

The following are examples of group norms of guidelines for enabling conversation

A.

1. We will respect people's integrity as members of this community of faith.
2. We will assume that as people of faith we are all sincere in our beliefs, including our reverence for Holy Scripture.
3. We will assume that there are persons present who are: lesbian, gay, single, married, divorced, re-married, widowed, otherly-abled, sick, dying, sexually abused.
4. We will respect the right of people to "name" themselves and their experiences.
5. We will use language which respects the dignity of others. We will not use language known to be offensive to others.
6. We will give each other time to speak and to be heard without interruption. We will not argue simply for the sake of argument or take away others' opportunity to speak by monopolizing the conversation. We will keep the topic in mind when speaking.
7. We will accept responsibility for our own feelings, beliefs and opinions, and accept the possibility that we may be wrong, or may have misunderstood someone.
8. We will speak in the first person (using "I" statements), from our own experience, and avoid generalizations.
9. We will ask no questions that we are not prepared to answer ourselves. We will respect the privacy of others.
10. We will maintain confidentiality, sharing our own learning, but not what others have said.

Human Sexuality Focus Group Principles for Conversation (cont.)

B.

1. We expect that the full range of issues of human sexuality exists within the church;
2. We acknowledge that gay and lesbian persons (as well as members of other sexual minorities*) are in the Church;
3. We will always assume that gays or lesbians (or representatives of other sexual minorities*) are present;
4. While we disagree on issues we will use language which respects the dignity of others;
5. We will respect the right of people to ‘name’ themselves and their experience.
6. If we ask a question, we will be prepared to respond to it ourselves;
7. We will respect people’s privacy;
8. We will respect people’s integrity as people of faith.

*eg. Singles, seniors, otherly abled, the sick, the dying, sexually abused, etc.

C.

- Speak for yourself. Use “I” statements. Avoid generalizations.
- Don’t argue – but don’t be obstinate either! (Don’t defend a position just for the sake of argument)
- Respect each other’s sincerity
- Discuss the issues. Don’t name people
- Don’t interrupt – don’t monopolize – encourage but don’t force others to speak.
- Use the language of respect

Human Sexuality Focus Group Principles for Conversation (cont.)

D.

Some principles for meeting with people whose beliefs differ from mine.

1. I accept with gratitude the call to live my life in the fellowship of the Christian Church on earth.
2. I will seek to offer a hospitable place in which to welcome those I meet.
3. I will listen first – and so hope to earn the right to be listened to.
4. I accept the possibility that listening to others will change my own beliefs.
5. I will accept the possibility that I may be wrong.
6. I will avoid bad arguments.
7. I accept responsibility for my own beliefs and opinions.
8. I accept responsibility (in so far as I can influence it) for the way I am heard and experienced by others as I offer my beliefs to others.
9. I will argue with the best of my opponent's beliefs and practice, not with the worst.
10. I will not impute disreputable personal motives or characteristics as a way of discrediting those I disagree with.
11. I will not publicly criticise individuals or groups I disagree with unless I am willing to express my views to them personally if love and wisdom required it.
12. I affirm that 'all truth is public truth' (Newbigin)
13. I will not use money as a means of influencing Christian debate.
14. I accept that there will be people and groups with whom I cannot be reconciled and where communication is no longer possible.
15. I understand this to be the way Christ meets us. It is therefore the way of the cross.

David Runcorn. October 2003 - These thoughts have borrowed widely but were inspired initially by the Gareth Moore's briefer statement of principles in his introduction: *A Question of Truth* (Continuum 2002).

Human Sexuality Focus Group Principles for Conversation (cont.)

E.

Group Standards for Enabling Caring Dialogue

1. Our sessions are confidential. We pledge our confidentiality about what is said here; we will not discuss what anyone says, even with those closest to us.
2. We are free to discuss our own comments or feelings with those outside this group, but not the comments and feelings of any other person in this group.
3. We will speak only for ourselves, from our own experience, using “I” statements. We will avoid generalizations.
4. We will give each other time to speak and to be heard without interruption. Differing views will not be argued, but honoured as valid for that person.
5. We will honour each person’s right to express his or her own understanding or belief.
6. We discuss issues. We do not name people.
7. We have the freedom not to speak, *not* to get involved in a particular activity. We are responsible for our own feelings.
8. We will take care that those who choose to reveal their sexual orientation to us are treated with respect and dignity.

Human Sexuality Focus Group Principles for Conversation (cont.)

F.

Covenant for International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality

1. We will respect each other's faith journey.
2. We will listen respectfully.
3. We will ask inviting questions.
4. We will have flexible understanding, attempting to understand from the point of view of others.
5. We will seek to learn from all perspectives.
6. We will keep the topic in mind when speaking.
7. We will not speak as individuals for the group.
8. We will not repeat each other's comments after we leave. We are free to share learnings without attribution to individuals. Otherwise, we will respect the confidentiality of the other's statements.
9. We will clarify the nature of our speaking. We will request clarification in good faith.

The Body's Grace

By Rowan Williams

To ask, "Why does sex matter?" sounds a rather futile way of beginning an address in these circumstances. It's rather obvious that it does matter, and that it matters in different ways to different people. To some it matters as a cause for alarm, to others as a cause for celebration: there would be less need for LGCM and kindred organisations if sex were not alarming to so many, and less impetus to join or support LGCM, if sex were not something a little more than another good cause.

Most people know that sexual intimacy is in some ways frightening for them; most know that it is quite simply the place where they begin to be taught whatever maturity they have. Most of us know that the whole business is irredeemably comic, surrounded by so many odd chances and so many opportunities for making a fool of yourself; plenty know that it is the place where they are liable to be most profoundly damaged or helpless. Culture in general and religion in particular have devoted enormous energy to the doomed task of getting it right. In this address, I want to try and understand a little better why the task is doomed, and why the fact that it's doomed, is a key to seeing more fully why and how it matters - and even seeing more fully what this mattering has to do with God. And to conduct this exploration in this context may turn out to have a particular "rightness" about it, as I hope may be clearer by the time I've finished.

Perhaps the only thing more risible than a professor theorising about sex is a professor theorising about jokes, so I'll try to keep away from rampant naked theory as long as I can, though I warn you that it's there. Better, though, to start from a particular thing, a particular story. Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* is full of poignant and very deep analyses of the tragedies of sexuality: the theme which drives through all four novels and unites their immense rambling plots is Ronald Merrick's destruction and corruption of his own humanity and that of all who fall into his hands; and that corruption effectively begins at the moment he discovers how he is aroused, how his privacy is invaded, by the desirable body of a man, and is appalled and terrified by this. His first attempt to punish and obliterate the object of his desire is what unleashes the forces of death and defilement that follow him everywhere thereafter.

His sexual refusal is dramatised by him in enactments of master-slave relations: he humiliates what he longs for, so that his dominion is not challenged and so that the sexual disaster becomes a kind of political tragedy. Merrick is an icon of the "body politic": his terror, his refusal and his corruption stand as a metaphor of the Raj itself, of power wilfully turning away from the recognition of those wants and needs that only vulnerability to the despised and humiliated stranger can open up and satisfy. We have a hint of this at the very beginning of the sequence, when the missionary teacher, Miss Crane, sits by the side of her murdered Indian colleague, Mr Chaudhuri, and knows that she must hold his hand. "It's taken me a long time", she said, meaning not only Mr Chaudhuri, 'I'm sorry it was too late' (*The Jewel in the Crown* p 69).

