

CSCS NEWS

The newsletter of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality

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EDITORIAL

After the excitements of the summer conference reported in our last edition, there is rather less to tell by way of developments over the past few months. We remain solvent; we are slowly growing in numbers; and we have updated our website (www.cscs.co.uk) which is well worth a visit if you have not looked at it recently. But can we point to any more impact on the debates within the Churches on sexuality?

We are now just one amongst many organizations making a contribution, but that, within that growing network, our input is respected. For example we are working with LGCM on their major conference on Faith and Homophobia planned for 17 February. And many of our members, often through their involvement with some of those other organizations, are taking the message out to surprising places. We reproduce below the bulk of a recent article by Christina Rees for the journal of Forward in Faith – not perhaps the most obvious place where one might expect to read a CSCS contribution.

Some of our efforts however are more direct, and have potential to be extended more widely. Our Chair, Jane Fraser, is well known as an expert on teenage sexuality and pregnancy, and was recently asked to lead a training day for youth workers in her own Diocese of Worcester. She has produced a booklet on the topic (downloadable from www.cofe-worcester.org) which could well be usable elsewhere. She reports on all this below. Young people, and those who lead them, want and need to talk about sexuality, but Christian resources for them are limited and all too often likely to be (or to be perceived as) negative. It may be that some of our readers, perhaps using the resource provided by Jane, could stimulate such discussion within their own churches? If so, we would very much like to hear from you about the outcomes.

Another place where we may be able to innovate is in interfaith dialogue. The public debate during the autumn about the wearing of veils has highlighted the difficult issues surrounding gender and sexuality within Islam in the context of contemporary Western society. Within Islam, as there have for some years been within Judaism, there are now a few other voices asking how a faith-based sexual ethic should respond to social change; but such voices are by no means in the majority. Religion in general is getting a pretty bad press at the moment, whether it is in the debate about faith schools or the impact of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, and the seeming dominance of fundamentalism of all kinds adds to a sense of divisiveness and irrelevance of religion in the public mind. Issues of gender and sexuality are rarely explicit in this – always excepting the role of women in Islam – but they are certainly implicit. Perhaps we, who have begun to come to terms with those issues as Christians, owe it to those of other faiths to share something of our journey and what we have learnt. And perhaps we in turn have much to learn from

the – often much more painful – journeys which others in those faith traditions have had to make.

That is the rationale behind our annual conference on Saturday 10 February at Carrs Lane Church in Birmingham. We are mailing all our members separately with fuller details. Please sign up AS SOON AS YOU RECEIVE THAT MAILING before you lose it! In deference to the Sabbath morning commitments of our Jewish brothers and sisters, we are this year holding the conference in the afternoon and the AGM in the morning, rather than the reverse as in previous years. Do try to come in time for the AGM – it is important! And please think hard whether you would be able to make the very modest time commitment involved in serving on the Committee. We really do need some fresh blood; most members of the existing Committee have served for several years, and none of us is now in the first flush of youth! Feel free to get in touch with Jane (contact details on back page) if you would like to discuss this further before making up your mind.

Meanwhile, the public thinking goes on, both in the Churches and in the academic and literary sphere. We include below, as promised in the last edition, some thoughts by both Gill Cooke and Alan Sheard about the increasing failure of the Church of England (at least) to take seriously the scientific facts which need to be one of the bases for any debate about sexuality. We also include a book review. We do our best to spot works which, whether academic or not, have something to say to the ordinary reader; but we would be glad of more recommendations and reviews submitted by members.

For my part I have only just got round to reading Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance* (Profile Books, 1999). That has been widely reviewed elsewhere and will be well known to many of our readers. Interestingly, it has some resonances with the book reviewed below by John Cook. The questions which it raises remain provocative. If apparent same-sex, transgender, and other "unnatural" activity is so very widespread in the animal kingdom, does that make it "natural"? What implications does that have for humans? If biodiversity is a good in evolutionary terms (as environmentalists now widely recognize), does the same apply to sexual diversity, and, if so, does that application stop at the boundary of humanity? Is it in some way – as Bagemihl would seem to imply – positively healthy that not all human beings are monogamous heterosexuals committed to breeding? Might the human race actually benefit, not just from the existence of same-sex relationships, child-freeness and celibacy, but even from a judicious mix of polygamy and promiscuity? But, if so, what of any norms and moral boundaries? Is it really, after all, the case that "anything goes", despite the witness of Christian and most other cultures? Or are there specific human characteristics which impose responsibilities not applicable to other animals? If any of our readers have thoughts on these questions, I should be delighted to publish them!

