

If God created us to be sexual beings, in relation with our fellow humans, why do we, in the church, try to diminish this element of ourselves in order that we might know God likes us as well as loves us?



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Abstract

For centuries now the Church has had difficulty with sex and sexuality, especially in relation to 'holiness' which has often been translated as meaning 'cleanliness'. If being holy is seen to be more about the state of our relationship with God, rather than a notion of purity, surely it is time for the church to look at the relationship between God, itself, sex and sexuality from a perspective of the Incarnation – God who comes to us in bodily form to inhabit our lives in all their fullness. This short article aims to take a look at why it is important for us to come to terms with our bodies and our desires in order for us to know more fully the freedom God offers us to be ourselves, made in his image.

As Stephen White writes, “the church and the churches are entering a crucial period in the area of human relationships...a period of potential change, of possible crisis and division.” (White, pg.12).¹ However, this potential change in how we view human, sexual relationships will reach “into the heart of Christian ethics leaving...apparently safe pastures full of unexploded doctrinal, pastoral and ethical land mines.” (White, pg.13). Quite simply, what White wrote in 2005 is now coming to fruition as we see the Church of England struggling with the issue of sexuality in all its forms.

For centuries the church has relied upon obedience from and control over its members and “the values of church and society have been largely coterminous.” (White, pg.13). As we have progressed through the last fifty years there has been a widening of the gap between church and state and we have witnessed the aggressive secularisation of our society especially in attitudes to moral ethics. The gap has been particularly wide in addressing the issue of gay and lesbian clergy and Christians but there is also a huge gap between what is deemed as acceptable heterosexual behaviour in our culture and that of the church. Where the 21st Century society in Western culture has laws granting equality and justice for the lay gay or lesbian person the church’s teaching mean that gay clergy have committed suicide² and gay

¹ White, Stephen R; *The Right True End of Love, Sexuality and the Contemporary Church*; The Columba Press; 2004

² Alison, J; *On Being Liked*; Darton, Longman and Todd; 2003; - “Benjamin O’Sullivan was a Benedictine monk of Ampleforth Abbey who killed himself in early 1996. As far as I can tell, he was set up by a reporter from a tabloid newspaper, and the only thing which prevented his death from being a murder was that Benjamin consented to the voice of the lynch mob and became the hand that put him to death...his death was brought about because this extremely attractive, apparently self-confident, effervescent young man had been unable to stand up as an ordinary gay man to the voice of the lynch mob. And the reason he was unable to stand up to them was because he was bound in his conscience. Shortly after his ordination he had expressed a fear...that he wasn’t really a priest, because ‘if they had known’, surely they wouldn’t have ordained him. That hardly anyone who knew Benjamin well can have failed to know that he was gay is of course not relevant: the

Christians do not necessarily feel able to fully belong to the church.³ They essentially have to choose between their faith and their sexuality.

But why? Well partly it has to do with the fact that as attitudes harden in the face of a changing moral climate it's all too easy to see some as being 'deviant' within our all-welcoming embrace. They are then made to feel guilty for being who they are.

Traditionally the church has painted men and women who behave in a sexual way as sinners and the question that is surreptitiously asked is 'how can you be a holy person if you have sexual feelings outside of procreation?'

The 'official' Roman Catholic Church line "is that all such non-procreative sexual activity is sinful" and this has led to the church refusing to celebrate sexuality in all its forms – whether gay, lesbian or heterosexual. It just about manages to 'tolerate' married sex but still thinks the only justification is so that we do not fall into further sin. Even

person caught in the trap looks at the world through fear-coloured spectacles, and fear darkens rather than illumines what it projects. But this gives a hint of what [is meant] by a bound conscience: the sort of person who can't stand up and be what they are, who can't trust in the goodness of what they are being given to become, whatever the lynch mob may throw at them, the sort of person who labours instead in a world of half-truths, any belonging being a half-belonging, because always feeling that 'if they knew' then 'I wouldn't really be allowed here'. Which translates into a permanent and deep feeling of 'I'm not really allowed here.'" (pg.100).

