

# The WIT Newsletter on Sexuality



## From the Director and Canon Theologian

Every so often, the Church seems to get preoccupied with a debate. Sometimes it's been war, or poverty, or race relations, or relationships with other faiths: at the moment it's sexuality. Not just here, in the Anglican church of this province, but across many countries and denominations, Christians are discussing (very often, arguing) with other Christians and with people of other faiths or none about a whole range of 'sexuality-related' issues, with same-sex marriage, and/or the possibility of the Church blessing same-sex committed relationships, and the ordination of those who are gay/lesbian (with or without partners being the most common foci of debate. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand we have the Ma Whea? Commission on the Ordination and Blessing of People in Same Sex Relationships meeting at the moment [see P10), and a doctrinal commission, the 'Commission on Doctrine and Theological Questions', being set up to look at a theological rationale for the liturgical blessing of people in permanent, faithful same-gender relationships.

It's against that back-drop that Wellington Institute of Theology (WIT) offers this newsletter, in which we examine a range of perspectives on human sexuality. This follows our newsletter on Marriage (September 2012), as WIT seeks to resource the diocese to participate in these debates. In this issue, Jenny Chalmers discusses 'A biblical view of sexual relationship', acknowledging that while the *Bible* is not straightforward in its teaching about sexual relationships this doesn't mean we have nothing to learn from scripture about the topic. Jenny reflects on the biblical values which should guide all relationships. Barb Lash looks to what the *Bible* says about unmarried people, and finds gems there for those who are not married.

Sarah Beattie searches for the most relevant questions, rather than answers, questions that could help us understand why these issues are so polarising, and what might be at stake – the fears that lie behind people's stances in these debates. Darryl Ward borrows some concepts from communication theory to suggest how our love of God, others and ourselves might be woven together, and how this could provide a possible framework for understanding sexuality better; while I also consider the connections between sexuality and spirituality, but in a slightly different way.

Fitting in behind all these contributions, and others elsewhere in these debates are, I believe, three pivotal questions. One concerns how we use the *Bible*, and whether, in our continued attempts to refine our exegesis and to take into account (to varying degrees) the perspectives of both tradition and reason, we are asking of the Scriptures questions they were never intended to answer. Another question is about the difference between cultural adaption (which is a good thing) or cultural capture (which is not good): what is really going on as the Church participates in these sexuality debates? The final question may be the toughest of all to answer, yet may turn out to be the crucial one: how can we continue to be 'one in Christ' with those who hold passionately to such very different views? How can we in this diocese, and elsewhere, find the ways – and the willingness – to listen with humility and interact with those who think differently?

*Canon Deborah Broome*

# A biblical view of sexual relationship

For we Christians, the *Bible* offers inspiration on the way we shape and live our lives, both in the long term and day by day. While the *Bible* offers any number of texts on love, marriage, family and community and speaks eloquently on the role of family in community in the First Testament and later Christian society, it's fair to say that heterosexual love and marriage is not one of its prime concerns. Even so, a number of *Bible* stories and our own experiences tell us that the deep joy of the marriage commitment is one of life's heavenly experiences.

There is no doubt that every couple who marry want what Abraham and Sarah are said to have experienced; to grow old together, surrounded by family and friends, and to be buried at last peacefully among family and friends. It seems that the human condition, as Jesus taught, is to love one another for our own good, and for the good of the world.

Every parent who has a child longs for the best for their child and their foremost longing is for a stable partnership and home. These longings are so deep within us, that we are almost unable to articulate them.

A great deal of the *Bible* though, and particularly the First Testament, seems to discuss situations that are quite outside our ideas of the traditional family, and 'traditional family values'. (The Levite's concubine; Abraham, Sarah and Hagar; Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac, Lot and his daughters; Jephthah and his daughter; Jonathan and David; Hosea and Gomer, to name a few.)

Although we know from the rules in Leviticus that marriage was critical to maintaining Jewish monotheism, culture and community, marriage was more often between a man and as many women as he could purchase.

The New Testament is also for the most, silent on marriage, for Jesus seems not only not to have not been married, but called his disciples to leave everything, wives and children included, and follow him and form a caring community whose bond in God was far greater than the marriage ties. Divorce however, is definitively proscribed.

