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**The Questing Spirit:
Listening to the Silent Voice of Gay Clergy
in the Church of Scotland**

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ABSTRACT

This research arises from personal experience. The thesis is divided into two parts in order to reflect and symbolize the dichotomy which the subject of homosexuality, in general, and gay clergy, in particular, creates within the Church of Scotland. This thesis seeks to explore this dichotomy

The Prologue provides an autobiographical backcloth to the research, it acknowledges my own personal experience and seeks to place the debate, with regards to the inclusion of gay clergy in the Church, in context.

Chapter One outlines the research methodology and, in particular justifies the use of discourse analysis as an appropriate research tool to investigate the subtext of the Church of Scotland's 1983 Report of Study Group on Sexuality.

Chapter Two focuses on the 1983 Report of Study Group on Sexuality. Although there have been later reports which have dealt with various aspects of sexuality this remains the Church's official stance on the particular subject of homosexuality.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology for the second part of my research where I interview five members of the clergy who have self-identified as being homosexual. It will justify, as an appropriate research tool, the use of case studies and semi-structured interviews as a means of uncovering information that would be impossible to gain otherwise.

Chapter Four contains a summary of the interviews that I have conducted allowing the voices of those who are hidden in the Church to be heard.

Chapter Five focuses on the five interviews and identifies common themes which have emerged from the semi-structured interviews and offers theological reflection and explores the wider implications which such reflection implies.

The conclusion seeks to offer a way forward in the present climate which will allow gay clergy to play a full part in the life of the Church, free from the current constraints that being open about their sexuality forbids.

Introduction: In the beginning...

Introduction

For some people, the words 'gay' and 'homosexual' still evoke the same reaction that the term 'cancer' once engendered – the unmentionable. But many years have passed since homosexuality was regarded as an illness or pathology. Nonetheless it is still difficult to write about the subject positively without appearing political.¹

... don't feel guilty. Don't hate yourself. And don't hate your parents. When you tell them about your homosexuality, give them time to understand, the same way you've had to give *yourself* time to understand. As you know, it's not easy to understand. And above all, be true to yourself, your good and decent self, and understand that there's no inherent conflict between homosexuality and decency. Don't let anyone, straight or gay, tell you any different.²

It is difficult to explain to someone who has not experienced it themselves, but I have known I was gay since early childhood. There was no conscious choice made, no blinding light where all was made clear or specific situation that crystallized what I already knew to be true. The initial longing I had for male company was not sexual as I was too young to realise what that meant. It is something, however, that is an inherent part of me and makes me the person I am. The added complication to my life is that I am a Church of Scotland minister and, as such, cannot be open as to my sexual orientation and its natural outworking. It is from such a perspective that this research had its genesis.

I believe, therefore, that it is important to start with my story because it is out of this that this research has developed. Therefore, the Prologue provides an autographical backcloth to the research which follows. I

¹ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., p.8.

² Bawer, B., (1994) *A Place at the Table*, New York: Touchstone, p.21.

have taken the opportunity to acknowledge and highlight my own personal experience as it relates to the call for the acceptance of openly gay clergy within the Church.

After the Prologue, the thesis is divided into two distinct parts to both reflect and symbolise the dichotomy which the subject of homosexuality and the inclusion of openly gay sexually active members and clergy, in leadership roles, engenders within the Church of Scotland. By structuring the thesis in this way I am seeking to explore the dichotomy between the Church's official teaching and the experience of those ministers who are forced to hide their sexuality in order to serve.

Part One, entitled 'The Public Voice of the Church', comprises two chapters (Chapters One and Two). Chapter One outlines the research methodology which I have employed and justifies the use of discourse analysis as an appropriate research tool with which to investigate and interrogate the Church of Scotland's 1983 Report of Study Group on Sexuality. The use of discourse analysis enables me to move from a surface reading of the text to identify the subtext and highlight any underlying themes.

Chapter Two will directly focus on the text of the 1983 Report of Study Group on Sexuality. I have chosen to use this text for, although there have been a number of later reports which have dealt with a variety of issues relating to sexuality, for example, Civil Partnerships, abortion and

marriage, the 1983 Report remains the Church's official position with regards to the subject of homosexuality.

Part Two, entitled 'The Private Voice of the Church', comprises of three chapters (Chapters Three to Five). Chapter Three outlines and justifies the research methodology I have chosen to investigate the experiences of those gay clergy who find themselves on the silent margin of the Church. I have chosen to interview five members of the clergy all who have self-identified as being homosexual. All have served in the parish setting at some point in their ministerial careers but now find themselves in a variety of situations. In this chapter I will justify the use of case studies and semi-structured interviews as an appropriate research tool in order to uncover information from the interviewees that would have been impossible to gain otherwise.

Chapter Four contains a summary of the interviews that have been conducted so allowing the voices of those who are silenced in the Church to be heard. I have not provided any transcripts within this chapter as it would have been impossible to maintain the interviewees' anonymity which was guaranteed as a condition of them taking part. This highlights the precarious position in which gay clergy find themselves, within the Church, and the difficulty they have in making their voices heard.

Chapter Five focuses on the interviews themselves, identifying and highlighting common themes which emerged from them. I have supplemented information from the interview summaries with that of the transcripts in order to bring greater clarity to some of the issues that were raised in discussion. Following analysis of the various themes I have offered a reflection and explored the wider implications that such reflection implies.

Finally, the conclusion seeks to offer a way forward for the Church in the present climate which will permit openly gay clergy to play a full part in the life of the Church.

Key Definitions

There are a number of key terms which I use throughout this thesis and I believe it would be helpful to outline them here. They are as follows:-

Homosexual – I have used the word homosexual to mean someone who is attracted to the same sex both emotionally and sexually. I have used the term to apply to both women and men.

Gay – as above. I use both terms interchangeably.

Clergy – refers to those in the Church of Scotland who have been ordained.

Church – refers to the Church of Scotland.

church – refers to the wider church, for example, the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church etc..

Section 28 – refers to section of Section 28 (Clause 2A) of the Local Government Act 1986 that prohibited the promotion of homosexuality.

1983 Report or Report– refers to the 1983 Report to the General Assembly entitled *Report of Study Group on Sexuality*. This report is the basis of the Church's teaching on homosexuality and I will refer to it as the 1983 Report.

Traditionalists – refers to those who hold to a more traditional view of scripture. Previously they have been termed 'evangelicals'.

Revisionists – refers to those who hold to a less traditional view of scripture. Previously they have been termed 'liberals'.

The Prologue: Finding my voice...

Tentative Steps

No one of us ought to issue vetoes to the other, nor should we bandy words of abuse. We ought, on the contrary, delicately and profoundly to respect one another's mental freedom: then only shall we have the spirit of inner tolerance without which all our outer tolerance is soulless, and which is empiricism's glory; then only shall we live and let live, in speculative as well as practical things.³

The foundation of my research has arisen out of personal experience. It began with the experience of gradually coming to terms with my own sexuality and then, subsequently, working as a minister within the Church of Scotland. In essence it began with a narrative, my own story.

We are a generation that has witnessed an explosion in the use and abuse of personal stories in recent years. Such stories have become the pathways we tread in order to understand our culture, they form the basis of each individual's identity, they help us to make sense of the past and they can become interpreted as narrative truths.⁴ Bookstores are full of people's accounts of growing up in hardship and poverty, surviving the horrors of abuse, escaping from oppressive regimes. Popular television programmes, such as those presented by Oprah, Jerry Springer, Montel Williams, Ricky Lake and Jeremy Kyle provide a platform for people to tell their tales of survival, against all the odds, in a world which they feel has counted them as worthless. The use of stories, therefore, to explore and interpret what we are and to find our place in the world has become a powerful force within our society.

³ James, W., (1956) *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, New York: Dover, p.30.

⁴ Plummer, K., (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories*, London: Routledge.

The story of my 'coming out'; to myself, my family and to the Church (a Church that I loved, and was trying to discover my place within) was not an easy process. At that time I had no theological or epistemological language with which to explain what I was experiencing and, even if such language had been available to me, there would have been little point in using it as the Church has never been open to hearing such personal stories from within its ranks either from members or clergy. An example just such a lack of openness and transparency, with regards to the discussion of homosexuality from within its ranks, was highlighted during a 1994 General Assembly debate on the subject of human sexuality. Faced with two reports, one from the Panel of Doctrine and the other from the Board of Social Responsibility, each arriving at different conclusions the Assembly agreed to accept each report but vote on neither. The consequence of this action was that the mind of the Assembly was not tested which meant, in reality, no decision on either working party's conclusions was taken. Therefore the Assembly, in agreeing to conduct the debate in this way, sought a tacit sense of unity over potential division rather than debating the issue openly, regardless of the divisions in the Church that such an exchange of views might accentuate. Summarising what happened that day Finlay MacDonald writes,

Undeniably, many would have preferred a clearer signal so that the Church could express an unequivocal view. Equally, there were many who were grateful for the breathing space to debate the issues and the implicit recognition that the principle of liberty of opinion was being brought into play in the area of sexual ethics.⁵

⁵ MacDonald, F. A. J., (2004) *Confidence in a Changing Church*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, p.157.

The way that the debate was handled, no matter whether the Assembly felt they were being either pastoral or that they needed to avoid a damaging split, had the effect of covering the subject of human sexuality and the reality of having sexually active gay people within its ranks in a shroud of uneasy silence. Subsequently, when the Church has decided to speak out on the subject it has often responded either by reiterating its 'official' position, which was that reiterated by the 1983 General Assembly, or, if the Moderator has been asked to offer an opinion, it has been made clear to the media that no matter the opinion offered, it was a personal one and so could not be taken as being sanctioned by the Church.

Stories are only useful mediums, therefore, when they are heard and although public figures, in recent years, within the political, theatrical and entertainment worlds⁶ have publicly proclaimed their 'coming out stories', those who work as ministers within the Church have kept a careful and uneasy silence breaking it only by contributing anonymously to Ministers' Forum,⁷ or as closeted ministers in debates. It is unprecedented for any to break their silence and speak as openly gay ministers. The reason for this is that gay ministers live in fear of losing their jobs, as well as the respect of their congregations and peers, and so have been forced, by legislation and a dominant theological view, to be silent. So they live in fear of being discovered and 'outed' finding themselves having to live a dualistic existence where their sexuality is hidden, revealing it only to a

⁶ I am thinking of Peter Mandelson, Chris Smith, Simon Hughes, Sir Ian McKellan, Will Young, Stephen Gately, Mark Feehily to name a few.

⁷ Ministers' Forum is an in-house magazine produced for Church of Scotland ministers.

trusted few.⁸ Such silencing has made gay ministers habitual deceivers because they have been forced to live under the guise of heterosexuality. This situation, surely, cannot be regarded as a healthy? Over 30 years ago the Dutch psychiatrist W. G. Sengers argued, in terms now largely accepted within the psychiatric community, that gay and lesbian people could only be truly free once they accepted who they were and stopped allowing others prejudices from determining how they should feel about themselves. He further argued that gay people who are forced to live a 'double life' to survive in a homophobic culture experienced feelings of shame and lived their lives constantly in fear of 'being found out'. He stated that this meant that 'what is good must be called bad, what is positive must become negative. It amounts to adapting... feelings to what others say about them.'⁹

It is my hope that this study, drawing on a range of disciplines, as well as on the insights and experiences of gay clergy, will provide a valuable contribution to the wider ongoing process of dialogue that needs to take place in order to turn private, personal stories into ones that can be told publicly and loudly with no fear of reprisals. For many it is the first opportunity that they have had to articulate their experience of how the Church has treated them and how they have survived in ministry to a wider audience. Is the Church ready for or willing to hear the stories of gay ministers within its midst? Time will surely tell and these 'vignettes

⁸ Plummer, K., (2003) 'Intimate Citizenship and the Culture of Sexual Story Telling', in Weeks, J., Holland, J., and Waites, M., (eds.) *Sexualities and Society: A Reader* Cambridge: Polity Press, p.34.

⁹ Sengers, W. G., (1969) *Gewoon hetzelfde?*, Bussum, p.23 (as translated by H. J. M. Nouwen for a book forward entitled *The Self-Availability of the Homosexual*.)

of human struggle are offered as a contribution to the current theological debate¹⁰ that is raging within the Church of Scotland. However, the only way for this process of dialogue to truly start is for safe spaces to be created within the wider Church for such stories to be told, listened to and heard.

¹⁰ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., p.1.

Telling Stories...

My story begins in the Church.¹¹ I was born and brought up in it. Indeed, my life revolved around it in so many ways. As a teenager I was a member of the Church, was in the Youth Fellowship, Sunday School, Boys' Brigade, Badminton Club and Drama Group. My social network revolved around my home congregation. And yet I knew, that no matter how hard I tried, there was something different about me, which was that I didn't 'fit in'. Furthermore, I recognised that if people found my secret out then I would be, like Adam and Eve, banished from the proverbial Garden of Eden. The inner turmoil I was experiencing at the time was heartbreaking because I had been baptised and had chosen to join the Church, reaffirming the baptismal vows taken on my behalf by my parents when I was a baby. I felt that, no matter the struggle I was having accepting my sexuality, this would make me acceptable to God. But all I knew was that nothing had changed, I was still gay and continued to feel like an outsider. Deep within my psyche I knew that I wasn't a bad person and on Sunday's was continually being told through children's addresses and sermons that Jesus loved me, that God saw all he had made, and although God did not say it was perfect, God did say that 'it was very good'.¹² But, no matter how often I heard these words, I knew that they didn't refer to me because I was outside of that all-encompassing love, that God's love was not for the likes of me, that God's love was for good Christian people who lived their lives according to the Commandments. Even though I had not broken any of the Ten

¹¹ Throughout this thesis I will be using the term 'Church' to refer to the Church of Scotland and 'church' to refer to other churches.

¹² Genesis 1:31

Commandments, *per se*, I still felt that I did not belong and was outside of God's love.

In his book *A Place at the Table*¹³ Bruce Bawer relates a story of coming out. It concerns a teenager standing staring at the contents of a magazine rack in a book store. He waits until nobody is looking before picking up and devouring, with his eyes, a gay magazine. When I read that I knew that it was me he was speaking about. I was that boy, at 18 years of age, 5000 miles away in Edinburgh. I remember with crystal clear clarity waiting, outside an Edinburgh newsagents early one Saturday morning, until the coast was clear. I had gone there because no one would know or recognise me and in the hope that it would be very quiet. Naively, in my mind, it strangely helped that it was owned by an Asian man because I thought that the chances were he wasn't Christian and so wouldn't automatically condemn me. When nobody else was about, and I thought the shop was empty, I left the safety of the car and made my faltering way inside to buy a copy of *Gay Times*, the only gay magazine that I knew existed at the time. As I picked it up off the top shelf, my face burned with embarrassment because I was certain in the knowledge that what I was touching was forbidden fruit. Trying desperately to stop my hands from shaking and attempting to appear as nonchalant as possible, all the time looking over my shoulder in case someone came into the shop, I almost threw the money at the man and

¹³ Bawer, B., (1994) *A Place at the Table*, *Ibid.*, p1-2.

left the shop as quickly as I could. Inside those pages I saw people who were just like me and realised, for the first time, I was not alone.

As a few years passed and I moved into ministry within the Church of Scotland, I knew that I was still an outcast. I had been asked during one interview at Selection School what my girlfriend thought about me applying to be accepted as a Candidate. With my heart in my mouth I said that I didn't have a girlfriend at the moment, that I was between relationships. I knew I wasn't lying because I didn't have a girlfriend. However, the relationship that I was wanting more than anything else was with a man and not a woman. No matter how honest I was being with them, I dare not tell them that and hoped that they couldn't guess what I was thinking from either my eyes or body language. I dreaded the interview with the psychologist, the next day, as I was sure I would be finally unmasked.

I knew, however, that if I got through, which I did, then I would just have to become married to the Church. The implications of this, to me, meant keeping my innermost thoughts and secret longings safe and undisclosed. I would also endeavour to refrain from acting on them as well. Therefore, in the eyes of the Church an un-confessed deviant and sinner, I promised that I would try and live my life with out the physical out-working of my sexuality – surely, I thought, being a minister would be compensation enough. The reason for this was simple, I knew that if I were to be found out and my true self revealed then I would get no more

chances, that the job that I loved and had felt called to do from a very young age, would be taken from me and I would be sacked from ministry within the Church of Scotland. At this time I also considered the possibility of becoming a member of another church but felt that my roots were within the Church of Scotland and it was in this community that I felt most comfortable expressing my Christian Faith.

Therefore, in order to survive in the Church, as Paul Monette has written,

... all I had to do was to keep my secret – which wasn't just being gay now but the crimes of a practicing deviant... I couldn't have been more disembodied as I made the pledge to live my life without the physical.¹⁴

Or, in other words, 'all I would have to do was not exist below the waist, and the future was mine.'¹⁵ But, as I wrestled to make sense of this nonsensical situation, the questions I was beginning to ask myself were: What kind of loving God condemns you to live only half a life? What kind of benevolent God throws something he has created out of love on the scrapheap? The God that I was coming to know would not have done that. If God did, then he was not the caring parent that I thought was waiting patiently for his son to return, God wasn't the God that I knew and loved.

Over the past generation there has been a revolution in society's understanding and willingness to discuss sexuality, in general, and homosexuality, in particular. From once being out on the margins of

¹⁴ Monette, P., (1992) *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*, London: Abacus, p.208

¹⁵ Monette, P., (1992) *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*, *Ibid.*.

historical and social scientific studies, sexuality has been brought into the centre of our understanding of what it means to build and to be part of a civilised society. Today contemporary identities, our stories, are a rich mixture of fragments from personal and social experience alongside family and corporate history. They are as heterogeneous and varied as the number of people on the planet; they are often political in the broadest sense, making links which defy the neat categorisations of social policy and social science, and challenging settled power relations.¹⁶ Everyday, they are knitted together into stories which give our lives meaning, define who we are, help to place us within society and give us a sense of belonging.

In recent years, however, our identities have become the focus of society's attention because as well as highlighting what we have in common they equally highlight what separates us and makes us different. This has never been accentuated more starkly than in the area of sexual identities. For, in the past, concepts of what engenders a socially acceptable identity have been intricately bound with notions of appropriately gendered or sexual behaviour,¹⁷ and no more so than in the Church setting. To date raising issues of sexuality within a Church setting has been viewed as being both disruptive and interpreted as a deliberate act by a vocal minority within society to undermine the faith, by those who follow a more traditional understanding of the Bible. Gay

¹⁶ Rutherford, J., (ed.) (1990) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

¹⁷ Parker, A., Russo, M., Sommer, D. and Yaeger, P., (eds.), (1992) *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, London and New York: Routledge.

voices being raised from the margins, where many believe they belong, disturb and upset the Church's notion of heterosexual normality. As such they highlight how much further the Church still has to travel before it can call itself,

... a place and process of communion, open to and inviting all people without discrimination. It is a place of hospitality and a place of welcome, in the manner that Abraham and Sarah received God's messengers in the Old Testament (Gen. 18). It is an earthly reflection of a divine unity that is at the same time worshipped as Trinity. It is a community of people with different yet complimentary gifts. It is a vision of wholeness as well as of healing, of caring and sharing at once.¹⁸

We all accept and proclaim that this is what the church is and stands for. It is the basis of our unity as Christians. Then why is it that, all too often, certain people among us and around us (usually those we consider as being unfamiliar or as strangers, as different....) are marginalized and even excluded? Wherever this happens, even by passive, omission, the church is not being what it is called to become. The church is denying its own reality. In the church, we are called to act differently. As St. Paul says, the parts of the body which *seem* to be weaker (we should notice that he does not say "*actually are weaker*") are indispensable (1 Cor.12:22).¹⁹

It would appear, from the World Council of Churches' document *A Church of All and for All*,²⁰ that responding to and welcoming people who are considered to be on the margins of society is the 'church's defining characteristic.'²¹ The reason for the Church's reticence to discuss and embrace gay sexuality is that it breaches boundaries, disrupts order and calls into question the reason why the current order is strangely dominant. Therefore, by silencing the voice of alternative sexualities within its midst, the Church has managed to disempower both gay

¹⁸ World Council of Churches, (2003) *A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement*, Document Number PLEN 1.1, Geneva: Switzerland, p.16.

¹⁹ World Council of Churches, (2003) *A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement*, *Ibid.*

²⁰ World Council of Churches, (2003) *A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement*, *Ibid.*

²¹ World Council of Churches, (2003) *A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement*, *Ibid.*

members and clergy from being able to effect change and so gain acceptance from those in the heterosexual majority.²²

This suggests that to raise the issue of sexual identities, of which our own individual stories are so intricately bound up, is to cause trouble on both a personal and social level. Certainly, it is a debate which is fraught with tensions, but it is important to investigate those tensions in order that we can rethink and reassess the nature of our Gospel values and our place within both society and the Church in line with our sexuality.

Personally, the issue of my own sexual identity and how it related to my personal story was raised when both society and the Church began to debate the wisdom of repealing Section 28 (Clause 2A).²³ This debate had the effect of re-igniting long dormant feelings, related to my sexuality which I have highlighted above, and I knew that I had to take a stand, for it seemed that the most vocal Christian position was a negative condemnation of homosexuality. This time, I just could not sit back and

²² Weeks, J., (1991) *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity*, London: Rivers Oram Press.

²³ The text below is the section of Section 28 (Clause 2A) of the Local Government Act 1986 that prohibited the promotion of homosexuality:

28 - (1) The following section shall be inserted after section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition of political publicity)-

2A - (1) A Local Authority shall not:

- (a) Intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality.
- (b) Promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.
- (2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.
- (3) In any proceedings in connection with the application of this section a court shall draw such inferences as to the intention of the local authority as may be reasonably be drawn from the evidence before it.

Throughout the thesis I will use the term 'Section 28' to refer to this act rather than using its full title.

watch from a distance. I could not let a vocal group of people hijack the Jesus that I had come to know by re-branding him, seemingly, in their own image. As Martin Niemoeller stated,

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak out for me.²⁴

In many ways, the debate that raged around the repeal of Section 28 was my own personal *kairos* moment. However, within the Church, it seemed that few other voices²⁵ were being raised against, what I saw as, a bigoted viewpoint. An issue that I thought should bring people out onto the metaphorical streets was not generating any active resistance. Nothing seemed to be happening. Where was the voice of resistance and defiance? Where was the voice of reason? Where was the voice of reconciliation? Where was the voice of forgiveness and acceptance? I was not hearing it from within the Church and I began to wonder if my feelings were shared by others. After all, what were other gay ministers doing with their anger and frustration? There appeared to be no articulation of Christian inclusivity being raised above the cacophony of condemnation that seemed to come from the Kirk's official

²⁴ Littell, F. H., *First They Came For The Jews*, Christian Ethics Today: Journal of Christian Ethics, Christmas 2005 Online Edition.

²⁵ The voices which were being raised against the Church's stance on homosexuality included Prof. George Newlands, Prof. Duncan Forrester, Rev. Kathy Galloway, Mrs. Elizabeth Templeton, Rev. Norman Shanks. It is interesting to note, however, that the voice of an openly gay minister or gay member was never knowingly raised in any of the debates or correspondence in newspaper articles.

spokespersons.²⁶ Amongst the voices of condemnation was the Rt. Rev. Iain Torrance who said,

I take the view that I am untroubled by the ordination of a person of self-disclosed homosexual orientation who lives a chaste and disciplined life. There is a difference between an open homosexual in the sense of someone who is graciously allowed by society and the church to say: 'This is how I am. I have different awareness and gifts, and I put them at the service of God and the Church', and someone who is open in the sense of engaging in practice.²⁷

Ann Allen, former Convenor of the Board of Social Responsibility, adds, 'God clearly created sexual relationships between men and women. He didn't make another Adam.'²⁸

Viewing this situation with a hermeneutics of suspicion I began to wonder why a certain theological standpoint and view of scripture were being given credence as the official position of the Church when there were other well founded approaches to sexuality being articulated by Christians in other contexts.²⁹ The official voice of the Church appeared to be in conflict with my experience within my own congregation and parish. For example, within the congregation I had five gay men, a lesbian couple whose baby I had baptised with no one viewing the ceremony when they both stood up to take the vows as being strange, and a post-op transsexual woman, who still stayed with her wife, and who both played an active part in congregational life. In addition to this I conducted the Annual World AIDS Day service for the local Council and the youth group organised a ceilidh the evening before to raise funds for

²⁶ For example, at this time, it was acknowledged to be Mrs. Ann Allen, Convenor of the Board of Social Responsibility.

²⁷ Quoted in *Life and Work*, (October 2003), p.9.

²⁸ Quoted in *Life and Work*, (October 2003), *Ibid.*.

²⁹ Here I am referring to the work of James Nelson, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Nancy Wilson, Elizabeth Stuart and Adrian Thatcher.

the local needle exchange. With the Kirk Sessions blessing I also had trained as an HIV/AIDS counsellor with the local NHS Trust. There appeared to be no discrimination or awkwardness with any members of the congregation or parish. Rather, I found only acceptance of them by the congregation as people. The issue of each person's sexuality was, quite simply, not on the agenda. As a consequence of this personal experience, I also wondered what was happening to the other voices that had been forced into silence. Were they being heard elsewhere? How were they coping? What mechanisms did they have in place to deal with this dichotomy between the public voice of the Church and their private experience?

In searching for an answer to such questions, which have arisen from my own personal story, I am not seeking to wound the Church. Rather, I am simply seeking to find some answers in the hope that I will find a place at the table which has been spread so that all may be welcome. Therefore this research seeks to examine the various stories that have been told through Church reports, media interviews and the plethora of writing that has filled many column inches on the subject of homosexuality in the Church. It seeks to listen to the stories of those who have felt compelled to keep silent in order to fulfil their calling as ministers of the Gospel. It seeks to tell a new story where all in the Church, regardless of their sexuality, can live out their faith without fear of censure, thereby offering their gifts and experience to the wider Church.

However, with every new story I am acutely aware that there is a rival old one. One that is dominant and often entrenched in a mixture of legalism, myth and tradition. Recently, for example, the stories of new families born out of the Civil Partnership legislation that came into force in Scotland in 2005 have been countered by stories of 'family values', 'back to basics' and the 'sanctity of marriage'.³⁰ Stories of blessings for 'non-traditional' couples have been countered with stories of what is 'natural' and 'ordained by God'.³¹ Stories of homosexual acceptance within society at large have been countered by stories of how important it is to remain true to the 'traditional standards of sexuality'.³² Such stories have,

... spawned confused thinking, such as the erroneous association of homosexuality with paedophilia...playing into homosexual stereotypes and into homophobia that lurks just under the surface of "British" society, and traditional religions.³³

In doing so, they have managed to generate intense anxiety on all sides.

Although the vision of,

The church as an inclusive community, in which the gifts of each are recognised for the contribution they make to the whole, is the model for what society as a whole is meant to be. Sadly, this unity is often hard to see within the church. There have been divisions within the church that have weakened the integrity with which it proclaims this Gospel of a reconciled community. Add to that those who have felt excluded from full participation in that community and you further weaken the church's authority.³⁴

³⁰ <http://news.scotsman.com/opinion.cfm?id=246702005>
<http://news.scotsman.com/scotland.cfm?id=2433792005>

³¹ <http://news.scotsman.com/latest.cfm?id=2473722005>

³² <http://news.scotsman.com/scotland.cfm?id=2474192005>

³³ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*, p.5.

³⁴ World Council of Churches, (2003) *A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement*, *Ibid.*.

These conflicting and competing stories, of what is deemed to be sexually acceptable, are weakening the Church's authority and integrity and is a central theme of this research. Although there are a range of responses to the problem of competing stories from fundamentalism and tribalism through to separatism, a more appropriate response in this instance may be that of communitarianism, with each side having their own traditions. It is a model where all have to live together and acknowledge the rights of each to hold to a particular point of view. By listening carefully to each voice as they tell their story some of the questions to be answered are: Can such divergent stories manage to co-exist within the Church setting or will certain tales triumph? What are the possible relationships of different stories to each other? Will one drown the other out? How can people with competing stories live together without the conflict becoming unbearable?

Regardless as to the answers to such questions, one thing of which we can be certain is that there can be no final single story. Rather what we are left with are fragments of stories from people's lives. Therefore what seems to be required is a sensitivity to listen to the ever-growing array of stories and to shun the all too tempting desire to place them in a coherent and totalising narrative structure.

I understand this study, whilst drawing on a range of disciplines, as well as the stories, thoughts and insights of gay ministers whose voices have been, as yet, unheard, to be a contribution to the ongoing discussion of

the place of gay people and gay ministers, in particular, within the Church. In other words, it is another fragment to be added to the wider continuing story.

At the outset it should be stated that this study is based on a number of underlying principles. Firstly, in contrast to traditional impersonal approaches to research, I am going to apply a reflexive approach. By doing this I will be acknowledging the impact of my own history, experiences, beliefs and faith and that of those interviewed on the processes and outcomes of my enquiry.³⁵ Finch, is amongst the numerous sociological researchers who endorse this approach. He states that this way of writing 'emphasises understanding the meaning of the social world from the perspective of the actor.'³⁶ This will provide greater transparency within the research.³⁷ I am fully aware that the epistemological and theoretical resources the researcher employs dictate the most basic assumptions on which the research will be built.³⁸

Due to its overarching reflexive approach this study also draws upon the traditions of standpoint epistemology³⁹ as it has developed within the social sciences during the past 20 years. Standpoint epistemology, as Neilson has argued, affirms

³⁵ Etherington, E., (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher – Using Ourselves in Research*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

³⁶ Finch, J., (1986) *Research and Policy: The Uses of Qualitative Methods in Social and Educational Research*, Lewes: The Falmer Press, p.10.

³⁷ Finlay, J. and Gough, B., (2004) *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide to Reflexive Qualitative Research in Health and Social Care*, London: Blackwell Science.

³⁸ Strathern, P., (2002) *The Essential Foucault, Ibid.*, p.4

³⁹ Code, L., *Feminist Epistemology*, in Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Version 1.0, London: Routledge.

...that one's everyday life has epistemological consequences and implications...the disadvantaged have the potential to be more knowledgeable, in a way, than the dominant group.⁴⁰

Lying at the heart of standpoint epistemology is the notion that those, whom society deems to be less powerful, or on the margins, have the potential to see a fuller view of the situation they find themselves in precisely *because* of their disempowered status. Standpoint epistemology suggests that those who are disenfranchised, such as gay ministers, by those deemed to have power have a unique contribution to make and that their experiences will rightly influence this research design. Therefore in this study gay ministers, who find themselves on the silent and invisible margins of the church, are required to understand the dominant (patriarchal) perspective as well as their own in order to survive in the organisation. Those who identify as heterosexual ministers, those in positions of power within the church, need only understand their own perspective.

In stating the above, it can be seen that standpoint epistemology challenges the belief that knowledge and politics can be divorced for the discussion. I will address the issue of power and knowledge⁴¹ using a Foucauldian⁴² framework which, furthermore, allows me to address the question of the relation of power to knowledge within the Church and how its outworking has perpetuated a situation where gay clergy, in

⁴⁰ Neilson, J. M(ed)., (1990) *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the Social Sciences*, Boulder: Westview Press, p.10.

⁴¹ Foucault, M., (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Sheridan, A., London: Penguin Books.

⁴² Strathern, P., (2002) *The Essential Foucault*, London: Virgin Books Ltd.

particular, feel threatened and vulnerable. It is for this reason that Michel Foucault's work has become a vital resource in my research.⁴³

Foucault's explanation of power and knowledge and how both these concepts relate to one another is central to understanding how the voices of both gay clergy and gay members have been largely silenced within the Church to date. The recognition of this and the challenging of the system which has permitted and encouraged this to happen help gay clergy, like myself, and gay members to have their voices heard thereby arguing for a change in the thinking and power structure that has led to the situation where they feel they have been ostracised by the Church.

Foucault firmly believes that the use of power in our societies has been 'characteristic yet transitory. For while many of its forms have persisted to present, it has gradually been penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power that are probably irreducible to the representation of law.'⁴⁴

⁴³ Although Foucault's writing on power and knowledge and the production of subjectivity have been profoundly influential, not least in the area of gender studies, using a Foucauldian approach can also be problematic. I say this because Foucault never showed much interest in issues of homosexuality, feminism or gender issues. For someone who wrote concerning how power produces subjectivity by focusing on the ways it invests the body, his writing is curiously gender-neutral. There would appear to be no understanding, on his part, of the way in which gender and sexuality impact in relation to power/knowledge. In addition to this, his concept of power is so wide that it can be hard to distinguish it from mere influence. Foucault criticises all discourses, including his own, but he does not give a way of determining which discourses are more desirable than others or which use of power is more legitimate than another. Therefore, in summarizing some of the issues in using Foucault, it could be said that Foucault offers great perspectives for the analysis and critique of extant social structures and that he sharpens the perceptions of discourse pathologies but he offers no means to address them normatively.

⁴⁴ Neilson, J. M(ed)., (1990) *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the Social Sciences Ibid.*, p. 89.

Foucault argues that the manipulation of power no longer takes law as 'the principle mode of representation of power.'⁴⁵ He states,

By power, I do not mean 'Power' as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule...The analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of that state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset: rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes.

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transformations, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallisation is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.⁴⁶

In summary, Foucault is arguing that power need not necessarily be rooted within an institution. Instead, 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.'⁴⁷

Unlike social analysts who often regard power as a repressive force which is the property of an elite and is used to maintain social hierarchies, Foucault believes that the concept of power can be a positive force permeating all levels of society. It is here that Foucault relates the concept of power to that of resistance as, for him, they co-exist: 'Where there is power, there is resistance.'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Foucault, M., (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Translated by Colin Gordon et al, Ed Colin Gordon, New York: Harvester Press, p. 141.

⁴⁶ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, New York: Vintage Books, p.92.

⁴⁷ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.93.

⁴⁸ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.95.

Secondly, Foucault also explores the relationship that power has to knowledge. He states,

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply be encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows. The object to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.⁴⁹

In order to understand how power/knowledge is manifested it is important to understand the concept of discourse. Discourse is not only language but, rather, specialised knowledge about a subject. As Foucault writes, 'Indeed it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together.'⁵⁰ For Foucault, discourses which address the subject of sex produce the notion of what is considered to be true with regards to one's sexuality. An example of this is that within the medical field when doctors medicalise sex and sexuality then they become powerful because it is their interpretation of what is acceptable behaviour which becomes the dominant discourse. However, according to Foucault, discourse need not be stable, fixed in stone or the preserve of the dominant group. For him,

Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and

⁴⁹ Foucault, M., (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Sheridan, A., London: Penguin Books Ltd., p.27-8.

⁵⁰ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.100.

produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.⁵¹

The importance, therefore, of analysing discourse is to uncover what is actually being said through it. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,⁵² Foucault examines the relationships which exist between those who dominate and those who are dominated. For him, this is a relationship which is based entirely on power. The use of discipline and punishment as a social force in order to assert control over someone requires an unspoken agreement between those who are powerful and those who are submissive. The important aspect of this, like the Church, is that the aim of the relationship is to ensure self-regulated behaviour.

As an example of this Foucault offers an account of a public execution taking place in mid-Seventeenth Century France. The prisoner, who has personally offended the king by breaking the law, is condemned to death and executed, by public disembowelling, in the city square. This horrific spectacle must take place in public in order for the members of the public to witness the extent of the King's power. In the act of punishment, the criminal's body becomes a visible sign of the inherent power that the king holds. The king makes his mark on the criminal's body, so that all may read it and know who was responsible. By doing this, and ordering the prince to display the body, the king instils a policy of terror on his subjects. However, when the king is removed as the

⁵¹ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.101.

⁵² Foucault, M., (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Ibid.*.

visible sign of that power, the power he created remains. Foucault argues that power-knowledge is in the hands of the king as the crowd comply with his wishes, even when he is not visible, and so give up their power willingly to him. They comply because they have implicitly agreed with the power relation which has been established. They have, in essence, forfeited their right to power so that they will not suffer the same fate as the man who has been executed. The fear of reprisals even when there is no physical evidence of the king's presence is interesting as it highlights the necessary nature of power, which is, that it must mask its workings in order to make its subjects conform to it.

Similarly in the panopticon, a new style of prison, which does not operate with restraints and chains. Rather it seeks to rehabilitate prisoners via the operation of knowledge operating on the mind and soul. The prison uses a system of surveillance, rather than the brutal means that were used in other prisons. It therefore relies upon the organisation of bodies in a particular environment. All the prisoners have individual cells that are located in a circle which surround a central observation tower. The prisoners cannot communicate with each other, but, when lit from behind, they can all be clearly observed from the tower. Their behaviour can be monitored and notes taken. The prisoners can be organised in a variety of different ways and minutely analysed. Therefore, by doing this a body of knowledge can be built up concerning them which adds to their control. This is the paradigm for the various institutions of knowledge and control to be found in society, for example, the Church.

We are all being watched whether we know it or not. And it is this fear of being watched that gives power to those in charge, causing the watched to think twice before acting. This brings self-regulating discipline to the organisation.

Thirdly, theologically the study is based on the belief that God is to be found with those deemed to be on the margins of society and that God's prophetic voice is to be heard there calling the Church into new ways of being which is a principle that has been developed by many people in recent decades. However, in saying this, it should be noted that the purpose of this study is not to impose one understanding of how gay ministers are accepted and work within the church but, rather, to enable an ongoing conversation to take place. A conversation that will hopefully be liberating for the church including both its gay members and ministers.

Playing Hide and Seek

The journey I have undertaken to reach this point of my study, as I seek to uncover and listen to the silent voices of gay clergy within the Church, has been fraught with difficulty. Reflecting on my own experience of being both a gay man and minister within the Church of Scotland, I was aware that little or nothing had been written on the matter that was not either letters to Ministers' Forum, debating the issues of homosexuality, it's compatibility, or otherwise, with a Christian lifestyle and the blessing of Civil Partnerships, or reports that had been presented to various General Assemblies which addressed homosexuality, in general. I knew that being gay was not, in itself, a bar to ordination but I knew that being sexually active was and being open was an unrealistic option. Therefore I tentatively began by searching for literature, as yet unknown to me, which would assist me in formulating an appropriate research question for as Borg and Gall state,

The review of literature involves locating, reading and evaluating reports of research as well as reports of casual observation and opinion that are related to... the planned project. It is aimed at obtaining a detailed knowledge of the topic being studied.⁵³

I uncovered no literature on this subject, although through speaking with gay and lesbian friends within the Church, I knew that the subject of how to survive being gay and a minister was an issue that concerned many, particularly in light of the heat and passion that was being generated within the columns of Ministers' Forum.

⁵³ Borg, W. R., and Gall, M. D., (1989) *Educational Research: An Introduction*, 5th edition, New York: Longman, p.114.

I then turned my attention to searching for literature from cognate sources to ascertain how they had addressed the subject. I did this because as Cooper states,

... a literature review uses as its database reports of primary or original scholarship... to summarise, evaluate, clarify and/or integrate the content of primary reports.⁵⁴

And as Bruce writes, 'its purpose is to provide the background to and justification for the research undertaken.'⁵⁵

My search highlighted many church reports, from as close as the Anglican Church in England and Wales⁵⁶, the Methodist Church⁵⁷ to Presbyterian Church (USA)⁵⁸ and Uniting Church in Australia⁵⁹. All had been struggling with the issue of homosexuality over the past 20 years and, to varying degrees had struggled with the question of 'orientation' over 'behaviour', 'celibacy' over 'practice' and the ordination of openly gay clergy. The reports that I read, like those in the Church of Scotland, stated the general premise that there was no bar to gay clergy being ordained as long as they were celibate⁶⁰. If gay clergy were not celibate then church teaching, across the variety of reports that I considered, dictated that they could not serve as ministers. The way that some churches actually acted in reality varied. For example in the Scottish

⁵⁴ Cooper, H. M., (1988) 'The structure of Knowledge Synthesis', *Knowledge in Society*, p.107.

⁵⁵ Bruce, C. S., (1994) 'Research Students' Early Experiences of the Dissertation Literature Review', *Studies in Higher Education*, 19 (2), p.218.

⁵⁶ *Issues in Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, (1991).

⁵⁷ http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/conf2005/co_17_pilgrimageoffaith_0505.doc

⁵⁸ <http://www.pcusa.org/101/101-homosexual.htm> ,

<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/church-and-homosexuality.pdf>

⁵⁹ <http://nat.uca.org.au/resources/pdf/homosexuality.pdf>

⁶⁰ The one exception to this is the Metropolitan Community Church which welcomes and affirms lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in their spirituality and sexuality. They ordain sexually active gay clergy.

Episcopalian Church, the employment of gay clergy, sexually active or not, depends on the Bishop with oversight of the Diocese.

Therefore, from what I was reading in other churches' reports, there was a similar dichotomy to that which gay clergy faced in the Church of Scotland where it is a case of being seen as ministers but not being heard as gay ministers.

It is to an exploration of this that I now turn in relation to my own experience within the Church of Scotland.