³ White, Stephen R; *The Right True End of Love, Sexuality and the Contemporary Church*; The Columba Press; 2004 – "to belong one must subscribe to certain views and uphold certain 'standards.' For the individual who differs in either of these...there are two choices: one can decide to become unchurched and free to hold more liberal views which the world outside the church will more willingly endorse than the church itself would, or one can remain churched but find oneself overtly or covertly (depending on how public one's views become) not approved of by that church." (pg.15).

the preface to the marriage service, as recently as 1928 proves this.⁴ Admittedly it is a big change from the Book of Common Prayer preface.⁵

As Elizabeth Stuart perceives, the problem is we have separated our bodies from ourselves. “We speak about sex in terms of *acts* and *performance*.” (Stuart & Thatcher, p.89)⁶ and we have essentially adopted a notion of body-soul dualism.⁷ Mary Douglas, in her classic study of purity rules surrounding the body concluded that “dirt symbolises disorder” (Stuart & Thatcher, p.91) and for the ancient Israelites holiness required order.⁸ “Bodies in the process of transformation or transition, deviating from their normal state, were regarded as unclean.” (p.91)⁹. Therefore, sex needs to be a conscious

⁴ “First it was ordained for the increase of mankind according to the will of God...secondly it was ordained that the natural instincts and affections, implanted by God, should be hallowed and directed aright.” 1928 (*Series 1*).

⁵ *Book of Common Prayer* - ordains marriage as a “remedy against sin, and to avoid fornications; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body” (BCP- preface to the marriage service) but it still makes it perfectly clear that any sexual union outside of marriage and not for the procreation of children is sinful – in the eyes of the Church and God himself.

⁶ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “This distancing of our true selves from our bodies has had two important repercussions: on the one hand it has led to failure, particularly amongst men, to take responsibility for sins of the body – the body is blamed for leading the true self into sin. On the other hand, women became associated with the bodily half of the body – body dualism and their bodies in particular were viewed as dangerous and in need of taming and controlling.” (p.90).

⁷ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “the soul met the body as the inferior ‘other’ to the self. The body was as different from the soul, and as intractable, as were women, slaves and the opaque and restless populace of the cities...It was a clay on which age, disease, and death fastened inexorably. At the end of so much long pain, it was best for the soul to go away – perhaps to the stars – ‘clean of the body’, the diseased flesh melted at last from the mind.” (p.95).

⁸ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “order rested on the ability to classify those things, animals or humans into distinct and discrete categories. Humans, animals or other things which could not be easily classified and which seemed to blur the divisions were disorderly and therefore dirty. People who wore clothes associated with members of the other sex, or a man who had sex with other men, blurred some of the most obvious boundaries and therefore threatened the integrity of the nation.” (p.91).

⁹ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “so the normal state of a woman is to be non-menstrual, and when she does bleed she is unclean. Douglas saw a connection between a nation’s concern with keeping itself pure and a sense of threat.

thought and an ordered activity, not something that responds to the chaos of our own sexual thoughts. Surely, as Christians, if we can control our own body we will then be able to control the social body in the community around us.¹⁰ The Holiness Code has seeped into our consciousness throughout the ages to the extent that it can be argued we measure holiness in the ability to control our bodies and our sexual urges.

Origen saw the body as being fluid and he believed that the ideal was a spiritual union with the divine. Therefore, for him any kind of sexuality could be dismissed and abandoned in this lifetime “indeed to do so was to declare in one’s own flesh where the spirit was heading.”¹¹ (Stuart & Thatcher, pg.95). Ambrose of Milan believed that every body bore a scar, that of sexuality. The virgin birth of Christ gave him reason to believe that this was what God wished for humankind too.¹²

Augustine of Hippo believed “that human beings were created physical beings and had before the fall enjoyed a unity of body and soul, their bodies completely under the will and the will fixed upon God.” (Stuart &

When the body of society is threatened, part of the response is to take great care over the unity, purity and integrity of the human body. The ancient Israelites were certainly under threat a great deal. The Holiness Code, which dates from the period after the exile when Israel was disillusioned and despondent, seeks to unite and rebuild the nation as a distinct and whole entity.” (pg.91).

¹⁰ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “by renouncing all sexual activity the human body could join in Christ’s victory [over the grave]: it could turn back the inexorable. The body could wrench itself free from the grip of the animal world. By refusing to act upon the youthful stirrings of desire, Christians could bring marriage and childbirth to an end. With marriage at an end, the huge fabric of organised society would crumble like a sandcastle.” (pg.95).