Anthony Woollard

TEENAGE PREGNANCY: ARE THE CHURCHES TO BLAME?

Jane Fraser

This was the rather controversial title of a paper I wrote for inclusion in *'Opening Up: Speaking Out in the Church'* [edited by Julian Filochowski and Peter Stanford, published by Darton, Longman & Todd last year and reviewed in the Winter 2005 edition of CSCS News]. It was pointed out to me by the Press and Communications Officer in our Diocese of Worcester, that I couldn't write about the lack of engagement by the churches in this social problem without doing something about it myself. Duly chastised, I met with the Bishop, the Social Responsibility Officer, the Director of Education and the Youth Officer for the Diocese. Out of that meeting came a proposal for me to write a 'popular', shortened version of the original paper to be published as one of a series of diocesan booklets containing stories and critical comment on social justice themes. They are meant to be read and studied by a wide range of people, both within the faith communities and in wider society. They are circulated to churches and other faith groups, voluntary and community agencies, statutory organisations and local authority departments.

A brief press release from the Diocesan Offices at the time of publication of the booklet stimulated a flurry of interest in the media – radio interviews locally and in London, and press reports in both Worcester papers and the Birmingham Post. For a little discussion booklet it was unprecedented and one can only surmise that the juxtaposition of God and sex was the trigger! However, it was a golden opportunity for me to highlight a Christian perspective on the wider issue of teenage sexual behaviour that didn't encompass the popular view that the Church is entirely condemnatory but, on the contrary, presented a compassionate analysis.

The other outcome of my discussion with Diocesan officers was to take up one of the recommendations in the booklet, to offer training to church and voluntary organisation youth workers on talking to young people about sexual matters. The Diocesan Youth Officer, working in collaboration with the Worcestershire Council for Voluntary Youth Services, arranged an evening workshop that was appreciated by those who came. It was of particular value for those who were fully aware of the need to discuss sexual matters with the young people with whom they had contact but were nervous about broaching the subject, or those who were uncertain about strategies that were known to be effective.

We are now exploring the possibility of joining forces with the local Teenage Pregnancy Unit to organise a local conference on the subject for any health, social services, voluntary or church personnel who share our concerns and are motivated to engage in a constructive way with the issues.

If any of our members are interested in this topic or the project in general, you may download the booklet entitled, *'Teenage Pregnancy: A Church Problem?'* from the Worcester Diocesan website www.cofe-worcester.org.uk You will need to click on 'Social and Economic Engagement' and then on 'Publications and Resources', where you will find it listed under the 'Just So' series of booklets. I am also happy to offer a workshop on 'Talking to Young People about Relationships and Sex' for a small fee and travel expenses. You can contact me on training@revjane.demon.co.uk or by phone on 01684 594715.

UNFOLDING ADVENTURE

Christina Rees

This article first appeared in 'New Directions' (the monthly magazine for members of Forward in Faith) at the invitation of its editor, Nicholas Turner. We reprint it here with his permission, as it is relevant to all within the Church of England who seek to engage with the issue of opening the episcopate to women.

I believe that part of what we are seeing at this time is God breaking down unholy barriers of our own making and causing us to face our fears and prejudices by the cleansing and purifying power of his Holy Spirit. The obedient response is for us to submit ourselves to God's action and to try to discern the ways in which we are being called to change.

Change is, of course, often painful and difficult, for individuals as well as for institutions. As Christians seeking to remain faithful to our heavenly Father, change can be a real threat: have we heard and discerned correctly, or are we being led astray into error? In his email inviting me to write this article, the editor (*of New Directions*) referred to the place in which we are now in the Church of England as the 'end times'. I realise that it must seem like that to many. With all that is in me I fervently believe that it is not. In fact, I see where we are now in the church in regards to opening the episcopate to women as the dawning of a new era in which we will discover more of the kingdom of God among us in greater strength, power, truth and grace.

Part of what we have to acknowledge is that none of us knows precisely where we are being led. The walk of faith is an unfolding adventure, requiring, step by step, trust in the guidance and indwelling of God's Spirit. We are reliant on God not only as individual disciples but also, corporately, as an institution.