Interwoven with Merrick's tragedy is the story of Sarah Layton: a figure constantly aware of her powerlessness before events, her inability to undo the injuries and terrors of the past, but no less constantly trying to see and respond truthfully and generously. At the end of the second novel in the sequence, Sarah is seduced, lovelessly but not casually: her yielding is prompted perhaps more than anything by her seducer's mercilessly clear perception of her. She does not belong, he tells her, however much she tries to give herself to the conventions of the Raj; within her real generosity is a lost and empty place: "You don't know anything about joy at all, do you?" (*The Day of the Scorpion* p 450).

Sarah is absent from the life of the family she desperately tries to prop up, absent from the life of European society in India, and present fully to no one and nothing. Her innate truthfulness and lack of egotistical self-defence mean that she is able to recognise this once the remark is made: there is no joy for her, because she is not able to be anywhere. When the manipulative and cynical but sharp-eyed Clark at last coaxes her into bed, as they "enact" a tenderness that is not really that of lovers (p 452), Sarah comes to herself: hours later, on the train journey back to her family, she looks in the mirror and sees that "she had entered her body's grace" (p 454).

What does this mean? The phrase recurs more than once in the pages that follow, but it is starkly clear that there is no lasting joy for Sarah. There is a pregnancy and an abortion; a continuing loneliness. In the third of the novels, *The Towers of Silence*, perhaps the most concentrated and moving of the quartet, we see Sarah through the eyes and the feelings of Barbie Batchelor, another ageing missionary teacher: Barbie is in love with Sarah, and Sarah, beneath her kindness and concern for Barbie in her desperate, disintegrating old age, cannot quite meet or even perhaps recognise this.

At the critical moment of Barbie's final mental collapse, Sarah is in Calcutta at the insistence of her appalling mother, undergoing her abortion; when she returns, Barbie does not recognise her. "Miss Batchelor held the girl's hand, She felt that she had to say something important but could not remember what" (*The Towers of Silence* p 398). Once again, it is too late for speech, for converse and touching and Sarah and Barbie are left alone (one to live, one to die).

Yet nothing in this drainingly painful novel (which ends with Barbie's death on 6 August 1945, as Hiroshima is destroyed far away) suggests that the moment of "the body's grace" for Sarah was a deceit. Somehow she has been aware of what it was and was not: a frontier has been passed, and that has been and remains grace; a being present, even though this can mean knowing that the graced body is now more than ever a source of vulnerability. Sarah's mother catches sight of her as she clings to a washbasin and hears the crying of her sister Susan's child. "Sarah raised her head, not to look towards the child's room but straight ahead of her into the mirror above the basin as if the source of the cry were there in her reflection" (ib. p 327). The body's grace, seen in one mirror, is also this in another.

But it is still grace, a filling of the void, an entry into some different kind of identity. There may be little love, even little generosity, in Clark's bedding of Sarah, but Sarah has

discovered that her body can be the cause of happiness to her and to another. It is this discovery which most clearly shows why we might want to talk about grace here. Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted.

The whole story of creation, incarnation and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, as *if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this; so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God.

The life of the Christian community has as its rationale - if not invariably its practical reality - the task of teaching us this: so ordering our relations that human beings may see themselves as *desired*, as the occasion of joy. It is not surprising that sexual imagery is freely used, in and out of the Bible, for this newness of perception. What is less clear is why the fact of sexual desire, the concrete stories of human sexuality rather than the generalising metaphors it produces, are so grudgingly seen as matters of grace, or only admitted as matters of grace when fenced with conditions. Understanding this involves us in stepping back to look rather harder at the nature of sexual desire; and this is where abstractness and overambitious theory threaten.

In one of the few sensible and imaginative accounts of this by a philosopher, Thomas Nagel writes:

Sexual desire involves a kind of perception but not merely a single perception of its object, for in the paradigm case of mutual desire there is a complex system of superimposed mutual perceptions - not only perceptions of the sexual object, but perceptions of oneself. Moreover, sexual awareness of another involves considerable self-awareness to begin with - more than is involved in ordinary sensory perception (T Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge 1979 pp 44-45).

Nagel elaborates: initially I may be aroused by someone unaware of being perceived by me, and that arousal is significant in "identifying me with my body" in a new way (cf p 47), but is not yet sufficient for speaking about the full range of sexuality. I am aroused as a cultural, not just a biological being - i.e. I need to bring my body into the shared world of language and (in the widest sense!) "intercourse". My arousal is not only my business: I need its cause to know about it, to recognise it, for it to be anything more than a passing chance. So my desire, if it is going to be sustained and developed, must itself be perceived; and, if it is to develop as it naturally tends to, it must be perceived as desirable by the other - that is my arousal and desire must become the cause of someone else's desire (there is an echo here of St Augustine's remarkable idea that what love loves is *loving*, but that's another story).

So for my desire to persist and have some hope of fulfilment, it must be exposed to the

risks of being seen by its object. Nagel (p 47) sees the whole complex process as a special case of what's going on in any attempt to share what something means in language: part of my making sense to you depends on my knowing that you can "see" that I want to make sense, and telling you or showing you that this is what I want implies that I "see" you as wanting to understand. "Sex has a related structure: it involves a desire that one's partner be aroused by the recognition of one's desire that he or she be aroused."

All this means, crucially, that in sexual relation I am no longer in charge of what I am. Any genuine experience of desire leaves me in something like this position: I cannot of myself satisfy my wants without distorting or trivialising them. But here we have a particularly intense case of the helplessness of the ego alone. For my body to be the cause of joy, the end of homecoming, for me, it must be there for someone else, be perceived, accepted, nurtured; and that means being given over to the creation of joy in that other, because only as directed to the enjoyment, the happiness, of the other does it become unreservedly lovable. To desire my joy is to desire the joy of the one I desire: my search for enjoyment through the bodily presence of another is a longing to be enjoyed in my body. As Blake put it, sexual partners "admire" in each other "the lineaments of gratified desire". We are pleased because we are pleasing. It is in this perspective, Nagel says, that we can understand the need for a language of sexual failure, immaturity, even "perversion". Solitary sexual activity works at the level of release of tension and a particular localised physical pleasure; but insofar as it has nothing much to do with being perceived from beyond myself in a way that changes my self-awareness, it isn't of much interest for a discussion of sexuality as process and relation, and says little about grace.

Nagel makes, in passing, a number of interesting observations on sexual encounters that either allow no "exposed spontaneity" (p 50) because they are bound to specific methods of sexual arousal - like sadomasochism - or permit only a limited awareness of the embodiment of the other (p 49) because there is an unbalance in the relation such that the desire of the other for me is irrelevant or minimal - rape, paedophilia, bestiality.

These "asymmetrical" sexual practices have some claim to be called perverse in that they leave one agent in effective control of the situation - one agent, that is, who doesn't have to wait upon the desire of the other. (Incidentally, if this suggests that, in a great many cultural settings, the socially licensed norm of heterosexual intercourse is a "perversion" - well, that is a perfectly serious suggestion.. .)

Trying for the moment to bracket out the much corrupted terminology of norms and ideals, it seems that at least we have here a picture of what sexuality might mean at its most comprehensive; and the moral question I suspect, ought to be one of how much we want our sexual activity to communicate, how much we want it to display a breadth of human possibility and a sense of the body's capacity to heal and enlarge the life of other subjects. Nagel's reflections prompt the conclusion that some kinds of sexual activity distort or confine the human resourcefulness, the depth or breadth of meaning such activity may carry: they involve assuming that sexual activity has less to do with the business of human growth and human integrity than we know it can have. Decisions about sexual lifestyle, the ability to identify certain patterns as sterile, undeveloped or

even corrupt, are, in this light, decisions about what we want our bodily life to say, how our bodies are to be brought in to the whole project of "making human sense" for ourselves and each other.

