



YR EGLWYS YNG NGHYCORU  
The Church in Wales

From the Most Revd Dr Rowan Williams  
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Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2000-09-28

Dr D Pitt



Dear Dr Pitt,

I must apologise for leaving your letter on August 9<sup>th</sup> so long unanswered. I'm afraid that rather a lot was waiting for me when I returned from holiday, and the less urgent letters, as always, sank in the pile!

This will have to be a relatively brief response to your very substantial question, but I hope it may suggest a few avenues. Until about 1980, I fully shared the traditional ethical understanding of homosexuality as a condition of (at best) some sort of 'privation', the practice of which was strictly forbidden to Christians by scripture and tradition. My mind was unsettled by contact, as a university teacher, with one or two genuinely serious Christians who had concluded after prayer and reflection that the scriptural prohibitions were addressed to heterosexuals looking for sexual variety in their experience; but that the Bible does not address the matter of appropriate behaviour for those who are, for whatever reason, homosexual by instinct or nature (I don't deny that some varieties of homosexuality may be therapeutically altered, by the way, but I don't believe this is true of all; discernment in this area is very difficult indeed).

So after 1980 I continued to study the issue sporadically, reading what I could on the psychology as well as the theology of it; and by the end of the 80's I had definitely come to the conclusion that scripture was not dealing with the predicament of persons whom we should recognise as homosexual by nature. And many of the arguments assumed by theologians in the Middle Ages and later increasingly seemed to beg questions or to rest on contested grounds. I concluded that an active sexual relationship between two people of the same sex might therefore reflect the love of God in a way comparable to marriage, if and only if it had about it the same character of absolute covenanted faithfulness. Peter Coleman's book, called, I think, *Homosexual Christians*, helped here, as (later on did Jeffrey John's pamphlet, *Permanent, Stable, Faithful*). I was not convinced by the argument that the ethics for homosexual relations should be different from those for heterosexuals (i.e. that they should not be exclusively faithful or lifelong).

The collection of essays called *The Way Forward?* edited by Tim Bradshaw a few years ago represents a helpful dialogue between Christians of generally doctrinally conservative convictions who have come to different conclusions on this, and I wish the discussion could be as constructive and sympathetic in the wider Church as it was in this group. But it is now a very much politicised question, with many treating it as the sole or primary marker of Christian orthodoxy. I find myself personally in a difficult situation, between the pressures of the clear majority view in my Church, my own theological convictions on this matter (as someone who has no desire at all to overthrow the authority of scripture here, but wants to ask if it has been rightly read on this matter) and the complex needs of individuals for pastoral counsel and support. I don't see myself as a campaigner for a new morality; but if I'm asked for my views, as a theologian rather than a church leader, I have to be honest and admit that they are as I've said.

One last point. The Church has shifted its stance on several matters - notably the rightness of lending money at interest (condemned outright in the Old Testament and by all theologians before the seventeenth century) and the moral admissibility of contraception (generally denounced by the Anglican Church up to the middle of the twentieth century). So I am bound to ask if this is another such issue. If I am really seriously wrong on this, I can only pray to be shown the truth. I'd ask simply that Christians might be a little more ready than they sometimes seem to accept the good faith of those who have come to a different conclusion (either way)!

I don't know if this will be any help to you, but I'm very willing to explain further if you wish (so long as you can be patient with my slowness in answering letters!). Thank you for writing.

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Yours in Christ,  
+ Ron Cambren



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Tuesday, 13 March 2001

Dr D Pitt



Dear Dr Pitt,

I'm sorry not to have written sooner to thank you for responding so fully to my letter and for sending the materials. I wish I had time to reply more fully myself, but must content myself with saying only a couple of things. Most Christian homosexuals I know have no interest in 'converting' anyone to their orientation, far from it; nor are they asking for a charter for promiscuity. I should deplore either of those, and I have said publicly that anything that looks like pressure to adopt homosexual behaviour, especially in an educational context, is wrong in my eyes. Again, I know hardly any Christian homosexuals who believe that Jesus was homosexual, or that they are superior to heterosexuals. I have some reservations about LGCM's agenda; but even they do not claim these things. When they speak of 'homophobia', a word I dislike, I admit, they have some perfectly genuine evidence of prejudice I regard as shocking. Scripture can be used and has been used in many ways to license prejudice, and I don't think they mean any more than this. I must also say that there is real evidence in schools of bullying around this issue, and even of suicide among young men particularly, because of attitudes expressed. If Christians could at least unite in condemning this, even when they disagree with the behaviour of some homosexuals, that would be an advance. When I said that I wasn't campaigning for a new morality, I meant, among other things, that if the Church ever said that homosexual behaviour wasn't automatically sinful, the same rules of faithfulness and commitment would have to apply as to heterosexual union. Whether that would best be expressed in something like a ceremony of commitment, I don't know; I am wary of anything that looks like heterosexual marriage being licensed, because marriage has other dimensions to do with children and society. I doubt whether there will be a change in practice in the near future, at the very least.

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24/3/01

Sorry I can't now reply at more length. Again, my thanks for your response and its tone. My prayers for you, and my request for prayers for an averagely muddled bishop!

In Christ,

+ Rowan Cambor