For Paul, committed to celibacy, the stable family was the best alternative (1 Corinthians: 7) 'Marry', he said, 'if you must, but do not get divorced'. We can deduce from this passage, that the emphasis is on stability of the committed relationship rather than the form of the marriage.

Paul, in his first letter to the community in Corinth and again in Romans seems to be far more concerned with, what even we would call depravity. For example in Romans 1:26 - 27, the context is one of debauched behaviours that belong to people who 'refuse to keep in mind the true knowledge about God' (v.28)... 'who have no conscience, and show no kindness or pity for others (v.31).

Even if a text could be found that specifically prohibits gay relationships, scripture always needs to be interpreted in the light of current knowledge. For example, we no longer believe it proper to keep slaves and few of us think that the Ephesians 5 text that wives should obey their husbands and so on, is appropriate in today's culture.

It's not as if we're asked to make a two thousand year leap between the context in which the canon was formed and today's world. Ideas about marriage have changed almost imperceptibly over time.

The Anglican prayer book definition of marriage demonstrates this momentum of change. In *The Shorter Book Prayer* the first reason for marriage, in the service was for the procreation of children. The second was as a 'remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication'. And the third was 'for the mutual society, help and comfort that one ought to have for the other, both in prosperity and adversity'. As well, later in the marriage service, the woman promised that she would not only obey her husband, but serve him as well.

Until *The New Zealand Prayer Book* marriage services, which became available in the 1980s, the marriage relationship, ordained by the church, was clearly not an equal relationship between male and female, husband and wife. This is further underlined by *The Shorter Book Prayer* definition of the married couple being 'man and wife'.

The *New Zealand Prayer Book* reflects the change in thinking regarding the equal union of husband and wife as the fundamental principal. It sets out two quite different key principles of marriage: the first is that marriage is a gift of God so that 'husband and wife should be united in heart, body and soul...and in their union fulfil their love for one another'; and the second is that 'marriage is given to provide the stability necessary for family life, so that children might be cared for lovingly and grow to full maturity.'

It seems then that in today's understanding, deep love and stability are crucial and significant principals of marriage, rather than the purchase of the bride as we see for example, in the tale of Leah, Rachael and Jacob

Christians use Bible stories to theologically reflect on and provide guidance for their lives and to inform their ethical relationships. But just as there is no clear or redemptive teaching about slavery, reproductive technology, sustainable living and a myriad of other contemporary concerns, the *Bible* is not straightforward in its teaching about sexual relationships. This doesn't mean we have nothing to learn from scripture about the topic.

The same values that guide all our relationships, be they commercial or intimate, apply to sexual relationships that is: unselfish concern for the

other; honesty, integrity and fidelity; sacrificial but not victimised love. That's a high standard, far higher than the moral standards that forbid divorce.

Rules are the lowest common denominator for morality. Love, as Paul said, never ends. The ethical criteria we should use about relationships then is this: is the relationship honest, does it have the components of stability, integrity and fidelity, honesty and sacrificial love?

It's not a matter of the sex of the people concerned, or even the expression of their sexuality. According to the Bible, in my view, it's a matter of the quality of relationship.

*Reverend Jenny Chalmers*

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## Being single

I have never been married and live a celibate lifestyle. But I know that I am heterosexual. I don't look at other women and fancy them. (I've disciplined myself not to look at men that way either as it makes life easier that way.) But I understand that being sexually active is different from sexuality.

I was raised to believe that people who were not married were defective in some way. Deep down I still believe this. I envy Roman Catholics who have a more positive attitude to celibate people living meaningful lives in other ways.

I have had to choose to make the most of my gifts and abilities in my career and around the Church. I have had to choose to let myself have friends who I know like me. I am aware that no one lives the perfect lifestyle. Married people don't get on with one another. The partner dies. Children don't happen. I listen to these people with understanding and rejoice when, like me, they still find the love of God.

I read the Bible with an awareness of what it says about unmarried people. Whenever I try to share this with married people they are embarrassed and try to give me an interpretation that twists the passage into being one about married people. I am not trying to challenge the rightness of marriage. I just want to share that for those of us who are not married, there are gems in the Bible. I've stopped sharing them. I am no longer naïve enough to think that people who I care about

would be pleased that I find something positive in the Bible. I've been told so many times that of course Paul was married!