To be able to make such decisions is important: a conventional (heterosexual) morality simply absolves us from the difficulties we might meet in doing so. The question of human meaning is not raised, we are not helped to see what part sexuality plays in our learning to be human with one another, to enter the body's grace, because all we need to know is that sexual activity is licensed in one context and in no other. Not surprising, then, if the reaction is often either, "It doesn't matter what I do [say] with my body, because it's my inner life and emotions that matter" or, "The only criterion is what gives pleasure and does no damage". Both of those responses are really to give up on the human seriousness of all this.

They are also, just as much as conventional heterosexist ethics, attempts to get rid of risk, Nagel comes close to saying what I believe needs saying here, that sexual "perversion" is sexual activity without risk, without the dangerous acknowledgement that my joy depends on someone else's as theirs does on mine. Distorted sexuality is the effort to bring my happiness back under my control and to refuse to let my body be recreated by another person's perception. And this is, in effect, to withdraw my body from the enterprise of human beings making sense in collaboration, in community, withdrawing my body from language, culture and politics. Most people who have bothered to think about it have noticed a certain tendency for odd sorts of sexual activity to go together with political distortion and corruption (Merrick again - indeed, the whole pathology of the torturer). What women writers like Susan Griffin have taught us about the politics of pornography has sharpened this observation.

But how do we manage this risk, the entry into a collaborative way of making sense of our whole material selves? It is this, of course, that makes the project of "getting it right" doomed, as I suggested earlier. Nothing will stop sex being tragic and comic. It is above all the area of our lives where we can be rejected in our bodily entirety, where we can venture into the "exposed spontaneity" that Nagel talks about and find ourselves looking foolish or even repellent: so that the perception of ourselves we are offered is negating and damaging (homosexuals, I think, know rather a lot about this). And it is also where the awful incongruity of our situation can break through as comedy, even farce. I'm tempted, by the way, to say that only cultures and people that have a certain degree of moral awareness about how sex forms persons, and an awareness therefore of moral and personal risk in it all, can actually find it funny: the pornographer and the scientific investigator of how to maximise climaxes don't as a rule seem to see much of the dangerous absurdity of the whole thing.

The misfire or mismatch of sexual perception is, like any dialogue at cross-purposes, potentially farcical - no less so for being on the edge of pain. Shakespeare (a, usual) knows how to tread such a difficult edge: do we or don't we laugh at Malvolio? For he is transformed by the delusion that he is desired - and if such transformations, such conversions, were not part of our sexual experience, we should not see any -joke. And

it's because this is ultimately serious that the joke breaks down. Malvolio is funny, and what makes him funny is also what makes the whole episode appallingly and irreconcilably hurtful. The man has, after all, ventured a tiny step into vulnerability, into the shared world of sexually perceived bodies, and he has been ruthlessly mocked and denied. In a play which is almost overloaded with sexual ambivalence and misfiring desires, Malvolio demonstrates brutally just why all the "serious" characters are in one or another sort of mess about sex, all holding back from sharing and exposure, in love with private fantasies of generalised love.

The discovery of sexual joy and of a pattern of living in which that joy is accessible must involve the insecurities of "exposed spontaneity": the experience of misunderstanding or of the discovery (rapid or slow) that this relationship is not about joy - these are bearable, if at all, because at least they have changed the possibilities of our lives in a way which may still point to what joy might be. But it should be clear that the discovery of joy means something rather more than the bare facts of sexual intimacy. I can only fully discover the body's grace in *taking time*, the time needed for a mutual recognition that my partner and I are not simply passive instruments to each other. Such things are learned in the fabric of a whole relation of converse and cooperation; yet of course the more time taken the longer a kind of risk endures. There is more to expose, and a *sustaining* of the will to let oneself be formed by the perceptions of another. Properly understood, sexual faithfulness is not an avoidance of risk, but the creation of a context in which grace can abound because there is a commitment not to run away from the perception of another.

The worst thing we can do with the notion of sexual fidelity, though, is to "legalise" it in such a way that it stands quite apart from the ventures and dangers of growth and is simply a public bond, enforceable by religious sanctions.

When we bless sexual unions, we give them a life, a reality, not dependent on the contingent thoughts and feelings of the people involved, true; but we do this so that they may have a certain freedom to "take time", to mature and become as profoundly nurturing as they can. If this blessing becomes a curse or an empty formality, it is both wicked and useless to hold up the sexuality of the canonically married heterosexual as absolute, exclusive and ideal.

In other words, I believe that the promise of faithfulness, the giving of unlimited time to each other, remains central for understanding the full "resourcefulness" and grace of sexual union. I simply don't think we'd grasp all that was involved in the mutual transformation of sexually linked persons without the reality of unconditional public commitments: more perilous, more demanding, more promising.

Yet the realities of our experience in looking for such possibilities suggest pretty clearly that an absolute declaration that every sexual partnership must conform to the pattern of commitment or else have the nature of sin and nothing else is unreal and silly. People do discover - as does Sarah Layton - a grace in encounters fraught with transitoriness and without much "promising" (in any sense): it may be just this that prompts them to want the fuller, longer exploration of the body's grace that faithfulness offers. Recognising this

- which is no more than recognising the facts of a lot of people's histories, heterosexual or homosexual, in our society - ought to be something we can do without generating anxieties about weakening or compromising the focal significance of commitment and promise in our Christian understanding and "moral imagining" of what sexual bonding can be.

Much more damage is done to this by the insistence on a fantasy version of heterosexual marriage as the solitary ideal, when the facts of the situation are that an enormous number of "sanctioned" unions are a framework for violence and human destructiveness on a disturbing scale: sexual union is not delivered from moral danger and ambiguity by satisfying a formal socio-religious criterion. Let me repeat: decisions about sexual lifestyle are about how much we want our bodily selves to mean rather than what emotional needs we're meeting or what laws we're satisfying. "Does this mean that we are using faith to undermine law? By no means: we are placing law itself on a firmer footing" (Romans 3.31): happily there is more to Paul than the (much quoted in this context) first chapter of Romans!

I have suggested that the presence or absence of the body's grace has a good deal to do with matters other than the small scale personal. It has often been said, especially by feminist writers, that the making of my body into a distant and dangerous object, to be either subdued or placated with rapid gratification is the root of sexual oppression. If my body isn't me, then the desiring perception of my body is bound up with an area simply of danger and foreignness; and I act towards whatever involves me in desiring and being desired with fear and hostility. Man fears and subdues woman; and - the, argument continues - this licenses and grounds a whole range of processes that are about the control of the strange: "nature", the foreigner, the unknowable future.

This is not to believe uncritically that sexual disorder is the cause of every human pathology, but to grant (i) that it is pervasively present in all sorts of different disorders, and (ii) that it constitutes a kind of paradigm case of wrongness, distortion something that shows us what it is like to refuse the otherness of the material world and to try to keep it other and distant and controlled. It is a paradigm of how not to make sense, in its retreat from the uncomfortable knowledge that I cannot make sense of myself without others, cannot speak until I've listened, cannot love myself without being the object of love or enjoy myself without being the cause of joy.