¹¹ Origen lived between 185-254 and was a prolific theologian and writer. He supposedly castrated himself in deference to Matthew 19:12. He was brought up as a Hellenist but his father also taught him the Christian scriptures.

¹² Ambrose believed that the virgin birth pointed us to a new way of living in relation with God that did not include a sexual relationship with each other. He espoused those who were not married to be celibate, those in marriage to be continent and priests to not marry which logically meant they should be sex-less.

Thatcher, pg.96).¹³ However, following the fall lust overwhelmed the will.¹⁴

This dualistic thinking came to dominate the Christian thinking¹⁵ although many did not go as far as the Gnostics in suggesting that the “body and all matter were inherently evil.” (Stuart & Thatcher, pg.97).

If holiness is to be understood as the leaving behind of “that which makes us most obviously and identifiably ourselves – that is our bodies” (White, pg.79) then is our search for holiness really a search for escapism from what we truly are and were created to be? In truth it could be described as a negation of God’s creative handiwork. “What is clear is that most of the Christian tradition is built upon anti-body theology.” (Stuart & Thatcher, pg.109).

The incarnation is what strikes me first as I contemplate the biblical aspect of this reflection. God chose to come to earth and be our

¹³ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - “sex had been part of the experience of Adam and Eve but it was very different to that experienced by humans subsequently, since it was under the complete control of human will. That had been lost when humanity subverted the ordered relationship between itself and God and disobeyed. At that point something truly tragic happened – desire and the will ceased to be friends and became enemies struggling for the control of human beings.” (pg.97).

¹⁴ Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A; *People of Passion, What the Churches Teach About Sex*; Mowbray; 1997; - Augustine saw man’s inability to control his erections as evidence for this but he certainly approached the issue from a purely male perspective. Reason, according to Augustine, is flattened and human beings are thereby reduced to the status of an animal, “which is an evil; to desire evil, to seek this pleasure is sinful. Only sexual intercourse for the purpose of procreation is justified.” (pg.96).

¹⁵ Runcorn, D; *Rumours of Life*; SPCK; 2006; - “The Christian faith has never been sure what to make of anyone’s body particularly. A perverse and destructive dualism between ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’ has infected so much of the understanding of the Church that we have been left with little positive use for the body at all. It has often been treated as a burden to be towed around in this mortal life while the ‘spirit’ within longs for its freedom. ‘The flesh’ has always been an embarrassment or an enemy...those without experience of being a church-going teenager will not have memory of certain embarrassing evenings at Christian youth camps – the ‘relationship talk’. Here I was told that my body was full of awkward and powerful passions...I learned that these were wonderful but wrong and needed strictly controlling in case I enjoyed them.” (pg.69-71).

salvation in the form of a human body.¹⁶ It meant something to him that he experienced total humanity¹⁷ as well as total divinity. Therefore, God must know something of desire¹⁸, chaotic feelings and thoughts. The Creator God has loved each and every one of us into being.¹⁹ As he has created us so we are to create love and understanding in the world in order that his Kingdom might be seen in every corner.

We witness in Jesus' ministry that he wept, laughed, became angry, fearful and felt compassion so why could he not have felt desire too? He was an extremely charismatic person, otherwise why did people leave their towns and villages to go and listen to him. In my experience charismatic people are also very attractive people. Women, like the woman at the well²⁰ obviously felt safe in his company and showed him how much they loved him and his company – they were even, potentially, led into conversation with Jesus via the medium of flirtatious conversation on both sides. Somehow Jesus made them feel good about their bodies; he respected every facet of them. Throughout the

¹⁶ Runcorn, D; *Rumours of Life*; SPCK; 2006; - "The Christian faith is incurably and unavoidably physical...it is faith in a God who has taken flesh and made his home in our physical, earthly nature. So Christian faith can never be about the liberating of our 'spirit' out of 'flesh.' It is about the hope of the union and transformation of spirit and matter, made one and whole in the love of Christ. Such a faith should change the way we relate to our own bodies. It is holy stuff, this flesh and blood: God has taken it as his own." (pg.72).