The Way Forward

This thesis is divided into two parts which reflects the dualism which is present in the Church when the subject of homosexuality is raised. Part one, entitled *The Public Voice of the Church*, will be investigating the Board of Social Responsibility's 1983 Report, entitled *Report of Study Group on Sexuality*⁶¹, which addressed the subject of homosexuality. The rationale behind this was that it remains the Church's official statement of the subject of homosexuality. Although there have been reports since that have addressed subjects, such as, civil partnerships, marriage, sex education and sexuality⁶², none have superseded the 1983 Report and so, as such, it remains the official position of the Church in relation to how it understands and addresses the subject of homosexuality.

In part two, entitled *The Private Voice of the Church*, I will listen to the stories of five gay ministers who have been, to date, silent within the Church because of their sexuality. By listening to their experiences and observations it is hoped that this thesis may provide a starting place where the 'still small voice' starts to be heard.

⁶¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.302-308. I will refer to this report as the 1983 Report throughout the rest of this thesis.

⁶² As an example I am referring to reports presented by Boards, Committees and Councils such as the Panel of Doctrine in 1993, 1994 and 1995; by the Board of Parish Education in 1994; by the Board of Social Responsibility in 1994, 2000 and 2005; by the Committee on Education in 2002; by the Legal Questions Committee in 2006; and by the Mission and Discipleship Committee in 2007.

The Public Voice of the Church:
‘Rules, rules and more rules...’

Chapter One: On the road...

'Methodology'

The Intellectual Puzzle

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world.⁶³

...in my view, all qualitative research should be constructed around an intellectual puzzle of some kind, and should attempt to produce some kind of explanation of that puzzle, or an argument.⁶⁴

In her book entitled *Qualitative Researching*⁶⁵ Jennifer Mason likens academic research to that of an 'intellectual puzzle' that needs a variety of tools and methods in order to solve it. Mason suggests that the questions which lie behind the solving of any 'intellectual puzzle' are, 'What is the intellectual puzzle?' 'What do I wish to explain or explore?' and 'What type of puzzle is it?'⁶⁶ In seeking answers to questions such as these, the purpose and reason behind a particular piece of research soon becomes clear. By keeping these questions to the forefront of my mind I hope to resist, what she describes as,

... the temptation to use *my* research to showcase egocentric or confessional tales about *myself*, which may do little to illuminate *my* research practice or problem, or to help *me* make sound research decisions.⁶⁷ (authors italics)

This is important because in an area such as sexuality, which defines who and what I am, it would be easy for me as the researcher to become so personally involved that I quickly begin to forget the need to interrogate my own understandings and compare them with those of others in order to come to a deeper understanding of the questions motivating this study.

⁶³ Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S., (2005) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research: Third Edition*, London: Sage Publications Ltd., p.3.

⁶⁴ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, London: Sage Publications Ltd..

⁶⁵ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, *Ibid.* p.13

⁶⁶ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁶⁷ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, *Ibid.*, p.5.

In order to ensure that my research retains its rigour I propose, after outlining and defining the ‘intellectual puzzle’, to consider the setting in which the ‘puzzle’ is located, namely, the 1983 *Report of Study Group on Sexuality* and how the use of discourse analysis will help to uncover the concealed meanings contained therein and what implications this has for gay clergy. I will then use semi-structured interviews to listen to the silent voice of the church, that is, those gay ministers who live out their lives in fear of being ‘outed’ to hear what they have to say about their place within an organisation which would prefer them to remain invisible.

Mason⁶⁸ identifies and explains 4 categories of ‘intellectual puzzle’.

They are:-

1. Developmental e.g. why and how something developed?
2. Mechanical e.g. how and why does something work in a particular way?
3. Comparative e.g. what can we learn from comparing things, and how can we explain differences and similarities?
4. Causal/predictive e.g. what influence do things have on each other or what causes a particular situation?

As Mason goes on to explain ‘one of the main virtues of expressing whatever it is you want to research and explain as a puzzle is that it

⁶⁸ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition, Ibid.*, p.18, 175.

focuses your mind on 'research questions.'⁶⁹ The resultant research questions that result from the puzzles outlined above may fall into one or more categories but the researcher must ensure that their 'puzzle is ontologically meaningful, and epistemologically explainable or workable.'⁷⁰

My puzzle, which has undergone many revisions, is both developmental and comparative. To date when the subject of gay clergy and/or homosexuality is raised within Church circles any debate, which attempts to rise above mere sloganeering, is usually stifled by an automatic appeal to scripture and an argument from complementarity. As Ian Watson has said, 'It's about living in line with the way God has revealed we should live in the Bible.'⁷¹ Previously he stated, 'Therefore when you adopt a lifestyle which is recognised as un-Christian you are seen as a hypocrite.'⁷² Ann Allen adds, 'Physically and physiologically it's the otherness of the other that makes a sexual union what it is. It's the completion which can't be possible in a homosexual physical union.'⁷³

Personally, I distrust such an automatic approach and as Andrew Sullivan has written,

But I don't fully distrust my own experience, or the experience of so many homosexuals I have met over the years. This experience is filtered, as all experience is, through the prism of reflection and self-reflection: it is not some raw datum in the empirical, verifiable world

⁶⁹ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition, Ibid.*, p.19.

⁷⁰ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition, Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Life and Work*, October 2003, p.9.

⁷² *Life and Work, Ibid.*

⁷³ *Life and Work, Ibid.*

which I am presenting for review. But it is as honest a sketch as I can provide of the experience of finding oneself a homosexual.⁷⁴

Within the Church there is a preference to have a definite solution to a particular problem or human predicament. According to the 1983 Report there would appear to be no shades of grey when the subject of homosexuality is addressed (the same, however, cannot be said for the 2007 Mission and Discipleship Council Report which presented the General Assembly with a survey of opinion on the subject of same-sex relationship). But I have related my experience, within this study, 'not to impress or to shock or to gain sympathy, but merely to convey what the homosexual experience is actually like.'⁷⁵ After all, 'you cannot discuss something until you know roughly what it is.'⁷⁶

With this in mind, therefore, I now proceed with the first part of my research. As previously stated this will be split into 2 definable parts. The first section will address the subject of the public voice of the church with regards to the subject of homosexuality, in general, and the acceptance of gay clergy, in particular. In it I will be addressing the way in which the Board of Social Responsibility's 1983 Report on Sexuality is still used as the benchmark for the Church's official view on sexual matters and how the lack of visibility and the acceptance of other sexualities helps to keep gay clergy silent. Therefore, it is concerned

⁷⁴ Sullivan, A., (1996) *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, New York: Vintage Books, p.7.

⁷⁵ Sullivan, A., (1996) *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, *Ibid*, p.16.

⁷⁶ Sullivan, A., (1996) *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, *Ibid*..

with the broad context in which the debate currently takes place and what legal and theological position it is set within.

Discourse Analysis

I have chosen to use discourse analysis to explore the 1983 Report and the issues surrounding the Church and its non-acceptance of gay clergy because as Stoye highlights, discourse analysis 'is an insightful socio-linguistic tool that uses a micro-level of critique to point to broader social constraints that are operating at a macro-level'.⁷⁷ She further states, 'Fairclough describes the process as 'constantly alternating between what is "there" in the text, and the discourse type(s) which the text is drawing upon.'⁷⁸

Amongst the questions that I will be seeking to answer are 'Who wrote it?' 'Why has the text been written this way?' 'Why was it not written using others words and phrases?' 'Why are the words and paragraphs used in a particular order?' 'Who comprised the intended audience?' 'What was the intention behind its authorship and message?' 'What was its intended purpose?' To address and seek to answer questions such as these we need to both dismantle and investigate what the text, in this particular case the Board of Social Responsibility's 1983 Report, is saying. In doing so I hope to uncover and highlight the broader social constraints that permeate this text and which are used by those in power

⁷⁷ Stoye, J., (January 2005), *Stem Cells: Where the Newest Technology Meets the Oldest Profession*, in *Theology and Sexuality*, Volume 11 Number 2, p.79.

⁷⁸ Stoye, J., (January 2005), *Stem Cells: Where the Newest Technology Meets the Oldest Profession*, *Ibid*.

to keep those who are deemed to be 'unnatural' in a subordinate position. According to Fairclough,

I take a 'rational' research programme to be one which makes possible a systematic development in knowledge and understanding of the relevant domain, in this case discourse. Given the in principle infinite amount of possible data, a principled basis for sampling is necessary for such a programme. No such principled basis is possible so long as discourse analysts treat their samples as *objects trouvés*...i.e. so long as bits of discourse are analysed with little or no attention to their places in their institutional matrices. A principled basis for sampling requires minimally (a) a sociological account of the institution under study, its relationship to other institutions in the social formation, and relationship between forces within it; (b) an account of the 'order of discourse' of the institution, of its IDF's⁷⁹ and the dominance relationships among them, with links between (a) and (b); (c) an ethnographic account of each IDF.⁸⁰

The primary reason for using discourse analysis, in this study, is because it deals 'primarily with the discourse dimensions of power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result from it.'⁸¹ It is, therefore, helpful in uncovering, exploring and addressing the inter-related issues of power, authority, knowledge and,

... a corollary of issues revolving around how power might be said to shape and define subjectivity, and the ways in which the object - the other - is constructed and acted upon by the discourse of which the statement is part.⁸²

Therefore, it can be said that the perspective of discourse analysis is from 'those who suffer most from dominance and inequality. Their central targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and justice.'⁸³ In other words, the

⁷⁹ Fairclough refers to ideological discursive formations as IDF's

⁸⁰ Fairclough, N., (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, New York: Longman Publishing, p.41.

⁸¹ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, in 'Critical Discourse Analysis: Critical Concepts in Linguistics vol. 2' (ed.) Toolan, M., London: Routledge, p.107.

⁸² Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, *Ibid.*

⁸³ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, *Ibid.*, p.107-108.

main criteria for those undertaking discourse analysis is that they stand in solidarity with those who are disempowered. For as Van Dijk writes,

There cannot be an aloof, let alone “neutral” position of critical scholars. Critical scholars should not worry about the interests or perspectives of those in power, who are best placed to take care of their own interests anyway.⁸⁴

The central tenant of discourse analysis, then, is the way in which social power and dominance are understood to interact.⁸⁵ Particularly within the Church setting, one crucial presupposition when undertaking discourse analysis is understanding the nature of the way that social power and dominance are inter-twinned. As van Dijk states,

An analysis of the various modes of discourse access reveals a rather surprising parallelism between social power and discourse access: the more discourse genres, contexts, participants, audience, scope and text characteristics they (may) actively control or influence, the more powerful social groups, institutions or elites are.⁸⁶

Similarly, lack of power is also measured by its lack of active or controlled access to discourse.⁸⁷

Therefore,

The crucial implication of this correlation is not merely that discourse control is a form of social action control, but also primarily that it implies the conditions of control over the minds of other people, that is, the management of social representatives.⁸⁸

It can be said then that social power is based on the privileged access to socially valued resources such as position, status, acceptance and knowledge to name but a few. In order, therefore, to ensure dominance those who are in the ‘power elite’, that is the members who comprise the dominant group, must retain control over those whom they deem to be

⁸⁴ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*, p.109.

⁸⁵ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*, p.112.

subordinate. To achieve this the dominant group will use either action or cognition. In today's society, in general, and the Church, in particular, the most effective means of wielding power is cognitively. In other words, by using persuasion and manipulation to change the minds of others to the dominant groups point of view. In the Church this is usually done through the production and sanctioning of Reports.

The concept of power depends on the dominant members controlling those who are powerless. As Van Dijk explains,

Such control may pertain to *action* and *cognition*: that is, a powerful group may limit the freedom of action of others, but also influence their minds. Besides the elementary recourse to force to directly control actions... 'modern' and more effective power is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to *change the mind of others in one's own interests*. It is at this crucial point where *discourse* and critical discourse analysis come in: managing the minds of others is essentially a function of text and talk.⁸⁹

He continues,

Critical discourse analysis also needs to focus on the discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise, 'neutralise' the social order, and especially relations of inequality.⁹⁰

Critical discourse analysis, therefore, is specifically interested in the way in which power is abused, whether obviously or more subtly, by the 'power elite' who (ab)use their power by breaking the principles of natural law, justice and equality. In order to distinguish this from legitimate and acceptable forms of power the term 'dominance' is used. Therefore, what I will be seeking to explore, in this study, is the subtle

⁸⁹ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, *Ibid.*, p.109-110.

⁹⁰ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, *Ibid.*, p.110.

form of dominance which appeared to me to be natural until I began to challenge it for myself.

The dominance of one point of view is often subtle using language which, on the surface and initial reading, appears to be reasonable, acceptable and natural. The problem, and it is one that discourse analysis takes to its heart, is that if the dominant viewpoint remains unchallenged then it becomes naturalised and is then seen as being the norm of the institution. Naturalisation gives particular ideological statements, like those relating to the incompatibility of the Christian lifestyle with homosexuality, the status of common sense and therefore, by their very nature, makes them appear to be opaque or, in other words, invisible as ideologies. In the past, in the Church, this has been the case with the issue of the subjugation of women which appeared to be according to the natural order of life, seen as the way God had created things and was argued from a biblical basis. It was only when such a view began to be challenged by those out with the dominant group that the Church's stance changed and women were accepted as full members and had the right to be ordained as elders and Ministers of Word and Sacrament. In addition this subtle form of domination has also been used to justify the slave trade and the dominance of white over black.

Those who are being dominated are influenced in such a way that they accept their position, without question, believing what they are being told

about being subordinate. In being passive members of the Church they act in a way that plays into the interests of the powerful elite. The interesting thing to note is that the impression given was that they are acting according to God's wishes. In fact, one of the main features of dominant discourse, which discourse analysis seeks to address, is precisely the manufacturing of such a consensus, acceptance and the legitimising of dominance.

Personally, at present, the domination continues within the Church, with regards to its view of the superiority of heterosexuality over homosexuality and the non-acceptance of sexually active gay clergy.

Describing such a power relation Van Dijk writes,

... the minds of the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interests of the powerful out of their own freewill, we use the term *hegemony*.⁹¹

Within the Church this subtle use of power today, where those who are dominated are made to feel that the position they find themselves in is 'natural', is to ensure that they are compliant subjects. This, I believe, is inherent in the concept of hegemony and, as such means that the undertaking of discourse analysis in this setting is far from straightforward because on a surface reading of the text there are no villains or victims.

Within the Church setting, one of the crucial ways in which the 'power elite' enact their power is through the control of context, for example,

⁹¹ Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis, Ibid.*, p.11.

when the 1983 Report on Sexuality was being drafted some 'voices', that is those who are openly gay and lesbian, were not taken into account. By doing this, these gay and lesbian voices were thereby censored, their opinions were not heard, their particular perspective was ignored and so the report itself became a segregated zone.⁹² This had the direct effect of making them less quoted, less spoken about and so their access to the process of consultation and making their voices heard was blocked. Today, even, if gay and lesbian ministers are part of study groups, discussion forums, members of Presbytery or commissioners to the General Assembly, they shall have their voices silenced by the dominant voice of the Church because if they do have the courage to raise their voice, as sexually active gay clergy, they would be in danger of being investigated, disciplined and punished.

I now turn to the 1983 Report to investigate it rigorously using the tools of discourse analysis. By doing this I hope that it will enable me to reveal the subtext which is hidden behind the report's main text. In other words it is a deconstructive reading and interpretation of the report.

⁹² Van Dijk, T., (2002) *Principles in Discourse Analysis*, *Ibid.*, p.115.

Chapter Two: Familiar territory...

'Analysis of the 1983 Report of Study Group on Sexuality'

A text taken out of context is a pretext...

For churches to baptise and confirm the homophobic insights of society; and indeed for theology to be exposed as the root of many such notions, is the scandal that has driven many people far from the pews. More significantly, to justify the virulent attacks on lesbian/gay people by an appeal to Scripture and tradition further undercuts any reason why lesbian/gay people would relate to Christianity as anything but adversary.⁹³

It would be all too easy for gay clergy, like myself, to simply agree with Hunt's conclusion as to why lesbian/gay people both with in and out with the Church view it's stance on the subject of homosexuality as adversarial. However, that would be to over simplify the matter. I believe that lying at the heart of how the issue of homosexuality is dealt with, within the Church of Scotland, is the fact that 'sexuality is still an embarrassment to the church, and those whose behaviour raises sexual issues are themselves an embarrassment.'⁹⁴

In seeking to address this 'embarrassment' the Church has exposed its inherent homophobia, with the 1983 Report being its public theological rationale for its stance. On ratification at the 1983 General Assembly, the Report became the 'mind of the Assembly' and the 'official position of the Church' when the commissioners voted to receive both the report and the associated deliverances. There is a danger in discussions of homosexuality and the Church that we pathologise the Report as it is the accepted public statement on all matters homosexual. This would be a mistake, however, as the Report is more of a symptom of homophobia within the Kirk rather than the disease itself. To continue the medical

⁹³ Hunt, M., (1990) *Fierce tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, New York: Crossroad, p.48.

⁹⁴ Webster, A.R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, New York: Cassell, p.147.

metaphor, in order to understand the disease we must first examine the Church's symptoms which will mean listening to the experiences of those that the Church's teaching on the subject of homosexuality directly affects. There is also an urgent need to examine the 1983 Report itself, as it is this Report which can give us an insight into the thoughts of the Church and what has led them to take such a stance. By doing this, to carry the medical metaphor further, we will be able to come to a differential diagnosis which will furnish us with information which will point to why it might be homophobic. After further discussion, evidence and investigation a definite diagnosis will be arrived at either confirming or refuting our initial thoughts and suspicion.

According to Foucault, such an exercise is essential if the dominant discourse in relation to homophobia is to be challenged. He writes,

Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. In these circumstances, criticism (and radical criticism) is absolutely indispensable for any transformation.⁹⁵

By using the process of discourse analysis I hope to deconstruct the power/knowledge relations that currently exist within the Church seeking to control and distribute the truth, as they see it. Also through genealogical criticism I will be able to challenge its overtly homophobic discourse by offering an alternative viewpoint. I adopt this as a method because it offers an analytical, critical, and strategic framework for

⁹⁵ Foucault, M., (1988) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, New York: Routledge, p.154-155.

understanding the general politics of, what Robert Goss⁹⁶ has termed, 'homophobic truth'. In his description of the way that power/knowledge correlates, Foucault addresses the question as to whose knowledge is real or true. For Foucault truth is defined as 'the procedure for regulation, production, and distribution of statements'⁹⁷ of discourse. Claims to truth therefore, for Foucault, are always formed within the struggles and conflicts of power. As Goss states,

These social mechanisms are the multiple power relations, the interplays of various discursive and non-discursive fields. The multiplicity of power relations and their effects form an ever-shifting and dynamic field of competing and conflicting mechanisms for the production and the distribution of truth.⁹⁸

Therefore, in this particular instance, homophobic truth refers to the way in which the dominant discourse, which is heterosexuality, silences the alternative discourse of homosexuality and thereby becomes the arbiter of what is true and what is false.

Each society and organisation has its own regime of truth and the Church is no different. The repression of gay clergy is real and is perpetuated by a complex web of power relations,

There are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, and circulation, and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power through the production of truth.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Goss, R., (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, New York: HarperCollins, p.187.

⁹⁷ Foucault, M, (1980) *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, p.93.

⁹⁸ Goss, R., (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, *Ibid.*, p.186.

⁹⁹ Foucault, M., (1980) *Power/Knowledge*, *Ibid.*.

Discourse then, as Goss interprets Foucault, is a 'form of power that circulates in the social field.'¹⁰⁰ It therefore becomes part of the struggle for power and domination. However, discourse can also be used as a point of resistance against the dominant viewpoint. As Foucault himself states,

...discourse can be both an instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.¹⁰¹

It also challenges the oppression performed by homophobic truth by exposing its frailties, instabilities, its failures and its interlocking exclusions. Therefore, genealogical criticism becomes a deconstructive strategy that questions the givenness of homophobic truth.¹⁰² A queer practice of genealogical criticism therefore,

concentrates on the dominating and exclusionary effects of power in the production and distribution of homophobic truth – not only does it become a critical practice exposing the dominating and coercive effects of homophobic truth, it also becomes a critical form of discursive activity whose very practice becomes an exercise of social power. It becomes the practice of its own power, its own production and distribution of truth. It produces its own political regime of truth.¹⁰³

It brings to the surface that which has been excluded from the dominant discourse of homophobia, a phenomenon which Foucault calls the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. Foucault has identified two aspects of subjugated knowledge, firstly, historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a systematic way and secondly, an entire

¹⁰⁰ Goss, R., (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, *Ibid.*, p.186.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, *Ibid.*, p.100-101.

¹⁰² Goss, Robert, (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, *Ibid.*, p.187-188.

¹⁰³ Goss, Robert, (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, *Ibid.*

set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task, insufficiently elaborated, or naive.¹⁰⁴ As those who carry this subjugated knowledge work to reclaim the validity of their history and knowledge, Foucault perceived this as 'an insurrection of subjugated knowledge'.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it offers a method of changing the Church because the emergence of any new knowledge system is ultimately linked with a shift in power.

The Foucauldian style of textual criticism, which I will exercise within this theory, seeks to,

... analyse a text with the following questions in mind: what are its effects; why this collection of statements and not others; what subject positions does it open up; what political interests does it serve; what role does it play in the politics of truth; what specific speakers' benefit can be attributed to it; what are its modes of existence, distribution and circulation?'.¹⁰⁶

As Steven Grimwood writes,

These are some of the themes that exercised Michel Foucault throughout his career, and, while it is true that he seldom dealt explicitly with "homosexuality" *per se* at length in his major works, it, like religion, hangs like a shadow over much of what he had to say.¹⁰⁷

He continues,

It is fitting, therefore, that one should attempt a sort of 'Foucauldian analysis'...For those of us who chose to identify ourselves as Christian or homosexual - and thus find ourselves caught up in this web of discourse - such an exercise might be particularly legitimate.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, M., (1994) *Genealogy and social criticism.*, in Seiman, S. (ed.), *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on social theory* (pp39-45), New York: Oxford Press.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, M., (1994) *Genealogy and social criticism.*, *Ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁰⁶ Barker, Philip, (1998) *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.13.

¹⁰⁷ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002), 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', in *Theology and Sexuality*, Number 16, p.98.

¹⁰⁸ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.98.

It is, therefore, to a discussion of the above issues as they relate to the Committee on Social Responsibility's 1983 Report, which addresses the subject of sexuality, that I now turn as it,

... serves to demonstrate the veracity of Michel Foucault's claim that, while sexuality is still the object of endless discourse, it is nevertheless, 'exploited as *the secret*' by those who wish to define what should count as the 'normal' and the 'acceptable'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*.

A few thoughts before I begin...

The beginning of Christian moral life is a stumbling into an awareness of our own complicity in hypocrisy, and becoming aware of quite how violent that hypocrisy is. Starting from there we can begin to stretch out our hands to our brothers and sisters, neither more or less hypocritical than ourselves, who are on the way to being expelled... by an apparently united order, which has an excessive and militant certainty as to the evil of the other. Let us then go and learn what this means: 'I want mercy and not sacrifice.'¹¹⁰

The call for mercy, rather than sacrifice, that Alison seeks from his fellow Christian travellers is one that requires a certain vulnerability on all those who have embarked upon that Christian journey. Particularly in relation to the subject of homosexuality there requires to be a certain honesty, integrity and openness to embark on a journey of discovery together.

Alison writes about creating a 'space in which a heart might find permission to come close to cracking. It is a space,'¹¹¹ he writes which he is 'discovering to be necessary for participation in theological discourse.'¹¹² For him,

This closeness-to-cracking comes upon us at a moment when we do not know how to speak well, when we find ourselves threatened by confusion. It is where two principal temptations are either to bluster our way out of the moment, by speaking with too much security and arrogance so as to give the impression that the confusion is not mine, but belongs somewhere else. Or on the other hand to plunge into a shamed silence of one who knows himself uncovered, and for that reason, deprived of legitimate speech. This space of the heart-close-to-cracking, poorly as it seems to promise, and difficult though it be to remain in it once it is found and occupied, seems to me the most appropriate space from which to begin a sketch of ways forward towards the stutter of a theology for the third millennium.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Alison, J., (2001) *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, p. 26.

¹¹¹ Alison, J., (2001) *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹² Alison, J., (2001) *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Alison, J., (2001) *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, *Ibid.*

The space that Alison calls for has been increasingly difficult to find within the Church of Scotland when the subject of homosexuality is discussed. As the Board of Social Responsibility acknowledged in its 1994 Report, 'Homosexuality is one area which arouses strong emotions.'¹¹⁴

An attempt has been made, however, at providing a safe space for dialogue to begin and that was to be found recently in the Mission and Discipleship's 2007 Report entitled *A Challenge to Church Unity: Same-sex Relationships as an Issue in Theology and Human Sexuality*.¹¹⁵ This is a Report that seeks to gain the middle ground in a debate that has seen churches facing both 'internal and inter-church conflict.'¹¹⁶ As it states at the very outset in its overview,

it seeks to articulate something of the range of differing views and at the same time to discern what may yet be said in a common Christian understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves.¹¹⁷

I believe that this has been a helpful strategy by the Working Group charged with preparing the report as it has enabled them to provide the Church with a document that summarises a variety of different positions, giving background information to those who are involved in the debate and interested in an issue that has the potential to cause schism within the Church. It is helpful that the Working Group state that, 'The report is not intended as the last word on the subject'¹¹⁸ as this provides a lead to the Church, as a whole, to become involved in a continuing debate on

¹¹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1994), p.512.

¹¹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (2007), p.4/9-4/39.

¹¹⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.4/10.

¹¹⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹¹⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

the subject. At a time when the Anglican Church is being torn apart by internal argument over this subject and where they are being quite prescriptive in their reports, the Working Party have managed to hold the different viewpoints of the Church together in an uneasy alliance. This simply would not have been possible had they had been more prescriptive.

In reality, however, it would have been puzzling had the Working Group provided a definitive response on the Church's view of sexuality as this was not the remit they had been charged with. The Council, informs the Assembly that 'In offering a report that mainly addresses questions of homosexuality, the Council intends, in view of the range of other important topics in human sexuality, that the Working Group might carry on its studies into these other areas.'¹¹⁹ Therefore, the issue of homosexuality is viewed and understood to be part of a much larger debate covering all areas of sexuality.

The strength of the Report lies in the fact that it surveys a breadth of theological and biblical perspectives in a well argued, reasoned and articulated way. It seeks to refrain from using language which could be regarded as contentious and aims to be as inclusive as is possible when discussing this subject.

In saying that, it defines homosexuality in the following terms as,

¹¹⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

...the phenomenon of same-sex attraction and sexual (genital) activity. The report distinguishes between homosexual activity (or practice or behaviour) and a homosexual orientation (or inclination). When same-sex sexual activity, as opposed to orientation in itself, is meant, the report endeavours to make that clear. "Gay" and "lesbian" are occasionally used as adjectives, synonymously with "homosexual", and do not by themselves imply sexual practice.¹²⁰

This is interesting because the implication, however it was intended, is that the term 'homosexual' will be equated with gay men. The reason for this is that in the psyche of church members and clergy this is an association that is naturally made. This can be seen in the terminology used in the Board of Social Responsibility's 1983 and 1994 Reports when the same association was made and those who were involved in the debates used the term 'homosexual' and 'gay man' interchangeably.

In focusing on the issue of same-sex relationships, I feel that the Mission and Discipleship Council had, perhaps, been a little premature in their deliberations. Although this is not their fault, as they were instructed by the General Assembly to do so, perhaps it would have been a more fruitful endeavour to have instructed the Council to explore and report on the issue of what it means to be a sexual being, before tackling specific areas and expressions of sexuality.

By this, I mean, that it is important for Church members to have an affirmative understanding of their sexual self. In other words; What is the Church's view and understanding of human beings as sexual beings? What does it mean to 'love yourself'? What does the Church think about masturbation? I suggest this because, to date, the Church

¹²⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.* p.4/12.

seems to be more concerned over the issue of sex within marriage and celibacy out with, thereby relegating other expressions of our sexual intimacy, by virtue of its silence, to a theological black hole where it parks subjects that it has difficulty in discussing. It is only by being more honest about sexual intimacy, as it relates to individuals, that the Church will be in a better position to think and debate about sexualities as it has a more grounded and objective understanding of sexuality in its widest possible meaning.

However, in saying this, the 2007 Report gives a survey of all the theological positions which currently exist within the Church regarding the subject of homosexuality. On the face of it, this is a report that appears to take the subject of homosexuality and same-sex relationships forward as it refers to the need for tolerance, respect and diversity which are all admirable qualities which seem to have been lacking in the past when this subject has been raised.

Foucault teaches that we should look at all discourse with a hermeneutics of suspicion. He believes that that discourse can change in changed circumstances in order to protect the status quo. If you read this report, it can be argued that this is exactly what has happened here. The language has changed and become more tolerant. However, nothing has really changed. The 1983 Report is still the Church's official position. The 2007 Report although accepted by the General Assembly, with very little debate, effects no change. Homosexuals are still to be

celibate if ordained and the primacy of marriage as the relationship where sexual intercourse to take place remains.

Therefore, although the 2007 Report is part of the on-going discussion on homosexuality, for the purpose of this thesis I have focused on the 1983 Report because it remains the Church's official statement on the compatibility of homosexuality with Christianity.

'The love that dare not speak its name'

Debated at the General Assembly of 1983 and with the passing of a deliverance which stated, 'Receive the Report of the Study Group on Sexuality and commend it as a guide to all who may have to cope with homosexuality'¹²¹ this Report became the officially accepted position of the Church of Scotland when dealing with the subject of homosexuality. Although other debates have taken place during subsequent Assemblies, and more will undoubtedly follow, some twenty five years later this remains the Church's official position. It is for this reason, then, that this particular document requires investigation and discussion. This Report embodies the authority of the General Assembly and, as such,

... part of the discussion surrounding the report should focus on questions of power and authority, and, of course, a corollary of issues revolving around how power might be said to shape and define subjectivity, and the ways in which the object - the other - is constructed and acted upon by the discourse of which the statement is part.¹²²

It is to the Report that I now turn.

¹²¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.287.

¹²² Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.* p.98.

The Report

Section One - An Introduction

The *Report of the Study Group on Sexuality* appears as a subsection of a subsection of a deliverance. Although it is item 4 out of 6 subsections of the Social Interests subsection, it is the longest covering 7 pages whilst all other reports cover between 1 and 2 pages. The sexuality section of the Report is broken down into 7 areas which deal with the issue of sexuality, and here sexuality is defined as homosexuality. It is taken as read that heterosexuality is the norm and that anything that differs from this needs to be seen and treated as a *special case*.

The first section, which comprises the initial introduction, provides a brief summary as to the background in which the present Report is set. It states, 'it was felt by the Committee on Social Responsibility that an opportunity should be taken to consider whether any change was called for in the Church of Scotland's existing statement on homosexuality'¹²³, adding that it had been commissioned by the General Assembly of 1981 'to consider the current relevance of the 1968 report on homosexuality produced by the Committee on Moral Welfare, and subsequent Reports by other churches.'¹²⁴ As well as the major denominations the study group looked at reports from 'the British Council of Churches, the Quakers, the Nationwide Festival of Light and from the Gay Christian Movement.'¹²⁵ Therefore, the Report is being presented as part of a wider ongoing discussion taking place within the Christian community on

¹²³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland,(1983), *Ibid.*, p.302.

¹²⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹²⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.302-303.

the subject of homosexuality. By highlighting homosexuality as a subject in need of investigation, by the Church, the members of the Study Group are effectively normalising their own and the majority of the Church member's heterosexuality. By doing this they begin to create the concept of an 'other' (homosexuality) which is viewed as a condition that is problematical. That is, it is something which requires investigation and comment. It is interesting to note that the denominations from which the Study Group collected contributions and reports are not named, as is the fact that they use the term 'nearly all'.¹²⁶ By failing to inform those reading and voting on the Report, the Study Group have become the custodians of the contributions and reports on which they have based their judgement. During the 1983 debate no one asked who the reports were from. The commissioners were satisfied that the Study Group knew what they were doing and that there was no need to question them. By permitting the Study Group to do this the commissioners agreed to and endorsed the Study Group's paternalistic approach. It is also of interest to note that the introduction to the Report goes on to state that, 'The Group has not attempted to produce yet another Report on the same scale as these other Committees or churches.'¹²⁷

The inference here is that what the world, in general, and the Kirk, in particular, does not need is *yet another* report on either homosexuality or the more general topic of sexuality. It should be noted that at the very outset of its findings the Study Group state a summary of their

¹²⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹²⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

conclusions *before* the matter is even discussed in the Report. Their considered opinion is that, 'the Church's response to this issue is most appropriately through the exercise of pastoral care and concern.'¹²⁸

By stating this so early in their Report the Study Group are highlighting the fact that there has been no movement from the Church's 1968 position where they called for the Assembly's backing for their Report stating,

But were the General Assembly to accept the recommendation of the committee many homosexuals would be willing to approach ministers, doctors and social workers, and others involved in pastoral care, for help. Such care, given without condemnation, without repugnance and distaste, would surely be in full accord with the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save those that were lost.¹²⁹

Very few Commissioners would have been aware of the content of the 1968 Report which stated, among other ideas that the 'subject of homosexuality is a distasteful one'¹³⁰ and that the 'ordinary person' needs to 'learn to look upon those men and women whose homosexual tendencies are so strong that they are apparently uncontrollable, as men and women who are sick, and who are in need of a physician, even although as yet no complete cure has been found'.¹³¹

The Study Group have maintained this understanding of homosexuality as the foundation on which to write the 1983 Report. In doing so they picture the homosexual as deserving pity and, despite its apparent sympathy with the plight homosexuals find themselves faced with, it

¹²⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹²⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1968), p.491.

¹³⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.489.

¹³¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

implicitly bears the silent, but pernicious, suggestion that there is something intrinsically 'unnatural' about them. In addition to this there is the inherent belief that homosexuality is an illness, that it is a condition that requires a cure and, as such, is something that one can gain prevention from. Therefore, 'heterosexuality is here set up as a compulsory, normative state.'¹³² In doing this it has the effect of creating a situation whereby the subject of homosexuality is to be scrutinised whilst heterosexuality escapes similar treatment. As Grimwood explains, 'In short, the subject privileges itself by being able to define itself over and against that which it constructs as the other.'¹³³ By doing this the Study Group have subtly transformed those who would identify as being homosexual into non-personhood. This is described by Foucault as follows, 'As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; the perpetrator ... now a species.'¹³⁴ The act is now labelled rather than the person committing it. Therefore, as Foucault has highlighted, the shift of attention from what one does to what one is 'helps to objectify and turn a person into a case.'¹³⁵ By doing this the homosexual is effectively silenced because, even if they were to contribute to the debate, they would be hampered by being the object of the debate. Therefore, at no time could they ever be on equal terms with heterosexuals because, not only is the heterosexual position

¹³² Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.110.

¹³³ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.111.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*.

¹³⁵ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.113..

never scrutinised, as to do so would be considered to be both unthinkable and unnecessary.

It is interesting to note that 'in fulfilment of its remit'¹³⁶, the Study Group 'would submit that it might be appropriate to revise or expand the existing statement in the areas outlined below.'¹³⁷ The areas which the 1983 Report included were 'The Biblical Attitude', 'The Formation of Sexuality and Sexual Orientation', 'Sexuality and Marriage', 'Some Common Misconceptions', 'The Church's Response' and 'Some Pastoral Guidelines'¹³⁸ none of whose headings were to be found in the original 1968 Report. Therefore, by highlighting the areas that it would address, the Study Group were seeking to confine discussion to these specific areas thereby controlling the debate and influencing its outcome.

¹³⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.303.

¹³⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹³⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303-308.

Section Two – The Biblical Attitude

The second section provides a brief overview of a selection of the Biblical passages¹³⁹ which are traditionally referred to when the issue of homosexuality is raised. The Study Group also investigate some of the passages that are quoted when referring to the prevalence of same sex love, for example, the relationship between David and Jonathan. And, in addition to this, the Study Group ‘take into consideration the Bible’s (and so also the Church’s) teaching about marriage.’¹⁴⁰ It is interesting to note here the equating of the Church’s teaching with the infallibility of what the Bible says on marriage. This dovetailing of the Church’s teaching with that of the Bible’s has the effect of closing down any room for dissent. However, what is missing is an appreciation, by the participants, that in such biblical exegesis and subsequent appeal to its authority, there is an inherent value laden perspective which the authors cannot help but bring to their work. The authors of the Report fail to take into account the context in which the passages were written in order to understand them. In addition to this, they also fail to recognise that the out-working of the implication that each text has for our lives today is a very different task.

Although the authors acknowledge that there are different interpretations of the relevant passages which are usually quoted when the issue of homosexuality is raised, they do not expand on this. They further state

¹³⁹ Texts often quoted in the discussion of homosexuality are Genesis 19:1-19, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:18, Judges 19:16-30, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Jude 7.

¹⁴⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

that there has been considerable debate with regards to the meaning and interpretation of some Hebrew and Greek words within these passages, of which the Study Group give four examples.¹⁴¹ Again they do not provide translations for these examples, discuss the differences in meaning and interpretation or place their examples in context. Bearing in mind that the majority of commissioners at the 1983 Assembly would have no or only partial knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, then it is clear that they would have had to rely on the Study Group's interpretation of the debate surrounding such words as being accurate.

The Study Group go one step further and state that they 'still hold that there is good grounds for claiming that there is condemnation of the homosexual acts instanced in the relevant biblical passages, from which it may be assumed a general disapproval of homosexuality.'¹⁴² The Group have invested themselves with the power to discern what the 'divine will' is in relation to the subject of homosexuality. It would appear that they have decided what comprises 'good grounds' for the 'condemnation' of 'homosexual acts'¹⁴³. As if to further highlight what they mean, the Group equate 'homosexual acts' alongside 'perversion, cruelty, exploitation and violent disregard of another's person or property.'¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note the use of language which is now

¹⁴¹ The four examples are: *Yadha* (Genesis 19), *To'edah* (Leviticus 18:22), *Tara Phusin* (1 Romans 26), *Malakoi Arsenokoitai* (1 Corinthians 6 & 9). An example of the variety in meaning of the text can be seen is the use of the term *Yadah*. It can be argued that its use in Genesis 19 can range from to be 'be familiar with', 'to show hospitality toward', 'to inspect passports of', 'to have intercourse with' or 'to have relations with'.

¹⁴² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

¹⁴³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁴⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

being used by the Group to describe homosexuality, words such as 'condemned' and 'reprehensible'.¹⁴⁵ By using adjectives, such as these, and by combining them with scripture which they would see as God-given, the authors of the Report are discouraging any exploration of its biblical exegesis and conclusions. They are, in effect, diverting any critical questioning by those whose interests may be served by it. Namely, homosexuals. In addition to this it has the effect of creating an accepted interpretation of scripture that those in the majority (heterosexuals) feel vindicated and upheld in their belief that their sexual experience is approved by God.

The result of such textual analysis is that the Study Group have rendered any alternative interpretation impossible. Those who are homosexual 'have been condemned to silence and to secrecy'¹⁴⁶ with the Study Group's 'authorised interpretation of scripture appearing to be infallible. Indeed, they are being paternalistic and, it would seem, that they know what is best for the commissioners and the Church. After all it is 'their opinion'¹⁴⁷ that,

... there are good grounds for claiming that there is a condemnation of the homosexual acts instanced in the relevant biblical passages, from which may be assumed a general disapproval of homosexuality.¹⁴⁸

What we have contained within the report is a certain theological interpretation of scripture. However to merely,

¹⁴⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.118.

¹⁴⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

... exclude homosexuals on the basis of the same kind of purity laws constitutes a reversion to a form of religion which Jesus encourages us to leave behind.¹⁴⁹

Simple appeal to scripture, therefore, has the effect of turning the Bible into a law book and it is St. Paul himself who argues against using the Old Testament in this way. It is ironic, perhaps, that the Study Group appear to be using his letters in a way and for a purpose which he, himself, condemned.

When dealing with the example of David and Jonathan, as an instance of homosexual love in the Old Testament, they state,

We would suggest that this is to read into such passages a meaning which is not there, and which the texts do not warrant. Further, scripture's explicit references to sex and marriage precludes it from allowing any place for homosexual love or long-term relationships.¹⁵⁰

This appeal, which the Study Group make to scripture, makes explicit their understanding of the primacy of marriage in a hierarchy of relationships. Marriage is understood,

... as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings. Sexual activity of any kind outside marriage comes to be seen as sinful, and homosexual practice as especially dishonourable.¹⁵¹

It is only through the institution of marriage, according to the Study Group, and the 'fidelity'¹⁵² that is contained within it, that understands 'genital sex'¹⁵³ to be 'an expression of commitment, trust and affection

¹⁴⁹ Duffield, I., (January 2004) *The Expository Times*, Volume 115, Number 4.

¹⁵⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁵¹ *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*, London: Church House Publishing, (1991), p.18.

¹⁵² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.304.

