

CSCS NEWS

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Editorial

Anthony Woollard

This is going to be the shortest editorial on record. With the exception of an article by Andrea Knowles, I am devoting the whole issue to the outcome of our Annual Conference, 'Sexuality and Human Flourishing' – held jointly with Inclusive Church, LGCM and others – on 6 February and our AGM on the same occasion. I begin with the report on the conference written by Clare Herbert of Inclusive Church, following that with the two outstanding presentations by Arnold Browne and Alison Webster. Then come the minutes of the AGM and the Chair's report and accounts. And, interspersed with these, the odd photo of the day – for which thanks are due to Michael Moran.

There is much else that could be said about the conference and other things that we are up to, but this material already makes for a bumper issue. And it speaks for itself.

Sexuality and Human Flourishing – Day Conference

Clare Herbert

For me the word 'inclusive' means reaching out to all – all parts of our church and world and all parts of me. The day conference of 6th Feb was trying to create a safe and holy space in which all sorts of people from within and beyond the Church of England could speak to each other about the discovery of God within their sexual identity and experience. In addition each of us was challenged to stretch beyond our 'normal' way of seeing ourselves to ask whether there might not be whole spectra of experience and identity which we do not uncover for fear of disapproval and rejection.

Arnold Browne (1) led the day with a Bible Study on Paul. He demonstrated how Paul had been instrumental in holding together Christians of vastly different views in one emerging Church. Paul urged our submitting all things, including our sharp disagreement with our neighbour, to the overarching love of Christ as Paul did himself – remaining unmarried while other apostles married, calling uncircumcised gentiles to Christ while others adhered to Jewish practice, holding his own firm identity and opinions while permitting others to adhere to their own.

In her talk which followed Alison Webster (2) emphasised two points from her own experience which had included an outward shift from being lesbian to being married, while she herself resisted categorising herself as either. She suggested that the categories into which we fit people – gay, straight, bisexual, transgendered, married, single,

partnered – dictate the power people feel they have in our church and society and therefore deserve close scrutiny by Christians. She suggested there is a broad hinterland of relationships in all our lives less easily categorised so mistakenly ignored and devalued.

The morning's speakers argued for a diversity of sexual experience we ignore in the scriptures and in ourselves and hinted too that 'the who' we allow to speak for ourselves as the Church, and 'the how' we speak – by lectures, sermons, formal prayers, debates – are covering instead of unearthing the energy of God's connection with us in terms of our sexuality and human flourishing.

How might the Church facilitate a wider discussion of these issues, a listening process for us all? A panel of speakers, sensitively chaired by Brian Thorne (3) took us to the heart of the matter: that the Church may be profoundly supportive of people grappling with difficult issues of human sexuality and identity and may also be destructive of self-esteem. Transgendered, gay, lesbian and heterosexual people, all at this stage of their lives in successful partnerships and marriages, gave moving accounts of being nurtured or in the wilderness in relation to Church at different stages of their lives.

Participants met throughout the day to ask what resources the Church might provide to facilitate rather than obstruct our flourishing as sexual human beings. Some suggested answers were these

- Bible Study resources to help us move beyond over simplistic interpretations of scripture
- Spaces to extend the listening process to the involvement of us all so that questions of faith and sexual identity are not laid simply at the door of LGBT Christians
- Ways of doing theology together so that we become more confident of our own voice
- Protection and support for LGBT ordinands and ministers in post

As a postscript, one of the most enjoyable features of the day was the working together of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality, with two parish churches, a counselling centre, and member groups, including Inclusive Church, from the LGBT Anglican Coalition. In the struggle to be both 'real' and 'Christian' we need all the help we can get. The temptation to be unreal – the punishment of honesty and the reward of secrecy – is alive and kicking in the Church.

1. Arnold Browne, the former Dean of Trinity College Cambridge, has a special interest in the use and abuse of the Bible and in counselling psychology. He has contributed chapters to *Sex and the Christian Tradition* (ed. Jeremy Morris) and to *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church.* (eds. Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris)

2. Alison Webster is Social Responsibility Adviser for the Anglican Diocese of Oxford, and has a long-standing interest in identity issues, particularly gender, race, sexuality and disability. She is the author of *Wellbeing* (SCM 2002) and *You are Mine* (SPCK 2009), an in-depth study of the formation of identity.
3. Brian Thorne is Emeritus professor of the University of East Anglia and known internationally as a person-centred therapist and writer. He is a Lay Canon of Norwich and Professional Fellow in Residence at the Norwich Centre. His books include *Infinitely Beloved*, *Behold the Man*, and *The Mystical Power of Person Centred Therapy*.

Welcome one another: The Scriptures and Sexual Diversity

Arnold Browne

Disgraceful behaviour!

Last week I did something for the very first time in my life. On this one occasion, at least, I managed to overcome my anxiety that this was unmanly behaviour.

It would not have happened had it not been so cold. There were only six of us, three women and three men, and the building was unheated. I had worn my hat on the way there, and this time I did what the three wise women did, and kept it on throughout. Paul may have told the Corinthians that ‘Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head’ (1 Corinthians 11.4), but he was honest enough to abandon theological justification and conclude that male and female headwear and hairstyle was more a matter of social convention: ‘If anyone is disposed to be contentious – we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God’ (11.16).

As my inhibitions testify, customs can be persistent and persuasive. But, even as he urged men to cut their hair and take their hats off for worship and women to grow their hair and keep it covered when praying and prophesying, Paul couldn’t help observing that men and women are mutually interdependent, and that, above all, all of us owe our existence to the grace of God (11.11-12). Observing the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul by receiving communion with my hat on was perhaps part of the continuing process of my own conversion. My head ‘was strangely warmed’. It was liberating!

