

Temple Tracts: Issue 3, Volume 1

Grace & Power: Sexuality and Gender in the Church of England

Hayley Matthews



William Temple
Foundation

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Biography

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Glossary	6
Two Prevailing Perspectives	6
<i>Perspective X: historical</i>	6
<i>Perspective Y: progressive</i>	8
Theological Accounts	9
<i>Walter Brüeggemann</i>	9
<i>Karl Barth</i>	10
<i>Adrian Thatcher</i>	11
<i>'Anglican Mainstream'</i>	12
<i>'Genuine' orthodoxy</i>	13
<i>Potential and pitfalls of the primacy of 'orthodoxy'</i>	14
<i>Other perspectives</i>	15
Final Thought	15
Bibliography	19
<i>Further reading</i>	20

Introduction

I have to keep my head down and my mouth shut if I want to keep my job. (Interview H).

One of the key arguments cited from within the Church is the idea that 'equality and diversity' are 'worldly' or 'secular' terms picked up from management-speak and secular legislation, neither originating from nor alluding to Christian principles or doctrine. Thus, as such, they are not necessarily to be regarded as principles to which Christian disciples should aspire, and certainly not points of reference against which to align Canon Law, for example. Indeed, they may be entirely opposite to all our Lord taught, and something against which to make a stand.

I have been 'suggested' into remaining single for most of my adult life despite having wanted to commit to a long-term, stable, non-scene relationship with another practicing Christian in lay-ministry, as I wait until this hoop is jumped through followed by another, and another, and another. (Interview I).

Power

Constructs of power are rarely openly acknowledged within faith communities called to embody the grace and humility of an egalitarian faith. Additionally, theology and doctrine tend to appeal to 'natural' or 'normal' constructs informing the gendered identity and sexual development of human beings. Given the vast weight that two verses from the book of Genesis are given in promulgating binary gender positions and heterosexism within Abrahamic faiths, the need to acknowledge power differentials and their origin within theological and doctrinal developments is critical. Temple wrote that 'self-interest is always exercising its disturbing influence, not less (though more nobly) when it is forcibly repudiated than when it is accepted as the guide of conduct' going on to suggest that, 'it may be the function of the Church to lead people to a purely disinterested virtue (though this is at least debatable)' (Temple, 1942: 65-6). This paper aims to explore two key constructs of self-interest, or power, going on to explore how these are manifested in the process of gendered and gendering socialisation both within and outside of the Church. Historical and progressive theological positions are then presented, with their use of power constructs viewed as a dialectical interplay of voices and research perspectives that has the potential to introduce more inclusive and mature view of humanity, sexuality and the Church. This paper also introduces research material from gay male and female Anglican priests interviewed for my latest piece of research.

"whatever you do, do NOT fall in love while you're in this parish," (Interview J).

Despite adhering to a faith that claims to represent an all-loving God who loves each of us as we are, in a Church that aspires to form ministers in 'a role in which God is helping you become yourself more deeply and fully' (Williams, n.d.), homosexual clergy reported feeling fundamentally constrained from being 'fully themselves'. Although in so doing priests enable their parishioners to similarly grow into the same sense of wholeness, in order that God's glory might more fully and freely flow through all that they are and all that they do, the homosexual priests interviewed all articulated feeling only 'partially accepted'. Indeed, more than one priest felt used for their skills, talents and family-free work ethic, whilst simultaneously being rejected as an individual with needs and desires for human contact and intimacy. Such discrimination had had a significant psychological impact with self-reported changes in their mental-health such as a 'constant low-level depression' (Interview K) or feeling 'de-sexualised' (Interview L) - a direct result of experiencing discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Again and again, clergy recounted 'not being allowed to love' diminishing their ability to love God, humankind, and even life itself.

Glossary

Transgender: ‘transferring’ from one gender to another. This usually follows gender dysphoria, the sensation that one has been born into the incorrectly gendered body. There has been some work on the structure of the brain as gendered (M/F) and how this can be discordant to the physical body. Whatever the genesis, persons undergo varying levels of transformative surgery and hormone therapy in order to ‘become themselves’ physically.

CIS: Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook defined "cisgender" as a label for "individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity," complementing "transgender".

Intersex persons have some or all of the biological attributes of both male and female genitalia at birth. There is currently a move to allow these children to grow up without surgical intervention in order to develop their own gender identity rather than it being medically proscribed at birth which can lead to later difficulties with identity. Many intersex individuals are now choosing to refuse surgical interventions altogether and to live holistically with their intersex body.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ): This is the most widely used conglomeration of non-hetero-normative sexual identities, and non-CIS / bi-polar gender identities at present. Each group contains variegated identities in their own right, and there are now new terms coming into usage such as ‘pansexual’, for example. Pan-sexual means that one is able to fall in love with any person, and that gender is not a defining/limiting feature of attraction towards another human being. Pan-sexual people are also more able than those clearly self-defined as heterosexual or homosexual or bi-sexual to be attracted to persons whose gender is less clearly defined or polarised. People who are intersex and transgender, for example, may also describe themselves as pan-gender.