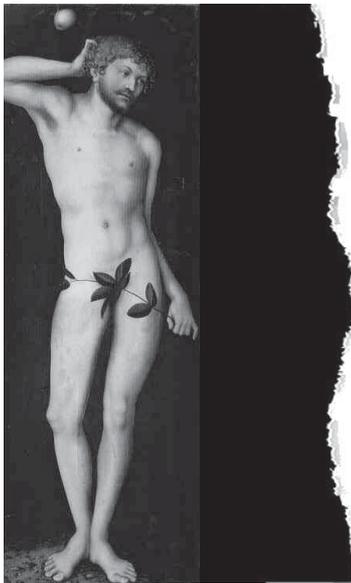
Yesterday I came across Isaiah 43:25-44:5. The central message of this passage is recognising that eunuchs could say, "I am a dry tree". But God says:

To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath,  
who choose the things that please me  
and hold fast my covenant,  
I will give in my house and within my walls  
a monument and a name.

God does not reject me, or anyone else, because I am unmarried, but has a special place for us.

*Barb Lash*

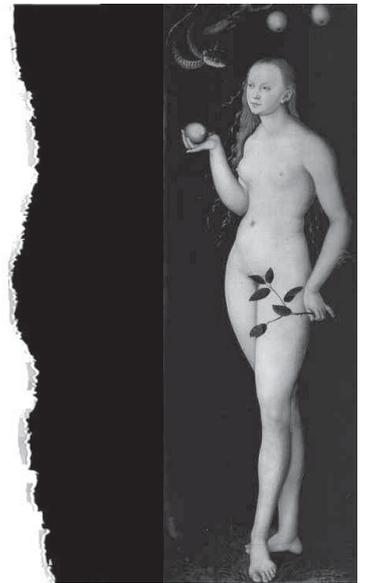




# What is at Stake?

## Gender, identity and sexuality:

### the 21st-century search for authentic personhood



Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. Rom 12:2 NRSV

Discerning and proclaiming the will of God regarding what is good, acceptable and perfect for the 21st-century Christian, in areas such as traditionally gender-specific ministry roles and same-sex relationships, is an increasingly contentious concern dividing churches and church communities into polarised groups often labelled as 'conservative/evangelical' or 'liberal'. Those unable or unwilling to identify with either label are left sitting uncomfortably in between, trying to duck below the exegetical grenades lobbed from both sides into the opposing camp.

Despite the best efforts of scholars and an abundance of literature ranging from the subjectively experiential to complex arguments over the interpretation of potentially key ancient Hebrew or Greek words, any resolution in terms of consensus through definitive biblical exegesis remains elusive. Both sides may claim scriptural authority and consequently the theological high ground for their stance but, significantly, they may also both be constructing a theology that is no more than a 'Procrustean bed on which doctrine and the plain facts of human nature and history, not to mention the Bible itself, are arbitrarily stretched or chopped off to fit'.<sup>1</sup>

The 'plain facts of human nature and history' are, however, as open to varying interpretations as the biblical text. Developing knowledge in the sciences, especially in the fields of human biology and psychology, has revealed the complexities and continuing mystery of some aspects of our sexuality such as our sexual orientation and its relationship

to gender. How the Church will deal with these complexities and mysteries is an ongoing challenge particularly in the midst of the current continuing exposure of sexual abuse by, or covered up by, those within the priesthood. There is also the inconsistency beneath the evangelical umbrella in the ways in which some churches, through selective biblical literalism, have dealt with gender issues, such as the ordination of women. An important starting point before turning to the biblical text may, therefore, be to consider the words of C.S. Lewis in stating that; 'With the Church . . . we are dealing with male and female not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge'.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, it is then perhaps a search for the most relevant questions, rather than answers, that is of current fundamental importance; questions that might lead to a better understanding of why the issues are so polarising, what is perceived to be at stake, and whether a way ahead might be found that is not dependent on consensus.

