

**CSCS NEWS**  
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**Editorial**

In the last edition I wrote about the movements of tectonic plates. On the surface, debates about sexuality in the Churches (as about many other things) remain polarised and often bitter. But under the surface new things are coming to birth.

The recently published anthology *Opening Up*, reviewed below by John Cook, gives many examples of new thinking in the Roman Catholic Church, on sexuality as well as on social and political engagement, liturgy and other matters. It was compiled as a sixtieth birthday present to a member of our Committee, Martin Pendergast, whose service to renewal in his Church has been exceptional. It is an honour to have him amongst us, and good to see that his contribution has been thus celebrated. But there are certainly many other members of CSCS whose contributions, if maybe not on the same scale, are significant – but unsung. We want to hear more of *your* experiences of contributing to the debate.

Another honour to CSCS has been the agreement of some distinguished church leaders to serve as Patrons and Matrons. We include here a short article by one of them: John Gladwin, the Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford, who spoke memorably at one of our Annual Conferences some years ago and helpfully introduced some of us to Foucault and other representatives of postmodern thought on sexuality. John will be returning, with speakers/panellists from other denominations, to contribute to our Annual Conference on 11 February on the sexuality debate in ecumenical perspective. It will be particularly good if at this conference we can see a suitably ecumenical spread of our membership, since the Committee has long been concerned about Anglican domination! Those of us who do belong to that particular Communion can so easily forget that the trials and tribulations of current debates, notably about homosexuality, are not the whole story about what is happening in the Churches. On 11 February we have a chance to engage with the bigger picture. There is a booking form in this edition; book now!

There is still, also, a chance to book for our residential conference in the summer jointly with the Modern Churchpeople's Union and the Student Christian Movement. This promises to be a major and highly popular event, so you are strongly advised to book early. Student discounts may well be available, and it would be particularly good to see some students from the theological colleges and courses to which we are now circulating this Newsletter. Those who will exercise leadership in our Churches badly need time, space and support to wrestle with the contemporary issues of sexuality. This conference will provide these things. It is not to be missed!

Meanwhile, so much other work and thinking goes on. Jane Fraser, our Chair, is not one to blow her own trumpet – though she is, I know, proud of her recent appointment as a Canon of Worcester Cathedral in recognition of her local and national work in important areas of sexuality, notably teenage pregnancy and the sexual needs of the

disabled and those with learning difficulties. Her contribution to this edition focuses on bringing members up to date on various CSCS matters, but behind it lies a probably unrivalled wealth of practical engagement in real-life issues. At a more intellectual level, Will Adam's work on the legal implications of the ordination of women bishops will be of interest to many readers.

Time and other pressures do not enable us to give as much space as we should like to the work of sister organisations such as LGCM and Changing Attitude – or in the area of women's ministry GRAS and WATCH. We know, however, that there has been much activity in these other parts of the wood. The debate on women bishops to which Will refers seems to be steadily advancing, and certainly in General Synod elections within my own Diocese the atmosphere was one of almost overwhelming support. Issues around the ministry of gay people remain more troubling, but we must congratulate those involved in the production of the recent book edited by Richard Kirker and Andrew Linzey, which we hope to review in a future edition, and those involved in bringing Bishop Gene Robinson to these shores and into dialogue with the Archbishop of Canterbury. There are so many signs that the tectonic plates are on the move.

But all this is just the tip of the iceberg. Every member of CSCS, and many who are not yet members, must be contributing something to the movement of those plates. The media may portray Christianity (and especially Anglicanism) as riven with disputes over sexuality and lacking anything positive to say on the subject to our generation. There is, depressingly, truth in that picture, but it is by no means the whole truth. How many people are quietly discovering, and perhaps sharing with others, a faith that is true to their own sexuality. The small trickle of renewal could become a torrent if we worked together to make it so.

Anthony Woollard

### **From a Patron**

*John Gladwin*

The church, in our western culture, is once again passing through a time of cultural challenge and change which is facing all of us with difficult questions about how we do moral theology. The troubled waters in the Anglican Communion on issues about sex is the public face of our struggle in mission in this cultural context.

