

CSCS NEWS

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

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EDITORIAL

Some of you may have been wondering about the silence of CSCS over the past six months or more. The reason is that the Committee has been doing some hard thinking.

Despite an encouraging AGM reported in the last edition, it has become clear that CSCS cannot carry on without new blood – and no new blood has so far been forthcoming. Your Committee remain in good heart and committed to our objectives, but have all too little time or energy to promote them as separate activities along with all their other involvements in the field.

We have some possible plans for 2008 – of which more below – but, unless that new blood is generated by those plans or otherwise, have come to the conclusion that CSCS as such may have only one more year of life.

We have been in existence, first as ISCS – an educational charity associated with LGCM – and then as the independent CSCS, for over fifteen years. This period has coincided with an increasingly lively, and all too often polarised, debate about Christian and sexuality. Inevitably the debate has focused mostly on specific issues such as gay clergy. The battle to accept women and their insights amongst Church leadership has in truth been largely won, though there remain some pretty sizeable pockets of resistance even in those Churches which have accepted them (let alone the huge blind spots in the Roman and Orthodox Churches). The parallel battle for the acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people and their insights is very far from over in almost every denomination.

All too rarely do the protagonists acknowledge the underlying issues. It is true that some of these, such as the nature of Biblical authority, are very basic indeed and themselves a major battleground. Others, however, relating to the nature of sex and sexuality as such within the Christian tradition, seem to have had scarcely any attention. Perhaps at that latter level, also, we have won more battles than we recognise. The Churches' past image of almost pure negativity and fear of sex seems now to belong to another era, and attitudes to cohabitation and divorce, for example, are a good deal more generous and less dogmatic than they were even twenty or thirty years ago. Members of CSCS who are active in Christian writing and speaking, from Jack Dominion to Jo Ind, must be thanked for much of that. But is there not still a huge educational task to be undertaken?

Our Chair's film review, below, illustrates one complex of issues which has nothing to do with homosexuality but touches on profound ethical and spiritual questions too easily swept under the carpet. The book review, which refers to our member David Brown's work on sexual surrogate therapy, is another clear case. As it happened, I was re-reading *Just Good Friends* by Liz Stuart (our former Chair) when I received this. Liz, like Jo Ind, supports the postmodern argument that sexual activities have no fixed meaning but only that meaning which is mutually accepted between the participants. Our view of sexual surrogacy may well depend on how far we can accept that philosophical position. As some of us found a few years back in debate with Bishop John Gladwin (now one of our Patrons), an unreservedly postmodern approach to sexuality may be theologically difficult for many Christians, even liberal ones. But where, outside CSCS, are such discussions taking place? It is true that they occasionally emerge in reports of the Church of England General

Synod and the equivalent bodies of other denominations – but usually only by implication, and increasingly in a framework which is conservative and afraid to stray outside the narrow confines of “the plain meaning of Scripture” (as if there were any such thing). The pages of this Newsletter have often contained accounts of how new ideas, and evidence from the natural and social sciences and from experience – not least the contributions of CSCS and its members - have been hijacked by narrow traditionalism. There would seem still to be an urgent need for the liberal/radical dimensions of the sexuality debate, as such, to be given voice in Christian circles. If one batters one’s head against a wall long enough, perhaps one might make a dent in the wall, assuming that the head can stand the battering.

From the outset CSCS had to struggle, in this context, with exactly what its role was and how it should be pursued. In the early days, when we benefited so much from the paid executive contribution of Alison Webster, much emphasis was placed on academic work. That helped to support the rise, under Liz Stuart’s leadership, of the journal *Theology and Sexuality*, which has now thoroughly come of age and has little direct connection with us, though it has remained a welcome and economical way for CSCS members to keep in touch with academic thinking. The impact of that academic work cannot easily be measured, and one cannot help suspecting sometimes that it is a little limited outside the circles of the academy, at least in the UK. That may be unfair. Perhaps its influence, and that of CSCS generally, on our Anglican episcopal members – Peter Selby and more recently John Gladwin – has had some modest significance, though it has certainly not saved that Church from its agonising about sexual issues. Perhaps something of the same is true with our range of contacts in the Roman Catholic Church and in some other denominations. But the fruits of the academic work are not all that immediately evident. And attempts to develop and disseminate more popular educational material on behalf of CSCS were sadly less successful than the promotion of the journal.

