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View From Down Under: Review of Living Out website and pastoral care of those who experience same-sex attraction

On the 10 January, 49BC Julius Caesar led a legion of armed soldiers across the Rubicon River. The Rubicon marked the border between Cisalpine Gaul and Italy proper, which was controlled by Rome.

According to Seutonius, Caesar was undecided about whether to cross, knowing that to do so would necessarily lead to armed conflict with Rome: there could be no turning back. His decision to do so was stirred by a supernatural apparition. Having crossed the Rubicon, Caesar uttered the famous line *ālea iacta est* ("the die is cast").

A process has been set in place to ensure that same-gender unions will be deemed ‘rightly ordered sexual relationships’ and therefore chaste. That done, there will be no basis for objection to blessings, ordinations and – in due course – marriage.

From the 9-15 May 2014 our General Synod met at Waitangi, firstly in Tikanga, then as a whole. After three days of caucusing and debates in and out of committee, Motion 30 was passed unanimously (though possibly with abstentions). Those who were there have spoken of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit bringing a dignity and unity to the General Synod. Some have spoken of the four resolutions in Motion 30 as expressions of the Church’s ‘prophetic’ voice. However one regards such claims, the Rubicon has been crossed, the die is cast. A process has been set in place to ensure that same-gender unions will be deemed ‘rightly ordered sexual relationships’ and therefore chaste. That done, there will be no basis for objection to blessings, ordinations and – in due course – marriage. If anyone is in any doubt about this, they should reconsider the penultimate clause of the motion:

We recognise that this (i.e. the recognition in public worship of same-gender civil unions and state marriages) may cause even further distress (i.e. to the LGBT community). Noting the commitment of the Church demonstrated

in clauses 1 to 4 above, we ask the LGBT community to recognise that any process of change within our Church takes time.

The journey might be slow, but the destination is fixed.

It has indeed been a very long journey; so long that the beginning is now less certain than the end. Did it begin at the 1988 Lambeth Conference, the first occasion on which a motion on human sexuality was considered by that august gathering? Or perhaps at our own 1996 General Synod, which set up a Commission on Human Sexuality which reported to the 1998 Synod and recommended the first of what now seem to have been endless rounds of conversations/hui at parish, diocesan and provincial levels? Regardless, what began as a matter of concern has evolved into an indecent obsession. GS 2014 spent the best part of three of its four working days on this issue. What should have been the centrepiece of the Synod, a motion instituting a decade of mission, was – and will continue to be – completely overshadowed. Moreover, the course this Synod has set ensures that the subject of same-gender unions will consume the Church for the next two, four and possibly six years! This is a hopeless, depressing situation.

How different things might have been if this Province had, instead of diverging off on its own wayward paths, adopted Lambeth Resolution 1.10 and proceeded in accordance with it. While the Anglican Communion worldwide is not bound by Lambeth resolutions, Resolution 1.10 is the nearest we have to an imperium on the subject of human sexuality. It was supported by nearly 90% of the bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. It presented a way forward which was both biblically faithful and pastorally sensitive. How much grief, waste and division it would have spared us if only we had accepted it as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, rather than rejecting it and expecting the same Spirit to lead and unite us in some ‘new truth’.

The heart of Lambeth 1.10 is found in clauses two to five:

2. *in view of the teaching of Scripture, [Lambeth] upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;*
3. *recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;*
4. *while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;*
5. *cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;*

What the Church in this Province has done is to misappropriate the Resolution, using the commitment to “listen to the experience of homosexual persons” as a lever for overturning clauses two and five. This was never what Lambeth intended. Its call was to uphold the teaching of the Bible on human sexuality, trusting God’s revelation in creation and the scriptures, while at the same time seeking to reform its attitudes towards, and pastoral care of, those who experience themselves as homosexual. In doing so, Lambeth 1998 issued the Church with a huge pastoral challenge, but one which – if taken up – would have brought considerable healing to the sexually broken.

Imagine if we had spent the last 16 years listening to the testimony of gay folk who had experienced

the transforming power of God, either to release them from same-gender sexual attraction or to empower them to remain celibate in a sex-mad world. How different the situation we would be in today.

