

*I've been told: "Your view is not Biblical", but I think it's deeply Biblical.'*

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I grew up in a North London family, who just had an acceptance of people as they are. My parents were brilliant at including all sorts of people, some of whom were, even to a young person, quite complex and difficult. They had a strong sense of neighbourliness and wouldn't have excluded anyone on the grounds of gender, race, age, and so on. I think my views come from their acceptance of everybody. Consider how offensive racism and sexism are – everybody's clear about that now. As a society we've been ambivalent about sexual orientation, but we've reached a point in Britain where in law we've almost resolved the matter and that feels to me a very good thing. It's a matter of justice. My views begin with my family, but are also deeply embedded in my faith.

Thinking back to my own journey, when I trained for ministry in the 1970s, there was a visible gay minority among us. In society and in the Church, people were pretty discrete and sexuality wasn't as talked about as it is now. As a curate, I had a colleague who was gay and in a relationship; he was open about who he was and who he lived with, and he was warmly accepted by our East London parish. I thought he and his partner lived a model life really, and I was struck by the 'ordinariness' of their relationship. I don't mean that disparagingly – what I mean is they were just getting on with life.

A change happened in the late 80s and 90s, when some of the clergy applying to work with me started to say, 'There's something I want you to know about me, because it's really important in terms of who I am. I'm fed up with being dishonest and I only want to do this job if I can be honest at least with you about this'. These were people tired of being unable to be fully open about themselves.

When an openly gay former colleague retired about 10 years ago, he held a farewell event in church. Not everybody there was gay by any means, but this was a group of people who could cope with difference; they could cope with people who were a bit edgy and they were good at making connections between the inside and the outside of Church. The occasion coped with the breadth and width of humanity as we really are, rather than as we might pretend to be. I recall sitting there in floods of tears, knowing that these were people I wanted to be with.

There was a visible minority of LGBT people in my last London parish. Some of them were fairly open about who they were, and then other people you'd have not the slightest idea about their sexual orientation. It's not the first thing people say about themselves when they come into a room, but a great variety of humanity exists.

I think it's the spectrum of sexuality that some people struggle with. Some Christians think: 'It would be so much better if you were straight, just choose to go that way. It'll be better for you and better for us'. We all like neatness and tidiness don't we? And we like people who are like us. But you can't choose to be gay or straight, you just are. So actually it's unkind to say to someone, 'Sorry, but you either must be celibate or you must behave as a heterosexual'. It is unnatural for that person. And God made us 'male and female', but what happens to that proportion of people who are intersex, who are indeterminately male or female? Whatever the small percentage, they are an enormous number of people.

I've been told: 'Your view is not Biblical', but I think it's deeply Biblical. I don't think you can decide the issue based on a few Biblical texts that mention homosexuality. They are not talking about faithful, loving relationships, but about promiscuity, adultery, exploitation, idolatry and that's different. They don't address the same-sex relationships of women, or that part of the gay community that is serious about faith. So for me, they don't produce knock-down arguments. It's more about the patterning of our Christian life.

One of my roles as Bishop is to keep the doors of the Church open and allow the movement in and out of people who enter and don't necessarily stay, but need feeding. There seems to me a pattern in the Gospels that it's the outsider who often teaches us the meaning of what we thought was an insider's story, and that's been my experience of Christian life. In 'The Good Samaritan', it's the outsider who teaches us the real meaning of the law. To exclude LGBT people as outsiders therefore damages the Church. The person different to you can be the person who brings the gift you most need. It's interesting that when Jesus visited Jerusalem he stayed in Bethany, which possibly means 'House of the Poor'. It's where his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived, it was outside the main city and was the closest that lepers could stay to Jerusalem. There's a pattern of who Jesus is, who he kept company with, where he was at home.

Archbishop Justin Welby shows us it's possible to disagree over something, but still recognise the goodness in each other's view; where I can see the Christ in you and the integrity of your faith and vice versa – a way of 'good disagreement'. The Church has a history of division and a history of the ways in which we've been able to handle difference creatively. This issue shouldn't be one that divides us. In Christ we should be able to find a deeper reality. I think that's what we'd all look for.