

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

FA8

TEACHING HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The government has been funding a pilot scheme which teaches primary pupils about homosexual relationships.

The scheme, entitled *No Outsiders*, has been running in 15 primary schools since 2006 and provides homosexual story books such as *King and King* and helps teachers to organise plays, talks and films about homosexual families.

However, threats have appeared on right-wing web sites giving names and contact details of researchers advising the scheme and, as a consequence, plans for a public launch this month have been called off. Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party, has described the organisers of the project as 'intellectual perverts'.

The aim, according to those promoting the scheme, was to put homosexual lifestyles in the spotlight, tackle homophobia and encourage an acceptance among children of homosexual relationships. The threats appeared after tabloid newspapers presented the scheme variously as teaching homosexual sex to under-11s, proposing gay saunas as a means of explaining the bodily contact enjoyed by gays and lesbians. The researchers rejected these descriptions as nonsense.

This seems to be another case where the two sides of an argument distort the truth in order to promote their position.

The answer to homophobia is not to present homosexuality as a right way of life which should be viewed as acceptable, and presenting as homophobic all those who say that it is wrong. This is untrue and based on poor reasoning. The real problem linked with homophobia, which the scheme is primarily trying to address, is the violence related to it.

On issues as fundamental and emotive as this, there is always a tension between the viewpoints of the two extremes. The need is to establish legitimate debate and for everyone involved to come to terms with those who hold different views. Resorting to violence is clearly unacceptable, but the

answer to violent behaviour is not to present homosexual activity as right behaviour, when many believe it to be wrong. This is a particularly provocative and dangerous strategy when presented to the most susceptible groups, such as schoolchildren, within our society,

The power of the tabloids has triumphed again, but for the wrong reasons. It seems they have, at the very least, exaggerated the facts in order to mobilise support. This too is wrong, since it undermines truth and limits the opportunity for a proper rational debate on these issues.

One of the saddest features of this episode is the quoted view of a young girl involved in the scheme: 'People can say it's wrong to be gay or lesbian, but it's what you feel.'

This quotation shows that it is not just an understanding of what is right and wrong that is at stake, but the very notion that there is an issue of right and wrong involved at all.

Peter Fearnley

The above was published in The Bulletin [November 2008]

Salt and Light Papers is a series of occasional papers on contemporary issues of social concern. It is published online by the Affinity Social Issues Team. Its purpose is to help Christians to think through questions of relevance to our place in the world around us. The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Affinity Social Issues Team.

The Old Bank House, 17 Malpas Road, Newport, South Wales. NP20 5PA
Telephone: 01633 893925
Email: office@affinity.org.uk
Website: www.affinity.org.uk

affinity
gospel churches in partnership