It was the snow and ice that led me to 1 Corinthians 11, but it may not be a bad place to begin our exploration of the resources that the Bible may have for us in the diversity of our sexuality and human flourishing.

In a brief introduction to his letters to the Corinthians (Canongate, 1998) the novelist Fay Weldon accuses Paul of prating love while demanding submission: ‘don’t smoke, don’t own guns, don’t be unrighteous, don’t spit in church, let’s have no dissension here! Don’t, don’t, don’t. Put away your adulthood and submit’. But, of course, Paul’s response to the difficulties and divisions facing the community at Corinth is much more thoughtful than that. Instead he shows the community ways of bringing together their reading of the Jewish Scriptures, what they have heard and believe about Jesus, and their own concerns, experiences and questions. It is less a matter of giving them his answers than of giving them the resources to find their own.

Twenty-five years or so after Jesus' death in Jerusalem, our first Christian writer addresses this congregation in Greece. He begins by reminding them that they in Corinth are called by God to be saints, 'together with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours' (1.2), and he encourages them to focus on that call. They disagree about many things, and their communion is threatened with schism (1.10, cf. 11.19). Some have written to him with their slogans which he quotes, 'All things are lawful for me' (6.12, cf. 10.23), 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food' (6.13), 'It is well for a man not to have sex with a woman' (7.1), 'All of us possess knowledge' (8.1), and they may have hoped that Paul would pronounce as to who had the right answers.

But Paul does no such thing. Is it lawful to eat food first sacrificed to idols (8.1) and then sold in the meat markets? Well, yes and no! And the way you will find out is to bring together your reading of the Scriptures, your commitment to Jesus Christ, and the particular circumstances in which you find yourselves, where you are called to be saints. Paul acknowledges that from their reading of Scripture alone, the enlightened and sophisticated individuals in the community know that, in the words of the Shema, 'There is no God but one' (8.4, cf. Deuteronomy 6.4) and that in the words of the psalmist, 'The earth and its fullness are the Lord's' (10.26, cf. Ps. 24.1). And so Paul allows that there are occasions when they may 'eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience' (10: 25).

But that is not the whole story, because the Scriptures are to be read in the light of their commitment to Christ, and reading this way Paul adapts the Jewish confession of God as one Lord: 'Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist' (8.6). And what a difference that makes. 'We know that "no idol in the world really exists", and that "there is no God but one" ' (8.4); but this one God is identified in Christ with what is foolish and weak, low and despised (1: 27f), and so the *yes* to eating must sometimes become a *no* for the sake of the conscience of a brother or sister who, although perhaps not so wise or strong, is one for whom Christ died: 'When you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ' (8: 12; cf. 10: 29).

Far from taking one side with an easy answer, and very far indeed from simply saying 'don't', Paul suggests that for some of the community, who are more superstitious about idols, it may be dangerous to eat this left over meat. But, pressing the point about the particular circumstances of the community, for others the danger may lie elsewhere. If there are those who may be destroyed by eating food sacrificed to idols (8: 10), then there are also those for whom it is Lord's supper itself that has become dangerous to eat: 'For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement on themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died' (11: 29f.). This seems very strange indeed to us, and is another reminder that Paul's cultural context is not ours. But it seems most likely that those who do not discern the body are those who are failing to recognize the needs of those poorer and weaker members of the body who are going away hungry. Being faithful to God's call is then not a matter of easy answers,

such as *no* to idol meat and *yes* to the Lord's Supper. What matters is the nature of God in Christ, and the whole community whom he calls to be saints.

I find it particularly remarkable that when addressing that question of gender differentiation in worship, Paul offers, in that one short passage in chapter 11 (2-16), two different ways of bringing together the creation accounts in the Jewish Scriptures, commitment to Christ as Lord, and the particular experiences and concerns of the community. The first is hierarchical, God and Christ, husband and wife. From the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2.21-23) Paul argues that men and women are fundamentally different, and the latter subordinate to the former. This was the common view of his Jewish and Graeco-Roman contemporaries, and was accepted as part of the natural order. Paul can ask, 'Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair it is her glory?' (11.14-15). What Paul here calls 'nature' we would call 'social convention', and it seems that he has an eye on those 'outsiders' (14.16, 23-24) who might be misled by seeing women prophets with dishevelled hair into thinking that Christianity was simply another ecstatic cult. The priority is the call to commend the gospel.

But even as Paul argues that hierarchical gender distinctions are natural, he offers a simultaneous second reading of the creation accounts in the light of Christ, stressing the mutuality of men and women: 'Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God' (11.11-12). And so he leaves no doubt that in the Christian community both men and women have the authority to pray and to prophesy as they build up the church.

This diversity of interpretation, even within one passage addressing one issue, suggests that we will need to listen to different voices as we work together to interpret the Scriptures in the light of our own call to follow Christ in the twenty-first century. And in our proclamation of the good news in our particular circumstances we will need to be aware that what we have discovered to be 'natural' and what might now be obstacles to the acceptance of the message in our society will be as important as, but very different from, the assumptions and conventions of first century Corinth.

Doing well and doing better!

Because Paul has such a bad press, 'don't, don't, don't, ... submit', as Fay Weldon puts it, I would like to share with you one more remarkable example from 1 Corinthians of a bringing together of the Scriptures, following Jesus, and particular circumstances in ways that allow considerable diversity of sexual practice within one call to proclaim the gospel.

