differences provide much stronger support for the theory. There have been a number of studies in a variety of countries and cultures which have consistently found that adult same-sex attracted people engage in more gender-atypical behaviours than do opposite-sex attracted people, and rate themselves as being more gender-atypical²¹. This is also true in childhood, with many children who later develop a homosexual orientation displaying gender-atypical behaviours both pre- and post-puberty²². This is one of the strongest findings in the field of homosexuality studies, with hardly any contradictory findings.

However, once again it is wise to be cautious in interpreting these data. Although there is a significant relationship between gender atypicality and sexual attraction, it is often only weakly significant. Many of the studies, particularly in children, have been done using clinical populations who are undergoing treatment for gender dysphoria or related conditions, which means that the findings aren't generalisable to the wider population. What's more, gender presentation is bound up with cultural norms and expectations, and people are often adept at hiding their true preferences in order to

gain societal acceptance, from either straight or gay society. In some non-Western cultures, homosexuality is expressed almost exclusively in combination with a gender-atypical presentation, for instance among the Samoan community of overtly-feminine homosexual males known as fa'afafine²³. Homosexuality combined with typical masculine appearance and behaviour may not be socially tolerated. Iran has the highest rate of gender reassignment surgery in the world, because the punishment for homosexuality is so severe that males experiencing same-sex attraction frequently undergo gender reassignment. The connection between gender atypicality and same-sex attraction in these cultures therefore has everything to do with social pressure, and much less to do with a direct underlying biological causal factor than might be supposed at first glance.

Investigations into a possible biological cause for this effect have focussed on two areas: hormonal exposure *in utero*, and adult neurological structure.

Androgenic hormones

Sexual development in humans is driven by a class of hormones known as androgens, which include hormones such as testosterone. High levels of androgens cause masculinisation of the sex organs and secondary sexual characteristics, and androgen concentration is ultimately controlled by the SRY gene on the Y chromosome. Dozens of studies have attempted to show that same-sex attraction is correlated with abnormal levels of androgens – too high in women, and too low in men. Unfortunately, this is quite difficult to demonstrate, as it is impossible to routinely sample hormone concentrations in foetal blood, because the procedure is high-risk and invasive. Investigators have used proxies to indirectly measure hormone concentration, such as measuring the amniotic fluid in pregnancy, or measuring the ratio between the 2nd and 4th fingers. One study carried out with the BBC in 2007 measured finger ratios in over 240,000 people²⁴. But despite the large sample sizes, results from this sort of study have been very inconsistent, often giving completely contrary results to the study that came before it²⁵.

Perhaps the best evidence for the role of hormones in same-sex attraction comes from 'natural experiment' populations. These are groups with rare genetic mutations that affect their hormone concentration. Women with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) have elevated androgen concentration due to a mutation in their cortisol pathway. Around 10 studies have found the rate of same-sex fantasy and same-sex attraction among CAH sufferers is higher than in the general population, anywhere between 15% and 40%, compared to 8-10% in matched controls²⁶. CAH women are also much more likely to have exclusive same-sex attraction, which is very rare in women. This finding is fairly reliable but there are difficulties of interpretation. Women with CAH tend to look 'unfeminine', being shorter and heavier on average. This could prompt feelings of greater masculinity, as could social expectation that CAH women are 'butch'. Thus, CAH women may not view their own feelings as strictly same-sex. Interpretation is even more difficult with the inverse population:

men who cannot detect circulating androgens due to a mutation in the androgen receptor gene. Even though these individuals are XY, the failure of the androgen receptor means that they develop as women, the default sex. They have feminised genitalia and are physically and socially entirely female. Labelling these individuals as men, and categorising their relationships with men as 'same-sex' relationships when they do not view it that way themselves is highly problematic. Overall, the evidence for hormonal effects on same-sex attraction is so limited by difficulties of measurement that it is extremely hard to draw firm conclusions about hormones and their causal effects.

Neurology

Human brains are sexually dimorphic in size, structure and disease susceptibility. Perhaps, it has been hypothesised, same-sex attraction is caused by a too-masculine or too-feminine brain? This was the conclusion of the 1991 study of Simon LeVay, who was reported to have found the 'gay brain'. LeVay performed post-mortem tissue dissection to measure the volume of the third interstitial nucleus of the hypothalamus (INAH3), in the brains of 41 mid-aged adults²⁷. LeVay reported that the brains of homosexual males had significantly smaller INAH3 volume than those of heterosexual males; the male homosexual brain was much more similar to a female brain.

LeVay's study is the best-remembered of three studies that were published in consecutive years from 1990 to 1992. The other two papers also reported finding differences in brain structure between hetero- and homosexual men, in the anterior commissure and another part of the hypothalamus. The combined influence of these three papers meant that for a while it was generally accepted that the 'gay brain' was a recognisable phenomenon. However, the results have not stood up over time, and attempts to replicate the studies have failed. One reason might be that the original studies never verified same-sex attraction directly with the probands – it was merely assumed from the fact that the patients had died of AIDS. The studies also failed to sufficiently control for the possible effects of having HIV and the drug regimes that were taken to cope with the disease.

More recently, with the advent of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and other complex brain scanning techniques, further attempts have been made to map physical or functional differences in the brains of hetero- and homosexual individuals²⁸. However, these studies have been small and limited. Because MRI scanning is hugely expensive, not a single recent brain scanning study has been replicated. No consistent and reliable differences have been shown to distinguish the brains of same-sex attracted and opposite-sex attracted people, and until there is such replication, it is impossible to make firm claims about the effect of neural structure and function on sexual attraction. Besides, there is a more fundamental problem with brain scanning experiments. The brain is plastic, not fixed. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the experience of feeling same-sex attraction, practising same-sex behaviour and

associating with different groups of peers will have a neurological impact. It can't be said for sure that any neurological differences between hetero- and homosexual people are causal for their sexuality – it might be the exact opposite.

The fraternal birth order effect

Since as far back as the 1930s, it has been speculated that same-sex attraction in males might be somehow related to sibling number, as same-sex attracted men were often seen to come from large families. This idea was not seriously investigated until the mid-1990s, when a Canadian research group began to examine birth order. This group has consistently and reliably found that younger brothers in a family of boys are significantly more likely to be same-sex attracted than their older brothers, independent of socioeconomic status, maternal age and overall family size²⁹. The likelihood is also independent of the number of sisters a boy has; only older brothers produce the effect, hence the name - Fraternal Birth Order (FBO) effect. These results have been replicated by independent groups, making this one of the more reliable findings in this area of research. The size of the effect is also note-worthy – in one sample a boy was a third more likely to be same-sex attracted for each older brother that he had³⁰.

The cause of this effect is currently unknown. The best available theory is that it's an immune response, because the phenotype (same-sex attraction) becomes increasingly severe with each successive male pregnancy. It is suggested that a male foetus can produce what's called an H-Y antigen, a small chemical compound produced by the Y chromosome. In this theory, the H-Y antigen passes through the placental barrier into the mother's blood, and provokes an immune response, because of course the mother has no Y chromosome and her body views the antigen as alien. The mother's immune system produces an antibody, which passes back across the placental barrier and into the foetus, where it has an effect on sexual development. This theory is supported by the fact that it explains the finding that sisters do not affect their brothers' chance of being SSA – female foetuses do not produce H-Y antigens. Adopted brothers don't have an effect either – a boy adopted into a family with many older but non-related brothers is not more likely than chance to be same-sex attracted³¹. This strongly suggests that the effect is male-specific and prenatal.

However, it has never been directly shown that male foetuses can provoke an immune response in their mother while *in utero*. In addition, the putative mode of action of the maternal antibody is a black box. Does the antibody cause mutations in the genetic code? Alter the foetal epigenome? Affect hormone concentration? Change something about brain development? We simply don't know. So the problem of causation of same-sex attraction is simply moved up a level, not solved. It should also be emphasised that, although the FBO effect appears to be a genuine effect and a significant cause of same-sex attraction, again it is neither necessary nor sufficient. There are many first-born sons who are homosexual, and many younger sons who are heterosexual. Attempts are estimating how many gay men might be gay due to this effect range between around 15 and 30%, which is non-negligible but still leaves 70%

of the homosexual population unaccounted for. Much more work is needed on the maternal immune hypothesis before we can draw any strong conclusions about its effect.

Conclusion

What can be made of this deluge of data? A few general conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, much of the field is plagued by lack of replication and inconsistency. Some causal models have received more empirical support than others, but no cause has yet gained sufficient support to provide a compelling explanation. Genetic influences on same-sex attraction cannot be ruled out, although any genetic variants that do influence sexual development will be of small effect, and there is no single 'gay gene'. The fraternal birth order effect is well-supported empirically, but there is no firm evidence for an immunological explanation for this observation. In women, almost the only positive evidence comes from hormonal studies, suggesting that exposure to elevated androgen levels can lead to developmental changes causing an attraction to women, but these data need to be treated with caution. Certain causal pathways, such as those resulting from childhood abuse, may be significant for a small percentage of the homosexual population, but require more research. By contrast, there is no positive evidence that same-sex attraction is caused by socialisation effects, by personal choice, or by poor parenting.

Secondly, no one causal mechanism is both necessary and sufficient to explain the whole gamut of human sexual attraction. Yet this is not really a surprising conclusion. Sexual attraction is a highly complex trait, and multiple pathways can produce the same end-result. It seems likely that across the variety of human personalities and cultures, different influences are important at different times and in different people. It's perfectly possible (though by no means proven) that one same-sex attracted woman might owe her attraction principally to hormones, while in another the primary influence is genetic. Thus, there is no point in looking for one single cause of same-sex attraction – it does not exist. And this negative conclusion is important, because both Christians and others sometimes assume that the aetiology of same-sex attraction is known and straightforward. But it is not.

¹ For a more detailed review, see Alexander, D.R. and Whiteway, E. 'Understanding the causes of same-sex attraction', In Press, *Science and Christian Belief* (2015). References given below are not comprehensive, but have been selected to provide an overview of the most important and/or the most recent papers and review articles.

² See Bailey, J.M. 'Anti-gay Uganda claims sexual orientation is a choice', *New Scientist* (2014), <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn25121-antigay-uganda-claims-sexual-orientation-is-a-choice.html>.

³ Gallup. 'More American see Gay, Lesbian Orientation as Birth Factor', Gallup.com (2013). Available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/162569/americans-gay-lesbian-orientation-birth-factor.aspx>.

⁴ Developed in 1948 in Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.B., & Martin, C.E. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1948).

⁵ Pew Research Center. 'A survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times', Washington, DC: Pew Research Center (2013) (available at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>)

⁶ Savin-Williams, R.C. 'How many gays are there? It depends', In Hope, D.A (ed) *Contemporary Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities*, New York: Springer (2009), pp. 5-41, provides a much more in-depth discussion of complexities of measurement and definition in this field. It is freely available online.

⁷ Gates, G.R. 'How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender?', Los Angeles: The Williams Institute (2011).

⁸ Data taken from Lewis, G.B. 'Does believing homosexuality is innate increase support for gay rights?', *Policy Studies Journal* (2009) 37(4), 669-693. This paper analysed poll results from 1983 to 2006, which asked the question 'In your opinion, what causes homosexuality? Is it something that people are born with ... or is it something that develops because of the way people are brought up ... or is it just the way some people prefer to live?'. It should be noted that these data only go up to 2006, and it is possible that views have shifted substantially since that year, as the increased media focus on same-sex marriages has brought the issue to the forefront of public attention.

