

The Church of England is at a crossroads in her calling to bring hope and transformation to our nation. The presenting issue is that of human sexuality, in particular whether or not the Church is able to affirm sexual relationships beyond opposite sex marriage. But the tectonic issues beneath, and driving, this specific question include what it means to be faithful to our apostolic inheritance, the Church's relationship with wider culture, and the nature of the biblical call to holiness in the 21st Century.

As culture and attitudes continue to change, the Church faces a range of new social realities. These include the rise in cohabitation and the wide scale acceptance of divorce with its negative impact on children, the explosion of diverse types of family relationships, the emergence of gender fluidity and bisexuality, and the recognition of same-sex unions. These far-reaching social changes raise questions and – in some quarters – undermine confidence in our inherited teaching.

The Church has not always navigated these social realities well. We recognise the damage caused by judgmental attitudes. We have sometimes failed to recognise acts of great kindness and humanity. We have elevated some sins above others. We have ignored the plank in our own eye. There is much work ahead, not least in ensuring that our communities offer sacrificial hospitality and service to all, regardless of background, family structure or sexuality.

At the same time, we remain convinced of the essential goodness of the Christian moral vision. The Bible is clear that God has given the marriage of one man with one woman as the only context in which physical expression is to be given to our sexuality. We believe that we flourish, whether single or married, as our lives are brought into harmony with God's intended design.

Any change in the Church's teaching or practice - such as the introduction of provisions that celebrate or bless sexual relationships outside of a marriage between one man and one woman – would represent a significant departure from our apostolic inheritance and the authority of the Bible in matters of faith and doctrine. It would also, inevitably, be a further step on a trajectory towards the full acceptance of same-sex sexual partnerships as equivalent to male-female marriage.

There are substantive issues at stake here about the Christian understanding of what it means to be human. We do not believe that God has left us alone in the confusion and uncertainty of constructing our own identity. The gift of male and female sexual differentiation, and its unique and fundamental mutuality, is part of God's good creation and a mirror to His own nature, and the boundaries it brings are for our flourishing and preservation.

We do not believe therefore that it is within our gift to consider human sexual relationships and what constitutes and enables our flourishing as sexual beings to be of 'secondary importance'. What is at stake goes far beyond the immediate pastoral challenges of human bisexual and same-sex sexual behaviour: it is a choice between alternative and radically different visions of what it means to be human, to honour God in our bodies, and to order our lives in line with God's holy will.

At this crucial juncture, as our bishops pray and discern together regarding how the Church of England should walk forward at this time, we urge them not to depart from the apostolic inheritance with which they have been entrusted.

Any further changes to practice or doctrine in these important areas will set the Church on a path of fundamental disunity. It would cause a break not only with the majority of the Anglican Communion, but

with the consistent mind of the worldwide Church down many centuries. It will trigger a process of division and fragmentation among faithful Anglicans in England. Responses would vary, but the consequences for the life and mission of the Church will be far-reaching, both nationally and globally.

We ask our bishops to commit to a renewed vision of a welcoming Church in which all hear the good news of the Gospel, all are invited to repent and receive the grace of God, and all are called as followers of Jesus to live out the Christian moral vision– in lives of self-sacrifice and mutual care – for the common good.

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Those signing below do so in a purely personal capacity. They are evangelical leaders from a variety of backgrounds, churches and organisations and indicative of the breadth and depth of support for this letter. Some could be labelled as LGBTI but are living in conformity with the historic teachings of the church.

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