Two Prevailing Perspectives

Perspective X: historical

Michel Foucault’s (1926-1984) theory of the panopticon, or ‘all-seeing eye’ (based on Jeremy Bentham’s architectural model of the prison tower that can survey what is going on in the prison yard but also within the prison itself) explores the phenomena of people self-regulating, self-disciplining or conforming themselves to the one whom they perceive having ‘power over’ them. In my recent research on equality and diversity in the Church of England, for many people there are potentially two ‘Masters’, one being the State, the other the Church. The results of my research confirmed that people were all too aware that their ‘Masters’ sometimes expected contradictory things of them, particularly from their most personal relationships. The idea then, that God for example, might become a *third eye*, renders the idea of a panopticon too simplistic to explain the way that power operates within a religious context for an individual. Indeed, should there be ‘layers’ of mastery, one would expect some synchronicity for the panopticon to prove a valid construct, albeit that validation of the concept by any one individual’s relationship with one or other (or all) or their ‘Masters’ is entirely possible. Many would claim that the church *as an institution* exemplifies Foucauldian structures – and strictures.

I don’t know if it’s safe to broach the subject. (Interview P, lesbian female priest).

In essence, we have organised our theology and doctrine around a definitive construct of gender as dualistic, biological, essentialist and God-ordained, namely polarised as male *or* female. To be a person outside of these constraints is to be somehow ‘disordered’, as opposed to an aspect of the diversity of the Divine. A minority gendered person, such as intersex, transsexual or pan-sexual, is therefore, ‘not of God’. Perhaps it is unredeemed human nature through which the majority holds fast to such social concepts, archotyping and privileging certain people within society and institutions who not only conform to those standards associated with being either male or female, but ensuring the conformity of others in a self-perpetuating cycle that

potentially damages as many (if not more) people *within* the system as are excluded by it. Grace is the means by which one is offered salvation, but, it seems, keeping it can be a tricky business if you do not fit the bill; for one rejects the Creator, if one insists that the Creator has made one so. Never has such a double-bind been as pernicious to spiritual – and psychological - health as ‘by grace we are saved’ – ‘except for people like you’.

Interviewees narrating their experiences of this form of exclusion exhibited physical anxiety when recounting such events, including their mind going blank, nail biting, giggling, shifting uncomfortably in their seats, looking off into their memories, losing their thread, flushing up, stuttering and regularly apologizing during such times of discomfit although they had not done or said anything requiring an apology (Hoel, Rayner and Cooper, 1999). On occasion two interviewees (one male, one female (trans)) significantly raised their voices, which could have been interpreted as aggression towards the perpetrator they were discussing, whilst at least two thirds of the interviewees voices were raised in the sense of exhibiting tonal anxiety. Behavioral activation systems (fight, flight or freeze) were, therefore, consistently triggered by their cumulative memories.

Female priests responded to their own lack of autonomy or self-exclusionary tactics by suggesting that they ought to “suck it up” since they had known what the Church was like and were duty-bound to follow their vocation ‘no matter what the cost’ (Matthews, 2014). For example, one female priest dutifully waited outside of the vestry doors to hear what her role might be in a particular service as she was not allowed in to the discussion. Another talked of being spat at, being called unmentionable names to her face and ‘lots of door slamming’ as male priests walked out whenever she walked in as if she were making small talk, rather than contributing to the topic of the meeting. Indeed, she spoke as if it were somewhat amusing, not the abusive behaviour it is. ‘You simply had to put up with it if you wanted to be a priest,’ she said. This response clearly suggests the obedience, subservience and absorption of punishment for ‘breaking norms’ that are the logical conclusion to Foucauldian notions of power.

In his books *Discipline and Punishment* (1977) and *The History of Human Sexuality* (Volume 1) (1979) Foucault asserts that humankind appeared to shift from a crass brutality, consisting of public, physical punishment (for example, the stocks, being hanged and public floggings), to seeming to become more humane and less brutal in the modern age. Yet he asserts that punishment merely shifted to the ‘disciplining’ of the mind or will through the complex and subtle exercising of power from within the prison system. Subtle forms of mental imprisonment interwoven with theistic moral weight are forms of punishment, discipline and control from which it is difficult to recover, assuming one is able to recognise both their hold, and their source.