⁹ Parris, M. 'Who's totally gay? There's no straight answer', *The Times*, 21st April 2013 (available at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/matthewparris/article3390885.ece>).

¹⁰ Beiber, I., Dain, H.J., et al. *Homosexuality: a psychoanalytic study*, New York: Basic Books (1962).

¹¹ Hooker, E. 'The adjustment of the male overt homosexual', *Journal of Projective Techniques* (1957) 21(1), 18-31.

¹² Andersen, J.P. & Blossnich, J. 'Disparities in adverse childhood experiences among sexual minority and heterosexual adults: Results from a multi-state probability-based sample', *PLoS One* (2013) 8(1), e54691.

¹³ Dawood, K., Pillard, R.C. et al. 'Familial aspects of male homosexuality', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2000) 29(2), 155-163.

¹⁴ Brakefield, T., Mednick, S. et al. 'Same-sex sexual attraction does not spread in adolescent social networks', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2014) 43(2), 335-344.

¹⁵ Gartrell, N.K., Bos, H.M.W. & Goldberg, N.G. 'Adolescents of the US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and sexual risk exposure', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2011) 40(6), 1199-1209.

¹⁶ Hamer, D.H., Hu, S. et al. 'A linkage between DNA markers on the X-chromosome and male sexual orientation', *Science* (1993) 261(5119), 321-327.

¹⁷ Mustanski, B.S., DuPree, M.G. et al. 'A genome-wide scan of male sexual orientation', *Human Genetics* (2005) 116(4), 272-278.

¹⁸ Bailey, J.M., Pillard, R.C., Neale, M.C. & Agyei, Y. 'Heritable factors influence sexual orientation in women', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (1993) 50(3), 217-223; Bailey, J.M. & Pillard, R.C. 'A genetic study of male sexual orientation', *Archives of General Psychiatry* (1991) 48(12), 1089-1096.

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²⁰ Drescher, J. 'A history of homosexuality and organized psychoanalysis', *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* (2008) 36(3), 443-460.

- ²¹ Eg. Lippa, R.A. 'Gender-related traits of heterosexual and homosexual men and women', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2002) 31(1), 83-98.
- ²² See Zucker, K.J., Mitchell, J. et al. 'The recalled childhood gender identity/gender role questionnaire: Psychometric properties', *Sex Roles* (2006) 54(7-8), 469-483.
- ²³ VanderLaan, D.P. & Vasey, P.L. 'Birth order and avuncular tendencies in Samoan man and fa'afafine', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2013) 42(3), 371-379
- ²⁴ Manning, J., Churchill, A. & Peters, M. 'The effects of sex, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on self-measured digit ratio (2D:4D)', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2007) 36(2), 223-233.
- ²⁵ For a review, see Berenbaum, S.A. & Beltz, A.M. 'Sexual differentiation of human behavior: Effects of prenatal and pubertal organizational hormones', *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology* (2011) 32(2), 183-200.
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Homosexuality: Biblical Aspects

Terry Griffith

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the reasons why the biblical writers treat human sexuality, and particularly homosexuality, in the way that they do. It will not cover all the biblical material on the topic but will focus on the most relevant texts. By the term 'sexuality' I refer both to gender differentiation (male and female as a duality and their interrelationships) and to sexual endowment (with its various biological, psychological and social dimensions). In this paper I will use shorthand descriptive terms that identify different approaches to the relevant biblical material. They are not without their problems but they have sufficient coherence and acceptance to remain useful. The first is the *classic* (or traditional) approach so called because this represents the consistent understanding of the Church from earliest times until the mid-twentieth century. The second may be termed the *revisionist* approach. This represents the attempt to re-envision what the texts might be saying from the

perspective of the experiences of gays and lesbians, both within and without the church, in the light of modern research into ancient attitudes to sexuality.

Genesis 1

In my library I have a 1757 second edition of Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*. Inside this volume I found a slip of paper with a handwritten note as follows. 'All Scripture connects itself with Genesis and ought to be read in this connection, for it is not so much the later Scriptures that throw light on Genesis, as it is Genesis that throws light on the later Scriptures.' This is a canonical assessment with which I am in overall agreement. In particular, Genesis 1-2.3 not only functions as an introduction to the book of Genesis, it also introduces the whole of the Bible. Its canonical placing is both emphatic and essential for it asserts, among other things, the fundamental *goodness* of the creation as ordered by God. This arrangement results in two parallel accounts of creation which fulfil slightly different purposes, but which taken *together* form the framework that governs the biblical understanding of human sexuality.

It should be noted that the Hebrew language has no general terms for 'sexuality' as such. But this does not mean that the Hebrew mind did not have a deep understanding and insight into the varied expressions of what we call 'sexuality', both negative and positive. Pride of place in the biblical canon must go to *The Song of Songs* which embodies a rich understanding of human sexuality although not one cast in modern psychosexual terms. In the light of this, the assertion that a concept of 'homosexuality' was not available to the biblical writers is potentially misleading.¹ It just so happens that the Hebrew language has no word expressing the general concept of 'idolatry,' yet it does have a rich and varied vocabulary for dealing with the social *realia* of idolatry and describing the perceived mind set of those who worshipped other gods. Interestingly, the foundation for biblical critiques of idolatry is also to be found in Genesis 1, with its explicit statement of creational monotheism, and its implicit critique of the worship of that which is merely creaturely which characterised the religious life of the ancient world. The relevance of this point will become evident in Paul's treatment of idolatry and sexual immorality in Romans 1.

We must thus begin with the opening chapters of Genesis. Richard Davidson has provided the most thorough examination to date of all the texts that have anything whatsoever to do with the topic of sexuality in the Old Testament.² He is particularly helpful on Genesis 1-3 and *The Song of Songs*, which he interprets as a return to Eden. Davidson gives the conclusion of his research at the start: 'the Edenic pattern for sexuality constitutes the foundation for the rest of the OT perspective on this topic', with the consequence that, 'the final canonical form of the [Hebrew Bible] presents a unified, consistent, overarching theological portrait of human sexuality.'³

Davidson draws attention to the fact that the nature and theology of sexuality receives central and climactic placement within both creation accounts. Only after the creation of humankind, singled out as made in the image of God and as male and female (Gen 1.26-27), is the whole created order declared to be 'very good' (Gen 1.31). Gender is therefore not merely a sociological construct but is theologically grounded in God's good creation. Furthermore, as far as the topic of creation is concerned, it is only the creation of humankind as male and female that has any focus in Genesis 2, and culminates in verse 24 with, '[f]or this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.' Genesis 2 thus fills out the content of 1.26-28 in two important respects:

1. Genesis 2 makes clear that only as husband and wife are the man and the woman to fulfil their mandate to '[b]e fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'
2. Genesis 2 makes clear that the creation of humankind does not involve any aspect of divine procreation. The differentiation of male and female is presented as a creation of God from the material order, and not as an inherent part of the divine nature itself. Other creation myths divinized sex but Genesis will have nothing to do with that understanding of the divine role in creating human beings. I find, therefore, that Karl Barth's explanation of the *imago Dei* primarily in terms of the relationality of male and female misses the mark, valuable though his contribution is. Rather, the image of God primarily refers to the representational nature of the man and woman as rulers and stewards over creation as God's vice-regents. Both Adam and Eve are complete in their own right as God's image-bearers, but the complementarity of male and female is necessary for the reproduction of other image-bearers who will fill the earth, and thus provides the divinely ordered paradigm for humanity from the very beginning.⁴

The Hebrew '*al ken*, 'therefore' or 'for this reason' at the beginning of Genesis 2.24 indicates that male and female is to be the pattern of all future human sexual relationships. In other words, humanity is binary in gender and it is this complementary reality that forms the basis of marriage. This complementary reality at least includes biological differentiation which would be evident in their primal nudity, with the congruence of their outwardly differing sexual organs being necessary for their reproductive purposes. Marriage is thus described in terms of a 'one flesh' union which also points back to the taking of the woman from the man (Gen 2.23).

James Brownson attempts to subvert this understanding of Genesis 2.⁵ His argument that as scholars do not agree exactly what the nature of this complementarity is, it is therefore not a useful concept, is a weak one. Brownson further argues that the emphasis in Genesis 2 is on similarity rather than difference. He believes this is

indicated by the rejection of the animals as suitable candidates to fulfil the role of 'helper' to Adam (2.20b), and by Adam's recognition of Eve as 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' (2.23). However, the Genesis texts emphasize both similarity and difference, and it is *difference* which is emphasized on the surface of the text. In Genesis 1.27 'humanity' (*ha'adam*) is described as both 'male' (*zaqar*) and 'female' (*negevah*) for the purpose of reproduction. In Genesis 2.23 'humanity' (*ha'adam*) formed from the dust (*'adamah*) is differentiated as 'man' (*'ish*) and 'woman' (*'ishah*) for the purpose of marriage (2.24). It is the difference that is important for the purpose of the text. Indeed, in Genesis 2.18 the Hebrew *kenegdo* ('suitable for him') bears the sense of 'equal but opposite'. If similarity were meant then the more natural phrase would be *kimoho* 'like him'.⁶ Thus the animals are not suitable partners for *ha'adam* because they are not his *equal*. However, the woman is a suitable partner for him because she is both his equal and his *opposite*.

Brownson attempts to show that Genesis 2.23-24 is merely a pattern for kinship relations as there is no mention of the role of procreation in Genesis 2, and the phraseology 'bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh' is used of other kinship relationships in the Bible. He argues that procreation does not exhaust the meaning and purpose of one flesh union, a view which the Bible endorses in the extolling of sexual intimacy and bonding as a good in its own right. There is, after all, no mention of procreation (or even the womb) in *The Song of Songs*, and Paul never introduces the topic of procreation in his discussions on marriage. Therefore, Brownson argues that Genesis does not view procreation to be of the essence of marriage. The emphasis, rather, is on meeting Adam's need in his *aloneness* (Gen 2.18) and on the *unitive* purpose of marriage (Gen 2.24). If the essence of marriage and its primary purpose is to be seen as unitive, then committed and faithful gay sexual unions may be seen as legitimate expressions of kinship unions as defined by Genesis 2.24.

However, if this were the crux of the matter, then this need would be equally well met by producing another male to be his helper, something which both the text and context are at pains to deny. To achieve his ends, Brownson has to play down the fact of the mention of 'father' and 'mother' in Genesis 2.24 (containing within it an explicit endorsement of the heterosexual pattern for marriage, as well as an implicit critique of incest), and with that, to minimize the connection with 'male and female' in Genesis 1.27. In fact, the main plank in Brownson's overall exegetical strategy is isolating and minimizing the overarching influence of Genesis 1 on texts dealing with marriage and with homosexuality.

Jesus

Brownson's exegetical strategy is seen at work in his treatment of Jesus' discussion on divorce and marriage in Mark 10.6-8 where Jesus quotes from both Genesis 1.27 and 2.24. It is instructive to note that Brownson makes no reference to Jesus' quotation of Genesis 1.27 when dealing with this passage. He thus succeeds in

putting asunder what Jesus has joined together. Indeed, if the unitive purpose of marriage is what counts then one is left wondering why Jesus didn't quote Genesis 2.18 ('It is not good for the man to be alone') instead of 1.27. Furthermore, when he does discuss the language of 'one flesh' with reference to male-female unions he asserts that although the Bible *normally* speaks in this way, '[the Bible] does not inherently, and of itself, indicate that it views such linkages *normatively*.'⁷ There are several false moves and consequent problems underlying this approach to Jesus' treatment of sexuality.

