



## **Living in Love and Faith**

**a response from the Parish of Wargrave with Knowl Hill**

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) refers to a range of written and video material, including a 5-session course, produced by the Church of England to help churches engage with the issues of same sex marriage, partnership, gender and sexuality.

Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) are the prayers recommended by some Bishops, including those in the Oxford Diocese, for use in blessing people in same sex partnerships.

John Cook gave us clear teaching from a conservative position which was also expressed by Richard Eves, from the pulpit and in the parish magazine. Two years ago we held a forum led by Dr Andrew Goddard where we learnt about some of the issues facing worshippers concerning same sex partnership, reflecting the biblical basis and pastoral considerations. Subsequently, there has been sporadic discussion in some house groups but no wider involvement of the Church.

When Sue and I met the local hierarchy of the Church of England to consider the process for the Interregnum and the appointment of a new vicar, we were advised we should include in our parish profile the position of the parish concerning LLF, to help potential vicars understand our view point. The Archdeacon then spoke at a recent PCC meeting to suggest we either decide to clarify the range of opinion during the interregnum or defer the process, making it clear we would want our new vicar to take us on this journey.

At the latest PCC meeting we discussed these options and would like to determine your views before a new vicar arrives. We have produced from within the Parish 3 articles, the first giving the historical background of the journey undertaken by the Church of England over the last 60 years to reach this point, followed by articles for and against the blessing of same sex partnerships. After reading, considering, and praying, we then invite all the members of our church on the Electoral Roll to take part in a survey, to demonstrate the range of opinion within our parish. The closing date for submissions will be Wednesday 16th October.

The feedback that we have received while drawing up the priorities for the Parish Profile has demonstrated that there are strongly held views on both sides on this matter. The PCC is not of one mind over LLF and is aware of the potential hurt and upset caused by this issue. We pray that the arguments and distress will be minimised by giving people the opportunity to reflect on this document in a time of prayer and quiet at home, and we are grateful that Revd Steve Turville after his return from Japan has offered to talk and pray at any time with individuals.

We are very much indebted for the time and effort which Revd Steve Turville, and Jubi and Annie da Silva, have spent to produce these articles. We feel it is particularly valuable to us as a congregation that the differing positions are explained by people we know and trust.

We are also grateful for the counsel of the PCC as to how we should proceed, and the work of The Parish Office Team and Andy Ferguson's team at PursuitNHA for their support. As we are aware of the strength of feeling on this issue, and also the need for everyone to be reassured that these responses to be handled in a confidential way, the PCC has decided on what it feels is the most robust method for handling and analysing your responses. We are also grateful for Helen Vonka for her work maintaining the Electoral Roll of the Parish.

**Mark Puddy and Sue Witney**  
Churchwardens

## **Contents**

[Sexuality timeline in the Church of England by The Church of England](#)

[Why I support Prayers of Blessing for same sex couples by Revd Steve Turville](#)

[A faulty umbrella & the Bible: Why PLF is not good news by Jubi da Silva](#)

[The Survey](#)



## **Sexuality timeline in the Church of England**

*(Adapted from a fact sheet produced by Religion Media Centre, 'an independent, impartial body helping journalists and other media professionals cover world religion and beliefs.')*

The Church of England is locked in an increasingly divisive internal debate over LGBTQ+ issues and same-sex marriage. This is the culmination of decades of wrangling and discussion, which began more than half a century ago.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Church of England published a report on sexuality, marriage and LGBTQ+ issues. **Living in Love and Faith (LLF)** is the fruit of three years' work by committees of bishops, clergy, historians, theologians, scientists and others, including representatives from the LGBTQ+ community.

It did not propose any change in the church's official doctrines, but instead offered resources summarising the latest thinking on how the Bible, church tradition, and society understands flashpoints such as gay marriage or transgender rights. **Living in Love and Faith** marks the latest in a decades-long struggle within the CofE to decide how to respond to the rapidly changing social climate and pastoral needs around sexuality.

### 1950s and 1960s

During the prolonged public debates about homosexuality, the church and its senior bishops, including Michael Ramsay, then Archbishop of Canterbury, supported the eventually successful efforts to decriminalise sex between consenting men, finally secured in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. The church's doctrine remained unchanged : sex was permissible only between one man and one woman in a lifelong marriage.

### 1970s

**1973** Archbishop of Canterbury Donald Coggan tells BBC radio many of his clergy are homosexuals. "We must treat them with great sympathy and understanding," he said.

**1979** A report, *Homosexual Relationships: A contribution for discussion* (sometimes called the Gloucester Report after the bishop who led the working party) was prepared for the General Synod. It delved deeply and mostly sympathetically into the research around homosexuality as well as discussing the Bible's approach, but was seen at the time as controversial and largely ignored by the wider church.

### 1980s

**1987** In the midst of growing public debate about homosexuality, the General Synod passed a controversial private member's motion, known as the Highton Motion after its evangelical sponsor, which stated "homosexual genital acts fall short of [God's] ideal and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion".

**1988** The once-a-decade Lambeth Conference of every Anglican bishop across the globe is held. It exposed the deep divisions within the Anglican Communion during discussions about gay issues. In its official report, it acknowledged the question remained "unresolved" and urged more scientific, psychological and theological study. "We continue to encourage dialogue with, and pastoral concern for, persons of homosexual orientation within the Family of Christ," it concluded.

**1989** Another report on homosexuality, the Osborne Report (requested by the bishops in 1986), was completed. This for the first time included the testimony of gay people themselves.

## **1990s**

**1991** The House of Bishops published *Issues in Human Sexuality*, a landmark report that examined in detail the entire debate. It worked through the Bible and the Christian tradition on gender, marriage and sex, the origins of homosexuality, homophobia, and how to respond to gay Christians already in the church. It concluded:

- Homosexuality is not an equal alternative to heterosexuality in the created order.
- Homosexual people are as valuable to God as any other.
- Gay Christians who choose to live celibate lives should be praised and respected.
- While the church cannot approve of gay Christians who choose to be in sexually active relationships, it should continue to offer friendship and understanding to them.
- However, this exception should not be extended to clergy, who “cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active” gay relationships.
- This does not mean bishops should rigorously try to investigate and expose any of their clergy who are in gay relationships.

**1998** The Lambeth Conference met in Kent and was gripped by debate over sexuality. Eventually the bishops voted through a resolution, known as Lambeth I.10, which:

- Upheld marriage as between one man and one woman.
- Committed the bishops to listen to gay Christians and assured them they are loved by God.
- Rejected homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture.
- Condemned irrational fear of homosexuals.
- Opposed same-sex unions or any kind of blessing of them.

**1998** Shortly afterwards about 150 bishops, including eight primates (chief archbishop of each province), issued their own open letter to the LGBTQ+ community which pledged to work for their “full inclusion” in the life of the church. The bishops were overwhelmingly from western churches, mostly the United States, the UK, Canada and Australia.