¹⁵³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

and its function as an affirmation of our responsibilities in procreation.¹⁵⁴

The inference is that, as Grimwood has stated,

it is clear that marriage is represented as the definitive norm and that other conditions are exceptions to this rule. It is a norm that seduces us towards conformity. Is it too much to say that heterosexuality is here being set up as a compulsory, normative state, from which a special dispensation is required in order to be exempt? Do churches not use marriage as the 'family' as a lever with which to apply the pressure that reinforces the heterosexual ideal, the continual barrage of words and concepts becoming as seductive as they are oppressive?¹⁵⁵

By stating that references in scripture to sex and marriage 'precludes... any place for homosexual love or long term relationships'¹⁵⁶ the Study Group are highlighting the fact that in order for marriage to be seen as 'normal' then there has to be 'something which is other to it and against which it might measure itself.'¹⁵⁷ This is an interesting move by the Study Group because they have now equated both 'homosexual love' and 'long term relationships' as being that which is 'abnormal'. The relationship between David and Jonathan, then, is seen by the Study Group as being good and wholesome as they are heterosexual men (to suggest otherwise 'would contradict everything that is said about David's sexual inclinations in other passages')¹⁵⁸ but, had he been homosexual, then they would have found themselves outside of the Bible's stories.

What the Study Group have done is to base their, limited, discussion of the texts involved on a static and inerrant understanding of scripture.

¹⁵⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁵⁵ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.109-110.

¹⁵⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

¹⁵⁷ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.* p.110.

¹⁵⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

They view the Bible's stories as time locked tales of truth. This is a major flaw in this section because although the Bible contains ethical injunctions and laws, it also contains stories which equally convey truth. Therefore to isolate texts to prove a point is a dangerous game to play. Even within the confines of scripture we find shifts taking place with regards to the understanding of who is acceptable to be part of the Christian community. For example, Peter on the road from Joppa to Caesarea to visit Cornelius the Roman centurion¹⁵⁹ has a vision during which he is told that he is to eat anything that God has provided. This included all those animals that the Jewish Law prohibited. Peter refuses three times and eventually he is told, 'It is not for you to call profane what God counts clean.'¹⁶⁰ With this vision fresh in his mind Peter continues to Cornelius' house and whilst there is asked to recount the story of Jesus to this Gentile family. The members of Cornelius' household are so convinced by what they hear that they are baptised. Through this single act, the story of the salvation of the Jews becomes a story of salvation for all humanity. In associating with, accepting and baptising Gentiles, who were seen as second class citizens, Peter puts aside the Holiness Code. In other words, the ritual and purity laws contained in the Old Testament are seen as temporary. By this act, Christianity becomes an inclusive community welcoming those who, traditionally, would have been viewed as outsiders.

¹⁵⁹ Acts 10:1-43.

¹⁶⁰ Acts 10:15.

The story of Cornelius is not an isolated one though as Philip baptises an Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8 of the Book of Acts. He takes a foreigner, a man regarded as impure who does not belong to an ethnic or tribal group and baptises him. By doing so Philip values the eunuch as a person in his own right and gives a place of honour to those whom his society marginalized, so overturning the direct teaching of Leviticus.

Such shifts of thinking and practice are not solely confined to the New Testament. The Old Testament itself is not static or uniform in its views. For example, in Deuteronomy 23:1-4 it is stated that no Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the Assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. Later in the Old Testament comes the story of Ruth, a Moabite, and in her marriage to Boaz she becomes an ancestor of David. Therefore, the story of Ruth is at direct variance with what is advocated in Deuteronomy. In the latter the Moabites are to be excluded from the congregation. But they now become part of the congregation through Ruth as an ancestor of David. Also in Isaiah 56 eunuchs are invited into the worshipping community in spite of the Deuteronomic prohibition on such a practice. Therefore even within the Old Testament itself there is a dynamic re-writing of earlier traditions in response to new experiences and scripture itself includes those who according to previous parts of scripture have been involved in abominable acts and excluded from the congregation.

What this goes to highlight is that, even within the Bible, changes in outlook, direction and acceptability take place. It is too simplistic, therefore, for the Study Group to argue that there is a traditional interpretation of scripture. Scripture is far too diverse. The problem with the Study Groups' interpretation of scripture is that it is based on paternalism, that there is the assumption that they have the knowledge of true and accurate exegesis and that if you disagree with them then you are outside of accepted orthodoxy. Also, by appealing to a traditional interpretation of scripture they are stating that theirs is an orthodox position, that finds its authority in God and that those who stray from it are outside of orthodoxy and so outside of the Church.

This is an incredibly powerful position for the Study Group to be in because, by accepting the Report, the Assembly agreed with their interpretation of scripture even though there was no exegesis included within it or discussion on the floor of Assembly. By stating that 'there is a condemnation of homosexual acts...from which it may be assumed a general disapproval of homosexuality'¹⁶¹ the Study Group have closed down the discussion on homosexuality as contained in the Bible. As Beverly Harrison has written, principles can be used either,

... for the purpose of terminating the process of moral reasoning...to invoke the principle [that] settles the matter, stops debate¹⁶² or it can open up processes of reasoning rather than to close them down...to help locate and weigh values, to illuminate a range of values that always inhere in significant human decisions.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

¹⁶² Harrison, B. W., (1985) *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Christian Social Ethics*, ed. Carol Rubb, Boston: Beacon Press, p.129.

¹⁶³ Harrison, B. W., (1985) *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Christian Social Ethics*, *Ibid.*.

In other words, what the Study Group have done is to close down and terminate the discussion on the interpretation of scripture to all who disagree with them. Their interpretation has become accepted orthodoxy within the Church and its official view. The Church has underlined heterosexuality as the accepted sexual orientation with homosexuality being further banished from its Garden of Eden. The result of which, according to David Halperin, is that by,

... constituting homosexuality as an object of knowledge, heterosexuality also constitutes itself as a privileged stance of subjectivity – as the very condition of knowing – and thereby avoids becoming an object of knowledge itself, the target of possible critique. In this, it is of course unlike homosexuality, which is a perennial object of inquiry but never a viable subjective stance, never a disinterested, non-partisan, legitimate position from which to speak, and is therefore never authorised except as an occasional voice of an already discounted and devalued subcultural minority.¹⁶⁴

The conclusion must be, therefore, that the Study Group have drawn upon those aspects of scripture which accord with their own, that is the heterosexual majorities, own assumptions and ideals. The result of this is that,

... a small selection of verses condemning various “sex acts” are decontextualised, universalised and misapplied to our situation... ‘proving’ beyond reasonable doubt that ‘homosexuality is incompatible with Christianity.’¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Halperin, D. M., (1995) *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.47.

¹⁶⁵ Webster, A. R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.26.

Section Three – The Formation of Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

The third section discusses the formation of sexuality and sexual orientation. Although there had been a huge amount of work undertaken on the issue of the origins of a person's sexual orientation, since the previous 1968 Report, the Study Group do not mention any of the findings or discuss the development of a concept of personhood. This is in marked contrast to the troubled 1994 Report where there is an entire section titled 'The Growth of Human Sexuality and the Development of Personhood.'¹⁶⁶ In saying this, it should be noted that the heading comes with a qualification that states that it is 'one view.'¹⁶⁷ However there is an implicit anthropology within the Report which relates to the concept of complementarity. That is, the belief that man and woman are 'made for each other', destined to live together in a particular relationship as 'man and wife'. This can be seen from one of the songs that the Church of Scotland has approved as a wedding song,

As man and woman we were made
That love be found and life begun,
So praise the Lord Who made us two,
And praise the Lord when two are one;
Praise for the love that comes to life
Through child or parent, husband, wife.¹⁶⁸

In many ways it would appear that heterosexual normativity, endemic throughout the Study Group's Report, rests on the concept of male-female complementarity. This has to be challenged because, in Adrienne Rich's words, 'Heterosexuality is an enormous assumption to have

¹⁶⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1994), p.501-503.

¹⁶⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁶⁸ Wren, B., 1973 words can be found at
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/m/a/manwoman.htm>

glided so silently into the foundations of our thought.¹⁶⁹ But this is not surprising because the Church, through its Reports, has established a set of norms which has had the effect of creating insiders (heterosexuals) and outsiders (homosexuals). The exercise of such power, within the Church, depends not only on a consensus of opinion amongst those holding power but, more importantly, on the complicity of those who are deemed to be on the outside. Those who are on the outside may not even be aware that they are being complicit in their ostracisation for as Foucault observes, 'power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.'¹⁷⁰ There is then pressure to conform by all its members. If this is the case then power is not used to control those on the outside, it is there to create them. This is an important point to highlight because,

... such objectification plays a significant role in the operation of power discipline and control. For it is clear that the subject who is able to objectify is able to define, represent and, ultimately, is the one who gets to do the talking.¹⁷¹

The control of what is said, therefore, and who is permitted to say it allows the Study Group (and those in the majority) to act as both 'Father and Judge.'¹⁷² The rules of any institutional game are always designed to serve the interests of the dominant group. If you are not in that group, then you are at fault because you have chosen not to play by the agreed

¹⁶⁹ Rich, Adrienne, (1981) *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience*, London: Onlywomen Press, p.9.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.106-107.

¹⁷¹ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹⁷² Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.116.

rules. The issue of homosexuality is no different and in this section the Study Group lay their reasoning behind their conclusion that 'we may choose what to do with what we are, and to some extent decide what we are to become.'¹⁷³

Although the Study Group in admitting that, 'our sexual development is complicated, involving the interaction of several biological and psychological processes during embryonic and post-natal life, and is shaped all the time by social factors and personal choices'¹⁷⁴ appear to be agreeing with those who believe that a person does not choose their sexuality. They conclude that while in many ways sexual orientation seems to be an inherited characteristic,

...nevertheless there can be no doubt that early influences and environment play a large part in shaping all our characters... Moreover while we may not choose what we are to begin with, as we grow in understanding and in grace we may choose to do with what we are, and to some extent decide what we are to become.¹⁷⁵

In other words, homosexual people have a choice as to whether they remain homosexual or become heterosexual, that is, normal and accepted. The notion that someone *chooses* to be homosexual, with all that that entails, is a powerful notion for the Study Group to employ. This is because it marks out the homosexual as a person who is *choosing* to separate themselves from the love of God, who is *choosing* to live outside the Bible's teachings, who is *choosing* to be out with the Church which represents the priesthood of all believers and the family of the faithful. In doing this the Study Group have subtly subjected the

¹⁷³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.303.

¹⁷⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁷⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

issue of sexuality to Church control with the Report becoming the tool whereby the Church regulates the sexual lives of its members and defines what is sexually acceptable within the Church and what is unacceptable. The sexually active homosexual has now been silenced and banished from church life.

Section Four – Sexuality and Marriage

After subtly, or not so subtly, condemning homosexual people for not *choosing* the conventional, heterosexual life section four introduces the subject of sexuality and marriage. The context of the discussion on sexuality and marriage is located in the belief that ‘male and female he created them.’¹⁷⁶ The belief that, ‘it is these necessary differences, biological, physiological, psychological, and emotional, as well as the similarities, which make possible the complementarity which we believe to be the essence of marriage’¹⁷⁷ is the method by which the Study Group establishes marriage as the ideal context for a sexual relationship and the one over which all other relationships are judged and defined.

The origin of the idea of complementarity remains unclear although the Book of Genesis, as quoted above, is often cited as its biblical foundation. But, whatever its origins, it has become inextricably linked with the concepts of gender and gender differentiation. The simplistic biological and psychological determinism that underpins this theory is used by the Church to justify the suppression of all expressions of same-sex love. Therefore what the Church is attempting to do is not to address the question as to whether sexuality should be expressed but, rather, dictate how. By doing this the Church is raising marriage to the ideal, the relationship that should be striven for, with other relationships being seen as exceptions to the rule and of lesser importance. As Alison Webster writes,

¹⁷⁶ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁷⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.304.

In Western Christianity the idea that men and women are 'made for each other', destined to live a particular kind of life together as 'man and wife', now overshadows all our relational ethics.

An older perception was that the primary purpose of human life was communion with God, and that human intimacy constituted a potential threat to the wholehearted contemplation of the Divine...But now, it seems, heterosexuality is fast becoming *the means* to achieve communion with God. Mainstream Christianity is in danger of making an idol of heterosexuality, and of making 'belief in' marriage a condition of belonging.¹⁷⁸

For the Study Group, and for those in power in the Church, the belief is that 'chastity out with marriage and fidelity within it'¹⁷⁹ is the ideal and that 'co-habitation not only complicates relationships, but also fails to satisfy basic human needs.'¹⁸⁰ The Study Group frame their discussion around these two principles. By doing this they immediately negate the possibility of any form of acceptable homosexual relationship. As if to further alienate homosexuals they then use a definition of marriage which is to be found in the Roman Catholic pamphlet 'An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People', which states,

Marriage is an intensification of that general affection we must have for all who enjoy God's love and are made in his image. Ideally, the husband and wife focus their love more and more intensely on one another until there is that uninhibited giving of each other in sexual union. This is more than the coming together of two bodies, it is the union of minds and the complete trust of those who are prepared to surrender everything to one another. It is the culmination of a loving relationship and, at the same time, the growth point from which the woman and the man move onto a deeper sharing of love.....it is exclusive in that such a unique and intense gift of oneself could only be shared with one other person.¹⁸¹

By including this definition in the body of the report, the Study Group, are explicitly aligning themselves with an authoritarian church whose system

¹⁷⁸ Webster, A. R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.186.

¹⁷⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁸⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁸¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

of controlling its members is 'based on an ethic of obedience to authority.'¹⁸² It is a church whose system of control is,

... protected by the claims of revelation and tradition: it is from God, so it was beyond human questioning; it was the way things had always been. And it was handed on in a way that interiorised it in the human psyche. To challenge it was perilous and isolating, but the very weight of its prestige made it difficult to challenge.'¹⁸³

For the Roman Catholic Church, marriage remains a sacrament, a relationship ordained and blessed by God. The relationship we should all strive for and the one in which children should be brought up. In addition to this, homosexuality is viewed as a mortal sin and so the implication given is that homosexuals are not welcome within the Church.

By aligning themselves with such an uncompromising stance, the Study Group were implicitly saying that they too were equally uncompromising and that to challenge the stance of the Study Group was, in effect, a challenge to the will of God.

The interpretation that can be derived from the section used from the Roman Catholic pamphlet is that homosexual sex is 'just' sex but that the 'sexual union' of husband and wife is 'spiritual' a 'coming together of two bodies... the union of minds... complete trust.'¹⁸⁴ Therefore, there is an implied hierarchy of relationships with heterosexual couples at the top of the pyramid and homosexuals at its bottom, with homosexuals not seen as having a morality in their relationships. As if to underline their

¹⁸² Holloway, R., (1999) *Godless Morality*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., p.152.

¹⁸³ Holloway, R., (1999) *Godless Morality*, *Ibid.*,.

¹⁸⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland,(1983), p.308.

immorality and just how far outside of God's love and the churches sphere of acceptability homosexuals are, Cardinal Winning, the leading Catholic Churchman in Scotland at the time, referred to homosexuals as *perverts* during an interview in 2000. Writing that week in the Sunday Herald, Bishop Richard Holloway noted,

The Cardinal's dilemma is religion's dilemma writ large...This is the dilemma that churches are facing: in order to end the sin of homophobia they will have to abandon the theology that promotes it. Tom Winning's candour last week shows how far conservative Christianity is from making that change...Cardinal Winning may have a perfect right to deny homosexual rights within the Roman Catholic Church, which people can choose to leave if they want to; he has no right to interfere with the laws and civil rights of Scotland, from which gay and lesbian people cannot abstract themselves...Part of the problem for ancient religious institutions is that they have long genetic memories of times when they called the shots in state as well as in church.¹⁸⁵

The study group, therefore, in aligning themselves with the Roman Catholic Church and their view of marriage have also aligned themselves with a conservative interpretation of personhood, relationships, sexuality and everything else that goes along with it. The result of such a stand is to say to homosexuals that there is no possible relationship that they could be involved in that could be seen as value-giving, life-affirming or loving in the eyes of the Church.

This is highlighted in the last phrase of the quotation from the pamphlet which reads, 'could only be shared with one other person'¹⁸⁶(of a different sex). By inference, then, this implies that same sex couples relationships are inferior and, in addition, it would appear that they would

¹⁸⁵ Holloway, R., (March 2002) *The Sunday Herald*, Glasgow (UK), p.2.

¹⁸⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

have multiple partners.¹⁸⁷ By referring to this in the 1967 Report the Study Group appear to be buying into the age old notion that gay male promiscuity is inevitable, natural and something that society needs to be protected from. Protection appears to be the order of the day and writing about those who were seeking acceptance of homosexuals within the Church, the Vatican stated,

...a materialistic ideology which denies the transcendent nature of the human person as well as the supernatural vocation of every individual... [they] seek to create confusion regarding the Church's position, and then to use that confusion to their own advantage.¹⁸⁸

Membership of the group is said to be:

...restricted by and large to those who either ignore the teaching of the Church or seek somehow to undermine it... she [the Church] is really concerned about the many who are not represented by the pro-homosexual movement and about those who may have been tempted to believe its deceitful propaganda.¹⁸⁹

It is interesting that both the Vatican and the Study Group, when they say that homosexuals have a choice whether to be included in the Church or not, blame them for their own oppression.

The importance of marriage and the desecration of homosexual relationships is complete when the Report states the ultimate function of marriage,

While it would be wrong to over-emphasise the importance of genital sex and to talk as if nothing else mattered in the marriage

¹⁸⁷ This was stated on page 514 of the 1967 Assembly Report *...the homosexual does not have the help of society to deal with his condition, and this increases his loneliness and tempts him to become promiscuous with others in order to overcome for a short while the all pervading loneliness in which he lives.*

¹⁸⁸ Ratzinger, J. Cardinal and Bovone, A., (1986) *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, Rome: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, paragraph 8, p.4-5.

¹⁸⁹ Ratzinger, J. Cardinal and Bovone, A., (1986) *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, *Ibid.*, paragraph 9, p.5.

relationship, it would be equally foolish to deny the very central place it has as an expression of commitment, trust, affection and its function as an affirmation of our responsibility in procreation.¹⁹⁰

In other words, the inference from this is that because homosexual same sex relationships can never end in procreation, genital sex is forbidden and so, following that logic, these relationships can never be a true 'expression of commitment, trust, affection.'¹⁹¹ This is an incredibly value-laden statement which, again, no one questioned on the floor of the Assembly.

It is interesting to note that the underlying assumption is that, up to this point, homosexual within this entire report equals gay men as nowhere is the term lesbian mentioned. The term 'homosexual practice' is never actually defined – does it mean to express affection? Is it a kiss? Is it a cuddle? Is it holding hands? Is it looking at someone of the same sex in a lustful way? Is it touching their body intimately? Is it oral sex? Is it anal sex? What is the defining action that turns you into indulging in 'homosexual practice'? The Study Group do not offer enlightenment.

It is interesting that the Study Group go on to state,

Given this view of the nature of marriage and the necessity of chastity outside marriage, the Study Group is bound to say that by definition there can be no such thing as a 'homosexual marriage', nor, for homosexual partners living together, can there be sexual acts which involve copulation by any means of anal, oral or coital intercourse.¹⁹²

Then they state,

¹⁹⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.304.

¹⁹¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

.....care must be taken not to adopt a double standard which allows for the expression of our sexuality and our loving affection in various other ways by unmarried heterosexuals and not by homosexuals. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, have to decide on what are the limits of responsible behaviour for them within their relationships.¹⁹³

This is a very subtle use of power and authority by the study group as they have previously outlined what is off limits to homosexual couples but no such prohibition is to be found anywhere with regards to heterosexual couples. In fact, the only thing they have to decide is what are the 'limits of responsible behaviour for them.'¹⁹⁴ For the homosexual couple the decision has already been made for them by the Church, no 'anal, oral or coital intercourse.'¹⁹⁵

Such statements from the Study Group find their genesis in natural law which is rooted both in classical Greek philosophy and in the Stoicism of the Roman Empire and lead to mind/body and spirit/body dualism. The outcome of this was a deep Christian uneasiness, or in some cases loathing, of the human body and sexuality. This has directly led to the situation today whereby the dominant Christian view of sexual instinct is that it is something that needs to be mastered and kept under tight control. Human sexuality is thereby reduced to marital sexuality and the Study Group by equating it with procreation further narrow its definition to reproductive sexuality. The consequence of this is to make all sexual acts and differing sexualities sinful, unnatural and something to be conquered or controlled. By reinforcing this with biblical passages which uphold the concept of heterosexuality we are led to believe that this is

¹⁹³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

¹⁹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

also God's preferred sexuality. There can be little argument then that the Church is organised to restore and uphold traditional family values within society. What the Study Group failed to understand or appreciate, when they focused on whether homosexuals were practicing or not, was that sexuality goes straight to the essence of who a person is and so means much more than any physical expression because,

Attached to a person's sexuality is the capacity to feel affection, to delight in someone else, to get emotionally close to another person, to be passionately committed to him or her. Sexuality is at the core of that marvellous human experience, being in love – to be struck by the beauty of another and be drawn out of yourself, to become attached to another human being so powerfully that you easily begin measuring your life in terms of what's good for someone else as well as for yourself.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid*, p.13.

Section Five – Some Common Misconceptions

Section five highlights some common misconceptions about the term homosexual. Numbered amongst these misconceptions are that ‘every homosexual is attracted to children and adolescents and wishes to have physical contact with them.’¹⁹⁷ However in the very same breath the Study Group negate this and reinforce this inaccurate stereotype by stating that,

... it would be wrong, however, to ignore the fact that homosexual contact may have a critical influence on the life of a young person who is drawn into some kind of homosexual encounter at a vulnerable time in his or her life.¹⁹⁸

Again the perception in the Church is that homosexuals are predatory, waiting to corrupt the young. The idea behind this is that you choose to be homosexual which harks back to the study group’s belief that ‘we may choose what to do with what we are, and to some extent decide what we are to become.’¹⁹⁹

The second stereotype highlighted is that homosexual refers purely to men. However again, the study group appear to lessen the impact of lesbianism, almost dismissing it as unimportant in the debate, by stating ‘for various reasons, homosexual relationships between women have in the past seemed to be less common than those involving men.’²⁰⁰ This is a sweeping statement and they offer no evidence to back it up. Therefore the impression that is given is two-fold, firstly, that lesbians are not a threat to society because their numbers are so small and,

¹⁹⁷ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*.

¹⁹⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.p.303.

¹⁹⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²⁰⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.p.304.

secondly, that because they are not male then they are seen as no threat to the Church and the nation's moral decency. Homosexuals, on the other hand, are viewed as a group of people whom all right thinking heterosexuals need protection from because of their predatory tendencies.

The final assumption and the Study Group's assessment of it is, perhaps, the most damning. They highlight that the recourse to willpower by the homosexual to 'correct their condition' (notice the terminology) 'is a gross simplification of the issue.'²⁰¹ However, again they immediately fall into the trap of doing that very thing, over simplification of the entire subject of how homosexuals manage to deal with their feelings by stating,

...it is important to point out that many more have a choice as to whether or not to practice homosexual acts than is often assumed. Of these, many may enter satisfactorily into stable heterosexual relationships. Others may come to see as an alternative to the overt homosexual act the possibility of channelling their energies in other directions. Whenever possible, the homosexual person should be granted the opportunity of being helped to come more readily to that choice.²⁰²

Here we hear nothing of the pain and frustration of men who have forced themselves into heterosexual marriages because society has told them that this is the proper thing to do. We hear nothing of the families living out the pain of a breakdown when one of the spouses has come to the conclusion that they must follow their instincts and reveal that they are homosexual. We hear nothing from the children who are left wondering why their parents have split up. In addition to that we have to wonder

²⁰¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.305.

²⁰² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

what the study group have in mind when they suggest that 'as an alternative to the overt homosexual act homosexuals should consider the possibility of channelling their energies in other directions.'²⁰³ Are they talking about gardening, body building, restoring old cars? And who is exactly going to help them come to that choice?

²⁰³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

Section Six – The Church’s Response

The report states, after ostracising the homosexual for most of the report by telling him that all he need to do is to stop being selfish and pull himself together, that ‘the message which the Christian Church has for the person who is of homosexual orientation is a positive one.’²⁰⁴ We learn that the message is the same for Christian’s everywhere, whether they be heterosexual or homosexual, the ‘message of grace, forgiveness and redemption.’²⁰⁵ Later on in the section they state,

...we believe that the practice of homosexual acts is not the way God would have his people live. The Christian response, therefore, is most appropriately that of one pilgrim humbly seeking to share the burden of another on the journey through life, in pursuit of God’s will. We may then be led to a new and better understanding of God’s love for His people expressed in His Spirit’s work in our lives.²⁰⁶

It is interesting to note that the Study Group are open to a ‘new and better understanding of God’s love for His people’²⁰⁷ but only if it includes heterosexuality as a necessary ingredient and does not involve homosexuals! It would appear that the Study Group are placing limits on the work of the Holy Spirit by their narrow definition. Although they have stated that they are open to the Spirit’s prompting they have already stated that ‘homosexual acts’²⁰⁸ are not to be included in any new revelation that it may offer. This brings to mind the argument of Richard Holloway who states, ‘God wants to give us new things, but we cannot

²⁰⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

receive them because our hands are clasped too tightly round to old.²⁰⁹ By doing this, the Study Group are claiming the right to discern for the Church, what the Holy Spirit is saying to it on the subject of homosexuality. This was never questioned at the time, the commissioners probably glad that they were not having such a burden placed on their shoulders.

Next the Study Group discuss the fact that social exclusion often affects homosexuals from the 'normal life of the community.'²¹⁰ They are concerned that through 'social disapproval'²¹¹ and the use of the term "homosexual" to sum up a whole category of people, effectively sets that group apart as it isolates for emphasis that part of their being which is their sexual orientation.²¹² Is this not what the whole tenure of this Report has been about? The Study Group throughout their Report have consistently used the term 'homosexual' to refer precisely to a group of people who, at that time through a variety of legislation, were excluded within society and are still excluded within the Church setting today. Therefore, how else should homosexuals feel, apart from exclusion on the primary basis of their sexuality? In addition to this, the Study Group state, 'In focusing upon this single dimension of a person's being, his or her sexuality, a simplified picture is drawn which is really a caricature of the homosexual person.'²¹³ What then, has the Study Group being

²⁰⁹ Holloway. R., (1994) *The Stranger in the Wings: Affirming Faith in a God of Surprises*, London, SPCK, p.22.

²¹⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²¹¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²¹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²¹³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

doing throughout the report but concentrating on the homosexual person's requirement to remain single and celibate? Is their report then just a caricature? This is not a flippant question for in seeking to find an answer to it we could undermine the Church's official position on this matter.

Again, then, the issue of control comes into the report as the Study Group prescribe the way forward for homosexuals to be welcomed into the 'Family of Faith'. In addition to the above requirements, we are told that,

For some of us prayer will be responded to by immediate relief. For others, a lifetime of prayer and commitment, even of struggle, may be devoted to the relief of some need for healing of which we are conscious. So it will be with those Christians who are homosexual and who ask for Christ's love to be revealed in His grace to live with and control that part of their nature.²¹⁴

Yet again we have the idea being perpetuated that all homosexual people need to do is *control* their urges. That the feelings they have can be overcome, if they really want it to happen. We are told by the Study Group that the 'duty of the Christian brother or sister is sensitively, and as appropriate, to point the way to a greater love, transcending the sexual, towards which they may be drawn.'²¹⁵ Or in other words, the only acceptable relationship that someone who is homosexual can involve himself in is a celibate one. The subtext of such a statement is that true Christian relationships are based on the tradition of heterosexual practice.

²¹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

Section Seven – Some Pastoral Guidelines

The last section deals with the pastoral concerns of the Church when dealing with homosexuals in their midst. Yet again, however, it is interesting to note that the Study Group borrow heavily from the Roman Catholic Church's pamphlet entitled *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*. As a summary for how they hope to care for homosexuals they quote the Catholic Social Welfare Commission stating,

In general terms the pastoral task might be considered as helping homosexual persons, or those who consider themselves to be homosexual persons, to understand and examine the meaning of their behaviour, sexual or otherwise, in the light of the love of God and the love of neighbour, together with the moral and pastoral teaching of Christianity.²¹⁶

There then follows fifteen suggested guidelines to help the pastor deal with a homosexual person who seeks her/his help and advice. The guidelines remind the pastor that everyone is seen as valuable and of worth within the Church. That the 'Church is concerned first of all with people'²¹⁷ and that 'how people are classified is secondary and is intended merely to be a help towards understanding people.'²¹⁸ This is the first time in the Report that the Study Group has stated this. It would appear that classification of people as homosexual was more important to them throughout the Report and that the value that each of us has in Christ is secondary at best.

²¹⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²¹⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²¹⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

The Study Group state that, 'Empirical evidence suggests that sexual orientation in a limited number of individuals is totally exclusive.'²¹⁹

There are no references as to where this information has been gleaned and the General Assembly, and Church, are being implicitly asked to trust and concur with the judgement of the Study Group. This appears to be a theme which runs through the report as a whole.

There is a suggestion then, from the 'evidence' that the Study Group have just presented that the majority of homosexuals have a 'choice' in defining their sexuality (another belief that permeates the report). This being the case, then it is up to those in the Church to provide guidance to the 'homosexual person' to enable them 'to explore all of the choices which are open to him or her, for many may choose to not enter into active homosexual contact.'²²⁰ The inference is that those who are homosexual cannot do this for themselves, that they cannot be trusted to make, what is seen by the Study Group as, the right decision; namely, a rejection of homosexuality and an embracing of heterosexuality. It is worthy of note that throughout this section the person who is deemed to be worthy of offering such guidance is a 'pastor'.²²¹ This is a strange term to use as the Church typically refers to its clergy as ministers. Only once do the Study Group use the term 'pastoral ministers'²²² and that in relation to a people who are 'properly trained to meet their pastoral

²¹⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.306.

²²⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²²¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²²² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.308.

needs.²²³ Is this an oversight on the Study Group's part? Do they see a difference between the two? What do they understand by the term pastor? It is difficult to know as we are never told what the mind of the Study Group is in relation to this. This is a strange omission as the guidelines which they have produced depend on such a person's assistance.

Pastors are seen as facilitators in the "coming out" process²²⁴ enabling those who are homosexual to come to terms with their sexuality. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the term 'coming out' on the Study Group's behalf as they do not mention coming out to family and friends or coming out at work and the implications that all this has for the homosexual person. In addition to this the Study Group do not acknowledge that as heterosexuals they never have to come out as their sexuality is deemed to be the norm. On the other hand, homosexuals are constantly having to come out in a plethora of situations because they are seen to be, somehow, 'different'.

Also introduced is the notion that homosexuality should not *only* be seen as an 'erotic, sexual attraction of a person towards members of the same sex.'²²⁵ Rather, 'it sometimes also means the absence of attraction to members of the opposite sex, even to the point of positive disgust for sexual relationships of the opposite sex.'²²⁶ This is incredibly dangerous

²²³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²²⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.307.

²²⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²²⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

ground that the Study Group are treading. I say this because they appear to be suggesting that if you are not attracted sexually to someone of the opposite sex then you are homosexual. What about the person who is asexual, who has no interest in the sexual act either with someone of the opposite or same sex? Are they also to be classified as homosexual, as someone who should be seeking counselling from pastors?

The concept of isolation from community and society, described above, is exacerbated by the Study Group when they turn to a discussion of the support that homosexuals may seek as they attempt to confront and deal with their sexuality. They make an unsubstantiated and sweeping statement which shows their underlying antagonism with all aspects of homosexual life. It highlights that the issue for the Study Group is not wholly focused on the 'genital act' as they had stated earlier in the section entitled *Sexuality and Marriage* but also includes anyone or any organisation that may be regarded as encouraging homosexual activity, whether that be through social interaction, friendships or sexual relationships. This is summarised in the statement,

... it is not unusual for homosexual people who find little opportunity for fellowship within the Church to rely instead on the support and understanding which they find in Gay Groups which have no sympathy with the life-giving message of the Gospel.²²⁷

The implication is that 'Gay Groups' cannot be life-giving or life-affirming to homosexuals, only the Church can give that message. This is interesting because it is precisely because of the way that that 'life-giving

²²⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

message' has been shared with gay and lesbian people that they have had to seek alternative avenues to find personal affirmation. Such a statement completely negates the work of groups such as the Metropolitan Community Church which affirms members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community, as well as those who would identify as being heterosexual, and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. There is a lack of understanding of the groups and associations that are already offering advice, support, help and a safe space in which to tell personal stories. This is highlighted when they state, 'this whole group of people often find themselves hopelessly estranged from those around them.'²²⁸ Although later in the Report the Study Group do mention 'Christian groups who are explicitly formed for the encouragement of homosexuals to cope with their difficulties'²²⁹ they refuse to commend them and, instead, view them with a sense of suspicion. They state,

The goodwill of these societies must not be automatically questioned, especially because their very existence may be due to the insensitivity of the general public. On the other hand, there are obvious dangers. Moral support may easily be turned to moral danger and the pastor must encourage the person who seeks his advice to face up to this real possibility. In addition, a society formed originally for the moral support of the homosexual might, even unwittingly, deepen an already existing problem. It might tend to relax standards rather than support efforts to cope with difficulties and homosexual activity may be nurtured rather than avoided.²³⁰

It would appear that the Study Group do not see the Church in this instance as being the cause of homosexuals seeking other organisations in which to find support and a sense of belonging. The use of the term

²²⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²²⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.308.

²³⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

‘the insensitivity of the general public’²³¹ would appear to absolve the Church from any criticisms that its attitude towards the acceptance of sexually active homosexuals into their community has anything to do with them seeking support elsewhere. By doing this the Study Group seek to move the blame from the Church’s attitude and, through the use of pastors offering help and advice, want now to be viewed as working for society’s common good by offering this perceived system of support.

‘The Christian’s response’, the way that this support should be offered we are told ‘is...that of one pilgrim seeking to share the burden of another... in pursuit of God’s will... we are to support and encourage one another towards wholeness and peace.’²³² Can people really be counted as being whole if a part of what makes them who and what they are remains unacknowledged? The use of words and concepts which are undefined effectively means that the Study Group can control their meaning if the issue were ever to arise. They are the authors and when questions are raised they can provide the definitions that suit their arguments. Yet again, the Study Group are using the power they have as authors to control what knowledge the community of faith have. This can be seen when they then inform the Church what they believe the components that will lead to wholeness being achieved. ‘Confession of sins of judgement and rejection, the prayer for God’s forgiveness and that of one another, and for the grace to see each other more clearly.’²³³

²³¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²³² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

²³³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

The Study Group tackle the issue of marriage in relation to homosexuality by acknowledging that 'marriage to a person of the opposite sex has not proved to be a successful answer for most homosexuals.'²³⁴ They cite some reasons for this as 'it for being for the wrong reasons'²³⁵ or 'a mid-life crisis'²³⁶. Particularly with the latter they understand this to be a 'regression into a prior stage'.²³⁷ This is worthy of note as previously they stated that 'personal development is never static'²³⁸ which, by implication, means that all human beings develop over time. It is only in the homosexual's case that an acceptance and embracing of one's sexuality is viewed negatively and seen as something that takes a person back rather than moving them forward.

Building on the idea of regression, which is itself a psychiatric term, the Study Group then go on to discuss the use and success of using psychiatric interventions in order to provide a 'remedy'²³⁹ for homosexuals. Again the Study Group are viewing homosexuality as a condition that can be cured. They even suggest that.

...pastors and counsellors may suggest psychological testing to determine whether a person is exclusively or predominantly homosexual, as opposed to a "transitional" homosexual, who is passing through a temporary phase of psychological development.²⁴⁰

Again the implication is that homosexuality is a condition that, with the right approach and treatment, can be addressed and cured. The Study

²³⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²³⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²³⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²³⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²³⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²³⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²⁴⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

Group then describe 'true homosexuals' as 'inverts'²⁴¹ which has the result of portraying them as being something to be pitied and viewed with suspicion by society and the Church. They conclude this section by stating that sometimes therapy does not work and that 'no false expectations' should be raised by those who seek to offer counselling.

Almost, in the same breath, the Study Group state that, 'the Church has a serious responsibility to work towards the elimination of any injustice perpetrated on homosexuals by society.'²⁴² Again the question that arises is: What about the Church's injustice and oppression?

It is at this point in the Report that the Study Group state, yet again, that they believe that the homosexual has a free choice as to whether or not they 'indulge' their homosexual feelings by entering into homosexual relationships. This belief that it is an active choice for someone to be homosexual is an idea that permeates the whole of the document to the extent that it appears that they believe that homosexuals need only to be strong and resolute to break the chains of homosexuality and so cross over into the heterosexual Promised Land. It is on this belief that the whole idea of the pastor counselling a homosexual person out of bondage, through offering encouragement and support, that the idea of eventual freedom rests. As the Study Group state in the final guideline,

The pastor will help souls if he introduces them to an understanding of that love which is more comprehensive than sexuality. His role is to introduce people to Christian life in all its fullness. This does not mean instant purification and real growth in holiness. Every person

²⁴¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

²⁴² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.308

with spiritual ambitions must cope with his personal limitations. These vary from person to person and are frequently complex and discouraging, but all people who, in spite of limitations and even failure, continue to struggle and grow in holiness deserve encouragement. Such people are very near to God.²⁴³

Throughout the Report the questions which have constantly raised their heads have been ones which deal with power, authority, acceptance and knowledge. Due to this, the Report cannot merely be read and taken at face value. Rather, the reader must look behind the façade of the Church's pastoral concern for the homosexual to the subtext which lurks so far beneath that it is almost impossible to see.

²⁴³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

Reflecting on the Report

What we are witnessing is not a debate about homosexuality *per se*, but a debate which strikes at the very foundations of the Church. Namely, its power and authority. I say this because this debate demands answers to questions such as; Who has the power to exclude? Where does that authority come from? How is it used?

The issue of sexuality has become the battleground for the Church and it is made even more serious because it is the last taboo, the final socially acceptable prejudice to hold in genteel company within the western hemisphere. The battle for the hearts and minds of its members has begun and the outcome will determine both the road that the Church will follow and the shape it will take for generations to follow.

It is interesting to reflect on what Foucault writes concerning the subject of power, especially as it relates here to the Church of Scotland. I say this because, for Foucault, power was never equated with brute force and ignorance. Rather the use of power was always more subtle, so subtle in fact that its influence could almost go unnoticed. Foucault writes describing this,

Small acts of cunning endowed with a great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious²⁴⁴

Although Foucault never wrote specifically about the relation of power to the Church it would seem that his overarching premise still holds. As

²⁴⁴ Foucault, M., (1991) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, *Ibid.*, p.136.

Steven Grimwood writes in an article discussing Foucault's principles in relation to 'The Windsor Report', a Church of England Report also dealing with the subject of sexuality,

So, Foucault envisages a situation where the subject lives in the midst of a mesh of power networks, disciplines and strategies: indeed, we are born into webs of power, shaped by them, with our 'docile bodies' the loci of the operations of power relationships²⁴⁵

Never has this been truer than when the issue of homosexuality is raised within the Church's hallowed walls. I say this because the power that institutional heterosexuality retains over the Church is incredibly subtle. Heterosexuality is viewed as the norm and if you wish to *fit into* the organisation which is the Church, then you too have to be seen to be heterosexual. For example, when I was attending Selection School to be assessed as a possible Candidate for the Ministry I was asked quite blatantly what my girlfriend thought of me being there, even though there was no hint that I had one! Heterosexuality is undoubtedly the credential for membership and leadership within the Church. In fact, the idea that the Church may contain homosexual members, in general, and (God forbid!) homosexual ministers, in particular, is completely dismissed by the vast majority of its members. Therefore, it becomes clear that heterosexuality rules and homosexuality is to be viewed with a great deal of suspicion and never be permitted to gain even a foothold.

If this was not true, the question that arises is: Why do homosexuals conceal their identity and, in doing so, collaborate in their own

²⁴⁵ Grimwood, S. M. H., (March 2002) 'Some Foucauldian Perspectives on Issues in Human Sexuality', *Ibid.*, p.105-106.

oppression? The reason why most homosexuals cling to their closet doors is testimony, if any were needed, to the fact that in order to be accepted, to be ranked amongst those in power, then to be identified as a heterosexual is a must. The result of this is that the Church becomes an organisation which subtly allows one group of people to experience life in all its fullness with its blessing whilst, at the same time, relegating another group to a subordinate position so depriving them of living as full human beings where they experience all that life has to offer.

