

**Political:** Now, and most certainly buttressed with the government's involvement in redefining marriage, this issue is one of justice [for all]. For all those who accept a liberal world-view where absolutes are banished, no single "good" can dominate, and therefore personal preference becomes the ultimate value. Neutrality is honored. Preferences are further linked to self-identity and therefore to make determinations against an individual's sexual preferences becomes a justice issue pure and simple. For many people, this is an issue about justice and equality

**Cultural:** In a post-modernist society, where experience is elevated over truth, or where truth is re-defined in terms of one's own experience, everyone is right, no one can be wrong and every one is unique. This moral relativism and radical individualism, together with our hedonism lends itself well in giving special and undue significance not only to sexual preference but to sexual satisfaction. Chastity, abstinence, and self-discipline are seen as self-denial and summarily rejected. For many people, this is an issue about unique rights and privileges.

**Theological:** Two Gospels are in competition for the hearts of people. On the one hand there is presented a "gospel of affirmation" that declares love as the final, determining factor in all decisions. Arising from an enlightenment philosophy, scripture [and truth] is to be interpreted in the light of culture and the Holy Spirit, devoid of any real healing power, is relegated to sense and feeling status. With this gospel, when confronted with sexual sin and brokenness, all one can do from the depth of a compassionate heart is love and bless both the person and the lifestyle. There are others who contend for a "Gospel of transformation" through repentance; who accept there are irrefutable Godly principles at stake, and who believe that through the Holy Spirit, God can bring forth healing and wholeness to our sexual brokenness. For many people, this is an issue about which Gospel the Church is called to proclaim.

# Why THIS ISSUE?

**Edith  
Humphrey**

**Why this Issue?**

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In the past seven years or so, I have been a reluctant participant in a debate that has now heated to the boiling point in the Anglican communion – this is, of course, the question of same-sex erotic behavior, and whether it is to be accepted, even "blessed," within the Church. I have written elsewhere regarding the clarity of Scripture and ongoing Church Tradition on this issue, and have indicated why the Scriptural proscription of homoerotic practice is not arbitrary, but for the good of God's human creatures, whom he loves.

Throughout my participation in the discussion, I have, like many, been uneasy, especially because it has been increasingly clear that this is the contemporary rock upon which the Anglican Communion will founder. Frequently I have remarked that our war over sexuality is only that bit of the iceberg that can be seen above the water, and that there are far more foundational issues that have led to this parting of the ways. Why, I have questioned, did we not recognize the current divide over more central or creedal issues, such as the uniqueness and divinity of Jesus the Christ? Why, for example, in my own ACC, did quantifiable dissent not erupt over Michael Ingham's *Mansions of the Spirit*, when it was published in 1997, or in ECUSA, over the ongoing spate of books by John Spong? Conflict over a "purely" theological issue would not be open to the charge of "phobia" and could not be as easily interpreted by the mean-minded as an example of uncharitable exclusion of the "other" by those who seek orthodoxy.

Yet, here we are, with a presenting issue not of our own choosing. Even Her Majesty the Queen has recognized this week that this may well be the issue over which our communion will formally divide. Our much-vaunted resilient willow tree (the Anglican *middle way*) may not possess the elasticity to weather this storm. Nor should it, many might add. We find ourselves in the dilemma of Tevye, who at the climax of *Fiddler on the Roof*, concludes that there *is* no other hand – identity has its limits.

**Why this issue?** Perhaps the reasons are not so circumstantial or so trivial, after all. Here is a question that is connected to grave and important issues, just as the tip of the iceberg suggests what lies beneath to the mature seafaring eye. Think, for a moment, about human sexuality. It connects us to the rest of the animate world, to the created order which God has commanded to "be fruitful and to multiply." Sexuality expresses our *embodied* condition, and so signifies the mode in which God has placed us within his cosmos. This body we share with

(The following comments do not belong with the body of Edith Humphrey's article)

### **Further Reflections (CPO)**

*Why This Issue Is So Volatile:*

*The issue of homoerotic relationships touches us all at various levels and consequently elicits considerable emotional response. Sometimes we are not fully aware of why we feel so strongly or why the person with whom we are engaged in discussion is responding with such passion. It might prove helpful, therefore, to understand what the different viewpoints are that converge in this particular issue. At least five "streams" can be identified: personal, social, political, cultural and theological.*

**Personal:** *At the most basic level this seems to be an issue of the heart – that is to say, most people seem to have some close acquaintance with an individual who is struggling with or who has settled into a homoerotic lifestyle: brother, sisters, sons, daughters, friends – you name it. In our best moments none of us desires to see another person suffering, marginalized or ridiculed – and we therefore contend for the "underdog." For many people, this is an issue about close acquaintances.*

**Social:** *For many years now, we have all be subject to a highly effective desensitization process focusing on the presence and acceptance of persons with homoerotic feelings. Through movies, television and written material, we learned to laugh at their posturing [which assuaged irrational fears we may have harbored], then learned of their desires and felt their isolation [which engaged our hearts], and finally came to accept their lifestyle as different, but normal. A new word was even coined to deflect attention from the sexual dynamic at work – no longer homosexuals, they are now "gay." For many people, this is an issue about what it means to be normal.*

Indeed, Jesus came to bring *shalom*, but his initial coming into the world also brought schism: "And there was a division ... because of him" (John 7:43). Let us pray, now that the chasm is gaping before us, that God will bring this to our good. As darkness deepens, and as some who are now with us put themselves in impaired communion with the historic church, may many others turn decisively towards the light, live in continuing repentance and joy, and reclaim their identity in the church of the apostles and martyrs.