Thinking about sexuality in its fullest implications involves thinking about entering into a sense of oneself *beyond* the customary imagined barrier between the "inner" and the "outer" the private and the shared. We are led into the knowledge that our identity is being made in the relations of bodies, not by the private exercise of will or fantasy: we belong with and to each other, not to our "private" selves (as Paul said of mutual sexual commitment), and yet are not instruments for each other's gratification.

And all this is not only potentially but actually a *political* knowledge, a knowledge of what ordered human community might be. Without a basic political myth, of how my welfare depends on yours and yours on mine, a myth of persona] needs in common that

can only be met by mutuality, we condemn ourselves to a politics of injustice and confrontation. Granted that a lot of nonsense has been talked about the politics of eroticism recently, we should still acknowledge that an understanding of our sexual needs and possibilities is a task of real political importance - which is why it is no good finally trying to isolate the politics of sexuality-related "issues" from the broader project of social re-creation and justice.

There is something basic, then as Freud intuited, about how we make sense sexually, basic for the fabric of corporate human life. But beyond the whole question of how the body's grace is discovered is a further, very elusive question. Sex is risky and grace is not discovered by all; and there is something frightening and damaging about the kind of sexual mutuality on which *everything* comes to depend - that is why it matters to locate sexual union in a context that gives it both time and space, that allows it not to be everything,

But, as I hinted earlier, the body's grace itself only makes human sense if we have a language of grace in the first place; and that depends on having a language of creation and redemption. To be formed in our humanity by the loving delight of another is an experience whose contours we can identify most clearly and hopefully if we have also learned or are learning about being the object of the causeless loving delight of God, being the object of God's love for God through incorporation into the community of God's Spirit and the taking-on of the identity of God's child.

It is perhaps because of our need to keep that perspective clear before us that the community needs some who are called beyond or aside from the ordinary patterns of sexual relation to put their identities direct into the hands of God in the single life. This is not an alternative to the discovery of the body's grace.

All those taking up the single vocation - whether or not they are, in the disagreeable clinical idiom, genitally intact - must know something about desiring and being desired if their single vocation is not to be sterile and evasive. Their decision (as risky as the commitment to sexual fidelity) is to see if they can find themselves, their bodily selves, in a life dependent simply upon trust in the generous delight of God - that other who, by definition, cannot want us to supply deficiencies in the bliss of a divine ego, but whose whole life is a "being-for", a movement of gift.

Sebastian Moore remarks (*The Inner Loneliness*, London 1982 p 62) that 'True celibates are rare - not in the sense of superior but in the sense that watchmakers are rare'; finding a bodily/sexual identity through trying to expose yourself first and foremost to the desirous perception of God is difficult and precarious in a way not many of us realise, and it creates problems in dealing with the fact that sexual desiring and being desired don't simply go away in the single life.

Turning such experience constantly towards the context of God's desire is a heavy task - time is to be given to God rather than to one human focus for sexual commitment. But this extraordinary experiment does seem to be "justified in its children", in two obvious

ways. There is the great freedom of the celibate mystic in deploying the rhetoric of erotic love in speaking of God; and, even more importantly, there is that easy acceptance of the body, its needs and limitations, which we find in mature celibates, like Teresa of Avila in her last years. Whatever the cost, this vocation stands as an essential part of the background to understanding the body's grace: paradoxical as it sounds, the celibate calling has, as one aspect of its role in the Christian community, the nourishing and enlarging of Christian sexuality.

It's worth wondering why so little of the agitation about sexual morality and the status of homosexual men and women in the Church in recent years has come from members of our religious orders; I strongly suspect that a lot of celibates do indeed have a keener sensitivity about these matters than some of their married fellow Christians. And anyone who knows the complexities of the true celibate vocation would be the last to have any sympathy with the extraordinary idea that sexual orientation is an automatic pointer to the celibate life; almost as if celibacy before God is less costly, even less risky, for the homosexual than the heterosexual.

It is impossible, when we're trying to reflect on sexuality, not to ask just where the massive cultural and religious anxiety about same-sex relationships that is so prevalent at the moment comes from; and in this last part of my address I want to offer some thoughts about this problem. I wonder whether it is to do with the fact that same-sex relations oblige us to think *directly* about bodiliness and sexuality in a way that socially and religiously sanctioned heterosexual unions don't. When we're thinking about the latter, there are other issues involved notably what one neo-Marxist sociologist called the ownership of the means of production of human beings.

Married sex has, in principle, an openness to the more tangible goals of producing children; its "justification" is more concrete than what I've been suggesting as the inner logic and process of the sexual relation itself. If we can set the movement of sexual desire within this larger purpose, we can perhaps more easily accommodate the embarrassment and insecurity of desire: it's all in a good cause, and a good cause that can be visibly and plainly evaluated in its usefulness and success.

Same-sex love annoyingly poses the question of what the meaning of desire is in itself, not considered as instrumental to some other process (the peopling of the world); and this immediately brings us up against the possibility not only of pain and humiliation without any clear payoff, but - just as worryingly - of non-functional joy: or, to put it less starkly, joy whose material "production" is an embodied person aware of grace. It puts the question which is also raised for some kinds of moralist by the existence of the clitoris in women; something whose function is joy. If the creator were quite so instrumentalist in "his" attitude to sexuality, these hints of prodigality and redundancy in the way the whole thing works might cause us to worry about whether he was, after all, in full rational control of it. But if God made us for joy... ?

The odd thing is that this sense of meaning for sexuality beyond biological reproduction is the one foremost in the biblical use of sexual metaphors for God's relation to humanity.

God as the husband of the land is a familiar enough trope. but Hosea's projection of the husband-and-wife story on to the history of Israel deliberately subverts the God-and-the-land cliches of Near Eastern cults: God is not the potent male sower of seed but the tormented lover, and the gift of the land's fertility is conditional upon the hurts of unfaithfulness and rejection being healed.

The imagery remains strongly patriarchal, unsurprisingly, but its content and direction are surprising. Hosea is commanded to love his wife "as I, the LORD, love the Israelites" (3.1) - persistently, without immediate return, exposing himself to humiliation. What seems to be the prophet's own discovery of a kind of sexual tragedy enable, a startling and poignant reimagining of what it means for God to be united, not with a land alone, but with a people, themselves vulnerable and changeable. God is at the mercy of the perceptions of an uncontrolled partner.

John Boswell, in his Michael Harding Address (*Rediscovering Gay History*, GCM 1982), made a closely related observation: "Love in the Old Testament is too idealised in terms of sexual attraction (rather than procreation). Samuel's father says to his wife-who is sterile and heartbroken because she does not produce children - , Am I not more to you than ten children? " And he goes on to note that the same holds for the New Testament, which "is notably nonbiological in its emphasis" (p 13): Jesus and Paul equally discuss marriage without using procreation as a rational or functional justification. Paul's strong words in I Cor. 7.4 about partners in marriage surrendering the individual "Ownership" of their bodies carry a more remarkable revaluation of sexuality than anything else in the Christian Scriptures. And the use of marital imagery for Christ and the Church in Eph. 5, for all its blatant assumption of male authority, still insists on the relational and personally creative element in the metaphor ("In loving his wife a man loves himself. For no one ever hated his own body" - 5.28-29).

In other words, if we are looking for a sexual ethic that can be seriously informed by our Bible, there is a good deal to steer us away from assuming that reproductive sex is a norm, however important and theologically significant it may be. When looking for a language that will be resourceful enough to speak of the complex and costly faithfulness between God and God's people, what several of the biblical writers turn to is sexuality understood very much in terms of the process of "entering the body's grace". If we are afraid of facing the reality of same-sex love because it compels us to think through the processes of bodily desire and delight in their own right, perhaps we ought to be more cautious about appealing to Scripture as legitimating only procreative heterosexuality.

