

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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THE ROAD TO GAY MARRIAGE

Imagine that someone stood on a soap box in your local market square and, with the issue of gay rights and homosexual practice in mind, urged the country to embark on ‘a new drive against male vice which would rid England of this plague.’

Within the last few years, for making remarks a lot less polemical than that, people have been hand-cuffed, taken to police cells, and put on a charge under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986.

Who, you may wonder therefore, is this strident bigot who seems to want to discriminate so passionately, uncompromisingly and publicly against the gay minority? It is none other than the Home Secretary in the Churchill government of 1951-1954, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe. In 1954, his remark ruffled no feathers, since at the time it represented the view of the three crucial elements of the UK’s democratic society – the establishment, the press and public opinion. Maxwell Fyfe was simply reflecting the long history of antipathy to homosexual practice, which had been a crime in Britain since 1533, and was outlawed under canon law before that.

If in 1954 you had stopped people on the street and told them that in 2006 same-sex couples would be emerging from a civil partnership ceremony to cameras and confetti on the town hall steps, it would have been beyond their comprehension. That indicates how dramatically, quickly and unexpectedly the deep-rooted social assumptions of the 1950s have evaporated. Homosexual practice has, by a series of rapid stages, moved from being a criminal vice, to being tolerated, recognised, granted equality and promoted with pride and approval, in less than 50 years.

In 2011 we are on the verge of seeing civil partnerships registered in places of worship, and within a year or two there will probably be a public consultation to discuss re-defining marriage to include the union both of same-sex couples and different-sex couples.

After that, as far as the gay rights lobby is concerned, presumably there will be no more worlds to conquer. The journey along the road to gay marriage seems almost complete.

1 Causes of the swift and significant changes in the attitude of British society to the gay agenda

Given that for nearly two millennia it was regarded with abhorrence, it is natural to wonder what could possibly have brought about the rehabilitation, recognition and approval of the gay agenda and lifestyle, in a mature democracy with a strong Christian heritage, in so short a time. Here are some of the likely contributory factors:

1.1 The loss of moral outrage

In 1997, Peter Tatchell, the gay rights campaigner, referred to homosexual practice as 'consensual, victimless same-sex behaviour.' In his mind, crime can only be crime if there is a victim. In contrast, prior to 1967, homosexual activity had been a crime for hundreds of years, even though, in most cases, there will have been no 'victim'. When law is put in place in order to express society's moral outrage, there does not need to be a victim. Law does not exist only to give victims justice – it signals the moral code of a society. By the 1950s, British society was beginning to lose its moral compass.

The traditional attitudes and the social expectations were still powerfully present, but the country was increasingly losing sight of the source of the accepted morality – God's righteousness as expressed in the Bible.

By 1967, when the law decriminalised 'homosexual acts by two consenting adult men in private,' there will have been more than a degree of moral confusion over the issue, some wondering why the practice was now being legalised and others why it had been outlawed for centuries. These moral uncertainties surrounding the 1967 law are illustrated by the fact that although homosexual acts became legal, propositioning for homosexual sex remained illegal. Since in practice all sexual activity has to be suggested by someone, this effectively meant that homosexual relationships were still unlawful. Thousands of men were still being prosecuted for gross indecency.

The loss of the moral dimension of the law is also demonstrated by a significant change of emphasis in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This Act changed the law relating to 'cottaging' – homosexual activity in public conveniences. The previous offence of 'gross indecency' was replaced by the offence of 'sexual activity in a public lavatory.' In other words, rather than the homosexual act itself being the offence, the public nuisance of the act became the offence. Rather than expressing a moral principle, the law had become a utilitarian corrective. All this demonstrates the steady erosion of the moral basis which had formerly been the imperative in English law.

1.2 The discovery of the concept of sexual orientation

Here's a quotation of February 2004 from King Sihanouk of Cambodia. If you can forgive his grammar, he said this: 'Gays and lesbians would not exist if God did not create them. It's not their fault if God makes them born like that.' [*The Daily Telegraph*, 25 February 2004]

This quotation goes to the heart of the issue of the fashionable and widely-accepted concept of sexual orientation. For the past 30 years, the world has tried to champion the idea that there are two equal sexualities, both of them based on innate tendency fixed at birth. On that basis, the argument runs, sexual orientation comes within the same category as other unalterable features of the person – e.g. age, race, gender and disability – which are characteristic of an individual, but not by virtue of their choice.