For many there is a genuine fear that the integrity of a biblically based faith is being steadily eroded through conformity to the demands of an increasingly secular world. At stake is personal salvation leaving no possible compromise with what is believed to be revelatory biblical truth. There is also an understandable desire for certainty in a rapidly changing world which has resulted in a fixed moral compass serving as an anchor to the 'true faith and what God would have us do in all matters of life'.<sup>3</sup>

For others, however, an ethic of authenticity or being 'true to oneself' is under threat when there is forced surrender to conformity with a behavioural

code that is believed to be neither biblical nor justifiable as intrinsically and essentially Christian. Feared here is a morality that takes precedence over everything with religion becoming its servant. Faith and the sacraments are then 'no longer understood as the basis of the moral life, but as duties to be carried out, as truths that we must believe, and as means to help us fulfil moral obligations'.<sup>4</sup> This is not, though, a call to 'depreciate the aspiration to concepts of sexual abstinence or sexual purity' but rather to address the question:

Should we make any particular take on sexuality mandatory for everyone, through a moralistic code which makes a certain kind of purity a base condition for relating to God?<sup>5</sup>

The questions now arising concern our understanding or interpretation of biblical morality as it develops within the two testaments and our ability to identify the often implicit influences that we bring to our readings of the text. Recent scholarship suggests that:

the Bible knows of sexual acts and behaviours – some licit and some illicit – and two genders, male and female, but does not categorise them according to innate sexual orientation... sexual categories and contrasts such as "homosexual" and "heterosexual" are modern constructs, products of the post-Enlightenment taxonomic drive and of the "sexual science" that by the nineteenth century replaced the "erotic arts" typical in many traditional societies.<sup>6</sup>

Relevant questions may therefore be:

As our thinking will always, to some extent, be shaped by cultural, traditional and personal/environmental influences, will this have the potential to distort our interpretation of scripture or will the way we interpret scripture have the potential to distort our perceptions of contemporary life?

Is our concept of God and scripture sometimes illegitimately or dishonestly used to provide ballast for moral beliefs, taking a moral high ground and preventing any form of challenge by referring to God's supernatural plan?<sup>7</sup>

Does searching scripture for a definitive understanding of human sexuality presume a stability within the concepts of gender and sexuality that has never actually existed and may not be the intention of the writers?

As early as the 5th century, Augustine warned about interpretations of Genesis that attributed ignorant and nonsensical opinions to the 'sacred writers' resulting in their criticism and rejection as unlearned men, with 'their pages full of falsehoods on the facts which ...[readers] have learned from experience and the light of reason'.<sup>8</sup> Sixteen centuries later this warning remains relevant, with experience and reasoning still often suppressed in potentially misguided attempts to protect the integrity of the text. The important questions for consideration here may, therefore, concern what is actually misguided about such attempts. For a liberal perspective:

Is it, as many would now assume, simply misguided to still believe in any sense of divine revelation within the biblical texts?

Or for a conservative perspective:

Is it misguided to believe in a concept of divine revelation that cannot withstand or accommodate the perceived threat from advances in science and technology and is, therefore, unable to transcend time and cultural change?

Perhaps ironically the possible responses from both groups to such questions have the potential to reduce the biblical text to anachronistic writing that is no more than a simplistic and scientifically ignorant view of the world's and humanity's beginnings. Any sense of a living Spirit-filled text is then lost along with its theological richness and potential to relate the issues of the 21st century.

Post-Enlightenment thinking has, for many, seen reason and its champion science as being incompatible with, and ultimately replacing the need for, religious faith. Interestingly, however, reason, as the ultimate tool for understanding the complexities of our behaviour, has recently been knocked off its pedestal from within its home territory. Working in the field of moral psychology, Professor Haidt believes that 'the worship of reason is a delusion taking us to almost any conclusions that we wish if we ask the right questions and avoid others'.<sup>9</sup> He argues that reasoning has evolved to help us engage in arguments, persuasion and manipulation in the context of discussions rather than to find truth. Significantly, therefore, the more skilled we become at finding evidence and arguments to support the positions that we already hold, usually for intuitive reasons, the more our search for truth is compromised.<sup>10</sup>

This is perhaps a salutary warning for all entering the contemporary debate about gender, identity and