Paul finds it necessary to defend himself against fellow Christians who have questioned his apostleship. They have pointed out that he is not accompanied by a wife, as James, Peter and the other apostles are, and that, unlike them, he does not get his living by his preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9.3-7). Paul acknowledges that the pattern of the other apostles' lives is based both on scripture and on the teaching of Jesus. On their side

of the argument is, of course, Genesis 1-2 and the command, 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1.28). And Paul even finds a scriptural text for them, in support of their being paid by those to whom they minister. It seems a surprising one to us, but Paul allows to them that what is written in the law of Moses, 'you shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain' (Deuteronomy 25.4) was expressly written to give Christian apostles a 'rightful claim' on their churches (1 Corinthians 9.8-12). He also readily agrees that 'the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel' (9.14), which seems to recall Jesus sending out the twelve taking nothing for their journey (Matthew 10.5-15; Mark 6.8-11; Luke 9.2-5). And in allowing that the other apostles have the right to be accompanied by believing wives, he may also have been aware of the tradition that Jesus sent out his appointed seventy in pairs (Luke 10.1).

On his own side of the argument, Paul repeatedly says that he engaged in manual labour so that he would not be a burden to those to whom he preached (1 Corinthians 9.18; 2 Corinthians 11.7; 1 Thessalonians 2.9), and he is clear that he would prefer all Christians to be single so that they can devote themselves fully to the affairs of the Lord (1 Corinthians 7.7, 32-34).

Even so, Paul does not question the other apostles' interpretation of scripture or deny that they too are following Jesus. Instead he defends his own position by interpreting scripture in the light of Christ. He reads these scriptural texts not as commands that he must obey, but as rights that he has received. And, in the light of Christ, he gives up these rights to be accompanied by a wife and to be supported by the Christian community (1 Corinthians 9.12-18). For Paul this renunciation follows Christ in putting others before himself. His argument continues, 'For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win some of them' (9.19). What he says here of himself echoes the language he frequently uses of Christ, who 'emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (Philippians 2.7).

Interpreting scripture in the light of Christ, Paul argues that it is appropriate for him to remain single and to support himself by manual labour. However, he accepts that the other apostles are being loyal to scripture and to the teaching of Jesus in being accompanied by believing wives and supported by the Christian community. Paul believes that he is imitating the pattern of Jesus' life in renouncing his right to support just as much as the other apostles are following Jesus' teaching in their dependence on the community. Reading scripture in the light of Christ leads not only to a diversity of interpretation but also to an acceptance of such diversity.

Given Paul's own preference for singleness in the service of the Lord, and remembering the slogan of some of the Corinthians that 'it is well for a man not to have sex with a woman' (7.1), it is interesting that Paul does not point to the singleness of Jesus as his example or concede to the tendency of those in the congregation who wanted to turn celibacy into a rule. Instead he allows both the right of those apostles to be married, and he affirms those Christians who still choose to marry: 'So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better' (7.38). In the service of the Lord it may only be a second best, for we owe more to Freud than to Paul if we see

our primary calling to be to heterosexual partnership and procreation. But it is here an acceptable option, and it is worth noting that Paul's emphasis is on mutuality rather than dominance, wife and husband are equally owed their 'conjugal rights' and each has 'authority' over the other's body (7.4), and this is more about desire, 'if his passions are strong ... it is no sin ... let them marry' (7.36), than about procreation.

It was good to hear Paul being drawn into the imagined pillow talk of John and Effie Ruskin in Peter Bowker's *Desperate Romantics*, a drama about the Pre-Raphaelites shown on BBC 2 last summer. After five years of his refusal to consummate their marriage poor Effie pleads with John, 'the husband does not have authority over his body, but the wife does'. That would have been a marvellous moment for 1851, but neither the imagined nor the historical John was persuaded. The real Effie later wrote to her father that among John's alleged reasons for the non-consummation were 'religious motives'. The marriage was annulled, and in 1855 Effie married John Millais and together they had a family of eight children.

Becoming one flesh.

Clearly Paul's positive attitude to sexual intimacy reflects the influence of the tradition about Jesus. He says that his teaching not to divorce and remarry (7.10-11) is based on a command of Jesus, and indeed it is very similar to the saying in all three synoptic gospels that remarriage is adultery (Matthew 5.32, 19.9; Mark 10.11-12; Luke 16.18). Paul seems closest to the tradition recorded in Mark (10.2-9) which assumes that both husband and wife could initiate divorce and where Jesus is innovative in teaching that adultery can be committed against a woman as well as against a man: 'whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery *against her*' (10.11). Of course, Paul has more to say, 'to the rest I say – I and not the Lord' (1 Corinthians 7.12), and it is possible that he is suggesting a circumstance where remarriage may be appropriate. His world is no longer that of marriage only within the Jewish nation (see Num. 25; Deut 7.1-7), and indeed he has nothing to say against interracial marriage. And in the world of his Christian congregations a believer may be married to an unbeliever, and bodily union is at best also a sharing of hearts and minds: 'Wife for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband for all you know, you might save your wife' (7.16, cf. 7.14). But where the unbelieving partner wishes to separate, then the believing partner should let them go, and, Paul adds, 'In such a case the brother or sister is not bound' (7.15). This not being bound would normally be taken to mean being free to remarry, and perhaps this is what Paul means here. In any event, Paul's discussion of Jesus' Palestinian teaching in the different circumstances of Greek Corinth is instructive. He at least does not make the mistake of turning Jesus' words concerning the preciousness of sexual intimacy and mutual faithfulness into a law that binds.

In his *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (Allen Lane, 2007) Martin Goodman considers how far the Christianity adopted by Constantine had strayed from its Jewish roots and sees the Christian view of marriage as an unbreakable bond rather than the Jewish view of marriage as a contract between husband and wife as one of the key differences (p. 545). As we have seen from 1 Corinthians, it is questionable

whether 'unbreakable' was always there from the beginning, but Jesus' challenge of divorce by his appeal to Genesis (1.27 and 2.24), 'So they are no longer two but one flesh', does seem to shift the emphasis from a legal contract to a personal bond (Mark 10.2-9, cf. Matthew 19.3-8). Divorce, says Jesus, was allowed by Moses 'because of your hardness of heart', and it seems that Jesus' fundamental attitude to the commandments is to see them as inadequate. It is often pointed out that, in looking back to the beginning of creation, Jesus is regulating sexuality by an appeal to the creation story as affirming a model of male-female monogamy. But we need also to notice that in speaking of regulations written 'because of your hardness of heart', Jesus is also using the creation story to look forward to the dawning of the promised new age when, in the words of Ezekiel, God 'will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh' (Ezekiel 36.26, cf. 11.19).