Western Christianity has traditionally based itself around the premise of heterosexuality and procreation by using the Bible as its blueprint for acceptable relationships. But as Gary Comstock writes,

The Bible is, after all, a patriarchal document. The social structure of biblical times was patriarchal – a man rules a nation as a man ruled a tribe as a man ruled his family...The Bible is a product of those who controlled and managed the social order of the time...The laws ultimately maintain the social and political position of a certain social class of men...In biblical sexuality the heterosexual man is central and in control.²⁴⁶

The Church has decided what is normal and what is abnormal. Through the Bible and tradition the Church has established a set of rules that has permitted the creation of an elite who retain the power and authority to determine who is in and who is out. In doing so it has automatically created an underclass who have no power but who find themselves subject to the authority of their heterosexual masters. We can see this clearly in the Study Groups Report when they state that,

Ideally, the husband and wife focus their love more and more intensely on one another until there is that uninhibited giving of each

²⁴⁶ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, p.34-37.

other in sexual union. This is more than the coming together of two bodies, it is the union of minds and the complete trust of those who are prepared to surrender everything to one another. It is the culmination of a loving relationship and, at the same time, the growth point from which the man and woman move on to the deeper sharing of love...it is exclusive in that such a unique and intense gift of oneself could only be shared with one other person.²⁴⁷

There is no expression of love for the homosexual and the only way that they can feel, even a part of such love, is if they choose to become heterosexual or live the celibate homosexual life. Neither is living true to themselves and neither will bring them the fulfilment that is offered by God to all creation. Such a stance by the Study Group has the result, not of helping homosexuals feel acceptance and belonging, but of alienating them. The Report has sent out a blatant message that homosexuals who refuse to follow the Study Group's guidelines are outside the Church and so impotent to respond to God's love for them. Or as Paul Monette wrote concerning coming to terms with his own homosexuality, 'if you hate yourself as I did and think that you're a worthless shit, then shit is all you deserve.'²⁴⁸ For many homosexuals, who consider themselves to be Christian, the Study Group's Report has made them feel utterly worthless rather than offering them the love that Christ offered to those he met when he was an itinerant teacher. And, it would seem, that is just how those who are holding the reigns of power would prefer them to feel. The goal of power is to create docile people and control human behaviour. The Church has managed to create a culture where gay ministers remain docile for fear of losing their jobs and so find themselves controlled by those in power. This old form of

²⁴⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.* p.304.

²⁴⁸ Monette, P., (1992) *Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*, *Ibid.*, p.201.

objective morality has been imposed from without, preached by those who see themselves as in service to the Divine, and Carter Heyward describes them as follows:

Heroes have brought us causes and crusades, flags and battles, soldiers and bombs. As our liberators and leaders, popes and presidents, bishops and priests, shrinks and teachers, mentors and gurus, heroes have brought us pipedreams and smokescreens and everything but salvation. And this, I am persuaded, is because we tend to search everywhere except among ourselves-in-relation for peace.²⁴⁹

In order to take up Heyward's challenge and create a new discourse then gay ministers must look to themselves and their own experience, thereby engaging in 'reverse discourse'. It is to this that I now turn.

²⁴⁹ Heyward, C., (1989) *Touching our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, p.4.

The Private Voice of the Church:

‘Listening intently...’

Chapter Three: Uncovering the story...

'Methodology'

Introduction

If you are going to be whole, you have to own the person you are. You have to do it at all levels...Like Lazarus I had to step out of that tomb.²⁵⁰

You live constantly under the threat of another insinuation. Although you would like to be open and relaxed about who you are, you can never guarantee the reaction of the people you're with, if they don't already know or haven't yet guessed. At the same time, you live in fear of any close interrogation of your personal life. You protect your deepest self at all costs because you don't want to be hurt any more. Straight people don't seem to live like that.²⁵¹

A closet is a wardrobe. You can't achieve anything inside a wardrobe. You run out of air and starve yourself of light. It is not a place to develop anything. Any plant that grows in a wardrobe emerges as a pale shadow of itself. Gay people have to live in the full ray of the sun, in the fullness of truth, as much as they possibly can.²⁵²

In the second part of my research I will address the subject of the private, or silent, voice of the Church. Arising out of my own experience of living and working on the margins of the Church, because of my sexual orientation, I have become interested in, and sought answers to, the question: 'Why are the voices of gay clergy so silent in the Church at a time when, in society, through legislation enacted by the Government and the influence of the media, homosexuality has become something of a non-issue?'

As previously stated with regards to the writing of Mason²⁵³, all research regardless of its subject matter originates with just such a question. Therefore, in seeking answers to it, I have sought to provide an appropriate forum whereby those who view themselves as being

²⁵⁰ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, Ibid., p.27.

²⁵¹ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, Ibid., p.44.

²⁵² Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, Ibid., p.63.

²⁵³ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, Ibid..

silenced by the Church on this issue and, in addition, are forced to hide their sexuality, are given the opportunity to tell their stories in a supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere that also allows me to 'record and analyse their moving narratives.'²⁵⁴ In seeking to achieve this I am inviting the participants to join me on a journey of theological reflection, which has been defined as 'an activity that enables people of faith to give an account of the values and traditions that underpin their choices and convictions and deepens their understanding.'²⁵⁵ This reflective journey, therefore, will comprise 'predominantly a critical enquiry into the process of relating the resources of faith to the issues of life.'²⁵⁶

The Qualitative Approach – 'taking the time to listen'

In qualitative research there is a need for genuine interest in and deference to, the story of the other. What is collected is not data but the unique perceptions, observations and feelings of another's lived experience.²⁵⁷

From the ancients to the present day wherever human beings are gathered stories, or narratives, are both created and employed as a means of communicating and making sense of their experience of the world. Stories tell where we come from and where we are going, they tell how we are feeling, they tell of an event or events that impact on our lives. By listening to such stories insight can be gained into the myriad of issues that people have to address on a daily basis. Traditionally

²⁵⁴ Kelly, E. R., (2007) *Marking Short Lives: Constructing and Sharing Rituals Following Pregnancy Loss*, Bern: Peter Lang AG, p.239.

²⁵⁵ Graham, E., Walton, H., Ward, F., (2005) *Theological Reflection: Methods*, London: SCM Press, p.5-6.

²⁵⁶ Graham, E., Walton, H., Ward, F., (2005) *Theological Reflection: Methods*, *Ibid.*, p.6.

²⁵⁷ Kelly, E. R., (2007) *Marking Short Lives: Constructing and Sharing Rituals Following Pregnancy Loss*, *Ibid.*, p.244.

interviews have been used to elicit such autobiographical stories and perspectives. As Weinberg writes, they serve to reveal a 'point of view and social circumstances that we would otherwise never encounter.'²⁵⁸

Holstein and Gubrium²⁵⁹ when describing traditional methods of interviewing liken it to 'prospecting'.²⁶⁰ They write,

The image of the social scientific prospector casts the interview as a search-and-discovery mission, with the interviewer intent on detecting what is already there inside variably co-operative respondents.²⁶¹

They expand on this later writing,

In traditional approaches, subjects are basically conceived as passive vessels of answers, for experimental questions put to respondents by interviewers. They are repositories of facts and the related details of experience. Occasionally, such as with especially sensitive interview topics or with recalcitrant respondents, researchers acknowledge that it may be difficult to obtain accurate experiential information.²⁶²

Similarly Kvale²⁶³ views this form of interviewing as part of a neutral process, which enables the interviewer to identify objective truths from the participants' responses with the aim of capturing the reality of the subjects being explored. Here the researcher is understood to be searching for facts to be 'quantified'. The interviewee is seen as a passive possessor of knowledge, while the interviewer's role is to stand objectively back from the process and ensure that the data gathered is

²⁵⁸ Weinberg, D., (2002) 'Introduction to Part II', in *Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Weinberg, D., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., p.80. p.76.

²⁵⁹ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd..

²⁶⁰ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods, Ibid.*, p.114.

²⁶¹ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods, Ibid.*

²⁶² Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods, Ibid.*, p.115.

²⁶³ Kvale, S., (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

not influenced or contaminated in any way by the interviewer's interaction with the interviewee.

Such an interview process would be futile to the qualitative researcher, in this instance, because 'in the vessel of answers approach, the image of the subject is epistemologically passive, not engaged in the production of knowledge.'²⁶⁴ The main objective in this section of my research was not to begin with a theory and then set out to test it by seeking answers to specific questions, but rather it was to begin with an area of enquiry and allow the relevant theory to emerge. Therefore, a different method of interviewing the participants had to be employed because, in order to gather data that was informative, I needed to move 'past the mere words and sentences exchanged in the interview process' and so 'establish a climate for mutual disclosure.'²⁶⁵

Therefore, I was searching for a form of interview that was based on interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, as it is in their interaction and exchange of views that a complex picture of the subject being explored is shaped. According to Kvale²⁶⁶ this shift in emphasis means that the subject is no longer objective data to be quantified but, rather, provides meaningful relations to be interpreted.

²⁶⁴ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods*, *Ibid.*.

²⁶⁵ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods*, *Ibid.*.

²⁶⁶ Kvale, S., (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, *Ibid.*.

For Kvale, then, the interview is the site for the construction of knowledge implying that the context of the interviewer and interviewee is central to the process of data collection. This calls for the interviewer to explore and identify this context as part of the research process, so that the context, which frames the interviewee's descriptions of their experiences, becomes central to data collection and interpretation. Clearly, in this method of interviewing, both interviewer and interviewee produce this knowledge together. For Kvale, the interviewees are not to be considered as detached communicators, simply sending out and receiving information, but are located in this medium and struggling to take their own social and cultural positioning into account.

By conducting interviews along lines such as this, it would allow me to give an audience to previously unheard voices and begin to make visible that which had previously been both unseen and unacknowledged within the Church. In addition, it would permit me to explore the rich data in relatively uncharted waters so allowing an interpretive understanding of what is going on.²⁶⁷

Epistemologically speaking, this meant looking from the standpoint of gay clergy and taking their experience, instead of that of heterosexual members, as my point of departure. By doing this, I am arguing that from this identified standpoint, important truths about the wider Church and the influence of a particular dominant theological viewpoint, can be

²⁶⁷ Stein, P., (1985) Using Grounded Theory Methodology in Nursing Research, in Leininger, M., (ed.) *Qualitative Research methods in Nursing*, Orlando: Grune and Statton.

revealed with critical questions raised about patriarchy and sexuality which have kept gay clergy on the Church's margins.²⁶⁸

According to Mason semi-structured, or qualitative, interviews have four core features which make them an ideal tool to use in this situation. These are '...an interactional exchange of dialogue...a relatively informal style...a thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach...the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual.'²⁶⁹ In being true to those core features the task of the interviewer is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced. Qualitative interviewing, then, can be seen as 'involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it.'²⁷⁰ Therefore as an interviewer, in this particular context, I see myself as a fellow traveller rather than as a miner whose job it is to 'dig out' the truth. Becker highlights the importance of this method of interviewing when he writes that interviews assign,

... major importance to the interpretations people place on their experience as an explanation for behaviour. To understand why someone behaves as he does you must understand how it looked to him, what he thought he had to contend with, what alternatives he saw open to him; you can understand the effects of opportunity structures, delinquent subcultures, social norms, and other commonly invoked explanations of behaviour only by seeing them from another's point of view.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Harding, S., (2004) Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology. What is 'Strong Objectivity?' in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual and Political Controversies*, (ed.) Harding, S., New York: Routledge, p.127-140.

²⁶⁹ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition, Ibid.*, p.62.

²⁷⁰ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition, Ibid.*, p.63.

²⁷¹ Becker, H. S., (2002) 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', in *Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Weinberg, D., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., p.80.

He continues that by 'virtue of its wealth of personal detail,'²⁷² interviews can also be

...important at those times when an area of study has grown stagnant. When this occurs, investigators might well proceed...using the rich though unsystematic data to provide a needed re-orientation of the field.²⁷³

And as Spencer reminds all who are intending to conduct such interviews that 'the people [we] are talking to are more interesting than the people asking the questions.'²⁷⁴

The Interview Process

I conducted five semi-structured interviews with gay clergy as it was my overriding concern to take into account their unique perspective where, in trying to reconcile their sexuality and faith, they were forced to live on the margins of the Church.

The semi-structured interview approach, outlined above by Mason²⁷⁵, was deemed to be the appropriate vehicle as it was less structured, with the emphasis being on greater generality in the formation of the initial research idea; there is greater interest in the interviewee's point of view and experiences; going off at tangents is encouraged as it gives greater insight into what the interviewee finds relevant and important; the interview can depart from the schedule and new questions can be asked, with follow up questions for clarification; the interview tends to be flexible, responding passively to the direction in which the interviewee

²⁷² Becker, H. S., (2002) 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', *Ibid.*, p.83.

²⁷³ Becker, H. S., (2002) 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', *Ibid.*, p.83.

²⁷⁴ Spencer, J., (2001) *Ethnography after Post-Modernism*, in Atkinson, P., et al. (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, p.450.

²⁷⁵ Mason, J., (2002) *Qualitative Researching: Second Edition*, *Ibid.*, p.62.

takes the interview; the interviewer is looking for rich, detailed answers; interviewees may be interviewed on more than one occasion; and no schedule of interview is slavishly followed. As Reinharz has written,

...interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher.²⁷⁶

Terkel adds noting that when this method is employed,

There were questions of course. But they were casual in nature...the kind you would ask while having a drink with someone; the kind he would ask you...In short, it was a conversation.²⁷⁷

To enable me to do this and to ensure transparency of purpose, as well as retaining objectivity, this system of interviewing would permit me to take seriously the participants contribution and also give a structure to the way that the stories are told. By listening to those untold stories, then, I will be 'actively creating data which would not exist apart from the researcher's intervention.'²⁷⁸ In addition to this, 'they offer a rich source of data which provide access to how people account for both their troubles and their good fortune.'²⁷⁹ The importance of these interviews to the wider Church, then, is that they describe,

... to people the way of life of segments of their society with which they would never otherwise come in contact. The life history, because it is the actor's 'own story,' is a live and vibrant message from 'down there,' telling us what it means to be a kind of person we have never met face to face.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Reinharz, S., (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.19.

²⁷⁷ Terkel, S., (1972) *Working*, New York: Avon, p.xxv.

²⁷⁸ Silverman, D., (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, London: Sage Publications Ltd., p.159.

²⁷⁹ Silverman, D., (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, *Ibid.*, p.114.

²⁸⁰ Becker, H. S., (2002) 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', *Ibid.*, p.84.

Using this interview technique my aim was not only collecting research material but, also, to offer an opportunity to emancipate the interviewees by helping them to find their own voice and use it to change their oppressed situation and status. In other words, to help open up 'the sluice gates of damned up hurts and dreams.'²⁸¹ By doing this an accurate 'understanding of people's experiences'²⁸² is gained and the wider Church begin to 'feel and become aware of the deep biases about such people that ordinarily permeate our thinking and shape the kinds of problems we investigate.'²⁸³

I realise that I will have to be flexible about the specific structure of the interview and that, primarily because it is semi-structured and I wish to hear the person's story, I will have to follow where the interviewee leads no matter where that may take me. All my questions will be open-ended so allowing the interviewee maximum space to tell me their story and experiences. The examples that they use to highlight their experience will be particularly valuable. I am also aware that each interview will inform the other therefore providing a rich contextual feel that will inform and alter further interview structures.

As the data is detailed and guided by the interviewee's own interpretation and the information that they feel is meaningful then, as

²⁸¹ Terkel, S., (1972) *Working, Ibid.*

²⁸² Silverman, D., (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction, Ibid.*, p.13.

²⁸³ Becker, H. S., (2002) 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', *Ibid.*, p.84.

interviewer, I will have to examine the transcripts of what has been said for 'themes grounded in the respondent's words.'²⁸⁴

This qualitative approach to the interpretation of the data obtained requires the researcher to examine the transcripts, so spending time with the interviewee's actual words in order that themes (or codes) can be identified. The reason for this is that the researcher is looking for meaning. Therefore, the 'development of themes and thematic categories is a way qualitative researchers try to extract meaning from their data.'²⁸⁵ By doing this the qualitative researcher 'produces meaning that does not result from quantitative surveys.'²⁸⁶ Although, it may be argued that a different researcher could arrive at different conclusions, due to the way they identified themes, this should not be seen as a weakness of the approach. Rather, different perspectives of the same phenomena will still contribute to the theoretical body of knowledge.

At their most basic level, interviews are conversations.²⁸⁷ They are an 'interpersonal drama with a developing plot'²⁸⁸ which 'transfers the subject behind the respondent from a repository of opinions and reasons

²⁸⁴ Hesse-Biber, S. N., and Leavy, P., (2006) *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁸⁵ Hesse-Biber, S. N., and Leavy, P., (2006) *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Hesse-Biber, S. N., and Leavy, P., (2006) *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Kvale, S., (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publishing.

²⁸⁸ Pool, I de S., (1957) 'A Critique of the Twentieth Anniversary Issue', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 21, p.193.

or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge.²⁸⁹ In qualitative interviews then what the researcher is attempting to do is to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to listen to people's experiences and to try to unpack and interpret them. The emphasis of these interviews is an intellectual understanding rather than the production of personal change on the part of the subjects.

Although qualitative results can be dismissed on political or methodological grounds by those who disagree with the findings, it is harder to dismiss the actual words of participants which convey their powerful emotions. Tape recording and transcribing allows for detailed analysis to take place and assures that the interviewee's answers are captured in their own words. All transcripts were checked by those interviewed to ensure that the content was authentic to them. In addition to this the summaries of the transcripts were also checked by each interviewee to validate its authenticity.

Reflexivity

It is clear from what has been written throughout this thesis that I have a specific reason for being interested in the subject matter covered and that the interviewees have been selected because of their particular

²⁸⁹ Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F., (2002) 'Active Interviewing', in Weinberg, D., ed. *Qualitative Research Methods, Ibid.*, p.119.

situation within the Church of Scotland. They are not merely a generalised other.²⁹⁰

According to Northway²⁹¹ the positivist emphasis on objectivity within the interview process has had the consequence of interviewers having the tendency of writing themselves out of the text as they have believed, that had this not been done, then somehow they would have contaminated the data they had gathered. Oakley²⁹² subscribes to this view and understands the interview as a one way process during which the interviewer elicits and receives, but does not convey any, information.

What the qualitative approach to interviewing acknowledges is that the gathering of information via the interview process is most successful when the interviewer is prepared to invest their personal identity and that the relationship established between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical in nature. One of the key factors in the research described above, therefore, is the acknowledgement that the mechanisms for producing knowledge is a social process, requiring interaction between both interviewer and interviewee, and so both parties play an important part.²⁹³ The interviewer is encouraged to place themselves within the research process as it is acknowledged that, by doing this, a deeper

²⁹⁰ Benhabib, S., (1987) 'The Generalised and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Moral Theory', in *Women and Moral Theory*, New Jersey: Roman and Littlefield, p.154-177.

²⁹¹ Northway, R., (2000) Disability Nursing Research and the Importance of Reflexivity, in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32, 2, p.391-397.

²⁹² Oakley, A., (1981) Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms, in Roberts, H., (ed.) *Doing Feminist Research*, London: Routledge.

²⁹³ Wolf, D., (ed.) (1996) *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

level of knowledge will be unearthed. This has the effect of placing the interviewer in a different relationship to the interviewee compared to that of the traditional relationship where the interviewer asks pre-prepared questions and the interviewee merely answers. Within the interview process I have chosen to follow, both interviewer and interviewee are regarded as having equal status as participant within the process.²⁹⁴ This is aided when the interviewer and interviewee share the same minority group, as in this case where both myself and the interviewees were gay clerics, then any perception of power is further minimised. I certainly found this during the interviews I conducted as they felt more like a conversation between equals than a relationship where the interviewer held power and position over the interviewee.

I acknowledge that each interviewer, no matter the subject being investigated, brings a history with them comprising particular values, interests and experiences gained through the particular life events that they have encountered. This means that although such experience does not necessarily determine particular points of view they do give interviewers a perception in relation to the topic under discussion. It is for this reason that the interviewer must be prepared to situate themselves reflexively in the research and also provide an analysis of the social relations underpinning the research process. This is important as it helps to make visible the ways in which the interviewer both influences and is influenced by the subject under investigation. The

²⁹⁴ Davis, B., (1992) Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories, in Ellis, C. and Flaherty, M., *Investigating Subjectivity Research on Lived Experience*, Newbury Park: Sage.

interviewer must be aware of how they participate, then, as subjects in their own research.²⁹⁵

Therefore, as I was concerned with the experience of gay clergy within the Church of Scotland, and identifying as such myself, I felt that it was right for me to place myself within the research process. I realise that this presents a very different relationship between interviewer and interviewee compared to the traditional research relationship, however, I felt that this was an important aspect of the interview dynamic. It meant that the interviewee did not only answer questions passively but, through conversation, would also produce knowledge together with myself. This I viewed as a strength of this kind of qualitative research. I also felt it important that the interviewee was interviewed by a gay cleric as I felt that they would be more open and comfortable as gay clerics do not share the same experience of being in the Church as heterosexual clerics do. It permitted me, therefore, to enter into the natural setting of the interviewee with a view to listen and attach meaning to what concerned them. However, in saying this, I felt that it was important for the interviewer to reduce, as much as is possible, any controlling influence. Therefore after the initial opening question the interviewee was allowed to take the conversation in the direction that they felt comfortable with.

²⁹⁵ Olesen, V., (1994) Feminism and Models of Qualitative Research, in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y., (eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

I encouraged the interviewees to 'tell me their story' as I felt that this would allow them the space to be open about their experiences within the Church. According to Fairbanks²⁹⁶ it is through the telling of such stories that the ordinary taken-for-granted events in people's lives can be explored and critically examined. By giving a voice to previously silenced groups, and by describing the diversity of their experience, readers gain a critical insight into their own prejudices and belief systems.

We need to respect the authority of the story being told and see the interviewees as subjects creating their own history, rather than objects of research. The challenge to me was not to read my own story into that of those being interviewed and to ensure that what might seem mundane was not left out or ignored.

Lamb and Huttlinger²⁹⁷ suggest that reflexivity recognizes this reciprocal relationship and seeks to make it explicit. Kock and Harrington²⁹⁸ view reflexivity as the critical gaze turned towards the self. Therefore personal reflection, by myself, throughout the process was considered to be an important resource and the insights gained could be integrated into the research rather than ignored. Reflexivity, then, is required to be considered at every stage of the research, with decision making being

²⁹⁶ Fairbanks, C., (1996) Telling Stories: Reading and Writing Research Narratives, in *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 11 (4): 320-340.

²⁹⁷ Lamb, G. S. and Huttlinger, K., (1989) Reflexivity in Nursing Research, *Western Journal of Nursing* 11, 6, p.765-772.

²⁹⁸ Koch, T. and Harrington, A., (1998) Reconceptualizing Rigour: The Case for Reflexivity, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 28, 5, p.882-890.

examined and made explicit. A reflexive approach attempts to make the whole process transparent and open, thus bringing rigour to the research.

Summary

In summary then, I aim to use qualitative interviewing to gain insight and knowledge of the silent voice of the Church of Scotland in relation to the subject of homosexuality and gay clergy. I will do this by emphasising the lived experience through; interviewing five gay ministers in a semi-structured way, I will repeatedly expose myself to the audio tapes, transcripts of the interviews and notes that I have made to ensure reflexivity, use intuition with reference to what I have heard, reflect on the data to be sensitive to emerging themes, code the themes to capture unique experiences from which commonality of meanings can be identified, and write the descriptions of the themes into a clearly formulated structure of the phenomena under study. By doing this I hope to bring the private voice of the Church into the public arena and so help to initiate further conversations and generate further study.

Chapter Four: Speaking up, speaking out...

'Interviews'

Introduction

Interview protocol: seeking ethical approval

Homosexuality's much more complex than the two-dimensional propaganda spouted by the fanatics... I *chose* long ago to be silent about my sexual orientation, but I didn't lie to myself about it. I faced what I was and made a rational decision about what I wanted from life... God almighty, no one in their right mind could *want* to have feelings that are the cause of so much misery – and if that's not politically correct...I don't care!²⁹⁹

In Chapter Three of my thesis, writing about the methodology that underpinned my qualitative interviews I argued that it is through stories that we communicate with each other and convey our inner most thoughts. When I considered how to approach the interview process I wanted to ensure that it was ethical, that it would give the interviewees a space in which they could tell their own stories. Stories of struggle, stories of heartache, but also stories of joy and triumph, for it is in these narratives that people create meaning for the experiences they encounter. It can be described as sacred space where the most intimate of details can be shared. It is for this reason that it was vital to seek ethical approval from the University of Glasgow to conduct these interviews.

Seeking to interview ministers ordained by the Church of Scotland, past and present, who self-identify as being homosexual carries with it enormous responsibility. Theirs is a narrative not normally told within the public arena and due to the current climate of non-acceptance within Church Law, in a number of Presbyteries and congregations it was imperative that confidentiality was maintained. In addition to this, they

²⁹⁹ Howatch, S., (2003) *The Heartbreaker*, London: Time Warner Paperbacks, p.31.

are in a precarious position because if they were identified, in the current hostile climate, it could lead to the initiation of disciplinary procedures leading ultimately to loss of employment. Therefore, it was of the utmost importance that all participants who wished to tell their story for the benefit of the Church and wider society were protected. To ensure this, I adopted the following process. Once I had identified potential recruits through personal contact, I verbally informed them of the study, the interviews that I was hoping to carry out and what their involvement would be if they wished to participate. After this initial contact, if they indicated their interest, I sent each an introductory letter and a consent form (copies of which can be found in Appendix One). They were asked to sign and return the consent form in a pre-paid envelope. The reason for this was to enable them to make a considered decision as to their involvement. It also gave those who were approached a 'cooling off' period where they could decide, without feeling any pressure, their commitment to the study. There was no payment or incentive offered as an inducement for the interviewees to take part in this research.

Once they agreed to take part in the study and to ensure their protection, I followed well tested procedures to anonymise the data that I gathered. Interviewees had their names changed and every effort was made to edit personal details so that, as far as was possible, to ensure that no interviewee would be able to be identified. I have kept the audiotape of each interview in a secure place and it will be destroyed appropriately. All interviewees retain the right to keep their involvement in the study

confidential. To that end I have only included summaries of the interviews as I felt to include the transcripts would have lead to a serious breach of confidentiality.

I began each interview with the following question: Can you tell me where you see the church going in the whole sexuality debate and what, for you, would be the most important parts and points within it? The intention of this was to place the interview in context. From this starting point I enabled them to tell their story.

What follows is that story and as they are read, let us remember that this is the silent voice of the Church speaking, often for the first time, in public.

Andrew's Story - Interview 1

As a student training for ministry within the Church of Scotland, Andrew never felt the need to conceal his sexuality. From the beginning of his academic career during Fresher's Week where 'within a week [of being] at University' he literally 'ended up in bed with someone...and as a consequence of that [he] was fairly out and open at college.' Although the question as to sexual orientation was not asked when he attended Selection School, some members of the Education for the Ministry Committee knew of Andrew's orientation. He had told a senior person within the Committee who was in charge of the supervision of Candidates. The Convenor of the Liaison Committee even sent Andrew a letter saying 'how wonderful it was to share such personal information and that they wanted to try and support' him during his training. This level of support continued when Andrew was in his final placement in a church in Edinburgh. There he asked his supervisor to tell the Kirk Session about his orientation 'because I wanted to see whether my sexuality got in the way of ministry.' Andrew goes on to say, 'But it didn't actually and I had a really positive experience with a really hard group of working class folk who just didn't even discriminate.' In fact he goes on to describe the reaction of an old elder who was the bane of everyone's life saying, 'apparently when she heard said, 'It's better than having a face like a torn scone.'" Therefore in one sense Andrew had a good experience within the Church. However, his openness was to change after he finished his training and entered into life in parish ministry.

Andrew explains that 'for self-preservation I could only be out to those people I trusted and I knew were going to love me.' Andrew's Session Clerk and a few elders were told once he got friendly with them and felt comfortable knowing that they were not going to reject him. As he says, 'the bastards crucify you over the colour of paint never mind over something as personal as your sexuality.' For Andrew then there was a 'huge issue of self-protection.' 'As an aside,' he says 'I'm no psychotherapist, but I think in all of us, clergy who are gay and lesbian, there's probably that huge issue of fear of rejection...And we need to feel we are loved actually so there is the issue of being scared to say who we are in case you are defrocked, dispensed with, because maybe we need this thing more than we think.'

Throughout his training he was advised never to be a maverick or be the one to set a precedent within the Church on the issue of homosexuality. And he understood that advice 'on one level because if you are the person who comes out and opens up the can of worms...it may go well or it may be disastrous. If it's disastrous that has a horrendous effect on other people.' So Andrew understands that the issue is not solely about him but has much wider and potentially damaging consequences. He is fortunate because, now working within the confines of the NHS, he has a certain amount of protection from those in the Church who would seek to have him removed from office if they discovered his orientation. During

our conversation Andrew stated that he 'didn't really care what the Church thinks' however on reflection he realised that 'deep down I probably do...because I would be devastated if in May [at the General Assembly] it says something that damages people.' For Andrew his plea to the 2007 General Assembly was for 'balance' in the whole debate and a situation where 'people learn to live with tolerance.' As he says with conviction, 'I think we need to teach the church to live tolerably. And if we can do nothing more than that then I think we will have done a good thing.'

Andrew believes that the whole sexuality debate which the Church is wrestling with is a direct consequence of 'huge sociological change' which has taken place 'in the past 20 years say, maybe even 30 years'. 'For many years, when Scotland didn't have a Parliament and a legislative framework of its own,...the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was seen as being the voice of Scotland. It no longer is....In fact, it was known as the Conservative Party at prayer.' But with the establishment of the Scottish Executive has come a change in stature for the Church and a diminishing of its relevance to the society in which it finds itself ministering and representing God's voice to a nation. 'Because the Parliament is the voice of Scotland...the Church's voice is diminished. It still has a voice and it can still say things, but I don't know how relevant it is anymore. And that's not to be critical of the Church it's... it's just the way things are.' Andrew goes on to say, 'I don't know if the Church is saying anything to anyone. So when the Church and

Society Council comes out with a comment, and they're often very good comments... But who cares? Does secular society, in which we actually live, hear that? Sometimes it does, but I don't know if it changes its shape.'

Since the establishment of the Parliament issues such as equality, diversity and inclusiveness have been at the forefront of Executive policy. Andrew thinks that 'sociologically, in terms of secular society, because of the Parliament and the Executive and... equality and diversity and all these issues quite clearly in the workplace, then in the real life Scotland it [homosexuality] is not an issue...It's a sad reflection that an organisation, like the NHS, is actually trying to be more Christ-like, more inclusive and more welcoming than some churches are.'

It is not only in society such changes have been taking place, however, the media have also been playing their part by becoming more inclusive and representative concerning sexualities, genders and races that are making up multi-cultural Britain. The acknowledging and wider acceptance of homosexuality in society has caused problems for the Church because, as Andrew highlights, 'this secular Scotland that we are trying to build, more inclusive and less sexist and racist... it's the world the Church members live in... and as society becomes more safe and open, that's got to have an effect on Church members.'

Perhaps one of the most dramatic changes that has taken place within society in recent years is of couples living together. 'Helping the debate in the Church, though the Church thinks it or not, sociologically there is a huge change. People are living together full stop!... Session Clerks live with partners, elders do and when Jeannie's grand-daughter gets married, the fact that she had lived with the boyfriend for 5 years... is now not the issue it was.' Andrew goes further and states, 'that people can't be quite so moralistic about lifestyles because their grand-daughter is living with her partner and has a child out of wedlock. The old traditional notions have gone... So when I was a parish minister every single wedding I conducted, apart from one, they all lived together before getting married...And that's major and when that kind of moral change, celebration happens, it has a knock on effect...So society's message is quite clear that discrimination is not acceptable and there's nothing wrong with people living, expressing different forms of sexuality.'

This level of acceptance of alternative lifestyles appears not to be reflected in the Church, in general, and in the life of its ministers, in particular. As Andrew says, 'I think that Church members have high standards for their ministers...unrealistic standards.' He provides an example of what he means stating, 'You know, if Jeannie's grandson lives with his partner that's one thing from the minister living with his or her partner.' 'Maybe, in Scotland, what we need is for straight ministers to move their partner in and be open and honest about that. Which is a cultural issue, it's not a theological issue, it's not a biblical issue... In

Germany pastors would live with their partners before betting married and congregations will not blink...’cause it’s a cultural issue and in Germany everyone does that. But if you have a straight minister move in a straight partner in Scotland then there would be an uproar.’

Andrew ponders, ‘I really don’t know if congregations even think that their ministers have sex. I remember when a female friend announced to the congregation that she was pregnant she got a round of applause. She felt she was being applauded because she had had sex... And I don’t even think that in their mind they actually thought she was at home shagging her husband in the manse.’ Rather they probably thought, ‘you know, that God had gifted her a baby like the Virgin Mary.’

The problem, as Andrew sees it, is that ‘the Church doesn’t talk about sex or sexuality... rather than being a real community, it’s more of a polite society...where we like things to be nice and friendly.’ What we need is for the ‘Church to wake up a bit and be a bit more honest about itself. What it thinks about sexuality full stop, never mind getting into homosexuality and bisexuality. I think it needs a kind of honest discussion about the body, what we feel about the body and I think that when it does that it will be more able to deal with different expressions of sexuality.’

Andrew believes that this honesty about sex and sexuality begins with our picture of Jesus. ‘The Jesus we have is the Jesus we need to have

rather than the real Jesus actually.’ When asked what he means Andrew replies, ‘Did Jesus wank?... That’s the debate we’re really having but no one is using the language. And it all goes back to the whole polite society thing, you know. In the polite society, that is the Church, we will use polite language...and so we’re not really talking about the debate...we’re focussing on the sex. But if you look at a gay relationship it is actually not about sex. What is more beautiful and wonderful and divinely inspired is the non-sex...but we seem to be focussing on the wrong thing.’

For Andrew this focussing on the sexual act rather than on the value of relationships and friendships is an example of the rise of the voice of fundamentalism within society, in general, and Christianity, in particular. He says, ‘I think that globally, in terms of religion, the dominant voice is fundamentalism...and I think in Christianity, especially that kind of right wing of the Church... it is often the voice that is louder.’ In fact, ‘in some aspects of the Church, it just makes them stronger, more militant in their moralising... Where they create a tight, pure moral code.’ However, for Andrew, this is not the case with all ministers of the Church who ‘look at the positive aspects of people’s lives and... encourage celebration...That’s the difference in the two perspectives in the Church. The two sides of the debate. One side looks and sees the bad and points that out... and the other sees the good and points that out.’

The trouble with this is that the Church is seen at odds with itself, seen as an irrelevant force within society. As Andrew points out, 'society has almost overtaken the Church in a sense and isn't it ironic that the place of blessing and the place of celebration is governmental and not ecclesiastical? Isn't it ironic that that's the place where we have to go? The government is the thing that is more life enhancing and celebrating than the churches are.'

In closing Andrew summarises his thoughts, 'Whilst I don't care what the Church thinks, I do care what God thinks...and I think I know what God thinks because we're all made in God's image.'

Simon's Story – Interview 2

Simon has always considered himself to be gay. As he states himself, 'I think I was born one.' Prior to his present relationship Simon had little or no experience of exploring his sexuality within a sexual context due, in the main, to his conservative evangelical theological position. He says, 'From 1951, when I first professed Christ, and thereafter through my time on National Service, my year in Teacher Training College, my years as a Church of Scotland missionary abroad, and then through the years in Divinity and my first decade as minister of the Gospel, through all that time I was celibate.'

However, for the past 30 years Simon has been engaged in a same sex relationship. Simon's partner had been a member of his congregation and was an elder. All through Simon's ministry they never stayed together in the manse, they hid their relationship from the congregation and they went to elaborate lengths to ensure that no one knew they were going on holiday together. Since Simon's retirement from Parish Ministry, after serving the Church for almost 4 decades, they have lived together in a house which the Church of Scotland provides for them.

In 2006 with both equality and anti-discrimination legislation going through the Scottish Parliament and the Church of Scotland debating the issue of Civil Partnerships, Simon realised that in the event of his death then his partner would be rendered homeless because the Church of

Scotland didn't recognise same sex relationships involving their ministers. Therefore, Simon 'entered into prolonged negotiations to see whether there was any way in which he might continue to live in the house after I was dead.'

The negotiations which took place necessitated Simon telling those in authority the truth concerning his sexual orientation and his living arrangements. Eventually the Housing and Loan Department agreed to Simon's partner being housed by them in the event of Simon pre-deceasing him. It has to be said, however, that this arrangement was only secured by them entering into a Civil Partnership. Neither wanted to follow this line of action and would not have entered into it of their own accord. Rather, it was on the insistence of the Church that they entered into a Civil Partnership. As Simon said, 'I doubt very much if we would have entered into it for any other reason...we registered our partnership in January of this year...there was no exchange of vows and no exchange of rings. We simply signed the schedule in the presence of the Registrar and our two witnesses...when one of our witnesses, who was a Church of Scotland minister, offered to give us a service of blessing, we declined. We don't think Civil Partnership is marriage.'

Throughout his ministry Simon has sought to reconcile his sexuality with his conservative evangelical theology. This has proved a journey of discovery and the eventual acceptance of his sexual orientation. In this matter Simon has been strongly influenced by Rev. Willie Still, the

founder of the Crieff Fellowship (in the 1970s, Rev. Still began a meeting of like-minded ministers in order to discuss common problems and share expertise. This developed into the more formal Crieff Fellowship, which meets three times a year and is attended by men and women, from many denominations, who hold to a conservative evangelical theological position).

Simon's mentor, Still (who himself, until shortly before his death, was a closeted gay minister), 'had so suffered excruciating loneliness...that he wanted that none of us should suffer as he had done.' Therefore Simon, and others, were actively encouraged by Still 'to find someone, another man, with whom we could form what he euphemistically termed a *special friendship*.' The reason for this, according to Simon was that 'he found such relationships psychologically and spiritually so beneficial for those who entered into them, that he plead for their acceptance in a paper he delivered to the Crieff Fellowship a little time before he died.'

It is interesting that Simon follows Still's insistence that the rules that are often used to argue for the forbidding of physical expressions of same sex love need to be taken in context and no more literally than many of the other texts that forbid a myriad of other situations e.g. the wearing of mixed fibres. Simon says, 'Of course he was aware of the texts in the Old Testament and the New which together could be construed as a rule forbidding the physical expression of homosexual love. None knew these texts better than he did. He had wrestled with them, and had

sought to understand them in ways more friendly to homosexual people who loved each other and loved the Lord. But if they did constitute a rule that forbade physical expression of homosexual love, then it was a rule that he maintained admitted of exceptions.'

For Simon, his personal starting point on the issue of same sex relationships is the question, 'When two consenting same-gender adults do in private engage in sex, what harm do they do?' He goes on to say, 'If they commit murder, they do a lot of harm. If they commit adultery, plainly harm's done. If they steal, that's serious. If they pervert the course of justice by telling lies, that can do terrible harm. But if they pleasure each other in bed, I am at a loss to see what harm they do.' Turning to the Church and its attitude to gay sexually active ministers he ponders, 'why the Church has magnified this thing into such a huge moral issue.'

Simon asked to make a statement to the Crieff Fellowship regarding their stance on homosexuality as he wanted to 'clear the air and put things right' with regards to what he believed the 'Still position was.' He was visited by two senior members of the Fellowship and persuaded to withdraw his statement. He was told that 'no one holds that position now.' As he says, 'it seemed to me that the Stillites were harder than Still, and I regretted it enormously... my plea is really for the acceptance and reaffirmation of the William Still position, not necessarily as expressing the mind of the Fellowship. I know it doesn't. But as the

view of the founder of this Fellowship and the man to whom so many of us, if not all of us, owe so much.'

When asked about what happened to the 9 original gay members of the Crieff Fellowship, or 'Cloud Nine' as they were known who 'met together in my manse...at his [Still's] invitation' only 5 are left. Simon says, 'Two are dead, two were disgraced and for some reason are no longer in the Crieff Fellowship. Which left...five. Of those five that are still on the roll of the Crieff Fellowship, two are glad to be gay Luke³⁰⁰ and me. One is safely hidden in a more or less happy marriage with a woman and one has since escaped into retirement. Which left one in the Church who was terrified that I was going to out him. So for his sake I said to these men [the representatives of the Crieff Fellowship] I would withdraw the statement.'

Simon has been challenged about his sexuality during his ministry but he says he 'managed to bluster his way out of it.' He thinks that 'to be in an open homosexual relationship and be a parish minister is virtually impossible' because he finds it 'difficult to imagine that any vacancy committee would contemplate recommending a candidate that they knew was homosexual, and much harder to imagine them recommending such a person if they knew he was going to move into the manse with a same sex partner.' Although, as a retired minister, Simon is in the position of living openly, and with the Church's blessing,

³⁰⁰ It should be noted that Luke is not an ordained minister but a lay member.

in a house that they have provided he sees his position as being different. Being retired has undoubtedly helped but he could not see himself living the way he currently does if he was still an active parish minister. 'It is difficult to imagine,' he says 'a congregation's accepting that their minister lives openly with another man in the manse.' For 'even if you kept it a secret and stay celibate, some people can ask you embarrassing questions. And if you do enter into a same-sex relationship, however discretely, you arouse suspicions and are challenged.

'Things may be changing. I hope fervently that they are and what is generally unacceptable now will become acceptable in the future. Homosexual ministers have something rich to give to the Church and the cause of the Gospel.'