## What is at Stake? Gender, identity and sexuality: the 21st-century search for authentic personhood (continued)

sexuality that is threatening to cause so much strife and division with the 21st-century church. Haidt offers, however, a possible way forward in the important observation that morality can both bind and blind; 'It binds us into ideological teams that fight each other ... It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of good people who have something important to say.'<sup>11</sup> His conclusion is that it is, therefore, important to have intellectual and ideological diversity within any group or institution whose goal is to find truth<sup>12</sup> and to focus on similarities rather than differences. Whether those within the Church can rise to this challenge remains to be seen but it may be that unity can be found in a renewed focus that is less about our diversity in whatever form it is manifest and more about what could ultimately be the most pressing question of all;

How can we be better, authentic human beings, transformed by the renewal of minds and able to discern and action the good, acceptable and perfect will of God for all of his creation?

The early chapters of Genesis lay the foundation for the biblical narrative that follows and are fundamentally relational, teaching about right relationships between God, humankind and the environment that they interact with and within. For

transformation to take place these relationships must be repaired or in some cases rebuilt but this may only be possible if we are prepared to listen with humility and interact with those who think differently. Then we may discover that God is at work in even the most unexpected places and perhaps find comfort and even a new found freedom in the fact that this is in spite of, rather than because of, our carefully constructed theological defences.

*Sarah Beattie*

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1 Elliot, E, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, 396.

2 Lewis, C,S, *God in the Dock*, 239.

3 Edser, S, *Being Gay, Being Christian*, 110.

4 Taylor, C, *A Secular Age*, 98.

5 Taylor, 504.

6 Hendal, R, *Reading Genesis*, 82.

7 Warnock, M, *Dishonest to God*, 128.

8 Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 42 – 43.

9 Haidt J, *The Righteous Mind*, 91.

10 Haidt, 89.

11 Haidt, 313.

12 Haidt, 90.



# Love God, love others, love ourselves

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;" <sup>30</sup>you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." <sup>31</sup>The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' <sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; <sup>33</sup>and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question. (Mark 12:28-34)

At first glance, the above text from Mark's gospel seems quite straightforward. It is an unequivocal message about loving God and loving others. But it marks a radical theological development. Jesus juxtaposes the commandment to love God with the commandment to love one's neighbour. In the Older Testament, these two commandments are in completely separate books. It took Jesus to bring them together and show that it is through loving others that we can demonstrate we love God.

But our relationships are not confined to others and to God. We also relate to ourselves at an internal level. Whenever we are writing a letter, thinking through a personal issue, daydreaming about a holiday we would like to take, or trying to make sense of something, we are in engaging what is called intrapersonal communication. Talking to yourself is not the first sign of madness. Everybody does it!

Although these three levels are distinct, and cannot be confused, together they comprise something bigger, rather like the three *personae* of the Holy Trinity, through lack of a better example. Our intrapersonal communication influences our interpersonal communication, and vice versa. The way we relate to others is demonstrative of our relationship with God. And the state of our relationship with God is reflected in our intrapersonal dynamics. If any one of these levels is out of balance, it will impact on all the others.



Sexuality is a widely misused and misunderstood word, but quite simply it refers to our sexual identity. It is not only simplistic, it very wrong to think of sexuality as merely being a label to describe what categories of the human population we are – and are not - attracted to. Or worse, to think of sexuality as a way in categorising the purely mechanical aspects of sex, like the anonymous quotation that says, "love is about chemistry, but sex is about physics!"

At the intrapersonal level, our sexuality is our personal construct of how we frame who we are in an intimate context, both when it comes to ourselves, and others.

At the interpersonal level, it is how we may – or may not - relate to others sexually. And it is important to note the "may not" part: a person who is celibate - or someone who identifies as being asexual - may not have sexual relations with others, but that does not mean they have no sexuality.

Finally, our sexuality is a gift from God. While we are all created in God's image, each of us is unique, and part of our uniqueness is our individual sexuality. And sex has long been associated with the sacred and with the divine. The unparalleled physical and emotional pleasure it offers, and the miracle of procreation, put sex beyond any boundary of human understanding until not that long ago. As Horse, the title character in James K. Baxter's semi-autobiographical novel put it, "Sex,

## Love God, love others, loves ourselves (continued)

seen merely as the fitting together of a nut and a bolt, did not interest Horse greatly. But when it occurred as the central act of the Horse religion, in conjunction with the goddess, sex conferred the same power on the believer. It led him through a low doorway to the only earthly paradise".<sup>1</sup>

But sex has always had its darker side. From King David's seduction of Bathsheba and his plotting the death of her husband Uriah the Hittite, to Herod Antipas' rash promise to give the daughter of Herodias anything she wanted, the Bible – and human history in general - are full of stories of those who have been led astray by their passions. (The writer can even recall reading a religious tract many years ago that claimed that the 'original sin' of Adam and Eve was sexual intercourse!)