One of the problems of a 'post modern' culture is its lack of historical focus. The journey that brought us to this place and how the reactions of the church shaped our thinking give way to an exploration of the mobile fields of culture. Yet the history of serious moral theology tells the story of the persistent work of scholars and pastoral leaders to hold to a living and developing relationship between the given-ness of the truth of God in Jesus Christ and the changing shape of human experience. The moral sense concerning sexuality and sexual praxis has been one of the most demanding fields for this tension between the given and the living experience.

The one thing post modern thought does offer to us is a capacity to encounter crucial dynamics for change as cultural shift. Michael Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is testimony to that. He paints a picture of cultural mores which contain some deep challenges for the church which he sees as a major contributor to the shaping of our cultural experience.

We can all describe the profound changes in human experience and understanding in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The expectations and values concerning the relationship of women and men would be a central example of the change. Similarly, the development and widespread use of contraceptive protection has altered the way people experience family and see sexual activity. Christian moral thinking has had to respond. The work done by Anglicans in the heart of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the Family and on family planning is evidence of the richness of the Christian tradition in developing its moral thought and pastoral practice.

The present conflicts around same sex relationships and practice have taken centre stage in our contemporary concerns. It is a serious mistake, however, to see our difficulties solely in these terms. That would be to burden the Gay and Lesbian community with responsibility for the moral confusions of our age surrounding sex. It might be argued that our culture presents us with rather deeper and more important theological and pastoral challenges. The Christian stress on the fundamental importance of relationships between persons as the foundation for thinking about what is appropriate for sexual practice needs reasserting. There is far too much emphasis on what people do and far too little on the stability and disciplines of relationships. When we untie the obligations and duties we have to each other from discussion about what is permitted in practice we collude with a functionalist approach to behaviour.

Serious Christian moral thought is about people in relationships. There is an urgent need for the church to refocus its thinking in that direction. That might begin to help us tackle the alarming rise in sexual disease, in the persistent reality of unwanted pregnancy, of the abuses within families and between partners – all evidence of a lack of understanding and support for strong, stable and loving relationships. This moves us towards the heart of the church's contribution to its pastoral care of all of us in our most personal relationships. It is in the joining of the mystery of the love of God seen in the face of Jesus Christ and the mystery of what it means to be human beings open to love that we will begin to fathom the depths of the wisdom and truth of God for the challenges of these days.

*The Rt Revd John Gladwin is Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford*

## **Legal implications of the ordination of women to the episcopate**

*Will Adam*

The decision to permit the ordination of women to the episcopate in the Church of England will be based primarily on theology. Many believe (including *Forward in Faith*) that the decision to go ahead was made in principle when the General Synod requested that legislation be drawn up and brought before them

However, lurking behind any decision based on theology, principle and justice there lie a number of decisions that need to be made on how that decision can be put into practice. Much depends on the legislation itself. There are different options before the group drafting legislation ranging from a single clause measure simply removing the bar to women priests being ordained as bishops to more complex scenarios allowing their ordination but preventing their appointment as either diocesan bishops or archbishops. We will not know the shape of the legislation until the report is published.

The first legal issue that will undoubtedly arise is the question of whether or not the General Synod and Parliament has the authority to permit the ordination of women as bishops. A spate of litigation questioning this authority followed the decision to ordain women priests. None of the challenges were successful and it is therefore very unlikely that anyone will be able to mount a successful challenge this time.

The second issue that I would like to point out is about the recognition of ordination. The Church of England consistently states that the orders of all those who are lawfully ordained should be recognised. Yet the legislation bringing in the ordination of women to the priesthood provided a mechanism for the ministry of lawfully ordained female clergy to be refused by PCCs and (at the time) by Diocesan Bishops. The refusal to accept the ministry of a woman bishop has further-reaching consequences as it could mean that some might refuse to recognise the efficacy of confirmation and ordination when conferred by her. Great care will need to be taken that the rights of female bishops and supporters, as well as opponents, of women's ministry are adequately protected. The courts are notoriously unwilling to pronounce on questions of the recognition of holy orders, most recently in the case of *Blake v Associated Newspapers*.<sup>1</sup> The recognition or otherwise of the ministry of female bishops also has knock-on effects in such areas as canonical obedience, submission to lawful authority and acceptance of the direction of the bishop in matters such as liturgy.