Bartholomew's Story - Interview 3

Bartholomew has made the move from Parish Ministry to Chaplaincy. Although the move coincided with an acceptance of his sexuality, Bartholomew emphasises that this was not the primary motivating factor behind his move but that it provided him with a level of freedom that was just not possible whilst in the parish. He says, 'in terms of personal living...it just frees up your lifestyle...so that, perhaps...was the saviour of it all really.'

For Bartholomew the realisation of his sexuality was a gradual process that came later in life and also whilst he was working as a Parish Minister. He says, 'I was a minister in the Church before I recognised my own sexuality which I thought was an important thing.' He goes on to describe the secretiveness and how that affected him, 'I was a wee bit into my ministry but...at the beginning, it was very secretive because a couple of things, a number of things. It seemed that that is how you had to do it. My role models told me that. The people I knew in the church, that I knew were gay, that's how they did it. I wasn't uncomfortable with that particularly, but you don't really talk about it at all.' In addition to this the Section 28 debate heightened Bartholomew's awareness of his own situation. 'We had just survived Clause 2A...so again that was the flavour of the month so I was hearing all those horrible things. And being me, and a minister, I had to go to do a whole load of biblical research.' This research led Bartholomew into an acceptance of his

sexuality although this was a journey that was not taken alone. 'The first thing I did was go into counselling, of course, because my head was mince...so I needed that kind of support. And it was a very lonely existence because, at that point, I hadn't told closest friends or my family...it took a long time to tell my friends...because there was so much other crap in my life that I had quite a lot to go through before I got to that.'

With regards to the Section 28 Debate that took place at the General Assembly Bartholomew says, 'I felt that if I took too much part in the debate there would be a big sign appear above my head that said, 'By the way he's one of them! That's why he's talking about it.' I suppose it was quite a dark time but it coincided with me moving into chaplaincy as well which, in terms of personal living...just frees up your lifestyle. You're living in a different situation, you're going into a workplace that, you know, is easier. So that, perhaps, was the saviour of it all really. The move into chaplaincy and got freed up from that.'

As Bartholomew has found the courage to speak out more on issues of sexuality he has become more open 'my own minister knows [as does] a lot of the congregation where I worship.' This openness and frankness has included the Church authorities. 'When I went for a Civil Partnership I didn't know where the person I had to speak to stood on things given the fact that he used to belong to a different denomination. But he's the boy I had to go and see about very practical things like the Community

Charge and, eh, these kind of things that were now my, our right to claim...I went and saw him and I told him and he was, eh, not shocked, but he had never had any notion, eh, that I was gay...[there was] absolutely no issue.' This level of support has been of great comfort to Bartholomew. Although Bartholomew is quick to point out that, 'I didn't go forward with a Civil Partnership so that I could...stick out my tongue at the Church and say I don't care what you think. I did it because actually it seems to be right...part of the thing that is the right thing to do...in terms of how I live my life. My life of faith.' Bartholomew believes that this is vitally important because 'it gives me an integrity to my faith and life which is what we keep bashing on about, what we want our candidates to really understand and to have and for all of us to have that balance in our Christian life of integrity and faith and how to live out both.'

For Bartholomew there was no such integrity when he was living a closeted life, as there was no openness or honesty around who and what he was and is. 'You do feel...why am I not talking about this, or why am I hiding, only talking about myself in the singular. I'm going on holiday, but in brackets, but I happen to be taking my partner with me! I found that really quite difficult... being secretive about things. It didn't feel natural to do so to be secretive about things that clearly no one needs to know about.'

When I mention that this is a brave standpoint to take within the Church at this present moment and that it might lead to censure by Presbytery and, maybe, even loss of employment, Bartholomew is unrepentant and realistic saying, 'What would happen if they chose to discipline me? If the Presbytery chose to do that, I think I would get a lot of individual support from individual ministers...and people within Presbytery. But what would the mechanism of the Church do? It might not...it still might not come out the right end. For all that there are those very supportive people who think that this is a nonsense, eh, but because of the way the Church structure is, its administration and so on, that machine would just roll. So I think that I do feel supported of individuals but am I supported by the Church? I don't think that I am.'

Although this lack of support from the Church, as an institution, concerns Bartholomew he is realistic in what it means for him. 'Essentially I have always had a healthy disrespect for the institutional Church because I was a normal person before I became a minister...I had seen how life might be.' He goes on to say, 'that gives me the courage to be more open and go on anyway. And I think that I am at the point without, you know, running through 121 shouting it out...I'm another stage on. So I'm not hiding this anymore. This is how I live my life and I think it's honourable and that one lives with integrity. So other folk who disagree with it can disagree but...I'm not going to alter the way I go about things.' He goes on to say, 'I have a partner that is supportive and will deal with whatever we deal with and equally I have decided that I can get another

job doing something else should I suddenly be told I cannot minister because you keep opening your mouth about this and indeed your gay.’ When asked what kind of job that would be and how would he miss ministry Bartholomew answers, ‘I can get a job doing something else...in that process there would be a lot of angst and unhappiness and all the rest of it but I am very clear in my call to... my call to God isn’t lessened and how I act out that ministry...would be different.’

The institution of the Church offers no barriers both to Bartholomew’s understanding and outworking of his faith. He says, ‘I don’t equate any of the structure or the institution of the Church actually as having very much to do with what my understanding of God would be... So the institution of the Church never got in the way and that’s why I think that I’m quite clear if this all blew up tomorrow and I could no longer manage to be a minister then my commitment and my love for God wouldn’t change because its not bound too much to the institution of the Church of Scotland anyway.’

Bartholomew realises that this is not the case for everyone, particularly those from a more conservative background. He says, ‘I have talked to people who would say being gay is very bad and the Bible says so. And then you say where about is it and what do you think that might mean? And the debate doesn’t happen.’ He continues, ‘there’s the whole emphasis, especially in the Church of Scotland, on the preaching and teaching of the word and the person...who is doing that preaching and

teaching almost being infallible... if you have always been told that the Bible is the infallible, inspired, God-breathed word how do you actually go back and say well, maybe, maybe it was contextual. Maybe Jonah didn't get swallowed by a whale, maybe it's just a really good story to explain something.'

'But somehow that intellectual debate doesn't happen for some people because it's too risky to start, as they see it, cherry picking. But we all cherry pick the Bible...I remember as a Parish Minister who was a moderate...being in a Bible Study and saying, 'I don't actually know about it.' I didn't mean I didn't know factually. I didn't know what I believed about that and looking at two of my parishioners who just about fell through the floor because I didn't know. That I had a bit of doubt about this. And then I realised the position I was in as a minister. That I wasn't actually allowed to say that. I had to be the carrier of the truth and not admit that I actually didn't know or had a bit of a doubt or I didn't agree with that particular group of people. And I think that that is multiplied by 1000 if you're in a conservative church. That your minister is going to tell you absolutely and if you begin to pick it apart your whole thing might crumble.'

Speaking of his experience with the Metropolitan Community Church he says, 'I can think of people that I have met at MCC who have been in a conservative church and, you know, have found themselves to be gay so there is a big dilemma so they find their way to MCC at some point. But

then say that I have never heard another point of view, I've only ever heard what my minister said. And you believe your minister.'

'I think in terms of Christian Faith there's this whole thing about you just believe what your minister says and you don't have any other debate. Even intelligent people don't do that.'

Matthew's Story – Interview 4

Matthew is a Parish Minister. He has been so for a number of years and has come from a strong church background. Of his childhood he says, 'I grew up in a conservative evangelical background, so being gay was just out. It just wasn't possible. I grew up with huge internalised guilt about it. I couldn't speak to anybody about it, not least my parents. I just couldn't really speak to anybody.' On being asked why he felt he couldn't speak with anyone regarding his feelings he says, 'Never at anytime was I able to talk to anybody about it, for fear really. For fear of being thrown out, you know, not being accepted. I mean I just wouldn't have risked it. I mean, I didn't even speak to my parents about it because, I thought, you know, it was just going to be way out the park.'

And so with these huge internalised feelings of guilt, shame and confused sexuality, Matthew did what was expected of him by his family and Church community. 'I met a girl, I was really fond of her and I would say that I loved her, I married her, even though I had lots of misgivings 'cause, you know, I had these sexual feelings and it was very difficult, mixed up. So, in the end it didn't work out for lots of reasons but, I mean, there is no doubt that my inability to come to terms with my sexuality was part of that.'

Matthew is scathing in his assessment of the part played by the Church and the theology that he was brought up with and, he himself initially,

took on board, 'I kinda feel because of my kind of conservative background that I kind of was forced to live a lie. And I suppose a lot of harm done to me as a person because the church...I couldn't see how the church could accept me or I could be the person I was within the church. And it came down to choosing between the two and I chose...and it's partly because I didn't think God could accept me being the person I was. And I didn't think that I would be acceptable to God being the person I was. I didn't think I would be acceptable to God as a gay person.'

Exploring this further Matthew speaks of the image of God that those on the more traditional wing of the Church have and how this has contributed to the situation that the Church now finds itself in. 'I think it's to do with this traditional image of God as a man and as a Patriarch. And I think a lot of straight....men are much more threatened by male homosexuality than they are female homosexuality...Whether they see it as a threat to masculinity or the masculinity of God. I think people.... I think people who are conservative on this issue have...an image of God that's bound up with Patriarchy and power. And I think, I think we who are homosexuals are a particular threat...to that notion of God and that notion of power exercised in the world... I think it's a God who is very much black and white, that is right and this is wrong eh. I don't think it's a terribly nice God and I don't really believe that it's a God that's revealed by Jesus. And I think it's much more of an Old Testament kind of eh fear of God.'

Added to this notion of power Matthew adds that he thinks 'there is something about sex and.... I don't know what it is about sex that gets people excited but it seems to be something for eh at least for a certain number in the church who eh it seems to be something that they major on in terms of ethics eh you know, they seem to place a... a... a disproportionately high place I think in terms of, kind of, an ethical code when it comes to sex... I don't quite understand it to be honest eh whether it's the case it's our tradition eh that there's a problem about eh the fact that we have bodies. It seems to me that there's a separation between spirit and flesh, there seems to be a dichotomy between physicality and spirituality, as if our physical nature is the poorer relation.'

This notion ties into Matthews thoughts concerning the humanity of Jesus '... for them I think that his humanity takes away from his divinity. I think they want to believe and buy into something that's other than eh of this world as it were... I think for some people, seeing Jesus as, other than being human it's important whether because that makes him a better redeemer eh in the sense that being saved from our humanity, redeemed from our humanity. And I think it's a pretty unhealthy theology, I mean the assumption is that our humanity and our mortality is essentially something that is bad or fallen or...not good. And I'm not sure that that's true.'

Asked what feelings he went through in his struggle to accept this sexuality Matthew says, 'after a lot of pain and suffering I have come to the place where I recognise that that's not true. But there's been a lot of heartache along the way. And what annoys me is how many other people are there like me or like other gay people in the church? Who have the same struggle. You know...how much damage do they go through psychologically, emotionally.... And its nothing to do with God it's all to do with, you know, the institution and the people who run it.'

Continuing this theme of the institution and change Matthew says, 'I think on the church's part I think there is a large segment of the church that has never come to terms with modernity, eh finds the kind of modern world and all its kind of change and I think the loss of the Church's social power and control. I think that there is a segment of the church that finds that very difficult to cope with and I think the sexuality debate, for them, is another example of that. I think probably the first example of that was the rights of women – women's ordination. I mean there's still people in the church who don't really sign up to women's ordination but they kind of go along with it eh, eh. You know sexuality in their mind is another example of this slippery slope. And I think a lot of it is to do with power.'

'For some of us it is to do with the nature of the Gospel. I think...that conservatives and liberals have a very different understanding of what the good news of Christ is. I think... I think we have a very different

conception of what the gospel is and what the good news really is. For me its about a... a... a way of life that eh that eh that people can live their day to day lives that really changes the fabric of society, turns the world upside down in reality on the ground. And from that point is a very challenging way to live and from that point, you know, it's... it's... that for me is the miraculous part. You know that people can be changed and that Christ, who is the demonstration of God's love and same inclusivity, eh, you know, can change the world upside down eh for me that's the good news. Where as for other people I know it's more of a... you know, it's more of a living and ethical code, it's more of a looking for perfection or salvation eh which is all to be kind of eh fulfilled in the next life.'

Form the experience of his upbringing and struggling to accept who he was, Matthew says that his survival has been due to his faith. 'I suppose how I have survived is through my faith in Christ really. And just a determination not to give up on it.' For Matthew the Church has not changed from the institution that he was brought up in and now serves, 'it's still frustrating me that the church itself is not a welcoming place for gay people.' This lack of welcome, Matthew believes, 'is why our churches are...have...emptied because most people just don't feel they can buy into it.' In other words, 'they don't feel they are acceptable or there's something in their life that doesn't fit...within this kind of model of what it means to be a Christian.'

Although Matthew's theology has changed with his acceptance of his sexuality and he bases his own ministry on the twin pillars of tolerance and acceptance, he remains in the closet as far as his congregation is concerned. 'I'm not out to my congregation... I think I live in a world of ambiguity really.... People wonder.... People think... So there's a kind of don't ask, don't tell culture. You know, and that's the kind of accommodation I suppose me and a lot of other people have reached. Again, I don't see that as being very healthy, it's not very satisfactory either.' 'I find it very difficult the idea that somebody comes to the manse door, you know, you've got to be kind of circumspect, or.... eh, eh, eh, anybody else in a relationship with somebody would want them to meet their neighbours, the people round them, be open, invite folk round for a drink, no questions asked you know, eh, and it's frustrating to me that I can't live like that. I think it's unhealthy eh, it's frustrating not just for me, but it's frustrating in this day and age for other people like me who are in the same position.'

Asked if he intends to stay within Parish Ministry or whether he sees himself working elsewhere Matthew is resolute, 'I could make the flight to Chaplaincy, I guess. I mean, if I was in a chaplaincy position, it would be a lot easier, wouldn't it? I suppose sometimes I think if I was in a city parish...it would be a lot easier. I've often fought with the idea of doing something else. But then, I also think, well I enjoy what I do, I love what I do, I love being in a parish actually. And I think to myself, 'But why should I have to?''

Matthew has decided to stay within the Church and fight for the acceptance, by the Church, of openly gay and sexually active ministers into their midst. But this is not a debate that can be won from the margins. Rather it is a debate that requires co-operation on a number of different levels. 'I think straight ministers have a lot of power...I think male ministers particularly, right or wrong...I think they have an ability....to make our passage to acceptability a lot easier....and a lot more straight forward. There certainly has to be a building of a coalition, you know, including that...part of the church.' The other part of the coalition that Matthew sees forming is an over-reaction by those who reject the acceptance of gay ministers into their ranks. Describing what he means he says, 'I'm also of the view that the other thing that might move it on is that if those who were against the more open acceptance of gay people in the church, if they, if they ever tried to over play their hand and kind of...pushed people too much in the opposite direction I think they might actually further our cause.'

Asked to expand on what he means he further explains, 'I think that there are a number of people in the church who are in the middle and are not quite sure what to think, not quite sure what the church should do, not of a fixed mind. But I think for them the sight of a group of people being persecuted or being done down by the church would probably prompt them...prompt the good part of their humanity to...to in

effect come to some sort of...common sense. I think that that might also be the way through.'

'I think that the church still likes to put off difficult decisions, I think the church still likes to put off....divisive issues because of the desire for unity and I understand that. Eh, I think that's the motivating factor that kind of stops progress. Eh, this is why I think campaigning groups like One Kirk, Affirmation Scotland, LGCM is so important, I think that at the end of the day someone has to keep the issue to the fore, and not just allow it to subside. Eh, whether the conservatives in the church will let it subside or whether this is....whether they are like a dog with a bone and they'll not let it go. I don't know. Eh, I mean, in a way if they decide to keep this going eh, I do think that there's a responsibility within the gay community within the church to..... Sometimes you know it shows you have eh, and I don't mean to say this in a patronising way, eh, but I do think that sometimes the fears we have are sometimes greater than they actually are....and I think that there is a role for the gay community within the church itself to step up to the mark, take responsibility and actually, you know, in a sense come out. Because I really do think that its when people eh, you know, wherever people are either apathetic about it....or....or want to turn away from it or don't want to acknowledge it....I think it is when these people are faced with the real life people, who they have probably known for a long time but not known, in the fullest sense, then I think that that is when things will change. And I think that is a necessary part. And I know it's difficult for people and I know.... I know as well as anyone else that the church.... that the church isn't a

safe place to do that. But, at the end of the day, you know, collectively eh, there is going to have to be some kind of movement in that direction, I believe, for things to move.'

Philip's Story – Interview 5

Philip was once a Parish Minister. He served the Church well for over 20 years until the struggle with his sexuality, and the reconciling of it to his theology, became too much and he felt that he had to leave. Since leaving the Church's employment Philip has gone back to university and re-trained in another sphere. He sees this as building on and utilising the many gifts that he had been able to develop when he was working in the parish.

Philip was in the Church during the debates on sexuality in 1983 and 1994. He was also there when Section 28 (Clause 2A) was heatedly debated within the Church. At that time he would have called himself a conservative evangelical.

Asked if he thought that this tension was creative Philip answers, 'no I don't think that it is a creative tension. I think it... if it comes to a point in a General Assembly where there is going to be a split over it then it will always be fudged and people will go for keeping things together rather than having, eh, a damaging split... I think that eh the liberal side will always, in the debate will want to maintain unity. But the conservative side will probably want to maintain what they see as the truth, at all costs. So if there's a spilt it will come because the conservatives are pushing their agenda, strongly, I suspect. So it just depends how strong they are really... it is to do with the interpretation of scripture; authority of

scripture rather. I think... and, I think in relation to sexuality it is out of all proportion to what scripture has to teach about it... but they see themselves as defending the truth in an absolute sense and so they, they cannot be compromised... that is the root of the issue.'

He continues, 'there seems to be an interpretation that sin concentrates on sexual sins, to a large extent, and individual sins rather than eh, what I would see as done now. Or what I would see as some of bigger deeds in the world like injustice and poverty and, and attitudes of exclusion.'

'Everything has to be neat and tidy and ordered. There has to be answers for everything. I think it seems to be something to do with family life and, eh, the notion of the family... I'm not sure if it really ever existed... the family is just part of that as a neat little structure into which everybody should fit... and the conservative theology that I came out of... the family was just one aspect of ordering the world.'

However, his gradual realisation with regards to his sexuality and what its outworking meant for him has led him away from this more dogmatic theology into one that is more moderate. But this journey gives him a unique insight into both sides of the debate. About the more conservative stance he says, 'I don't see the conservative side being willing, or, or able to actually make a change.' From what he remembers of the last General Assembly debate he attended he comments, 'the last Assembly that I was at was pretty evenly split in opinion and I think that

that is just going to remain.’ In saying that, though, Philip believes that there is a ‘big silent majority, in the middle, and I’m not sure, how opinion is divided in that silent majority.’ Even though he is unsure, he believes that it is the silent majority who hold the key to the acceptance of gay ministers by the Church.

It was the Section 28 Debate that marked a turning point in Philips personal life. ‘The Section 28 debate raised issues’ he says, ‘I mean there was a personal journey going on and I had begun to explore my sexuality a bit more. I mean, when I got married in my early 20’s I was a virgin; I had no experience with either sex. The desire for same sex relationships was there, but I was determined I didn’t want to be gay. I wanted to be straight and I badly wanted to fit in, wanted to conform, wanted to be, what I thought, normal and what I was told was normal. But, I had... in my thirties, had the odd sort of contact with others and that was the, you know, the turning, the beginning to make me realise that I didn’t deny this, much as I wanted to. And the Section 28 Debate threw everything into sharp relief because I was involved in [one of the Boards] which was making a statement on behalf of the church and the church’s decision on sexuality and knowing what I knew about myself and, I had begun to explore things, it was to me I was in a hypocritical situation... and my life was very divided. It was the real me that was like a total secret from everyone. There was the... me that was a minister, there was the... me that was the family man and there was no integrity in my life... And I had to do something about it.’

Philip slowly began to reassess his life and personal integrity, 'I went to meetings in London quite regularly, I had a relationship with a man in London for 3 ½ years...I was also, by that time, quite sure of my own orientation, identity whatever and realised that I had big decisions to make, and I had to get to the next bit on my own. When I say on my own I was also, by that time, making friends in the gay community in my local town I went along to the Gay Outdoor Club and went swimming with them regularly and met with them socially... I developed a completely new network of friends out with my former network of friends and out with the Church. After the relationship...I really felt that I had to decide whether I was going to stay in the Church or not, whether I was going to stay married or not. And I did make the decision that I would have to get out of the Church first eh because I didn't see how I could ever be honest about who I was in the position that I was in. As a, so called, evangelical minister who was a married man. And I began to see that marriage was going to be pretty difficult to sustain as well. I went to counselling'

For Philip the journey on which he has embarked is one that has been difficult for the reasons stated above. He has had to rebuild his faith as he has sought to travel from an evangelical position to one that was more open and relevant to his own personal journey and the experiences he was having. It has not been easy for him to re-interpret the scriptures that he holds so dear in a 'queer way'. But he has felt that

this was fundamental to him feeling accepted by God. It is interesting to note that, for Philip, this acceptance by God far outweighs acceptance by those he once counted as friends and colleagues. None of those he once ministered alongside have been in contact with him since he demitted his charge. In many ways Philip believes that he has a new life now. 'One that I have had to build from scratch and it no longer has anyone from my old life in it.'

Part of this search to reconcile his sexuality to his theology has included Philip attending Courage in London for support and it is there that he initially found an open, welcoming and affirming group of Christians some of who were also from his theological background. 'It was like a light being put on in a dark room. I felt as if I belonged, as if I wasn't the only one to have the feelings that I was struggling with.' It was through Courage and the relationships that Philip build up there that gave him the confidence to face the issue of his sexuality which was gradually taking up more and more of his thinking.

There was no such welcome or support from those within the Church. Those who suspected that there might be something 'not quite right' in Philip's life brought up the subject in round about ways asking, 'Is there something you need to tell me?' 'Your preaching has changed, your more conciliatory and more accepting. Is this something we need to talk about?' Philip felt he couldn't talk to anyone about it because he knew

he would be condemned. After all, it wasn't all that long ago that he himself would have condemned the very people that he had become.

To be fair to the Church Philip does say, 'The Church didn't have a chance to treat me in any particular way because I, I was never honest. I never felt able to be honest... and when I left the church another part of what I put in place was a strategy to get out of the Church which preserved... which didn't cause scandal to the congregation, preserved some dignity for my [family] and for me as well. So I left, if you like, not in disgrace, but I just felt that there was nowhere...that I could turn, in the Church, for help. Maybe that was my... part of my problem and the way I perceived things. But certainly amongst the part of the Church I had come from I was fairly sure there was nobody that I could go to for any kind of help except to be told more of the same or not to do what I had decided to do.'

Speaking of how he feels now, a number of years since demitting his charge, Philip says, 'actually now that I have left it I feel empowered. That's how I would describe myself now. I was controlled before...by the theology.' It was 'like a Damascus Road experience in the sense that em, Jesus said, 'You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.' And it dawned on me that what I thought was the truth had actually been imprisoning me and crushing me for so many years. Therefore, it couldn't be the truth that Jesus was speaking about if it was having that effect on me as a person and, as far as I could see, on

others as well.' Philips experience of being a gay minister in the Church was one of 'fear, terror, shame, guilt, isolation, loneliness... all of these things. Terror, in fact, more than fear.' When asked what was so terrifying he says 'Of being honest at being able to say what I really, who I really was, what I really felt, em, what my desires were because I felt it would meet with condemnation and rejection... and I think that my experience has borne that out and I wouldn't have been strong enough to bear it when I was younger.'

In closing Philip has a plea for the Church that, 'When Jesus said, 'Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.' The Church should 'just look at the hundreds of people who have been turned away because of what the church has been saying, look at the souls who have been crushed and possibly even the lives that have been lost . certainly the contributions that have been lost because of the lack of acceptance and also just look at the people who have contributed huge amounts who have been in the don't ask don't tell [culture] who have been gay and suffered with it all their lives and would have given so much more had they been allowed to be honest.'

Chapter Five: Uncovering the treasure...

'Emerging themes'

Scripture and Authority

As St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, we should not now enslave ourselves by culture or tradition, especially if we then deny our God-given humanity.³⁰¹

Religious people defend these tenants of religious orthodoxy by saying that God expects us today to use our brains and the new knowledge that is available to us. But it is the very newness of that knowledge that the Church has resisted, fought against, and condemned through the centuries.³⁰²

For all those who were interviewed it was impossible to divorce the content of scripture from their context and life experience. They felt that this was one of the reasons that the debates in the Church, where sexuality was on the agenda, had generated so much heat and passion. As Christians, first and foremost, and gay clergy second, it was agreed by all the interviewees that what we do, the way in which we live our lives, were shaped by our individual interpretation and understanding of God's word as contained in scripture. It was a shared understanding, of the interviewees, that for many in the Church their perception of God is based on a picture which many have grown up with and encountered in Sunday School or Bible Class lessons. The impression that I was given during many of the interviews was that this was a God who controlled people's lives and watched over them to see if they were being obedient or not. Matthew highlights this stating,

...it's a very patriarchal God... it's a God who keeps social control... a God who's in control and does things to keep control. I think it's a God who is very black and white, that is right and wrong... I don't think it's a terribly nice God and I don't really believe that it's a God that's revealed by Jesus. And I think it's much more of an Old Testament kind of... fear of God.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.* p.67.

³⁰² Spong, J. S., (1998) *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, New York: HarperCollins, p.7.

³⁰³ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

Philip describes this God thus, 'the God who is intolerant and likes things cut and dried, no mess, black and white, [a] do as your told kind of God.'³⁰⁴

Those who were interviewed were scathing in their assessment of the traditionalist stance on the infallibility of scripture and people from that particular theological background's reluctance to challenge a literal interpretation. Bartholomew stated,

...I have talked to people who would say being gay is very bad and the Bible says so. Then you say, "Where about is it and what do you think it might mean?" And the debate just doesn't happen... I think in terms of the Christian Faith there's this whole thing about you just believe what your minister says and you don't have any debate. Even intelligent people don't do that.³⁰⁵

However, this is not merely a case of a minister (ab)using their position because congregations also place expectations on their minister with regard to the interpretation of scripture. When working as a parish minister Bartholomew says,

... I realised the position I was in as a minister... I had to be the carrier of truth and not admit that I didn't actually know or had a little bit of doubt or I didn't understand. And I think that is times a thousand if you're in a conservative church.³⁰⁶

Philip points out that, 'the conservative church can offer a very definitive answer to a lot of that. But the difficulty is when you've been on the receiving end of that... I'm coming out the other end of it.'³⁰⁷ Matthew summarises the dilemma, 'conservatives and liberals have a very

³⁰⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.7.

³⁰⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.8.

³⁰⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.8.

³⁰⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.7.

different understanding of what the good news of Christ is... I think we have a very different conception of what the gospel is.'³⁰⁸

The question of Biblical authority was another important area of concern for those interviewed. Prior to coming to terms with, and later accepting, their sexuality the majority of interviewees described themselves as being on the evangelical wing of the Church. Although they would not necessarily have described themselves as believing the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, they certainly believed that scripture was to be interpreted in a certain authoritarian way. As Philip said when describing wrestling with his sexuality and his evangelical beliefs, 'I didn't think that I would be acceptable to God as a gay person.'³⁰⁹ Bartholomew echoes this, 'if you have always been told that the Bible is infallible, inspired, God-breathed word, how do you actually go back and say well, maybe, it was contextual?'³¹⁰

All those interviewed agreed that during the time that they were beginning to wrestle with the growing awareness of their sexuality, their belief system prevented them from questioning the interpretation of the texts that related to homosexuality. Indeed they were never encouraged to question any of the inaccuracies or inconsistencies that pepper the Bible's pages. Instead, they were encouraged to be pliant, to follow established orthodox and accepted evangelical teaching for, if they

³⁰⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

³⁰⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.4.

³¹⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.3.

didn't, they felt that they would be viewed by others as being less than devout. As Simon said,

... I daren't question anything, I daren't tell anyone how I was feeling. I wanted to belong, indeed I needed to belong and I didn't want to be seen as the outsider, the one who was different. I didn't want anyone to think I was anything other than a model Christian.³¹¹

Listening to how the interviewees described this period in their lives the common theme which emerged was of a system of belief that discouraged difference, free-thinking and an acceptance of anything that was not judged to be orthodox. For Andrew this structure provided safety, protection and camouflage so others would not guess 'what he was.'³¹² Philip expands on this, 'everything had to be neat and tidy and ordered.'³¹³ He continues, 'there has to be answers for everything.'³¹⁴ Matthew is in no doubt what lies behind the hard line taken, 'I think a lot of it has to do with power.'³¹⁵

The feeling given by the interviewees was of an upbringing and faith that did not allow them to grow into adults who felt confident or comfortable with the idea of thinking critically about the authority of scripture. It was apparent, from what they were describing, that it was more important for them to believe that everything contained within scripture was true, from the Garden of Eden to the Revelation of St. John and everything in between. As Bartholomew says,

Maybe Jonah didn't get swallowed by a whale, maybe it's just a really good story to explain something... but somehow that

³¹¹ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.4.

³¹² Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

³¹³ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

³¹⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

³¹⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

intellectual debate doesn't happen... because it's too risky to
start.³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

Scripture and Authority

A Reflection

There's a lamentable tendency to try to find some definitive solution to permanent human predicaments - in a string of DNA, in a conclusive psychological survey, in an analysis of hypothalamus, in a verse from the Bible - in order to cut an argument short.³¹⁷

Despite the amount of heat the debate over homosexuality has produced in the churches, the discussion has been woefully slack as far as rigorous theological thinking is concerned. The sheer passion of the discussion betrays emotionalism on both sides, and the necessary exegetical and theological grounding is ignored.³¹⁸

In recent years the issue relating to the acceptance of openly sexually active gay members and clergy by the Church into its membership has generated much heat but little, if any, genuine dialogue. This has been because the debate which has been taking place is one 'about' and not a debate 'with' those who are homosexual. As Oliver O'Donovan has written,

...at this point we encounter much dispute, no debate. A debate occurs when people take up arguments that others have raised against them, and try to give serious answers. To do that they must think their opponents mistaken, certainly, but not wholly foolish or malicious. They must suppose that some misconception, or partial truth not fully integrated into other truths, has limited their vision. They must accept the burden of showing how the partial fits in with other truths, or if identifying and resolving the misconception. This cannot happen while there is still a struggle for rhetorical dominance; that is to say, while each side hopes to win a monopoly for the categories in which they themselves frame the question... This describes... the style of disagreement heard in British churches.³¹⁹

Following O'Donovan's line of argument to its logical conclusion, then, for the Church to conduct a debate that could be considered to be truly theological it will be required to speak 'with' its homosexual members,

³¹⁷ Sullivan, A., (1996) *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.16.

³¹⁸ Wink, W., (1999) *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p.viii..

³¹⁹ O'Donovan, O., Homosexuality in the Church: Can There be a Fruitful Theological Debate?, in *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, ed. Bradshaw, T., SCM Press, p.20-21.

who have a unique contribution to make, rather than 'about' them. This is a step, that many who have a more traditional understanding of the Bible, feel is too far.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental misunderstandings in this debate is that those who are homosexual are seeking to undermine the Church by imposing, wholesale, a gay theology upon it. In reality there could be nothing more inaccurate. Rather what gay members and clergy are seeking, I believe, is for all in the Church to work together in an air of openness, respect and acceptance on a Christian theology which is worked out with honesty from a gay perspective. I make this distinction because, at present, a gay theology suggests nothing more than what we are already doing, which is going round in ever decreasing circles, bandying scriptural texts at each other so establishing nothing new and providing no progress in the discussion. In the present climate, however, to expect anything else and believe that Church members can somehow talk dispassionately towards some kind of tacit agreement could, at best, be considered as being naïve.

Walter Wink writing in 1999 regarding the situation that the churches were facing could, in fact, use identical words to describe the current situation facing the Church of Scotland and a variety of other churches³²⁰ as they seek to address this issue. He writes,

³²⁰ Here I am referring, in particular, to the Anglican Communion which has seen deep divisions arising over the appointments of gay clergy. However, also debate continues within the Roman Catholic Church with regards to the appropriateness of accepting gay students, whether sexually active or not, into training for the priesthood.

Sexual issues are tearing our churches apart today as never before. The issue of homosexuality threatens to fracture whole denominations, as the issue of slavery did a hundred and fifty years ago. We naturally turn to the Bible for guidance and find ourselves in interpretative quicksand. Is the Bible able to speak to our confusion on this issue?³²¹

For many in the Church, that is those who count themselves amongst the traditionalists, the answer to Wink's question would be an unequivocal, 'Yes!' And in doing so they would agree with the sentiments which were expressed in the *Dallas Times Herald* on 31st March 1978,³²²

I can much more easily respect and understand an atheist or agnostic accepting homosexuality than an individual who alleges to take the Bible seriously. Scripture is unequivocal on the subject, and to interpret it in any other way is to play fast and loose with God's word.³²³

Those who would count themselves as revisionists, however, the use of the Bible in such a literal manner causes a sense of uneasiness as they view their personal experience, within the Church, as a factor that cannot and should not be ignored when interpreting the scriptural texts.

Our attitude to scripture, then, is key to opening up the debate on homosexuality precisely because the Church has consistently both understood and used the Bible to be its authoritative foundation stone in matters of theology and ethics. To date traditionalists have used scripture, in particular the creation stories from Genesis, the story of the destruction of the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Levitical

³²¹ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*, p.33.

³²² Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, in Homosexuality and Christian Community, in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Seow, C., Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 28.

³²³ Quoted in Furnish, V. P., (1979) *The Moral Teaching of Paul*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, p.52.

prohibitions and the writings of Paul, to prove that homosexuality, in general, and homosexual relationships, in particular, are unnatural and as such should be condemned.

Within the Church, in recent years, if one was to read the numerous letters submitted to Ministers' Forum or heard ministers and elders speak at Presbytery and General Assembly, one could be forgiven for thinking that a person's stance on this single issue decided whether they were seen as standing within accepted biblical tradition or merely dancing to society's current tune. It could be argued then that this single issue has become, for many within the Church, the very 'touchstone for orthodoxy'.³²⁴ On this matter Rowan Williams has written, 'Ours is a time in which it is depressingly easy to make this or that issue a test of Christian orthodoxy.'³²⁵ He continues, '...attitudes to sexuality have come to be seen as a clear marker of orthodoxy or unorthodoxy in certain circles.'³²⁶ This was highlighted by one contributor to the debate who wrote,

The Church is most effective when it refuses to bend to the prevailing wind...The more we adopt the attitudes of society around us, the less distinctive we are, and people have fewer reasons to pay heed to us or join us. The Gospel of Grace demands that we offer the people of Scotland an alternative life-style, an alternative Lord.³²⁷

³²⁴ Middleton, P., *The Bible and Sexuality*, an internet paper written for OneKirk, available at www.onekirk.org/bible_sexuality.html p.3.

³²⁵ Williams, R., (2003) Knowing Myself in Christ, in *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, ed. Bradshaw, T., SCM Press, p.12.

³²⁶ Williams, R., (2003) Knowing Myself in Christ, *Ibid.*.

³²⁷ Article available at www.forwardtogether.org.uk/documents/civil_partnership_papers.pdf , p.4.

Quite how our attitudes to homosexuality and same-sex relationships became a doctrinal matter within the Church of Scotland is unclear as there would appear to be no mention of homosexuality either in the Westminster Confession of Faith, The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed or any of the other creeds and confessions that the Church would adhere to. But as Middleton asks, 'Does it really alter what we believe about God, about the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the activity of the Holy Spirit?'³²⁸ The answer is probably no to that question and if the debate is examined more closely, it can be seen that the issue is not so much about homosexuality in and of itself but, rather, about the role and authority of scripture.

Sola scriptura is certainly the bedrock of the Protestant understanding of scripture which has had the consequence of inextricably linking together the concept of the Word of God with that of scripture. As Christians, scripture has its own claim on us conveying as it does the story which has helped to shape our identity as the People of God as well as preserve the testimony of those who knew Jesus personally. As a document whose words are bound to a particular historical setting it is perhaps unhelpful to view scripture with unquestioning and blind obedience. For by treating scripture in such a way the continued revelation of God is left time bound thereby leaving the story of God's work in creation incomplete.

³²⁸ Middleton, P., *The Bible and Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.3.

From reading the Bible it can be seen that scripture has never been a static set of rules and regulations. Instead, it is an ongoing account, the story, of a people's journey with their God. Therefore scripture is a sign pointing beyond itself to the continuation of God's work and further revelation by the Holy Spirit. Understanding scripture in this way is in keeping with the experience of God's people who have always been asked to step out in faith into an unknown future. Throughout the Bible this would appear to be one of the conditions of being counted as belonging to God. Abraham, in the twilight of his years, was called to leave the security of a land he considered to be his home to seek out a new land; Moses was called to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt to embark on a desert pilgrimage that would eventually last for forty years; the Israelites dispossessed of their land and taken into captivity sought to sing the Lord's song in a strange land; the disciples embarked on a journey with Jesus not knowing where it would take them or what would be expected of them; the early Christians witnessed the spread of their religion and suffered at the hands of the Roman Empire; and later Christians on their own journey of faith have been required to address how that faith related to slavery, Nazism, apartheid, the ordination of women and the rise of HIV/AIDS. I use these examples to show that the story of God's people is not static but, rather, is a dynamic story which follows God's continuing revelation in creation. As a Church, therefore, we are continually being shaped by the address of God. We have been brought into existence as a believing community by being spoken to by God and through our response to that Word.

This possibility of God calling us into a new experience exists in tension with traditional interpretations of scripture. As stated earlier, however, scripture cannot simply be treated with unquestioning obedience or regarded as the whole of God's revelation and work in the world. Rather, scripture points beyond itself to God's continual revelation in creation through the Spirit.

Calvin believed that it was the 'Spirit at work in the believer that joined with the Word for the experience of authority.'³²⁹ For Calvin, scripture was not God's final revelation rather scripture should be used as spectacles through which we should view and interpret the world. He wrote,

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of the Deity, which, till then, lay confused in their minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly.³³⁰

In other words, scripture helps us to see God and God's spirit at work in the world. This can also be seen in the Westminster Confession of Faith³³¹, the Church of Scotland's subordinate standard, where it states 'we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in

³²⁹ McClain-Taylor, M., (1996) But Isn't 'It' a Sin?, in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Seow, C., Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p.77.

³³⁰ Calvin, J., *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., tr. Beveridge, H., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973, p.184, Book 1, Chapter 6, Section1, Para.64.

³³¹ Office of the General Assembly, (1991) *The Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (USA), 6.001-6.178.

the Word.'³³² Also, 'the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined...can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.'³³³

McClaine-Taylor writing on this subject states, that when biblical authority is understood as 'involving text *with* spirit...then the words of the text and the textual codes, while remaining relevant, are not themselves the primary locus of authority.'³³⁴ He continues his line of argument stating, 'In fact, it is part of the ambiguity of scriptural authority that portions of the word are downplayed or resisted, even when the scriptures are revered as authoritative for thought and practice.'³³⁵

Nelson echoes this line of argument writing,

It is a curious but unmistakeable phenomenon that a great many Christians treat so literally the references to homosexual practice in the Bible, while at the same time they interpret biblical text on almost every other topic with considerably flexibility and non-literality.³³⁶

Hays writing concerning the interpretation of the Pauline letters and epistles states that even once we have understood what he believed with regards to homosexuality then we must still determine,

... how to construe the authority of his opinion in the present time...because there remain open questions about precisely how the Bible functions as an authority for normative ethical judgments, we cannot relieve ourselves of the responsibility for moral decision by appealing to the plain sense of the single proof text.³³⁷

³³² Office of the General Assembly, (1991) *The Book of Confessions*, *Ibid.*, 6.006.

³³³ Office of the General Assembly, (1991) *The Book of Confessions*, *Ibid.*, 6.010.

³³⁴ McClain-Taylor, M., (1996) But Isn't 'It' a Sin?, *Ibid.*, p.77.

³³⁵ McClain-Taylor, M., (1996) But Isn't 'It' a Sin?, *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Nelson, J., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, p.181.

³³⁷ Hays, R. B., (1986) 'Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to J. Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1, p.205.

Hays is arguing that in order to understand a text fully then ‘we must go beyond the mere formality of reading the text’³³⁸ because ‘textual understanding requires a great deal more patience and study than a mere reading of the text.’³³⁹ The reason for this, according to Blount, is that

God works through human beings and has inspired the human authors of those texts to write as they have written. God’s message becomes the central indicative faith statement, which, in turn, becomes the foundation of this message. Yet because God inspires and does not overwhelm human messengers, they are not mere tape recorders who transcribe God’s word in a vacuum. Instead they interpret that word through their own historical circumstance and the presuppositions of that circumstance. Already, then, the faith statement they present is an *interpretation*, an *understanding* of what God has given them. They are not merely repeating the dictation of God’s words; they are interpreting God’s Word.³⁴⁰

If this is indeed the case then it has implications for the current debate, within the Church of Scotland, regarding homosexuality and requires a re-evaluation of the Church’s stance. The reason for this is that our context, living in the first half of the twenty-first century, and the understanding we now have on issues around sexuality is vastly different from the way that the biblical writers, including Paul, understood it.