¹⁷ Runcorn, D; *Rumours of Life*; SPCK; 2006; - "one of the earliest theological arguments in the first Christian Church was whether Jesus came as a real, physical human being. A very early test of true faith was whether the believer was willing to confess that Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:2), rather than just wearing humanity like a cloak to cover his real, all powerful divinity." (pg.69).

¹⁸ Runcorn, D; *Rumours of Life*; SPCK; 2006; - "God's desire is revealed in our bodies. After all, what the doctrine of the incarnation whispers to us is that God, eternally, wants a body like ours. Have you ever thought about this...our body, as something God desires?"

¹⁹ Psalm 139 vs 1 & 13 - "O Lord, you have searched me and known me...For it was you who formed my inward parts; you who knit me together in my mother's womb."

²⁰ In my opinion this is an example of Jesus being a 'flirt.' He is challenging in a way that is provocative and he acts provocatively toward the woman whom he knew had five husbands. A woman he knew would give as she got and would challenge him in return. She became as provocative as he. You can almost sense the heat in their eyes and their conversation. It was her provocative challenge that led Jesus to contemplate a new idea – an idea that would be spread across the world.

Gospels he heals those who are broken physically and mentally and never turns away from touching those who would ordinarily be deemed to be unclean.

Jesus showed us that we are in relationship with God and we need to outwork that relationship in the world. “Jesus introduced the idea that one could know God by finding God in the other. The idea of loving others as the sign of knowing God (1John 4:16) complements the idea that in loving others we come face to face with God in the face of the other (Matthew 25:40).” (Rollins, pg.125). Our beliefs need to challenge, transform and liberate the existence of others and ourselves.

Sin can therefore be described as “the refusal of relation.” (Slee, pg.45).²¹ As Ruether says “Sin as distorted relationship has three dimensions: there is a personal-interpersonal dimension, a social-historical dimension and an ideological-cultural dimension.” (Slee, pg.46).²² Rita Nakashima Brock and Carter Heyward speak of “Christ as erotic power...evident wherever right relationships of mutuality and justice are operating...not in a narrow sexual sense , but as a type of embodied incarnational and passionate love that seeks for connection and right relation between persons, between God and humanity, between God, humanity and the cosmos. This erotic power of connection is exemplified in the life of Jesus.” (pg.57, Slee).²³ Through Jesus we can reclaim the body and the senses “as positive and the

²¹ Slee, Nicola; *Faith and Feminism*; Darton, Longman & Todd; 2003; - “sin is our out-of-touchedness with the fact that we are in relation – that our lives are connected at the root and that this is sacred basis of our creatureliness, our humanity, our lives together on planet Earth.” (pg.45).

²² Slee, Nicola; *Faith and Feminism*; Darton, Longman & Todd; 2003; - Exploitation of individuals leads to sexism, racism and classicism – the social-historical dimension – and then these systems are kept in place by ideologies that “make such unjust relationships appear good, natural, inevitable and even divinely mandated.” (Slee, pg.46).

²³ Slee, Nicola; *Faith and Feminism*; Darton, Longman & Todd; 2003; - “It is the creative power of God that seeks and longs for connection, and, in connecting, heals the dualism and separation that is the world’s injustice and pain.” (pg.57).

locus of the divine.” (Slee, pg.57). The essence that drives lovers to make connections also means we yearn for well-being in the wider world.

Christ claims the body again through his death, resurrection²⁴ and ascension. His human body is nailed to the cross in horrific reality. He becomes completely vulnerable for us, giving his physical body to be mutilated that we might celebrate our own bodies. On that first Easter Day, when Mary finds him in the garden, his body is transformed. In fact it is so transformed that Mary doesn't recognise him and is unable to cling to him but, as the disciples testify later, his body still bears the scars of his earthly life and death. For God the body becomes the witness and proof of his salvation. It has been and is vitally important in allowing us to know who God is and how he acts from creation via incarnation to death and resurrection.

Out of this comes our understanding of salvation but salvation does not come from thinking we know about creation. Instead, as Alison writes, “it is important...to consider the doctrine of creation starting from an understanding of salvation, which is where it comes from.” (Alison, pg.48). He goes on to say it is a “real mistake if we consider creation to be something which very specially has to do with the remote past” (Alison, pg.49).

