

Guest EDITORIAL - Anthony Woollard

... Sexuality isn't the only thing Anglicans can talk about

By one of those strange coincidences which are perhaps not coincidences, I found myself – the very day before I was invited to write this editorial – re-reading Susannah Cornwall's excellent textbook on theology and sexuality (SCM Press, 2013). If readers do not know it, I commend it to them.

The Anglican Communion – and not least, in these politically troublesome times, the Church of England – faces many crises. But the continuing issue of sexuality is by far the greatest. As we agonise also about falling numbers in our churches, I have evidence from within my own family that our problems in this area are a major alienating factor for many. Currently my own Bishop (Christopher Cocksworth of Coventry) is chairing a major national project on “Living in Love and Faith”, intended to make progress in this area, and I know that he is finding it a very challenging experience. That project is due to report in about a year's time, and already there have been resignations from the steering group over the handling of transgender questions, an area where Susannah has a special theological expertise.

The questions of sex, gender and sexuality go to the very heart of the theological endeavour. Of course, for many, the issue of Biblical authority, and the many awkward and sometimes “savage” texts that go against current secular assumptions on such matters, is central. But the nature of humanity and the created order, the place of science, reason and experience in understanding these, and even the nature of God, all ultimately come into play. This presents different challenges to different parts of the Communion, and even the Church of England alone shows wide divergences on all these fundamental matters.

It seems likely that efforts will be made, at the 2020 Lambeth Conference, to focus on other challenges in the contemporary world, in the hope of concentrating on ideals that can unite us rather than what divides us. That is good, but the divisions will remain, and may be far more fundamental than disagreements about gay marriage.

Anthony Woollard is a trustee for Modern Church, one of the oldest theological societies in the Anglican Communion. In 2020 the Annual Conference, chaired by Adrian Thatcher, Visiting Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter will include insights from across the spectrum, not only of sexualities and genders but also of the Anglican Communion as a whole. See: (<http://www.modernchurch.org.uk/events>).

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