There are already calls for the setting up of a third province free of women bishops and priests. Detailed proposals have been published by *Forward in Faith*.<sup>2</sup> Such a move would have huge legal implications in terms of the synodical structure of the church, the parish system, the training and discipline of clergy and, possibly, such areas as ecclesiastical courts.

The Church is entering a minefield first of legislation and then, assuming the change is brought about, of dealing with the consequences of that change. These consequences include practical, legal matters and great care will need to be taken to ensure that the Church gets it right.

*Will Adam is Priest in Charge of Girton, Ely Diocesan Ecumenical Officer, and a Research Student at Cardiff Law School*

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<sup>1</sup> [2003] EWHC 1600 QB.

<sup>2</sup> [www.forwardinfaith.com](http://www.forwardinfaith.com)

## **From the Chair**

### ***An ecumenical theme to our Spring Conference – A Dialogue between the Churches on Sexuality Issues***

Plans are at an advanced stage for our AGM and Spring Conference to be held on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2006 at St John's Church, Waterloo. Please see the enclosed publicity flyer and complete the booking form as soon as possible if you are able to join us for this extremely interesting event.

The decision to hold it in London this year has meant that we have been able to invite our Patrons and Matron to attend and contribute to the theme that was agreed at the last AGM. At that meeting, members asked for an ecumenical perspective on current issues around sexuality and we are delighted that The Revd. Roberta Rominger (URC) and The Rt. Revd. John Gladwin (Anglican) have accepted our invitation to respond to your request. Unfortunately, The Revd. David Gamble (Methodist) is unable to attend due to prior commitments that he has been unable to change. However, we are confident that we will be able to offer you two further highly respected speakers who will challenge us on a Methodist and a Roman Catholic perspective.

### ***A residential conference in collaboration with The Modern Churchpeople's Union***

For the last three years, CSCS has had observer status on the Council of the Modern Churchpeople's Union. This has reflected our common stance on Christianity and Sexuality and is now to be reflected in a more tangible way through this year's annual residential conference entitled '*Passion for Justice*'. This is to be held at the High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddeston, Hertfordshire from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> July 2006. You will have received a flyer inserted in the last CSCS Newsletter. It is to be chaired by Professor Elaine Graham, who spoke so compellingly at our last CSCS Annual Conference in Birmingham and there are some exciting contributors on themes around human sexuality. It is proving to be a popular event, so if you would like to attend and haven't completed a booking form, please do so as soon as possible. If you've lost your conference flyer, do let me know and I'll send you another! We hope that this event will give CSCS a broader platform and welcome publicity. Publicity about the event has gone out to theological colleges and seminaries and through the Student Christian Movement. In this way we hope to attract younger Christians concerned about this aspect of their faith.

### ***Consolidating membership lists and subscription rates***

I would like to thank all those of you who have responded to Daphne Cook's letter and indicated to us your wishes regarding the option to continue (or not, as the case might be) receiving *Theology and Sexuality* but at a slightly increased rate to reflect the fact that it is now published three times a year. Some of you have indicated that you wish to continue as members of CSCS without subscribing to *Theology and Sexuality*. Our membership list has been amended to reflect these changes and the names of those who have not responded to our correspondence over the last year have been deleted.

At the last CSCS Committee meeting, an executive decision was made to clarify the subscription rates for the year 2006, as follows:

“In view of current uncertainties about CSCS membership and publications costs, the Committee as an emergency action agrees that the subscriptions from 1 January 2006 should be £40 where *Theology and Sexuality* is required and £15 in other cases. Where two members at one address ask to receive *Theology and Sexuality*, one copy shall normally be sent to that address and the combined subscription shall be £40+15. Overseas subscriptions and any other special cases shall be adjusted *pro rata*. The membership shall be invited to endorse this emergency action at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 11 February 2006.”

As you see, we shall be asking you to endorse this decision at the AGM. I look forward to seeing you there!

*Jane Fraser*

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Julian Filochowski and Peter Stanford (editors), *Opening Up*, Darton Longman and Todd, ISBN 0-232-52624-9. £14.95.