As individuals, we need to take responsibility for our spiritual health and discipline, our attitudes and actions. As the institutional church, to a greater extent, we have to rely on our systems, structures and leaders to keep us attentive, responsive and faithful. All of this requires trust, something that has been in woefully short supply in our church.

Trusting one another and being willing to discuss issues about which we hold very different views does not imply, or necessarily lead to, agreement. What it can do, though, is lead to a greater understanding of each other's views and concerns and a greater sense of our connectedness in the heart of God.

As part of the subject of this article I was asked to address the issue of how a church that consecrates women as bishops will 'cope' with the continued existence of those elsewhere on the churchmanship spectrum as honoured members. First of all, I greatly hope that we will not merely be 'coping' with those who, for a variety of reasons, disagree with women's ordination. What I would like to think is that we can come to the position of living, working and ministering more honestly and openly together.

That will require an ongoing commitment on the part of the mainstream church and those who remain opposed to women's ordination to mutual respect and mutual acceptance. It will also require on the part of Forward in Faith and Reform an acceptance of the reality of where we are in the Church of England in regards of the position of women.

Back in 1988, the then Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood, said, 'I believe women

ought to be ordained to the priesthood ... I believe that truths which were there from the beginning in the Christian faith can lie dormant until the social conditions are right for them to be perceived. And I affirm that the time has come to express this truth in the life of the Church.'

A year later, Dr Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, said at General Synod, 'I remain of the conviction that the ordination of women to the priesthood ought to be construed as an enlargement and extension of the historic Christian ministry.' Neither of these men could be described as capricious revisionists, and their comments arose from years of rigorous and serious engagement with the issues, something to which the Church as a whole has been committed for many years.

As a result of this engagement, women were ordained as deacons nearly twenty years ago and as priests twelve years ago. There are over 2000 licensed priests who are women, and now one in every five Church of England clergy is female. Over the next few years we will be drafting legislation that will make it legal for women to be consecrated as bishops.

There cannot be genuinely mutual respect unless this reality is acknowledged and accepted – not necessarily agreed with – but accepted as where we are as a church. Only then can we go about the business of honouring each other's presence and position.

We have got to where we are by a steady, prayerful and painstaking process that will continue in our synods and in the College and House of Bishops. Our church is imperfect, but it is what we have. We hold in tension the reality of the church as a particular institution and also our understanding of the Church universal as the body of Christ. In that Church there are no synods and working parties, no legislation and arrangements, only Christ as the head, 'from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.' [Ephesians 4.16]

Until the eventual reconciliation of all of creation with God, until the ultimate triumph of love, we will have to live with our flawed and imperfect structures and also with our flawed and imperfect selves. Theologians tell us that God has the patience to wait for, and the power to bring about, this ultimate fulfilment and reconciliation. If only our perspective and vision could be so enlarged!

It is apparent that, with the issue of women's ordination, and with other issues where there is difference, we cannot agree on what Scripture says or even on how to interpret it. There is, of course, the principle that, when there is a seeming contradiction in Scripture, to go for what is clear and to build on that. One thing that is clear is that we, men and women, together, are made in the image of God: 'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.' [Genesis 1.27] There is not more of the image of God in the male and less in the female, or more of God in the female and less in the male. Together, and equally, we are made in God's image.

It is also clear that the baptism of Christ is not different for males and females, but the same for both. All those who are baptized into Christ share the same inheritance. Hence the famous cry of women, 'Either ordain us or don't baptize us!' Likewise, men and women are to share equally in the ongoing life of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, men

and women together received the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire and in the sound of rushing wind.

When Paul wrote his great treatise in his letter to the Romans on the pre-eminence of salvation by faith and of new life in the Spirit, it was not a gendered message. Women and men together were included in the salvation offered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul, the traditional Jew, was passionate about the transformed state of those who are in Christ: 'But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.' [Romans 7.6] This liberation was not just for men, or just for women, but for both men and women.

In 1 Corinthians, when Paul enumerates the gifts of the Spirit, it is clear that they are not given only to men or only to women, but to all who are in Christ. After his wonderful description of the parts of the body of Christ, Paul writes: 'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.' [1 Corinthians 12. 27–31].