## **2000s**

**2002** The Diocese of New Westminster in Canada (centred on the city of Vancouver) became the first Anglican diocese in the world to offer services to bless same-sex unions. This was the first spark for a fierce civil war within the Anglican Communion over the issue.

**2003** In May, Jeffrey John, a gay priest in a long-term relationship with another cleric, was announced as the next Bishop of Reading, within the Diocese of Oxford. There was a

backlash from conservatives, especially from overseas where some vowed to cut ties with the Church of England if the appointment went ahead. In an attempt to protect the unity of the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams persuaded John to withdraw from the post.

**2003** Shortly afterwards in August, the Diocese of New Hampshire in the United States chose Gene Robinson, who was openly gay and living with his partner, as its next bishop. This time the appointment did go ahead, despite another backlash. A large number of conservatives decided to split from the American church and start their own breakaway Anglican denomination, uniting with like-minded Canadians and some other smaller groups to form the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). Over time more conservative Anglicans in places such as Africa and Australia built formal links and even consecrated “missionary bishops” within these breakaway churches.

**2003** In October, Williams called all the primates from across the Anglican Communion to a meeting at Lambeth Palace to discuss the developments in Canada and the United States. They issued a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to staying together, but said the actions by New Westminster and New Hampshire had “threatened the unity of our own communion ... in a world already confused in areas of sexuality, morality and theology”. The statement also said the Lambeth I.10 resolution from 1998 had “moral force and commands the respect of the communion as its present position on these issues”.

**2003** In November, the bishops of the Church of England released *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, which proposed no changes to doctrine on sexuality but did set out the variety of views within the church on the controversy. The document was framed as a study guide to help Anglicans “think through different aspects of gay, lesbian and transsexual relationships”.

**2004** A commission asked by the primates to explore the fractures within the Anglican Communion reported back. Known as the Windsor Report, the document recommended:

- The American Episcopal Church should apologise for choosing Robinson as a bishop.
- Those who consecrated him should “consider in all conscience whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions in the Anglican Communion”.
- The Episcopal Church must not appoint any other bishops in same-sex partnerships.
- All Anglican bishops worldwide should refrain from approving services for publicly blessing same-sex unions.
- Bishops in Canada and America who have authorised such rites should apologise and withdraw from taking part in wider communion work.

The Windsor Report was much criticised by liberal Anglicans.

**2005** Following the creation of civil partnerships (most of the bishops in the House of Lords voted for the legislation), the bishops in the Church of England released a statement detailing their continued belief that sex and marriage were permissible only between one man and one woman. The church would not create a service to bless civil partnerships, but clergy could respond individually with prayers for a partnership if they deemed it to be within the church's teaching (i.e. was celibate). Any priest wishing to enter into a civil partnership themselves had to promise their bishop they would remain celibate. Lay Christians in civil partnerships would not have to promise the same before being baptised, confirmed or given communion.

**2008** The rift in the global Anglican Communion deepened after a conference was held in Jerusalem by dozens of conservative bishops and Archbishops, mostly from the global south. Called Global Anglican Future Conference, the conference generated a follow up movement of conservative Anglicans known as GAFCON which supported and promoted breakaway conservative Anglican churches in the more liberal countries.

**2008** Shortly after Gafcon Jerusalem, the next Lambeth Conference was held in England. Archbishop Williams decided not to invite Gene Robinson, largely over fears that if he attended, many of the Gafcon bishops would boycott the meeting. Some prominent and senior conservatives still refused to attend because other American Episcopal bishops were present.

## **2010s**

**2013** Yet another report commissioned by the House of Bishops on sexuality is published. The Pilling Report once again explored issues around sex, marriage and homophobia but did not represent any new policy or doctrine by the church. Instead, it recommended clergy should be allowed to offer public services to "mark" same-sex relationships. It said the CofE's current teaching was "deeply off-putting" to non-believers and called for several years of "facilitated conversations" between both sides in the church to discern a way forward.

**2014 Same-sex marriage is legalised in England.** The law included a provision which made it illegal for the Church of England to opt in to marry same-sex couples, unlike other denominations. It also had protections to stop clergy who declined to marry a gay couple from being sued for discrimination.

**2014-16** About 700 clergy and laypeople across the CofE took part in the "shared conversations" called for by the Pilling Report. These saw small groups from each diocese spend a weekend at a time at a hotel or conference centre being led through discussions on sexuality by professional facilitators to understand better each side's position. The General Synod held its own version of this in 2016 too.

**2015** The Episcopal Church in the US became the first Anglican Church in the world to permit gay marriage formally.

**2016** The Bishop of Grantham, Nicholas Chamberlain, became the first English bishop to come out openly as gay. He said he was living with his partner in a celibate relationship, in line with the church's teaching.

**2017** Debates between the conservative and liberal wings of the church continued at the next July synod meeting. The affirming-LGBTQ+ group secured passage of two motions: one condemning "conversion therapy" for gay people, and another calling for a special liturgy to mark gender transition.

**2019** It was announced gay bishops would be invited to the next Lambeth Conference, to be held in the summer of 2020, but their spouses and partners would not be, unlike the spouses of straight bishops. This was due to fears their presence would cause a widespread boycott by conservatives.

**2020** After a delay caused by the coronavirus pandemic, **Living in Love and Faith** was finally published in November, just before the next meeting of the General Synod. Although it did not present any recommendations on policy, it is expected to inspire the next round of debate on the CofE's teaching on sexuality. Church of England churches were encouraged to undertake a short course of study based on the Living in Love and Faith materials during 2021 and 2022

**2022** April: Bishops announce new proposals and the setting up of a working group to explore gender identity and transition

**2022** May: Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) produced a short film *How Important Are Our Differences?* saying Christians cannot simply agree to disagree on issues of sexuality because they are of eternal significance. This was one of a series of five films called 'God's Beautiful Story' charting the depth of theological division.

**2022** August: Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, addresses the Lambeth Conference of global Anglican bishops stating the obvious, that the Communion is deeply divided over same sex issues. His speech was seen as a watershed moment, accepting the validity of both sides within the Communion. Resolution I:10 from 1998, which bans same-sex marriage, remains in place

**2022** September: Document published summarising feedback on Living in Love and Faith from consultations with church members. This starts the final stage of the process as bishops discuss the results

**2022** November: House of Bishops discuss the LLF consultation to start deciding their response

**2022** November: Dr Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford, published 'Together in Love and Faith' sharing his personal journey from parish ministry in Yorkshire to serving as bishop in the Diocese of Oxford, and recounting poignant conversations with the LGBTQ+ community and conservative Christian groups. Bishop Steven called for an end to the ban on same sex marriage, as did the Bishops of Worcester and Dudley shortly afterwards.



**2023** January: Bishops produce proposals for the General Synod suggesting same sex marriage should continue to be banned but blessings for couples will be allowed. This pleases no-one

**2023** February General Synod ‘welcomed’ proposals which would enable same-sex couples to come to church after a civil marriage or civil partnership to give thanks, dedicate their relationship to God and receive God’s blessing

**2023** July: General synod given update on working groups discussing same sex blessings. Over the summer, more consultation would be held with different stakeholders, to listen to “hopes and fears”.