²⁴ Runcorn, D; *Rumours of Life*; SPCK; 2006; - “The Gospel stories clearly emphasise the physical reality of the risen Jesus...in front of startled and frightened disciples Jesus went out of his way to assure them that it was really him and to demonstrate to them the solidity and reality of his physical nature. The disciples at Emmaus never questioned that they had travelled with a real human being. Mary in the garden, even out of traumatic grief, never doubted that she was talking to a real person...Finally Thomas was invited to physically touch Jesus' wounds. But this is surely consistent with the story that has gone before. God has always been delighted in physical things. He created this universe. He came and lived, suffered and died in our flesh. And it is in this flesh that he has now risen from death to new life.” (pg.73).

Our understanding of creation has developed over the centuries through Isaiah (45:18-19)²⁵ and Macabees (7:28-9)²⁶ where we witness the connection between creation and resurrection. God's free gift to us is one of life and he is to be trusted in this so that death will have no hold over us anymore. "When Jesus rose from the dead he revealed in a humanly accessible form not only that God has nothing to do with death...the giving of himself...had been the way in which the Creator himself...has wanted us to form part of creation." (Alison, pg.57).

We participate in God's creation by being in relation with him. "The Creator himself wanted to undo the knots of futility in which we found ourselves bound...and empower us to be personally involved in discovering and bringing into being what is...For this reason they speak of Jesus as the one through whom all things were created." (Alison, pg.57). As Moltmann-Wendel has noted, death loses its sting.²⁷ "We can relax and enjoy our bodies...embodied theology relocates salvation in and through the body. Our alienation from our bodies is healed and we experience the saving grace of God within them." (Stuart & Thatcher, pg.99)

²⁵ Alison, J; *On Being Liked*; Darton, Longman and Todd; 2003; - "two discoveries – that the oneness of God and that of the cleanness, limpidity of creation – go together and imply each other...Isaiah 45:18-19 – For thus says the Lord who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the Lord, and there is no other. I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in chaos.' I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right."" (pg.54).

²⁶ Alison, J; *On Being Liked*; Darton, Longman and Todd; 2003; - "in the space of two verses, two things go together: creation, now indeed conceived for the first time as something out of nothing – ex nihilo – and belief in the resurrection."

²⁷ Moltmann-Wendel; *I am My Body*; 1994; - "'Don't be anxious', 'Don't be afraid'. That is the message which stands at the beginning of the incarnation, God's becoming body, and it can also accompany us as we become human beings. It is also the message of the resurrection on Easter Day, the message of hope that all that is cannot be separated from the love of God, whether blade of grass, or human being or animal." (p.77).

It can be argued that in the Western world we have a problem with the body. It can be argued that we live in a time of extremes. We have a national and international problem with obesity²⁸ but at the same time the levels of anorexia²⁹ and bulimia in men and women is also rising, as we struggle to attain the perfection that has been sold to us. Our perception of the body has become skewed and blurred. It seems that we are not quite sure what our bodies are for any longer.

Film, television and magazines bombard us with ever more unattainable images, which constantly reinforce this is the only way to be attractive to the opposite sex and ourselves. Their message tells us that we can be endlessly happy, successful and have an amazing life if only we can be this shape or that shape. The trouble is that this idea of perfection is now being taken up by boys and girls as young as eight who are dieting at the detriment of their long-term health. It is becoming apparent that obesity, anorexia and bulimia stem from depression brought on by the lack of stimulation or satisfaction with life.

Alongside our problems with body image we are also fighting the exploitation of men, women and children in abusive relationships that contribute to their long-term psychological attitude to their own bodies.

²⁸ The Department of Health child obesity statistics show that between 1995 and 2003, the prevalence among children aged two to 10 rose from 9.9% to 13.7%. The biggest increase was among eight to 10 year-olds, from 11.2% to 16.5% during the eight-year period.

²⁹ www.weighingthefacts.blogspot.com – “1 in every 100-200 adolescent girls are affected by Anorexia. Anorexia is the 3rd most common chronic illness among adolescents. Approximately 1 in 10 cases of Anorexia will lead to death from cardiac arrest, suicide, or starvation. Approximately 5%-10% of those diagnosed with anorexia or bulimia are male. Anorexics are up to 10 times more likely to die because of their illness. 15% of young US women not diagnosed with an eating disorder display substantially disordered eating behaviours and attitudes. Estimated: 11% of high school students have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.”