In fact, of course, in a church which accepts the legitimacy of contraception, the absolute condemnation of same-sex relations of intimacy must rely either on an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous texts, or on a problematic and non-scriptural theory about natural complementarity, applied narrowly and crudely to physical differentiation without regard to psychological structures. I suspect that a fuller exploration of the sexual metaphors of the Bible will have more to teach us about a theology and ethics of sexual desire than will the flat citation of isolated texts; and I hope other theologians will find this worth following up more fully than I can do here.

A theology of the body's grace which can do justice to the experience, the pain and the variety, of concrete sexual discovery is not, I believe, a marginal eccentricity in the doctrinal spectrum. It depends heavily on believing in a certain sort of God - the trinitarian creator and saviour of the world - and it draws in a great many themes in the Christian understanding of humanity, helping us to a better critical grasp of the nature and the dangers of corporate human living.

It is surely time to give time to this, especially when so much public Christian comment on these matters is not only non-theological but positively anti-theological. But for now let me close with some words from a non Christian writer who has managed to say more about true theology than most so-called professionals like myself.

I know no better account of the body's grace, and of its precariousness.

It is perception above all which will free us from tragedy. Not the perception of illusion or of a fantasy that would deny the power of fate and nature. But perception wedded to matter itself, a knowledge that comes to us from the sense of the body, a wisdom born of wholeness of mind and body come together in the heart. The heart dies in us. This is the self we have lost, the self we daily sacrifice (Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence Culture's Revenge Against Nature*, London 1981, p 154).

Rowan Williams. 1989. Archbishop of Canterbury 2002

A History and Theology of Sexuality

Diocese of Toronto - Same Sex Consultation

The Rev. Canon Eric B. Beresford

I have been asked to offer a brief reflection on the history and theology of sexuality. I need to begin with a caveat. Although I will draw on insights from across the history of Judeo-Christian thought, we need to acknowledge at the very beginning that the concept of sexuality is one that is foreign to most of that tradition. Although the bible has a lot to say about sexual love, desire, and behaviour, the idea that sexual desire and behaviour might be a pervasive element of our personalities, affecting many aspects of our lives that are not overtly sexual, can be traced back no further than the latter part of the 18c. At that time psychologists began to develop understandings of psychosexual development and its impact on our general health and well-being. This is one of the realities that makes conversations in this area so very difficult. As Christians we can surrender neither our modern context - with its understandings of the self - nor our commitment to the scriptures as the witness to who we are in the midst of God's saving purposes and as the starting point for our reflections on who we are called to be, and what we are called to become. Yet it is not entirely clear how we are to relate the two.

The other factor that makes our task difficult today is that the topic is vast. As we read the scriptures and examine the writings of great theologians we find a range of attitudes to sex and sexual relationships. While I think there are some clear concerns emerging from the scriptural witness, even there, the attitudes are complex. I cannot hope to cover all the territory that might usefully be covered along the journey that is our developing understanding of human sexuality. What I shall give in this brief summary will be more like a series of postcards highlighting what I take to be striking moments along the way.

So let me start at the beginning of that journey with Genesis 1 and 2. One of the difficulties in handling these texts comes from their relationship to each other. Most scholars now agree that Genesis 2 is older than Genesis 1. However, in the practice of reading closely related passages of scripture that stand in tension, as these do, it was common to see the passage placed second as providing commentary, corrective or at least a questioning dialogue with the first. In this way Genesis 2 would be read as providing commentary on the affirmations about human sexuality in Genesis 1.

In Genesis 1 the creation of human beings takes place in a single act on the sixth day.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:27)

Some scholars have taken this passage to mean that human beings reflect the image of God in their maleness and femaleness taken together, as if man without woman or woman without man is an only incomplete, partial image of the divine. However, most scholars now see this as an over-reading not justified by the text. Rather the affirmation is that both male and female reflect the image of God completely and perfectly as male and female. This is one point of disagreement between Patrick Yu and myself, because Patrick links the image of God much more closely to the relatedness of male and female than is justified by this passage. The emphasis on procreation however is supported here; because the passage goes on to speak of the relationship between men and women in terms of procreation.

However, Genesis 2 takes a rather different route. It is a story rich in image and symbolism and the part that interests us begins with the first negative judgment on creation "It is not good that the man should be alone." Actually the Hebrew word behind this passage (Adam) should not really be translated as man (I sh). Literally it means creature of the dust (earthling). "It is not good that the earthling should be alone" What follows is an extraordinary story of the search for a fitting companion for Adam, "but for the earthling

there was not found a helper as his partner." So God creates Eve as "bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh" The writer concludes

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

The basic thrust of this story is obviously a little different. Sexuality is now understood not in terms of procreation, but in terms of the search for a fitting companion and in terms of the human need for intimacy. Of course, there are problems. By describing Eve as a helper, the passage introduces a note of hierarchy and this is strengthened even further in the account of the fall. There the curse of Eve includes the prophecy that, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

Even in this brief account I have spent more time on the Genesis passages than I will be able to spend elsewhere. I have done that because I think we see here some of the key themes and also some of the ambivalences in the Christian tradition's approach to sexuality. On the one hand it is embedded in the social and biological importance of procreation, it is built on an understanding of the created order of things. It also gestures towards an intimacy that was not obviously the quality of all the sexual relationships we see in scripture. It is difficult to understand what sort of intimacy Solomon might have shared with all of his wives! At the same time there is a note of hierarchy. Women are subordinate to men. Some have taken these passages to imply that this is based on differences in the creation of men and women, that they are essentially different, not just biologically but in character and quality. This claim is now widely challenged. We have begun to understand that many of the differences between men and women that we took to be "natural" are in fact the products of social conditioning. What is more troubling is that the differences indicated in Genesis link back to a long line of thinking about women as temptress and seducer and as therefore inherently dangerous. In the scriptures Woman was also a source of impurity especially around menstruation and childbirth. At menstruation women were separated from the wider community and isolated

within the menstrual tent. There is a negativity here that will be emphasised later in the tradition both to support patriarchy – the domination of women by men - and also to support the growth of celibacy and a distrustful attitude to sexual desire in general.

Later, in early Christianity, we see another source of negativity emerging, namely dualism. Dualism sees the spiritual and the physical as separate and distinct. More than that it sees the spiritual as pure, good, and worthy, and the physical as being at best a distraction from the spiritual and at worst being intrinsically evil. The most extreme expressions of these views can be found in certain sects such as Manichaeism. The Manichees are important because St. Augustine, one of the most influential and formative figures of the early church was involved with Manichaeism before his conversion to Christianity and it is often suggested that his rather negative remarks about sexual desire come from this element of his background combined with his own sexual history. When Augustine was 18 he took a concubine, a common arrangement in his day, accepted even by Christians at the time. Yet Augustine seems to have had a somewhat ambivalent attitude to this relationship as we see in his famous prayer, "Lord, give me chastity, and continence, *but not now.*" After 12 years together, and one child, Augustine's mother arranged for him to become engaged to the daughter of a wealthy Milanese Catholic family. The concubine was returned to Africa. We are not told what happened to her. Augustine however feeling bruised by her departure, Augustine took a stopgap measure; he took a mistress. This whole experience left him deeply uncomfortable. Augustine became, and remained deeply suspicious of sexual desire. To quote Peter Brown

In mankind's present state, the sexual drive was a disruptive force. Augustine never found a way, any more than did any of his Christian contemporaries, of articulating the possibility that sexual pleasure might, in itself, enrich the relations between husband and wife.