1. The assertion that Jesus' positive statement of marriage as being heterosexual in nature, (a position which every Jew known to us from the Hellenistic era also held), is only to be understood descriptively and not prescriptively, goes against all the evidence we have, unless appeal is made to gnostic texts. Others assert that Jesus implicitly approved of homosexual relationships in some circumstances and instance the centurion and his servant whom Jesus healed. Here the assumption is that all master-slave relationships involved a sexual dimension, a not uncommon occurrence in the Greco-Roman world, and thus Jesus was knowingly restoring the loved one to the lover. Or perhaps Jesus even had a homosexual relationship with the 'Beloved Disciple', or Lazarus who is described as 'the one you love is ill' (John 11.3).⁸ These assertions rank as examples of 'sexegesis' of the highest order. All such understandings suffer from very high degrees of historical implausibility.⁹
2. The question needs to be put that if Jesus wanted to extend the biblical understanding of marriage to include same-sex marriage then why did he not make the most of the opportunity to do so? Jesus subverted the 'traditional' family by placing allegiance to himself above that of parents, spouses, family and children (Matt 19.29). He redefined kinship obligations when he asked, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' answering his own question, 'Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3.33-35). Jesus could hardly have caused more of a stir among his contemporaries by redefining marriage, than he did by challenging widespread and deeply held understandings of the Temple, the Sabbath, purity laws, and the Samaritan question. These issues functioned to define and strengthen Jewish identity, but Jesus had no qualms about taking a very different line to that of the religious authorities on these important matters.
3. This approach proceeds via the argument from silence. Jesus is said never to have said anything about homosexuality, and so we cannot know what he thought about it. The argument from silence can prove nothing, for he never said anything directly about polygamy or incest, or, for that matter, about idolatry and cultic worship. We can however, strongly infer his attitude to idolatry both from what he says about serving God or Mammon (Matt 6.24),

and the fact that he was a Jew. Similarly, we can be certain beyond reasonable doubt what view he would have taken on homosexuality. Jesus' positive endorsement of a 'yes' to heterosexual marriage brings with it a 'no' to *all other* forms of sexual relationship. We know of no Jew from the Hellenistic era who thought differently on this matter. In fact, Jesus does refer to 'sexual immorality' alongside 'adultery' in Mark 7.21. It is historically inconceivable that any Jew, including Jesus, would think of sexual immorality other than in terms of the prohibitions found in Leviticus 18, which includes a specific prohibition on homosexual practice.¹⁰ This was understood and accepted in every Jewish text that we have from the Hellenistic era on this topic. Furthermore, where Jesus introduces new teaching on sexuality it is by way of tightening the standards of sexual conduct, and extending the definition of sexual sin to the realm of thought and imagination. He does not broaden the definition of marriage but confirms it within the boundaries set by Genesis 1-2.

4. Finally, a troubling consequence ensues of relegating Jesus' endorsement of the Genesis texts to the level of 'normality' only. If the male/female variable in the marriage equation is not fixed, then on what basis can it be argued that the numeric variable must remain fixed? Polyamorists would argue that faithful, committed and loving relationships within a group of adults, of whatever combination of sex and orientation, are really only at one end of the distribution curve of normality. Such group relationships would also qualify for consideration as marriage precisely because faithfulness, commitment and love can be predicated of *groups* as well as of *pairs*.

Cultural Background

We move now towards the consideration of the only text in the Bible that provides an explicitly *theologically* based discussion of homosexuality. Paul's reasoning in Romans 1.18-32 has become a battleground in recent decades. Revisionist interpretations bring various arguments to demonstrate that Paul is not referring to life-long committed same-sex unions, which seem miraculously to have emerged only in modern times. I will proceed by analysing some of these arguments before taking a look at Romans 1.18-32.

The first question to be addressed relates to the state and extent of knowledge about homosexuality in New Testament times. Would Paul, or anyone else in the Roman Empire, have known that life-long committed homosexual relationships were possible, or that homosexuality might have been regarded as a life-long condition?¹¹ We find just such issues being discussed in Plato's *Symposium* from the fourth century BCE. After Plato's *Republic*, the *Symposium* was the most widely known and discussed text of the Academy.¹² This should not surprise us as its topic is that of Eros or Love. Tom Wright notes that 'the influence of Plato himself remained

massive throughout the [New Testament] period.¹³ For example, Horace, Ovid and Cicero all went to Athens to complete their education. Furthermore, the Academy had several branches throughout the Mediterranean, including a famous one at Tarsus, Paul's home city. Strabo even tells us that the philosophical schools in Tarsus were in better shape than those of Athens and Alexandria.¹⁴ Thanks to the work of the late German New Testament scholar, Martin Hengel, we are now fully aware that Jewish culture *within* Palestine, as well as the Diaspora, was thoroughly hellenized well before the time of Jesus. It is almost inconceivable, therefore, that as educated a man as Paul was not fully conversant with what Greeks and Romans thought about homosexuality, and that Jews in general were not aware of this to one degree or another.

It is in the *Symposium* that we find the first extant reference to female homoeroticism. Aristophanes speaks of *hetairistriae*, women who are sexually attracted to women, and explains this phenomenon, and that of male homoeroticism, in terms of having their origin in primeval beings consisting of two halves with two sets of the same genitalia. Heterosexuals originally had two different sets of genitalia. These beings were divided in two by Zeus as a punishment, and each half of the pair in this world is engaged in a search for their 'lost' other half so that they may be reunited again. This account clearly presupposes an understanding of sexuality as present at birth, and that the goal is one of life-long union with one's lost primeval partner. Bernadette Brooten adduces further evidence for understandings of lifelong erotic orientation in the Hellenistic period. For example, there are astrological texts which understand that the position of the stars and planets at birth predetermine erotic orientation.¹⁵ Also, some medical texts seek to explain erotic orientation in terms of the processes of conception.¹⁶

Furthermore, the *Symposium* discusses the desirability of lifelong homoerotic unions. Pausanias refers to the pederast who takes a sexual interest in young men who reach the stage of growing beards, which he regards as coincident with gaining intelligence. He says, 'Those who begin to love them at this point, I think, are prepared to be with them through the whole of life and pass their lives in common, rather than deceiving them by catching them in the thoughtlessness of youth and then contemptuously abandoning them and running off with someone else.'¹⁷ A little later Pausanias speaks of 'the lover of a worthy character that abides through life, for he is joined to what is constant.'¹⁸ Brooten also adduces second century CE evidence for woman to woman marriages.¹⁹ In the light of these texts it is no longer possible to assert that Paul could not have had some knowledge of lifelong same-sex orientation and union.²⁰

The second question to be dealt with is the argument that Paul casts his discussion of homosexuality in terms that betray specific cultural understandings of gender, passion, purity and impurity, honour and shame, and nature. Of course, Paul was not

alone in expressing disapproval of homosexuality. In Plato's last work, the *Laws*, he speaks of same-sex relations as 'contrary to nature' and a 'daring or shameless act' exhibiting a 'lack of self-control'.²¹ There are five aspects of cultural accommodation that are frequently used in revisionist interpretations of Paul's discussion of homosexuality.

1. Male homoeroticism in the Greco-Roman world was generally disapproved of because it required the passive partner to act like a woman in being penetrated. Officially, Roman law deemed same-sex intercourse between citizens as *stuprum*, a criminal act, because the high status of citizenship was violated in the case of the passive partner. No such status violation occurs where the passive partner is socially inferior such as a non-citizen or a slave. Honour in this scenario is maintained by the higher status individual as long as he was the active partner. Thus the feminisation of men was regarded as shameful in a culturally specific gendered way. It is argued that in a culture where gender is no longer defined sexually in terms of activity (= masculinity) and passivity (= femininity) then Paul's strictures do not make sense.
2. Another cultural presupposition concerning homosexuality in the ancient world was that it was the result of an excess of passion and therefore was always an expression of lust. Where such assumptions no longer pertain then it is argued that Paul's critique is no longer relevant and that he would not condemn gay relationships that are faithful, loving and committed.
3. It is often asserted that Paul is speaking against coercive homosexual practice such as pederasty, or forced sex between master and slave, where the power relations are unequal. Against this restriction it may be noted that Paul begins Romans 1.27 with '[i]n the same way' or '[l]ikewise' (*homoios*), with a reference to lesbianism in the previous verse. There is no evidence for the female equivalent of such coercive relationships in the many discussions on homosexuality in the classical world. Furthermore, common and specific vocabulary describing these types of homosexual relationship is lacking.²²
4. It is suggested that Paul's concern relates to cultic impurity. However, the language of purity and impurity relates as much to marriage in 1 Thessalonians 4.7 and Hebrews 13.4, where the concern is for holiness within the church as a temple of the Holy Spirit, without any particular reference to pagan idolatry.
5. The major revisionist argument focuses on the link between idolatry and homosexuality. The link between idolatry and all forms of sexual immorality was a commonplace in Jewish thought. This link is even implicit within the Genesis 1 account, in that the schema of creation over six days can be read as

a polemic against anything in the created order being regarded as worthy of worship. All cultures known to the Jews worshipped gods, together with their representational images in various material forms, or worshipped the heavenly bodies themselves as gods. The Jewish polemic against the use of idols uses the Creator/creature dichotomy as its basic rationale. The association of idolatry with sexual immorality was, of course, most fully expressed in the fertility cults but was not necessarily confined to them. However, it would be absurd to think that the Hebrew mind-set condemned sexual immorality only when it occurred within temple precincts or as a part of religious ritual. The Creator God of Genesis 1 is sovereign over all creation and all human activity, and all aspects of human life are accountable to him. Within the Jewish community, which had experienced redemption by God from slavery in Egypt, this accountability found expression in the *Torah*, literally 'instruction', in the form of laws that governed cultic, family, personal and civic life, which include laws prohibiting homosexual practice.²³ The argument that Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13 are to be interpreted as applying only to homosexual practice within the context of idolatry, based on the references to the child-sacrificing cult of Molek (Lev 18.21 and 20.2-5), is merely an attempt to establish guilt by loose association. There is no evidence for homosexual practices being connected with the Molek cult. Significantly, the term *qadesh* meaning male shrine prostitute, used in Deuteronomy 23.17-18, is absent in Leviticus. Furthermore, if the limitation of the proscription of homosexuality is to cultic contexts only, are the associated laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 to do with incest, adultery, or the use of mediums to be similarly constrained by that cultic context? The rationale for the inclusion and *specification* of the cult of Molek within the Levitical code is to be found elsewhere, probably in the protection of children within the ordering of family life, or perhaps in the fact that it too was regarded as an extremely detestable practice.²⁴

Paul

What is to be made of these issues of cultural accommodation with respect to Paul's understanding of homosexuality? The larger part of James Brownson's book is given over to a four chapter analysis of Paul's teaching on sexuality in Romans 1 around these points, under the headings of lust and desire, purity and impurity, honour and shame, and nature. It is not to be denied that Paul draws on the language of all these categories in his exposition. He is after all thoroughly immersed in Greco-Roman culture. However, Brownson seeks to argue that it is these culturally defined categories that shape Paul's argument and, therefore, define what he is really tilting at, namely, promiscuous and abusive sexual relationships. The problem is that he achieves this by minimizing the influence of Genesis 1 in Paul's exposition. Furthermore, he deals with these matters in an atomistic way without providing a consecutive exposition to show how the structure of Paul's argument actually works.

How then does Paul present his material in Romans 1.18-32? The specific background of Genesis 1 to Paul's argument is manifestly evident within the text.