Thus Foucault used the image of the Panopticon (see above) as a metaphor for the brutality of a regime that can see into and regulate every area of a prisoner’s life without ever needing physical violence as a means of domination. However, this use of power, Foucault postulates, was no less brutal, seeping as it does into every aspect of a person’s being as fastidious adherence to rules and regulations as it sought control over when prisoners slept, ate, drank, worked, rested, socialized, and how they carried out those activities. Foucault describes authority itself in terms of ‘power... [which] seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people’ (Foucault, 1977c: 28). Those who have been inducted into military and ecclesial organisations may recognise this as ‘formation’ to a greater or lesser degree, no less so those subscribing to X typologies of their faith.

Bourdieu (1930-2002) concurs with Foucault’s control-based analysis, observing that the violence of symbolic and subliminal dominations having a profound impact upon its recipients. Stating that symbolic domination is as damaging as overt violence, Bourdieu claims that the economic exploitation of women is as psychologically damaging as physical abuse, for example. In the context of the Church, its entire doctrinal and theological position is underpinned by symbolism, both sensate and allegorical, as it is through these means that the faith is passed from one generation to the next, including gendered power relations. Pronouns matter.

I think that might be because I’m the default gender of the institution. And that in itself is an interesting idea that there is a kind of default gender... I’m in the default gender so I just get on and do what I do.
(Interview O, male priest).

In contrast to Foucault, however, Bourdieu suggests that power resides in social constructs as well as the oppressive ideologies advanced by institutions like the state. In other words in groups who have some form of social 'capital' that provides the leverage for 'power-over' others. At its simplest level, this is a capitalist construct: 'I have goods that you want/need, and you will need to barter with me on my terms in order to get them'. Bourdieu's theory of socially constructed relationships of power that are various, depending upon with whom and in what context people relate, provides an explanation of how one or more 'panopticon', 'Master' or 'more powerful' person or social group may impact individuals variously, depending upon their own position and response to the apparently hierarchical nature of the majority of socially constructed relationships. In other words, on one context a male homosexual priest may accrue power by virtue of his gender, whereas in another context his power may diminish by virtue of his sexuality, for example.

Foucault spoke of the panoptical power inherent and reflected by societal structures such as the church, medicine and education, as so insidious and difficult to grasp and identify that significant sacrifice would be required to be made by those exercising and benefitting from hierarchical power imbalances for genuine evolution to occur:

If repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost.

Foucault (1979:5).

Foucault's research specifically explored the relationship between knowledge, power and the body by shifting the focus from the external ways in which punishment and discipline were enforced in pre-modern societies, to ways in which dominant social and political norms were internalized by the public at large. Consequently, he began to accept empirical subjectivity (i.e. people saying how they feel) as a valid means of exploration for theorizing. This in itself posits the notion that 'hard scientific facts' cannot of themselves penetrate or illuminate the realms of power, gender, embodiment or sexuality. This is significant when we consider the polarised cries of biological or doctrinal 'facts' versus 'the way people live' particularly when those 'facts' are essentially the ((pre-)scribed narratives of oral traditions and oral history around theism.

Perspective Y: *progressive*

In contrast, a less definitive definition of gender recognises something of a spectrum, of the unknown and the unusual, of which individual variations from definitively male or female babies range from rare to "more common than diabetes", recognises a glimpse of God in every aspect of diversity within humankind. Gender is less important within such constructs; people and their spiritual lives are the more so.

Being a part of a majority does not define one's position within the community of faith, society, or indeed, the ultimate communion of the saints, for one's physical, gendered and sexual bodies are not *harbingers* of holiness, but *conduits* of it. It is from Christ and Christ alone upon which salvific grace is predicated, and such grace does not seek holy places in which to reside, but resides in everyone through the sanctifying Holy Spirit, thus *making* holy, *those inhabited*.

Consequently, perspective Y does not have a need for heterosexism to be named, as it is not concerned with the expression of love between individuals as the basis of faith, or Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, power is more easily acknowledged from a progressive position as something to be used as an *empowering* tool, as opposed to a self-serving one. Thus minorities may feel *power-full*, gifted by those in power to share in decision making and resource sharing, free to articulate and have heard their own needs and perspectives in many 'taken-for-granted' practical (pastoral) and theological (liturgical) contexts. In the following theological accounts, both historical and progressive perspectives are clearly illustrated.

Theological Accounts

Below we will explore four contrasting theological accounts of embodied differences and their relationship with the typology of perspective X and perspective Y.

Walter Brüeggemann

the justice trajectory [of the Old Testament] has decisively and irreversibly defeated the purity trajectory... the purity trajectory of the text may help us understand pastorally the anxiety produced by perceived and experienced disorder, but it provides no warrant for exclusionary ethical decisions in the face of the gospel.

Walter Brüeggemann (2012:193-96).

