

**Submission to the Special Commission anent questions relating to  
homosexuality and the ordination and induction of ministers**

**Glasgow: Sandyford Henderson Memorial Church Kirk Session**

Inclusive; diverse; addressing all our behaviours

*'God's welcome is always transformative'* (Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury)

Sandyford is a diverse congregation seeking to live out God's love in a very varied contemporary parish. We are diverse in ages and backgrounds, and we are a sexually diverse congregation. We represent homosexual (including lesbian), bisexual and heterosexual orientations, people who are married, widowed and many who are single: some by choice, many who would rather not be. Probably all of us have struggles in this area.

As we explore the pain caused for many by the truth 'it is not good that the man should be alone,' we are united in a commitment to evangelical obedience to God's word.

We shall be very sorry if the Commission feels able to regard homosexual acts as a matter on which the opinions for and against are equally valid, or on which mutual recognition of ministries is possible. Our gay, celibate members are particularly insistent on this.

We list the following texts for easy reference and to save repeating them in the catholic, world-church, wide-ranging appeal that follows. We ask the Commission particularly to notice in what breadth of thought (e.g. creation and the love of Christ for his church) Holy Scripture places sexuality, and in what company of sins it places homosexual acts.

**Gen 1 & 2** [also used by our Lord (Matt. 19) and St Paul (Eph. 5) as the basis for their teaching on sexuality]: We are "made in God's image male and female ... it is not good that the man should be alone ... that is why a man shall be joined to his woman and they shall be one flesh." Every subsequent reference in scripture is in harmony with the precept that sexual intercourse was created for man-woman marriage and is forbidden elsewhere. There is not a single exception.

**Lev. 18.22** "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is 'detestable'<sup>1</sup>."

**Matt.5.17ff** "I have not come to abolish the law & prophets but to fulfil them; until heaven and earth disappear not the least stroke of a pen will disappear from the Law."

**Matt.15.19f.** "Evil thoughts, murder, adultery, 'porneia' (sex acts outside marriage including homosexual<sup>2</sup>), theft, false testimony, slander: these make a person unclean."

**Rom. 1. 21ff** [on God removing restraints when humankind] "neither glorify nor thank God; therefore he gave them over to dishonouring lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural; the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another ... and (he gave them over to) envy, murder, strife, ... "

**1 Cor.6.9ff** "Idolaters, adulterers, passive and active partners in same-sex erotic practice<sup>3</sup>, thieves, greedy, drunkards, blasphemers, robbers - none of these will participate in the Kingdom of God. "

**1 Cor.6.18ff** "Flee from 'porneia' (see above). All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body, a temple of the Holy Spirit."

**Eph.5.31ff** Christ cares for the Church, 'for we are members of His body. That is why a man is to leave his parents and be joined to his woman, and the two will become one flesh.'

**1 Tim.1.9ff** "Murder, adultery, same-sex practice, slave trading, lying and perjury are contrary to sound doctrine."

We draw attention to two points in the 2007 report on sexuality.

1. The Church of Scotland position is clear and has not been replaced: 'The practice of homosexual acts<sup>4</sup> is contrary to God's will for mankind' (GENERAL ASSEMBLY 1994 and 2007 4.3.4 note 1)

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<sup>1</sup> *To 'ebah*: see 4.2.1 below

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, G. Kittel, ed., trans. G.W.Bromily, *TDNT*, s.v., p. 587-593; G.D.Fee, **1 Corinthians**, Eerdmans 1987 p.200

<sup>3</sup> This is certainly the correct understanding of *malakoi* ('soft') and *arsenokoitai* (those who engage in male-male coitus: see note 4). See articles by Edith Humphrey (n. 9) and Fee (op cit, ad lac).