- 1) There is direct reference to the creation of the world (1.20).
- 2) There is direct reference to the Creator (1.25).
- 3) Paul denotes the sexes as 'females' (*thēleiai*) and 'males' (*arsenes*) following the Septuagintal translation of Genesis 1.27 (*arsen kai thēlu*).
- 4) Paul takes up the same terms 'likeness', 'image' and 'man' in 1.23 from Genesis 1.26.
- 5) Paul refers to 'birds', 'animals' and 'reptiles' in 1.23 which also occur in Genesis 1.26, and in this tripartite form agrees with the tripartite formulation in Genesis 1.30.

These points demonstrate that the load bearing structure of Paul's argument is his vigorous *creational monotheism*. Paul is well able to dress that structure with ideas drawn from Gentile culture that cohere with his essentially *Jewish* worldview and serve his purpose. But it is a mistake to think that the course of his argument is in any way *determined* by such concerns. Tom Wright puts it like this. '[Paul's] understanding of *ethics*, rooted in Jewish creational monotheism, was that of a genuinely human existence in which the new creation was coming to birth. He affirmed the goodness of the original creation (hence the strong emphasis on classic Jewish sexual ethics, the key point where Paul insisted that gentile converts should renounce gentile ways) [...].'²⁵ Therefore, Paul, when he speaks about 'nature' (*phusis*) in the context of Romans 1, 'can only be referring to the *order of creation* and not specifically *human nature* or more generally *social convention*.'²⁶

Paul thus draws on the stock in trade themes of idolatry and sexuality from his understanding of Genesis 1 and the Old Testament in his exposition of how and why the 'wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (1.18). The way in which Paul relates his treatment of idolatry and homosexuality is presented in revisionist interpretations as if homosexuality is a subset of the main theme of idolatry, and therefore to be interpreted wholly within that cultic context. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of Paul's theological logic. There is no *direct* relationship between the incidence of idolatry and the incidence of homosexuality in his reasoning. Both Paul's treatment of idolatry and his treatment of homosexuality are given as separate and parallel examples of the *direct* consequence of human failure to worship God as the Creator, namely, to glorify God as God and to give thanks to him (1.21).²⁷ As a result people's thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened (1.21). This theme is picked up again in 1.28 where human desire to reject the knowledge of the one true Creator God results in depraved thoughts and conduct as listed in 1.29-31. William Loader concludes that 'Paul's primary argument is that what led to wrong sex was wrong theology.'²⁸ Thus, Paul is not arguing that same-sex activity is wrong *when* associated with idolatry. Rather, he

is demonstrating that the world is idolatrous and rebellious by highlighting same-sex activity.

Interestingly, Paul gives no other *specific* examples of sexual immorality in Romans and this is a further clue as to Paul's theological logic at this point. In what follows I am indebted to Simon Gathercole who is Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Cambridge.²⁹ According to Paul, the suppression of the knowledge of God available through his creative activity (1.19-20) involves not only a *rejection* but also an *exchange*. The *leitmotif* of 'exchange' is found three times in 1.23,25,26. Specifically, the exchange that is highlighted is that of swapping the glory of the immortal God and the truth about God for worthless and false idols (1.22-23,25). This *rejection / exchange* motif functions as a kind of 'meta-sin' in Romans 1, which produces sins of bodily degradation in general (1.24), female and male homosexuality (1.26-27), and in doing 'what ought not to be done', literally 'doing what is not fitting' (1.28). This is expanded into the list of sins found in 1.29-31. The end result of all such behaviour according to God's decree is death (1.32).

Another *leitmotif* in this passage is the theme of God's 'handing people over' to their sins (1.24,26,28). Paul's key argument here functions to show that God hands sinners over into situations which precisely highlight the meta-sin of the rejection / exchange motif in relation to idolatry. There is also an irony to be found here in that what humans desire is the exact opposite of what it should be. Taking 1.22-24 first,

- 1) In place of the reality of '*glory*' they get literally '*a likeness of an image*', a form of double insubstantiality.
- 2) In place of the *immortal* one, they choose *mortal* objects of worship.
- 3) In place of *God*, the Creator, they serve *people, birds, animals and snakes*, namely, created things.

As a result of these human decisions God repays these deeds in a measure-for-measure fashion. In 1.24 they are said first to be handed over to 'uncleanness', which is an apt description of the impurity of idolatry, a fact compounded by mention of serpents which themselves are unclean. And second, their abandonment of God's *glory or honour* results in the *dishonouring* of their bodies. Something similar is going on in 1.28 where there is a play on words *ouk edokimasan* and *eis adikimon noūn* which is difficult to bring out in translation. Gathercole paraphrases: 'God punishes the action of *not considering him worthy* with a mind that *cannot consider whether something is worthy or not*.'³⁰

How then does the controversial reference to homosexuality in 1.26-27 function in this schema? It is worth pausing to note that this is the only specific reference to lesbianism in the Bible.³¹ Here, the ironic correspondence between idolatry and homosexual practice goes deeper than the verbal parallel between *exchanging* the truth of God for a lie (1.25), and the subsequent *exchange* of natural for unnatural practice (1.26). Rather, Gathercole argues that '[t]he key correspondence lies in the

fact that *both involve turning away from the 'other' to the 'same'*.³² Put simply, Paul's analysis of the human predicament is predicated on the fact that the human *creature* ends up worshipping other similarly *creaturely* things rather than the Creator who is the Other.³³ This is against the natural order of things and represents, in Martin Luther's phrase, an *incurvatus in se*, a 'turning in on oneself.' Thus,

- 1) *Humanity* should be oriented toward *God*, the Other, but instead *turns in on itself*, as a part of the creation (1.23,25).
- 2) The *woman* in her sexuality should be oriented toward her 'other', the *man*, but turns in on one who is the 'same' (1.26).
- 3) The *man* in his sexuality should be oriented toward his 'other', the *woman*, but turns in on one who is the 'same' (1.27).

Construing Paul's reasoning in this way makes excellent sense of his linking idolatry with homosexuality. This particular connection also perfectly illustrates the measure-for-measure punishment in that 'the *incurvatus in se* of worship (1.25) results in the *incurvatus in se* of sex – a rejection of the *other* in preference for the *same*.'³⁴ They thus receive '*in themselves* the due penalty for their error' (1.27) which also links us back via the truth / error duality to Paul's theological understanding of idolatry.³⁵

Paul is therefore not focusing on particular cultic practices which would contextualise his strictures to the priests of the goddess cults, who violated gender roles by castration, cross-dressing and effemination, and all those who participate in their works.³⁶ Neither does he have male temple prostitution specifically in his sights. Paul does not make use of any of the many terms available to him which would clearly indicate that he is specifying cultic homosexual practices.³⁷ Homosexual conduct would not be acceptable in any form to Paul, not even in a non-idolatrous religious society such as to be found in the Jewish communities of Jerusalem and Judea, because for him and for all Jews, it is the order of creation in Genesis that reveals God's will.

We might stop to ask why Paul mentions lesbianism first. There was much discussion of pederasty and master-slave homosexual relations in the classical world.³⁸ But there is little discussion of lesbianism in comparison and it is almost entirely cast in negative terms. Perhaps Paul is leading with his strongest suit knowing that he can assume near universal pagan agreement on the unnaturalness of female homoeroticism.³⁹

Some scholars have attempted to 'problematize' the reference to lesbianism by noting that the phrase 'exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones' (*tēn phusikēn chrēsīn eis tēn para phusin*) also describes heterosexual non-vaginal sexual activity, apparently with the purpose of avoiding pregnancy. Indeed, the earliest quotations we have of Romans 1.26 are applied heterosexually in this fashion. It is not to be doubted that this type of activity is also covered by the use of this phrase.⁴⁰ The issue is simply one of what is the topic under discussion and, in this case, teachers in the

early church seeking a text to justify a prohibition against non-vaginal marital sex, turned to Romans 1.26. However, it makes no sense whatsoever for Paul to choose this as his first vice following the topic of idolatry, as this would be unique in the standard idolatry and sexual immorality topos with which he is working. There is also the fact that Paul shows no interest in procreation in his discussions on marriage, and, of course, the *homoiōs* in 1.27 speaks against it.⁴¹

Finally, with reference to 1 Corinthians 6.9 and 1 Timothy 1.10, the terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitēs* describe the passive and active sexual roles in homosexual practice. Translating the first term as ‘prostitute’ is incorrect.⁴²

Some Modern Scholars

We have come a long way and I will now finish with some quotations from scholars whose significant work has yet to be taken into account in revisionist arguments about the biblical material. The first is from Bill Loader of Perth, Australia, who spent a five year full-time professorial fellowship from 2005-10, researching every Jewish text from the hellenistic era which touched on the topic of sexuality. In this he has done an incalculable service. The fruit of this research has been published in five book-length monographs.⁴³ The last monograph is on the New Testament material. There is no one who knows more about this area than he does. After his discussion of Paul in Romans 1, in which he shows that the classic interpretation of this passage is indeed almost certainly correct, he says this: ‘My concern in seeking to elucidate as clearly as possible what Paul was saying comes not from a belief in Paul’s abiding authority nor a desire to depict his views as resembling or matching my own. My hermeneutical perspective is to bring to his writing the respect it warrants as one of the earliest documents of the Christian movement, a respect I believe is due, at the very least, to all human beings.’⁴⁴

The second quote is from the Roman Catholic American scholar Luke Timothy Johnson. He, like Bill Loader, is also in favour of same-sex unions. He complains about attempts to make Scripture say what it plainly does not: ‘The task demands intellectual honesty. I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says.’ The million dollar question is, as Johnson goes on to say, ‘what do we do with what the text says?’ His response is to ‘reject the straightforward commands of Scripture, and appeal instead to another authority [...]’⁴⁵ He seeks to locate that authority in contemporary ‘stories’.

I prefer the approach of Tom Wright who notes in a context dealing with the interpretation of Romans 9-11: ‘If it turns out that Paul says things I don’t want to hear, I shall live with it. If it turns out that I say things which Paul doesn’t want to hear, perhaps he will one day put me straight. If it turns out that Paul says things the

twenty-first century doesn't want to hear, it's better that we get that out in the open rather than sneakily falsifying the historical evidence to fit our predilections.⁴⁶

¹ See Bernadette Brooten's critique of David Halperin on this point in her *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 160-62.

² Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendricksen, 2007).

³ *Ibid.*, 3, 6-7.

⁴ See R. J. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

⁵ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). For a critical review and engagement with this book see Andrew Goddard at www.klice.co.uk/uploads with a summary version available at www.fulcrum-anglican/articles.

⁶ See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), 68.

⁷ Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 105.

⁸ The relationship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament is similarly cited as positive evidence for homosexuality in the Bible. This view is effectively rebutted by Jonathan Y. Rowe, *Jonathan and David: An Unexpected Love*, Grove Biblical Series 69 (Cambridge: Grove, 2013), which summarizes his book *Sons or Lovers: An Interpretation of David and Jonathan's Friendship* (London: T and T Clark, 2012).

⁹ A valuable exegetical resource is Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

¹⁰ With regard to Acts 15.29, it is interesting to note that the four things that Gentile Christians would do well to avoid in the letter from Jerusalem follows the order of these topics in Leviticus 17-18, and in that context are said to relate equally to the resident alien as well as the Israelite.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.37 records how Nero 'married' Pythagoras using the full rites of legitimate marriage in AD64, and how three years later Nero also 'married' Sporus in a publicly celebrated 'wedding'.