Brown's point is particularly helpful in reminding us that Augustine's attitudes were not unique, indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that Augustine was far more moderate and compassionate in his attitudes to

sexuality than either Jerome or Ambrose or any of the other great figures of the church of his day. The other thing that is important to notice here is that Augustine is inevitably caught up in the debates of his surrounding culture, as we all are. There is no *pür laine* Christianity – no point or period in which Christians are not responding to the positions of the culture around them – sometimes affirming, sometimes rejecting.

The negativity regarding sexual desire can also be found in the New Testament, think of Paul's suggestion that it is better to marry than to burn, hardly a ringing endorsement of the married state. This negativity has also been carried into our own liturgical traditions. In the prayer book in use up to 1959 the preface to the marriage service speaks of marriage being

Ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

And councils against entering into marriage, “to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding.”

In later Christian thought, sexual relations were treated under the heading of natural law. The early Christian use of natural law theories can be seen as having their roots in two sources. On the one hand a great deal of Hebrew ethical reflection was based around the order of creation. Anything that stood outside that order was confusion, a subversion of God's creative purposes, and was therefore unclean. So, we all know that a fish has gills and scales and swims in water. Eels have gills and swim in water, but no scales, so they are a confusion, and unclean and must not be eaten. Cattle have a cloven hoof and chew the cud, pigs have a cloven hoof, but do not chew the cud, and so they are unclean. There are many attempts to give pseudo-scientific reasons for this order, but Mary Douglas is surely right to see the issue as the control of liminality.¹

Liminality is that experience of being on the edge, being in situations where the usual order of things no longer holds. These situations are disconcerting, confusing, even, perhaps, dangerous. Change in the life of a community is always a liminal experience. That is why we find it uncomfortable, even if we believe it is change for the better. In most societies the liminal moments of human life and development are surrounded by ritual and custom - birth, adolescence and the beginning of

¹ I am drawing from Mary Douglas' book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, NY Routledge 1991, c1966.

menstruation, marriage, sickness and death. In these circumstances the task is to regain control of a situation that has slipped out of control. To find ways of normalising contexts where the usual ways of behaving no longer seem to work. In this context Douglas describes impurity as “dirt out of place”. We can't avoid dirty things completely, but they should be kept in their place. Blood belongs in the body and if it spills out, as in menstruation, it is impure.

In the Christian era this sort of ordering in terms of ritual purity gave way to the categories of Natural Law under the influence of Greek thinkers, particularly Plotinus. Again, the assumption is that we can read the order of the moral life off from the order of creation.

Both of these types of thinking strengthened the link between sexuality and procreation because procreation is the obvious biological purpose and result of sexual activity. Yet is it the only purpose? I have already suggested that it isn't. Is it a necessary purpose? Are all sexual relationships that are not open to procreation inappropriate? If it is then presumably any sexual relationship not open to procreation falls short of the demands of natural law. This would apply not only to homosexual relationships, but also to relationships in which one partner is known to be infertile, relationships entered after the period when procreation is possible, and relationships in which contraceptives are used. It is worth remembering at this point that Anglicans have had a somewhat ambivalent relationship, both to natural law theories, and to the importance of procreation. We see this in the debates around contraception.

People forget that until the 1930's Anglicans were opposed to the use of contraception in all circumstances. The reasons were similar to those that Roman Catholics offered; the use of contraception was a deliberate frustration the natural end and purpose of sex, namely procreation. What changed in the 1930's was that there began to emerge a much more relational approach to sex. This relational approach became more and more central to Anglican understandings so that by Lambeth 1958 we read,

Sexual intercourse is not by any means the only language of earthly love, but it is, in its full and right use, the most intimate and the most revealing. It is a giving and receiving in the unity of two free spirits which is in itself good.... Therefore it is utterly wrong to urge that, unless children are specifically desired, sexual intercourse is of the nature of sin. It is also wrong to say that such intercourse ought not to be engaged in except with the willing intention to procreate Children.

This shift draws our attention to two elements for which we need to turn back into the scriptures and the tradition of the church, namely the evaluation of desire and pleasure, and the importance of intimacy.

First, desire: I have already indicated that there has been a suspicion of the role of sexual desire that has permeated large parts of Christian thinking. For Augustine the ideal was to procreate without the experience of sexual pleasure. For Augustine, sexual pleasure always has the character of sin. This duality continues at some levels even today. Even the recent Church of England Report, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*, which is generally a balanced and helpful document, has an unsettling tendency to oppose procreation to pleasure or personal fulfilment as if these were the only alternatives, or as if personal fulfilment were solely individual, and not relational. At the same time the tradition has some affirmations of sexual love and desire that are wholehearted and frankly erotic. The most obvious example of this is, of course, the Song of Solomon. What this thread of Judeo-Christian thought has had to contend with has been a fear that such erotic desire is too strong, and too dangerous. So it has been repressed or sublimated. The Song of Solomon is displaced from what it so evidently is, an extended poem on the joys of erotic love, to a mystical poem about the souls desire for God. Yet the very success of this displacement shows us why we need to recover the capacity to speak more frankly and appreciatively of the erotic. The very act of displacing desire into mysticism shows its power and capacity for intimacy and relationship. Yet I cannot in the end believe that our longing for God will be undistorted if we are not able to reflect more clearly and affirm more positively the sexual love and desire through which we learn something of that longing.

Yet sexual desire is certainly disruptive. We are here today because for some this desire is not ordered towards members of the opposite sex, but towards members of the same sex. We know little about the reasons for this difference at this time, we do know that it is a difference that is discovered, and not chosen. We need to be aware of some dangers here. To speak of

homosexual relationships as a “lifestyle” suggests that they are chosen, more than that, that they are odd, eccentric, even wilful. Alternatively, the reduction of the ordering of desire to mere “feelings” suggests that they are transitory and easily changeable. Yet there is no evidence that this is true for the vast majority of gay and lesbian people. Further, the experience of a particular ordering of our desires as a given needs to drive us back into the tradition to think afresh about how we are to understand sexual desire.

I have taken some time to point out both the gift and the ambivalence of the traditions we have inherited. The positive affirmation of sexuality, and bodily life is limited by the impacts of patriarchy, dualism, and deep suspicion of the force of sexual desire. Our current learnings are suggesting that the natural order is not as straightforward as either Paul or the writer of Leviticus assumed it to be. If homosexual orientation is a natural given, rather than an eccentric and sinful choice, a wilful rebellion against God and the order of creation, then faithfulness to scripture will require that we carefully re-evaluate how we use the handful of texts that refer, all negatively, to homosexual sexual activity.

Further, if sexual desire turns out not to be primarily about self-gratification, but about the possibility of intimacy. If it is truly, “not good for the earthling to be alone”, then we may need to think again about those arguments that seek to impose the aloneness of celibacy on an entire class of people regardless of their vocation.

Part of the problem here might be understood when we reflect on the reasons for the negative elements of the understandings of sexuality we have been thinking about. In a paradoxical way much of the negativity rests on a recognition of the power and importance of the sexual in human lives, insights that have been born out by developments in modern psychology. However, when we understand sexual desire in terms of intimacy rather than in terms of self-gratification we begin to see that one of the key elements here is vulnerability.