<sup>4</sup> In the careful words of psychiatrist John White, 'acts designed to produce sexual orgasm between members of the same sex'. J White *Eros Defiled* IVP 1977 p.105

2. 'There was somewhat surprise at the degree of concord reached regarding the plain reading of scripture in the specific mentions of same sex sexual activity. There was almost a weariness with interested readings of certain key texts, which tortuously attempt to repudiate the writer's clear intention to condemn behaviour as bad. The Bible, when it occasionally takes up the subject of same-sex activity, presents it as a wrong choice.' (4.13.18)

Given these and the 80% vote (36 presbyteries to 9) in 2006-07 under the Barrier Act against permitting recognition of civil partnerships (and that having been a stand for the authority of scripture and church unity), we regret that individuals have not respected the Church's firm, clear and repeated position on this matter and that the advice given from the Principal Clerks' Office has obscured the fact that this is the Church's view.

Our paper addresses four questions. Does this still apply today? Is it indeed the word of God? What of the case for the ordination of practising homosexuals? How important is this issue?

### **1. Does the Bible's proscription of homosexual acts still apply?**

- 1.1 It was at just such a time as ours, when divorce was commonplace and homosexual practice fairly widespread in the Roman Empire (although the latter not in Judaism: see 3.7 below), that Jesus said we must draw our view of human sexuality from creation: God made us in his own image, male and female, and said "that is why a man shall leave his parents, be joined to his woman, and they are to be one flesh" (Matt. 19.4 f). The principle was countercultural then as now: God created sex to belong only within man-woman marriage. Thus the Bible's prohibition of homosexual acts is not anti-homosexual but pro-marriage. See Wolfhart Pannenberg's article.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.2 Unlike the matters of female ministry and slavery, which are handled differently from text to text, there is no tension between the passages that speak of same sex practice. They all register disapproval.
- 1.3 Nor can the NT material be dismissed by an appeal to cultural conditioning, as in the

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<sup>5</sup> W. Pannenberg 'Can love ever be sinful' Church Times June 1996. A masterly summary of the principles at stake.

question of head-covering for women. The biblical teaching on homosexual practice, far from being coloured by cultural norms, adopts a decisive stand against behaviour that was often condoned then. Indeed it was a major player in the Roman Empire's move to proscribing same sex activity.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Is this the Word of God?**

We hold that the above evidence is sufficient and we refute the interpretation of the First Article Declaratory which claims that the Word of God is a smaller canon within the canon of scripture. But accepting it for the sake of argument, there are accepted criteria for discerning when a teaching is God's Word<sup>7</sup> whichever view of scripture is taken. The ban on same sex acts meets all of them. It is a coherent line of thought, an organic whole seamlessly included in the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. It is not based on just one text or string of texts, but on our calling to reflect the image of God in his different-ness and unity, and the love of our Lord Jesus for his Church. It is Trinitarian, Christ-centred and reflects the argument of the whole of scripture in creation and redemption. Wherever in scripture we meet it, it is both consistent and emphatic. If anything in the Bible is the Word of God, this is; it is as prominent as the doctrine of the Trinity, and much clearer than the doctrine of baptism which we make a matter of discipline.

### **Conclusion.**

It is beyond sensible dispute that the Commission is faced with a choice between the Word of God and a homosexual lifestyle. A church cannot simultaneously retain the first article declaratory ('receives the Word of God contained in OT + NT as its supreme rule of faith and life') and permit homosexual acts. We ask the Commission to find first, that for a Christian disciple sexual intercourse should be celebrated only within man-woman marriage: homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian discipleship. Therefore second, the church cannot sanction or bless same-sex unions. Third, since the ordained ministry carries a necessarily representative function for the life of the church, those who order their lives in

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<sup>6</sup> Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Susan Treggiari, "Marriage and Family in Roman Society," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, IV.25.2, in *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999)

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. M. Hayter, *The New Eve in Christ*, SPCK 1987 p. 146 -168

this way cannot be ordained.<sup>8</sup>

This in no way jeopardises Gospel inclusiveness. The person with homosexual orientation is often lonely and unhappy, all of us-are equally welcomed by God, and the Church must recognise and guide acceptably for all our needs. But it is no help to provide a solution that rebels against the beneficent authority of God's Word.