**2023** 9 November: GAFCON ends meeting in Uxbridge offering support to all bishops, clergy and laity who oppose same sex blessings.

- ‘We encourage all orthodox Primates to join us in this stand against those who support a revisionist agenda.
- We encourage Gafcon Provinces to consider withdrawing all links with any English diocese whose bishop supports the proposals
- We also extend the right hand of fellowship to and support all bishops, clergy and laity who oppose these revisionist doctrines and courageously uphold the teaching of Christ on the sanctity of marriage as God has ordained it (Matthew 19:4-6).
- We especially commend those English bishops who have distanced themselves from the egregious recommendations of the House of Bishops.’

**2023** 14/15 November: The General Synod narrowly backs a plan to hold standalone services of blessings for same-sex couples on a trial basis. The close vote showed the synod was deeply divided, passing by just four votes in the House of Laity. Bishops promise further work on whether marriage is doctrine, revised pastoral guidelines for those who disagree and new structures to keep the divided church together.

**2023** 11 December: A letter is written to the bishops from **The Alliance** (an informal network of Anglo-Catholic and evangelical Church of England leaders) requesting a formal legal restructuring of the Church of England. *All signatories are leaders of networks/organisations but sign in their personal capacities, recognising they cannot claim to speak for everyone that they lead.*

**2023:** 12 December: The bishops say Prayers of Blessings can be used from Sunday 17 December

**2024:** 25 January: The bishops of Newcastle and Leicester, leaders of the Living in Love and Faith Process, announce that a “reset” is needed to resolve differences.

The Ephesians Fund is set up by Church of England evangelicals, to make a way for individuals and PCCs to ensure their financial giving only goes to churches that hold to the same beliefs as them (traditional), and not to Dioceses or churches who don’t.

July: The Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) commissioned the first group of 'overseers' (18 men and 2 women) to provide informal oversight to clergy and PCCs who feel a loss of confidence in the spiritual leadership of their bishop(s), and at a separate service, seven men were 'commissioned' (not ordained) as public leaders and for public ministry in training posts in Church of England evangelical churches.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Anglican:** Anglicanism developed from the practices, liturgy, and identity of the Church of England following the English Reformation, in the context of the Protestant Reformation. Adherents of Anglicanism are called Anglicans; they are also called Episcopalians in some countries.

**Anglican Communion:** The Anglican Communion is the third largest Christian communion after the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Formally founded in 1867 in London, the communion has more than 85 million members within the Church of England and other national and regional churches in full communion. The traditional origins of Anglican doctrine are summarised in the Thirty-nine Articles (1571). The archbishop of Canterbury in England acts as a focus of unity, recognised as *primus inter pares* ("first among equals"), but does not exercise authority in Anglican provinces outside of the Church of England.

**CEEC:** The Church of England Evangelical Council is a group that represents evangelicals in the Church of England.

**Church Of England:** The Church of England (C of E) is the established Christian church in England and the Crown Dependencies. The Church of England's doctrinal character today is largely the result of the Elizabethan Settlement, which sought to establish a comprehensive middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Church of England affirms the protestant reformation principle that scripture contains all things necessary to salvation and is the final arbiter in doctrinal matters. The Church of England has, as one of its distinguishing marks, a breadth of opinion from Catholic to Calvinist. This tolerance has allowed Anglicans who emphasise the catholic tradition and others who emphasise the reformed tradition to coexist. The three schools of thought in the Church of England are sometimes called high church (or Anglo-Catholic), low church (or evangelical Anglican) and broad church (or liberal).

**Ephesians Fund:** A fund set up by conservative evangelicals to ensure evangelical individuals and churches' financial giving goes to local churches that have signed up to the CEEC basis of faith, and not to Dioceses or churches that have not.

**Evangelical:** Four distinctive aspects of evangelical faith: the necessity of personal conversion to faith in Christ; high regard for biblical authority; the centrality of the saving death and the resurrection of Jesus that offers forgiveness of sins and new life; and sharing the gospel through evangelism and social action.

**The 39 Articles:** The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion (commonly abbreviated as the Thirty-nine Articles), finalised in 1571, are the historically defining statements of doctrines and practices of the Church of England.

**Reformed:** Reformed Christianity, also called Calvinism.

**Episcopal Church:** American Anglicans

**GAFCON:** Formed in 2008 The Gafcon movement is a global group of conservative Anglicans

**General Synod (of The Church Of England):** The General Synod is the governing body of the Church of England meeting several times a year. It is divided into 3 houses – the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity. A majority of two thirds is required in each of the 3 Houses for major changes of doctrine to be passed, which is why the Church moves slowly.

**Lambeth Conference:** the gathering of bishops from the worldwide Anglican communion, which takes place every 10 years, to discuss world and church affairs, and how the Anglican communion might react to them. Agreements are not legally binding.

**LGBTQI+:** the blanket term for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-sexual, queer, intersex, and more.

**Living In Love And Faith (LLF):** the printed and video resources published by the Church of England in 2020 to help churches consider the issue of sexuality, gender, marriage.

**Prayers Of Love And Faith (PLF):** the prayers recommended by Bishops in 2023 for the blessing of people in same-sex civil marriages

**Revisionist:** someone trying to revise the doctrine of the Church of England, particularly in regard to the doctrine of marriage.

**The Alliance:** An alliance of church leaders in the Church of England who oppose the blessing of people in same sex relationships and any revision of the doctrine of marriage.

## **LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES**

Living in Love and Faith. A resource to help explore sexuality, gender, identity, relationships and marriage. A pdf of the 480 page book

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/llf-web-version-full-final.pdf>

LLF Videos (c 30 mins)

Session1 Learning Together

Session 2 Identity

Session 3 Relationships

Session 4 Sexuality

Session 5 Life Together

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0zivFd5oYU&list=PLbj\\_gMxqqoon\\_PCNf0K0FTwUYgXi7cfrj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0zivFd5oYU&list=PLbj_gMxqqoon_PCNf0K0FTwUYgXi7cfrj)

Bishop of Oxford's 2022 essay 'Together in Love and Faith', setting out the ways his own views have changed on same-sex relationships over the last decade.

<https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/61f2fd86f0ee5/content/pages/documents/together-in-love-and-faith.pdf>

A conservative response to the Bishop of Oxford, by Revd Vaughan Roberts

<https://ceec.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Vaughan-Roberts-Together-in-Love-and-Faith-a-response.pdf>

**Why I support Prayers of Blessing  
for same sex couples**

**REVEREND STEVE TURVILLE**

## INTRODUCTION

The worldwide Church has been wrestling with the highly contentious issue of LGBTQI+ equality for many years. In 2020, the CofE produced 'Living in Love and Faith' (LLF) material to help churches explore questions around identity, sexuality, relationships, and marriage. After much debate over several General Synods, the Bishops commended Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) for same-sex couples in civil marriages in December 2023.