Brüeggemann (1933-|) believes that there are two strands driving our understanding of Old Testament Biblical teaching on gender and sexuality as the 'divine order'. Brüeggemann states that justice - as won through Christ's redemptive and salvific work on the cross - overcame, or 'trumped' the ritualistic legalism that had dominated religious thought and practice, in the name of 'purity'. In essence, Brüeggemann explains that religious purity via practice is a sign of the old order of things, not the new, as Christ's redemptive work fulfils therefore negating adherence to the law as a means of genuine salvific holiness. Consequently, we might say that we have moved from legalism and puritanism to humankind being under the grace of God in Christ Jesus. In other words, the hierarchical system of priest-police codifying, promulgating and enforcing ritual cleanliness as equating holiness gave rise to a religious elite having 'power-over' people thus generating in and out-groups (holy = ritually clean; unholy = unclean and vice versa). We might think of this as the thesis of Foucault's Panopticon vis á vis the antithesis of Galatians 5:4 'you who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace'.

Brüeggemann states:

1. Everybody has a script. People live their lives by a script that is sometimes explicit but often implicit. That script may be one of the great meta-narratives created by Karl Marx or Adam Smith or it may be an unrecognized tribal mantra like, "My dad always said ..." The practice of the script evokes a self, yields a sense of purpose and provides security. When one engages in psychotherapy, the therapy often has to do with re-examining the script--or completely scuttling the script in favour of a new one, a process that we call conversion.

As the self is organized by a script, so are communities. And leaders of a community are skilled in appealing to that script.

2. We are scripted by a process of nurture, formation and socialization that might go under the rubric of liturgy. Some of the liturgy is intentional work, much of it is incidental; but all of it, especially for the young and especially for the family, involves modelling the way the world "really is." The script is inhaled along with every utterance and every gesture, because the script-bestowing community is engaged in the social construction of a distinct reality.

It is difficult to imagine life in our society outside the reach of this script; it is everywhere reiterated and legitimated.

Brüeggemann (2005: 22-28).

Brüeggemann's work is closely aligned with typology Y, suggesting that typology X has become 'merely' a script against which we hold up our arguments, aligning them without ever re-examining the constructs themselves. When these 'scripts' are also hard wired into our faith systems – they, too, can require 'conversion' in order to assimilate new understandings. Suggesting critical reflection, Brüeggemann's argument stops short of exploring

what this might mean for those beliefs being challenged when one is deemed to be 'critical' of fidelity to a 'known orthodoxy' (X).

Karl Barth

They stand in sequence. Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like the two halves of an hour glass, which are obviously two, but absolutely equal and therefore interchangeable. Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore, be equated. In inner dignity and right, and therefore in human dignity and right, A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage. ...A precedes B, and B follows A. It means preceding and following. It means super- and sub-ordination.

Karl Barth, (1961: 118).

Karl Barth (1886-1968), a Swiss reformed theologian, believed that men and women were complementary with the 'super' ordination of man being a service of leadership for God and towards his wife, a role that Barth perceived as one that could only be truly fulfilled with genuine humility. Believing that the self-giving of the woman to her husband was the ultimate fulfilment of her role, Barth concluded that 'to wish to replace him in this [leadership], or to do it with him, would be to wish to not be a woman' (Barth, 1961: 171).

This explanation ascribes power to one gender but not to another, generating power over individuals as well as groups, which are apparently biological in nature thus appearing to be a normative consequence of birth. It could be termed 'gendered happenstance'. This essentialist notion of leadership and subservience as biologically driven suggests an innate difference in the ability to lead that is divinely circumscribed for either gender.

This theory fits very closely with Foucault's all-seeing Panopticon (typology x) globally proscribing gendered power differentials, and seeking to deny any other socially constructed counter-argument via recourse to a 'higher power' (in this case, Divinity). Such theology/theory is clean and simple with seemingly obvious boundaries. From the earliest moments of recognising gender differentiation each individual has a very clear 'script' to follow, and very clear expectations to work towards. As these are 'divinely proscribed' there is no need to challenge or question them, thus a harmonious, stable and 'safe' community can be socialized that essentially regulates its members at home, within the education system and at church if those messages are all congruent. This form of literal theology echoing the simplistic nature of the liturgical verses in Genesis suggests women are derivative, and therefore 'sub-ordinate[s]' of men, or if taken literally, women are essentially a spare rib.