In his remarkable essay, *The Bodies Grace*², Rowan Williams talks about the vulnerability that is part of all sexual relationships. He speaks of the interplay of desire and of profound emotion with the absurd, even comic elements of sexual intimacy, and the very real possibility of making fools of ourselves. The sexual, on Williams account, is liminal. It is an area where the boundaries between self and other may be, for a glorious moment, suspended, as the BAS recalls when it says that, "they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love". It is worth remembering that the Hebrew word to know is also used of sexual intimacy, "Adam knew his wife, and she conceived..." (Genesis 4:1) It is the very intimacy of sexual experience, the vulnerability of the sexual that makes it so difficult to talk about. All too often when we try, what comes out is our own experience of the hurt of vulnerability, or an attempt to shut the conversation down in a narrow legalism. Yet if the purpose of such legalism is to protect us from vulnerability and risk then it also shuts us off from the promise of intimacy that will come at no lesser price.

This account of sexuality does not separate it from the biological, but it does not limit it to one aspect of the biological, namely procreation. It does not deny that some types of relationship will always be wrong and immoral, relationships that are manipulative or exploitative, cannot serve the needs of intimacy. We need to learn to make good judgments, but we will not do that by continuing to be suspicious of the role of desire.

Sexuality is an articulation of the need to reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others. As such it connects with God's intention that human beings find their authentic fulfilment, not in isolation, but in relationship. Authentic sexuality is a moment of grace, it is about the possibility of intimate relationship, it is about communion. If we as Christians are to speak constructively about this then we will have to acknowledge the complexity of our own traditions and even their complicity with patterns of relationship that are far from healthy and life giving.

² From C. Hefling, ed. *Ourselves Our Souls and Bodies*, Boston, MA: Cowley Press, 1996.

Stories of Creation From Different Parts of the World

A Canadian First Nations Creation Story

Long ago a great catastrophe caused the world's supporting pillars to collapse and destroy the earth. Two men emerged full-grown from hummocks of earth. They married each other, and one became heavy with child. The other man sang a magic song, which caused the pregnant man's penis to divide, he then became a woman and gave birth to a girl child. The mother and father giants cared for the child who grew large and fiercely loved meat. One night she bit into her parents limbs while they slept. They awoke in horror as she tried to bite them again. They took her in a umiak far out into the deepest sea, where they pushed her into the water. She clung to the side of the boat, so they cut off her fingers. The fingers became whales, seals, and shoals of fish. The giant parents were afraid of their child and they rowed away into the night. The giant girl became the demon girl Sedna, the Great Mother of sea creatures. She causes storms and governs the migrations of her sea creature children.

North American Indian Mythology. Cottie Burland, Hamlyn Publishing, 1965

An African Creation Story

Maori created the first man, Mwuetsi, who became the moon. Maori gave him a ngona horn filled with ngona oil and told him he would live at the bottom of the waters. Mwuetsi objected and said he wished to live on the land. Maori reluctantly agreed, but said Mwuetsi would give up immortality if he did. After a while Mwuetsi complained of loneliness, so Maori sent him a woman, Massassi (the morning star), to keep him company for two years. Each night they slept on opposite sides of a campfire, until one night Mwuetsi jumped over the flame and touched Massassi with a finger he had moistened with the ngona oil. In the morning Massassi was huge, and soon gave birth to plants and trees until the whole earth was covered by them. At the end of two years Maori took Massassi away. Mwuetsi wept for eight years, at which time Maori sent him another woman, Morongo (the evening star), saying that she could stay for two years. On the first night Mwuetsi touched her with his oiled finger, but she said she was different than Massassi, and that they would have to oil their loins and have intercourse. This they did, this night, and every night thereafter. Every morning Morongo gave birth to the animals of creation. Then she gave birth to human boys and girls, who became full-grown by that very same evening. Maori voiced his displeasure with a fierce storm, and told Mwuetsi he was hastening his death with all this procreation. Morongo, ever the temptress, instructed Mwuetsi to build a door to their habitat so that Maori could not see what they were doing. He did this, and again they slept together. Now in the morning Morongo gave birth to violent animals; snakes, scorpions, lions, etc. One night Morongo told Mwuetsi to have intercourse with his daughters, which he did, thereby fathering the human race.

<http://www.mythome.org/creatafr.html>

A Chinese Creation Story

The ferocious God of Thunder was captured by Fuxi's father and imprisoned deep within a mountain cave. No one was allowed to visit him. Fuxi and Nüwa could no longer bear to hear the Thunder God's pitiable entreaties for water, but they dared not bring him any water. Eventually, the two of them shed tears which the god drank out of their cupped hands. The Thunder God was so strengthened by the tears that he burst out of his mountain prison. To repay Fuxi and Nuwa for their part in the rescue, the Thunder God pulled a long canine tooth from his mouth and gave it to them saying: "In three days, mankind will suffer a terrible calamity. You may use this tooth to keep yourselves safe from harm." Having said this, the Thunder God leaped into the sky and disappeared. Three days later, the sky was filled with thunder and lightning. A tremendous storm broke out. Rain fell incessantly and the flood waters rose; huge waves swept across the earth and the entire human race was destroyed. As the flood began, the Thunder God's tooth transformed itself into a boat. Safe aboard this vessel, Fuxi and his sister rode the waves and drifted with the tides. Only when the waters had subsided did Fuxi and Nuwa realise that they alone had survived the desolation. When they had grown into adults, Fuxi and Nuwa became husband and wife in order to bear descendants and establish a new human race.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/chinacreation.html>

A South Pacific Creation story

The Maori creation myth tells how heaven and earth were once joined as Ranginui, the Sky Father, and Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother, lay together in a tight embrace. They had many children who lived in the darkness between them. The children wished to live in the light and so separated their unwilling parents. Ranginui and Papatuanuku continue to grieve for each other to this day. Rangi's tears fall as rain towards Papatuanuku to show how much he loves her. When mist rises from the forests, these are Papa's sighs as the warmth of her body yearns for him and continues to nurture mankind. In Maori mythology the primal couple Rangi and Papa (or Ranginui and Papatuanuku) appear in a creation myth explaining the origin of the world.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/maoricreation.html>

**Created in the Image and Likeness of God:
How we live out our creation as embodied, physical beings.**

Anglican History and Tradition.

Until the 20th century, Anglican history and tradition related to the teaching (or not!) of how we are to regard ourselves as physical beings was very much in line with that of the rest of the Christian Church. Our life together in the greater family of the church was an extension of our life together in the family of kinship and blood-ties.

Marriage was a life-long commitment and there were strict rules as to who one could or could not marry (see ‘Table of Kinship and Affinity’ BCP). A contract of intent to marry was as significant as the marriage ceremony itself, and Breach of Promise suits were not uncommon in the civil courts when an engagement was broken.

Until the mid-eighteenth century church weddings as we know them were contracted only between couples who were marrying for reasons of dynasty, property or advancement. The general population did not undergo a church ceremony but received a blessing on their union from the parish priest. Such a blessing was usually conferred in the church porch rather than in the church itself.

Sex before marriage was a sin, but until the nineteenth century it was not uncommon, particularly in rural communities, for betrothed couples to engage in sex without condemnation. A betrothal was as significant as a marriage, as has been stated previously.

Chastity was a virtue, not only in the Anglican tradition but in most cultures, in all ages. It was, moreover, vitally important that the mother of future kings or aristocrats should be a virgin, to ensure that the bloodlines remained ‘pure’. It is interesting, however, to note that chastity was primarily regarded as a virtue among women. Men were granted more latitude! Chastity meant more than merely maintaining one’s virgin state; it meant full abstention from all sexual activity, including masturbation.