Latterly, under the chairmanship first of Andrew Yip and most recently of Jane Fraser, the emphasis has been more on the practical, with Committee members drawn mainly from those who are engaged in what might be described as pastoral work with the casualties of the Churches’ sexual confusion. (Questions about sexuality in a postmodern age are not just academic, they are profoundly pastoral, as the “surrogacy” issue demonstrates.) At the same time, other groups, both existing ones such as the Modern Churchpeople’s Union and new ones like Inclusive Church, have deepened their concern for those casualties, and made it more intellectually and pastorally respectable to take a liberal Christian stance on sexuality as well as other matters. The CSCS participation (together with the Student Christian Movement) in the MCU’s 2006 conference “A Passion for Justice” on sexual issues was surely the high point in our recent history; but the conference was essentially MCU-driven, and, because of that, attracted far greater numbers than we have ever commanded even in our early days.

Is there still, then, a place for CSCS, alongside the groups promoting Christian liberalism and inclusivity generally on the one hand and the more focused campaigning groups like LGCM on the other? Some of us still feel that there ought to be such a place. Many people, both gay and straight, struggle with sexual/spiritual issues which may have little directly to do either with Christian liberalism generally or with the specific topics of current Church debates. The film and book reviews in this Newsletter illustrate that. And surely these are areas where CSCS is needed to contribute a liberal Christian voice.

But it is all very well for us to believe that. As any economist will tell you, a need which is not translated into effective demand might as well not exist. And there has been little effective demand for our work. We get only a very few requests to speak, or otherwise contribute to debate, on behalf of CSCS as such. The world of theological education has shown no interest whatever in our approaches. We have lost quite a few members over the years – often, it would seem, because of

their increasing commitments elsewhere in the same or similar fields – and there is a bare trickle of new ones. Do we fall between too many stools? Are we too academic or even precious for some, not academic enough for others? Are we too broad in our approach to help the struggling gay priest, too narrow for the anti-fundamentalist campaigner? Is there, in fact, a real middle ground left, within which our objectives are meaningful?

Many of our continuing members, it is true, are contributing significantly to those objectives in other arenas. The material from ICASA gives one example, and the final contribution to this Newsletter gives another, taking up the story of Henry Mayor's attempts to engage the Church of Uganda in dialogue about gay issues which we featured in a previous edition. We may hope that such members have valued our support over the years. Yet they make few demands on us - and even fewer offers of help. Appeals for new Committee members, in particular, have fallen on deaf ears.

Perhaps we have deluded ourselves about the need – or perhaps it is being met by others in better ways. In either case, it would be pointless arrogance and a waste of energy to try to keep the show on the road just for the sake of it.

Yet we do not intend to go quietly. We plan, in 2008, to undertake a major dialogue with as many as possible of the other bodies concerned with issues of faith, sexuality and justice, to see how their efforts can best be co-ordinated. We hope that this dialogue will begin with our Annual Conference and AGM on 9 February in central London, when Christina Rees, a well-known Anglican campaigner principally in the field of women's ministry (and member of CSCS), will be our keynote speaker. The letter from our Chair, below, sets out those plans in more detail.

Out of that dialogue may spring something quite new. There could, after all, be a continuing role for CSCS, though that will only be possible with new blood, since the Chair and Treasurer are in any event stepping down in 2009. Or we may find that some other body, or confederation of bodies, could most appropriately be entrusted with our mission.

We therefore look to you, the membership, for three things.

First, to attend the Annual Conference and AGM, of which further details will be available shortly.

Second, to let us have details of organisations with which we should be in dialogue – and your views on the way ahead.

Last but not least, to consider once again, thoughtfully and prayerfully, just how much you value CSCS, and whether you are prepared to back your convictions by serving on the Committee.

It really is up to you now.

Anthony Woollard

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I have been a member of CSCS, and before that ISCS, since its inception. I have served on the Committee for 10 years and have had the privilege of being your Chair since February 2001. At the last AGM I promised to serve for one more, final year but would like to end on a positive note, regardless of the uncertain future of CSCS.

I have been passionate about the role – both real and potential - of CSCS as a focus for education and debate about Christianity and sexuality. One might say that this was inevitable, given that I was ordained as a Minister in Secular Employment in the Church of England as someone actively engaged in education, training and counselling around sexuality issues. Throughout this ministry (that has spanned nearly 20 years) I have become increasingly aware of a common thread that has bound together the many strands of this work – justice. We worship a God of justice and mercy and, in order to be true to our calling to take risks for the sake of the Gospel, even if we are seen as ‘fools for Christ’, we must be willing to speak out.