In 1992, Desmond Tutu, then Archbishop of Capetown, wrote, 'I am more convinced than ever before that theologically, biblically, socially, ecumenically, it is right to ordain women to the priesthood. The most radical act that can happen to any human being is to become a member of the body of Christ. If gender cannot be a bar to baptism, then gender cannot be a bar to ordination. The Bible is quite clear that the divine image is constitutive of humanity, irrespective of gender.' In that one comment, Tutu encapsulates the far-reaching ramifications of what it means to be a Christian. Former views of what men and women were, and what they could and could not be, or do, are replaced by a new understanding of our identity in Christ.

In the months to come I pray that we might be able to reflect in new ways on the infinitude of God's unconditional love and on our own absolute indebtedness for our very existence and for our capacity to relate, to reflect, to love and to be loved. I would like to think that we can begin to trust God more as we dwell on the mystery and wonder of the universe we inhabit, and on our own place within that universe.

To what extent are we willing to discern and discover God's purposes for ourselves, our church and for all of creation? To what extent are we willing to allow ourselves and others the freedom and opportunity to be changed into the likeness of the Lord? Do we dare to accept God's invitation to join in the Divine Dance? Whatever we choose, however willing or unwilling we might be, we can trust that the Dance will go on.

Christina Rees is a member of The General Synod of the Church of England and of its Appointments Committee, and a founder member of the Archbishops' Council as well as on the Church of England's Communications Committee. She is a member of CSCS. Christina is best known as the Chair of WATCH (Women and the Church) but is also a member of GRAS (Group for Rescinding the Act of Synod), as well as a supporter of Inclusive Church. She speaks and preaches widely and is a professional life and business coach. Her books include 'The Divine Embrace' and 'Voices of this Calling'.

SEXUALITY AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SCIENCE

Gill Cooke

'The Working Party attempted to discover and assess the medical evidence as objectively as it could and to set down what seemed to be the facts of the matter whether the facts were to the liking of all its members or not.' These words express how the Chair of the 1979 C of E's working party report on Homosexual Relationships treated the scientific material in its deliberations, a working party which included medical experts. The material, drawn from major scientific books and journals, covers 14 pages of a 94 page report. (The reports of the 1950s concerned with the decriminalisation of homosexuality had similar scientific sections and were produced by multidisciplinary working parties.)

The importance of science was also recognised in the Lambeth Conference Reports of 1978 and 88 which acknowledged 'the need for deep and dispassionate study of the question of homosexuality, which would take seriously both the teaching of Scripture and the results of scientific and medical research'. The 1988 subsection report on Sexual Orientation goes even further: 'We believe that the Church should therefore give active encouragement to biological, genetic and psychological research, and consider these studies as they contribute to our understanding of the subject in the light of Scripture'. It also advocated further study 'of the sociocultural factors which contribute to the differing attitudes toward homosexuality in the different provinces of our Church.' The Church is here acknowledging the need for rigorous, objective scientific information in its discussion of homosexuality.

Until recently this would have been undisputed in the Church debates about homosexuality, but now there seem to be worrying signs that at a time when scientific research has been developing rapidly and affirming gay people's views, the more reluctant the Church is to include this dimension in the debate.

Gone are the multidisciplinary Working Parties, which included scientists and medical practitioners. The issue is now solely in the hands of the Bishops. The 1991 report, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, which is still quoted, has three brief paragraphs of general comment.

It gets worse! The 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution on Sexuality has no mention of scientific and medical research. Only in the subsection report on Sexuality do we have a mention of 'scientific questions'. It states that after prayer, study and discussion they (bishops of course, no scientific advisers) 'were unable to agree on the scriptural, theological, historical and scientific questions'. Let's give our worldwide bishops the benefit of the doubt and assume they are competent on Scripture, theology and history – but have they also really now become scientific experts?

Then we have the lengthy 2003 report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* produced by four Bishops with two theological consultants, one of whom wrote the report. The only material on science and medicine occurs in the Chapter Homosexuality and Biblical

Teaching. For the current state of research we are referred to a book by two conservative Christian writers. They are both psychologists, but their book *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Ethical Debate* claims that the Bible must decide what is acceptable as evidence in the debate. One of the lengthy quotes by one of the same authors says (to paraphrase) that homosexuality may have a biological or genetic cause but this may be true of other antisocial things like drunkenness and violence. When we examine the context of the quote in the original book, things become even more disturbing. The chapter referred to begins with a lurid story from Penthouse involving a story of a sex ring involving predatory American clergy and abuse taking place on Church property. Same sex relationships are being clearly linked by the authors to sexual abuse, although this link is not made in the Bishops' report. Did the Bishops actually examine the context of the original reference?