But the issue is bigger than 'prayers': it goes to the heart of the Church's traditional teaching and understanding of gender, sexuality, marriage, inclusion, equality and justice. As an ordained minister in the Church of England, I cannot ignore this issue and have a grave responsibility to take it seriously and try to get it right.

After several years of prayer, thought, reading and discussion since 2016, I changed my position from traditional/conservative/orthodox to what is variously called liberal/inclusive/revisionist/affirming in c2019. Reverends John, Hugh and Richard have been aware of my position.

## ABOUT ME

I am a 64-year-old, white, heterosexual male, born in a time of white, heterosexual, male supremacy, when racism, sexism and homophobia were acceptable and common attitudes and behaviours. I don't know what it is like to be discriminated against, abused or feel intimidated because of my colour, gender or sexuality so I try not to assume what non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual people feel, or tell them what they should feel.

I have spent my entire working life predominantly among working class males. I came back to the church in my late 30s. I have one gay person in my extended family that I am aware of.

In 2017, I was ordained in the Church of England and serve in Oxford Diocese, in a village church with a vicar and curates who held to the traditional view. Out of respect for my vicar's authority, I undertook not to preach or teach against the traditional view, though where directly asked, or in private conversations, I have been honest about my view.

**I believe** the Bible is the inspired word of God.

**I believe** that the Bible is 'the most valuable thing the world affords'<sup>1</sup> because it contains the accounts of God's relationship with his creation from the beginning, particularly the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, by whom we can know God and be united to God.

---

<sup>1</sup> As described in the Coronation Service of HM Queen Elizabeth II

**I acknowledge** that there are several places in the Bible where it overtly condemns practising homosexuality as a sin<sup>2</sup>, and others where it implies it, and that there does not seem to be anywhere in the Bible that affirms homosexuality.

**I also acknowledge** that the Christian church has always (as far as I know) taught that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. When I became a Christian 26 years ago, this is the view I adopted and supported.

**Having said that, I now find myself at odds with the Bible and the Church where they say that homosexuality is a sin, and that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. This is not something that has happened overnight. It is something that has taken many years and is not something I have taken lightly. It would be fair to say that this question has vexed me through hundreds of waking hours of the night over many years.**

### **HOW HAS MY POSITION CHANGED?**

The Church of England has traditionally looked to 3 things to inform our theology:

1. Scripture
2. Church Tradition
3. Reason

I will consider those now, and also consider ...

4. Experience (that is Life experience, not spiritual or religious experience)

These thoughts, questions and conclusions that I have tried to tidily divide into the following four sections did not come to me neatly but randomly over several years.

---

<sup>2</sup> E.g. **Leviticus 20:13**. 'If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death.'

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**. Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals (*men who lie with a man as with a woman*), nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

**1 Timothy 1:8-10**. But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals (*men who lie with a man as with a woman*) and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

## 1. THE BIBLE

**How a person regards the Bible will determine what they believe regarding LGBTQI+ equality. It is absolutely crucial to the question. Do individual Christians have the right to change what we believe? Do we have the authority to challenge what the Bible and our leaders say? I believe that the example of the Protestant Reformation demonstrates that every individual Christian has the freedom and responsibility to go to Scripture, to read it, pray about it, and then make up their own minds.** But we do not read the Bible in isolation. We read it with 2,000 years of Christian theological tradition behind us, and we read it with a 21<sup>st</sup> Century mind.

When I first became a Christian, almost 30 years ago, I came to believe that a belief in the inerrancy or infallibility of the Bible is an important part of Christian faith. However, **over the years, through study and reflection, I no longer believe the Bible is inerrant or infallible. Why?**

### **The Bible is inspired, not dictated.**

- As our Holy Scriptures, we rightly hold the Bible in the highest esteem. We call it 'The Word of God'. Week by week, service by service, 'This is the Word of the Lord' is reinforced, so that we can come to believe that every verse of the Bible was *dictated* by God. However, Christians aren't expected to believe that. Christians believe the Bible was *inspired* (God breathed) *through* some 40 different male writers over 1,500 years - not dictated or delivered by God or his angels. God inspired it, men wrote it. There is a partnership.
- We can also come to believe the Bible is a precise record of dialogue, actions and events – as if someone was actually there recording events and conversations as they happened. But that's also not the case. Luke tells us how his Gospel was written – by investigating and recording eye-witness testimonies (*Luke 1*). So, Luke does not claim divine inspiration for his Gospel at all, but that it is simply an orderly account of what people have told him, and many years after the actual events which he was not present at or witnessed.

### **The Gospels are a selective and partial account**

- The Gospel writer John confirms that *'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.'* (John 20:30.31). So it's clear that the Gospel writers had a specific agenda. They did not include everything because they never meant to. They only included what they needed to include for people to 'believe'.



## **The Bible is filtered through fallible people**

- The Bible may have been inspired by God, but it was originally written by men - every single one of them a fallen, sinful man. Even the apostle Paul, our most influential theologian and Christian apologist, describes himself as the worst sinner of all sinners (1 Tim 1:15). I am no longer persuaded that the Holy Spirit overwrote the Scripture writers' sin when inspiring the sinful, fallible, errant men to write.
- The fallibility of subsequent translators seems to be accepted by many evangelical churches who add the 'infallible *as originally given*' caveat to their statements of belief. So, it seems that even evangelical churches accept that the Bibles they have in their pews are fallible and errant.
- Alister McGrath, a contemporary evangelical theologian, says that the idea of Biblical infallibility only really caught hold in the mid-1800s in the USA, so it is not something the Church has always believed. (Coincidentally, in the 1870s, the Catholic church decided that the Pope was infallible too.)
- If I take the many different translations of the Bible, all translated by top scholars and (I hope) godly people, yet all fallen sinful people, they will at times differ on meaning of key words, so that sometimes the meaning can be significantly different between different versions of the Bible. This shows the Bible is open to interpretation and different understanding.

**So it seems to me that the idea of Biblical infallibility is not a matter of fact but a matter of faith, in spite of the facts.** Most people who believe it, do so because they have been told so by people who were told so by people who were told so etc.

10 years ago, I would have agreed wholeheartedly with the following quote from the world-famous and influential Victorian Baptist church leader and preacher, C.H. Spurgeon:

*"The mind of God is greater than all the minds of men, so let all men leave the gospel just as God has delivered it to us."*

However, I now see the flaw in this quote. The flaw is that *God delivered the Bible to us through the minds of men.*

***All Scripture is God breathed (1 Timothy 3.16), but at every point in its development, interpretation and preaching, the Bible has the fingerprints of fallen men all over it. If you pour pure water through a dirty filter, do you still have pure water? No. But can dirty water save a person's life? Yes.***

## **Our context is very different to the original context**

- The Bible was written to a context very different to our own. There are many laws and instructions in the Bible that we no longer accept as relevant to our own time and context and therefore no longer binding on us. Even conservative Christians disregard many Bible instructions as no longer applicable to us as Christians today.
- The Bible was originally written to cultures totally different to our own. These cultures had different conventions regarding their writings. We must beware applying our 21C rules of literature and logic to these ancient texts. For example, Greco-Roman biography was much more concerned with extolling the virtues and achievements of a person than the accuracy of facts and figures.
- The Bible was written at a time when people believed that they were the centre of a universe that revolved around them – that the stars were simply lights hanging from a dome above the earth. We now know that we are an infinitesimally small part of an unbelievably vast and complex universe. Creation is much less simple than the Bible suggests.

