

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

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WHY WEDDINGS ARE BANNED AT POWDERHAM CASTLE

Down at Powderham Castle in Devon, they are finding that standing by biblical principles can prove to be expensive. In fact Hugh Rupert Courtenay, 18th Earl of Devon, owner of the Castle, situated in the village of Kenton on the banks of the River Exe near Exeter, estimates that it will cost him £200,000 a year.

Up until now the Castle has been licensed by Devon County Council as a venue for civil wedding ceremonies. However, the 66-year-old earl has recently refused to allow a same-sex couple to contract a civil partnership at the Castle, and the Council has ruled that under the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007, this is illegal discrimination. It plans to revoke the Castle's licence from January 2009. Weddings already booked for 2008 will be allowed to proceed.

The revocation of the licence means that the Castle, whose web site promotes the venue as 'a truly majestic place to hold your wedding reception,' will be hosting no more weddings from the New Year.

Commenting on the Council's decision, the earl is quoted as saying: 'The question has never arisen here before, but I suppose I always knew it would at some time. Now it has, then that is the way it is and has to be. I have no option. As a Christian I have to object to this.'

The earl's decision to ban the same-sex ceremony has been described by the couple concerned as 'outrageous.' Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, a campaigning group on behalf of the gay community, now wants the Treasury to investigate whether the Earl's stance calls into question any of the Inheritance Tax exemptions for which he currently qualifies.

The Courtenay family was originally from France, coming to England in medieval times and acceding to the manor of Powderham in 1325. The oldest part of the present castle dates from 1392.

As has been made clear in previous articles in *The Bulletin*, the Sexual Orientation Regulations discriminate against people who believe and live by the Bible, which unequivocally condemns homosexual practice as sinful. The Regulations do not, for instance, allow someone to rent out commercially a house they own unless they are prepared to accept a same-sex couple as tenants. Most evangelical Christians will not be prepared to accommodate homosexual practice in their own home, and so are deprived of the opportunity to earn an income from letting their property.

The recent revocation of the Earl of Devon's licence is simply a higher profile and more expensive version of this basic blatant injustice. The Sexual Orientation Regulations bring great shame upon our current society, since they not only continue the recent tendency to try to make homosexual practice appear acceptable and normal, but they also punish anyone who is consistently determined to uphold God's standards for life and society.

One way of expressing our support for the Earl of Devon would be to make a point of visiting Powderham Castle during 2008 or 2009. The current admission price is £8.50 for an adult day ticket (£7.50 aged 60-plus). An influx of paying visitors would greatly help to offset some of the Earl's financial loss. Further details of the Castle, its location and attractions, are available on the Powderham Castle web site (www.powderham.co.uk)

With acknowledgements to the Daily Telegraph (30 May 2008) and to the following web sites:

www.thisisexeter.co.uk

www.thefirstpost.co.uk

www.powderham.co.uk

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The above was published in The Bulletin [July 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.

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