For the biblical writers the issue of homosexuality was viewed as being negative, something to be punished (by death) because ‘it was seen as being contrary to the “natural” procreative ordering of male and

³³⁸ Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, *Ibid.*, p.29.

³³⁹ Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, *Ibid.*.

³⁴⁰ Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, *Ibid.*.

female.³⁴¹ This is still the view taken by those who would count themselves amongst the traditionalists within the Church. As Kinsey writes,

In traditional Christian theology, heterosexual marriage is a God-given relationship of complementarity between men and women. It is rooted in God's purposes in creation, originates out of his perfect wisdom, and provides the essential framework for both the peaceful ordering of relationships between men and women and for the proper upbringing of children. Beyond that, it provides the inspired biblical image for the relationship between Christ and his Church³⁴²

Continuing his theme Kinsey states,

There are many of us in the church who, whilst believing that God loves all men and women, also believe that God has reserved sexual relations for heterosexual marriage.³⁴³

Such arguments raise, in an 'acute way, how we interpret the Bible'³⁴⁴ with the real issue being 'not simply homosexuality, but how Scripture informs our lives today.'³⁴⁵ The fundamental question for the Church, then, is how the scriptures relate to this process. This is perhaps the most important question lying behind the actual question of the inclusion of openly gay members and clergy participating fully in Church life.

For many within the Church the plain word of scripture is the decisive test of whether an action or a situation is permitted or forbidden. Such an approach, on the surface, is seen as being thoroughly Christian and appears to negate any alternative approach. Those who subscribe to such a view are concerned, in the main, with upholding the exclusive

³⁴¹ Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, *Ibid.*, p.36.

³⁴² Kinsey, L., (March 2006) in *Minister's Forum*, *Ibid.*, p.1.

³⁴³ Kinsey, L., (March 2006) in *Minister's Forum*, *Ibid.*.

³⁴⁴ Wink, W., (1999) *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, *Ibid.*, p.33.

³⁴⁵ Wink, W., (1999) *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*, *Ibid.*.

legitimacy of their point of view. By doing so they are maintaining traditional Christian practice and teaching in the area of human sexuality. In many ways, those who are traditionalist in their outlook are concerned that, with regards to the subject of homosexuality, 'the credibility, the importance, the very authority of the Bible is at stake.'³⁴⁶ As Ann Allen states,

The fundamental issue is not about sex but how we interpret and use the Bible. That's the difficulty. Do we say that the teaching of the Bible is there for every generation and stands the test of time and that God is an eternal, unchanging being and loves people for whoever and whatever they are? Or because of current mores, we hijack the Bible and say love, whatever that means, overthrows everything else, which I don't think the Bible does teach. I think the Bible is clear that love goes hand in hand with holiness and truth and righteousness.³⁴⁷

Therefore, scripture has become *the* defining issue for the Church at present causing much soul searching for those ministers who identify as being homosexual seeking, as they do, to reconcile their most intimate feelings, their interpretation of scripture and their theology with what the Church currently teaches. Middleton has suggested that the biblical argument has become the current focus of the debate, within the Church, because in the past,

... they didn't spend that much time on the biblical texts; they simply used arguments that were current in society. It is only when those social arguments no longer existed, more emphasis was placed on the Bible. And there are now no convincing social arguments against same-sex relationships; all that is left are arguments from the Bible.³⁴⁸

Middleton makes an interesting point as, today, all the social arguments against homosexuality are no longer in existence, with the repeal of Section 28, legislation bringing equality to the age of consent, the

³⁴⁶ Middleton, P., *The Bible and Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.3.

³⁴⁷ *Life and Work*, (October 2003), p.10.

³⁴⁸ Middleton, P., *The Bible and Sexuality, Ibid.*, p.4.

decriminalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults, anti-discrimination legislation and the implementation of Civil Partnership legislation. Therefore, with homosexuality being accepted within society, with rights protected by law, the interpretation of scripture on this subject has become the modern era's battleground between the traditionalists and the revisionists.

For the traditionalists, there is no doubt that the Bible states that homosexual acts are forbidden leaving no room for either debate, questioning or discussion. As Kinsey states,

Holy Scripture indicates the importance of obedience to God in the area of human sexuality...and the apostle Paul clearly indicates that the conduct of our sexuality has implications for our salvation...It is a salvation issue.³⁴⁹

For the traditionalists, then, scriptural interpretation is the central issue.

Dempsey writes,

...can we really take the position that the Creator of the universe and all it contains is incapable of giving us the book he wanted us to have?

For the sake of clarity the Church of Scotland must decide what place the Bible really has in the life and witness of the Church and it must do so with this proviso: If any part of the Bible is declared unreliable or untrue, then all of it must be and it must be openly declared that the Bible is not our 'supreme rule of faith and life'. Anything that is simply a matter of one's own interpretation cannot be reliable in any shape or form. We must have an anchor fastened to a rock which cannot move, or go into the chocolate teapot business for real.³⁵⁰

With regards to the particular subject of homosexuality and the Bible, Robert Anderson states, 'There is no record of Jesus pronouncing on homosexuality. This is taken by pro-homosexuality liberals as an

³⁴⁹ Kinsey, L., (March 2006) in *Minister's Forum*, *Ibid.*.

³⁵⁰ Dempsey, B., (July 2007) in *Minister's Forum*, ed. Ferguson, J., Issue 295, p.3.

opportunity to advance their case'³⁵¹, (it is also taken by those, like Anderson, to advance their case against the acceptance of sexually active homosexuals within the Church). He states,

The extent to which minority interest groups have been able to change the law in their favour is concerning. It is extraordinary that a particular lifestyle should merit special protection. From legal exclusion to legal favouritism in a single generation is a remarkable status for homosexuals to have achieved.³⁵²

He continues, 'But homosexuals are not asking for forgiveness...but to be accepted as homosexual practitioners and for this to be made part of the understanding of the Churches.'³⁵³ From this it can be seen that homosexuality is viewed by the traditionalists as a threat to the survival of the Church community. Therefore, those who are homosexual are expected to suppress their sexuality, keep quiet, remain undemanding and make their needs subservient to the 'collective' needs of the community. Or as Molefi Asante states,

All brothers who are homosexuals should know that they too can become committed to the collective will. It means the submergence of their own wills into the collective will of our people.³⁵⁴

This is what lies at the heart of the argument and why the issue of the interpretation and authority of scripture is central. For both traditionalists and revisionists seek to ground their argument in scripture as a means of either maintaining the status quo or as a vehicle for change.

According to Foucault every society has a variety of mechanisms for 'distributing, regulating and controlling the circulation of texts.'³⁵⁵ Within

³⁵¹ Anderson, R., (January 2007) in *Minister's Forum*, Issue 289, p.2.

³⁵² Anderson, R., (January 2007) in *Minister's Forum*, *Ibid.*, p.3.

³⁵³ Anderson, R., (January 2007) in *Minister's Forum*, *Ibid.*.

³⁵⁴ Asante, M. K., (1980) *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Buffalo: Amulefi, p.65. As cited in Cohen, *Ibid.*, p.380.

Western culture the most prominent ones can be described as exclusion and prohibition.³⁵⁶ Amongst the types of prohibitions that Foucault mentions are,

those that deal with particular objects; those that are involved with ritual and all that surrounds it; and those that confer the exclusive right to speak about a particular subject. These reinforce each other and operate to form a web of prohibitions constantly subject to modification.³⁵⁷

In addition to this there are also exclusions which operate around the 'distinction between true and false and emerges against the background of how it is that certain statements or propositions are taken to be true while others are taken as false.'³⁵⁸ By questioning the interpretation of scripture and the authority to interpret it in a particular way, those considered by the wider Church to be 'indecent' are using their subjugated knowledge³⁵⁹, that is their experience as homosexuals within the Church, to challenge the accepted wisdom of the 'decent' in biblical exegesis of the passages which are being used to keep them silenced on the margins of Church life. By doing this the 'indecent' don't simply read the texts into the twenty-first century but, rather, through their particular experience strive to understand them in the light of the twenty-first century context.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Barker, P., (1998) *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p.6.

³⁵⁶ Barker, P., (1998) *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, *Ibid.*.

³⁵⁷ Barker, P., (1998) *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, *Ibid.*.

³⁵⁸ Barker, P., (1998) *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, *Ibid.*.

³⁵⁹ Knowledge is labelled as subjugated when it is driven underground or edited out by the limitations and censorship imposed by the reigning beliefs of the dominant cultural discourse.

³⁶⁰ Blount, B. K., (1996) Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality, *Ibid.*, p.37.

At the heart of this argument lies the question of experience. By this I mean what value we place on tradition and on our own individual and contemporary experience? In our reading of scripture do we place greater emphasis on contemporary experience or tradition? The role of experience and the value we place on it is central to this debate.

Perhaps one of the difficulties, in this respect, between the traditionalists and the revisionists is that they are using different languages to express their experience and understanding of how God acts in the world. In other words, those involved in the debate may be engaging in it using language from a very different worldview. If this is the case then it is vital that this is taken into account when addressing the issue of homosexuality raises.

Traditionalists have tended to use deontological language when speaking of their relation to God and to the way they use scripture. Deontology uses the language of obligation or duty and focuses on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves. According to it, the rightness of any action depends upon that action being performed because it is a duty, not because of any good consequences arising out of that action. Therefore, it emphasises duty as the basis of moral value. For example, if God has commanded that people do not work on the Sabbath, then people act rightly if they do not work on the Sabbath. For the traditionalists God is the primary actor and we have a duty to respond. Although experience can play a role in this worldview, it is not

how we feel or how others experience our actions that is important; rather the importance lies in our experienced sense of duty towards God, neighbours and our own conscience.

This way of speaking about scripture and authority is found wanting by those revisionists who are seeking reform as it is not the language that they feel comfortable with or use. Instead they are seeking to find their voice, grounded in their own experience.

As stated earlier, when discussing the use of stories, the latter part of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of the phenomena whereby people use their personal experience to claim authority in a particular subject or area. This is not merely a societal phenomenon for within the wider church liberation and feminist theologians, have also written from personal experience about their disenfranchisement so focusing attention on their collective experiences of oppression. They ask what interpretation of scripture makes most sense to their suffering, what would be the most liberating? By engaging in this process they are acknowledging that their suffering gains them privileged access to God's further revelation for it allows them to examine their faith, re-examine scripture and tradition and listen for a new word, or revelation, from God. As Lauritzen writes,

To acknowledge experience as a legitimate source of moral knowledge means that one does not immediately dismiss what one knows or feels experientially simply because it conflicts with

conventional wisdom or because traditional categories of analysis leave little room for experience.³⁶¹

Within the Church, the possibility that God is calling us into a new experience, always exists in tension with both tradition and scripture. Scripture, however, cannot simply be treated with unquestioning obedience nor can it be regarded as the whole of God's revelation and work in the world. Like the liberationists and the feminists, whose work informs this discussion, scripture must be viewed as pointing beyond itself to God's continual revelation and work in the world.

In this sense then the experience of gay members and clergy are not placed outside or over and against scripture but, rather, is viewed as an integral part of scriptures interpretation. This may be an uncomfortable process for those of a more traditional view in the Church but as this journey is undertaken it is good to be reminded that our ancestors in faith underwent a similar process and that what we now take for granted as tradition was, at one time, a hesitant and uncertain response to the Spirit's leading.

The question as to when the Church let's a traditional interpretation of scripture go and when to accept an interpretation that is new, is just a normal part of our faith something which our ancestors also struggled with. It is not to be feared and it is unfair to blame those who would

³⁶¹ Lauritzen, P., *Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Think No Evil: Ethics and the Appeal to Experience*, HYPATIA, Vol. 12, no. 2, (Spring 1997), P.91.

count themselves as revisionists for seeking to destroy cherished tradition and hijack scripture with their non-traditional interpretation.

As experience is tested against scripture, we would do well to ask what precedent in the Church's history is relevant in this situation? Is homosexuality like the inclusion of the Gentiles in whom the pouring out of the Spirit necessitated a revision of monumental proportions to religious tradition? Is it like left-handedness, once viewed as being against the created order but now viewed as nothing more than natural? Is it like the question of women's ordination which once considered prohibited in scripture but is now viewed as normal practice? Surely there are far worse things that the Church might do than try to act on the Spirit at the risk of making a mistake. Far worse is to risk quenching the Spirit's revelation either out of fear or uncertainty.

The question which lies before the Church is the issue of scripture and authority, is how we listen to scripture in today's society to make a valid contribution to the debate on homosexuality that rumbles on? Richard Hays³⁶² has proposed several guidelines that may be beneficial for the Church to use.

(1) We must respect the shape of the biblical text.

Hays asks those involved in using scripture as a basis for authority to look at the particular passages and to recognise their 'shape' or purpose. By this he is referring to the purpose which the writer intended

³⁶² Hays, R. B., (1990) Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics, *Interpretation* 44.1, p.42-55

the text to have, such as, should it be viewed as instructional, as providing an example of the ideal, as a cry of protest etc.. For example, the story of Pricilla and Aquilla addresses the subject of communal living and the sharing of money and goods. Such a way of life is not considered to be something which the scriptures view as being a binding statute similar to the Ten Commandments. However, the story can be used as an influence on how we live and treat others. Listening to the scriptures for an answer to a particular question is not about picking and choosing between different texts but, rather, is about listening to them on their own terms and according to their purpose.

(2) Respect the tensions that appear in scripture.

Tensions in scripture should never be explained away or ignored. Instead they should be allowed to stand and, by doing this, the voice of the text will be both uncovered and heard. As Hays writes, '... we are often tempted to dissolve the plurality of perspective by appealing to universal principles (love, justice, etc.), historical development schemes or dialectical compromises.'³⁶³

(3) Being explicit about the hermeneutical principle being employed.

There is a need for us to be explicit about the issues and situations that govern and impact upon the way we interpret scripture. This is imperative for mutual understanding as it acknowledges each others differing interpretive principle which, unsurprisingly, will give rise to different interpretations and conclusions.

(4) We must give consideration to non-biblical evidence.

³⁶³ ³⁶³ Hays, R. B., (1990) *Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in New Testament Ethics*, *Ibid.*, p.46.

There has to be a decision taken with regards to the weight that non-scriptural evidence carries within the debate. Scripture cannot be listened to today except through society's current knowledge of the world. This is a world vastly different from biblical times and, although scripture is the fundamental source of authority for the Church, it should not exclude other sources of wisdom or revelation from serious consideration. By doing this the Spirit is being given a voice to speak through scripture on issues and to situations which are important today but were of little importance or relevance in biblical times.

Although such guidelines are not going to bring, in and of themselves, a conclusion to the debate on the inclusion of sexually active homosexual people as members and clergy within the Church, hopefully, they help to provide some structure to the debate in such a way that scripture is treated with the respect it deserves, not just as a proof text, and that experience, often borne out of a great deal of personal pain, is given a voice which is heard. The task of working out what this means in practice has never been easy, but it has always been necessary.

Rules and regulations are required by every society if they are to have any kind of coherent structure and the regulations relating to sexual practices are also employed for that very same reason. However, it should be noted that the aforementioned rules and regulations, both in biblical and modern times, have tended to be employed to service the 'system of domination and to serve as a form of crowd control rather

than to enhance the fullness of human potential.³⁶⁴ However, today, our interpretation of scripture and the authority we place on it should not be used, as the traditionalists would have it, as a 'chastity belt for repressing urges'³⁶⁵ but rather as a 'way of expressing the integrity of our relationship with God.'³⁶⁶ It is surely up to us, both as individuals as well as collectively, to critique the sexual practices of our day in light of the ethic of love as displayed and exemplified by Jesus. As Wink states,

For those of a same-sex orientation, as for heterosexuals, being moral means rejecting sexual mores that violate their own integrity and that of others, and attempting to discover what it would mean to live by the ethic of the love of Jesus.³⁶⁷

If this is the case then surely our moral task must be to apply Jesus' ethic of love to whatever sexual practices are prevalent in our culture, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transgender. Or to put it another way,

The Church's unequivocal support of civil rights for gay people ought not depend upon Christian agreement about the theological and moral appropriateness of homosexuality. The matter of civil rights is a matter of basic Christian commitment to social justice for all persons.³⁶⁸

Equating the battle that is currently going on in the churches with that of the abolition of slavery Wink suggests,

What happened to bring about such a monumental shift on the issue of slavery was that the churches were finally driven to penetrate beyond the legal tenor of Scripture to an even deeper tenor, articulated by Israel out of the experience of the Exodus and the prophets and brought to sublime embodiment in Jesus' identification with harlots, tax collectors, the diseased and maimed and outcast and poor. It is that God sides with the powerless. God liberates the oppressed. God suffers with the suffering and groans toward the reconciliation of all things. Therefore Jesus went out of his way to declare forgiven, and to reintegrate into society in all details, those who were identified as 'sinners' by virtue of the

³⁶⁴ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*, p.45.

³⁶⁵ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*.

³⁶⁶ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*.

³⁶⁷ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*.

³⁶⁸ Nelson, J., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, *Ibid.*, p.205.

accidents of birth, or biology, or economic desperation. In light of the supernal compassion, whatever our position on gays, the gospel's imperative to love, care for and identify with their sufferings is unmistakably clear.

What Jesus gives us is a critique of domination in all its forms, a critique that can be turned on the Bible itself. The Bible thus contains the principles of its own correction. We are freed from bibliolatry, the worship of the Bible. It is restored to its proper place as a witness to the Word of God. And that Word is a Person, not a book.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁹ Wink, W., (1999) Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*, p.47-48.

Living with integrity, honesty and the question of self-disclosure

...so unrealistic, so inhuman, so pious, so "pure"... I want to be allowed to be me.³⁷⁰

He would not deceive himself so much. He would not - and this was the test - pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own. He loved men and always had loved them. He longed to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs.³⁷¹

The subject of personal integrity rated highly in all the interviews which I conducted. Shared by all interviewees was the belief that there had to be a certain level of integrity to both their life and faith. But there is, according to the interviewees, a high level of dishonesty within the Church when this subject is broached. As Andrew said, '...there's huge dishonesty in the Church.'³⁷² When asked to expand on what he meant he said, 'it's the question of how honest, or how much self-disclosure you can have without getting the sack?'³⁷³

Putting this whole debate in context Simon stated, 'it's really all about personal integrity... of honesty with yourself and the Church.'³⁷⁴ He continues, 'it's about being honest. As ministers we trade on our honesty and integrity, they are the foundation stones on which you build your ministry... but if you are not permitted or encouraged to be honest about who and what you are, then what level of integrity do you

³⁷⁰ Bailey, R., (1997) *Scarlet Ribbons: A Priest With AIDS*, London: Serpent's Tail, p.67.

³⁷¹ Forster, E. M., (1971) *Maurice*, London: Penguin Books, p. 58-59.

³⁷² Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.4.

³⁷³ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.5.

³⁷⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.9.

have?³⁷⁵ He answers his own question adding, ‘...very little, I’m afraid, very little.’³⁷⁶

This is a view shared by Philip who says, concerning his own situation, ‘I could never have been me where I was in the Church. I could never have served as much as I did had I been honest.’³⁷⁷ He goes on to say, ‘I wouldn’t have been in ministry had I been honest.’³⁷⁸

The issue of having to hide and camouflage one’s true nature is something that all the interviewees have struggled with after being ordained. Although this was not always the case for some prior to ordination as Andrew explains, ‘I was fairly open at college. Certainly 121 knew.’³⁷⁹ But, Andrew realises that his situation may have been unique as he goes on to explain, ‘...but that’s not necessarily a fair reflection because that was kind of behind the scenes, on a one-to-one basis.’³⁸⁰ But, for Andrew, once he was ordained and working within a parish setting that openness and transparency, out of necessity, would quickly change. With the benefit of hindsight and experience he adds,

... it’s actually interesting because in my training I think I was open and out but in the parish, for self-preservation, I could only be out to those people I trusted and who I knew were going to love me because the bastards crucified you over the colour of paint never mind over something so personal as your sexuality.³⁸¹

³⁷⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.9.

³⁷⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.9.

³⁷⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.6.

³⁷⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.7.

³⁷⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

³⁸⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

³⁸¹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.9.

This feeling regarding not being able to be open about one's sexuality and its impact on the integrity of the individual permeated all the interviews. Matthew, in particular, found this area difficult to contend with. He says,

I feel because of my kind of conservative background that I kind of was forced to live a lie... a lot of harm was done to me because of the Church... I couldn't see how the Church could accept me or I could be the person I was within the Church.³⁸²

Philip echoes this feeling of not being allowed to be honest '... at being able to say what I really, who I really was, what I really felt, what my desires were because I felt it would meet with condemnation and rejection.'³⁸³ Describing the internal struggle he was having to contend with Philip continues,

... the desire for same sex relationships was there but I was determined I didn't want to be gay. I wanted to be straight and I badly wanted to fit in, wanted to conform, wanted to be, what I thought, normal and what I was told was normal.³⁸⁴

He continues, '... it was the real me that was like a total secret from everyone. There was me that was a minister, there was me that was the family man and there was no integrity in my life.'³⁸⁵

'Secretive'³⁸⁶ was the word that Bartholomew used to describe how he had to live in order to survive within the Church. As he explained,

... it seemed like that was how you had to do it. My role models told me that. Well those I knew in the Church who were gay. That's how they did it so, I thought, that's how you must do it.³⁸⁷

³⁸² Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

³⁸³ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.3.

³⁸⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.3.

³⁸⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.4.

³⁸⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.3.

³⁸⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.3.

For many of the interviewees the Section 28 Debate within the Church and the subsequent debate on the right of ministers to bless Civil Partnerships, free from the threat of discipline, has been the catalyst to become more accepting of their sexuality and also to give consideration to become more vocal. This journey has not been an easy one however.

As Bartholomew explained,

... it felt difficult to be in a debate when it really meant me now... that was a difficult time to get my head round. Then to discover you... in an establishment that sounded like it didn't want to embrace it at all.³⁸⁸

He continued, 'I felt if I took too much part in the debate there would be a big sign suddenly appear above my head saying, "by the way he's one of them that's why he's talking about it."' ³⁸⁹ Bartholomew goes on to describe it as a 'dark time'.³⁹⁰ Philip agrees,

... the Section 28 Debate threw everything into sharp relief... the Board of Social Responsibility, which was making a statement on behalf of the Church and the Church's decision on sexuality, and knowing what I knew about myself and I had begun to explore things, it was to me...a hypocritical situation.³⁹¹

He adds, 'I was in inner turmoil.'³⁹²

For Andrew there is a sense of frustration because 'still amongst friends who are gay friendly, don't be too militant, don't stick your head above the parapet.'³⁹³ This is certainly advice Andrew appears to have been getting throughout his career. He says, 'Throughout my ministry I was

³⁸⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

³⁸⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

³⁹⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

³⁹¹ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.3-4.

³⁹² Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.4.

³⁹³ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.10.

always advised, by many people in the Church, never to be the maverick... don't dare set a precedent.'³⁹⁴ Andrew continues,

I can understand that on one level because if you are the person who comes out and opens up that can of worms... it may go well or it may go disastrous. And if it is disastrous it has a horrendous effect on other people. So it's not just about me.³⁹⁵

Asked if he would worry if he was outed by a newspaper tomorrow he says,

I don't think I would worry as much now as I would have done if I was in the parish... I'm not saying it wouldn't be painful, I'm not saying it wouldn't be difficult, but I wouldn't worry as much. I don't know if I'm giving a fair assessment of where I'm at because although I'm saying I don't actually care what the Church thinks, I suppose deep down I actually do.³⁹⁶

For Bartholomew also the move out of parish ministry has given him a different perspective on this issue and a new found voice,

... I'm back to that place that I feel I can survive for the moment in the Church because I know there's a wealth of support around... therefore that gives me the courage to be more open and go on anyway... I'm now at the point without running through 121 shouting it out... I'm another stage on. So I'm not hiding this anymore, this is how I live my life and I think it's honourable that one lives with integrity. So other folk who disagree with it can disagree but I'm not going to alter the way I go about things.³⁹⁷

He adds, 'The tension is broken for me because I now do it, almost hang the consequences I suppose.'³⁹⁸

This feeling of self-acceptance is not felt by Simon though who says,

After leaving the Church no one in Presbytery has asked me to do Pulpit Supply even though, I know, there are vacancies and they are struggling to find people. It's undoubtedly because I am gay and living with my partner.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.9.

³⁹⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.9.

³⁹⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.9.

³⁹⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.4.

³⁹⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.4.

³⁹⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.3.

Closely allied to the concepts of honesty and integrity for the interviewees was that of self-disclosure. All of the interviewees struggled over the concept of self-disclosure and whether or not they should be open within the Church with regards to their sexuality.

This sense of frustration that they all felt is summed up by Matthew,

... what annoys me is how many other people are there like me or like other gay people in the Church who have the same struggle?... how much damage do they go through physiologically, emotionally?... And it's nothing to do with God; it's all to do with the institution and the people who run it.⁴⁰⁰

Speaking of the fear that he felt at either self-disclosing he was gay or being outed Matthew says,

I couldn't speak to anyone about it... I just couldn't really speak to anybody... Never at any time was I able to speak to anybody about it for fear, for fear of being thrown out, not being accepted... I mean, I just wouldn't have risked it.⁴⁰¹

He goes on to say, 'I didn't even speak to my parents about it because I thought, you know, it was going to be way out the park.'⁴⁰² And 'there is no doubt that my inability to come to terms with my sexuality was part of that.'⁴⁰³ Asked why he thought that the issue of sexuality had become, for some, the defining and difficult subject on which suitability for ordained ministry rested, Matthew said, '...we feel threatened by people who are different from us, who challenge our norms and our values. It's much easier to get on with people who think the same way as you.'⁴⁰⁴

On the subject of openness Matthew says,

⁴⁰⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

⁴⁰¹ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

⁴⁰² Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

⁴⁰³ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

⁴⁰⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.4.

I'm not out to my congregation... I live in a world of ambiguity... people wonder, people think, I'm sure people know...there is a kind of don't ask don't tell culture.⁴⁰⁵

The same phrase is used by Philip when he says,

It was don't ask don't tell... But nobody asked me outright. I don't know how many suspected... I was a married man... and I don't think it really crossed a lot of people's minds that I might be gay.⁴⁰⁶

Matthew adds, '... that's the kind of accommodation... me and a lot of other people have reached... I don't see that as being healthy, it's not very satisfactory either.'⁴⁰⁷

Philip left Parish Ministry before he felt he could 'come out'. For him, staying within the Church as a gay minister was not a viable option. He described his departure from the Church,

... when I left the Church another part of what I put in place was a strategy to get out of the Church which preserved, which didn't cause scandal to the congregation, preserved some dignity for my family and for me as well. So I left, if you like, not in disgrace.⁴⁰⁸

Asked if he felt he was being truthful Philip added,

It was about self-preservation. I didn't lie as much as was economical with the truth. I said what needed to be said. But some might say that my life had been a lie in the Church.⁴⁰⁹

From the position of being outside the Church now Philip offered these comments,

I'm happy to be me, for the first time in my life all the parts of my life are together and I'm not frightened to be honest as to who I am. So in some ways the church has become irrelevant to me now and I haven't missed it. And that is the biggest surprise to me of all. That I haven't missed it at all and it was my life.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.5.

⁴⁰⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.5.

⁴⁰⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.5.

⁴⁰⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.6.

⁴⁰⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.6.

⁴¹⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.7.

The subject of being open with a congregation is picked up by Andrew during the interview when he said,

I don't know how many people know about me or not and I don't know how much of it was the typical thing of 'we know but don't tell us'... I've heard phrases like 'he's not the marrying type'... people have euphemisms for saying what they want to say.⁴¹¹

But he goes on to say,

...but I don't know if congregations even think that their ministers have sex. I remember when a female friend announced to the congregation that she was pregnant, she got a round of applause, and she felt that she was being applauded because she had had sex. Which was actually what they were doing although they weren't meaning that... I don't think that in their mind they actually thought that she was at home shagging her husband in the manse.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.2.

⁴¹² Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.2-3.

Living with integrity, honesty and the question of self-disclosure

A Reflection

You live constantly under the threat of another insinuation. Although you would like to be open and relaxed about who you are, you can never guarantee the reaction of the people you're with, if they don't already know or haven't yet guessed. At the same time, you live in fear of any close interrogation of your personal life. You protect your deepest self at all costs because you don't want to be hurt any more. Straight people don't seem to live like that.⁴¹³

Those who try to kill the body violate God's law. Those who try to kill the soul also violate God's law, even though their crime is less visible to others.⁴¹⁴

The call to be permitted to live their lives as ministers, whether working in the parish, in chaplaincy or retired, with a sense of honesty and integrity was voiced by all the interviewees at some point during their interview with me. There was an intrinsic belief that in order for the debate about homosexuality in the Church to move meaningfully forwards, then it was an issue that would have to be addressed.

However, at the centre of this need to be themselves, to own who they are, in the way that God created them, is an inherent belief that, within the Church, they have to keep silent about their homosexuality. In many ways it is their 'dirty, little secret' that should never be allowed to be shared with anyone expect, that is, their most trusted allies, those whom they know will not reject them.

Throughout their lives the interviewees have had to deal with issues such as the fear of rejection, fear of exposure, as well as, feelings of

⁴¹³ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*, p.44.

⁴¹⁴ Coelho, P., (1996) *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, London: HarperCollins, p.27.

self-loathing, confusion and shame. They have had to struggle with what it has meant to be gay and the natural out workings that follow from the acceptance of such a discovery. They have all felt as if they were the only ones experiencing such thoughts, feelings and desires. None of them, initially, wanted to be counted as 'one of them' and a number went into counselling whilst others sought out support groups. One interviewee dealt with it in isolation, on his own.

The implications of this for all of them is that it has meant, at some point, living a 'double life', certainly within the confines of the Church as well as with regards to their families and amongst friends. For two of the interviewees this meant embarking on marriages they hoped would 'cure' them of their homosexual desires. There was a feeling if they met and married the right girl then everything would naturally sort itself out. Naturally it did not and the marriages broke down as they sought to reconcile the homosexual feelings that would not disappear. Others, amongst the interviewees, felt that if they 'married the Church' then that would negate questions that might arise about their sexuality. The result of this was that each of the interviewees, using strategies they employed to keep their homosexuality secret, privatised their homosexual identity so that they could survive in a patriarchal and heterosexist Church.

As I have discussed briefly during my theological reflection on *Sexual Activity and Promiscuity*, the Church has made an explicit distinction between 'orientation' and 'behaviour' with the result that those who give

physical expression to that orientation are in need of 'gradual purification and [a] real growth in holiness.'⁴¹⁵ Such an attitude taken in tandem with what the Study Group had said about 'chastity' cannot do anything but instil gay clergy with a sense of alienation, unwantedness and unacceptability. This is a sign of rejection for many, like the interviewees, within the Church. Although all the interviewees expressed the belief that, no matter what the Church said about them, God still loved them, but it was hard for them not to take the Church's view personally as it was dealing with the part of them that they believed made them who they were, for example, Andrew said,

I'm not denying the fact that being gay is not a big thing in me, because it's who I am. And I don't know what it's like to be straight. So maybe when I pray I do pray in a gay way. I don't know because I don't know what praying in a straight way means. It's just me.⁴¹⁶

The problem that gay clergy face, with the 1983 Report, is that, if they are open, if they do become more vocal, then they could face an investigation and possible exclusion from serving as an ordained minister. The reason for this is that ministers are expected to live their lives as examples of morality and spirituality. They have higher standards set for them by the Church and these high standards are also expected of them by the wider membership. This is one of the reasons, that when a minister falls from grace, they will often find themselves featuring in one of the tabloid publications. The Church of Scotland, as I have indicated, will not officially tolerate sexually active gay ministers and speeches have been made as recently as the 2006 and 2007

⁴¹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), *Ibid.*, p.308.

⁴¹⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.8.

General Assemblies reinforcing this point. It is interesting to note though, that no such speeches have been made, as far as I am aware, along similar lines relating to single heterosexual clergy. The interviewees' experience, to date, has been that if they manage to conceal their behaviour from public attention, and the Church, so that it does not cause either embarrassment or scandal, then they will remain in their jobs. This may be the compromise that both the Church and the clergy are prepared to 'unofficially' live with. However, the reality for gay clergy is that living in such a situation means they become trapped in a cycle whereby they are forced to behave in a way that is shameful and they are unable to live either openly or morally. This is the antithesis of what the Church expects of its ministers as it is a system that does little to empower gay clergy, it says nothing positive about being open to others and celebrating sexuality, it relegates homosexual relationships to the level of clandestine affairs and it highlights the exercise of patriarchal power over gay clergy rather than pastoral care and concern. It can only, then, continue to alienate those ministers who are gay. Therefore gay ministers 'survive' in the Church rather than 'live' in the Church.

At the heart of this 'survival' lie the twin issues of honesty and integrity because the loss of both is the cost for them continuing to work as (closeted) ministers. The only way that homosexual ministers can regain their honesty and integrity then, is by consciously embracing their sexuality and using it as a positive force for change. For Foucault, this was critical:

Sexual choices must be at the same time creators of a way of life. To be gay signifies that these choices diffuse themselves across the entire life; it is to make a sexual choice the impetus for a change of existence.⁴¹⁷

Marcella Althaus-Reid addressing sexual honesty and integrity, in an ecclesiastical setting, argues that the future of the church is bound up in this issue. She writes,

It is from there that not only do we rediscover the face of the Queer God, but also find our relationship with God challenged and see emerging new reflections on holiness and on Christianity.⁴¹⁸

It is Althaus-Reid's contention that by refusing to acknowledge openly its gay clergy and by refusing to debate sexuality in all its many guises, then the Church is 'prevented from coming of age, and is not allowed to reflect on its prejudices and mistakes'⁴¹⁹ and, therefore, there 'is always an epistemological ceiling, called faith, or patriarchal faith, which is not removed.'⁴²⁰ This Althaus-Reid calls 'the ceiling of decency.'⁴²¹ It could be argued that this 'ceiling of decency', with regards to gay clergy, refers to the rules which map out the behaviour expected if you are to become a member of the Church's sexual community. For it is these rules, as I have argued earlier, which enables the heterosexual majority, via the Report, to 'keep central controls, to homogenise and obliterate [through

⁴¹⁷ Cohen, E., (1988) "Foucauldian Necrologies: 'Gay' 'Politics'? Politically Gay?" *Textual Practice* 2, no. 1, p.87-101.

⁴¹⁸ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, London: Routledge, p.3.

⁴¹⁹ Althaus-Reid, M., (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender And Politics*, London: Routledge, p.167.

⁴²⁰ Althaus-Reid, M., (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender And Politics*, *Ibid.*.

⁴²¹ Althaus-Reid, M., (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender And Politics*, *Ibid.*.

a culture of shame and secrecy] the right of people'⁴²² in the name of God.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that gay clergy face in their quest to break down this 'ceiling of decency' is to gain acceptance for their argument for full sexual rights as they have become enshrined in secular legislation. All the interviewees thought that this would take years or decades. None felt it was a right to be won in the short term.

Althaus-Reid agrees stating,

The problem is that heterosexuality stratifies and compartmentalises our vision of the present, constructs our past according to its own categories of important historical events, and therefore, controls our community projections of the future.⁴²³

To challenge such accepted thinking is to take a 'step into a very frightening space.'⁴²⁴ I say this because in challenging the Church's accepted wisdom you leave its protection behind and begin a journey unsure of where it might eventually lead. It is a step where the private voice of the Church is calling for us to go, a place where complete honesty about who and what we are is called for and a place where we will be eventually unmasked as being gay. No matter how uncomfortable such a step is, it is something that is a prerequisite if the Church is to give birth to a new theology that is free from heterosexism. Wherever that road may lead, it begins with the Church acknowledging that it has got something wrong, that its theology of sexuality may be flawed and that its inherent patriarchal system of belief is open to

⁴²² Althaus-Reid, M., (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender And Politics*, *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁴²³ Althaus-Reid, M., (2000) *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender And Politics*, *Ibid.*.

⁴²⁴ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, p.79.

question and revision. This is a requirement for any discussion taking place because, as Alison states, 'we are not dealing with information which some have, and others haven't, but with the workings of the Holy Spirit in the midst of God over time.'⁴²⁵

In his book, *A Place At The Table*⁴²⁶, Bruce Bawer picks up this call for challenging the accepted notion of heterosexuality being the accepted and unchallengeable norm writing,

To present a proper Christian case for acceptance of homosexuality, in other words, it is imperative that we do not argue for the retailoring of moral principles or religious doctrines to suit our selfish needs or the secular priorities of the times in which we live; it is, rather, to insist that it is incumbent upon Christians, as Christians, to distinguish principle from prejudice, well founded teaching from groundless tradition, and to put into practice the lesson in love that was Christ's supreme commandment. Tradition is a very fine thing, but it is no virtue to adhere to unjustified, hurtful, and - yes - anti-Christian traditions merely because they are traditions.⁴²⁷

In other words the Church, through its quest to retain its 'ceiling of decency' in matters of sexuality, 'represents not a foundation for love and hope but a memory of hatred and rejection.'⁴²⁸

The task, therefore, of the private voice of the Church is one of prophecy. It is the voice calling in the wilderness waiting to be heard, a voice that is scandalous, a truth 'that will not shine unless people stand up for it and are prepared to take risks for it.'⁴²⁹ Equally, however, those 'indecent' voices which speak up and are heard need to be careful that

⁴²⁵ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked*, *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁴²⁶ Bawer, B., (1994) *A Place At The Table*, *Ibid.*.

⁴²⁷ Bawer, B., (1994) *A Place At The Table*, *Ibid.*, p.126-127.

⁴²⁸ Bawer, B., (1994) *A Place At The Table*, *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁴²⁹ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked*, *Ibid.*, p.80.

they are not cast as victims. For to be portrayed as a victim can be so disempowering and disabling that the voice is silenced before it has time to speak. On the other hand, as Alison highlights,

... the problem is that this 'being identified with the victim' can come to be used as an arm with which to club others. The victims become the group of the 'righteous just' in order to exclude the poor Pharisees, who are never in short supply as the butts of easy mockery.⁴³⁰

Gay clergy, then, must be seen as fellow travellers, yes from the margins, but fellow travellers none-the-less who are also seekers after truth.

To date, within the Church, the issue of gay clergy has been dealt with only on a 'theoretical level where discussions of identity, authenticity, and essentialism are often held'⁴³¹, precisely because gay ministers feel they cannot speak out openly. It should be noted that the 1994 and 2007 Report to the General Assembly did include input from gay clergy, either by letter or by interview⁴³², but although their story was listened to, it would appear that their contribution had little or no impact, on the deliverances that comprised the final reports. However, at least their voices were raised as, too often in the past, they have had to remain

⁴³⁰ Alison, J., (2001) *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., p.18.

⁴³¹ Cohen, C. J.,(1996) 'Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS,' in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Seidman, S., Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., p. 365.

⁴³² In the 1994 Report there were two opposing views offered from homosexuals regarding how they viewed the outworking of their sexuality within the Church. In the 2007 Report two ministers were interviewed, one a chaplain and one retired, along with a gay member and a representatives of the Metropolitan Community Church and the True Freedom Trust. It should be noted that when the ministers requested anonymity, so they could be as open as possible, this was declined by some members serving on the committee.

silent. As other gay ministers, perhaps, prepare to speak out on the subject it is timely to be reminded that,

The essence of sin is 'other people telling me who I am and I believing them'. Collusion with inauthentic images of myself can only be a denial of the irreducible originality of the given self, and thus an offence to God.⁴³³

It is through their sexual choices that gay ministers are able to establish their true identity and by being honest about what that means to them, personally, will allow integrity to follow. As Foucault writes,

Sexuality is something we create ourselves - it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationship, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not fatality; it's a possibility for creative life.⁴³⁴

For Alison part of this 'possibility for creative life' involves gay clergy speaking up and making their voices heard within the ecclesiastical system. In fact, he is scathing about those gay clergy who stay within the system and permit themselves to be mute bystanders on the margins of the Church. He writes,

Of course power structures favour mendacity, but surely the mendacity of power cannot be allowed to be an excuse for the dishonesty of gay people within the clerical system? No Christian can ever *justify* their dishonesty by blaming power. Our religion is specifically about someone who gave his life so as to make the truth shine in the midst of the mendacity of power. Not to be able to stand up for truth may be understandable, and for many of us, learning to be able to tell the truth at all has been a slow and painful process. But not standing up, over time, for what you know to be the truth can never be *justified*.⁴³⁵

He continues with his criticism of the continued silence of those who are deemed to be 'indecent' in the Church writing,

⁴³³ Howatch, S., (2003) *The Heartbreaker*, *Ibid.*, p.426.

⁴³⁴ Quoted in Goss, R, (1993) *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*, *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁴³⁵ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked*, *Ibid.*, p.98.