In this light it is worth looking again for a moment at Genesis 2.23-24:

Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken'. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife.

Doubtless the institution of marriage is in view here, but in hearing that rapturous cry, 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh', we can perhaps understand why commentators such as von Rad and Westermann have seen this story as setting our sexuality in the wider context of the need for relationship and human community.

There seems to be just such a more inclusive of the passage in the New Testament itself. Paul writes to the Galatians:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer any Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (3.27-28).

Jew *or* Greek, slave *or* free, but male *and* female in an echo of Genesis 1.27, 'So God created humankind in his image ... male and female he created them', and in anticipation of the climax of his letter, 'for neither circumcision nor uncircumcision in anything but a new creation is everything' (6.15).

In this context Paul's 'no longer male and female; for you are all one' seems also to echo Genesis 2.24, 'they become one flesh', particularly when we remember that Paul uses this text 'the two shall be one flesh' in 1 Corinthians 6.16-17 in a discussion of the believer's relationship with Christ.

So in the New Testament we have not only Jesus' use of Genesis 2.24 to refer to marriage as the new age dawns but also Paul's use of it to refer to the wider context of human relationship recreated in Christ. In a conversation with the novelist Howard Jacobson shown two weeks ago (24/1/10) in the first of Channel 4's new series, *The Bible: A History*, Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, found the meaning of the creation narratives as

‘the redemption of solitude’. The New Testament gives us two different account of this not being alone in two different interpretation of the ‘one flesh’ of Genesis 2.24.

In some ways these two New Testament accounts of ‘the redemption of solitude’ stand in tension with each other. We have already seen that Paul thinks that marriage can be a distraction from the fullness of life in the community of those called by Christ (1 Corinthians 7.32-35). And Jesus himself, in calling men and women into the community that shares his life and destiny, asks them to be willing to break the ties of family commitment, including, in Luke’s version, *wife* in the list of those who might have to be abandoned ‘for the sake of the kingdom of God’ (18.29-30, cf. Mark 10.2-30).

Jesus, like John the Baptist before him and Paul after him, seems not to have chosen the way of marriage, and we have glimpses of the ways in which his ‘redemption of solitude’ was realized in the wider context of human community. For example, in his reaction to the woman who, in Luke’s account, bathes his feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, kisses them and anoints them with ointment (7.36-50). Jesus shows no anxiety that her sensual and tactile act is humanly inappropriate or sexually dangerous. Instead he says, ‘She has shown great love’ (7.47). Perhaps we can link this with his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, ‘Whoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart’ (Matthew 5.27). Jesus suggests here that male sexuality requires male responsibility. Just as the men at that dinner table would have dismissed that woman from the city, so other men required women to cover themselves. Ben Sira warned fathers, ‘Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter – see there is no lattice in her room ... do not let her parade her beauty before any man’ (Ecclesiasticus 42.11-12). But Jesus accepted the bathing, kissing, anointing as an act of love, and he expected men to be able to look at a woman without wanting to have her, without seeing her as someone to abuse or possess.

Again there is diversity of interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures, by Jesus and in the light of Christ, and there is diversity of practice. And neither is made into a rule. Some abandoned family to follow Jesus, but Peter remained married. Paul commended the unmarried state, but he never questioned the married Peter’s status as an apostle.

To whom it is given.

In Matthew’s Gospel, after Jesus’ teaching about divorce, ‘his disciples said to him, ‘If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry’. But he said to them, ‘Not anyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given’ ‘. And ‘this teaching’ seems both to refer back to his teaching about marriage and then forward to what Jesus says next about eunuchs, including those ‘who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’ (19.10-12).

There are diverse callings, and they are all for those to whom they are given as God’s gift, for those who live by God’s forgiveness.

When I wore my hat last week no one commented as we warmed our hands with our coffee cups after the service. My sisters and brothers accept me with my head covered or uncovered. But in France a parliamentary committee has recommended a ban on women wearing veils in public places, and in a bleak refugee camp in Somaliland, Quresh, a woman whose husband had just been shot and killed, recently described how the religious police had then run into her house in Mogadishu: 'Woman, why are you not wearing a veil?' 'There were two of them with a whip ... even now you can see the marks' (*The Observer Magazine*, 31/1/10).

Paul was once one of the religious police – it was one of his credentials: 'As to zeal, a persecutor of the church' (Philippians 3.6). Circumcision, food laws, Sabbath observance were to be imposed by force if necessary. But 'the conversion of Paul' was to a new understanding of his religion. He had, he told the Romans, been reading the Scriptures as 'the law of sin and of death', but now he read them as 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (8.2). Now the commandments are not to be imposed, because loyalty to Christ comes above everything else. And so remarkably he could say to those same Romans about Sabbath observance, 'Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds' (14.5).

At the beginning of the same letter Paul depicts the disorder of a collapsed selfish society that, as he goes on to explain, is reversed when the new community in Christ follows his selfless way of 'peace and mutual upbuilding' (14.19). In describing this self-determined society Paul includes one example of behaviour that most of his Jewish and Gentile contemporaries would have agreed was a rejection of gender distinctions that were both natural and conventional. Same-sex relationships were disordered because men should not be the passive, penetrated partner and women should not presume to have the active mind and desires of a man.