Although this form of gendered power differential relies upon a Foucauldian panopticon ascribed to God, it is clear how important Bourdiean social constructs are in ratifying and reiterating these positions unquestioningly from generation to generation, and within and between groups (such as men and women). Such tight constructs of gendered power are all the more forcibly felt by those for whom they are not possibilities, such as those born neither male nor (or both/and) female. As a typical expression of an X typology, the beauty of such a perspective is its clarity and an ease of understanding. It does not call us into uncomfortable dialogue with truths or experiences that are beyond our 'norm'. There are two possible consequences of such strong and simplistic 'norms' which I have not yet touched upon. First persons may be genuinely unaware of the wider and variant perspectives surrounding them, to the point that any infringement by them is perceived as a 'violation of the inerrant truth'. Second, persons may perceive challenges to any part of their perspective as a challenge to their entire construct of belief, imagining any single theological or ideological critique as damning to the whole. Just as in the removal of one wooden block in the game *Jenga*, one has no idea which one will bring the entire edifice down, and few subscribing to X perspectives volitionally offer themselves to that risk. To question one issue, is to question all.

Amongst my interviewees, gay male priests reported being sanctioned via lack of progression based upon their non-(?) conformity to the prevailing culture. Therefore, historically within the Church of England, an openly gay

male priest such as Jeffrey John was not consecrated as a bishop and was duly removed from a potential bishopric by an Archbishop (highest ranking Anglican) in 2005, whereas the Church of England is all too aware that some gay male priests have been (and are) bishops at the price of seeming – to all intents and purposes – to subscribe to the ‘norm’ despite it officially sanctioning their own exclusion (Matthews, 2014). This sort of ‘double-think’ can be pernicious, in the sense that one is happy to toe the line as long as one achieves one’s seat at the table. This gives rise to those who would find themselves able to sanction others in a similar position. This may conceivably be fear-based, thus preventing such persons feeling able to stand for what they perceive to be ‘liberative’ or ‘right’, based on the permanent exclusion and likely humiliating public exposure it would cost them. It is human nature to want to stay “in the club”. Thus some will toe the line at the risk of alienating others or even perpetuating (their own) discrimination.

Yes, I do juggle with people’s perceptions, or what I think their perceptions are... navigating not only other people’s perceptions but also my own. (Interview F, gay male priest).

Adrian Thatcher

The thorniest question for the sexual teaching of the churches from the 1970s through to the new century has been whether heterosexual marriage remains the sole context for full sexual expression, or whether other norms for regulating it are available. While many denominational reports have commended widening the scope of legitimate sexual experience beyond married people to include co-habitators, single people, and lesbian and gay people (usually as long as they are not clergy), the mood of denominational authorities, councils, synods and governing bodies has nearly always veered back to a traditional formulation of the traditional heterosexual teaching. The resilient conservative temper in these matters has given rise to charges that the traditional teaching is now affirmed for a different reason. It is a convenient way of dealing with a related issues, viz., proscribing homosexual sexual experience. The traditional teaching for heterosexual people, ‘no sex outside marriage’, now has a new relevance in a related area. It conveniently proscribes all same-sex activity because it does not and cannot take place within heterosexual marriage.

Adrian Thatcher (2002: 53).

Adrian Thatcher (1948-|), an English liberal theologian, posits the idea that Christian teaching in the field of gender and sexuality is used as a means of proscribing the sexual behaviour of the minority in the same way that the sexual behaviour of the majority is defined. Consequently, Bourdieu’s socially constructed hierarchical models of power here are based indirectly on gender, via sexuality.

Thatcher’s work also draws on Bourdiean social constructs, highlighting the arbitrary nature of a socially dominant group’s ability to revisit theology with new insights whilst allowing the law to remain inflexible. For example, marriage was once a means of ensuring one retained one’s own wife (wives), with sex as essentially a procreative act. Thus one raised one’s own offspring, and one’s heritable wealth was passed ‘down the genetic line’. Despite fresh understandings of sexual activity as a recreational means of bonding and expressing loving affection between partners (as opposed to being purely procreative), non-procreative sex is still sanctioned for homosexuals whilst further liberating the dominant group: heterosexuals. Thus, according to Thatcher, dual-gendered couples may marry and engage in intimate physical, love-making whereas mono/pan-gendered couples may not. Consequently, those new insights only apply to the ‘in-group’ doubly castigating the ‘out-group’ from both inclusion and new progressions in thinking. Thatcher’s work suggests that we revisit our hermeneutics, or the lenses through which we have interpreted biblical narratives around sexual activity, betrothal and marriage, offering challenges to our ‘script’, theological or otherwise.

Thatcher’s work illuminates the ability of the ‘Master’ to change the goal posts to suit the dominant group, whilst leaving the minority or less powerful groups’ posts set in concrete. Notably, there is within such worldviews an unspoken ‘norm’ that *the majority is the ‘Master’*. However, this might be challenged as the ‘lowest common denominator’ method of categorisation.