It’s not too late for us to do so. But first this Province needs to acknowledge, as Motion 30 does not, that this section of the so-called ‘LGBT community’ actually exists; that there are many who desperately want the church to support and help them, not to abandon them to sinful behaviour. To date, their voice has been silenced. Those who presented, at great personal cost, to the Ma Whea? Commission, didn’t rate a mention in its report.

More than mere acknowledgement of their existence is required though if they are to be treated justly. Their desire for sexual wholeness needs to be validated, not discounted. The same applies to sexually broken heterosexuals. Of course the LGBT community is most unhappy with the notion that same-gender attraction may be overcome, whether by self-control or by change. Citing the fact that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its register of mental disorders in 1973, they argue that it is abusive to offer ministries of healing or celibacy-support to those who identify as homosexual. The testimony of those who have benefited from such ministries must be silenced or discredited as it is an embarrassing contradiction.

Unfortunately there will always be those who can testify to failed or even abusive ministries, and whose testimony is valid. This is an area where godly wisdom and caution need to be exercised, as in every area of Christian counselling and healing ministry. However it is not a reason to invalidate all such ministries. There are a number of very reputable persons and organisations who offer responsible Christian ministry to the sexually broken, hetero- as well as homo-, bi- and transsexual. And it is not always the ministry that is at fault; as in all areas of counselling, success depends as much on the client as the provider.

I attended all four of the Hermeneutics Hui. Only those homosexual/lesbian persons whose experiences accorded with the revisionist agenda

were listened to. None of the official reading lists I have seen includes a single book from the list below. This Province has done nothing to explore, let alone promote, ministries to the sexually broken. Some parishes and clergy have, and some have experienced censure for doing so.

I commend the following websites/ministries and books to those who believe that God's desire is for his transforming love and power to be experienced

by the sexually broken, and would like to explore further.

As anyone seeking help is likely to check out your website first, particularly to see whether your church is 'safe', something specific on your website may be helpful. For example <http://westhamang.org.nz/upload/doc/261.pdf>

May this be the way forward, at least for the Latimer Fellowship.

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- <http://www.livingout.org/>
The website of Living Out, founded by Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Ebbe's, Oxford. "This a group of Christians who experience same-sex attraction, and we want to share our stories, answer your questions, and recommend resources about Christianity and same-sex attraction."
 - <http://www.redeemedlives.org/aboutus.htm>
The website of Redeemed Lives, founded by Mario Bergner, an Anglican Priest canonically resident in the Diocese of Quincy IL, USA. I first came across Mario's work through the Jubilee Centre, Oxford.
 - <http://ministriesofpastoralcare.com/>
Ministries of Pastoral Care is now well established in New Zealand. My two pastoral staff have attended two training conferences with great benefit, and minister regularly to sexually broken folk, mostly from outside the church. One Bryden Black introduced me to MPC!
 - <http://www.zacchaeus.ca/index.html>
The website of the Zachaeus Fellowship, a Canadian, Anglican based group. I heard one of them speak at an Exodus Conference in Auckland in 2011, and was impressed. Unfortunately the website hasn't been updated for some time.
 - Bergner, Mario. *Setting Love in Order: Hope and healing For the Homosexual* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.
 - Chambers, Alan. *God's Grace and the Homosexual Next Door: Reaching the Heart of the Gay Men and Women in your World* Eugene: Harvest House, 2006.
 - Comiskey, Andrew. *Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness* (My copy has the Front Matter cut out, but go to <http://www.bookdepository.com/Strength-Weakness-Andrew-Comiskey/9781459652644>)
 - Couvela, Stephanie. *Celebrating Celibacy: Sexuality, Intimacy and Wholeness for the Single Adult* Cambridge: Grove Books (P109), 2007.
 - Davies, Bob (Ed.) *Portraits of Freedom: 14 People Who Came Out of Homosexuality* Downers Grove: IVP, 2001.
 - Keane, Christopher. *What Some of You Were: Stories about Christians and Homosexuality* Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2001.
 - Tylee, Alex. *Walking With Gay Friends: A Journey of Informed Compassion* Nottingham: IVP, 2007.
 - Whitehead, Briar. *Craving For Love: Relationship Addiction, Homosexuality and the God Who Heals* Tunbridge Wells, Monarch, 1993.