## **Literal or allegorical?**

Much is made of the Genesis account of the creation of men and women and their relationship to each other and God, which has been the basis for the Church's teaching on authority, gender, sexuality and marriage. But the opening chapters of Genesis are not a physics book, a biology book, or a psychology book, but a very broad-brush narrative of the creation of all things. It is a very simplistic story of a mind-bogglingly complex, momentous and miraculous event that occurred over billions of years. It is in parts, written as a poem, and poets don't tend to expect their poems to be read literally, but imaginatively. Poets tend to ask questions rather than give answers; they tend to widen horizons and possibilities rather than close them down and define them.

## **What does the Bible actually say about sexuality, gender etc?**

There are quite a few references to sex and sexuality in the Bible. The prohibitions of homosexual activity seem clear and plain. I think there are 6 verses in the Bible that specifically ban homosexual activity. However, there are also scholars who argue that the context of sex, sexuality and marriage was very different in Biblical times - e.g. that sex was all about power and dominance, and marriage had little to do with love. So, there are scholars/theologians who say that the prohibitions are very clear and unambiguous and there are other scholars/theologians who say that those prohibitions speak to a very different context and understanding of marriage, sexuality and sex.

I have heard it said that Leviticus 20:13 (*If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable*) as the Word of God, is just as applicable to us now as it has ever been. However, the second half of the verse says, *'They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads'*. So, is the whole

verse still applicable now? Should homosexuals be put to death? If not, why not? And who decides what is and isn't applicable and why? Again, revision of the word of God has taken place.

*In the same way that the Church has decided many Old Testament laws or even New Testament instructions are no longer applicable, I do not feel that modern Christians are automatically bound by these ancient understandings.*

### **What did Jesus say?**

It has been claimed that Jesus was very clear in the Gospels about marriage, gender and sexuality. Was he really? Actually, I think his only reference in the Gospels to marriage is in response to a question from the Pharisees, 'is it lawful for a man divorce his wife for any reason?' Jesus replied, quoting from Genesis,

*"Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."  
(Matt 19:4)*

So, although Jesus does appear to affirm a traditional understanding of marriage, his point is not actually about marriage, gender or sexuality, but the commitment and responsibility of men to marriage. Can a man divorce his wife for any reason? Jesus says, 'No of course you can't discard your wife on a whim!' So, I don't agree that Jesus spoke clearly about sexuality and gender at all.

*What Jesus did speak clearly about was justice for the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, and inclusion for the excluded, the ostracized, the outcasts, the voiceless, and forgiveness of sins for the repentant. Jesus spoke very clearly and often against the teachers of the law and Pharisees who placed unbearable burdens on the people. Could celibacy be considered an unbearable burden for a gay or lesbian person?*

### **What about Paul?**

When Paul quoted the same Genesis verses in Ephesians 5:31, he was writing about the roles of men and women within marriage, (e.g. wives should submit to their husbands in all things, *which we no longer see as binding today*), but then goes on to say that he is actually talking about the mystery of Christ and the Church. He too seems to be talking about commitment, so again, hardly clear.

*The Genesis verse (2.24) that Jesus and Paul quote, comes directly after the bizarre account of how God created Eve from one of Adam's ribs while Adam slept, and seemingly as an afterthought, so even the original verses have an uncertain and unclear origin, context and meaning.*

## **Binding and Loosing**

I am intrigued by Jesus's teaching on binding and loosing in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 (*Whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*)

'Binding and loosing is originally a Jewish Mishnaic phrase mentioned in the New Testament. In usage, to bind and to loose means 'to forbid by an indisputable authority and to permit by an indisputable authority.' (As defined in Wikipedia.)

I think it is significant that Jesus doesn't say that what is permitted/forbidden in heaven must be permitted/forbidden on earth – he says it's the other way round. It seems that Jesus gave his disciples authority to permit and ban things, and what they permitted or banned would be rubber stamped in heaven.

Maybe Jesus gave his disciples authority to bind and loose because he knew that the world and our understanding of it would change. Maybe he does trust us that much - and maybe that does apply to the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality?

## **The Law in my heart?**

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in a person when they give their lives to Christ (Ephesians 1:13,14). The Spirit teaches us and reminds us of Jesus's teaching. (John 15:26). Should we not take him at his word? Or is the Holy Spirit's only job to help us understand and obey only what was written in the Bible? (which as John's Gospel says is a mere fraction of what Jesus actually did and said (John 21:25)). Is the Holy Spirit bound forever by the confines of a limited and partial (and fallible) Bible? Or is the Holy Spirit free to teach us a new thing?

## **Does this mean I think the Bible is untrustworthy?**

No, not at all. Scripture remains our supreme authority in matters of faith and life, but I believe it is a living book that speaks to every generation and context. It needs to be read humbly *and intelligently*, and in reliance on the Holy Spirit and each other, to help us interpret it.

## **Finally ...**

**The Bible has immense power and is immeasurably precious, but like every powerful and precious thing, it needs to be handled with care. Handled carelessly, a powerful thing can cause damage, and a precious thing can be damaged. I believe the reputation of the Bible, the Church, and ultimately God is damaged by simplistic interpretation.**

**But much worse, the Bible has been used by Christians down the ages to justify their persecution and oppression of people and peoples 'in the name of God', thus bringing the name of God and His Church into disrepute.**

## 2. DOCTRINE/TRADITION

Regarding **the Church's teaching**, it took the early church several hundred years to formulate its doctrine. Some doctrines were fairly straightforward, others were more complicated. Again, this was a process of discussion, debate and decision by sinful men.