As one of Christ’s ‘fools’, I made a tentative suggestion to your Committee that I end my tenure as Chair by facilitating a conference on ‘Faith, Sexuality and Justice’ and that we do so by reaching out to any other organisations with a common cause in a collaborative venture. Knowing that many such organisations and individuals will have their focus on the Lambeth Conference in July 2008, I suggested that we re-invigorate the debate in the post-Lambeth period of autumn 2008. I have been encouraged and supported in this by your Committee and now look to you, our membership, for ideas and suggestions of suitable links we might make. Clearly, we will also need practical support in the form of organisational skills, media and publicity experience and financial advice. Do please contact me if you can help in any of these areas or know of people we should contact.

In the meantime, I ask for your prayers as we seek God’s guidance.

With every blessing

Jane A. Fraser

The Revd. Canon Jane Fraser

October 2007

FILM REVIEW

Richard is my boyfriend. Shown on Channel 4 TV on 7.8.2007 at 11.05 p.m. Written by Zinnie Harris. Produced & directed by Ian Duncan and Oliver Morse.

This is a film about two young lovers, Anna and her boyfriend Richard, and their developing sexual relationship. The fact that they are not yet married is not seen as an issue. The key theme, however, is Anna’s capacity to give informed consent to sexual intercourse. Although Anna is 24, she is deemed to have a mental age of five. Richard also has a learning disability but is more able than Anna and helps in a local tea shop.

The story line is one that is familiar to those of us who, like me, have worked with and for young people with disabilities in a professional capacity with the aim of enabling them to develop relationships that bring them acceptance, love and pleasure¹. Anna and Richard are clearly in love and take every opportunity to sneak off together for time alone with a kiss and a cuddle. Richard comes round to Anna’s house one evening when, just for once, Anna’s mother, Michelle, has left the sleeping Anna alone in bed so she can share a birthday drink with her friends. Anna wakes up and lets Richard in – not just to the house, but also to her bed, with the result that, some weeks later, it becomes evident that she is pregnant. In her desperation to avoid the possibility of becoming responsible for Anna’s baby as well as for Anna, Michelle obtains an abortion inducing pill via the web and persuades Anna to take it to ‘make her stomach upset better’. She also tricks her ex-

¹ See Bodysense website at www.bodysense.org.uk

husband, Steve, into paying for this via his credit card. Needless to say, when the statement comes through and he realises what he has unwittingly purchased, his views on the abortion and Anna's relationship with Richard, are totally at variance with Michelle's. From this point onwards, various professionals become involved in deciding Anna's fate. Either she is to be sterilized so she can continue her relationship with Richard without fear of a further, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, or she has to be kept at home and supervised at all times in order to prevent her meeting Richard again.

Although this film that was made for TV has no reference to religious belief, the ethical dilemmas acted out within the story-line are, none the less, ones that continue to tax the major faiths and, in particular, the Christian denominations. Free will and self-determination are examined within the context of a young woman with a learning disability's capacity to give informed consent. The use and abuse of power is seen within the context of decisions made for Anna by her parents and the various professionals who make decisions that have a profound effect on the quality of her life and relationships. The issue of respect for the value we place on every life (or lack of it) is also seen throughout the film and even in the timing of its transmission (when most good folks have gone to bed).

I was also reminded of the importance of accurate, experience-based information in making decisions and how the use of distorted or incorrect information has such potential for harm in our lives and the lives of those to whom we relate. The reason Anna became pregnant despite their use of a condom was because Richard had been given insufficient information about how to use it. His teacher had demonstrated how to use a condom by rolling it onto a banana and failed to see that Richard did not have the capacity to transfer information from one context to another. The gynaecologist gave insufficient information on alternative methods of administering hormonal contraception other than the oral contraceptive, a method which would have required Michelle's agreement and co-operation which was not forthcoming. The official solicitor, appointed to assess Anna's ability to form a consenting relationship with Richard, failed to get any verbal response from Anna about her feelings whilst her mother was present. She also failed to see Anna with Richard, unlike the psychiatrist who observed Anna relating joyfully to Richard in a way that enhanced the capacity for friendship and mutuality in both, and demonstrated their love for each other in a way that words could not.