Contraception was neither expressly forbidden nor expressly approved. However, the general understanding was that one should do nothing to prevent the gift of children.

Abortion has not always been frowned upon by the church and church teachings on the subject have varied widely. Not even the Roman Catholic Church has always condemned abortion.

Birth was primarily a female concern. Until the late 18th century men were not involved in the birth process. Midwives, and the mothers and sisters of the new mother were in attendance and delivered and cared for the newborn. Men, as obstetricians, were not known until the nineteenth century. Birth took place in the home, not in a hospital, and the coming-into-the-world was perceived as matter-of-factly as death: it was part of a natural cycle.

Children were “to be seen and not heard”, and were treated as possessions of their parents, both by tradition and under law.

Same-sex relationships were abjured and generations of homosexuals spent their lives in the proverbial closet, suffering because of “the love that dared not speak its name”.

Divorce was anathema. Until the late 1960s the Anglican Church of Canada did not permit the re-marriage of divorced persons in the church. Even today, a couple seeking

marriage in the church must have the permission of the Diocesan Bishop and/or a Marriage Tribunal if one or both parties are divorced.

Extended family relationships were closer in bygone generations, since society was less mobile. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were very much a part of one's life. Even as late as the 1950s it was not unusual for grandparents, parents, children and unmarried aunts and uncles to live in the same house. Nuclear families – that is, parents and children living apart from extended family – are primarily a post-World War II phenomenon.

Death, when it came, was perceived as a natural event. The end of one's physical life was not seen as or understood to be traumatic.

The Role of Culture in Religious Teaching.

The upheavals of the 20th century, with its scientific, technological, medical, psychological, and sociological changes, particularly with reference to the status of women and children, has thrown much of church teaching into question. Can we, as faithful people of God, reject these advances and cling to the past teachings of the church or do we need to review and re-think our interpretation of scripture in the light of social and cultural change? There are strands of the Christian church which negate science, technology, medical and psychological knowledge as being somehow apart from things of the spirit, but as Anglicans we have a tradition of viewing the world around us using scripture, reason and tradition to inform us and it is incumbent upon us to continue that process of seeking God in the world in which we live, and God's purpose for the world, for all creation and for ourselves as embodied, physical beings, created in the image and likeness of our God.

Other Cultures and Traditions

Much of the teaching of the church on sexuality have had more to do with social and cultural mores than with the teachings of Jesus or the working of the Holy Spirit. The writer of Timothy, for instance, was reiterating his society's view of women in I Timothy 2:8-15, a view of women which was shared by Greeks and Romans, as well as Jews and Christians of that day and age. In short, that passage is, in essence, a cultural rather than a spiritual teaching. Women were chattels, possessions, of their families – the families into which they were born and later the families into which they married. Indeed, under Jewish law, women were non-persons and could not bear witness in court cases. Children, too, were not perceived as persons in their own right.

Celibacy was viewed by Jews as unnatural. A man or woman who chose not to marry was guilty of selfishness! Marriage and the procreation of children was expected in Jewish society leading up to and during Jesus' time. Imagine the reaction St. Paul got in his own time and place, then, when he wrote "that it is better to marry than to burn" with its implication that living a life of celibacy was infinitely superior than subjecting oneself to the physical intimacy of marriage.

As Christians we have been directly influenced by scripture, of course, and even today there are strands of the Christian church which do not allow women and children a full role in the life of faith based on scriptural directives (qv I Timothy 2:8-15). In the more

conservative parts of the church universal there dress codes, prescribed roles for men, women, youth and children, and rules about food and behaviour, all based on scripture.

As Canadians we share a country populated for the most part by immigrants (people of aboriginal descent, including Métis, account for 2% of the population), regardless of when that immigration occurred. Moving from one country to another does not mean that we leave behind all cultural influences. In recent years, immigration from Asia and Africa has greatly surpassed that of immigration from Europe and in heavily-populated areas like southern Ontario and the lower mainland in British Columbia the cultural influences of immigration are more obvious than in, say, rural Manitoba or Newfoundland and Labrador.

Traditional Aboriginal Views of Sexuality

Prior to contact with Europeans, the aboriginal inhabitants of Canada lived as members of some fifty different nations (with up to 150 more nations south of what is now the Canada-US border), each with its own language, traditions, religion and culture. While there may have been similarities in all these areas, they were distinct from one another. However, some attitudes with regard to sexuality prevailed across these diverse cultures. Homosexuality was not condemned in any of the aboriginal cultures; indeed, homosexual people were generally accorded the same status as shamans. Sexual relations were perceived as natural and were not carried on out of sight of the children. There were no separate bedrooms in lodges, tipis or hogans! The body was not considered something shameful and something necessarily to be covered up. The original inhabitants of North America wore clothing only as protection against the elements or as a symbol of status.

Aboriginal cultures, not having written languages, passed on traditions, religious and medical lore, and social mores by example and in many of the aboriginal nations it was the grandparents who taught the children the culture of their society. One of the most harmful and lasting effects of the Residential Schools is the loss of the traditional role of the grandparent as teacher of the young.

In his book, 'American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World', David Stannard documents the negative effect that the European subjugation of North American native peoples has had on their societies and makes no bones about laying much of the decline of aboriginal culture on the doorstep of the Church!

Other cultural voices

Since the 1960s Canada's population has grown by about one-third and much of that growth is due to an influx of immigrants from Asia and Africa. Consequently, Hindu temples and Islamic mosques are becoming as much a part of the Canadian city landscape as churches and cathedrals. One can meet Buddhist monks on the streets of Toronto and the subject of whether or not Muslim girls should be able to wear hijabs to soccer practice and young Sikh men should wear the kirpan to school have been subjects of hot debate across the country. Who can forget the whoop-de-doo that accompanied the Royal Canadian Legion's attempt to ban turbans from their club rooms on the west coast? Or

the shockwaves that rippled through the Anglican Communion following the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent comments about Sharia Law?

Each of these groups bring to the Canadian patchwork centuries of tradition and culture. In traditional Hinduism young men and women do not marry as they choose, but marry partners chosen for them by their parents. In some Moslem traditions, women do not leave their homes unless they are covered from head to foot in a burqa. In some African cultures, as well as in Islam, polygamy is permitted and is not perceived as unnatural in any way.

Increasingly, too, our Canadian society is becoming more secular. Growing numbers of Canadians are becoming lapsed Christians (or Moslems or Hindus, etc) and seeking to enlarge their spiritual dimension outside the confines of organized religion.

Some questions for consideration

How do we as Anglicans in this multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith landscape establish for ourselves holistic and realistic understandings of human sexuality, using our three-legged stool of scripture as seen through the lens of reason and tradition? Perhaps we can begin by considering these questions:

- Who is responsible for teaching an understanding of sexuality to our children? Is it a family matter? Should the church be doing a better job? Is it the role of the schools?
- Why, for the most part, are we hesitant to acknowledge our own sexuality?
- When and why did sex become a secret, behind-closed-doors activity?
- Do I understand the difference between Anglican doctrine and religious tradition when it comes to the roles of men, women and children in our society?
- Who determines moral codes? Is it an individual responsibility, a matter of law or church teaching?
- Should we as 21st century Canadians uphold 1st century teachings about human sexuality, given the development of psychological, medical and sociological change?

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