As we read this Romans 1.26-27 in the light of Christ and in our own circumstances, we should consider:

that what we understand to be 'natural' or 'conventional' matters;
that Paul is not offering ethical guidance at this point in the letter;
and, above all, that the converted Paul left behind an understanding of religion as the imposition of commandments.

Paul challenged even those who keep the fourth commandment and those who did not keep the Sabbath *not* to pass judgement on each other (14.10). Instead they and we are to 'welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God' (15.7).

Diversity in One Human Journey

Alison Webster

I would like to begin with a poetic contribution from Audre Lorde, the African American womanist warrior poet who died, sadly, back in 1993.

'Every woman I have ever loved has left her print upon me, where I loved some invaluable piece of myself apart from me – so different that I had to stretch and grow in order to recognise her. And in that growing, we came to separation, that place where work begins. Another meeting.'

I want you to hold that quote in your hearts as you listen to what follows. Not because I am going to reflect on it explicitly, or in any way analyse it, but because it undergirds everything I want to say today.

Like you, I am who I am today because of the diversity of people I have loved and been loved by. And I am who I am today because of the diversity of ways in which I have tried to be open to the love of God.

The particular aspect of diversity that I embody – and I suspect, the reason why I've been invited to address this particular aspect of today's agenda – is the diversity that comes from inhabiting both sides of the perceived gay/straight divide. Not that it is particularly unusual to have this experience, but it is, I think, an experience that is under-reflected upon. Tales of journeying in one direction (usually from apparently straight to gay – 'coming out' narratives), abound. Occasionally there are stories of making the journey in the opposite direction. Sometimes we talk about 'bisexuality', as though there were only two kinds of sexuality. But my own experience is one of considering myself to be both heterosexual and lesbian at the same time. All the time. I couch it like that because of considerations of how structural power works in our society – of which more later.

I want to begin with two reflections from my personal experience. I consider them to be stories of a transition to the underside of power, and back again. Both were written as conscious and careful attempts to describe the intense and specific feelings associated with very particular events. The first was written in 1996, describing what it was like to be 14 and in love with another woman. As I was 14 in 1980, the writing was an act of remembering and recreating something from 16 years before. I wouldn't write it like this now, but I use it as I originally wrote it because I consider it to be closer to the actual feelings of the experience at the time. The second was written for my latest book on Identity, *'You are Mine'*, and launches the section in that book on 'telling untold stories' – a section that explores how, in order to resist the power of the apparently 'normal', we have to learn to articulate the uniqueness of our own experience – and tell it.

Reflection One

I am on the school hockey field. It's a winter afternoon. One of those unspeakably bleak ones – mist hanging, semi-defrosted mud under foot. This is the 'cast-off' team – made up of those who want to muck around and have fun. I like this group. There are some good players, some utterly hopeless. The main reason for being here, though, is that *she* is here. Any excuse to be near to her, in her sights. 'Miss Brown will take the dunce hockey class'. OK, well I'll be a dunce for Miss Brown.

Her. How to describe what I felt for her? It goes something like this. This woman took up most of my head-space for the best part of six years of my life. Six years. From the age of fourteen, when she came, newly qualified, to the school, to the age of twenty when we started to make the successful transition from unbalanced devotion on my part, to equal friendship between the two of us. That blessed time when to call her by her first name became easy and natural. Miss Brown transformed into first-name terms. I – we, I guess, worked hard to achieve that.

Anyway, she was my RE teacher. ‘O’ and ‘A’ level. Four periods a week, plus the hockey. It wasn’t enough. Nothing would’ve been enough. Let me describe the symptoms. You might recognise them. I can spot her across the other side of the school because I know her gait. I know her body language. It’s a very definite stride – a bit ‘loping’ and certainly unusual. I love it because it’s my early warning signal. When I spot it I can change my route. Go the long way round to the science block just to see her, just to be seen. Another symptom: I never go past her flat without seeing if her car is there. And I have to look up at the windows to see if there’s any sign of her. When I’m anywhere near her, I’m never relaxed.

It was partly because of her that I studied theology. She brought religious questions to life for me. She made me think about meaning; made me think about value; made me feel joy and pain; enabled me to feel God; made me question everything I thought I knew about who I was and what I wanted out of life.

Anyway, she made me, *made* me, made *me*. In so many ways. Scary the power she had. I didn’t know I was in love. I certainly didn’t know it had anything to do with my sexuality. That was unimaginable.

Back to that hockey field. The game’s over now. We’re walking back up the hill to the sports hall. This is my weekly chance to walk next to her. Just for a few wonderful minutes. I work hard for this every week and usually succeed. The trick is to make it look casual. I look around at everyone else and think, ‘they think we’re just walking back to the sports hall. They’re not even thinking about it, about her. Not giving her a second thought. Just walking. Part of me wishes I could be free of whatever this feeling is, and be like them. Normal, unconcerned, just walking, back to the sports hall. Some weeks I pretend to be like them, pretend to be blissfully unconcerned about whether I get to talk to her or not. But the feelings remain.

This time, we’re talking about what we’ll do in RE next week – what we’ll discuss; what the class is like, what we think of ‘the others’. I make a joke. She laughs. I *love it* that I can do that sometimes. Make her laugh. Affect her. Then she reaches out and touches the back of my neck. A friendly sort of ‘cuff’. A light touch, in jest, that’s all it is, but for me, this is the most delicious, powerful, unforgettable tactile gesture in my life to date. I’m speechless, light-headed. It’s wrenching, pleasure and pain intensely mixed. I don’t know what to do, don’t know what to think. Don’t know what this makes me and don’t know if I care. I have no words for this and I’m not sure I want any. Certain words hover, but I

don't let them take shape because I sense danger in them. I love this woman, and I am afraid.