These doctrines have not remained fixed as originally agreed. The church has, over its history, changed its view on many things written in the Bible. Why? Perhaps because we recognise that the Bible is the word of God that speaks to every culture and context, and that cultures and contexts are forever changing. *The Bible has a vitally important message for the culture, but the culture also informs our understanding of God's Word through progressive understanding of ourselves and the universe around us.* For example:

- The Church's attitude to **Creation** has changed. Very few Christians believe the universe was created in 6 days, 6000 years ago, but accept gradual evolution over billions of years. Darwin's Theory of Evolution shattered the Church's notions of Creation and history. The Church had to drastically review its beliefs as a result.
- The Church's attitude to **women** has changed. Biblical teaching has been instrumental in subordinating women to men (e.g. that God created Eve out of Adam's rib to be his helper), and in many churches this is still the case. Not so in the Church of England. Women are not expected to stay silent in church and wait until they get home before asking their husbands what something means<sup>3</sup>.
- Our attitude to **women in leadership** has changed, such that we now accept women as equally able to lead in all areas of life – including church life. (This issue also caused major division in the Church, with many CofE churches still refusing the leadership of women priests and bishops.)
- The Church's attitude to **slavery** has changed. The Bible does not condemn slavery and even seems to tolerate it<sup>4</sup>. Hence, the Bible has been used by slave owning societies to support slavery. It took 1800 years for that to change<sup>5</sup>, so that nowadays no Christian would support slavery.
- The church's attitude to **other races** has changed. The Church, both Catholic and Protestant has been complicit in the ruin of indigenous peoples and their cultures through forced conversion, as we conquered and colonised the 'heathen' world, using Jesus's Great Commission as our justification, and the Jews conquering of the Promised Land as a Biblical precedent.
- The church's attitude to **divorce** and remarriage has changed. Priests may marry divorced couples at their discretion.
- The church's attitude on **law and order** has changed. We no longer have the death penalty (or a whole host of other punishments) in contradiction of Biblical commands.

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34-36

<sup>4</sup> Paul's letters: Philemon, Colossians 3:22, Ephesians 6:5

<sup>5</sup> Slavery was abolished in 1834 in the UK, and in 1863 in the USA.

## **Is the Church of England on its own in reassessing its traditional beliefs about marriage, gender and sexuality?**

No, it isn't. Many other Christian denominations have reassessed their traditional beliefs, and then changed their minds. (See below)

- The Methodist Church has allowed gay marriage since 2021.
- The Scottish Episcopal Church.
- The United Reformed Church.
- The Church of Scotland allowed gay marriage in 2022.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the largest Lutheran church body in the United States, allows for LGBTQI+ marriage and ordination of LGBTQI+ clergy.
- The United Church of Canada, the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, affirms that gay and lesbian persons are welcome in the church *and* the ministry.
- The Uniting Church in Australia allows for the membership and ordination of gay people and extends the local option to marriage.
- From August 2019, the blessing of same-sex marriages is allowed in the Swiss Reformed Church.
- The Church of Sweden,
- The Church of Norway,
- The Church of Denmark,
- The Church of Iceland
  - (all Evangelical Lutheran) allow full membership, ordination and marriage of gay people.
- As of 2023, the 'Lutheran Church in Great Britain' permits gay marriage.

It is true to say that a great number of Anglicans in the Global South still hold to the traditional view of sexuality and marriage. But it is also true to say that homosexual practice is still illegal in 31 of the 54 states in Africa.

**So the Church of England has not gone out on a limb in reassessing its traditional beliefs. A large number of denominations around the world already affirm gay marriage and ordination. Have all of these denominations bowed to the spirit of the age? I don't believe so. I believe it much more likely they have seriously and openly engaged with the plight of gay people in church in the light of our modern knowledge and a broader Biblical view, and as a result of that, changed their minds.**

### 3. REASON

The example of the Reformation allow each Christian to test and challenge what we are told. Church allows us to think about things.

- When I look around the world, I see diversity everywhere. The diversity among animals, vegetables and minerals is awesome.
- That diversity continues in people. We are all different. Different body types and different body shapes. The different parts that make up our bodies are all different sizes and shapes. We have different eye colours, hair colour, skin colour. We are all different.
- We don't all have the same IQ. Our intelligence quotient is widely varied.
- Our emotional intelligence is widely varied. We all relate to people and situations differently.
- We don't all have the same likes and dislikes, or the same abilities.
- If we look at every area of our lives – physical, mental, emotional, even spiritual – we are all on some kind of sliding scale. Each of us is unbelievably complex.

So, I ask myself – *'Why can Gender only be binary?'* i.e. male or female, simply because 3,500 years ago, the unknown writer of Genesis wrote 'male and female he created them'? Why shouldn't we expect to see some kind of sliding scale of Gender, from very masculine to very feminine? What happens in the middle of the scale? Is there really a neat, thin dividing line? Or is there an area of blurring? According to Wikipedia, in 1 in 2,000 babies, their gender is not physically obvious and other tests are required. Approximately 700,000 babies are born each year in the UK, which means that 350 babies are born each year with ambiguous gender. And that's just what's physically obvious, never mind any mental/psychological ambiguity.

And *why should sexuality be confined to just one?* i.e. heterosexual? Shouldn't we expect to see some kind of sliding scale in Sexuality?

**And so, my Reason tells me that given the diversity in every aspect of Creation, and the awesomely complex physiological and psychological make up of each person, it no longer seems logical to me that there would be no diversity in Gender or Sexuality. It therefore also seems totally unfair to me to penalise people based on something they have no control over – i.e. where they fall in the spectrums of Gender and Sexuality.**

#### **4. EXPERIENCE (of life and the world around us, not religious 'experience'.)**

As well as the Scriptures, Church Tradition, and Reason, there is a 4<sup>th</sup> way of informing our theology – **Experience** - because it is in our day-to-day experience as we live out our Christian discipleship, that our theology is tested.

My experience of LGBTQI+ people is limited but my experience tells me that LGBT people are essentially no different to straight people. I am sure that they are sinful in the same way that all straight people are sinful. They can be equally selfish, equally proud or unkind, they can fail to love God, murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness or covet. They can also love God and love their neighbours as themselves, and be equally kind, selfless, loving, caring, generous, hospitable. They contribute equally to all areas of society, positively and negatively, in exactly the same way as straight people.

#### **SO FAR ...**

Having looked at Scripture, Church Tradition, Reason and Experience, I believe that there is room for Christians to take a different view on things from the views stated in Scripture and historically expressed in Church Doctrine and Tradition. But there is a deciding factor for me, on why my position on LGBT equality has changed, and that is ... **JUSTICE**.

**I find the grand and overarching Biblical theme of Justice for the oppressed and excluded to be a persuasive argument for LGBTQI+ equality.**

#### **JUSTICE**

A big difference between straight people and LGBT people is that LGBT people have been persecuted for millennia. They have had to hide their sexuality for fear of losing their families, their jobs, their friends, their place in society. Where they haven't been able or willing to hide it, they have been mocked, abused, and beaten, they have been put in prison, they have been tortured, they have been unlawfully killed and lawfully executed. This is still happening in much of the world.

Another difference is that as a minority people group, LGBT people carry a burden of non-conformity. Some embrace the difference, but for many, standing out from the crowd is a difficult and scary place to be. In the related matter of Trans people, the decision is particularly difficult, and I don't believe they make it lightly. If, after careful deliberations by a person, their doctors, psychiatrists, counsellors (and parents if they are minors), they decide that trans-gendering is the best option for them, then I am certainly not qualified to disagree (and I don't think the Bible writers were either) - in fact, I think it cruel to seek to prevent it.