Thatcher's work is interesting in that it notes the potential for X perspectives to be malleable, and *not* set in stone, which is the antithesis of its typography. Indeed, we might like to think of this as X-lite. However, his premise illuminates the general dominance of the X typology, with the Y typology managing some inroads, but in a piecemeal manner that still only services whichever hegemony is being promulgated; in this case non-procreative sex for heterosexual married couples. Consequently, the 'moving goal posts' of the in-group only serve to confuse and confound any genuine dialogue with the out-group.

'Anglican Mainstream'

Our understanding of orthodox Anglican faith can be summed up in the words of the Jerusalem Statement which emerged from the first GAFCON gathering of 2008:

[...] 11. We are committed to the unity of all those who know and love Christ and to building authentic ecumenical relationships. We recognise the orders and jurisdiction of those Anglicans who uphold orthodox faith and practice, and we encourage them to join us in this declaration.

12. We celebrate the God-given diversity among us which enriches our global fellowship, and we acknowledge freedom in secondary matters. We pledge to work together to seek the mind of Christ on issues that divide us.

13. We reject the authority of those churches and leaders who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed. We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord.

CEEC Basis of Belief.

[...] 3. The Bible as the Revelation of Grace – We receive the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the wholly reliable revelation and record of God's grace, given by the Holy Spirit as the true word of God written. The Bible has been given to lead us to salvation, to be the ultimate rule for Christian faith and conduct, and the supreme authority by which the Church must ever reform itself and judge its traditions.

Anglican Mainstream (website, 2014).

Anglican Mainstream is an online forum committed to the flourishing of the Church of England, through promoting, teaching and maintaining 'the commonly agreed Scriptural truths of the Christian faith'. The website's doctrinal position clearly subscribes to notions of 'respect' towards both 'historic and consensual reading' of scriptural texts, as well as the 'liberation' of all, with words such as 'diversity' and 'unity' featuring as core qualities. However, these core attributes are then presented as only valid within certain doctrinal tenets, namely:

8. We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard (emphases mine) of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family.

Their stated desire for a truly diverse unity, and a gospel of radical inclusion based upon grace as opposed to works (or any other 'qualifying factor') meets with the rejection of anyone disagreeing with their interpretation of the 'orthodox faith' including a denial of their religious orders and theology (13). However, Anglican Mainstream states that they 'acknowledge freedom in secondary matters'. It is still unclear why and when one's gender and gender role, or sexuality /sexual expression become a primary matter within the Christian doctrine of grace and faith.

Consequently, whilst acknowledging the role of grace and primary doctrine in terms of 'orthodox' religious belief, i.e. the (Foucauldian 'Master') doctrinal tenets are mediated via socially constructed, self-defined 'in' and 'out' groups, notably, 'those who do not agree with us' (13), and those who are neither celibate, nor dualistically gendered (8). What is interesting in terms of diversity is that all that is 'a matter of variety' is not actually defined.

The resulting inbuilt insecurity for adherents is that they do not know what is and what isn't debatable or secondary to the core tenets of their faith, but they do know that the result may be permanent exclusion, or a denial of one's holy orders, a primal sanction of complete exclusion until one returns to 'orthodox' ways of thinking.

The Bible has been given to lead us to salvation, to be the ultimate rule for Christian faith and conduct, and the supreme authority by which the Church must ever reform itself and judge its traditions. (2).

The Bible does indeed contain all things 'necessary for salvation' but is this the same as 'the Bible containing all understanding of the world as we now know and understand it?' For example, very few, if any, conservative Christians would describe the world as flat, built upon pillars with the 'deep' below it and a canopy above it (the sky), yet that is the 'scriptural' description of it. The use of power as absolute, able to sanction the views and practices of a minority through force of group closure mechanisms is the most intractable position from which the journey towards possibilities of new insight is most profoundly threatening. For to begin to challenge one brick of this edifice, can bring the entire building crashing down upon one's head if every brick has been mortared in place with absolute certitude.

'Genuine' orthodoxy

'Orthodoxy' has become such a contested term that it now requires qualifiers such as 'genuine', 'radical' and 'conventional' in order for theologians and lay persons alike to grasp the underpinning values driving 'orthodox' theological reflection. In this next section, varying forms of 'orthodoxy' are explored, noting the challenges they pose to genuinely dialectical hermeneutic approaches to theology and doctrine.