The Bible does not endorse this modern assumption, nor King Sihanouk's attempt to link to God the creation of a homosexual tendency. Scripture puts a great difference between heterosexual and homosexual sexuality. In Romans 1:27 and Jude 7, homosexual practice is described as a 'perversion.' After the Fall, there was still a pattern to this world which conformed to God's order, and one feature of that pattern was connected with the role and practice of sexual conduct. In God's order, this was wholly a heterosexual pattern. While it was possible for the practices and privileges of this heterosexual framework to be abused, or exercised in a sinful way, such excesses, failures and sins are never described in the Bible as a 'perversion.' The word 'perversion' is used in connection only with same-sex sexual relationships, the essential feature of which is that they are 'unnatural' – a perversion even of the fallen nature. In the light of this, it is impossible to accept, even in a fallen world, the Sihanouk principle that God has left man with two sexualities of equal repute and normality.

The identification, theologically, of the normal pattern does not mean that there are no individual cases of genetic abnormality. The Fall has damaged every area of man's creation, and there will be those whose genetic make-up may contribute to a tendency out of keeping with God's pattern, in the same way as there are individual cases of gender confusion as a result of an imbalance of chromosomes. However, it must not be assumed that genetic anomalies are the only possible cause of a distorted sexual tendency. Environmental and social factors of various kinds may have influenced sexual tendency during the long time which elapses between birth and adolescence.

This article is not denying the reality and force of the sex drive which homosexuals experience, nor even objecting to describing it as a sexual orientation. What it does deny is that it is a birth tendency and a valid, equal sexuality.

In addition to the biblical perspective, two statistical findings powerfully support the argument that the two sexualities are not equal. If two legitimate sexualities of equal status and of similar origin exist, one might expect that the numbers claiming to belong to each of these sexual categories to be approximately equal. This, however, is not the case. An Office for National Statistics (ONS) report of September 2010, *Measuring Sexual Identity: An Evaluation Report*, found the number of homosexuals in Britain to be far fewer than the government has been assuming for years. This report found that only 1% of the population is homosexual, and 0.5% bi-sexual. This contrasts with the 5% assumption in the Consultation Document on the proposed Civil Partnership Act, published in June 2003, and the 6% assumption by the Department of Trade and Industry published in December 2005, the month in which the Civil Partnership Act took effect.

The higher percentage figures were used by the government to justify its patronage of 'homosexual rights' and its pursuit of the equality agenda. They were particularly helpful in respect of the introduction of civil partnerships. Based on a population of 60 million, 6% would represent a homosexual population of 3.6 million, whereas 1% limits the figure to a mere 600,000. The smaller the number, the easier it is for people to accept that the homosexual tendency in each case can be explained by factors other than that 'God made them born like that.' The ONS report is not only official but hugely authoritative, involving interviews with 238,206 people.

Equally compelling evidence of the difference in status of the two forms of sexuality can be found in statistics relating to the degree of exclusiveness in the sexual experience of the participants.

The results of a major survey on *Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles*, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust, were published in 1994. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with 10,000 men and 10,000 women. Of the men in the survey, 90.1% had only ever had sexual experience with women, and an even bigger percentage of the women, 92.7%, had only ever had sexual experience with men.

In contrast, of the men who had at some time in their life had a male sexual partner, as many as 90.3% had also had a female sexual partner. The percentage for women was even higher, 95.8% of those who had had a female sexual partner having also had a male partner.

These statistics convincingly show a striking difference between the nature of the two sexualities. A heterosexual disposition is generally exclusive and invariable – exactly what fits the description of 'natural.' On the other hand, the same-sex drive seems to be less permanent, with very little exclusiveness, strongly supporting the contention that its impulse lies in social, environmental and personal factors, rather than pre-determined genetic characteristics.

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These two sets of statistics call into serious question the nature of sexual orientation, and the government's recognition and promotion of the gay or lesbian lifestyle as a valid diversity feature on a par with race, age and disability, deserving of a legal status equivalent to marriage.

It will not be called into question, since today's Establishment attitude is driven by the assumptions surrounding the equality agenda, rather than by a reasoned and objective assessment of what is just and appropriate in the light of the evidence, and of what is morally right, socially good and conducive to individual happiness.

1.3 The pursuit of the equality agenda

By accepting the validity of the principle of sexual orientation as a birth tendency, the government has justified its regarding of the two sexualities as equal, and its awarding to sexual orientation the

status of a fixed diversity characteristic. On the basis of these assumptions, legislation and public policy in the UK has not only granted equal rights and status to homosexuals, but has regarded that equality as a just entitlement, and has viewed the provision of it as obligatory and virtuous.