Gone is the objectivity of the earlier reports. Science is no longer a respected partner in the debate. The Bible has become the supreme authority for judging science. Surely Church history since the age of Galileo must have taught the Church the dangers of doing this. With the Archbishop of Canterbury only too aware of the ignorance of so many about sexuality, it might have been hoped that the necessity of informing the worldwide bishops about the increasing developments of scientific research in the field of sexuality would be considered essential. Indeed this would accord with the 1978 and 1988 Lambeth Resolutions, but this does not appear to be happening if, as the Church Times of 10th November 2006 reports, he has ruled out reopening of Resolution 1.10 on human sexuality from Lambeth 1998 where there is no mention of scientific and medical research. Listening 'to diverse views and experiences' is necessary if they are to be well informed, but sadly this is often not the case since many opinions reflect views which contemporary science has shown to be wrong.

Science cannot decide ethical norms, but we cannot have an informed ethical debate without an understanding of present scientific knowledge.

SEXUALITY AND SCIENCE

Alan Sheard

The Church of England report 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality' published in 2003 claims that 'The jury is still out on the causes of homosexuality'. This implies that little is known about homosexuality, but there is a great deal of scientific evidence about it that the Some Issues report completely ignores.

Scientific research on this goes back to the 1950s, and indicates that a person's sexual orientation is fixed, and in the great majority of cases is unalterable. This led to the removal of homosexuality from the list of recognised medical disorders in 1973. Further advances have been made in the past 25 years which confirm the position. In the late 1980s the Government sponsored, and the Wellcome Foundation funded, a very comprehensive survey of sexual attitudes in Britain, which revealed a great deal of information for the first time, and this was published as a book by Penguin in 1994. The sample was large enough to include statistically significant numbers in subgroups within

the population. Then in 1991 Simon Leroy conducted a series of autopsies on homosexual men and showed that the anatomical structure of part of the brain was different in homosexual people. Much work has also been done on other lines of enquiry, which has led to the conclusion that sexual orientation is largely fixed by the time of birth.

Prevalence studies have shown that exclusively heterosexual or homosexual people make up almost all of the population, and bisexuality is rare. This is unlike most biological variables, such as adult height or blood pressure, where most people have values near to the average. This in itself suggests that sexual orientation develops on two different paths.

Historically, Sigmund Freud's view of sexuality was accepted in the early 20th century, that good mental health, and a heterosexual orientation, were dependent on a good relationship with the parents during the early years of life. Well constructed surveys to test this were not done until the 1960s, when it was found that neither homosexual people nor mentally ill people were more likely to have had a poor relationship with their parents.

The possibility remained that association with gay or lesbian people could lead to initiation of a young person into lifelong homosexuality. Again, detailed studies, particularly the one published by Penguin, have shown that this does not happen; the study shows that young people at same sex boarding schools do as a group show a higher proportion having homosexual activity, but, in a group who had left a same sex boarding school five years or more previously, the proportion still having same sex activity was no higher than in the general population. Also, in one of the tribes in New Guinea, children are made to have same sex relationships with adults, but the homosexuality rate in their adults is no higher than elsewhere. This is further evidence that homosexuality is not addictive, and not permanently altered by external influences. However the Church of England Report 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality' wrongly infers, in paragraph 4.4.64, that changes in sexual behaviour in some circumstances are evidence against an innate sexual orientation.

Enquiries into families have confirmed that homosexuality does cluster in families in a way that suggests it is inherited genetically. Identical twins have exactly the same genetic inheritance, and non- identical twins have half the same genetic inheritance. Studies have been done of groups of twin pairs, in all of which at least one of every pair was homosexual. The second twin was also found to be homosexual in half of the identical twin pairs, and in 16% of non-identical twin pairs, and 6% of adoptive pairs. The finding that half of the second identical twins were homosexual indicates a strong hereditary influence, but also that there is another, non-hereditary factor also operating among those twins who were homosexual. Nevertheless, conservative Christian spokesmen claim that the lack of full concordance in the identical twin studies shows that homosexuality is not inherited.