**When we apply our theology and doctrines to real life, our theology and doctrines need to make sense. Of course, our lives should conform to our theology, and in the vast majority of cases they do, and will continue to do so. But occasionally, they**



**don't, and in those cases we need to be able to revise our doctrines and theology, as the church has done in the past. Consequently, I no longer see Sexuality and Gender simply as a matter of sin, (straight = IN, not straight = OUT; male/female = IN, other = OUT) but as a matter of Justice.**

## **RESPONSIBILITY/CULPABILITY**

By going away from the traditional Biblical teaching against homosexuality etc, I accept that in that regard, I am going against the traditional teaching of the Bible in that specific area. I also accept that as a leader and teacher, I have a grave responsibility not to lead anyone into error, and that God will judge me more severely<sup>6</sup>. I am very aware of the precariousness of my position. But by supporting equality for LGBTQI+ people, I believe I am supporting a much bigger Biblical principle - that of justice for an oppressed people. **So, I do not believe that I am anti-Bible and anti-God's Word, but very pro-Bible and very pro-God's word.** If I have got that wrong, then I can only throw myself on the mercy of God and hope for forgiveness.

## **CONCLUSION**

**It seems to me that where people stand on this issue, is ultimately decided by their view and interpretation of the Bible.** For those people who have been taught that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, then to take a different view to the Bible is very difficult. Ten years ago I held that view. It took three years to change my mind, so I know how difficult it is for anyone with an entrenched traditional view to be able to change. I understand that.

I also understand that it is very difficult for people to disagree with their 'tribe'. There is a lot at stake for conservative Christians, both leaders and congregation members, to go against their tribe - they risk rejection. This is particularly difficult for members of conservative congregations who have only ever been taught that the Scriptural interpretation of their leaders is the only possible view, and that anything else is false teaching and a rejection of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I think this dispute - and the fear, confusion and pain that is being felt by many conservatives - may be as much about tribalism and tradition as it is about theology. There is a lot at stake.

However, I reject the charge that anyone who disagrees with the traditional view is 'unbiblical'. Scripture must always remain as our supreme authority in matters of faith and life, but I believe it is allowable, after much prayerful consideration, to disagree with the Bible, and reject parts of the Bible as no longer binding on us today, just as the Church (including conservatives) has done on many occasions. Rejecting parts of the Bible is not

---

<sup>6</sup> James 3:1

a rejection of the whole Bible. **Rejecting parts of the Bible is not a denial or rejection of Almighty God or the Lordship of Jesus Christ.**

**I am still very pro-Bible and very pro God's Word. The Bible is still the inspired word of God. It is still central and supreme in matters of faith and life. It is still 'the most valuable thing the world affords'. Just because I take it less literally, that doesn't mean I take it any less seriously.**

I also reject the charge that everyone who believes other than the traditional view has simply gone along with the prevailing culture or bowed to the spirit of the age. I believe that Jesus has given his disciples authority to review (bind and loose) our traditions and doctrines in the light of our evolving understanding of ourselves and the world around us (after careful consideration and prayer), as a great many denominations have done and are doing.

I believe that the diversity we see throughout all creation is also present in human gender and sexuality, and it is therefore unreasonable to continue to insist people fit the traditional binary model.

As an ordained minister in the Church of England, I have taken oaths of obedience to my bishops. When the Archbishop of Canterbury (evangelical), The Archbishop of York (Anglo-Catholic) and the Bishop of Oxford (evangelical) are able to change their minds regarding the traditional view of marriage, gender and sexuality, then I think they deserve to be listened to and taken seriously. Knowing how much angst this has caused me, I cannot imagine how much pain and stress this has caused them, and I have not had to face the abuse that has been levelled at them. I believe the bishops have done the best they can with a very difficult pastoral situation, and I trust them to be my bishops for the future.

**I believe that the great Biblical theme of justice (not to mention the love, grace, mercy and compassion of God) for the oppressed overrides the several Bible verses that label homosexuality as a sin. LGBTQI+ people have suffered long enough. They have contributed and continue to contribute every bit as much as heterosexuals to our history, our culture, our society and the Church, so I believe it is now time this contribution is acknowledged, and that LGBTQI+ people are accepted as equal members of the Church in every sense, and that this begins by recognising and affirming their legal marriages with prayers of blessing in church.**

*Reverend Stephen Turville, Associate Minister, The Parish of Wargrave with Knowl Hill*

*September 2024*

**A Faulty Umbrella & the Bible:  
Why PLF is Not Good News**

JUBIRACY DA SILVA

Imagine a same-sex couple walking into St Mary's Wargrave, in good faith, asking the vicar for a blessing. I trust you would be eager for God to bless them. Given the appalling history of real homophobia all around the world, unfortunately still rampant in many countries, wouldn't it be wonderful for us to see our LGBTQI+ neighbours, friends and family walking into our own village church, confident of a blessing? Yes, it definitely would. But the question is, how do we go about doing that?

We need to ask ourselves some very important questions. Firstly, what does the Bible say about God's blessing? What does it say about marriage and same-sex relationships? Is it really clear on these matters or can we just "agree to disagree"? Taking a step back - *why* should the Bible matter so much to us anyway?

For clarity, this article is not questioning the civil rights of same-sex partnerships. On the contrary, I support legislation to protect LGBTQI+ people's rights worldwide. This is not in question. Rather, this article is purely about the Bible and the Christian faith.

Secondly, we then need to hear the stories of same sex attracted Christians who have chosen to favour the calling of Jesus Christ in the Bible over their own sexual fulfilment. Let us listen to them. They have every reason to accept what the Church of England proposes that we do but, at great cost to them, they haven't.

The Church of England proposes that we use the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, or just PLF. But I join many others around the world who are fully convinced that these prayers are not good news for any of us - ironically, not even for same-sex attracted people.

In fact, if a blessing functions like a divine umbrella protecting us all from all sorts of elements, both natural and spiritual, then this is our situation: on the one side, we have the Bible and on the other, we have PLF. We will ponder both and hopefully realise it. The Bible is God's blessed word, whereas PLF is a man-made umbrella full of large holes: well-meaning, but completely useless from day one.

I hope to demonstrate this to you in this two-part article. In Part 1, I will open the Bible with you and show you what it says, and why it matters, while sharing stories of same sex attracted people who have resolved to trust what they read. I hope this will be enough for you to say "No" to PLF.

In Part 2, I will open the PLF umbrella and point you to four different holes in it. After reading it, I expect you to join me and many others in our disappointment at our bishops for proposing this to us and say "No" to PLF.

I am Jubi da Silva. I was a pastor in Brazil before studying theology in Vancouver. I moved to the UK five years ago when I married Annie. I work for a Christian charity and sometimes I preach at St Mary's. I have always felt very welcome in this country, especially in this village, where I was given all sorts of opportunities to serve our local church, opportunities like this one. Thank you.

I'm also grateful for Revd. Stephen Turville. I know many people who have lovely things to say about him and I myself am very fond of him and his family. That's my problem here. I tremble to write because I like the man!

But this is not a debate. I resolved not to read any of Steve's writings before writing this article. Any similarity between the articles is pure coincidence.