Increasingly, professionals are coming to an understanding of consent as a concept that is not simply conveyed intellectually and verbally but also (and sometimes alternatively) demonstrated through our actions and body language. When someone's language and intellectual skills are limited, we have to place greater emphasis on observation of the emotional and physical responses to a situation or relationship in order to assess their consent. It is, in my opinion, a mark of lack of respect for someone with a disability, when we fail to take this into consideration. One of the most profoundly disturbing images in this film was the extreme distress and overall deterioration in Anna at the end of the film when she was permanently deprived of her relationship with Richard.

If we believe that all of us are equal in the eyes of God and that we are made to relate to him in love, as he relates to us in love, then this film should be deeply challenging to us. Jesus placed a child before his disciples² and told them that 'unless you ... become like one of these, you will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven'³. He took the least powerful person in society – one with no social, economic, political or intellectual standing and confirmed their priority in the eyes of God over those who use and even abuse their social, economic, political or intellectual standing. As for

² Matthew 18:2

³ Matthew 18:3

those who abuse their vulnerability, some of his most outspoken warnings are directed towards them⁴.

The Revd. Canon Jane Fraser

August 2007

(Jane is a Minister in Secular Employment working as a trainer and consultant on sexuality issues)

BOOK REVIEW

Sexual Surrogate Partner Therapy, JNB Publishing, ISBN 0-995-52390-7.

From Adam and Eve through to the swinging 60s and the modern-day debate over pornography, the subject of sex continues to be a taboo topic with the lines between love, lust, affection and eroticism blurred by modern day society. In this book David Brown demystifies the conjecture and controversy, and in doing so explains the power of Surrogate Partner Therapy as an effective way to resolve psychogenic sexual problems and dysfunctions; even the otherwise “untreatable” conditions created by fear of intimacy, performance anxiety and sexual insecurities and phobias.

By the author’s own admission Surrogate Partner Therapy is a subject that is much misunderstood by the general public, and, as a result, there has been great misconception and sensationalism, sometimes deliberate on the part of the tabloid press, towards it. David, as one of Europe’s leading experts and practitioners in the field, deconstructs those misconceptions and explains the benefits and sexual and spiritual wellbeing that knowledge can bring.

The strength of the book is its simplicity. A subject like Surrogate Partner Therapy is a daunting one for any uninitiated reader, but far from being an academic tome that is technical and lecturing, the chapters and prose are easy to understand and engage the reader in an almost conversational style — where the reader is provided with some answers but is also left challenged to ask more questions of the author, and perhaps more importantly, themselves too.

In discussing and detailing the concept and implication of Surrogate Partner Therapy, David strips the process into stages that do not overburden the reader with terminology. Noticeably the book does not contain many references to sex in its crudest and stereotypical form, a fact that will be an undoubted disappointment to any reader seeking some sort of titillation.

A chapter containing case studies of clients who have benefited from Surrogate Partner Therapy is respectfully written and necessary for the reader to appreciate the practical problems that can exist and the solutions that lie within. Another chapter chronicles frequently asked questions — and some perhaps rarely discussed — which gives the reader the opportunity to debate within its pages issues that David has explained throughout the book.

The first and final chapters are a personal journey for David; and an emotional one both for the author and the reader. David looks at the formative years of his work, the conflicts he faced with the passing of Jane Brown through breast cancer, and the strength gained from a new vision of the Happy Dream Project, which will offer hope to those struggling to come to terms with cancer and their own sexuality.

Sexual Surrogate Partner Therapy is an honest and genuine work that is clearly aimed not just to inform but also to inspire — and it succeeds through the sensitivity of the words written and the

⁴ Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2

subject discussed, which embraces rather than confuses those reading it. In short, the book unpatronisingly treats the reader as an adult, in what is after all an adult subject to discuss.

Note: the above review was commissioned and provided by the School of ICASA, of which David Brown – who is a CSCS member – is Principal. The School invited the Editor to add his own comments.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of this book, and the enterprise to which it refers, is that it invites the reader to examine the presupposition that “sexual relationships” and “therapeutic relationships” are mutually exclusive. Of course many if not all healthy sexual relationships have a strong therapeutic element. But the conventional wisdom insists that therapeutic relationships, as such, should not be sexual. Brown does not believe this, and tends to dismiss the “safety-first” attitude of conventional therapy. I do not see in his writing any real discussion of the relationship between sex and power or the dangers of abuse. In fairness however it must be said that ICASA appears to exercise the most rigorous and intensive vetting, training and supervision of possible surrogate partners, and it is significant that there are only a tiny number of them - clearly outstanding and courageous people - and they are nearly all women. All the case studies refer to the work undertaken by these women with sexually dysfunctional men.