Reflection Two:

I think I am feeling an absence of an absence, and I'm wondering how I can tell.

I am walking with you in the hills. We are holding hands. This feels deeply unsettling to me, for you are a man, and I am a woman and this is not what I am used to. Nobody looks away when they catch sight of us. No-one averts their gaze. I expect to feel relief but I do not. This newfound sense of security has a paradoxical effect. I feel destabilised, cut adrift from my old identity, even as I am rescued from the sense of dislocation it brought with it. The social kaleidoscope has twisted; the pieces have fallen into myriad new places all around me, and I am located differently now.

I am angry that in another year, with a former lover, on a similar walk, in the same hills, if I dared to hold hands with her, even to let go when others came near, I was looked at differently. Not with hostility so much as a blank emptiness. With a weight behind the void – a sense of knowing who was in charge, and it wasn't us. A deep awareness that how ever self-confident we were, their tolerance could be withdrawn at any moment - if it was there in the first place.

Now, it seems, I am legitimised - worthy of recognition. It is so subtle that I wonder at the enormity of its effects; so slight that I doubt myself and my perceptions. To the extent that others are 'normal' they will doubt them too. Am I simply imagining this? Yet these fractional changes feel like the difference between belonging and not; between being a person and less than a person. Those I am meeting on narrow pathways in these wooded and fertile hills reflect something of me in their eyes as they meet mine. In their sense of recognition I experience estrangement. 'You are one of us', they seem to say. I do not want to be.

From the inside, I am the same person on the same walk in the same hills – whoever I am with. Holding hands or not. And it is suddenly clear to me how the variegated and nuanced, complex and beautiful, multiple inflections of my personhood have been forced by the world into a blunt and dichotomous either/or. I will not choose.

There are three things I would like to pull out of these stories: Culture matters; power matters; unnamed loves matter.

1) Culture Matters

Whatever our personal feelings, and whatever our intellectual opinions, we embody the value system that we have imbibed from our social context. This is powerful, it is visceral. It operates at a gut-level, and must be resisted at that level too. When it comes to personal transformation, our minds and our intellect are severely limited in their potential to make a difference. They are important, obviously, but I don't believe they are decisive.

As I reread my first story, I am struck by the sense of hesitation; of fear; and of simply not seeing the blindingly obvious; living with a maelstrom of intense feeling, whilst being disqualified, by seemingly invisible and incomprehensible forces, from naming it. Because, culturally speaking, it was not possible for me to be ‘one of them’, a lesbian – or even to utter the ‘L’ word to myself at that stage, I was unable to feel what I was really feeling. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that I was aware of my feelings, and their power, I just could not name them for what they were. *I could not afford to let them be real.*

Being lesbian is about an ‘absence’. Because it is an unsayable word, a stigmatised cultural category – a word of abjection and horror; a taboo, the impact of naming oneself in line with one’s feelings was something that – when it happened – had physical embodied consequences for me until I physically – at gut level – came to terms with it. I suggest that these powers of abjection cannot be as easily erased as practical forms of discrimination. They are carried in our collective psyche and live on. Or they did for me, back in 1980. But I suspect, social attitudes surveys notwithstanding, they still exert their power, for visceral value systems run deeper than individual opinions.

So my question to us all today is this: what other visceral value systems are at work in us as we pick our way through our relational lives? Racism? Orientation towards conventional forms of ‘success’? Attitudes to our bodies, and our physicality? Who do we expect to love, and what happens when love visits us outside of our expectations? How does the reality of loving challenge these textures of the culture that lives in us – and how does it feel to embody that challenge in the deepest parts of our selves?

2) Power Matters

The things that texture our psyches work themselves out in systems and structures: power structures. However tempting it may be to glibly assert that there is ‘neither black nor white, male nor female, gay or straight’, but that we are ‘all just people’. In the real world this is not credible, for it takes no account of those systems and structures, and it does nothing to subvert them. And as people of God we are called to subvert them.

Think about the *power* of ‘doing the right thing’; of *being* the right thing. Notice those systems of social reward and punishment. Remember feeling deserving in the wake of cultural approval; relive the vulnerability of being on the receiving end of cultural opprobrium. We live in a system that punishes and rewards according to its own conventions. Conventions that, as people of God, we cannot and should not own.

When you are on the underside of power – as I feel I was when I was living as a lesbian – your very being is delegitimized; called into question. You have a right to be only insofar as the power structures allow it. And the really clever thing is how hidden this is. Society takes away your full right to be, whilst asserting, in explicit terms, that you still have it. And it hides it so subtly and successfully that those NOT on the underside of power find it almost impossible to see that this has happened, and even harder to see their part in it.

So for me, flipping back to an apparently ‘legitimate’ way of being: that is, married - to a man - I could suddenly feel and notice the rewards and comfort that flowed from that position. I could see more clearly how the punishment had worked, because now the system wanted to reward me.

Resistance is the watchword according to which I lived as a lesbian, and I live it still, for different reasons. Because the things I learned as a lesbian are things I do not want to lose. I am glad for those 14 or 15 years. I was radically reshaped by them – irreversibly so. I do not ever want to unlearn those things, and I do not think I ever will, because they are part of the fabric of my being now. My understanding of systems of power; and the alliances I found with others on their underside are gifts I cannot do without.

3) Unnamed loves matter

Every human encounter is an invitation to go deeper; to embrace the challenge of difference and be changed. One cultural value we live with is the tendency to over-emphasise the importance of one, singular, partnered relationship. That applies to the gay world and the straight. It marginalises those with no spouse or partner, obviously, but it does more than that. It encourages us to devalue so many of our other deep connections – usually with the word ‘just’. ‘Oh, don’t worry about him, he’s just a friend’.