The sub-title of this book is “Speaking Out in the Church”. The 24 contributors (almost all of whom are Roman Catholics) write about the need for the Church to go back to Jesus, his example and teaching, his life, death and resurrection: but to note what life in the world is like *now*. The book is a plea for the Church and the Gospel Message to escape from the shackles of past thought and practice, and to address the realities of human life in 2005.

Several contributors point out that the Church should be a listening and learning Church, not just a teaching Church. “*We are Church. Together. We are multi-hued, we are female as well as male, we are gay and straight, we are all sinners and all would-be saints. And we must learn again to listen to each other.*” It is “a global people united in sacrament and solidarity striving to follow the Lord in this broken and divided world”.

Down the centuries the Church has been impoverished by concentrating power and authority in the ordained, and under-valuing the experience, the thought and the insights of its lay members. Baptism has primacy over ordination. Having an all-male ordained ministry has further weakened the understanding and the applying of the Gospel.

Chapter after chapter is a plea for the Church to get real about sexuality, poverty, and peace. Theological seminaries should ensure that students (and staff) understand the realities of God’s good gift of sexuality. “What you don’t know can hurt you”. Sexual intercourse is for expressing and building up a loving relationship, not just a means of producing babies.

Believing that Jesus showed God’s love for all people, clergy, nuns and others have worked amongst gay and lesbian people. Unsympathetic members of the hierarchy have tried to stop them. Priests have been rebuked for welcoming gay and lesbian people to receive the Holy Sacrament.

No one doubts that the Church needs rules. There is no virtue in chaos. But “the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath”. To forbid the wife of an HIV-infected man from insisting that he uses a condom, is to promote death not life.

The Church also needs to get real about Options for the Poor. God is described in the Bible as “the Father of orphans, defender of widows”. The cancelling of unpayable debt, and the promoting of fair conditions of trade are urgent. There is no salvation for the rich if the poor are ignored. “Extra pauperes nulla salus” – outside of the poor there is no salvation.

I am typing this review on the day that newspapers report the publication of “*An Instruction concerning Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders*”.

The document, from the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, says the church deeply respects homosexuals. But it also says it 'cannot admit to the seminary and the sacred orders those who practice homosexuality, present deeply rooted homosexual tendencies or support so-called gay culture.' The document reiterates the Church's traditional teaching that homosexual acts are 'grave sins' and also intrinsically immoral and contrary to natural law.

Writers in *Opening Up* point out that respecting Natural Law means the Church has to take account of scientific discovery. The Earth does revolve around the Sun. Human beings do not choose their sexual orientation. All of us, lesbian, gay, straight, need to live our sexuality in ways which conform with the two great commandments: to love God whole-heartedly, to love our neighbour as ourselves. God calls some of us to a life of celibacy, God calls others of us to a faithful sexual relationship of love.

“Traditional Church Teaching” emphasises the importance of applying church rules carefully to particular circumstances. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and the levite obeyed the rule of purity (do not touch what might be a corpse) rather than the rule of compassion. The Church needs its members to cultivate and obey an informed conscience, rather than be unthinkingly compliant.

The book has been published to mark the beginning of the leadership of Pope Benedict. As the introduction states “*Opening Up* is not a monochrome or tidy gathering. There is no common experience, temperament, register or angle of vision. But each voice, in its individual and sometimes contrary way, is a reflection on love, truth and justice in the Catholic Church spoken in honour of a friend.”

The friend is Martin Pendergast, who “has given most of his life to cherishing those who are on the margins, whether of society or the Church”. Martin is a member of CSCS.

Our CSCS leader, Jane Fraser, is one of the contributors. She has written the chapter "Teenage Pregnancy: are the Churches to Blame?" You cannot read this chapter without being forced to think very deeply indeed.

Reading this book is like opening the window of a stuffy room, and receiving breath after breath of fresh air. I recommend that as many people as possible read it. With thinkers and writers such as these, there is hope for God's Church on earth.

*John Cook*

**This newsletter is produced for CSCS**

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**for more information on CSCS, its Committee and its activities.**

**Next copy deadline for the Newsletter is 1 March 2006.**

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