Conventional Orthodoxy (such as presented in the theological tradition above), is traditionally seen as being primarily driven by scripture; however, it is rarely acknowledged that this approach builds on a pre-existing understanding of scripture as an inerrant and comprehensive guide for human life that has been in circulation across the millennia. In other words it is a pre-modern use of the Bible that is being promulgated in a modern age. This means that some fundamental, underpinning beliefs and values within the pages of the Bible are not *methodically* subjected to review against new medical, psychological and biological/genetic findings. In other words it exemplifies an X (or historicist) typology. Furthermore, hermeneutics – the contextual perspective from which a piece of scripture is written and/or read - are not *cogently examined for consistency* against any particular tradition (which would amount to a Y (or progressive) typology). Therefore, both fact and cultural or traditional 'norms' from the ancient world continue to influence theological presuppositions over and above proven knowledge. Claims to such historicist forms 'orthodoxy' can also fail to take into account that there are other pertinent scriptural ideas and themes which offer a more progressive and open stance towards human experience and diversity. These passages are precisely those that are not 'reeled out' in the usual 'zero-sum game' discussions around gender and sexuality but which may point to new and illuminating attitudes towards difference amongst disciples. Here are some examples:

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say,

"The LORD will surely exclude me from his people."

And let not any eunuch complain,

"I am only a dry tree."

For this is what the LORD says:

"To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,

who choose what pleases me

and hold fast to my covenant—

I will give them a name within my temple and its walls

a memorial and a name

better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that will not be cut off.
(Isaiah 56:3-5)

Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free! Stand, then, as free people, and do not allow yourselves to become slaves again.

Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, it means that Christ is of no use to you at all. Once more I warn any man who allows himself to be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the whole Law. Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You are outside God's grace. (Galatians 5:1-4).

Consequently, some of the most important questions around acceptance of diversity within human identity and sexuality concern not just questions of orthodoxy, but also address the extent to which we allow for the prevenient grace of God to manifest itself in moves of the Spirit beyond the walls of the Church in movements of liberation and greater understanding in the wider world.

Potential and pitfalls of the primacy of 'orthodoxy'

As we read earlier, potentially the eponym 'genuine orthodoxy' can be challenged, as the notions of hermeneutic standpoint, tradition and scriptural exegesis combine to present challenges to pre-existing doctrine as well as the pastoral theology that is the resultant outworking of such doctrine. However, there is not always clarity about whose 'orthodoxy' is being utilized to underpin theological premises, let alone drive pastoral reflexive practice. For example, 'original' orthodoxy alludes essentially to the Eastern Orthodox Church. In the 'Nicene Creed' we have a succinct rendering of doctrinal 'orthodoxy' to hand. There is little here that can guide or dictate our approach to gender or sexuality, therefore it is incumbent upon priests, theologians and disciples of Christ to continue to wrestle with what our central doctrines mean in terms of faith, belief, theology and practice.

Radical Orthodoxy, on the other hand, burst into the Christian theo-philosophical scene in 1999 after John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward published a collection of essays in which (from a post-modernism perspective) they reject modernity. In essence, science, ethics, politics, economics and all other branches of study are interpreted and informed through a theological ontology, with mainstream secular variations representing heresies (as in deviations from orthodoxy). Nowhere is the sacred/secular divide more clearly articulated. This dualism seems to fly in the face of a post-modern treatment of 'orthodoxy', suggesting instead, a return to 'traditional' credal values, some of which are inherently dualistic owing not to modernism, but to ancient Greek Stoicism. When we consider 'radical' orthodoxy in the light of its inherited philosophical dualism, again, we are left with questions such as if the carnal body merely houses the Spirit of God entrusted to us as Life itself, what does this mean for our carnal body and its gender, if anything? What does it mean for our coupling, whether pro or re-creative? How does it explain the enormous focus within our Christian communities on A.N. Other's body, whether it is black, female, homosexual, deaf or differently-abled making our embodiment of less account than our spiritual development and the outworking of our discipleship in character and service? In St Paul's own words:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4).

Other perspectives

Clearly theology is not the primary source for gender and sexuality studies in the academic and medical worlds. Psychologists and neurologists have begun to work together to understand the structure and dynamic of the brain and psyche, primarily through learning to understand what drives such 'conditions' as transsexualism (the sensation that one has been born into an incorrectly gendered body) showing structural (basic brain build) and hormonal (androgens) clues as to the reality of such gender dysphoria, for example (Hines, Brook and Conway, 2004; Dessens, Slijper and Drop 2005; Hines, 2011).

Geneticists have proven that the incidence of homosexuality amongst identical twins is higher than most other genetic anomalies, and that the risk of a child being homosexual increases with higher numbers of progeny, although this might not explain why firstborn children are homosexually oriented (Kallmann, 1952; Pillard and Bailey, 1998)

Psychiatrists have shown that even the most severe aversion therapies are incapable of permanently and reparatively (as opposed to conscious decision making) altering minority sexual identities to heterosexuality (Beckstead, 2012; Dickinson et al, 2012).

Social scientists have challenged biological and essentialist notions of gender from anthropology to queer theory; from economic and public theory to identity construction and power. The Church has neither the first nor the last word on gender and/or sexuality as constructs, labels, identities, or philosophical ideals.