We are also living in a society that thinks it is ok to dress a six-year-old in the same clothes as her mother.

In some strange way we like our bodies too much but at the same time it would seem we hate them too. Plastic surgery is on the increase with 'lunch time' treatments such as Botox being available for anyone. In fact we would rather poison ourselves than accept the wrinkle - a consequence of laughing, crying and frowning – in short being human as God intended us to be.

Sex is sold cheaply in every advert, every shop and every magazine or programme. It is seen as the 'normal' behaviour of a healthy person but there is also a continued problem with teenage pregnancy, however much education we put into schools, which is derided by the same publications that sell sex on every page. Sex has become something which should not be kept for committed, special relationships but something that is given away to anyone for the instant gratification of that person in line with our 'instant gratification society' where at the click of a button everything comes to us immediately.

We are also living in a society that recognises many ways of living in relationship. As recently as the 1960s homosexuality was against the law and punishable by imprisonment – it still is in other countries around the world. It is also punishable by death, usually in the form of stoning, something that the worldwide Church can be seen to seemingly support in its desperate search for unity. As Bill Johnson writes "Gay men and women, in finding the courage to be, find a hermeneutical lens, the lens of their own experience, with which to observe and expose the patriarchal and heterosexist basis of much church teaching." (Stuart, pg.14). Johnson accuses the church of being over concerned with

‘intellectual theology’ and under concerned with ‘experiential theology.’ He goes on to write, “it is vital that gay people come out, articulate their experience and reflect theologically upon it for, ‘we who are Gay know the validity of our experience, particularly the experience of our love. That love calls us out of ourselves and enables us to respond to the other. Through our experience of love we experience the presence of God.” (Stuart, pg.14).

Jim Cotter goes further in suggesting that “gay people bring home the reality that to be human is to be a sexual being.” (Stuart, pg.18).³⁰ Perhaps this is what God is trying to tell us through the wonderful myriad of the people who make up the earth. I created you to be sexual and I created you to have healthy bodies in order that you might be fully human and also begin to know something of the divine.

Conclusion

Alison writes, “Now I put it to you that the Eucharistic presence of Jesus in our midst is the way God constantly reminds us...of his regard, one of liking us, encouraging us to be daring with him, during the time of the ‘absence of the master’, and that our having conscience unbound means our becoming able to trust in the regard of one who likes us and so is delighted that we will come up with crazy new daring schemes which didn’t seem to be part of the programme at all...If our conscience accepts the regard of, and wants to be like, someone who likes us, who is daring, creative, innovative, effervescent, unafraid, risk-taking and so on, then we will find ourselves behaving like that, being able to stand up

³⁰ Stuart, Elizabeth; *Gay and Lesbian Theologies*; Ashgate Publishing Ltd; 2003; - “Cotter applies the analogy of eating to sexual ethics. Eating is a fact of life, neither right nor wrong in itself. Though it may be necessary to eat on your own to fulfil a biological need, it is more satisfying to eat with others. Something is wrong if you eat obsessively or starve yourself, ‘but there is a healthy rhythm of fasting and feasting, of abandonment and restraint.” (pg.18).

and take the rap, delighting in finding ways of getting people off the hook, never taking no for an answer, refusing to believe that something is impossible for God; and that is who we will become.” (Alison, pg.110).

God does not just like us, from an arms’ length point of view but he likes us and wants to be “in on the adventure with us.” (Alison, Pg.111). God says “I like you” and that gives us permission to be creative and delight in his presence along the journey of this life towards home. We can dance together through whatever the rest of life and ministry brings because we not only love one another but we like each other.

It is no longer about forgiveness and salvation – it is about finally being able to accept God’s forgiveness through the peace he gives us in the still small voice - in the silence. In the silence and the forgiveness we can hear a new voice calling us to be the person God created us to be. He calls us to use our God-given bodies and sexuality (whatever form they may take) as part of our belief in a God who comes to us in the bodily human form of a baby in the manger and a man upon the cross and in so doing challenges people to contemplate a new idea of God – that He enjoys our bodies, our sexuality and our pleasure as much, or probably more than we do.

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