Heredity therefore appears to be responsible for a predisposition to homosexuality, which

must be triggered by some other influence. We have already noted the possible postnatal influences that might be responsible for this, which could be early parental effects or copied behaviour in later childhood, and found that these are not implicated in causing homosexuality to develop. But is homosexuality just a free will decision made by people, who are responsible for their own sexuality? There is a lot of evidence against this. Many homosexual people, often in response to the criticisms coming from religious organisations or individuals, have undertaken courses of 'treatment', often at great expense, to make them heterosexual. These almost always fail. A recent study by Professor Spitzer of New York University is frequently quoted by conservative Christians as showing that sexual orientation can change. He asked for people who had undergone therapy for homosexuality to contact him. Only 200 people responded, almost all of whom had had therapy because of religious criticism. He concluded that only 13 out of the 200 had become mainly heterosexual, and confirmed that for the great majority change of orientation is not possible. Conservative Christian commentators seem unable to understand that people differ, and cannot all be forced into the same pattern in this respect.

We therefore have to consider the one remaining possibility, that the environmental factor causing sexual orientation operates before birth, in the uterine environment.

Sexual development in the foetus does not begin until the sixth month of pregnancy, when the baby is complete in almost all other respects. At that time the sexual organs develop and grow in the pelvis, and there is also a rapid change in the part of the brain known as the hypothalamus. Experiments on animals have established that the hypothalamus includes the nerve centre for sexual awareness and activity. This is one of the reflex centres in the brain that control different aspects of body functions, such as body temperature, the fight or flight response to danger, and body balance. The variability in voluntary control of a person over their reflexes is notable – there is none in the case of body temperature. When the hypothalamus is surgically altered in an experimental animal, the animal's subsequent sexual behaviour becomes dramatically different. And biochemical tests have shown that the hypothalamus is specifically receptive to the sex hormones, oestrogen or testosterone, and their derivatives. Any prenatal influences on sexual orientation must be operating at this point, anatomically and in time.

By a process of trawling, ie designing and testing all conceivable hypotheses, which is the basis of the scientific method, it has surprisingly been found that males who have two or more older brothers have a small but significant increase in likelihood that they will be homosexual. A possible explanation is that a male foetus inside the mother's body is essentially foreign to the mother, since she herself has no male tissues. As with other external substances entering the body, such as microbes, the mother's immune system develops antibodies against them – in this case, against the male hormones in the developing foetus. Antibody formation is always a slow process, building up over several exposures, which in this case is over several male pregnancies. It is feasible to suggest that an antibody to the testosterone (or its derivatives) in the male foetus could alter the development of the hypothalamus at the critical sixth month stage of pregnancy,

configuring the sexual reflex centre to recognise males rather than females as attractive. This occurs in only a small proportion of male births, but similar hormonal variations in the developing brain could be occurring in other pregnant women, with female or male foetuses, and could account for other instances of homosexuality. There is a close analogy with Rhesus disease of the newborn, which is due to a reaction by a Rhesus negative mother to her Rhesus positive foetus.

The importance of the sex hormones in prenatal development is revealed by two rare medical disorders. One is Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, in which a genetically male foetus is totally insensitive to the effects of the testosterone circulating in its body. These people grow up as women, and usually marry, but of course they are infertile. The other is Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, in which the child is genetically female, but has a tumour of the adrenal gland which produces the male hormone testosterone. If the tumour is removed surgically very early in life they grow up as heterosexual women. If it is not removed, as was always the case until recently, they grow up either as men, or as women with a high probability of being lesbian.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that most homosexual people have no abnormalities. Every person in the world is unique, with their own combination of characteristics, including such things as resting blood pressure, pulse rate, height, haemoglobin concentration et cetera. In a male foetus, a normal but low testosterone level during later pregnancy when the brain is developing may lead to a homosexual orientation, and in a female foetus a normal but high testosterone level may lead to a lesbian person, in the normal course of affairs.

This is a very brief summary of the main findings of the biological research into sexuality. A useful recent book is *Born Gay* by Wilson and Rahman, two London University Psychologists, published in 2005 by Peter Owen Books, which gives a fuller account. Also of interest is the British Medical Journal of 21 February 2004 on the history of the treatment of homosexuality up to the 1950s, pages 427 to 432, headlined 'Treating homosexuality as a sickness, one of medicine's many mistakes'; copies should be obtainable through libraries.