Having had to struggle with my own, my own questioning of gender inadequacy...and then coming to terms with my sexuality... I resented the stereotype in which I was being typecast... (Interview R)

Final Thought

Equality and diversity relies heavily on an understanding of which mechanisms best pervade institutions integrating rather than rejecting knowledge that may challenge secondary and primary understandings of humanity and the universe she inhabits. Socialising institutions that subscribe to Foucauldian and Bourdiean modes of power moderate and sanction belonging, believing and behaviour, persist in an unquestioning resistance to new insight which is always perceived primarily as a threat to the status quo, as opposed to the liberative and consensual developments of a graceful God, leading humankind into the fullness of a divine love that embraces all (in a Christian context). I have characterised the former position as X (i.e. historical) and the latter as symptomatic of a more progressive (as in Y) approach. (We might also consider these to be masculine (X) feminine (Y) forms of knowing and understanding the world, or linear and organic models, respectively.)

Anything that is seen as 'threat' presupposes a challenge to somebody's autonomy and leadership, thus alerting us to an institution fundamentally presupposing power differentials that not only proscribe but uphold inequalities. Yet William Temple's work and legacy remind us that our faith has the ability to influence and inspire people not just in their own lifetime, but in generations to come including politicians, Prime Ministers and, of course, Bishops and Archbishops. It is crucial that we acknowledge and own – or perhaps more importantly, use learn how to use - the power that we have, for the common good.

For example, the General Synod report *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1994) was not able to reconcile the full expression of homosexuality within monogamous relationships, although it did suggest that clergy exercised permissive pastoral care for laity in civil partnerships irrespective of sexual activity, whereas homosexual clergy in civil partnerships were consigned to celibacy. More recently however, *The Pilling Report* (2013) was able to articulate and present varying gender and sexuality identities in a way that has never before entered the Church's public discourse. Although it did not revolutionise people's understanding of Church traditions or Christian theology around sexual relationships, it has paved the way for 'shared conversations' to begin taking place around sexuality between those who have varying perspectives, in a more open fashion.

The 'common good' tends to intimate a crude 'one size fits all' approach that has neither been deconstructed nor subjected to pastoral reflexive cycles in anything other than an ad hoc manner. Surely now is the time to revisit our understanding of our personhood, gender and/or sexuality offering theologians and reflective practitioners a vehicle with which to incorporate, examine and re-examine core texts, alongside key advances in medical, psycho-social and genetic understanding of the diversity inherent within the reproduction of humankind. It is my belief that emotions run particularly high around gender and sexuality because they hit upon two profound and paradoxical truths that we are loathe to acknowledge. First, that power is used overtly and covertly through a faith which calls us to *kenosis*, or the outpouring of our 'power' for the sake of others. Second, gender and sexuality are at the very core of what it is to be human. All are agreed that 'it is not good that [humankind] should be alone'. As we live out that Trinitarian truth, it is isolating and diminishing that we cannot exercise or develop our divinity (*imageo dei*) if we are refused the depth of relationship and love emulated within the Trinity, and expected – indeed, celebrated - by monogamous, heterosexual, married couples.

Temple, when talking about politics, baldly suggested that ultimately all power struggles were between the 'the Haves and the Have-nots' (Temple, 1942: 66). Nowhere is this more personally illustrated than between those who may fall in love, engaging in a consensual, monogamous, committed sexual relationship, and those who may not. It is my hope that a more inclusive and healthy debate on sexuality could emerge from both my research and the current conversations and debates around sexuality and gender ensuring that (any) constructs of power are cogently exposed using a variety of hermeneutic standpoints during exegesis. I see this as a more nuanced and dialectical debate between the X and Y positions, between tradition and innovation, between stability and change, between institutional wisdom and personal authenticity, between the Word and the Spirit. The current Anglican initiative '[Shared Conversations](#)' may also enable broader understandings, and wider inclusion, as the profligate hospitality of the gospel welcomes the outcast to the very heart of what it means to be a person of faith, through salvific grace.

Reflections

In light of the arguments above, consider the following questions:

Does your gender afford you any privileges and / or expectations that could be experienced or explained as powerfulness or powerlessness? What are they? How did you know?

Does genuine orthodoxy rely entirely upon God's grace in Christ Jesus our Lord for the salvation of all? What does this mean for a person who is intersex or non-heterosexual?

Are there rules for one group of people that do not apply to another? Which ones? Why?

Do any of these arguments hinder our work towards mission in today's world?

Do any of the arguments illuminate the problems the Church of England is having trying to agree "a party line" on sexuality?

Having read through these schools of thought and different perspectives, has your opinion changed at all? Why?

Will this change anything that you do/way that you live/understand your faith/theology? What? What difference will that make?

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