¹² See R.E. Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato, vol. II: The Symposium*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1991), ix. Quotations are from this translation.

¹³ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, (London: SPCK, 2013), 232.

¹⁴ Strabo 14.673.

¹⁵ Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 115-41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156-59.

¹⁷ Plato, *Symposium* 181a.

¹⁸ Plato, *Symposium* 183e.

¹⁹ Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 332-33; together with a reference to Clement, *Paidogōgos* 3.3.21.3 (322).

²⁰ Philo, *Contemplative Life* 59-63, specifically discusses these themes in Plato's *Symposium*.

²¹ Plato, *Laws*, 636b-c; also 836a-837a; *Republic*, 403a-c.

²² Eg. *erastēs* (the lover) and *erōmenos* (the beloved); *pedairestēs* (pederast); and *kinaidos* (effeminate man).

²³ Only male homosexual practice is forbidden. The rabbis interpreted this *mutatis mutandum* to apply to women also (as do Philo and Pseudo-Phocylides). Where cultic prostitution is proscribed in Deut 23.17-18 both men and women are mentioned.

²⁴ See the excursus on Molek in John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Nashville: Nelson, 1992), 333-37. The Levitical material shows that even the most culturally acceptable forms of homosexuality in the ANE are *verboten* in Israel. Uniquely in the ANE, the Levitical material dealt with the active/penetrative partner in same-sex intercourse, and held both individuals in consensual acts equally accountable.

²⁵ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1508.

26 See *T.Naph.* 3.3-5; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.39; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199, 273. More generally, see the discussion in Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 379-406.

²⁷ Also William Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 227, 320-21.

28 William Loader, *Sexuality in the New Testament*, (London: SPCK, 2010), 27.

29 Simon Gathercole, 'Sin in God's Economy: Agencies in Romans 1 and 7' in John M.G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole (eds), *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 158-72.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹ Clement of Alexandria (*Paidogōgos* 3.3.21.3) inveighs against women who contrary to nature (*paraphusin* as in Rom 1.26) behave like men and marry other women (both actively and passively using the active and passive participle of the verb).

32 Gathercole, 'Sin in God's Economy', 163, emphasis his.

33 Henri Blocher also makes a similar point: 'rejection of the other corresponds to idolatry in its relation to God, the rejection of the Other, it is a divinization of the *same*, the creature' (Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* [Leicester: IVP, 1984], 103).

34 Gathercole, 'Sin in God's Economy', 164, emphasis his.

³⁵ So also Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 318

³⁶ See, for example, Jeremy Townsley, 'Paul, the Goddess Religions, and Queer Sects: Romans 1.23-28', *JBL* 130 (2011), 707-28.

³⁷ Contra the point that Alan Wilson makes in his *More Perfect Union: Understanding Same-Sex Marriage*, (London: DLT, 2014), 80.

³⁸ See Martii Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 57-88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108; Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 240; and Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 310.

⁴⁰ The commentary of Didymus the Blind on Zechariah explains Romans 1.26 with both senses (4.52.8).

⁴¹ The attempt by Jamie A. Banister, 'Homoiōs and the Use of Parallelism in Romans 1:26-27', *JBL* 128 (2009), 569-90, to show that this adverb is unlikely to determine the meaning of 1.26 by the content of 1.27, does not bear the grammatical weight placed upon it. Someone as adept in his native Greek as John Chrysostom clearly did not read *homoiōs* here in this way. So also Loader, *New Testament on Sexuality*, 311.

42 On 1 Corinthians 6.9 (and 1 Timothy 1.10) see Bruce W. Winter, 'Homosexual Terminology in 1 Corinthians 6.9: the Roman Context and the Greek Loan-Word', in A.N.S. Lane (ed.), *Scripture and Interpretation: Historical and Theological Studies in Honour of David Wright*, (Leicester: Apollon, 1997), 275-90; and a shorter version in Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 110-20.

⁴³ This research has been published in summary and accessible form in William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁴⁴ Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 321. Similarly, *idem*, *Making Sense of Sex*, 137.

⁴⁵ Cited in Ian Paul, *Same-sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts*, Grove Biblical Series 71 (Cambridge: Grove, 2014), 29.

⁴⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1133.

Homosexuality: A Rapidly Changing Society.

Stephen Keyworth

Whatever your view on homosexuality I trust we can all at least agree that we are living through a generation of change with regard to issues of sexuality and societal values. The rate of change in this particular area of society is staggering. It's hard to believe that less than fifty years ago homosexuality was illegal in Britain. A time when countless men feared being arrested by zealous police wanting easy convictions, often it is reported, for doing nothing more than 'looking a bit gay'. It was at 5.50am on 5 July 1967 that a bill to legalise homosexuality eventually limped through its final stages in the House of Commons. One commentator says:

"It was a battered old thing and, in many respects, shabby. It didn't even come close to equalizing the legal status of heterosexuals and homosexuals (that would take another 38 years). It didn't stop the arrests: between 1967 and 2003, 30,000 gay and bisexual men were convicted for behaviour that would not have been a crime had their partner been a woman."

In the light of the debate around the introduction of same sex marriage, that seems like another world – but at the same time helps us to understand the reaction of many. Society and attitudes towards sexuality have changed significantly in a relatively short time and that's a part of the context that we find ourselves in today.

As we have already noted it is not possible or indeed desirable to look at these four approaches to the subject of homosexuality in isolation – there will be inevitable overlap and I make no apologies for that, in fact I celebrate it. I should also point out that I have been asked to address the area of society and culture. And although I hope I am somewhat attuned to the societal context within which I minister in C21 Britain, I am no expert sociologist.

However, a thumbnail biography... I am a person of privilege: white, male, heterosexual, 53 years of age. I have been married for 34 years. We met when I was 14, my first real girl friend. You will immediately have made judgments about me and my ability to engage with these issues - and I will bring my own experience and perspectives - and you will bring yours! But, I should make it clear that I do not believe that my salvation rests on my sexuality, our marriage or our fidelity. That is firmly in the hands of my personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the gracious love of God. As a minister I serve our Baptist Union as Faith and Society Team Leader and as such have been involved in trying to help our union to make a Baptist response (or responses) to the new Marriage (Same Sex) Act 2013. In that process I have become all too aware of how Christians are extremely polarized around the issues involved and how in so many ways we often find ourselves with a contrary

view to society – but that is not universally so. It is also my experience that sadly, it is one of those issues which brings out the worst in people in terms of how they behave towards others. Whatever your view on the issue I'm confident that you would be shocked to read some of the emails I have received from so called Christians about homosexuality and marriage. And I do not mean that everyone who has written with concerns has done so aggressively, but some certainly have. As a Baptist Union we have tried to encourage continuing conversations and debate and for the most part that has been successful in acknowledging serious concerns and values –we too have many different views on the issue and I celebrate that.

I should also say that this is my own personal view and research, not all Baptists would see it this way and as a union we have tried to remain true to our ecclesiology by challenging the local church and our ministers to discern the mind of Christ for its own mission and ministry, rather than a central body dictating policy on this or indeed on most other issues. I also welcome the opportunity to engage in conversation and the educator within me wants to test that by pushing boundaries in debate – in other words I trust you will accept this for what it is, a work in process. I do not claim that it is the definitive word, but the reflection of a ministerial practitioner who happens, for a brief moment, to be serving in a national office.

Before I get too far I would also want to make the point that in my experience this is not a debate between those who believe the Bible and those who do not – but of how Bible believing Christians seek to respond to societal change. It's true that many outside of the church point to the Bible as being the problem, resulting in what they would claim to be homophobic doctrines and policies within an institution that they have no time for. But it is also true that many who love and study the Bible and seek to live by its teaching as disciples of Jesus come to very different conclusions about what it might have to say about monogamous, committed, loving and faithful homosexual relationships.

In his presidential address to General Synod 5 July 2013 the Archbishop of Canterbury said:

“The cultural and political ground is changing. There is a revolution. Anyone who listened, as I did, to much of the Same Sex Marriage Bill Second Reading Debate in the House of Lords could not fail to be struck by the overwhelming change of cultural hinterland. Predictable attitudes were no longer there. The opposition to the Bill, which included me and many other bishops, was utterly overwhelmed, with amongst the largest attendance in the House and participation in the debate, and majority since 1945. There was notable hostility to the view of the churches.

I am not proposing new policy, but what I felt then and feel now is that some of what was said by those supporting the Bill was uncomfortably close to the bone... We may

not like it, but we must accept that there is a revolution in the area of sexuality and we have not fully heard it."

There is cultural change that amounts to revolution and we (people of faith in the church) have failed to notice. Just because it is 'change' it is not necessarily 'good' of course and we might need to reflect on its benefit, but the fact is that wider society appears to look at the traditional church stance and dismiss it as out of touch and irrelevant. Whatever our view, that should be of concern. For many people the introduction of the Same Sex Marriage Act is a matter of justice and equality – fundamentally for them it's about the way that society honours and values loving relationships. That is definitely the way that the government introduced it. And for those people who see it as a justice issue, the stance against recognizing homosexual relationships in this way (often associated with the traditional Church view) is seen as capricious and unjust. We need to understand why people think like that.

It is of concern for me primarily because it becomes a missional stumbling block. There are many pastoral concerns too and I have no intention of playing those down either as I have far too often heard harrowing personal accounts of real lives damaged by uncaring prejudiced attitudes and what amounts to lousy pastoral care – and that too is fundamental to missional endeavor and respect. As the Archbishop said, some of the things we heard in the debate were uncomfortably close to the bone. I too listened to a great deal of that debate – it's one of the few occasions I've sat and listened to a televised debate like that – and it was a grim experience. And I don't necessarily mean that in terms of the outcome, but in terms of the content of debate and it made me personally feel so uncomfortable – especially in the way it represented Christian faith.

It has also been said that:

Pastoral practice and missiological effectiveness are coloured by the way we respond to this issue. The Church's response is, I believe, widely viewed in society as ungenerous, unkind, bigoted and at odds with the message that is so often proclaimed, 'all are welcome here', 'God is a loving God who accepts us as we are...' It seems as if the whiff of hypocrisy is sensed by those beyond the Church, and to offend against the British sense of fair play and tolerance may well seriously compromise our mission to reach everyone with the good news of Jesus Christ.

We face many challenges in the society that is our context for a life of faithful discipleship. Every year since 1983 the British Social Attitudes survey asks over 3,000 people what it's like to live in Britain.

Compared with 30 years ago, the 2013 survey reveals British people are far more likely to be tolerant of one another's relationships and lifestyles.

One commentator suggests:

“On the basis of the survey back in 1983 it was hard to imagine a Conservative Prime Minister advocating gay marriage. Now public opinion suggests that widespread acceptance of gay marriage and gay adoption is here to stay.”

The survey shows that in 1983 only 28 per cent said it was ‘always’ or ‘mostly’ wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations outside marriage. Now just 12 per cent say this is ‘always’ or ‘mostly’ wrong, and an all time high of 65 per cent see nothing wrong at all in such behaviour.

Even when a couple want to have children only 42 per cent think they ought to get married first.

But the figures reveal that attitudes towards other parts of our personal relationships have become more conservative.

Cheating on a partner is more likely to be greeted with disapproval than it was 30 years ago. Now 63 per cent say that it is “always wrong” for a married person to have sexual relations with someone other than their partner, slightly more than the 58 per cent who thought this in 1984.