The equality agenda, however, has not been driven solely by the British government. Most recent equality legislation is the result of policy directives of the European Union. The Treaty of Amsterdam, approved in October 1997 and effective from May 1999, gave the EU greater powers over citizenship issues and individual rights in Member countries. In consequence, the EU began issuing anti-discrimination directives in June 2000, and there has been a steady stream of them since. The first relating to sexual orientation was issued on 27 November 2000, obliging Member States to outlaw discrimination in the workplace. More recently, a directive was issued relating to the provision of goods and services, leading under the resultant UK law to several high profile legal cases of which evangelical Christians will be aware, some of which have yet to reach the end of their journey through the courts of Britain and Europe.

1.4 The influence of the 'gay rights' lobby

Stonewall was founded in 1989 by campaigners who had opposed Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 (legislation preventing the promotion of homosexuality in schools). Stonewall's web site claims some of the credit for a number of legislative achievements – the repeal of Section 28, equalisation of the age of consent, lifting the ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the military, allowing same-sex couples to adopt, establishing the legal status of civil partnership and ensuring that the rights of lesbians and gay men in respect of the provision of goods and services were protected in the Equality Act. Outrage!, a less conventional campaigning group, was co-founded by Peter Tatchell in May 1990. Both have been highly effective organisations.

1.5 The impact of the terms 'homophobic' and 'homophobia'

The word 'homophobia' was not invented by the gay rights lobby, but its existence has contributed incalculably to the creation of the present public perception, which almost universally regards gay rights as uncontroversial. By the way they have nuanced these words, the gay rights lobby has established the idea that anyone who disagrees with its agenda is a bigot driven by irrational discriminatory prejudices. By dictionary definition, 'homophobia' means the 'intense hatred or fear' of homosexuals, neither of which is true of evangelical Christians. However, by their skilled usages of the term, pro-gay campaigners have succeeded in broadening the perceived meaning of 'homophobia' to include intellectual dissent from pro-gay assumptions and aspirations.

As a result of the consequent new *mores*, anyone querying the gay agenda is likely to be branded anti-gay, rather than being viewed simply as having a different view about an issue. The 'homophobia' factor has generally eliminated from the public mind the possibility that a negative view of homosexuality might be based on a legitimate conclusion derived from objective rational

consideration. The ‘homophobia’ factor has helped to make the gay rights agenda seem mainstream and normal.

2 How should the evangelical constituency respond to the public recognition of the gay agenda?

2.1 By continuing to declare the Christian world-view

We need to hold firmly and confidently to the Christian world-view derived from the Bible, teaching it unequivocally and unapologetically to the present church and to every new generation of Christian believers. In the recent Evangelical Alliance survey of evangelicals, *21st century evangelicals – a snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK*, it was disturbing to see the response, as indicated below, to the statement: ‘Homosexual actions are always wrong.’

<i>Opinion expressed</i>	<i>%</i>
Agreed a lot	59
Agreed a little	14
Unsure	11
Disagreed a little	8
Disagreed a lot	8

The above figures mean that 41% of evangelicals appear to be taking a view on the issue which is weaker than that of Scripture. Whatever the reasons for this – and these could include ignorance, loyalty to a friend, or a too ready acceptance of parts of the gay agenda’s propaganda – an immense teaching duty faces our churches, as we address all the issues surrounding sexuality and sexual practice. It is not safe to assume that everyone connected with evangelical churches understands and holds to biblical stances.

Nor is it enough to teach the principles, and to assume that the applications will take care of themselves. Aside from the social and the personal, there are the profound biblical and theological lessons to be drawn. Marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Homosexuality is a distortion of that picture.

2.2 By taking an optimistic view of the future

It is only 57 years since British society began to show any tolerance towards a homosexual lifestyle. The complete Bible has been in being for more than 30 times that length of time, and there is no evidence in British social history, prior to the mid-20th century, that the practice of homosexuality was ever accepted.

We don't yet know whether our present times represent a blip in history, or whether they are the beginning of a long-term change in the social assumptions and practices of the world

We don't yet know therefore whether our present times represent a blip in history, or whether they are the beginning of a long-term change in the social assumptions and practices of the world. It isn't easy to imagine the tide being turned back without a time of great gospel fruitfulness across the world, but we don't know that this isn't in God's purposes, and so we have no grounds for pessimism. We can be more than optimists – we can be *praying* optimists.

2.3 By engaging in the debate over all the subject areas connected with homosexuality

We must take every appropriate opportunity to present the Christian view of homosexuality. By involvement in media opportunities, public discussion, lectures, production of literature and writing letters and articles in learned journals, we can advance the credibility and reasonableness of the Christian view, and counter the weaknesses and inconsistencies inherent in the arguments used to support the social policies which promote and justify homosexuality. By presenting truth, sensible logic, and convincing substantiated argument, with clarity and courtesy, we can address, with credibility and authority, the implications of the number of homosexuals in the population, the validity of sexual orientation and the effects of the practice, recognition and promotion of homosexuality on its practitioners and on society as a whole.