In truth, what could be more pathetic, and less powerful, than these broken old men, our brothers, going down to their graves in shame, apparently unable to understand what has happened, or how the machine which they saw themselves as serving to the best of their ability, has swallowed them and given them not the persona of a child of God, but the mask of a failed corporate manager?⁴³⁶

For Alison then, if gay clergy are to minister effectively then they must be willing to stand up and be counted, they must be willing to break their silence, a silence which has been borne out of shame and they must be willing to engage honestly with the community that is the Church. In other words, 'if we are to be a minister, either we will be one of Christ, or we will be one of the machine, but we can never blame the machine for not allowing us to be a minister of Christ.'⁴³⁷

There is truth in what Alison is stating because unless we, as gay ministers, are willing to challenge the inherent authority and teaching of the machine (the Church) in the whole area of sexuality then we will forever be a minister of the machine, living only half a life, hiding our sexual orientation which is the very thing that makes us who we are. Although there are those who would disagree, I would argue that the issue of the acceptance of openly gay and sexually active ministers by the Church is not necessarily about doctrine *per se*. Rather, picking up Alison's observation it is actually an argument about an area of mendacity, or falsehood, that has been permitted to inform the Church's doctrine and hold sway over a number of centuries. Therefore it is this falsehood that is being challenged here and not necessarily the doctrinal

⁴³⁶ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked, Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked, Ibid.*, p.99.

stance of the Church. By challenging this falsehood, of the superiority of heterosexuality over all other sexualities, particularly that of homosexuality, then I am seeking to argue that all human experience is valid and that my ministry and those ministries of other gay clergy are as valid as those of ministers who are heterosexual. For it is out of my own experience and a willingness to be open and honest that such a plea comes. As Alison writes,

To put it in a nutshell, what we are discovering about being human is quite simple: that there are certain human beings who, for reasons which are not clear to anyone, are, irrespective of cultural differences, and if social mores, principally attracted at a profound emotional and erotic level to members of their own sex...and that such people flourish and are happy when they find themselves able to develop somewhat the same forms of human life as others, principally the ability to tell the truth, and secondarily the ability to relate to others in a straightforward and transparent way...In other words, we are discovering that there are such things as gay people, and that their flourishing happens in exactly the same way, *mutatis mutandis*, as that of everyone else. Which is to say that they are not defective heterosexuals, but just are that way.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ Alison, J., (2003) *On Being Liked*, Ibid., p.84-85.

Sexual Activity and Promiscuity

Deeply religious, with a living desire to reach God and to please Him, he found himself crossed at an early age by this other desire, obviously from Sodom.⁴³⁹

God gives only one person out of several thousand the gift to live chastely in a state of virginity.⁴⁴⁰

As soon as his body developed he became obscene. He supposed some special curse had descended on him, but he could not help it, for even when receiving Holy Communion filthy thoughts would arise in his mind.⁴⁴¹

Honesty was a subject that was raised, not only within the context of the personal lives of the interviewees but also, as an issue when the interviewees spoke about how the Church deals with the subject of sexual activity and perceived promiscuity. As Andrew says,

There's this weird perception in Church life and it's heterosexual, married, 2.2 children, half a Labrador and the car in the drive. That's the aspiration, that's what people look up to or dream for and that's what we're encouraged to do, either implicitly or explicitly on the Church's teaching.⁴⁴²

Expanding on this explanation Andrew continues,

...if on a Friday night I go and have a beer with a friend, who's told me about his latest conquest, or her latest conquest... that's real life. But you don't get that in the Church because there's almost a denial of reality... we don't go there to be honest, we don't go there to be real human beings.⁴⁴³

He continues,

... there's something not right there... there's... that John Shelby Spong quote that says we'll bless bombs, trident, warships in the name of God, but we won't bless relationships. I don't give two hoots who sleeps with who, as long as it's consensual. But the Church isn't ready to discuss threesomes.⁴⁴⁴

This is an issue that was also highlighted by Bartholomew,

⁴³⁹ Forster, E. M., (1971) *Maurice*, London: Penguin Books, p. 67.

⁴⁴⁰ Bailey, R., (1997) *Scarlet Ribbons: A Priest With AIDS*, London: Serpent's Tail, p.15.

⁴⁴¹ Forster, E. M., (1971) *Maurice*, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁴² Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.6.

⁴⁴³ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.6.

⁴⁴⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.7.

... it's an uncomfortable thing to have to talk about on a Sunday morning, to go and hear anyone talk about anything to do with sex, whatever variety it is... anything that's remotely different makes you feel uncomfortable, so we're not going to talk about swinger parties for heterosexuals either.⁴⁴⁵

Simon adds,

... we don't talk about the sexual positions that heterosexuals get into because it's seen as being orthodox and ok and beyond the need for discussion... maybe it's the complementarity argument, maybe it's because it's seen as being a procreative act... but how many have sex with procreation in mind? Not many especially when they use condoms or the pill and I don't see them sanctioned by any biblical text. For whatever reason, the intricacies of gay sex seem to be a fixation for the evangelical wing of the Church.⁴⁴⁶

The issue of promiscuity featured particularly in two of the interviews.

Bartholomew stated,

... of course the gay scene is promiscuous but you only need to go to the Garage on a Saturday night where the heterosexuals are playing and it is equally as promiscuous... or any other club. It's about the age range.⁴⁴⁷

Andrew describes gay culture as a 'pub culture... in reality both the gay community self-ghettoises and society ghettoises gay experience. So the only place you can go and get it is in the ghetto of promiscuity in a sense.'⁴⁴⁸ 'On the one hand the liberal side of the Church will say it's ok, but on the other hand they'll frown upon the expression of it.'⁴⁴⁹

Continuing his description of this apparent dualism within the liberal wing of the Church he explains,

... there's... the liberal side of the Church with its need to be welcoming and affirming... but its own self-abhorrence about frowning on practice... on the one hand they cope with my sexuality, but frown on what they would perceive to be promiscuity.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.7.

⁴⁴⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.6-7.

⁴⁴⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

⁴⁴⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.4.

⁴⁴⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.4.

⁴⁵⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.4.

When the subject of sexuality is mentioned within the Church it is usually aired in a scandalous sensational way, as Andrew describes,

... that's when the debate comes up... it's when the married man is caught in the sauna, or in the toilet, or with the prostitute... it's never reported in a positive light... it's exposed and therefore the gay experience, is often the ghetto experience. It's always the negative that he's straight, that he's committed a sin... whereas what is really there is a tragic story of a man who has found himself caught in a marriage that isn't working for him. But they don't have the inner resources to, somehow, be authentic.⁴⁵¹

This concept of authenticity is one which other interviewees mentioned.

For Matthew this lack of authenticity on the Church's part, '... is why our churches have emptied because most people can't buy into it.'⁴⁵² When pressed further he explains what he means saying,

... lots of people, for all kinds of reasons, give up on it because they don't feel they are acceptable or there's something in their life that doesn't fit in within this kind of model of what it means to be a Christian.⁴⁵³

Andrew continues,

it's the whole existential stuff that, as ministers, week by week we are meant to call people into an authentic existence. But does the Church really mean it? It's back to the polite society that... we like things nice and friendly and not too militant.⁴⁵⁴

But, as Andrew says,

... at the end of the day, when it comes down to it, it's actually genital activity. It's what the Church is actually obsessed with... it's more concerned about the sexual activity than the quality of the relationships.⁴⁵⁵

He continues,

'we're talking about consenting adults rubbing their bodies against each other. That's what we're getting upset about. Not nuclear warheads, not poverty in Africa, but what consenting adults do in private... Wouldn't it be wonderful if someone stood up during the debate at the Assembly and said, 'All we're talking about is folk rubbing their bodies against each other.'... because that's all it really is... we're focussing on the sex. But when you look at a gay

⁴⁵¹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.10.

⁴⁵² Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.5.

⁴⁵³ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.5.

⁴⁵⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.10.

⁴⁵⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.8.

relationship it's actually not all about sex. And what is more beautiful and wonderful and divinely inspired is the non-sex.⁴⁵⁶

Andrew finishes with the observation, '... we seem to be focussing on the wrong thing.'⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.11.

⁴⁵⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.11.

Sexual Activity and Promiscuity

A Reflection

That is what I yearn for: that what we do sexually, or what our colour or nationality are, shouldn't matter.⁴⁵⁸

We fear in others what we do not have under our own control.⁴⁵⁹

Celibacy was a church-made rule. Follow me into exile; become both priest and lover. I will lead you places never imagined.⁴⁶⁰

Whilst those who were being interviewed told their story, I was aware that I was listening to an emerging, personal and intimate narrative that was being publicly expressed, often, for the first time. They were stories that told of frustration at having to hide behind a false heterosexual persona, of having to always refer to oneself in the singular even when they had a partner, of always having to watch what they said and how they acted in case suspicions were aroused. But, perhaps, more significantly they spoke of the difficulty and pressure of trying to justify the right to have an active sex life, to themselves. That particular story was one that few, if any had told, and one that certainly had never been recounted by Church ministers in public.

This is a story which was of great significance as it highlighted, as no other could, the tension gay ministers feel when they give physical expression to their sexuality. In addition to this, and from the vantage point of my own story, what was being spoken of underlined my belief

⁴⁵⁸ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴⁵⁹ Meyers, R., (2006) *Why the Christian Right is Wrong: A Minister's Manifesto for Taking Back Your Faith, Your Flag, Your Future*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p.93.

⁴⁶⁰ Goss, R. E., (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, p.21.

that we are both spiritual and sexual. However, neither sits well together within the Church and its understanding of sexual theology. I am also aware of an unwillingness to discuss sexual issues within the Church in general.

This was brought home to me in 2006 when members of various churches were mobilised, throughout the United Kingdom, to picket theatres and write letters of complaint to newspapers, regarding the nationwide tour of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. Although many had never been to the musical, they still complained mainly, in addition to the bad language, because Jesus mentioned in the show that he was a 'bit gay' and gained sexual gratification from defecating in nappies that he wore. A similar outcry was made when the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, was released in cinemas. The objection raised again, often by people who had not seen it, was that it portrayed Jesus being tempted by imagining himself engaging in sexual activities.

The traditionalist backlash, which these examples help to highlight, reveal how profound 'the linkage of Christian erotophobia and homophobia is and how invested it is in maintaining a heterosexual Jesus.'⁴⁶¹ In fact, I would go further and say that it is imperative that what is maintained is a celibate heterosexual Jesus.

⁴⁶¹ Goss, R., (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Traditional Christianity has placed the humanity and divinity of Jesus in a dualistic relationship. They are viewed as opposites which are combined in a unique and sinless way in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, then, is not considered as being fully human because God would never have permitted the divine Spirit to be tainted by human flesh. Therefore, Christians, particularly those who hold to a traditionalist interpretation of scripture, maintain that God only took the appearance of a human body. The justification for this is that Jesus was considered to be sinless, which is frequently understood to mean that, unlike human beings his physical being was not tainted by humankind's fall from grace as described in the creation stories in Genesis. As such, with the Fall often understood as being the sexual awakening of humans, Jesus is considered to be sexless.

For Augustine, sexual pleasure was considered to be something that needed to be fought against, tamed and then controlled. In this respect then, Jesus the Christ embodied the anti-pleasure principle and Augustine, and those in the Church who have followed this line of thinking, have effectively castrated 'Jesus, making him an asexual eunuch.'⁴⁶² Foucault, considering this situation wrote,

The famous gesture of Adam covering up his genitals with a fig leaf is, according to Augustine, not due to the simple fact that Adam was ashamed of their presence, but to the fact that his sexual organs were moving by themselves without his consent. Sex in erection is the image of man revolted against God. The arrogance of sex is punishment and consequence of the arrogance of man. His uncontrolled sex is exactly the same as what he has been toward God – a rebel.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² Goss, R., (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, *Ibid.*, p.147.

⁴⁶³ Foucault, M., 'On Genealogy', Dreyfus, H., and Rabinow, P., (ed.) (1985) *Michel Foucault*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.370.

Nelson and Longfellow believe that Foucault is correct in his summation thereby capturing much 'of the accepted Christian legacy about sexuality, particularly as that tradition has reflected the male experience: sexuality equals genital sex, and genital sex is intrinsically uncontrollable and antithetical to authentic spirituality.'⁴⁶⁴ The splitting of the body from the spirit has been a long tradition within Christianity and it still exerts influence over Christians when discussing anything sexual. Nelson explains the implications of such dualism, stating,

[S]exual dualism has marked much of the Christian tradition. Implicit in this dualism has been an assumption of divine impassivity, literally the apathy of God. If the body is marked by passion and if spirit is passionless, then bodily eros has no connection with the divine. God is without hunger, and the human hungers (of which sexuality, with its drive to connection and intimacy, is one of the most basic) seem to have no relation to our experience of God.⁴⁶⁵

John Robinson also writing on this subject states, 'To think of Jesus as having had sexual desires of any sort has seemed to offend against his purity... Consequently, the church appeared to present him as sexless.'⁴⁶⁶

In other words, there has been a divorcing of the sexual from the spiritual, an abdication of sexual pleasure from the body. Therefore, this results in Christianity developing its spiritual practices and theologies to

⁴⁶⁴ Nelson, J.B., and Longfellow, S. P., (eds.), (1994) *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*. London: Mowbrays, p.xiii.

⁴⁶⁵ Nelson, J. B., (1992) *The Intimate Connection, Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality*, London: SPCK, p.116.

⁴⁶⁶ Robinson, J. A. T., (1973) *The Human Face of God*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, p.64.

enshroud sex in a cloak of shame and guilt. This has persisted to the present day and enlightens us as to why the traditionalists regard the body so negatively and why, in the example I began with, they were offended by the suggestion that Jesus may have had sexual thoughts or, indeed, was a sexual being.

But why should this be the case? Why does the notion of Jesus as a sexual person sound so inherently blasphemous or, at the very least, scandalous to some in the Church?⁴⁶⁷ According to Goss the answer lies in the fact that, 'For many Christians, the scandal of the incarnation is not that God became flesh but that God became fully human and actively sexual.'⁴⁶⁸ He continues,

Most Christians deny Jesus' sexuality or a Christology that integrates a value of erotic pleasure. Are our imaginations really stretched to contemplate a sexual Jesus? Are we so erotophobic that we continue proclaiming an asexual Jesus? Such dogmatic assumptions about an asexual Jesus from the silence of textual evidence have been destructively applied to persecute and oppress.⁴⁶⁹

Comstock illuminates this point further when writing regarding sexual ethics, stating,

Sexual ethics is doing what is good, right, pleasurable with our bodies. In exchange of and a response to "yes-and-no" as we touch ourselves and others, we learn what is good and pleasurable; we construct a sexual ethics of giving and receiving body pleasure.

A social order that does not allow or encourage people to discover, experience, and enjoy their bodies deprives them of living as full human beings. We live within such a social order.⁴⁷⁰

He continues,

⁴⁶⁷ Nelson, J.B., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexual and Christian Theology*, *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁶⁸ Goss, R., (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, *Ibid.*, p.119.

⁴⁶⁹ Goss, R., (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*, *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁴⁷⁰ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, *Ibid.*, p.27.

The sexual ethics that I oppose finds its meaning in procreation; and the genitals have exclusive or primary importance.⁴⁷¹

This, I contend, would appear to be the case with the 1983 Report dealing, as it does, with what it deemed to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviour for homosexuals. In particular it is actually instructing them how they should and should not use their genitals if they wish to be considered as being in a right relation with both the Church and God.

Times of potential crisis within society and institutions call for a closer examination of the presuppositions which have had the effect of dominating discourse in the past and, in light of new information that may be gained in this process and any experience arising out of the crisis, to review the aforementioned discourse. In 2006, the debate at the General Assembly on the rights of ministers to bless Civil Partnerships, in light of new government legislation which gave full partnership rights to same-sex couples, and the furore surrounding it brought the Church to a point of potential crisis. Many, myself included, thought that this was an issue that could potentially split the Church along traditionalist/revisionist lines. Indeed it was such a hotly contested issue that it returned the subject of homosexuality to under the Church's microscope and forced it to consider examining afresh some of its most fundamental presuppositions surrounding it. It also saw the founding, and further growth in membership, of groups such as Forward

⁴⁷¹ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, *Ibid.*, p.27-28.

Together⁴⁷², One Kirk⁴⁷³, and Affirmation Scotland⁴⁷⁴ whose stated aims were to provide support and a voice in the debate.

At its most fundamental I would argue, when addressing the subject of homosexuality, is the need for the Church to face the variety of ways in which its sexual ethic, with regards to gay people, based on the 1983 Report has prevented them from hearing the good news of the gospel proclaimed and then welcomed as full members within the Church community.

For the Church to be healed from the threat of potential splits, on the grounds of sexuality, it also requires to seek its own wholeness before it can be seen, and effectively function, as a channel for God's healing love. In other words, what is required for this to become a reality, is for the Church to respond to the call to combat the stigmatisation of gay people within its midst by acknowledging its own complicity in such stigmatisation, particularly by the stance it has taken in endorsing the 1983 Report. I say this because, how can this Report be seen as welcoming and affirming gay people within the Church when it prohibits them from playing a full, active part in Church life?

In their 2007 Report, the Mission and Discipleship Council wrote,

In the church's life, there may be a full participation of homosexual people in leadership and service. Identified sexuality which is gay is not a bar in itself to baptism or to communion. Being gay or lesbian

⁴⁷² <http://www.forwardtogether.org.uk/>

⁴⁷³ <http://www.onekirk.org/>

⁴⁷⁴ http://www.affirmationscotland.org.uk/page_1175437396656.html

by orientation is no bar to serving God as a church member, elder, reader, deacon, minister or moderator.⁴⁷⁵

Although what was stated was, in fact, true and a position that the Church has maintained over a number of years, it highlights an unwelcome dualism for gay members and clergy, by distinguishing between orientation and practice. Nelson highlights this point when he writes,

Nowhere does the Bible say anything about homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Its references to the subject are rare – without exception – statements about certain kinds of homosexual acts. Our understanding of homosexuality as a psychosexual orientation is a relatively recent development. It is crucial to remember this, for in all probability the biblical writers in each instance were speaking of homosexual acts undertaken by persons whom the authors presumed to be heterosexually constituted.⁴⁷⁶

Webster also writing about this distinction states,

The “orientation”/“practice” split is helpful in salving the consciences of Christians of all types. It allows conservatives to condemn same-sex relationships, but at the same time to appear loving, so inducing in the “sinner” a dependence on the goodwill of a small and closely knit community of faith.⁴⁷⁷

In addition, the stated task of those who are gay, within the Church, is that they are to apply themselves,

to understand and examine the meaning of their behaviour, sexual or otherwise, in the light of the love of God and the love of neighbour, together with the moral and pastoral teaching of Christianity.⁴⁷⁸

By doing this, the Church expects that they will ‘examine themselves’⁴⁷⁹ in the hope that this will, somehow, resolve the problem of their

⁴⁷⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (2007, *Ibid.*, para. 4.8.4, p.4/17.

⁴⁷⁶ Nelson, J., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, *Ibid.*, p.182.

⁴⁷⁷ Webster, A.R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁴⁷⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), *Ibid.*, p.306.

⁴⁷⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

‘behaviour’ and make them compliant with the wish of the Study Group that will see them remaining celibate and silent.

There is an inference in the Report’s discussion of orientation and behaviour/practice that gay people have a choice to be either homosexual or heterosexual. The report’s authors state,

... while we may not choose what we are to begin with, as we grow in understanding and in grace we may choose what to do with what we are, and to some extent decide what we are to become.⁴⁸⁰

They go further by stating that ‘many more have a choice as to whether or not to practice homosexual acts than is often assumed.’⁴⁸¹ Adding after,

Of these, many may enter satisfactorily into stable heterosexual relationships. Others may come to see as an alternative to the overt homosexual act the possibility of channelling their energies in other directions. Whenever possible, the homosexual person should be granted the opportunity of being helped to come more readily to that choice.⁴⁸²

By stating this, the Study Group are giving rise to the perception that all homosexuals have to do is carefully think about their situation and, if they simply were to do this, then they would see the error of their ways and become heterosexual. This view carefully avoids any analysis of heterosexuality as a sexual identity and halts any questioning of heterosexuality as the dominant political and organisational structure within the Church, thereby, making any ethical analysis of the situation an impossibility. For those, then, who feel they are on the Church’s

⁴⁸⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.303.

⁴⁸¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

⁴⁸² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

margin, like the gay clergy I interviewed, such a message can only be seen as being unsupportive.

Campaigners for the acceptance of sexually active gay people within the Church have tended to insist on its genetic origin, on the grounds that it would substantiate that homosexuality is a 'given', within creation, and therefore 'natural' and created by God. Traditionally, however, the Church has tended to reject such a view preferring, instead, to anchor its interpretation of what is deemed acceptable in sexual relationships in the creation stories found in the book of Genesis. From those two accounts, traditionalists have argued against any homosexual sexual expression of love on the grounds of complementarity. At its most basic, this argument begins from the belief that God created Adam and Eve, that God said 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'⁴⁸³ According to this viewpoint, the ultimate reason for engaging in sexual intercourse is for the purposes of procreation. This is, naturally, not a possibility with regards to gay sex. In addition to this, the traditionalists further point to the physical make-up, and differences, of both male and female bodies arguing that bodies of same-sex partners do not 'fit together' in the same natural way as partners of a different sex do and so, this kind of physical relationship is deemed to be against God's plan for creation and, hence, disordered. They state,

... the differences as well as the similarities in the sexes must be taken into account, since it is the differences, biological, physiological. Psychological and emotional, as well as the

⁴⁸³ Genesis 2:23.

similarities, which make possible the complementarity which we believe to be of the essence of marriage.⁴⁸⁴

They continue,

While it would be wrong to over-emphasise the importance of genital sex and talk as if nothing else mattered in the marriage relationship, it would be equally foolish to deny the very central place it has as an expression of commitment, trust and affection and its function as an affirmation of our responsibilities in procreation.⁴⁸⁵

The two redeeming purposes of sexual intercourse then, as far as the Church is concerned, can be understood to be the twin pillars of marriage and procreation, in that order. With this in mind, the Church has continued to maintain that marriage alone is the proper context for all sexual intercourse as it is understood as being the proper context in which to raise children and achieve true union. The 1983 Report states,

Given this view of the nature of marriage and the necessity of chastity outside marriage, the Study Group is bound to say that by definition there can be no such thing as a "homosexual marriage", nor, for homosexual partners living together, can there be sexual acts which involve copulation by any means of anal, oral or coital intercourse. Where homosexuals co-habit it would be wrong to engage in genital activities which aroused these expectations in one or both partners... The Study Group is aware that its conclusions here with regard to sexuality and marriage may be seen by some Gay Christians as putting them in what has come to be known as a "Catch 22" situation, but we believe it has to be accepted as the logic of the Church's position.⁴⁸⁶

Mary Daly, the feminist theologian, refers to this situation as a 'terrible taboo'⁴⁸⁷ 'that is held in place and legitimated by the theological construct of companionship.'⁴⁸⁸ The logical outworking of the Church's acceptance of this view of relationships and how they are valued, is that there is a hierarchy of relationships formed with the highest value being

⁴⁸⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

⁴⁸⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*..

⁴⁸⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*, p.304.

⁴⁸⁷ Quoted in Webster, A. R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁴⁸⁸ Webster, A. R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*..

placed on marriage and the lowest on same-sex relationships. Heterosexuality, then, is perceived as the norm and the ideal to be striven for. This is a view with which Webster concurs writing, 'Heterosexual normativity, endemic in the Christian community, rests on the concept of complementarity.'⁴⁸⁹ Such a view is underlined in the 1983 Report when it states that, in marriage, 'the husband and wife focus on that love more and more intensely on one another until there is uninhibited giving of each other in sexual union.'⁴⁹⁰ This union is carried to new heights, in ways that no other relationship can match as it 'is more than a coming together of two bodies, it is the union of minds and the complete trust of those who are prepared to surrender everything to one another.'⁴⁹¹

This concept of complementarity, then, is the theological mechanism whereby the Church justifies and perpetuates the subjugation of homosexuality within its ranks because, as the report states, 'we believe it has to be accepted as the logic of the Church's position.'⁴⁹²

By interpreting scripture in such a way and adhering to the concept of complementarity, the traditionalists and authors of the 1983 Report are

⁴⁸⁹ Webster, A. R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁴⁹⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

⁴⁹¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

⁴⁹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

limiting the freedom of God to call people into other types of relationships.⁴⁹³ As Duff asks in relation to this particular issue,

‘If...a gay couple who are faithful members of the church experience their love for another in the context of their love for God and enrich the lives of those around them, for what reason does the church continue to maintain an ‘intolerable contradiction between their creation as sexual beings and their calling to the Christian life?’⁴⁹⁴

The sticking point for the Church in relation to its traditional stance on sexual issues is not, necessarily, their revision. Revision of their stance on issues related to sex and sexuality have already taken place in the past with regards to the acceptance of divorced and remarried people, and on a less formal basis such acceptance has also been offered to heterosexual people who are co-habiting and sexual activity outside of marriage. Although the last issue would be seen as being against Church law a blind eye is often turned by many ministers within the Church. Lindsey’s point on this issue is interesting, he states,

Most mainline Protestant churches have implicitly done this, [the revising of traditional sexual ethics] through benign acceptance of divorced and remarried people, heterosexual people living together without the benefit of marriage, heterosexual activity outside of marriage etc.⁴⁹⁵

The sticking point is quite clearly homosexuality for it is only homosexuals who are addressed within the 1983 Report.

The Report states that the condition through which homosexuals can gain partial acceptance into the wider Church community is via celibacy.

⁴⁹³ Duff, N. J., (1996) How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality, in *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, ed. Seow, C., Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p.155.

⁴⁹⁴ Duff, N. J., (1996) How to Discuss Moral Issues Surrounding Homosexuality *Ibid.*, p.155/6.

⁴⁹⁵ Quoted by Lindsey, W. D., (1996) ‘The AIDS Crisis and the Church: A Time to Heal’, *Ibid.*, p.360.

In prescribing celibacy for its gay ministers it requires to be stated that this is not the same as the concept of singleness, or to use the terminology employed by the Study Group, the situation that ‘unmarried heterosexuals’⁴⁹⁶ find themselves in. I highlight this because singleness is a state that those who are unmarried, divorced or widowed are in but, in which, there is both the potential for sexual intercourse and marriage to take place. The celibate life, on the other hand, is one in which there is no possibility of either such a ceremony or sexual intercourse taking place. It should be stated that there are Civil Partnerships for same-sex couples recognising the commitment they wish to take to each other and providing financial security in law, however, the Church has refused to allow its ministers to bless such relationships or participate in them. This being the case: Where is the sense of the individual having a choice in the matter when any freedom they may have had is removed and a state of celibacy enforced?

In *Issues in Human Sexuality*⁴⁹⁷ there is a helpful distinction made between singleness and celibacy. It states,

It is important to distinguish the single state in general from that of celibacy...The single state may be the individual's preference or it may not; it may be a time before marriage, or after being widowed or, increasingly in our own contemporary culture, after being divorced. The single state becomes celibacy only when it is freely and deliberately chosen in order to devote oneself completely to God and his concerns.⁴⁹⁸

To ‘prescribe’ celibacy, as it would appear that the Church is doing to its gay ministers, is a misuse of both term and concept. ‘Celibacy cannot

⁴⁹⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*.

⁴⁹⁷ *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops*, (1991) *Ibid.*.

⁴⁹⁸ *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops*, *Ibid.*, para.3.15.

be prescribed for anyone.⁴⁹⁹ This position, in which gay ministers find themselves is, in many ways, a product of the Church's patriarchal system which has ensured heterosexuality's centrality in all matters sexual. Therefore, the resultant situation is that gay clergy are expected to remain celibate and concur with the traditional teaching of the Church on sexuality and marriage as though it also meets their inner most needs and desires. By remaining celibate, and silent, thereby not bringing the Church into disrepute, gay clergy gain a tacit acceptance from the heterosexual majority.

If Christian behaviour and character are determined by what it means to live truthfully, lovingly, trustingly and hopefully, in the light of the gospel message: How can gay clergy do this when they are forbidden from living openly? Also, when the Church continues to define homosexuality without admitting to their discussion gay members and clergy, one must begin to wonder if there is another agenda at work.

From the above it can be seen that the Church has traditionally dealt with the subject of homosexuality from an argument based on nature. Homosexuality is seen as a threat to the Church and the term is imbued, without challenge, with negative connotations. It is seen as something that the Church and its members need to be defended from and traditionally this has been done through scripture interpreted from the position of heterosexual privilege. By doing this the Church has ignored

⁴⁹⁹ *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops, Ibid..*

the voices of its gay members and clergy as if they were inconsequential to the debate.

But this does not have to be the case for the Church. If one was to engage the traditional teaching of the Church in a different way then these silent voices may, at last, be heard. Sheila Jeffery suggests that one way of doing this is to begin by drawing, 'heterosexuality out of the protective camouflage of "nature" or "just the way things are", and into the spotlight of political analysis.'⁵⁰⁰ This would allow for the subject of 'nature' to be removed from the centre of the debate so allowing for new ways of addressing the subject of homosexuality to be employed. This follows Foucault's thinking when he wrote that,

... sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct.⁵⁰¹

By following this line of thinking, it will be possible to employ a hermeneutic that allows us to speak openly about how the social effect of both traditional and revisionist thinking on homosexuality has on the lives of gay people. This will allow the Church to address actual gay people and examine the structures that impact of their lives, rather than the tradition that has so often been the case in the past. Following this line of thinking William Lindsey writes,

If the aphorism that sexuality is a historical construct points the way our tangential journey to investigate the morality of homosexuality will take, we will emphasise aspects of the tradition or biblical

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in Webster, A.R., (1995) *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality*, *Ibid.*.

⁵⁰¹ Foucault, M., (1990) *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, New York NY: Vintage Books, p.105.

revelation (e.g. norms having to do with justice) quite different from those emphasised either in the present... teaching... Most importantly, we will employ a hermeneutic that allows us to speak more openly and honestly about the *social effect* of both traditional and contemporary Christian teachings regarding homosexuality on the lives of gay people. In the final analysis, a turn to the social permits us to speak about the morality of gay people as if we are speaking about the *actual, lived, embodied existences of real people*, and not, as the tradition has so often done, as if we were speaking *alongside* people, offering healing to people whose full humanity we have difficulty affirming.⁵⁰²

In today's society there has been Equal Age of Consent and Civil Partnership legislation enacted which has had the effect of legitimising homosexuals in the eyes of the law, so protecting them from discrimination. And so, by viewing the Church and its stance on homosexuality from this standpoint and via a hermeneutics of suspicion, we can examine the reasons as to why it continues to stigmatise and vilify homosexuality, in general, and ministerial homosexuality, in particular. The reason for undertaking such a journey is to highlight and explore what is lying hidden within the stance taken by heteronormativity, namely, that its primary function is 'about maintaining patriarchy and those readings of the Bible that privilege patriarchy.'⁵⁰³

As Lindsey argues,

... one arrives at the conclusion that Christian moral theologians cannot continue to talk about the morality of homosexuality as if something more is not present in all that the church and society say about homosexuality. That something more inhabits the bodies and social spaces of gay people as violence, unjust discrimination, exclusion from community, internalised self-hatred etc.⁵⁰⁴

Approached from this point of view Wink argues that,

⁵⁰² Quoted by Lindsey, W. D., (1996) 'The AIDS Crisis and the Church: A Time to Heal', *Ibid.*, p.354-355.

⁵⁰³ Quoted by Lindsey, W. D., (1996) 'The AIDS Crisis and the Church: A Time to Heal', *Ibid.*, p.357.

⁵⁰⁴ Quoted by Lindsey, W. D., (1996) 'The AIDS Crisis and the Church: A Time to Heal', *Ibid.*, p.358.

...the issue is at once transformed. Now the question is not 'What is permitted?' but rather 'What does it mean to love my gay neighbour?' Approached from the point of view of faith rather than works, the question ceases to be 'What constitutes a breach of divine law in the sexual realm?' and becomes instead 'What constitutes integrity before the God revealed in the cosmic lover, Jesus Christ?' Approached from the point of view of the Spirit rather than Christian legalism, the question ceases to be 'What does Scripture command?' and becomes 'What is the Word that the Spirit speaks to the churches now, in the light of Scripture, tradition, theology, and, yes, psychology, genetics, anthropology, and biology?'⁵⁰⁵

The result of this is that homosexuality as a subject is discussed in a way that involves real people and addresses theology that is no longer one step removed from actual people. It is no longer depersonalised. No longer will the Church find itself in the situation, and it will no longer be tolerated, where the subject of homosexuality is forced back into the closet, spoken about in hushed tones and gay people referred to as 'those out there'. Legislation has broken down the closet door once and for all and it is up to the voices of its gay clergy to begin to speak up and out. The problem is, that within the Church, when the subject of homosexuality has been discussed, particularly at the 2006 and 2007 General Assemblies, there has been a vocal and highly organised reaction against any attempt that was being made to revise traditional Church teaching with regards to homosexuality. This is interesting because it would appear to suggest that as society had become more tolerant, the Church is in danger of becoming even more traditional in its understanding of scripture on this and other topics.

In 2008 the Church needs to ask itself afresh, whether the 1983 Report is the best it can offer its gay clergy and laity. Viewed in the present climate I would argue that it is insensitive to gay and lesbian people,

⁵⁰⁵ Wink, W., Homosexuality and the Bible, in *Ibid.*, p.46.

from the standpoint of social justice it is insufficient, for it would appear to include no gay voices, the sexually active homosexual is still viewed as a 'deviant' and, therefore, unable to attain the ideal standards of Christian morality; namely, heterosexual normativity.

In a speech to the General Assembly of 1995, George Newlands said,

The theology of sexuality is an area which will develop in ways as yet unknown to us over the next few hundred years. We don't have all the answers. In the interval we have to counsel respect for differing understandings of Christian life. There is a strong case for a conservative position of banning all sexual expression outside marriage, and it was ably made here last year. The Bible often seems to point this way. For at least two thousand years we have usually acted as if this was the only proper viewpoint, and have punished those who have deviated from it, often severely. We can hardly be surprised then when people are reluctant to change their opinions. There is a real fear that change may bring chaos...

The gospel is about the unconditional, gracious love of God in Jesus Christ, self-giving, creative, responsive love. Jesus is really there for the oppressed, the outcast, the marginalised. Liberation is not a consequence of the gospel... liberation IS the gospel. Liberation from exploitation, to reconciliation. This applies to all areas of human relationship...

Tolerance is not enough. The cost of discipleship is acceptance and respect...I sense that we are still somewhat reluctant to support gay Christians, all gay people, consistently...

We are considering not an isolated group but all humanity, the community of relationship between all human beings together. We all have our dark corners, and painful areas of our lives. The Church should be where there is pain.

Those of us who take a more progressive position in these matters have a responsibility to act in solidarity with the disadvantaged. The reality of active discrimination is not someone else's problem. Every one of us here in this Assembly Hall has the power, power to enhance the lives of those who are discriminated against, power to damage lives, in great ways and small. And it seems clear that people in poverty, in this area of life as in every other area, often suffer most from the effects of discrimination... what sort of example would the Church, the Church, give to the world by encouraging discrimination?... it may well be that there will be a good deal more darkness to come. But the light of the gospel will never be extinguished by the darkness. That is God's promise.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁶ Newlands, G., (May 1994) 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland', Unpublished.

Newlands reminds the Church that the subject of homosexuality should be treated with caution because it is dealing with the real lives, of real people. The Church, therefore, is morally obliged to adopt a listening and properly ordered pastoral approach to its gay members, including ministers. Also, as it reads and reflects on scripture, the foundation on which its sexual ethic is built, it needs to begin to use a liberationist ethic that takes into account cultural bias. This has been done, in the past, with the subject of divorce, slavery and the ordination of women.

In Mark Twain's novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*⁵⁰⁷, the tale is told of how Huck had to struggle with a moral dilemma about demonstrating the value of true friendship with someone who was stigmatised in his day. The man in question, Jim, bore the dual stigma of being African American and a slave in a society that was racist and exploitative. In order for Huck to help Jim escape meant that he would have to contravene both civil and divine law as it was interpreted in that particular society. Huck had the twin worries of going to hell and being considered a thief, as helping a slave escape was tantamount to stealing another's property. But, such worries did not prevent him from doing what he felt and knew was right. Huckleberry Finn realises that there is a difference between feeling 'sympathy' or 'empathy' for the situation someone finds them self in. For we sympathise from a privileged position, recognising the other person's misfortune. But we can only

⁵⁰⁷ Twain, M., (1994) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, London: Penguin Books Ltd..

truly empathise with another when we share directly or analogously common wounds or comparable pain.

Matter argues that,

... we must challenge what the magisterium of the Church teaches about the eternal truth of human sexuality as a *created reality*, based on the relationship between language and power. This 'reality' is a cultural creation, now some centuries old, one which can no longer be said to accurately reflect our twentieth-century discourse about sex, nor our own experience. As we understand the functions of sexuality better, we understand more fully a 'continuum of embodiment' that differentiates the sexual experience of not only men and women, but gay men and heterosexual men, lesbians and heterosexual women, and lesbians and gay men. The reality of sexual difference, different languages, different ways of knowing our embodiment, is the main reason for the widespread dissatisfaction with the monolithic, unchanging view of sexuality presented by the hierarchy of the Church.⁵⁰⁸

Perhaps it's time for gay clergy to 'do what is right' and courageously proclaim 'the gospel of God's salvific love, and particular love for the marginal.'⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Matter, E. A., (2001) 'Habemus Corpus: Women's Embodiment, Feminist Spirituality and Catholic Theology - An Essay in Memory of Kevin Gordon', in *Theology and Sexuality*, No. 14, p.43-58. ed. Stuart, E., and Walton, H.

⁵⁰⁹ Quoted by Lindsey, W. D., (1996) 'The AIDS Crisis and the Church: A Time to Heal', *Ibid.*, p.364.

Society and the Church

Those people who preach about love judge me without love.⁵¹⁰

There are many sexual dissenters whose theological community is made up of the gathering of those who go to gay bars with rosaries in their pockets, or who make camp chapels of their living rooms simply because there is a cry in their lives, and a theological cry, which refuses to fit life into different compartments.⁵¹¹

All of the interviewees believed that the legislative change which had taken place within society, in general, would eventually have a positive effect on the Church with regards to the issue of homosexuality. As Philip said, 'it's been a major change in society, societal attitudes have changed and... it's more difficult of all for conservatives... to come to terms with change.'⁵¹² Asked why he felt that this was the case, Philip suggested that he thought that it was 'something to do with family life... the notion of the family that I'm not sure... really ever existed.'⁵¹³ He explains further what he means, 'the conservative theology that I came out of, that was the whole kind of ethos. The family was just one way of ordering the world.'⁵¹⁴ He continues, 'I think it's a lot to do with power and shifts of power within society challenging the old ways as well.'⁵¹⁵

This is something also highlighted by Bartholomew, 'in a very few years society has changed dramatically in terms of the whole gay thing.'⁵¹⁶ He continues, 'so it now seems almost silly not to acknowledge it because... by

⁵¹⁰ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁵¹¹ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁵¹² Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

⁵¹³ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

⁵¹⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

⁵¹⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.2.

⁵¹⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

and large society has got over the debate.⁵¹⁷ Andrew agrees with this summary of the situation adding,

I think sociologically, in terms of secular society, because of the Parliament... and equality and diversity and all those issues... there in the real life Scotland it is not an issue... society's message is quite clear that discrimination is not acceptable and there's nothing wrong with people living, expressing different forms of sexuality.⁵¹⁸

He continues,

... the Church is not out of this world. This secular Scotland that we're trying to build more inclusive and less sexist and less racist, is the world that the Church members live in... as society becomes more safe and open, that's got to have an effect on Church members.⁵¹⁹

For Matthew the gay community which so far has been silenced within the Church could hold the key to the door of acceptance. He says,

As its become more openly acceptable in society at large, I think there must be a sense in the gay community, at large, of an unwillingness to be denied their rights in the Church... For those of us involved in the Church that's a huge part of our lives.⁵²⁰

He continues, 'I think there's an unwillingness to sort of be hidden away... I think there's a desire to see openness and an acceptance as we find in other parts of society.'⁵²¹ For Matthew, with the acceptance of his sexuality, there is 'an unwillingness to reach a compromise'⁵²² that will mean 'we will keep our heads down.'⁵²³

Speaking in wider terms of acceptance within the Church, Matthew says,

I think on the Church's part there is a large segment of the church that has never come to terms with modernity... that finds that very difficult to cope with and I think the sexuality debate, for them, is another example of that. I think probably the first example of that was the rights of women's ordination. I mean there's still people in

⁵¹⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.5.

⁵¹⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.2.

⁵¹⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.2.

⁵²⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.2-3.