Some conservative Christian organisations have circulated reports of population studies which they claim show that homosexual people characteristically abuse children, are prone to drug taking, and are likely to die young. Their evidence is totally unreliable, being based on selective and unrepresentative population samples, such as convicted people or deaths mentioned in gay magazines, in which deaths of older people would hardly be newsworthy.

In the medical profession the debate is long past. Doctors are forbidden by the General Medical Council to allow their views on sexuality to affect the treatment they give or arrange for their patients. Surely it is time for people to receive the same understanding and acceptance by the Church.

BOOK REVIEW

OTHER VOICES OTHER WORLDS: The Global Church speaks out on Homosexuality Darton Longman & Todd 2006, ISBN 0 232 52569 2.

John Cook

This much-needed book is edited by Terry Brown, Anglican Bishop of Malaita in the Pacific Islands Province of Melanesia. A few of the 28 contributors are from Europe, Australia or North America; most of them are not. The history and traditions of indigenous African, Asian, and other cultures make it clear that there has always existed a diversity of human sexualities, and that homosexuality is not a disease imported from the West. Homosexuality is a global phenomenon found in all cultures, all religions.

Chapter 1 is written by Martin Brokenleg, the Director of the Native Ministries Programme and Professor of First Nations Theology at the Vancouver School of Theology. He invites us to imagine a reservation in the USA fifty years ago. Three hundred Sioux (who call themselves Lakota) gather for a feast followed by a social dance. The Lakota people have two forms of their language; one spoken by men, one spoken by women. Men and women understand both forms of their language. Men and women dress differently according to their gender.

One man sits with the women and speaks Lakota using the grammar and sentence structure appropriate for women. As the food is served to the men, children and women who are guests, this man helps with the serving. He performs all the tasks of a woman. During the dancing the man shuffles to the circle's perimeter, stands side-by-side with the women, and dances in the bended-knee style of Lakota women. He dances as an honoured member of the Lakota community. He is *W'i'unkte* – a man who speaks with women's language (Women's Lakota). Traditional Lakota people regard him as a sacred person who is understood to be powerful.

Native North American cultures are normally female-led cultures. In Navajo society one introduces oneself as being of the mother's clan, 'born for' the father's clan. Women own property, men own the weapons with which they defend the women and children.

This much-needed book thus opens with a chapter revealing a far greater variety of sexuality and gender-roles than those who claim to speak for "orthodox" Christianity recognise or acknowledge. Other chapters written by indigenous people of Africa (including Nigeria), Asia and New Zealand, reveal still more diversity. Ancient Chinese literature, such as classical novels, opera, songs and poems, show that homo-, bi- and trans-sexual practices were very common phenomena; they were not imported from the West. An unbiased person might suspect God our Creator of *liking* variety.

Christian leaders such as Moses Tay, former Bishop of Singapore, claim to be following the teaching of the Bible when they condemn homosexuality. This is challenged by other Asian leaders such as Bishop as Duleep de Chickera, of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He points out that at times biblical texts seem to give contradictory teaching or direction.

A Cardinal responded to a criticism that one of his priests was outside God's grace because in Romans 1:26–27 St. Paul condemns homosexuality as a sin. Acknowledging

the sexual orientation of the priest concerned, the Cardinal described him as one of his finest and most caring, creative and sensitive priests. He was able to see in this priest, more than in most others, the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control: all fruit of the Holy Spirit enumerated by the same St. Paul (Galatians 5:22).

The over-riding biblical themes of grace, love, mercy, salvation, must impact upon isolated verses such as those quoted to condemn homosexuality. Jesus said that people shall be known by their fruits.

One of the encouraging features of the book is the accounts of people who are not heterosexual and who maintain their Christian faith and practice despite being cold-shouldered (or worse). Groups of such Christians are to be found in Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney to name but three. The book mentions a number of websites from which further information can be gained.

The 28 chapters are well-written by sensitive people who know about the subjects upon which they write, and who know the love of God for themselves and for *all* the diverse people He has made. I shall continue to re-read this book, and I recommend it to bishops attending Lambeth 2008.

**This Newsletter is produced for CSCS
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