This particular gift from God can be – and is – abused.

So is it any real surprise that some cultures have repressed sex, and only begrudgingly acknowledged its value in conceiving children? It was not that long ago that western society treated sex as a dirty secret, and certainly not something to be indulged in for pleasure.



When we show love to others – and take care of ourselves - we also demonstrate love that originates from God in the first place. But when we are abusive to others – or live destructively or unhealthily - we are abusing the very image of God.

And regardless of whether we express our sexuality with others in a physical manner or not, our sexuality transcends three distinct levels of relating: with ourselves, with others, and with God.

*Darryl Ward*

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, James Keir. (1985). *Horse*. Oxford University Press, Auckland, New Zealand. P50.

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## Sexuality and Spirituality: being, not just doing

'Sexuality' is in the news again, whether it's the gay marriage debate, a lesbian singer switching venues for a concert because an evangelical church objected to her sexuality, or a movie star's latest marriage. Why all this attention, especially as one recent comment has it that sexuality is such a small part of a person's makeup? Or is it more important than that? I suspect much depends on what we mean by 'sexuality'. At the 4<sup>th</sup> Hermeneutics Hui held in Auckland at the beginning of February, Helen-Ann Hartley (Dean, Tikanga Pakeha, at St John's College) spoke of the danger "of reducing our understanding of 'sexuality' to 'sexual practice'", resulting in an understanding of sexuality that is unnecessarily narrow. I agree with Helen-Ann. I think we have to get away from seeing sexuality as mostly connected with particular acts done with particular body parts. Surely it is more than that?

A deeper understanding of sexuality connects it not merely to acts but to being. (Maybe this is where we remind ourselves that we are human beings and not human doings.) Sexuality is one of the

things that defines who we are, and in particular the relational dimensions of our being. It's about who we are and how we relate in totality. We are relational beings or, as John Donne (priest/preacher/writer of erotic poetry – and what a combination!) put it: 'no man is an island, entire of itself'. We are created in the image of God, and that *imago Dei* means *imago Trinitatis*, in the image of a relational, triune, God.

Part of what is involved in sexuality, as we might expect, is our attitudes towards our own bodies and those of others. That says something about our existence as embodied selves or, as Aquinas says, 'ensouled bodies' ('Man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body'). Any true understanding of sexuality must acknowledge this combination of soul and body, the psychology as well as the physiology, sexuality as a means of communication and as a symbol of our very need for communion with others. Sexuality is about much more than interlocking body parts, yet we need to recognise that the body matters. New Testament scholar Scot McKnight has this to say:

The one thing Jesus learned in the Jewish world was that the body isn't a container for the spirit but that the body is fully integrated with spirit. For Jesus, there is complete integration of body and spirit. So, it can be put this way: The reason Jesus and his Jewish world talked about sex and bodies so much was because the body was so important. Your body matters and what you do with your body is your spirituality!<sup>1</sup>

Now there's a thought. McKnight is onto something here, that explains why the Church is rightly talking about sexuality – not just because we think the rest of the world is talking about it (it's probably more concerned about other topics) but because of a deep connection between our sexuality and our spirituality. For spirituality, like sexuality, is not about acts but about being. It's not only (and not principally) about the religious disciplines and practices through which we relate to God but about the totality of our relating to that to which we accord ultimate worth. Spirituality is all that expresses that relationship between our humanness and God's holiness. It is about our human experience of God, that God 'who made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you'.<sup>2</sup> Augustine recognises that people are made for relationship – with God, with ourselves and with others.