In terms of homosexuality, in 1983, half the public surveyed said that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex were always wrong, a figure that rose to 64 per cent over the next four years, in the wake of the discovery of AIDS. Then, only 17 per cent thought homosexuality was ‘not wrong at all’. Now these proportions are more or less reversed. Only 22 per cent think that same-sex relations are ‘always wrong’ while nearly half 47 per cent say they are ‘not wrong at all’. Eighty-three per cent of the people surveyed now think it is acceptable for a gay man or lesbian to teach in a school while 90 per cent feels comfortable with their holding a position in public life.

And the figures are even more startling when you factor in the age of the respondent – those born in the 1940’s are far more likely to be opposed to same sex relationships (46%), whilst those born in the 1980’s are much more likely to be affirming (only 18% think it to be wrong.)

In so many ways, this is a different world from the one that we grew up in and the differing attitudes of the generations bring particular challenges to Christian witness. There are many ways that we might track that change in terms of popular culture and in the time available I’ll limit myself to just one:

British soap operas and their treatment of homosexuality in characters and story lines. One of the issues that society faced in the 80’s was the way that homosexual lifestyle was portrayed by celebrity culture. It was so often portrayed as an over the top, in your face, promiscuous life style choice – often associated with outlandish behavior.

In many ways it may have been an understandable reaction to opportunities that had never before been possible and it was not inconsistent with other less helpful aspects of celebrity culture that was let loose in the 80's. On the whole the great British soap opera took up the challenge of confronting these issues and they have played a significant part in changing societal impressions of homosexual people as they have increasingly been normalized into the context and story lines. It's hard to remember the controversy that surrounded the first gay kiss on EastEnders in 1989. One newspaper ran with the headline:

"Filth! Get this off our screens" and the actor, Michael Crashman received a brick through his window. There were even questions in parliament asking if this was the sort of thing that should be portrayed on prime time TV and called for the programme to be banned. A lot has changed since then – who'd have imagined that only 25 years later the same Houses of Parliament would see the introduction of same-sex marriage. All the major soaps have included numerous gay characters in many different story lines –sometimes including their sexuality and struggles they encounter with that, but often simply as a part of the character involved in real life (or at least as real as soap operas get!).

Suddenly profession characters, like the vet Zoe in Emmerdale was there because she was a vet, not just because she was a lesbian. Later in Emmerdale Aaron, the hard guy, the garage mechanic who was never slow to lash out with his fists to sort a problem as a bullish teenager eventually comes out as gay and becomes involved with Jackson – who following a car crash is left a paraplegic – what follows was a portrayal of love and faithfulness, with no possible sexual content, which eventually ended with a moving portrayal of issues surrounding euthanasia. In terms of church, Coronation Street brought the challenge with Sophie's story. Sophie who found faith, was baptized as a believer on prime time TV – extremely well researched and presented, complete with testimonies and the works. Later, she comes out as gay and in a long running story line is cast out of her church. The fascinating aspect of that storyline was how it was placed alongside her sister who was anything but faithful in relationship – but she was the one accepted, whilst Sophie who struggled to remain true to her new found faith and her partner, was estranged.

And the Christian press, who celebrated the fact that a soap opera had so carefully carried a long running storyline of a journey into faith, ignored her struggles with her sexuality and faith.

And in interfaith engagement, Eastenders again, with Christian and Syed, the son of the Muslim family on the Square... and so I could go on (but you might think I watch this stuff). Love them or hate them, British soap operas have done a lot to reflect and maybe form attitudes towards homosexual people and relationships. This was perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics.

In Danny Boyle's extravaganza that showpieced all that has helped to form Great Britain, there, flashed on the big screen for all of 1 second was the lesbian kiss from a 1993 episode of Brookside.

And with so many countries in the world which still outlaw homosexuality, that was quite a cultural statement. Something which John Barrowman took to a new level in the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games with his so called 'Glas-gay kiss'. And whatever you might think of that, again with 42 out of 53 Commonwealth countries still with laws and often draconian punishments for homosexual people, it is a powerful statement of changing societal values.

It is into this context that the present government began the process which has changed the way society understands marriage.

Early in 2012 I encouraged Baptist churches and ministers to participate in the Government consultation on equal marriage (March-June 2012).

If you followed the progression of the bill closely you will note that there were several changes in name for this bill as it passed through consultation, the commons and the committee stages. Equal Marriage and Civil marriage, often referred to, especially by those who don't want it, as Gay Marriage. But the act is now Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

It cannot be equal marriage, because it is not the same, not even in law. It cannot be consummated as law defines it and you cannot file for divorce for sexual infidelity because, as law defines adultery - it cannot happen. So, this is the same sex marriage act which technically speaking broadens the definition to embrace same-sex couples. In terms of registration of buildings, it's a parallel track an extension of the original provision and it is only available if it is requested in the appropriate manner.

We have no way of knowing how many churches chose to respond to the original consultation, but overall the Government claim that it generated 228,000 responses (which is a lot for these things) with 53% in favour, 46% against. (In parallel to the consultation a large petition from the Coalition for marriage against the proposal collected over 500,000 signatures.)

It was on the basis of this consultation the Government introduced legislation to allow the provision of same-sex marriage by broadening the definition of marriage in law. It's easy to forget that the consultation concerned provision of equal civil marriage and categorically stated that this did not apply to religious groups. The Act has made provision for some religious organizations to 'opt-in' whilst protecting others from legal challenge. We must recognise that this happened because some religious groups specifically asked for the opportunity to conduct ceremonies. (Society of Friends, Unitarians, and Liberal Jews.) We have been consulted on a couple of occasions, not

to challenge the bill as such (that happened in other ways), but to help the civil service to understand non-conformist congregations. Whatever your view on same sex marriage we must try to help each other and our congregations to think theologically about marriage per say.

What is it for us, what has it been, and how has it changed? Marriage, as we know it, is –by the grace of God – very different to how it has been through the centuries. Although many of our traditions hold onto a particular model that I'm certain we need to leave behind for good – marriage is understood differently today, and that's good and something I would want to celebrate. I'd also want to see it continue to evolve and for us to leave behind Victorian values expressed in so many of the marriage traditions.

In fact we might say that throughout the ages marriage as an institution has been consistent only in the way it has changed - and we do well to remember that marrying for love is a very modern concept.

I've found Adrian Thatcher helpful on this as he helps us reflect on what marriage is, or might be in our context. Especially with the emphasis he places on gift and covenant and the embodiment of divine love – a unity of body, mind and heart.

Qualities, which if we went there, are just as important in same sex marriage as they are in traditional heterosexual marriage – if there are faithful couples who wish to commit in this way should we at least think about what that might mean?

What is the role of the state and a Baptist church on this one?

Baptists do not conduct marriage ceremonies in the same way as the established church. We are not (by the grace of God) a state church – I did not swear an oath to the state at ordination.

Although the media – and I would have to say many Baptist churches and ministers – do not understand, we are different from Anglican priests in law.

Baptists have never had, and will never have, an obligation to provide marriage services in the same way that the established church does.

We have an arrangement where our buildings can be registered for the conducting of marriage ceremonies, under license from the registrar. We do this 'according to the rites and ceremonies of the Baptists...' This is a so-called privilege that has only been in place for a little over 100 years. It was in 1898 – 145 years after the 1753 marriage act that this privilege was granted to Baptists. The authorised person - who may or may not be the minister - is 'authorised' by the registrar and not the church. Appointed by church meeting of course, but they act on behalf the registrar.

Again, speaking personally – I have never allowed myself to be an authorized person as a minister. I have had that role before ministry, but never since. I do not wish to be an agent of the state in any form – maybe as Baptists it is a time to reclaim our dissenting and non-conformist heritage. Maybe, in the light of the way we understand marriage today we should consider whether it is appropriate, as Baptist churches, to offer any legal marriage at all.

Luther said: marriage is of the state – the church may bless a union. Others, have made similar suggestions and I think I'm with them –as an option.

Whatever our view, same sex marriage looks like it is here to stay and it is certainly a part of the social landscape in which we live a life of faith, with I trust a missional and pastoral heart. We might not want to embrace it – but some will – what is most important, is that we take time and energy to listen to each other and at least try to understand the difference that there is between us.

Homosexuality: Pastoral Aspects

Simon Woodman

I'd like to begin with a few words of introduction about my own background, which has included a move from a position on human sexuality that was pastorally inclusive with some biblically based reservations, to one that is now fully inclusive in both theology and practice. I have been an ordained Baptist minister for over fifteen years, and I have been married to Liz for over twenty. As one who is white, male, and straight, I have never had anyone try to disadvantage me on the basis of my ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. However, I have often found myself taking a stand, for what it is worth, alongside those who experience such disadvantages. My observation, and my conviction, on each of these issues, is that it matters to me, because, when my sister or brother in Christ is disadvantaged, for something about which they can do nothing, then my humanity before God is also compromised. So I have spoken up on issues of ethnicity, and was privileged to be part of the Baptist Union Council meeting that offered an apology for the transatlantic slave trade in 2007. I have spoken up on issues of gender, and have had a number of articles published on the question of women in Baptist ministry. And today, I find myself speaking up on the issue of human sexuality.

A few years ago I wouldn't have been standing here, saying what I want to say today. A few years ago I would have said that my reading of scripture led me to a conviction that God's intent for human sexuality was for lifelong, heterosexual, Christian

marriage. Which was convenient for me, as a Christian heterosexual in a, God-willing, lifelong marriage. A few years ago I would have put homosexuality in the same box as that which contained divorce and remarriage, or marrying a non-Christian. I would have seen these as 'not God's ideal', but possibly the best that was available for those individuals. So just as I would conduct a wedding for a divorcee, or for someone marrying outside the faith, so I would bless a partnership between two people of the same gender. But all the while walking the careful line of not suggesting that it was a 'marriage' in the sense that my own marriage was fortunate enough to be. This is not now my position.

So, what has changed my mind? The answer is surprisingly simple; it was a series of pastoral encounters with people who are gay. When I was a young pastor, I was preparing one of the teenagers at our church for baptism. I knew he was gay, and he knew he was gay. The difficulty was that we were in a fairly conservative church, which would have struggled greatly with him, had it known his sexuality. His commitment to Jesus was unshakeable, and his gifting for ministry was unmistakable. So I baptised him, and over the next few years he began to take an active role in the life of the church, including as a worship leader and speaker. He had given his life to the Lord, and the Lord seemed pleased to receive the gift. In due course, he came out, and started dating. As I had feared, this created some problems for him with some of those in the church he was by then attending. However, some of those who had got to know him, love him, and value his ministry, found that they could not deny that God was still using this young man, even though they were convinced, on their reading of the Bible, that he was behaving in a way that was displeasing to God. I'll move away from his story now, but it makes what I think is an important point: It becomes harder to maintain a condemnatory perspective on homosexuality, the more one encounters those who are both Christian and gay.

Over the years I have had various colleagues and church members who are gay, and I have seen God at work in their lives every bit as much, if not more so, as he is in my own. The living out of forgiveness, grace, and love, from those who might have been expected to demonstrate anger, bitterness, and hatred, has spoken dramatically to me that our God is a God of radical transformation and renewal.