2.4 By contending as far as is possible for laws and public policies which are consistent with God's righteousness and God-given freedoms

This will mean challenging the existing law. In some instances the law is not clear and legal interpretations and judgements have still to be made. In the case of the hoteliers in Cornwall, Peter and Hazelmary Bull, in January 2011, the judge in the case granted leave to appeal on the basis that: 'There is little or no direct authority on the issues I have had to decide.' What he meant was that some of the details relevant to the Bull case had not previously been the subject of a court finding, and on those matters there is scope for the courts to determine how the law applies.

As biblical evangelicals, we believe in the principle of law as the basis for orderly society, and should regard the law as our friend, deserving of our respect, until proved otherwise. Given such an understanding of the place of law in society, it is consistent and necessary to seek to clarify any legal uncertainties which appear to inhibit the opportunity of citizens to practise righteousness. Clarifying the law also helps us to know whether, with a clear conscience, we can co-operate with the policies of the State and its agencies.

Our motive in going to court is not to 'defend our corner,' but is based upon concern for the nation as a whole. Righteous law benefits everyone, as well as being pleasing to God. Every successful legal challenge adds to the sum of righteousness in the nation. We should give the law every opportunity to come up with the right outcomes. It is only when a law has reached the end

of its due process, and has clearly established a position contrary to Scripture, that we have grounds for 'obeying God rather than men' and will need to consider, in the context of an individual matter, what further steps are then required of us.

2.5 By embarking on political engagement

Where the courts find against the righteousness and freedoms which are biblical, an obvious response is to contend for changes in the law to restore or establish these values. This will involve engaging with politicians, government departments and other agencies and interest groups. The voice of the prophet must be heard. Someone has to address national governments on the subject of what pleases God. This prophetic voice must be that of evangelical Christians, since only they hold to a biblical world-view. In the course of political engagement, we will be joined by a range of co-belligerents on a variety of issues, and will welcome this, but the motive for our own involvement will be our biblical responsibilities to the world over which God is the sovereign Lord.

2.6 By ensuring that our own marriages set a worthy example

There is little point in campaigning on behalf of marriage as a theoretical ideal, if the practice which people see exemplified in our ranks does not match up, either by virtue of the number which survive, or of their apparent quality. The Bible gives us instruction in the principles which form the basis of successful marriages and we need to work hard and constantly to ensure that our own marriages survive, succeed and inspire others. In Ephesians 5, marriage is compared with the relationship between Christ and his Church, and that analogy should be sufficient to inspire us to practise the love, loyalty, faithfulness and sacrifice which Jesus demonstrated in his regard for his Church.

2.7 By supporting agencies working to promote God's righteousness in the world

As the scale of work needed on both the legal and the political stage is beyond the scope of individuals and local churches, the work of specialist agencies, such as The Christian Institute, will need to be encouraged and supported. The role of such agencies is of immense significance in our national life, and one can only imagine that it will become more so.

2.8 By reviewing our attitude to individual homosexuals

In our contact with individual homosexuals, we need to be courteous, reasonable and winsome. Some sections within Christendom seem habitually to describe homosexuals as 'sodomites.' Wherever this term is used, it reads as though it is intended as a term of abuse, lacking any hint of compassion or concern for the individual homosexuals being described. It is hard to understand why this should be considered the most desirable approach.

If Jesus chose to speak instead about a wide range of other truths and teachings, as the New Testament seems to suggest, why should we insist on preaching about homosexuality in the market square?

It is important not to make homosexuality a totemic issue – not because we are afraid of the issue, but simply because we haven't any biblical grounds for highlighting it, and treating it as a cause célèbre. I cannot find in the Gospels even one instance of Jesus speaking about it. If Jesus chose to speak instead about a wide range of other truths and teachings, as the New Testament seems to suggest, why should we insist on preaching about homosexuality in the market square?

Fewer than two per cent of the potential hearers are homosexuals, and those that are not will sympathise with them if they think that a preacher is singling them out for condemnation. It will be an entirely counter-productive strategy. We need to preach about things that affect and challenge everyone – unbelief, and its implications, for instance, and the missing dimension of the gospel.

Finally, we need to believe that homosexuals can be rescued from the sinfulness and the misery of their ways. What we find in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 is hugely hopeful. Paul gives a long list of categories of people involved in gross sins, including, in v 9, 'homosexual offenders.' But he then goes on to say: 'And that is what some of you WERE,' adding: 'But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.' This makes clear that some people were once homosexuals, but are no longer. We should never view any group of people as irredeemable.

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