Those case studies make it clear that surrogate partnership can, and indeed must, involve intimacy in every possible sense (physical and emotional). Whether that would be seen as acceptable will depend on the underlying assumptions, for both parties, of the nature of sexual activity. Here Brown applies his own spirituality, based both on Jung (oddly misspelt “Yung”) and a lot of Goddess mysticism, tantrism, theosophy and other somewhat syncretistic approaches. Whilst there is much here on which to meditate, and some things which may ring true to the experiences of many, I found myself asking, as a Christian realist, whether he does enough justice to the incarnational insights of Christianity which take rather more seriously the hard realities of the human condition, its biological imperatives and drives, and its darker side.

Be that as it may, Brown makes a good argument that the understandings of sex prevalent in Western society – for which Western religions must in part be blamed – are at the root of many sexual dysfunctions because they approach the issue too much from the “outside in” and pay too little attention to the spiritual dimension. At this point many CSCS members would probably sympathise with him. Whether they can make the jump from there to the virtues of therapeutic polyamory, and in doing so seemingly dismiss entirely whatever insights the mainstream Western Christian tradition may have possessed, is perhaps another matter. Yet there seems little doubt from the case studies that a genuine and healing, if temporary, love relationship can occur within surrogate partnership.

Back in the 1960s Harry Williams became notorious through his assertion, as a Christian priest and theologian, that the prostitute-client relationship portrayed in the film *Never on Sunday* was therapeutic both sexually and spiritually. Brown rightly insists that surrogate partnership is in its intention quite different from prostitution; the latter offers physical relief from the “outside in”, the former spiritual/sexual healing from the “inside out”. But where Williams was right was in reminding us of the ambiguity and complexity of sexual relationships in a spiritual context. I cannot help feeling that, if Brown were to explore more deeply the resources of the Christian tradition in the way that Williams did, he might be able to do more justice to issues such as biological imperatives and the sheer dangerousness of sex, and possibly not dismiss the conventional wisdom quite so readily. But I am sure that Williams would have kept an open and sympathetic mind on what Brown and ICASA are seeking to do; and so should we.

Anthony Woollard

NEWS FROM HENRY MAYOR

What have I been up to in Britain this year?

In March 2006 I had agreed with Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi at a personal meeting a plan (never agreed on paper) to hold a discussion with some of the Anglican Church of Kenya bishops on Same-gender Relations and Biblical Interpretation, accompanied by others from the Church of England. I was looking forward to going back to Kenya in 2007, possibly in the spring, to carry out the plan. Three people volunteered to come, of whom two seemed to me eminently well qualified, and a further person was prepared to consider it in the future.

Among many people who expressed interest in the plan were Philip Groves, the Anglican Communion Officer for the Listening Process, and Colin Coward, the Director of Changing Attitude England. I've had a lot of encouragement from them.

I was put in touch with an American pro-gay Christian group which was going to spend part of summer 2007 in Nairobi, working with an existing Kenyan group of MSM (men who have sex with men), to have fellowship with them and their families and friends and to affirm them as children of God. They asked me to go with them. It was an attractive offer, but I decided instead to go to the parts of rural Western Kenya where I'm already known, and build on the contacts I'd already made. I learnt that the group was enthusiastically welcomed by large numbers in Nairobi, and also made contacts with church leaders and the general public.

In July I accompanied Colin and others from Changing Attitude to the meeting of the Church of England General Synod in York, to introduce members to Davis Mac Iyalla, a gay member of the Anglican Church of Nigeria and leader of changing Attitude Nigeria.

On August Bank Holiday weekend each year there's a big festival for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people here called Manchester Pride. It includes a parade through the city centre. This year there was an ecumenical Christian contingent in the parade for the first time, and I was among them. The crowds lining the streets for the most part were happy to cheer us on.

The meeting of the Anglican primates of the world in February 2007 had brought into sharp focus the deep divisions in the Anglican Communion over homosexuality. I waited for a long time to get a sign that anyone in the Anglican Church of Kenya would want to hold a discussion with me on that topic. Eventually a reply came from Kokise, welcoming me there in October. There is also a chance of a discussion at another Kenyan college in November. Now it turns out that the people I hoped would come with me are not available during that period, so I'm going alone!

Henry Mayor, 15 Sept 2007

**This Newsletter is produced for CSCS
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