**Why this issue?** *Because in this debate, the entire present Church is called to recognize and celebrate God's will for humanity. In these painful times, all of us are called to respond -- those who are theologically literate and those who are pragmatic in nature, those who focus on ideas and those who yearn for justice, those who accentuate the spirit and those who give thanks for the flesh. Christians are of course called to be rounded, and not simply one-issue people. However, the challenge of C. S. Lewis is appropriate to today: let us not be brandishing fire-extinguishers while the ship is sinking. The water (and the iceberg) must be seen for what they are.*

creation, and by it we are afforded a priestly or "bridge" position in order to nurture the rest of creation. (The English "pontiff" comes from the Latin *pons*.) But God has also revealed that our human sexuality somehow links us with God's own self, since marriage is a *mysterion* showing forth the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32).

Unlike Gnosticism, the Christian Way does not teach that what is done in the body is irrelevant, or that what is "spiritual" is more important than what is "physical." On the contrary, our salvation comes to us through the Incarnation of the Son, who takes on our frail human flesh, as Jesus is born of a woman, at just the right time, as he dies our death, and is raised to new life. So, then, Paul warns the Corinthians that what is done in the body is utterly significant – "Shun fornication! Every sin that a human commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

**Why this issue?** Because what we think and say and do about our sexuality is intimately connected to who we are – who we are in the created order, who we are in society, who we are with our spouses and friends, who we are ecclesiastically, and who we are in the new creation which God has brought into being and which he will complete through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is no doubt because of the interrelatedness of this issue that it brings forth visceral reactions, for good or for ill. Those who have difficulty thinking seriously about the intricacies of Trinitarian relationships are galvanized to consider this present question. In so doing, they find themselves on the brink of multiple very serious questions. To ask, as a Christian, about homoeroticism, leads ineluctably to a many-directioned quest, with numerous areas of inquiry:

- creation and the human body;
- marriage and the inter-relationship of male and female;
- the place of male and female relations and same-sex relations in society;

Prowse brought his *Financial Times* article to this climax:

- the way that the human gendered condition is an icon of Christ's relationship with the Church;
- how we interpret Scripture in its various forms of narrative, law, gospel and epistle;
- revelation and authority, and how we understand the different roles of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in hearing God's word;
- the contemporary problem of individualism in the Church, and the existence of multiple denominations, which divided for various theological and ecclesial reasons;
- what we mean, in the Church, when we enact a rite, bless a relationship, enter into a "holy mystery" or participate in liturgy;

what it means to be part of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church, that new creation of the Holy Spirit that spans time and geographical space.

That these issues are all involved becomes clear when we analyze the rhetoric of those who tackle this question. So, for example, Michael Prowse, in his recent defense of Canon Jeffrey John (who was in line to be Bishop of Reading), called the opponents to John's candidacy "mostly Anglo-Catholics and evangelical fundamentalists" -- even though *fundamentalism* with its particular contours is hardly a common phenomenon in this communion! Prowse was, of course, using the term "fundamentalist" in order to suggest an approach to Scripture and the gospel that differs from his own, but also to elicit a dismissive emotional response from his readership. He was correct that the response to same-sex eroticism is connected with views of the Scripture and of authority in the Church. What he failed to recognize was that the so-called "progressivist" has specific "fundamentals" as well, when he or she interprets "the gospel" and affords the covenant sign of the rainbow a new meaning. "Liberal" voices can be as "fundamentalist" and "exclusivist" as others.

*"The anti-gays have good reason to want to stop Canon John. They know the pomp and pageantry of a formal consecration at Westminster Abbey this autumn will send the world a powerful message. Rowan Williams, the liberal Archbishop of Canterbury, will be giving gay relationships the British establishment's formal blessing. But the time is right; and if it causes another split in the Church, that is a price he should be prepared to pay. Justice demands it."*

We should, of course, be absorbed with the cause of justice, and of love. God is, after all, at pains to "bless" his wayward creation, so that we recover that state of "original justice" that God conferred upon us at creation, and that humanity has not possessed since the initial ingratitude of the first couple. True shalom includes a state where there is no disruption in communion between God and humanity, male and female, people and people, and in which every person has in proper balance the spirit, mind, heart and bodily functions. Despite this vision of a fulfilled and reconciled cosmos, the Bible is frank about our situation. The shalom of God has been disturbed, and requires restoration. Moreover, God, in his love, wants to take us beyond the restoration of that original image of the divine, so that we might participate in his very nature (2 Peter 1:4) -- to this end, God the Son has assumed human flesh! What will the recovery of "original justice" and the ultimate glorification of humanity mean? It will mean the bringing together of heart, spirit, mind and will, and the reconciliation of all under the Lordship of Christ.