So, what about the Bible? Well, all of us read scripture through a lens, and none of us reads it in an objective vacuum. We are the sum of our parts, and the product of our cultures. For those who, like me, grew up in a Christian context that saw homosexuality as incompatible with God's plan, scripture can seem very plain on this issue. However, what I have discovered, as my lens moved from monochrome to multi-chromatic (or rainbow coloured, or even pink, we might say!) is that what I see in scripture has changed. I do not now think that scripture says what I once thought it said. However, in all of this I do not believe that I have sacrificed my rigour as a biblical scholar. I remain committed to a diligent and careful reading of scripture, one

which is guided by the Spirit of Christ, at work in the community of his people. I speak today as a pastor, as a former seminary tutor and university lecturer in biblical studies, and as a disciple of Christ with much still to learn, who believes that the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

There is a booklet by the theologian Walter Wink which I have found helpful in my engagement with scripture.¹ The reality, it seems to me, is that the Bible does not, clearly and unambiguously, speak to the subject of our contemporary context of same-sex monogamous relationships. There are those in same-sex relationships who are practicing Christians. There are churches and ministers, the majority, who in good conscience before God and in the light of scripture, believe that those with same-sex attraction should remain celibate, and that if they do not, they are placing themselves outside of God's ideal for sexual expression. But there are other churches and ministers, a minority, who in good conscience before God and in the light of scripture, believe that those with same-sex attraction who are in sexually expressed relationships, are acceptable to God and the church, can be baptised and accepted into membership, and can play a full role in the life of the church.

We already live with this difference of view and practice, and have done so for many years. It is my hope that this is not an issue over which we have to divide from one another, and that it is not an issue over which communion will be broken. It is my conviction that this is not a primary issue, it is not some shibboleth that we use to judge a fellow Christian's orthodoxy. Rather, it is a journey that we are on, as the church, before God and in the light of scripture, negotiates the changing world to which God has called it. The introduction of civil partnerships, and the subsequent legislation regarding 'same sex' marriage are changing the social agenda beyond the church, and those in the church are seeking to respond appropriately.

I'm not going to spend any more time now on the topic of biblical interpretation, because I'd like to talk for a few minutes more specifically about the topic of pastoral care for lesbian and gay Christians. There is a phrase that was made popular by disability activists in the 1990s which may be of help to us here, and it is the slogan, 'nothing about us without us'. So in preparation for today, I have spoken with friends and colleagues who are gay, in order to echo some of their voice to this meeting. I have also invited Luke, who is part of the congregation here at Bloomsbury, to come and speak to us in a few minutes.

But first, some specific reflections on pastoral care and sexuality. I think that those of us who are part of the Christian church, whatever our personal convictions on sexual orientation before God, need to recognise that, historically speaking, the refusal of the church to engage with this issue in any way other than by condemnation has proactively contributed to the suffering of those who are gay. We often go to great lengths to encourage our heterosexual teenagers to enter into a way of life that is

neither celibate nor promiscuous. Recognising that lifelong celibacy is the specific calling of only a few, we encourage our teenagers to abstain from promiscuity, often in the context of 'true love waits', and in the hope that in due course they will find a partner and enter into the covenant of marriage, blessed by God and the church, for the good of wider society. With our gay teenagers, we have traditionally offered them no such model for sexual expression. They are faced with an expectation of lifelong celibacy, or an anticipation that they will enter into a heterosexual relationship anyway. There are many gay Christians who have married straight out of pressure from their churches, and who in so doing have put themselves and their partners into impossible situations.

Try a thought experiment with me for a moment... If you're straight, imagine that the rules have suddenly changed. Imagine that it is no longer pleasing to God that you find people of the opposite gender attractive. In fact, it is a sin, and you must stop doing it. More than that, you must now start to find people of the same gender as you sexually attractive, to the point where one day you can imagine yourself having same gender sex, and getting married. You must never again have a sexual relationship, or even fantasise about doing so, with someone of the opposite gender.

OK, end of experiment. That, in a nutshell, is what we do to our gay teenagers. So is it any wonder that they do not tell us what their sexuality is? Is it any wonder that they go outside the church for love and friendship? Is it any wonder that their normal teenage insecurities frequently compound to a degree that is hard for them to live with? Is it any wonder that they struggle to form monogamous and stable relationships? Is it any wonder that alcoholism and other addictions become the coping strategies for insecurities, that affect such a large percentage of the gay population? Is it an wonder that promiscuity is so prevalent?

Being a gay Christian often involves living a life that is inhibited in ways that the rest of us would struggle to comprehend. For a faith whose default language is one of freedom, it is ironic that we psychologically incarcerate our gay sisters and brothers. Imagine hiding one's true self for twenty years, never revealing that one has an 'other half', never speaking about relationships or friendships. Imagine the disconnect that takes place within families, as teenagers distance themselves from their parents, afraid that if they 'come out' they will encounter not only of condemnation, but worse, disappointment, as dreams of grandchildren are dashed. 'How will Mum and Dad tell their friends?' is enough to drive many a teenager to despair.

One of my friends told me that getting drunk is frequently used to provide a way out of an otherwise entirely inhibited lifestyle, and that relationships are often formed on the assumption that they will be short term, because no-one must ever be allowed to get too close to the 'real you' that you have been hiding for all these years. And so a disconnect develops between sex an affection, with promiscuity providing an easy way out. There has been no coherent role model for a Christian loving committed

partnership between two people of the same gender; and so our gay teenagers imbibe a message that they are not allowed to love, and sex and emotion become separated.

Another of my friends has produced a checklist of Good Pastoral Support, as seen from a Gay Christian's point of view, and in closing I share these with you now.² Firstly, Listen well: enable us, perhaps over a period of time, to say what we mean and understand ourselves better. Secondly, Recognise our vulnerability, particularly at the time we are likely to seek pastoral support: our sexuality is as much a part of who we are as our age, our place of birth, and our gender. To seek to dismiss our feelings as transitory can be extremely damaging. Thirdly, Be willing to accompany us on our Christian journey. Fourthly, Do not condemn: many LGBT people will struggle with self-esteem and will need to be affirmed as people you respect for who we are and for how we have chosen to describe ourselves, often after considerable thought and angst. No-one chooses to be gay! Fifthly, at the appropriate time, whatever your personal views, be honest about the different views of people within the church on what is right. And finally, Seek to show Christ's love in allowing us to decide how 'to be the best that we can be.' as Billy Graham once said, 'It is our job to love, it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict'.

So at this point I'd like to invite Luke Dowding to come and speak for a few minutes. Luke has a degree in theology from Spurgeon's College, and is a part of the congregation here at Bloomsbury.

Luke Dowding

Like Simon, I thought I'd start by talking briefly about my background and why the topic of human sexuality is a deeply personal and important one for me. At the ripe old age of 26 I am acutely aware that I don't offer the breadth of experience or education that the other speakers today collectively share, but what I can offer is the practical lessons learnt by someone who has at times experienced the, often accidental, rough hand of the Church, and the exclusion I have previously been forced into living.

I didn't spend much time in Church during my early childhood, except for the occasional Sunday school meeting or Christingle service – this wasn't a conscious decision on my part, and in fact I probably would have appreciated more visits to a Church setting. I've been told that at the age of five or six I came home visibly distressed after being told by a peer that God doesn't exist; combined with my slightly melodramatic ways, even at that age, my parents decided that I'd either be an actor or a vicar.

When we as a family relocated to Sussex, we were invited to attend the local Baptist Church and over the years my mother and I became more and more involved in Church life – leading Sunday schools, Easter holiday clubs, Bible studies, and so on. I thrived being a part of a Church community, and in the years since then have gained

my Batchelor's in Theology, worked as a Youth Pastor, and now continue to explore a sense of call and conviction into Baptist Ministry. However, unfortunately the positive experiences I enjoyed as both a member and later a paid member of the ministry team were often overshadowed by periods of crippling shame, anger, and discontent. Learning under the tutorage of the Youth Pastor when I was in my mid-teens meant that at times I was exposed to conservative views, ones which although are completely valid in their interpretation of Scripture, were conveyed in such a way that prevented me from talking about the feelings of same-sex attraction that at this point I'd been aware of since I was nine years old.

There were times of complete emotional disconnect during Bible Studies, in which we discussed abstinence before marriage, God's plan for creation through Adam and Eve, or even the topic of homosexuality itself; how could I, a sinful gay, marry, have children, and live happily ever after as God intended? This had damaging and dangerous consequences in my experiences outside of Church, and the familiar double-life paradox began to become a regular fixture. I engaged in sexual encounters with those who I knew were struggling with their feelings of same-sex attraction, having little regard for what they were attempting to figure out as my mind was too consumed with my own problems; I'd then angrily seek forgiveness from God, angry at myself, at God at everyone. This anger was visible in my home-life; to the world I was a charming young man, a blossoming leader in the Church, a good student and polite too. At home, my parents and siblings received the backlash, the pent up rage and emotion, the hurt and the angst. This was teenage drama on speed, and I'm forever grateful for their grace, patience and resilience.

After a series of trips abroad for Church work in my two years away from formal education, I returned to the UK to start in the same post, for the same Church that had caused a lot of the above hurt, and I began my three years as Youth Pastor. It was at the same time that I began my studies for my degree at Spurgeon's, and it was through that process that I began to learn of another way, another interpretation: a way in which my sexuality had no impact on my worth as a beloved part of God's creation. It was slow and steady at first, beginning by considering that perhaps my same-sex attraction wasn't God's best for me, but that he didn't hate me for it and I could live a single life for him. In the years since then I have slowly shifted from this position, not because of an innate desire to be in a relationship but because my studies, reflections, and times with God have led me to the conclusion that love is good, and where there is love, there's God.

This particular part of today's symposium is focussed on the pastoral issues that we face when wrestling with various interpretations of Scripture. One hopes that when approaching any issue of hermeneutics we do so with the right intent, with the hope that by our study and through our learnings we may gain even a glimpse at the Kingdom of Heaven. However, what can often happen is that we use the Bible to

attack and demonise people; whether they are the ethnic minority slaves of the past, women of 100 years ago or divorcees of 50; instead of building people up through the promises of God's word, we tear them down. Instead of the Bible being an invite to sit, talk and learn at God's table, it is perceived as a rejection, a slight, an enemy of human rights.

When we talk about "pastoral issues" we are ultimately talking about the problems we face when working with people, human beings with all of our gifts, baggage, and everything in between. It's easy to forget sometimes that the condemnation of homosexuals isn't the condemnation of an abstract theory on human sexuality, it's the condemnation of your neighbour, your colleague, your family member. Of me.

I stand before you today as a divinely created being, one who has many aspects – I am white, I am male, I like contemporary pop music, I am tall, I have blue eyes, I'm a Trekkie, I love Indian food, I have a mole on my head in exactly the same place that my father does, I'm a Christian, I love my partner, I love my parents and my siblings, I have brown hair, I'm gay. My sexuality is not the defining aspect of who I am. Just as those who identify themselves as heterosexual would not first introduce themselves by saying: "Hello, I'm Wendy and I'm straight", nor do I introduce myself by saying: "Hi, I'm Luke and I am same-sex attracted and have been for as long as I can remember".

Pastorally our concern should be bringing people to God, encouraging the growth of their relationship with God, disciplining and teaching them. Through the development of that relationship with our Creator, all of our flaws and our strengths are exposed and can be worked on, developed, refined, or stopped; but acting remotely, abstractly, and in condemnation can only ever nurture discontent and disconnect from the very God to whom we're seeking to bring people closer.

If our mission is to solely focus on an individual's sexuality, then we lose sight of so much of what makes them who they are, and that hurts. It hurts them, it damages our integrity, and it dilutes the mission of God's Church.

¹ <http://forusa.org/content/homosexuality-bible-walter-wink>

² This paper was produced for a seminar at the Baptist Assembly in 2013 by Martin Stears-Handscorn, of *Affirm: The network of Baptists affirming lesbian and gay Christians*.

