

Sexuality and the Church of England.

(a story as long as it is repetitive)

- **1955** in *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition, re-examining Scripture, tradition, reason and experience*, the Revd Dr Derrick Sherwin Bailey of the Moral Welfare Council concluded that often-cited biblical passages were not relevant to modern same-sex relationships.
- **1957 Wolfenden Report.**
- **1967 Partial decriminalisation. (Age of consent at 21)**
- **1970 Stretton-Steve Report** (unpublished)
 - 'Immediate encouragement of all projects of help for persons with problems associated with homosexuality even if there is no question of making them into heterosexuals or celibates', with a centre combining professional support for lesbians, gays and others facing sexual or family difficulties and research on related sociological, psychological, legal and theological issues.
- **1978 Lambeth Conference Resolution.**
 - Called 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 Church, recognising the need for pastoral concern for those who are homosexual, encourages dialogue with them'.
- **1979 *Homosexual relationships: a contribution to discussion***, by a working party chaired by John Yates, Bishop of Gloucester.
 - concluding that there were 'circumstances in which individuals may justly choose to enter a homosexual relationship involving a physical expression of sexual love'. Suppressed.
- **1989 Osborne Report.** Called for more understanding and discussion. Suppressed, though leaked.
- **1991 Issues in Human Sexuality.**
 - 'What is needed is unpressurised time for prayerful study and reflection, pursued within congregations in whatever ways that are most helpful and acceptable and with readiness to listen to those who can speak relevantly from personal experience'. Very little was done, though in some diocese there were some discussion.
 - Insisted that 'clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships' – 'to allow such a claim (on their part) would be to seen to be placing that way of life in all respects on a par with heterosexual marriage as a reflection of God's purposes in creation. The Church cannot accept such a parity..'

- **1995 Something to celebrate**
 - urged that same-sex couples ‘be given encouragement and support’ in living out their commitments. Senior clergy disowned this.
- **1998 Lambeth 1:10**
 - ‘upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;’
 - ‘We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;’
 - ‘while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;’
 - ‘cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;’
- **2003 Repeal of Section 28**
- **2005 Civil Partnerships**
 - Bishops in the House of Lord voted against and said
 - ‘House of Bishops affirms that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership.’
 - ‘Members of the clergy and candidates for ordination who decide to enter into partnerships must therefore expect to be asked for assurances that their relationship will be consistent with the teaching set out in Issues in Human Sexuality’
- **2013 Pilling Report**
 - recognised the lack of consensus on the theology of sexuality, including what the Bible has to say, and recommended that clergy be free to hold services for same-sex couples.
- **2014 Same Sex Marriage becomes legal**
 - Bishops voted 9 for (5 abstentions) for a wrecking motion. Justin Welby said marriage would be marriage "abolished, redefined and recreated" ‘weakened’ .
 - Valentine’s Day letter. ‘we are all in agreement that the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman remains unchanged.’
 - for those seeking a church service ‘any prayer will be accompanied by pastoral discussion of the church's teaching and their reasons for departing from it. Services of blessing should not be provided.’
 - The House is not, therefore, willing for those who are in a same sex marriage to be ordained to any of the three orders of ministry. In

addition it considers that it would not be appropriate conduct for someone in holy orders to enter into a same sex marriage, given the need for clergy to model the Church's teaching in their lives.

- **2015-16 Shared Conversations**

- An exercise in futility? 3 rounds of 'conversations' – Bishops, Synod and between diocese. No formal mechanism for reporting back. No report and no outcomes.

- **Bishops Report GS2055** Despite there being no formal feedback from the diocese the Bishops wrote their own Report. They failed to consult outside of themselves and their report was rejected by General Synod in Feb 2017.

- The Archbishops promised “radical new Christian Inclusion, ... founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it.”

- subsequently committed themselves and the House of Bishops to two new strands of work: the creation of a Pastoral Advisory Group and the development of a substantial Teaching Document on the subject – now Living in Love and Faith.

- **Living in Love and Faith**

- Not intended to change the Church's teaching. A resource for study. Due out in 2020 (likely to be delayed). Some form of feedback system is expected. What next – who knows...