Spirituality, like sexuality, is that which defines who we are and how we relate. The two are deeply connected, for we are ensouled bodies. Linking spirituality and sexuality in this way rejects that dualism which privileges some aspects of our make-up over others, seeing mind and spirit as more important than the body and emotions. Too often people have gotten away with keeping their sexuality and their spirituality in separate silos, in a way that is ultimately quite damaging to personhood. Instead, we need to acknowledge that

sexuality is part of God's design – the God in whose image we are relational beings. This positive acknowledgement of sexuality affects our spirituality, just as its opposite does, for how can we relate truly to God if we are denying part of ourselves? I see a connection here between an authentic spirituality and an authentic sexuality. Can we truly worship if we are inside a closet (of any kind)?

And the two are connected in other ways, as generations of mystics have found. Analogies between worship and marriage abound, all the way back to the allegorical treatment of the Song of Songs. The focus in this way of thinking is on the relationship between lover and beloved, between God and worshipper, between Thou and I. What undergirds this is an understanding that a deep expression of both our spirituality and our sexuality involves two things: self-transcendence and vulnerability. When we truly worship we are focused on God and not on ourselves, and that can make us intensely vulnerable. Perhaps a strange combination of courage, humility and self-confidence is needed for humans to grow fully into their identity as both spiritual and sexual beings.

What might it mean for all the Church's present debates over sexuality if we were to get away from our focus on particular sexual practices and reclaim this connection between our relating to other people as 'ensouled bodies' and our relating to God? A theologian once described making Eucharist as 'that most embodied moment of worship': how might remembering this help us gather together around the altar-table in one diverse yet united community?

*Canon Deborah Broome*

<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *One Life: Jesus Calls, we follow* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 2010: Zondervan), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1

## Coming up:

### Wellington Theological Consortium colloquium on 'Faith & secularity'

Saturday 10 August  
Te Wāhanga Atawhai Mercy  
Conference Centre  
15 Guildford Terrace  
Thorndon  
Wellington 6011



# Ma Whea? Commission on Same-Gender Relationships, Ordination and Blessing

The Commission, whose name translates as 'Where to?' is made up of 5 people, and chaired by former Governor-General Sir Anand Satyanand. The other members are Justice Judith Potter, Professor Paul Trebilco, Mele Tailai, and Sir Tamati Reedy. Elizabeth Smaal, from our own Diocese of Wellington, is the Executive Secretary. Sir Anand has described the members as a "team of generalists, led by a generalist".

The Commission's Terms of Reference are:

The General Synod Standing Committee at its meeting in November 2011 establishes a Commission to be made up of a small group of eminent people with ability, credibility, and a commitment to work in prayerful collegiality, and to report to the General Synod / te Hinota Whanui on:

(a) A summary of the biblical and theological work done by our Church on the issues surrounding Christian ethics, human sexuality and the blessing and ordination of people in same sex relationships, including missiological, doctrinal, canonical, cultural and pastoral issues; and

(b) The principles of Anglican ecclesiology and, in light of our diversity, the ecclesial possibilities for ways forward for our Three Tikanga Church; and

(c) The implications of (a) and (b) on the place of our Three Tikanga Church as a whole within the worldwide Anglican Communion; and

(d) What care and protection there would be for those who could be marginalised.

(e) The Commission should consider and report on other issues and matters that may arise from their consideration of the above.

The Ma Whaea Commission is supported by a Church Reference Group, whose members include theologians from across the spectrum of views on these issues.

**Submissions are invited from anyone**, and should be submitted in writing in the first instance to The Ma Whea? Commission, c/o The General Secretary, PO Box 87 188, Meadowbank, Auckland 1742, or [gensec@ang.org.nz](mailto:gensec@ang.org.nz).

Any parish, individual or group needs to note that the last day for receiving submissions to be considered in the report of the Commission is **1 June 2013**, so that it can report to General Synod / te Hinota Whanui in July 2012.

Check out this video on youtube, where the Commission Chair talks about the Commission and its process: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA71xm-LHQI&feature=youtu.be>.



## Contact details

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington. Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 4759085 or [debroome@paradise.net.nz](mailto:debroome@paradise.net.nz). Or contact Librarian John McCaul at 04 4718599 or [WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz](mailto:WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz). The Palmerston North Library is located at St. Peter's Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North. Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council, c/o the Anglican Centre.

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**2012-13**

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