### **3. What of the case being proposed in favour of ordaining practising homosexuals?**

The following are the main arguments used.

- 3.1 *Paul was opposed only to homosexual acts when they were unnatural, i. e. practised by heterosexuals, and is not addressing such acts when practised by gay people to whom it is natural.* But scripture universally addresses not our orientation but our lifestyle. Paul's point is that these acts are in themselves against the way God created things to be (Romans ch. 1). Compare the works by Humphrey.<sup>9</sup>
- 3.2 *Faithful same-sex partnerships were not known then; scripture would be happy with those.* In fact homosexual practice of all sorts was common in the Roman empire and the scripture addresses exactly the contemporary lifestyle: see 1 Cor 6 and 1 Tim 1 texts above. It is the acts which are forbidden.
- 3.3 *Paul was only speaking of pederasty and prostitution, not of faithful relationships.* This is an interpretation imposed on the text for which there is no evidence, and subsequent scholarship has found it lacking (see e.g. Humphrey's discussion paper no. 3: ref in n. 9).
- 3.4 *This is my orientation and I have a right to behave this way.* But we all have various orientations and scripture does not offer us a right to express them all. Some people are naturally quick-tempered, others constitutionally alcoholic. Scripture would have them deny those orientations, as also this one.

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<sup>8</sup> Wording taken from NT Wright (Bishop of Durham)'s article in *Fulcrum* August 2009.

<sup>9</sup> The articles prepared for the Faith and Order Commission of the Anglican Church in Canada written by Prof Edith Humphrey, available on [www.edithumphrey.net/articles.htm](http://www.edithumphrey.net/articles.htm)

- 3.5 *As a matter of justice it is wrong to exclude the gay lifestyle from eligibility for Christian leadership.* But look at the texts: we would not say it is unjust to exclude from the ministry someone committed to a lifestyle of robbery, adultery or idolatry. Scripture places the homosexual lifestyle under the same ban, in the same breath, for the same reasons, and then adds others: see 1 Cor. 6 .18 text above. Justice and righteousness require that homosexual acts should be eschewed as much as idolatry, robbery or adultery. A lifestyle incompatible with Christian discipleship should render us ineligible for ordination.
- 3.6 *The appeal to baptism: all the baptised should have access to all the sacraments, for baptism indicates God's acceptance of people as they are.* But this ignores the NT teaching about baptism, that it constitutes a dying to self and sin and a rising to new life with Christ, characterised by a holiness and renewed humanity in which certain habits and styles of life are left behind. From the first century it has been universally understood that this includes sexual immorality, and that that includes homosexual behaviour.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.7 *Jesus said nothing about homosexuality.* This is not true. The word 'porneia' is a general term for sex outside marriage including homosexual acts, and Jesus includes it in his list of evils (Matt. 15 . 19f). And when asked about divorce He gave humankind only two sexual choices, either marriage or 'eunuch', i.e. celibacy (Matt 19). Nor is Jesus' reference to Sodom irrelevant, because we know the contemporary view of it among the Jews from Philo and Josephus. *Against Apion* is typical: 'what then are our laws about marriage? That law owns no other mixture of sexes but that which nature hath appointed, of a man with his wife ... it abhors the mixture of a male with a male.' Josephus calls this 'sodomy': a behaviour for which Sodom was judged. And Jesus was clear that Judgement Day would not be comfortable for Sodom; it is inconceivable that he would have spoken in those terms had he thought homosexual acts were, or could ever become, acceptable.
- 3.8 *The Church should be inclusive.* It is true that we are all welcomed by Christ just as we are; but to someone caught sinning he said *not only* 'Neither do I condemn you'

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<sup>10</sup> Wording taken from NT Wright (Bishop of Durham)'s article in *Fulcrum* August 2009.