We each have, potentially if not actually, a vast hinterland of passionate connections that make up the rest of our relational lives, once the question of whether we are partnered or not is answered. The paucity of our language in this regard interests me. For naming is power, and we have very few names for those we love who are not spouses or blood relatives. Think about your life. Who are those on whom your life depends? Without whom you would be bereft? Those who have made you who you are, and those who still do. They may be those you share passionate interests with; those you have creative partnerships with; you may share a deep spiritual connection. These relationships may or may not be conventionally ‘sexual’, but they involve our sexuality because we are whole people within them. These are those with whom we are bold; take risks; make ourselves vulnerable. These relationships have no name. They are often trumped, in the conventional pecking order of priorities, by the contractual; the legitimate; the defined. Yet they are always bursting into and through relational spaces and gaps – sometimes chaotically, reminding us of the mystery of love; its giftedness; its unpredictability. If love is of God, how could it be otherwise?

If love is of God, we must embrace this hinterland; work with the grain of it. Not allow the world to tell us that these connections that have no name have no importance. On the contrary, we must work to articulate them better, to develop a language for them.

Conclusion

Each of us is not a category – of sexuality or of anything else. We are human beings, flesh and blood, infinitely beloved of God, trying to learn how to love one another as God

would have us love one another. With our hearts, souls, minds and bodies. Our different locations in the power structures give us a diversity of perspectives, and we need one another's perspectives to learn to be better at it. To learn how better to open our hearts to one another; to create spaces beyond convention where God can speak and live and do God's creative work. My question and challenge to us today is: how can we do this?

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SEXUALITY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 6 FEBRUARY 2010

Present: Roberta Rominger (Matron), John Gladwin (Patron), Jane Fraser (Chair), Daphne Cook (Treasurer), John Cook, Martin Pendergast, Colin Coward, Hugh Bain, Hazel Barkham, Michael Moran, Colin Hart, Anthony Woollard plus two guests.

Apologies: David Gamble (Patron), Heather Barfoot, Tony Crowe, Mike Egan.

Report from the Chair: The report is attached to these minutes. The Chair reported on a most productive year and expressed satisfaction that she would be handing over her role with CSCS in good heart.

Treasurer's Report: The report is attached to these minutes. The Treasurer noted that the year's surplus was in part the result of there having been no bills for *Theology & Sexuality*; there had been a hiatus in publication due in part to the purchase of the title by Equinox, but the series would now be brought up to date and the cost to CSCS members (and hence members' subscription levels) would be unchanged. The true surplus was in fact understated as the Gift Aid tax reclaim for the year was outstanding. The report was received by acclamation.

Appointment of Examiner of Accounts: The Treasurer proposed that Mike Egan be reappointed and this was accepted by acclamation.

Committee members: The following were unanimously elected to serve until the 2011 AGM:

Chair – Martin Pendergast (proposed by Anthony Woollard, seconded by Daphne Cook)
Treasurer – Colin Hart (proposed by Jane Fraser, seconded by Anthony Woollard)
The matter of the Secretary's duties was agreed to be left to the new Committee to resolve.

The following were further elected by general acclamation:

Michael Moran
Anthony Woollard
Heather Barfoot
Jane Fraser

Daphne Cook also agreed to serve briefly in order to ensure a smooth handover to the new Treasurer.

The outgoing Chair reminded members that there was still room for one or two additional Committee members who could be co-opted at any time during the year.

Future of CSCS: Satisfaction was expressed at the outcome of plans for the joint conference on Sexuality and Human Flourishing taking place the same day. This presented a model for networked activity, but it was still necessary for CSCS to continue in being as the only charitable organisation with a remit for study across the field of faith and sexuality. It was felt that that remit might be discharged more effectively if there were opportunities for responses to the many thoughtful articles in *Theology & Sexuality*; Anthony Woollard reminded members that the columns of *CSCS News* existed for just such a purpose, and suggested that the new Committee could also look at more effective use of the website or of the Web more generally to facilitate such discussion.

Report from the Chair for the AGM of CSCS 6th February 2010

This has been an extremely interesting year for CSCS, as I believe we have succeeded in achieving the two major tasks outlined by our last two Annual General Meetings.

Concern had been expressed by our members about an uncertain future for CSCS with its declining membership. This, in turn led to an examination of its continuing role as a forum to provide opportunities for sexuality to be discussed honestly and openly and to help others in the churches to provide similar opportunities.

Members had noted a number of recent examples known to them where Christian groups had found it difficult to build bridges between *a priori* theological principles and practical pastoral questions. It was felt that there might be a need for assistance with curricula or training materials, which CSCS and/or other organisations working in the field of faith and sexuality could help to fulfil. Members had also suggested that we should develop a network of organisations with similar aims to ours. With this in mind, I even made a tentative suggestion to our Committee that I end my tenure as Chair by facilitating a conference around the topics of 'Faith, Sexuality and Justice' and that we do so by reaching out to any other organisations with a common cause.

Clearly, today's conference has achieved the latter aim in ways we hardly dared to imagine this time last year, and we are immensely grateful to Clare Herbert for taking up the challenge when she addressed our AGM this time last year. We hope to build on the links that we have made with other organisations which have helped to put on today's conference and there are signs that there is an increasing willingness to collaborate in our mission.

There has also been an inter-denominational input to our continuing dialogue with leading theological educators on how best to support those undergoing training for

ministry and prepare them for some of the sexuality issues faced by members of our congregations. We have gathered together some key players in the field of theological education and ministerial formation who are undertaking some excellent work in preparing future church leaders to address some of the issues that are being aired in today's conference on 'Sexuality and Human Flourishing'. There is representation from the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, United Reformed Church and Methodists and we have met on three occasions so far for some insightful and extremely helpful sharing of experience, expertise and ideas. All are keen to continue with a view to publishing some outcomes in order to encourage further work in this field of ministry.