⁵²¹ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

⁵²² Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

⁵²³ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

the church who don't really sign up to women's ordination but they kind of go along with it... sexuality in their mind is another example of this slippery slope.⁵²⁴

Andrew goes further with his analysis saying,

I think that there is something about if it doesn't impinge on my experience then it doesn't really matter. But as soon as people start discovering they have gay and lesbian grandchildren then it will become an issue in the Church because if the minister says anything that is homophobic then somebody might actually have the courage to challenge.⁵²⁵

For Andrew,

... it's reassuring that... some human beings in the Church are actually responding to their intuition. So if the minister preaches nonsense then deep down inside Jeannie's thinking, 'well what would he know anyway.'... there's something reassuring to know that people actually have the capacity within themselves to dispense with it.⁵²⁶

Simon adds, 'most people live together before getting married, are having children out of wedlock and they don't seem to be bothered about the Church's teaching on marriage.'⁵²⁷ Perhaps one of the current problems for the Church on this issue is that it 'is now so much fuller of older folk who categorically don't want to talk about it. Maybe it'll change as younger people come through and that whole attitude is different.'⁵²⁸

Also in the interviews there was a belief expressed by all the interviewees that the current situation in the Church where 'gay folk are still on the margins and not really to be talked about'⁵²⁹ is one which cannot be permitted to continue unchallenged. Rather, they felt that some form of co-ordinated challenge needed to take place so that the gay voice within the Church was heard.

⁵²⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3.

⁵²⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

⁵²⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

⁵²⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Simon*, p.4.

⁵²⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.7-8.

⁵²⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.1.

But for all of them it begins with being non-confrontational and having an open discussion about it. For Andrew it begins with enlisting the help of those who we see as our allies. He says, ‘... those that are gay friendly, or purport to be, they need to start getting on the soap boxes and being more vocal. Maybe if that were to happen it would be a positive influence.’⁵³⁰ Matthew agrees saying, ‘straight ministers have a lot of power. I think straight ministers particularly... have an ability to make our passage to acceptability easier.’⁵³¹ Speaking of the straight ministers who are employed within the Councils of the Church, Bartholomew says, ‘... they can help us make our case.’⁵³²

One of the reasons why it is so difficult, however, for gay ministers to trust those in the hierarchy is the belief by them, as highlighted by Andrew, that, ‘... when people stand up at the General Assembly and make a pro-gay comment I’m sure that their name goes down in a book somewhere’⁵³³...I feel as if they have almost got a wee post-it on your file, you know, that this is an issue that they could almost use later.’⁵³⁴ This level of suspicion of the Church hierarchy and of those on the evangelical wing of the Church was widespread amongst the interviewees because it could adversely affect their ‘job security’.⁵³⁵

For Matthew, coalition building starts at the grassroots level with the education of the members of Church. He believes that the way forward for

⁵³⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.10.

⁵³¹ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.7.

⁵³² Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.2.

⁵³³ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.10.

⁵³⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.4.

⁵³⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Bartholomew*, p.1.

the Church is to bring to 'an end the set piece debates'⁵³⁶ and to encourage and support the 'facilitation of churches and congregations, to get to grips with this issue on the ground.'⁵³⁷ For him, 'talking about it in Kirk Sessions... not grandstanding speeches at Presbytery for one position or another, but an actual sitting down, grappling with the issue the way the Committee has.'⁵³⁸ This non-confrontational approach is vitally important according to Philip, 'because, basically, my own view is that the more people talk about it the less the fear factor... the greater good will be done for gay people.'⁵³⁹ He continues, 'I think the more we talk about it... the more we end it as a taboo subject because it is still taboo in many ways... at least in the courts of the Church it is.'⁵⁴⁰

For Matthew acceptance of sexuality active gay clergy, by the Church, is a long way off but feels that 'no one wins that right until they are prepared to stick their heads above the parapet.'⁵⁴¹ He explains,

I think we can talk in generalisations all we like but, I think, until some people are faced with real people, real personalities, who have real gifts which they clearly use in the body of the Church, I think things will not move on as much as we would like them to.⁵⁴²

There is almost the argument that women cannot preach feminism because they get accused of being hysterical feminists. So men really need to preach feminism. In the same way... sometimes gay and lesbian ministers are not the ones to actually preach about inclusivity. It needs folk who are straight and who are married to actually stand up and own some of this too. That's not to say that people who are gay and lesbian shouldn't preach about it. I think they should.⁵⁴³

Matthew agrees with this saying,

⁵³⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.8.

⁵³⁷ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.8.

⁵³⁸ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.3-4.

⁵³⁹ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.9.

⁵⁴⁰ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.9.

⁵⁴¹ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.6.

⁵⁴² Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.7.

⁵⁴³ Transcript of Interview, *Andrew*, p.3.

... the ordination of the first woman really came as a result of someone taking a case to the Assembly... It was a case of someone being able to say, 'Why should I be discriminated against because is this right?'... and it was a group of men and women working together that made it happen.⁵⁴⁴

The other suggestion that Matthew posits is,

I'm also of the view that the other thing that might move it on is that if those who were against the more open acceptance of gay people in the Church, if they ever tried to overplay their hand and pushed people too much in the opposite direction, I think they might actually further our cause because... I think that there are a number of people in the Church who are in the middle and are not quite sure what to think, not quite sure what the Church should do, not of a fixed mind... I think, for them, the sight of a group of people being persecuted or being done down by the Church would probably prompt them... prompt the good part of their humanity... to come to some sort of common sense. And I think that might also be... the way through.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.7.

⁵⁴⁵ Transcript of Interview, *Matthew*, p.7.

Society and the Church

A Reflection

The ecclesial family... has taught me that there is some truth in most things but no monopoly of truth in any particular thing.⁵⁴⁶

It is difficult to resist the notion that God's most significant activity has been somewhere back in the past and that it is the duty of the Church to preserve what God has *done* rather than identify what God is *doing*.⁵⁴⁷

Politically in Scotland, over the past ten years, there have been many changes with the most important being the establishment of its devolved Government. Within this governmental framework there has been a raft of legislation enacted which has seen the rights of gay and lesbian people being both protected and advanced.⁵⁴⁸ Such changes have brought the churches, in general, and the Church of Scotland, in particular, into conflict with the, then named, Executive. Part of the reason for this conflict was that the churches had felt that the biblically based principles and beliefs, that they hold to be true and unchanging, were being challenged by an Executive that were seen to be pandering to popularity, that morality in society was being eroded and that the centrality of the 'traditional' family unit, as the place for children to be brought up in a safe environment, was being usurped by 'non-traditional' understandings of what it means to be family. The Church of Scotland has always made representation to any public consultation that has taken place, on matters such as described above, and it has prided itself

⁵⁴⁶ Holloway, R., (1994) *The Stranger in the Wings: Affirming Faith in a God of Surprises*, *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁵⁴⁷ Holloway, R., (1994) *The Stranger in the Wings: Affirming Faith in a God of Surprises*, *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁵⁴⁸ Here I am referring to Equal Age of Consent, Anti-discrimination and Civil Partnership legislation in particular.

on being at the centre of Scottish Life, being the National Church and one of the groups traditionally within the 'three estates'.⁵⁴⁹

However, during the debate on the proposed repeal of Section 28 (Clause 2A) of the Local Government Act 1986 at the May 2000 General Assembly, which was trailed extensively in the media because it was thought that the outcome of the debate had the potential to split the Church, it was suggested to the commissioners that the part of the Board of Social Responsibility's Report that dealt with this area should not be debated but, instead, would be received by the Assembly. The Board's request was granted and a potential split was avoided. This method of dealing with an issue that had become a defining issue in gay and lesbian rights, up to that point in Scotland, was seen by the media as a means of evading a potentially damaging debate and avoiding a difficult topic that was causing tension within society. *The Herald* condemned the Board for their decision commenting,

The Church of Scotland would like to claim a place at the centre of Scottish Life. We believe it should do so, but on the evidence of yesterday's craven performance... the Kirk has abrogated that right. The debate [in society]... has been long and lively. Strong opinions have been offered from both sides... But there has also been an evident desire for guidance on the part of many thoughtful church folk, and also by those who at least look to the Kirk for an input... the refusal of the Church of Scotland to even debate the issue yesterday is a clear indication of the state into which it has fallen. We would have had more respect for the Kirk if it had debated the question and voted against the position we support. As it is, the Church's highest gathering could not even bring itself to debate, which is shameful in the extreme... According to Ann Allen of the Board of Social Responsibility, it was important

⁵⁴⁹ The Parliament in Scotland in the Middle Ages was made up of the secular and clerical lords known as the 'community of the realm'. The first record of a Parliament containing representatives of the commons (burgh commissioners) as well as lords is 1326. These three groups (nobility, senior clergy and burgh commissioners) became known as the 'three estates' (tres communitates). This much-used term has become a shorthand collective name for the Parliament's membership, even though the nature of the estates changed during the different stages of the Parliament's existence.

to unite the Church...So this is what it has come to. The unity of the Church of Scotland is above an issue of great moral, spiritual, and social importance... Frankly that is pathetic. What will happen when the next big issue comes along? Will the Church duck from under it... we began this week by calling for the Kirk to be more involved in public and national life. Now it seems it has nothing to offer.⁵⁵⁰

This may be a little harsh, perhaps, but it does raise the valid question as to the relationship between the Church and society and how they inform each other.

Listening to the interviewees, it was clear that changes taking place within society are beginning to impact on the Church in terms of its theology and ethical stance on a number of issues, such as, cloning, genetically modified crops and the rights for gay and lesbian couples to adopt. Recently in issues relating to sexuality⁵⁵¹, which the General Assembly has debated, it was clear from the tenure of the debates that there is a very uneasy relationship between society, in general, and the Church. For as society is becoming more accepting of non-heterosexual relationships, the Church it appears, to one who has been involved in the debates and sat through many Presbytery meetings where such issues have been discussed, is becoming less tolerant. This feeling was reinforced when by 9 votes to 36 Presbyteries decided that it would not permit ministers and deacons to conduct services of blessing for Civil Partnership ceremonies. As it said on the Forward Together website when commenting about the result of the vote, 'We give thanks to God

⁵⁵⁰ (May 25, 2000) *The Herald*, Glasgow (UK), p.18.

⁵⁵¹ Here I am referring to the 2006 Legal Questions Committee's Deliverance referring to Civil Partnerships and the 2007 Mission and Discipleship Council's Report on Same-sex Relationships.

that He has spoken very clearly to his church and that the church has overwhelmingly agreed to reject this Overture.⁵⁵²

I am convinced that people, in the Church, only see and deal with that with which they feel comfortable. I remember being in San Francisco one summer travelling over the Bay to Alcatraz Island. During the short boat ride I overheard part of the conversation a Scots couple were having with a man sitting next to them. The man was with his boyfriend, he was wearing an enamel AIDS ribbon pinned to his shirt breast pocket and was dressed in the 'uniform' of what would be termed in gay language a 'bear'. That is, he was of stocky build, was wearing black steel toe capped boots, jeans, a checked 'Ben Sherman' shirt, had a shaved head and sported a goatee beard. His boyfriend was similarly attired. The Scots visitors were complaining that he and his wife had visited the Castro District, the main gay residential area in San Francisco, and were disappointed because 'there were none of these gays about!' The visitor continued, 'I heard it was Gay Pride last week, I suppose they are all tired out and away having a rest.' I recount that story as an illustration that even when surrounded by gay and lesbian people and when talking with someone who was obviously gay, the Scots couple were unaware of who and what was confronting them. They only saw what they wanted to and felt comfortable with. What, perhaps, they were culturally and sexually sensitive to. Perhaps the situation in the Church is similar, with those who identify as

⁵⁵² This can be found on Forward Together's website at <http://www.forwardtogether.org.uk/civilpartnerships-index.htm>

heterosexual. Perhaps, they only understand and want to engage with people they feel comfortable with. Perhaps they do not feel comfortable in combining the spiritual with the sexual.

Paul Ricoeur has made the observation, with regards to this difficulty of relating our spiritual lives with our sexual lives. He stated that there were three major stages in the development of Western thinking with regards to the relation of sexuality to religion.⁵⁵³ At its earliest stage there was a close identification of the twin spheres of spirituality and sexuality, where sexuality found itself incorporated into religion, myth and ritual. The second stage, which accompanied the rise of the great world religions, saw a separation of these two spheres which led to the sacred becoming 'increasingly transcendent while sexuality was demythologised and confined to a small part of the earthly order (procreation within institutionalized marriage).'⁵⁵⁴ The third period, which we are presently experiencing, is marked by the 'desire to reunite sexuality with the experience of the sacred.'⁵⁵⁵ This has been prompted by a more holistic understanding of personhood and the ways in which sexuality is present in all human experience.

Currently, within Scottish society, this move to address the spiritual component within people's lives can be seen in a number of spheres.

⁵⁵³ Ricoeur, P., (1994) 'Wonder, Eroticism and Enigma', in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*. Nelson, J.B., and Longfellow, S. P., (eds.), London: Mowbrays, p.80-84.

⁵⁵⁴ Nelson, J. B., (1996) 'Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality' in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, *Ibid.*, p.213.

⁵⁵⁵ Nelson, J. B., (1996) 'Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality' in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, *Ibid.*.

For example, in the National Health Service within the realms of providing holistic care the Scottish Executive in 2002 issued guidelines which sought to address the spiritual care of its patients and staff.⁵⁵⁶ In addition to this, the Religious Observance Committee highlighted the importance of spirituality with regard to the care of pupils in Scottish schools.⁵⁵⁷ It stated that,

The term "spiritual" applies to all pupils. The potential for spiritual development is open to every one and is not confined to the development of religious beliefs... The term needs to be seen as applying to something fundamental in the human condition... it has to do with the unique search for human identity...⁵⁵⁸

This search for meaning, for the thing that makes us uniquely human, can be seen in a more unscientific way, by looking at society in general, from the standpoint of an interested observer. There has been an apparent increase in the use of alternative and natural therapies, those seeking enlightenment from eastern philosophies and the quest to 'get in touch with your inner being'. Society certainly appears to be more open and accepting with sex and sexuality being discussed and legislation enacted. In the light of this it would be good to listen to Nelson, who comments,

Perhaps never before in the history of the church has there been so much open ferment as there is now about issues of sexuality. The outpouring of treatises, debates, studies, pronouncements and movements bent on reforming religious-sexual attitudes (or protecting them from unwanted change) has been unprecedented. In all of these developments there are signs that a paradigmatic shift is under way.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁶ www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/HDL2002_76.pdf

⁵⁵⁷ www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/05/19351/37057

⁵⁵⁸ www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/05/19351/37057

⁵⁵⁹ Nelson, J. B., (1996) 'Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality' in *Christian perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, *Ibid.*, p.214.

Caught up in this 'paradigmatic shift' are gay clergy who find their rights in society protected with equality and anti-discrimination legislation, who see the need to express their hidden sexuality as full part of who they are and want to explore what that means for them but, within the Church, find that nothing has changed and the dualism between things spiritual and things bodily is alive and well, with the voice of the traditionalists increasing in volume and the voice of the revisionists not really being heard.

This is not a healthy situation for the Church to find itself as it is only through dialogue, discussion and debate that a way forward which deals with the body in all its beauty, with all its mess, and in all its glory, can be found. Sexual issues need to be urgently addressed in the Church precisely because they deal with our inner most desires and passions. To date, however, the Church has shied away from dealing with such issues, particularly where they have sought to deal with the subject of homosexuality. It is perhaps telling that the cornerstone of the Church's official position on homosexuality is based on a report adopted in 1983. In the intervening twenty five years there have been significant advances made in the way that society understands and accepts homosexuality as just one part of a wider sexual spectrum. In addition to this, the discrepancies between official Church teaching and the actual sexual practices of some of its members raise questions about the Church's credibility and, perhaps more importantly, honesty. This should not be viewed negatively however, because, within society, there has rarely

been a more opportune time, for sexuality to be discussed. But perhaps the cloud to that particular silver lining is that the Church often has difficulty in dealing creatively with any form of sexuality that differs from the heterosexual norm. As was stated above, the reason for this is that the 'sexual dualisms, though more consciously challenged in recent years, continue to have their formidable grip on our personal lives, on our communal ethos and our communal structures.'⁵⁶⁰

Nelson highlights the results that can be seen from holding these particular dualistic tendencies,

One is that churches simply shy away from dealing vigorously with sexuality because it seems either incidental or inappropriate to "the life of the spirit." Resistance arises also because serious engagement with virtually any sexuality issue can threaten entrenched male power. Also present is the fear of divisiveness. It is difficult to face sexual issues boldly if we fear that the consequences for the church's unity and institutional cohesiveness will prove too dire should we do so. So dualisms, entrenched sexism, timidity, and genuine concern over the well-being of the church all mingle together.⁵⁶¹

Added to this, the Church appears to be tackling sexual issues in a reactive rather than a proactive way. By this I mean that the 2007 Mission and Discipleship Council Report addressing same-sex relationships arose out of Civil Partnership legislation that was making its way through Parliament. By acting in this way, the Church, fairly or not, is seen as only entering into the debate if it is forced by what is happening in society. The Church does not seem to be taking the lead and actively engaging people in real dialogue.

⁵⁶⁰ Nelson, J. B., (1992) *Body Theology*, Louisville Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, p.19.

⁵⁶¹ Nelson, J. B., (1992) *Body Theology*, *Ibid.*, p.19-20.

It would also appear that the basis from where that conversation takes place is often disputed. Is it the Bible? Is it tradition? Is it human experience? Or is it a mixture of them all? Using the Church's stance on homosexuality as an example, how helpful is it to engage in dialogue about homosexuality when one of the parties is coming from a fixed procreative position? Is a tradition that believes that heterosexual marriage is the only valid relationship in which to have sexual intercourse helpful when trying to uncover an ethic of single sexuality, or same-sex relationships, or transgendered sexuality? Those who are gay and lesbian within the Church often argue that their experience of being gay or lesbian needs to be listened to in any debate as it is their story, a story that often speaks of oppression, violence, hatred, struggle which are all experiences that the Church needs to hear.

When such voices are taken seriously and are valued for what they can contribute to the debate then the Church will begin to realise a true sexual theology. As Nelson writes, 'It is the awareness of and the struggling with this two-directional movement which characterizes *sexual theology*.'⁵⁶² He continues,

That is not to claim that sexual theology will provide an all-encompassing approach to the Christian theological task. It is to say, however, that this is another needed approach with which to grapple with the meaning of God's purposes, presence, and action for our lives at this particular time and place in history.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶² Nelson, J.B., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexual and Christian Theology*, *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁵⁶³ Nelson, J.B., (1978) *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexual and Christian Theology*, *Ibid.*.

However, traditionalists reject the kind of argument that Nelson is making because they understand homosexuality to be part of human being's fall from grace as viewed through the lens of the creation stories found in the opening chapters of Genesis. Nelson refers to this understanding as a 'theology of sexuality'.⁵⁶⁴ By this, he means a theology that is one-directional and does not engage in any form of dialogue, for example, it would ask questions similar to: What does scripture say about our sexuality? How should we then be expressing it? What does the minister say? What is the Church's teaching? It is a theology that seeks to control and inhibit sexual experience and has as its foundation traditional gender roles.

Nelson argues that questions, similar to those outlined above, are not adequate when engaged in theological reflection and enquiry of sexuality. Rather, he suggests, what is required is a 'sexual theology'.⁵⁶⁵ That is, a theology that engages in dialogue, that is rooted firmly in our lived experiences as 'human sexual beings'⁵⁶⁶ and out of that experience we learn to read and understand scripture. Out of necessity, for Nelson, it must be two directional. He writes, "sexual theology", like the term "liberation theology", suggests this dialogical, two-directional investigation.⁵⁶⁷ This has the effect of removing sexuality out of specific acts and, instead, into the realm of the relational. The role of the Bible in such a theology is to bear witness to that experience rather than

⁵⁶⁴ Nelson, J. B. (1992) *Body Theology, Ibid.*, p.21.

⁵⁶⁵ Nelson, J. B. (1992) *Body Theology, Ibid.*.

⁵⁶⁶ Nelson, J. B. (1992) *Body Theology, Ibid.*.

⁵⁶⁷ Nelson, J. B., (1996) 'Sexuality and Spirituality', in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender, Ibid.*, p.214.

imposing controls. Richard Holloway, agrees with Nelson when he uses the phrase 'theology of life'⁵⁶⁸ Holloway also argues for a broader understanding of sexuality where human beings are affirmed, feel accepted and join in celebration of the life that each of us have been given.⁵⁶⁹

This broader definition of what it means to be human, what it means to be sexual is not focused on genital activity. It allows homosexuality to be understood in a less restrictive sense and as part of the spectrum of sexualities and sexual activities that we as human beings use to express ourselves. This is the antithesis of the 1983 Report that focuses on the homosexual sex act⁵⁷⁰ and because it resonates with the experience of people today the traditionalists are wary of it.

But, perhaps, the greatest advantage of following the 'sexual theology' path is that sexual ethics becomes a broad subject and not one that is fixated on homosexual male genital activity. This is one of the differences between Nelson and Holloway and the Study Group that wrote the 1983 Report, for the Study Group have shown themselves to have a narrow understanding of sexual ethics which has the result of focussing their thinking on things physical rather than things spiritual.

⁵⁶⁸ Holloway, R., (2001) *Doubts and Loves: What is Left of Christianity*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books, p.240-241.

⁵⁶⁹ Holloway, R., (2001) *Doubts and Loves: What is Left of Christianity*, *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁵⁷⁰ Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, (1983), p.304.

This kind of narrow thinking is one of the reasons why debates on sexuality in the Church are so difficult. If they had used a different starting point then they would have been able to consider homosexual relationships in the same terms as they did married heterosexual relationships, namely, as an 'expression of commitment, trust and affection.'⁵⁷¹ The only way that this can take place is by a fundamental change in the way that the Bible is interpreted. Therefore, rather than making 'life conform to the biblical viewpoint expressed centuries ago, the text should help people find guidance to deal with the dilemmas of life they encounter.'⁵⁷²

As was stated earlier the Church of Scotland, regards scripture as central to its life and witness. It states in the Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual, 'The Church of Scotland... receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as its supreme rule of faith.'⁵⁷³ Therefore, any attempt to change centuries of tradition with regards to with regards to the Church's stance on sexuality, in general, and homosexuality, in particular is going to have to gain some level of biblical support. However, there is another phrase contained within the Articles Declaratory which is often forgotten when dealing either with matters sexual or other issues that are equally unpalatable to some members of the Church. That phrase is, 'trusting in the promised renewal and

⁵⁷¹ Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² Brunskill, R., (September 2003) Will There Be an End to the Homosexuality Debate in the United Reformed Church?' in *Theology and Sex*, Volume 10 No.1, p.73-92.

⁵⁷³ Quoted in MacDonald, F. A J., (2004) *Confidence in a Changing Church*, *Ibid.*, p.184.

guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷⁴ For a Church that prides itself as, 'reformata, semper reformanda', then perhaps the Holy Spirit will aid this in the area of 'sexual theology'. After all, if we truly believe in a Holy Spirit that is active in the world surely change is inevitable? The Holy Spirit is the presence of God living among us, which we are expected to listen to and then reflect on its promptings. As Holloway writes,

... we must constantly be abandoning places and systems through which God once spoke in order to keep up with God, who will not be trapped or entombed in any system or category.⁵⁷⁵

The gay clergy whom I interviewed were ever hopeful that the Church, at a local level, would begin both to look out and listen for the Holy Spirit's leadings on this important and life affecting issue. It seemed that the Spirit had been working away in society with all the changes in legislation that have been taking place, but the Church is just not ready to listen at the moment.

They all thought that the problem that the Church has is that it speaks about homosexuality in the third person. As if it is to do with someone else, out there. But, of course it's not. It is about real people, who are employed, who are doing good work and as Philip said,

When Jesus said, 'Come to me'... just look at the hundreds of people who have been turned away because of what the Church has been saying, look at the souls who have been crushed and possibly even the lives that have been lost... certainly, the contributions that have been lost because of the lack of acceptance and also just look at the people who have contributed huge amounts who have been in the 'don't ask, don't tell' [culture] who have been gay and suffered with it all their lives and would have given so much more had they been allowed to be honest.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ Quoted in MacDonald, F. A J., (2004) *Confidence in a Changing Church*, *Ibid.*.

⁵⁷⁵ Holloway, R., (1994) *Stranger in the Wings: Affirming Faith in a God of Surprises*, London, SPCK, p.8.

⁵⁷⁶ Transcript of Interview, *Philip*, p.8.

Yet, the Church seems intransigent in its position at present. Why is it that a desire to define doctrines, erect barriers and establish borders appear to emerge in the Church whenever groups of religious people feel threatened by secular society, or something that they have little, or no, experience with?⁵⁷⁷ Holloway is damning of this kind of 'blinkered' mentality writing,

We can persuade ourselves that the divine action is over, that the Holy Spirit, contrary to John, chapter 16, verse 13, has no more to tell us and that the life of faith, essentially, is a matter of remembering what God has done and never a matter of discerning what God is now doing.⁵⁷⁸

But what could be a way forward for us at this time? Perhaps it is contained in the four words: honest and open dialogue. It is true that life for gay clergy in the Church is not going to change overnight. It will take years, of that there is no doubt. However, through being open and honest, through talking to each other the Church may come to a realisation that there are people in its midst who are hurting. They are not outside, they are not part of somebody else's family. They are part of the Church family, a family that sits down at table together, a table that is open to all who will come if they 'love the Lord'. But this means a level of risk on the part of gay clergy as it means that they have to start being more vocal and more honest. They have to stop being silent and engaging the Church in conversation that is not based on what we do with our genitals, as the 1983 Report would have us believe is our

⁵⁷⁷ Armstrong, K., (2000) *The Battle for God*, London: HarperCollins.

⁵⁷⁸ Holloway, R., (1994) *Stranger in the Wings: Affirming Faith in a God of Surprises*, *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

defining characteristic. Rather it is only our broken, scared and trembling humanity we have to offer.

Conclusion: Next steps...

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret.⁵⁷⁹

Discussions In the church have tended to centre on whether a homosexual is 'practising' or not, a distinction rarely drawn in the heterosexual world... there are those who feel it ultimately devalues the debate, serving only to undermine the gift of wholeness to which sexuality points.⁵⁸⁰

Human sexuality, and in particular, homosexuality, has been the issue that has lit the touchpaper for the Church whenever it has been discussed. The rhetoric has often been vitriolic, as evidenced by Ron Ferguson who wrote, 'Many self-labelled Christians outclass the spitting cobra in the quantity and rage of their hurled venom.'⁵⁸¹ This has led to a moving away from a process of informed discussion and careful listening by people from across the spectrum of views within the Church with a great deal of ink having been used and a lot of energy expended as the subject has taxed both minds and beliefs. There are those who believe that far too much time has been spent on a subject for which the Bible is clear in its condemnation. Others are attempting to seek a way forward that will see the Church as an inclusive body where all are welcome and all are valued. In the middle are people like myself, gay clergy, who are caught in the crossfire of a debate that concerns our integrity, our honesty and, most of all, that very part of our lives that makes us who we are.

It is out of this background and the experience of having to live as a closeted gay minister that this research had its beginning. This has

⁵⁷⁹ Foucault, M., (1990), *The History of Sexuality. 1. An Introduction*, trans. Hurley, R., London: Penguin Books, p.35.

⁵⁸⁰ Ford, M., (2004) *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual*, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁸¹ Ferguson, R., (3 July 2003), *The Herald*, Glasgow (UK), p.22.

been a labour of love, on my part, as it has allowed me time to consider the history of the Church's stance on a matter that was so personal to me. It has not been easy, in fact it has been a monumental task to uncover and gather the information that I sought as I carried this research out. It would appear that there is a wall of silence, there being little, or no, information addressing the subject of gay clergy within the Church of Scotland. The Church reports, which were an obvious starting point, refer to homosexuals in general and never mention the subject of gay clergy. It would appear that there is an uneasy position adopted by the Church of 'don't ask, don't tell' that protects it from having to consider and confront this subject head on. If all that I had done was examine the Church statements and reports on the subject then the conclusion that would have been drawn, was that homosexuality was something that happens 'out there' in society and not in the Church. And if it did happen in the Church then there is the rule of celibacy to 'take care of things'.

Althaus-Reid comments on just such a situation writing,

...closeted theologians indulge permanently in duplicity between the realms of a public and private theology. They build schizophrenic spiritualities, those which require to be put aside at meal times, as the last Juan Luis Segundo said, Can we keep carrying the burden of a theology which leave us alone when having sex?⁵⁸²

This, it would appear, is what the Church expects but my experience was telling me something different.

By interviewing five gay clergy, from a variety of backgrounds within the Church, I sought to uncover the silent voice that, through my own

⁵⁸² Althaus-Reid, M., (2000), *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions on Sex, Gender and Politics*, *Ibid.* p.88.

personal experience, knew was there. For them to speak, took great courage and a leap of faith in my ability to capture what they had said accurately. Listening to their, often troubled relationship with the Church, its sexual ethic and its inherent patriarchal system of government, alongside modern commentators from a variety of disciplines which inform this area of research I was able to consider a way forward for the both the Church and the gay clergy who serve, and have served, faithfully in a variety of settings from chaplaincy to parish. It is from their experience, their bodily experience and all that this entails⁵⁸³, that 'not only do we rediscover the face of the Queer God, but also find our relationship with God challenged and see emerging new reflections on holiness and on Christianity.'⁵⁸⁴

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'it is an axiom of social change that no revolution can take place without a methodology suited to the circumstances of that period.'⁵⁸⁵ Similarly in relation to the issue of the acceptance, by the Church, of openly gay and practicing ministers in order for change to be effected within it then there needs to be an appropriate methodology, or theology, developed which addresses the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. It is not enough to allow the status quo to remain. We cannot be given to fears such as those expressed by Rt. Rev. David Lacey, who when Moderator stated,

I find myself on both sides of the argument simultaneously. I cannot offer leadership on that. I do not want to see a way out for the

⁵⁸³ Nelson. J. B., (1992), *Body Theology*, *Ibid.*.

⁵⁸⁴ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁵⁸⁵ King Jr., Martin Luther, (1964) *Why We Can't Wait*, New York: New American Library, Mentor, p.34.

church except plumping for one side or another and if we did it would divide us down the middle. I'm very much in tune with the General Assembly on the issue. It has refused to debate the issue twice because it knew it would divide the church. I think the Anglican Communion has just shown that the debate will split the church.⁵⁸⁶

We, as gay clergy, must start by undertaking theological reflection from the position in which we find ourselves because our theology is personal, shaped by the way we live our lives, our loves, our sexuality and our being. Therefore if our theology does not address such issues then the theology that we are following is not ours, it is not owned by us. Instead, it is imposed on us by those who are outside of our experiences. Highlighting this during a discussion of Liberation Theology, Althaus-Reid states,

It did not occur to them [Liberation Theologians] at that time that it was necessary to dismantle the sexual ideology of theology, and for theologians to come out of their closets and ground their theology in a praxis of intellectual, living honesty. God, meanwhile, was also kept hidden in God's own closet. Nobody thought about doing theology in gay bars, although gay bars are full of theologians...The point is that the understanding that arose in Liberation Theology of the possibility of doing a theology for social transformation should also lead us on the journey of re-discovering (or unveiling) the true face of God as part of the Queer theological quest.⁵⁸⁷

As gay clergy, who are struggling to make their voice heard in a theological way, it should be noted that they are not being asked to disregard the tradition of the Church in which they serve. Rather, they are being encouraged to re-examine those traditions in light of their experiences as homosexuals working within a heterosexist and patriarchal organisation. This will inevitably lead to those ministers

⁵⁸⁶ *Life and Work*, (May 2005), p.15.

⁵⁸⁷ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.3

challenging and questioning the very traditions that they have sought to uphold because,

...the process of queering may turn them upside down, or submit them to collage-style processes by adding and highlighting from them precisely those elements which did not fit well in the construction of the church tradition and thus were excluded or ignored.⁵⁸⁸

By doing this, by engaging with our sexuality and our honest relationship to the Church and its traditions, then our theology will be open, honest and transparent. It will be a true reflection of the life that we are living. For,

There are many sexual dissenters whose theological community is made up of the gathering of those who go to gay bars with rosaries in their pockets, or who make camp chapels of their living rooms simply because there is a cry in their lives, and a theological cry, which refuses to fit into different compartments.⁵⁸⁹

The need has arisen, then, for such a theological process because the current ecclesiastical structure within the Church of Scotland does not permit or encourage gay ministers to discover, experience or enjoy their bodies. It does not allow their sexual experience or, perhaps at an even more basic level, them as gay people to live as full human beings and thereby reflect on what God is saying to them and consider where God is located in their unique experience of life. By doing this, the Church that has caused us to feel shame about our bodies and our sex lives is now being given the opportunity to both confront and change that, and so bring acceptance and a sense of connectedness that has, thus far, been lacking. It is what Comstock refers to as 'feeling free to choose from the full range of one's experiences, sensitivities, and skills, and not always

⁵⁸⁸ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God, Ibid.*, p.8.

⁵⁸⁹ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God, Ibid.*, p.2.

having to be self-consciously selective, guarded or fearful of candid self-expression.⁵⁹⁰ By this he is speaking about,

...a ministry in which a minister lives, works, and plays fully as her or himself - as a whole, and not partial person, for whom her or his affections, fantasies, imagination, and dreams are an active resource inspiring and shaping ministry - as a person who draws from her or his own experience instead of from that which is fabricated, expected, or assumed.⁵⁹¹

As Althaus-Reid also reminds us 'the search for love and for truth is a bodily one. Bodies in love add many theological insights to the quest for God and truth.'⁵⁹² There is also a warning to those who are considered to be amongst the 'decent' of the Church that 'doing theology from other contexts needs to consider the experiences and reflection of Others too.'⁵⁹³

But it is not only an issue of accepting who we are, as God made us, that I am referring to here. For hidden within the acceptance of who we are comes a challenge to the 'decent' (that is the heterosexual majority) for us to play our part, perhaps as still the 'indecent', in equal decision-making and leadership roles within the Church. This is often where the problem lies for the 'decent' because for many it is seen as a step too far. It is the issue that rocks the Church to its very foundations. It is this request that, the 'indecent' are reminded that for all the tolerance and accepting that may be spoken about and offered, heterosexuality is still a requirement, the single non-negotiable condition, for the attainment of power and influence within the Church. If this is not the case then 'Why,'

⁵⁹⁰ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁵⁹¹ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, *Ibid.*.

⁵⁹² Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁵⁹³ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.2.

does Comstock ask, 'would most lesbians and gay men conceal their sexual/affectional orientation so that they can move into the ordained ministry and other such jobs?'⁵⁹⁴

Like Comstock and Alison, the call from Althaus-Reid to do theology from the margins, from the indecent places, is one that cannot be resisted if one is to be true to who one is. The problem is that the 'church is not yet ready for that. And the world has stones at hand to hurl at those who first introduce the subject.'⁵⁹⁵ Even so, we should take courage from the fact that Jesus went there before us.

All of us who are gay ministers should be 'indecent theologians' because we have 'learned to survive with different passports.'⁵⁹⁶ We are theologians in diaspora⁵⁹⁷ exploring 'at the crossroads of Christianity issues of self-identity and the identity of her community, which are related to sexuality, race, culture and poverty.'⁵⁹⁸ Our theology as well as being Queer will also be of a biographical nature because 'at the bottom line of Queer theologies, there are biographies of sexual migrants, testimonies of real lives in rebellions made of love, pleasure and suffering.'⁵⁹⁹ Therefore it is in and through these experiences and our theological challenging of them, that we gain our redemption.

⁵⁹⁴ Comstock, G. D., (1993) *Gay Theology Without Apology*, *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁵⁹⁵ Coelho, P., (1996) *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, p.156-157.

⁵⁹⁶ Althaus-Reid, M., *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁵⁹⁷ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁹⁸ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*.

⁵⁹⁹ Althaus-Reid, M., (2003) *The Queer God*, *Ibid.*, p.8.

As 'indecent theologians' we are given the opportunity to transform our pain and suffering, our guilt and shame, our hiddenness and self-loathing, our fear of exposure and threatened dismissal from the Church, to change and rebuild the Church community as Christ would have it. Where those who are part of the community, both 'decent' and 'indecent' are edified, their gifts taken seriously and their life's experiences, gay and straight, valued.

Through speaking out from our experience on the margins, gone will be the days of hiding and being silent because we needed to survive in a community that would have been hostile to us had they known our true self, gone will be the days of constantly living under the threat of another insinuation which might expose us and gone will be the days that the fear of our self-identity will keep us locked in psychological captivity.

We, who are on the margins, who are counted and count ourselves as 'indecent' must be prepared to take risks with our lives, our honesty and our theology. Such honesty, about being open and questioning as to who we are, brings great risk and may lead to censure, loss of employment, estrangement from the Church community. However as Coelho writes,

Pitiful is the person who is afraid of taking risks. Perhaps this person will never be disappointed or disillusioned; perhaps she won't suffer the way people do when they have a dream to follow. But when that person looks back – and at some point everyone looks back – she will bear her heart saying, "What have you done with the miracles that God planted in your days? What have you done with the talents God bestowed on you? You buried yourself in a cave because you were fearful of losing these talents. So this is your heritage: the certainty that you wasted your life.

Pitiful are the people who must realize this. Because when they are finally able to believe in miracles, their life's magic moments, their life's magic moments will have already passed them by.⁶⁰⁰

We must not let this opportunity pass us by. After unconsciously queering his theological understanding of Jesus and what his intentions were, Gavin the prostitute in Howatch's novel, states about the woman, the 'indecent' who anointed Jesus' hair and feet with perfume,

The woman sneaks into a social gathering, she washes The Bloke's feet with some ultra-luxury stuff which has obviously cost her a bundle – and at once all the snotty onlookers are saying she should have given the money to the poor instead. But The Bloke puts them in them in their place.....I think of that poor slag two thousand years ago. I think: I know how you felt; sister. You saw truth and goodness, such truth and such goodness that you wanted to offer up the most valuable thing that you had as a token of your gratitude for being given such a vision – but the vision wasn't just a vision, and it wasn't taking place in some never-never land either. The truth and the goodness came out to meet you in reality right here on earth. It didn't matter that you were the lowest of the low. The truth and goodness encircled you, they made you feel you counted, you mattered, because beyond the truth and the goodness was love, and love is the great reality, the greatest reality any of us can ever know.⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰⁰ Coelho, P., (1996) *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*, *Ibid.*, p.8-9.

⁶⁰¹ Howatch, S., (2003) *The Heartbreaker*, *Ibid.*, p.498-499.

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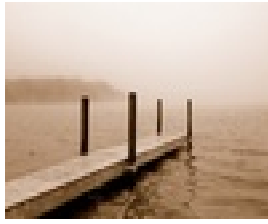
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Appendix:
Issues of Consent



Date

Dear X,

I am writing to invite you to take part in a research project which I am undertaking as part of my Doctoral studies at the University of Glasgow.

The project involves the collection of gay minister's life stories particularly relating to how they have managed to balance their sexuality and the outworking of their faith with the condemnatory statements which have come from within the Church of Scotland's Councils. The purpose of the study is to record and reflect upon gay minister's experience working within the Kirk in order to identify the insights they have had as they reflect upon their ministry, faith and sexuality.

The interview, which will be audio recorded, will last approximately one and a half hours. During it you will have the opportunity to tell the story of your own spiritual history in relation to ministry, faith and sexuality. It is entirely up to you the way in which you tell your story. Following this interview, the tape will be transcribed. After all the interviews have taken place I will be examining what has been said for any themes which have emerged. This will form the basis of the second part of my thesis.

As this is an extremely sensitive subject matter, in order to safeguard your anonymity and satisfy the demands of the Data Protection Act, there are some issues regarding informed consent and confidentiality of which you need to be aware. These are outlined below.

Informed Consent:

Any recorded contribution in written form, on tape or in notes taken from the interview by the researcher will be used in accordance with the wishes of the interviewee. Attached to this letter is an informed consent agreement which, if you would like to take part in this research study, I would ask you to sign, date and return to me in the pre-paid envelope.

Confidentiality:

Rigorous steps will be taken to preserve your anonymity in this project. Pseudonyms will be used from the transcript stage of the research and every effort will be made to edit personal details so as to protect you from identification. Any direct quotations from the interview will be anonymised.

Right to withdraw:

If at any time you feel unable to continue to participate in the research for personal or other reasons, you have the right to withdraw.

I would like to point out that participation in this project is entirely voluntary which is why I am writing to you to explain the project details and ask if you would be willing to participate in this way. It is my hope that, should you decide to take part in this project, it will be of personal interest to you as well as those who may benefit from the insights gained from your experience.

If you have any questions about the project or would like further details, please do not hesitate to contact me at home on or by email at

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Cameron Langlands

ID NUMBER:

CONSENT FORM

Project title: A qualitative study of gay minister's experience within the Church of Scotland.

Name of Researcher: Cameron Langlands

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the accompanying information letter for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. /
2. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. /
3. I agree to take part in the above study /
4. I agree to my interview being tape-recorded. /
5. I understand that my contribution will be kept safely and securely with access only available to the researcher. /
6. I understand that any quotations used will be anonymised. /

Name of Interviewee

Date

Signature

Name of Person taking consent

Date

Signature