*but also 'go and sin no more.'* As Prof William Barclay wrote, 'every voluntary association of people is in one sense necessarily an exclusive body. People who come into it have to accept its rules and its principles, and if they will not, they cannot become or remain members of it. No preacher is entitled to preach what he likes, unless he likes to found a church of his own.'<sup>11</sup>

3.9 *This is like Peter's vision in Acts 10: God breaking us out of our prejudice.* But the vision was given to confirm the Scriptural vision (Isaiah 2.3, 42.6, 49.6) to Peter whose mind was closed to it. It is an abuse of the passage to claim it in favour of throwing out a clear Scriptural vision: the burden of the passage is precisely the opposite.

#### **4. How important is this issue?**

4.1 The importance of our created sexuality. As Humphrey writes, 'Perhaps the reasons are not so circumstantial or so trivial, after all. Human sexuality connects us to the rest of the animate world, to the created order which God has commanded to "be fruitful and to multiply." But God has also revealed that our human sexuality somehow links us with God's own self, since marriage is a mystery showing forth the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5 :32).

'Unlike Gnosticism, the Christian Way does not teach that what is done in the body is irrelevant, or that what is "spiritual" is more important than what is "physical". On the contrary, our salvation comes to us through the Incarnation of the Son, who takes on our frail human flesh, as Jesus is born of a woman, as he dies our death and is raised to new life. So, then, Paul warns the Corinthians that what is done in the body is utterly significant - "Shun fornication! Every sin that a human commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify

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<sup>11</sup> W. Barclay 'Why Theology?' in 'Faith and Thought' Vol. 97 no 2 Winter 1968 p. 50

God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6: 18-20).

'Why this issue? Because what we think and say and do about our sexuality is intimately connected to who we are - who we are in the created order, who we are in society, who we are with our spouses and friends, who we are ecclesially, and who we are in the new creation which God has brought into being and which he will complete through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is no doubt because of the inter-relatedness of this issue that it brings forth visceral reactions, for good or for ill.' - E. Humphrey, Anglican Faith and Order Commission paper 'Why this issue?'<sup>12</sup>

4.2 The importance which God's word always gives it.

4.2.1 Leviticus uses the two words *to 'ebah* (abomination, detestable act) and *tebel* (confusion, perversion) virtually as synonyms to indicate sins which are particularly serious. The words are used of homosex, bestiality and incest. It is true that many of the Levitical laws are no longer binding on the church. That is no reason, however, to dismiss all its instruction. The question to ask is, "How does the *general* pattern of the scriptures direct us to understand the Levitical prohibition? Do we place homoerotic behaviour in the same category as the prohibition of non-kosher foods and the twining together of two types of thread; or, do we hear it, like the prohibition of incest (18:6-18), addressing our behaviour today? The distinctions of "cultic" and "moral," "culturally-specific" and "general" are helpful here." (Humphrey) And it is stated in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus was fulfilling the ceremonial law and intensifying the teaching of the moral law, not destroying it.

4.2.2 Compare the list of texts at the head of this paper. The behaviours in those lists are examples introduced to show the reader the varied sins that make us unclean (Matthew), from which the Christian community has been or is being rescued (1 Corinthians), being "contrary to sound teaching" (1 Timothy). Scripture is not difficult to understand in this area, and we are hemmed in to conclude that homosexual acts are sinful acts.

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<sup>12</sup> See note 9

- 4.2.3 The sound Reformation principle of the perspicuity of scripture cannot but apply here:

God's Word is able to be understood by ordinary people and its natural meaning can be trusted. The lists of disqualifying lifestyles show that it is as unacceptable to ordain practising homosexuals as to ordain practising robbers, liars or adulterers.

We do not refer to those who give in to their passions and then repent; what is under discussion is whether the Church of Scotland is to change to a policy of ordaining those who give in to their passions and claim there is no need to repent, and who would teach others likewise.