Book Reviews

J. David Pleins *In Praise of Darwin – Georges Romanes and the Evolution of a Darwinian Believer* Bloomsbury New York 2014 398 pp. Pb. £23.99 ISBN: 978 1 6235 6554 1

A manuscript lost for over a hundred years revealing the inner struggles of one of Charles Darwin's closest colleagues is the foundation of David Pleins' book. The manuscript (referred to as 'the Typescript' throughout) is in part a memorial poem to Darwin, but more a collection of poems covering the work of Darwin, his personal impact on Georges Romanes, the turmoil in his thoughts arising from Darwin's death, and the continuing lifelong struggle with the conflicts arising in his mind from the ideas of Darwin, including the evolution of religion itself.

David Pleins was fortunate that Santa Clara University, acquired the 'Typescript' enabling him to undertake an in depth analysis resulting in this book. David Pleins casts a light into the historical association between Georges Romanes and Charles Darwin and some of the circumstances that led to Darwin's burial in Westminster Abbey. For instance to quote from David Pleins' book 'The Rev. Frederic Farrar unexpectedly ran into Thomas Huxley and William Spottiswoode "in deep and earnest conversation at the Athenaeum" shortly after Darwin's death. When he asked them why they had not applied to have Darwin buried in the Abbey, Huxley said "Nothing would be more fitting; it is the subject on which we were talking. But we did not mean to make the request, for we felt sure it would be refused." Farrar countered with a smile, saying "that we clergy are not all so bigoted as he supposed." With this intervention the appropriate approvals were granted and Darwin's burial in the Abbey was secured.'

The affection in which Romanes held Darwin was surprisingly deep and Darwin's death and surrounding circumstances are the subject of some of the most moving poems in the manuscript.

David Pleins shows a special ability in the dissection of the poetry, not only its meaning and links to the events in Romanes' life but also in relation to the range of poetical techniques employed.

It is remarkable that a scientific collaborator of Charles Darwin who though he saw how Darwin's work and objective thinking challenged the Christian faith should be able to write imaginatively and movingly in a quite different genre.

Romanes Memorial Poem was published in his life time but only in fifty copies for private circulation. It seems that though he was always exercised about the way the

new 'truth' that science had discovered tended to force skepticism upon him he maintained a determined search for religious truth and tried to effect a synthesis between them. An example of this can be seen in the lines where Romanes begins to see how the very work of death somehow generates love and that part of the clue to the mystery of suffering is that its workings produce such character as he saw in Darwin who he mourned and yet loved still.

More strong is love than Death, we say;
 Then on the face of Death we see
 A lurid smile that answers – "Yea?"
 "Ye knew his love; look now on me!"
 Almighty Death! We do thee wrong!
 Love made not thee; thou madest Love:

The fact that the poems were not widely available and the full manuscript not published shows Romanes reluctance to publicize his religious yearning, preferring his public perception to remain as that of a more cerebral scientist tending to skepticism.

The complete Memorial Poem is included in Pleins' book as an Appendix with all the suggested insertions, omissions and corrections marked up by Georges Romanes. The Memorial Poem however, can stand alone and could be published independently of any analysis. It mirrors in some ways Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' where a similar deep grief is analyzed and the problem of the suffering in nature wrestled with but the trust that God is somehow still love not finally abandoned. Anyone who has explored such questionings will relate to Romanes' poem.

The skepticism, despair and complaint expressed in good verse parallels in some ways Fitzgerald's *Rubiayat*. The way in which that Poem has become a little classic in its own right perhaps suggests a way ahead for the Memorial Poem of Romanes.

Although the Poem is old and its circumstances relate to the time around the late Victorian era it will resonate with anyone seeking an integration of science and faith today.

David Pleins' in depth analysis of all aspects of the work is a worthy and scholarly production relating the poem to Romanes' life, his friendship with Darwin and interactions with many other scientists and thinkers of the time. He puts into context many parts of the Memorial Poem that otherwise might have seemed obscure. It will interest all Darwin scholars and anyone thinking through the wider significance of evolution for Christian belief.

It is hard to see how better use could have been made of Santa Clara University's acquisition of this long lost and intriguing manuscript. It represents a further landmark

in the history of the earthquake generated by “Darwinism” the tremors of which are still echoing through many places in human culture and religion.

There can only be one truth and all efforts to find it are worthy of respect but the synthesis of scientific discoveries with the Christian revelation in Christ is an ongoing work. It is here that David Pleins and Romanes both make a valuable contribution. David Pleins writes sensitively on Romanes struggles but appears to take the role merely of a scholarly observer in this book leaving the reader wondering what his own theological position might be.

Georges Romanes struggled to find the answer in his rational quest for the truth but in the end the light that often seemed to be breaking into his darkness shone clearly when he found that ‘becoming like a child’ finally opened for him the kingdom of heaven. After all his reasonings, publications and correspondence it may be the long delayed publication of the full Memorial Poem might prove to be his most lasting legacy. If this turns out to be so then David Pleins must take his share of the credit for putting this Memorial Poem into print together with his own excellent, extensive and illuminating analysis.

Reviewed by Dr .E Gwyn Jordan

Craig.L.Blomberg *Jesus and the Gospels (New Testament Introduction and SurveyPart 1)* Nottingham IVP Apollos 2nd.edition 2014 500pp. Pb. £16.99 ISBN 978.1.84474.475.6

Craig.L.Blomberg *From Pentecost to Patmos(New Testament Introduction and Survey Part 2)* Nottingham IVP Apollos 2014 577pp. Pb. £16.99 ISBN 978.1.78591138.1

Both these volumes developed from hand-outs for students and developed into books covering a degree course on the New Testament that would enable the undergraduates not only to know the background and text but also to be able to think theologically and be able to analyze real life problems from a biblical perspective. To use the author’s expression each one is a ‘one stop shopping textbook.’ The award-winning ‘Jesus and the Gospels’ was first published in 1997 and has been extensively used and widely acclaimed. This second edition is 15% longer with a revised and clarified text, incorporating developments in scholarship and including updated bibliographies. Nearly half of the book consists of introductory matters, which gives the reader a comprehensive overview of both the background to and a critical assessment of the Gospels.

The opening chapters deal with the historical background from the end of the Old Testament to the Roman occupation of Israel followed by a discussion of the religions of the contemporary world of Jesus, both Greco-Roman and Jewish, and the home life and culture in which Jesus and his contemporaries found themselves. Blomberg also comments on recent modern assessments of these cultures by liberation, intercultural and feminist critics. The chapters on Gospel criticism encompass the traditional textual, oral, source, redaction and canon criticism as well as the more recent narrative, reader-response and those from the structuralist and post-structuralist schools. Each Gospel is introduced by the usual attention to questions of authorship, date, provenance and theological emphases. Blomberg majors into the historicity of the Gospels with comments after each section of commentary as well as chapters devoted to the quests for the historical Jesus as well as a discussion of the historical evidence supporting the biblical accounts. The second half of the book is taken up with a commentary on the text of the Gospel accounts.

The second volume dealing with the rest of the New Testament follows a similar pattern, although there is less introductory material. One chapter deals with the life and ministry of Paul and his theology and with the topic of letter writing by Paul and his contemporaries. This book concentrates on a detailed commentary on the content and texts of the New Testament books from Acts to Revelation stressing the most interesting, relevant and controversial passages with enough detail about items of introduction to provide the necessary background for sound interpretation. Each section helpfully ends by pointing the reader to the book's contemporary application. Each chapter of both volumes contains a detailed bibliography helpfully divided into introductory, intermediate and advanced literature and questions for review.

Craig Blomberg, who is a distinguished professor of New Testament, has the gift of being able to write both scholarly and popular books. Although scholarly in content these two volumes are eminently readable and can be read with profit not only by students and academics looking for a current summary but, as the author hopes, by lay persons desiring to deepen their biblical roots. The books are written from an evangelical Christian perspective but the author is at pains to give a broad view of scholarly opinion and is aware of popular works by writers such as Dan Brown and Hal Lindsey whose views can give a misleading impression of the evidence. Though not exhaustive these two books are comprehensive enough to provide the average Christian with a stand-alone commentary on the New Testament. It will prove a boon not only for students but for preachers and also, with the questions for review as a useful tool for those leading small (house)groups. I thoroughly recommend these books and believe that they will become standard textbooks for many years to come.

Reviewed by Reg Luhman.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Professor Lamoureux is doing an excellent job for as he says "Evangelical students in public universities are leaving the faith in record numbers" and he realises the importance of helping them to hold on to their faith without having to reject the findings of good science. He has had to travel this road and is clearly searching for the best way to integrate his faith with the process of evolution. The church does not always help in showing the way here; often suggesting the only way is to regard much of modern science as erroneous.

Lamoureux focuses on Darwin; this is good in one way for it is often by appeals to Darwin that arguments are made. But I think talking of Darwinism is merely often only a simple way of referring to the idea that the world of living things has arisen without any apparent divine input. It is interesting that Darwin was no Darwinist in this sense and that is the strength of Lamoureux's case. But this is not really solving the problem for it simply says that Darwin did not feel faith was inconsistent with his discoveries though he did not get far towards a full synthesis of faith and science himself.

The natural world and its evolutionary history really do challenge evangelical faith on many fronts and the difficulties do not go away easily. The simple and in many ways apparently safe solution for the conservative evangelical is to reject scientific conclusions. At least this position leaves fewer problems with interpretation of scripture. One's cherished interpretations can be embraced and all conflicts with science fall away with the view that the science is flawed. But it is this approach which can be blamed for the exodus from the churches of the students, reported by Lamoureux.

Although focusing on Darwin's own religious position is interesting it is historical rather than helping solve the problem we have today. The science has moved on somewhat since Darwin's day and it is merely the great scheme that survives with the motor of natural selection and so much more information about the process is now available especially the genetics of which Darwin was ignorant. It also should be remembered that Darwin's great idea was in truth only an idea whose time had come, as evidenced by other discoverers who get overlooked by the need to try and simply our explanations.

The great need for us as Christians today is to uphold the truth wherever we find it and see how we can integrate science with the great truths of our faith. Lamoureux is bold and brave here and goes further to hold science with faith than many will find comfortable. But it is clear from his work what he feels is needed to keep the two together and it is this we must note. The problem of evil, the fall and the first human

must be addressed. Even to say this will put us in difficulty with some of our best Evangelical friends.

In all this I have found the work of the late Rev. Professor Douglas Spanner my best guide to start a synthesis. My personal knowledge of him, his sincere faith, his example in his life and work and finally the scholarly way he devoted himself towards the synthesis of the highest views of scripture, with modern science have been of the greatest help to me. He powerfully fought against the assertions of atheists, and was always active as a witness to Christ in everything he did. His last book was never published in book form but is available freely via on the web (<http://www.creationandevolution.co.uk/>) I often wonder if it could be reproduced in edited form, taking account of some recent developments as one of the most helpful works interpreting the scripture in such a way that discoveries of science represent no ultimate challenge to its authority or revealed nature.

This is the urgent need, to get more good Biblical scholars to show us the way forward.

I shall be interested to see what Roman Catholic theologians are going to do now that the Pope has declared that Evolution and the big Bang are to be regarded as correct explanations of origins.

Lamoureux shows us we shall need more flexibility than we have generally allowed ourselves. He will stand as representing one respected position and this could help many struggling to find their way.

I am very glad you have been able to bring Lamoureux to our attention.

Gwyn Jordan

NOTES

NOTES

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