Apart from these meetings, your committee has met on four occasions and has welcomed the addition of three new members to the team, Michael Moran, Heather Barfoot and Colin Hart. We value their commitment to the aims of CSCS and the experience they bring to our work. Anthony Woollard is our longest serving committee member who, apart from acting as an efficient minutes secretary, has acted as editor of the CSCS Newsletter which is a most valuable link with our membership. Martin Pendergast continues to keep us informed of the many links he has with other organisations in this field of ministry and with the particular concerns of Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. Daphne and John Cook have served the committee well over the last few years, offering us hospitality for our meetings and, in Daphne's case, acting as Treasurer. They will be standing down this year and we thank them for all that they have done for CSCS, especially in raising our awareness of gender dysphoria. As I mentioned in my Annual Report last year, I will also be standing down as your Chair, after eight years in this position. It is a good time to hand over the reins to another person as CSCS enters a very different future working in collaboration with other organisations and individuals to further our aims more effectively. Beyond the committee itself, I must thank Michael Egan for examining our accounts and Philip Gardner for his oversight of our CSCS website.

We continue to have difficulty in obtaining a clear response from the new publishers of the journal, *Theology and Sexuality*, which many of our members opt to receive as part of their membership benefits. The second edition of volume 15 that should have been distributed last year is about to be mailed to members and Equinox have assured me that volume 16 should be completed in 2010. They will continue to offer our members a discount that will keep prices as they were. The handover from Sage Publications has caused considerable disruption to the publication of the Journal and they have apologised to our members for the poor service we have received. In turn, I must thank those members who receive the Journal for their patience over this matter.

Last year we were faced with the possibility that CSCS had perhaps run its course and its ministry in this form was no longer viable. We thank God for the renewed vision we have received and look forward to the development of the projects we have in hand. It is good to see that more collaborative work is being done in the field of Christianity and sexuality as we will surely be enriched by working more closely with others and our voice will also be stronger for this.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have offered advice, information and support to me over the years I have served as your Chair and especially to the Committee and all those who, over the years have supported CSCS and our work.

Thank you.

The Revd. Canon Jane Fraser (Chair of CSCS)

6th February 2010

**THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY AND SEXUALITY
ACCOUNTS YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2009**

Income		2009	2008
	Subscriptions	1830.00	1794.00
	Conference Fees	590.00	210.00
	Interest receivable	7.36	48.52
	Tax refund	0.00	1093.04
	Total	2427.36	3145.56
Expenditure			
	Journals	0.00	1166.00
	CSCS News	319.18	342.28
	Conference	291.83	176.19
	Website	115.00	124.43
	Committee/secretarial	551.49	271.75
	Total	1277.50	2080.65
Surplus		1149.86	1064.91
Opening accumulated fund		4633.78	3568.87
Closing accumulated fund		5783.64	4633.78
Represented by:			
	Current account	3636.70	2490.33
	Deposit account	2146.94	2143.45

Wrestling the Name

Andrea Knowles

Rape is a violation of relationship. When we are made to participate unconsciously in archetypal patterns of behaviour we lose touch with ourselves and our needs. -the body, the spirit –the incarnate spirit of God is within us is harmed; we enter into a betrayal to our world view and our moral, relational and physical and religious standards are desecrated.

When a woman is not following her own heart's desires and instead acts only to fulfil others' needs she may be under the influence of the rape archetype, the prostitute

archetype or the Virgin Mary/mother archetype, depending on the circumstances. The rape and prostitute archetypes are closely related. Women learn that sexual activity is an area of their lives in which they have little control. The romantic love ideal in heterosexual relations requires a dominant male sexuality-subordinate female sexual relationship between two people. Growing up, many girls (and some boys) find themselves the object of sexual advances from sexually aggressive adult males. When a woman engages in sexual activity that she does not want but feels unable to do anything to prevent this, she is under the influence of the rape archetype. From an early age many women experience themselves as powerless sex objects, coercion and manipulation become accepted means of interaction.

The same archetype is present if she is being denied sexual pleasure because she feels that is what her partner wants/demands and again feels unable to alter her situation. The archetype may participate in her own violation, when she participates in such things as abortion that he wants but she doesn't. Where there is this unequal or coercive power there is here no consent.

In church teaching Saint Maria Goretti was brutally attacked by a rapist at the age twelve. In an unprecedented move a homily was delivered by Pope Pius XII at her canonization. A 'real rape' survivor takes on a Virgin Mary quality, pure and holy.

The belief that rape is sexually pleasurable and that good girls never say 'yes' and disregards the fact that few boys want to listen to 'No', confuses here the difference between sexual violence and sexual activity and what wider society confusion over what constitutes 'real rape' is as there is no other rape archetype in Christian theology exists. other than the Virgin Mary archetype. Christians themselves are called to fix their sights on moral perfection, however difficult the course may prove.

In the Pope's homily, although she successfully prevented herself from being raped, her attacker stabbed her to death. As she died, she forgave her murder. Unlike most rape victims she here is vindicated for her conduct as she surrendered her life for God. The attempted rape is seen as a sexual approach rather than a violent attack, that it is preferable that a girl dies rather than commit the sin of losing 'her virginity', because of the rape. This breeds classic rape myths of the Virgin Mary survivor and real rapes in the public imagination are non-existent and harmful archetypes, which set unrealistic standards and keep women from naming their experiences as rape. Law enforcement, medical personnel, family, friends, and church look at a situation of rape, compare its veracity to the Virgin Mary scenario and judge it accordingly.

Recommended books:

Christina Northop, Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing

Kristen J Leslie, When Violence is no Stranger

Marie Fortune, Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited

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The next issue is expected in Autumn 2010 – contributions invited by
1 September

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