- 4.3 The final verses of 1 Cor. 6 spell out the particular seriousness of sexual sin: "Flee 'porneia' (sex outside marriage including homosex). All other sins are outside our bodies; he who sins sexually sins against his own body ... a temple of the Holy Spirit Whom you have received from God."

- 4.4 A change from our current position to permitting the ordination of those who engage in sexual acts outside man-woman marriage would throw out the authority of God's Word over us. This would be to cross a line over which we must not go.

- 4.5 Such a change would put us in conflict with our subordinate standard, the document which guides our reading of God's Word, The Westminster Confession. The Confession speaks of Christian liberty in this way:

"God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His word; .... (but) they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered ... we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness."

- 4.6 The catholic Church worldwide and history long stands firmly against homosex, and to move in this direction will divide us from most of the world church. We testify alongside the Church of all ages and of the whole world (except for a tiny recent

minority in the West) that a move to permit homosexual acts will lead to division in Christ's church. In the words of Wolfhart Pannenberg:

"Here lies the boundary of a Christian Church that knows itself to be bound by the authority of scripture. Those who urge the Church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a Church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognised homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a Church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of scripture.

"A Church which took such a step would thereby have ceased to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic."<sup>13</sup>

- 4.7 To depart from the mind of the world church on this issue will divide and diminish the Church of Scotland. One of the startling phenomena since General Assembly 2009 has been the size and wide base of the reaction on this matter. The Commission should know, not as a threat but simply to indicate the implications of its chosen final deliverance on the topic, that a policy of ordaining those who practise same sex acts will certainly cause a realignment of denominational affiliation in Scotland that will divide and diminish the Church of Scotland. We offer our conviction also that to rebel so unambiguously against the Word of God and the catholic understanding of sexuality will reduce the mission and the stature of the Church of Scotland.
- 4.8 To permit homosex would open the door to behaviours that all of us would agree are unacceptable, because the principles of Christian behaviour have been lost. How do we decide which behaviours to espouse and which to eschew? As soon as the principles outlined in this paper are transgressed - in essence, evangelical obedience to the ten commandments as deepened in the Sermon on the Mount - there is no

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<sup>13</sup> Pannenberg, *op. cit*

reason in principle to object to other behaviours being openly courted.<sup>14</sup>

4.9 Public responsibility curtails private liberty. The influence of an ordained person is disproportionate and a higher standard of both behaviour and teaching, in conformity with scripture, is required of such.

Our gay, chaste members and all of us are clear that the homosex lobby is doing them and others who are gay no favours. The Gospel gives a peace, even amidst the struggle which evangelical obedience requires of all of us, which is to be found only in our Lord's pattern for sexuality. We must not offer people a yes to homosex when the gospel forbids it and offers them so much more.<sup>15</sup>

One thing is beyond dispute: the tiny minority pushing for this are not furthering the peace and unity of the Church. We beg the Commission not to imagine that this issue is minor or only about same sex acts. It is about whether to reject the authority of the Word of God and the doctrine of the catholic church. It is about whether to allow a tiny vocal minority to split the Church of Scotland and divide her from her daughter and sister churches worldwide. It is about whether to say no to self for the sake of much larger issues. We as a Kirk Session believe it will prove to be a decision between (on the one hand) protecting and preserving, and (on the other) effecting significant disintegration in and accelerating the decline of, the Church of Scotland.

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<sup>14</sup> For some examples see L. William Countryman *'Dirt Greed and Sex'* Fortress Press rev. edn 2007

<sup>15</sup> The early mediaeval period saw the practice of adelphopoiesis ('brother-making'): two people covenanted together in close friendship for Christian prayer and service, promising holy living which in context must have included celibacy. See Humphrey's discussion. Could such a celibate covenant serve some glorious friendships and also ensure housing for either party after the death of the first? But for others it could be a source of distressing temptation, and therefore to be avoided.