Now let us look at the Bible.

## **PART 1: THE BIBLE**

### **There is Something About the Bible**

There is something mysterious about the Bible. It is by far the best-selling book of all times, having sold between 5 and 7 billion copies worldwide<sup>1</sup>. The full Bible has been translated to 756 languages and the New Testament has been translated to more than 1700 languages... and counting<sup>2</sup>! Undoubtedly, it has captured vastly wide audiences across the globe and throughout human history, inspiring people from all sorts of backgrounds and cultures, including many of us.

But the Bible poses a challenge to the West. Nowadays, it can come across as patriarchal, homophobic and regressive. How can that be God's word to us? Aren't we better off taking what is helpful from the Bible and not bothering with the embarrassing bits? Before I open the Bible to you, we should not be afraid to raise this question: can we really trust the entire Bible as God's very word for us even today?

This is a big question, and we'll open the Bible itself to find the answer to it. Perhaps some may think that I am about to embark on circular logic as I do this, as though I am saying, "The Bible is God's word because... well, the Bible says so." They will think, "That is not rational, that is just a truth-claim!"

There is an irony there. The argument appeals to an authority seemingly outside the Bible, as though it says, "Thus saith Rationality: Thou shalt not use the bible to affirm the bible." But that in itself is another truth-claim. In this way, Rationality has become the new bible. One could start that same truth-claim by saying, "Islam says... Mindfulness says... Progressive Ideology says..."<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Guinness World Records. "Best-selling book." 2024. Accessed September 28, 2024.

<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction>

<sup>2</sup> Wycliffe Global Alliance. "2024 Global Scripture Access". 2024. Accessed September 28, 2024.

<https://www.wycliffe.net/resources/statistics/>

<sup>3</sup> I adapted the argument from Barry Cooper's excellent short book, *Can I Really Trust The Bible?*, pages 22, 23.

Here is more irony for us. We simply cannot avoid appeals to external authority as we think and speak. Whether we are religious or not, this is just how human beings reason *precisely* because we are not God. Ironically, we need the Bible again to understand this.

As we will see, the Bible shows that we are God's creation designed to live and flourish in this world *through...* God's word. Because this is true, regardless of our faith, we cannot help but resort to an authority outside ourselves that we think is self-verifying, functioning like... God's word. Call it science, history, ideology or even story, we all appeal to some higher authority while thinking, not realising that we may actually be calling upon our own gods to support us.

Of course there is truth in philosophy, science and story. They all play their own, very important role in our postmodern lives. That's not in question. The big question behind this survey is this: when there is disagreement, who has the *ultimate* authority to tell us how to live? The Bible or the bishops? The Church of England or *The New Testament*? The human stories of LLF or the gospel of Jesus Christ?

You may have already realised. The real question of this survey is much more profound than just what to do about PLF at our local church. We are all like Pontius Pilate now, hearing the shouts of the crowd and asking Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)<sup>4</sup>. Make no mistake: first and foremost, we are choosing who to please, we are choosing our gods here.

Let us see what it says, firstly about itself. Open the Bible halfway through and you will find some interesting verses in Psalm 19 (italics my own). Read them slowly, please.

"The *law of the LORD* is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The *statutes of the LORD* are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

The *precepts of the LORD* are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The *commands of the LORD* are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever.

The *decrees of the LORD* are firm,  
and all of them are righteous."

---

<sup>4</sup> This is the "address" where you can find this quote in the Bible. Just look for the Book in the Table of Contents (or list of books from an app). It simply means: (Book, Chapter: verse).

The “decrees”, “commands”, “precepts”, “statutes” and “the law of the LORD” are all the same thing and they all point us in the same direction: to God and his own word. They do us much good and “all of them are righteous”, even the bits we don’t like reading. You will find many more references like that in the first part of the Bible: *The Old Testament*, also called “Moses and the Prophets”, or just “the Scriptures.”

Jesus himself affirms the Scriptures. Flip the Bible to the *New Testament* and you will find Jesus appealing to the Scriptures again and again. I think the most remarkable example comes from one of Jesus’ biographies, the gospel of *Luke*, chapter 24.

You may know the story. It’s the third day since Jesus died and two of his disciples are headed towards the village of Emmaus, walking and talking, downcast and confused. The risen Jesus shows up and joins their conversation, but for some reason they don’t recognise him. Jesus doesn’t seem bothered by it. On the contrary, he gently asks them questions, allowing them to express their grief until he changes his tone. Rather bluntly, Jesus shows them what is really bothering him (*italics my own*): “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe *all that the prophets have spoken!* Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all *the Scriptures* concerning himself.”

Here is the risen Jesus pointing his troubled disciples not to his own resurrected body, like saying, “Cheer up, guys... give me a good look!” No. The Scriptures were spoken by mere mortals like the prophets and Moses, Jesus himself admits, yet he compels them to believe him *through the Scriptures*. Why?

The apostle Paul explains (*italics my own*): “*All Scripture* is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16) Paul affirms the *whole* Bible, including both the lovely and the uncomfortable bits, because it is more than “God-verified” — it is “God-breathed”. Fresh air from God moved those writers.

Yet they remained very human. The apostle Peter agrees, and adds this: “... prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21). It is mysterious to us, but the Spirit of God compelled them to write the Bible. That is why it is 100% “righteous” and useful for training us “in righteousness” — even to us progressives in the West. Both beautiful and disturbing, the Bible remains God’s word to us all.

So far we have seen the Bible affirming itself. Now let us open it to see the truth about blessing and marriage. If the Bible is true, it will also “feel” true and make sense of our human experience of life. We will ponder some questions as we do this and invite some sex attracted Christians to join us.

## Does the Bible “Feel” True?

Why do we feel like every human life is precious, including our own? Why have we come to believe in equality between men and women? And why do we yearn for relationships that are perfectly good and everlasting?

Open the Bible. On the very first page, in the first chapter, you will see the most spectacular vision of the human race. "So God created mankind *in his own image, in the image of God* he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

The Bible is revealing why we all feel so precious: because the infinitely precious God made us in his own image. You and I are like mirrors of God. We were designed to reflect divine beauty; not just in looks, but especially in character. So, when we can no longer contribute anything to society; when beauty, health, wealth and intellect are gone, let us remember this. Because we bear God's image, we remain worthy of life.

God created us male and female — equally worthy of life. And right in the next line, without having done anything to deserve it, the Bible says of humans (italics my own): "God *blessed* them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number'." So the Bible is not patriarchal. On the contrary, it is revealing why we came to believe in equality between the sexes. Both men and women stand as equals before our Maker, who blessed them to flourish together. And how does this blessing come about?

Turn the page of your Bible and you will see the most mysterious creation of God... that brings God's blessing to fruition. "[...] a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) That's marriage according to Scripture. Marriage is God's idea. God *designed* marriage.

The English word "united" doesn't quite capture the picture of the ancient, original language. When a man is "united" to his wife, the original Hebrew shows one "pressing against" the other, out of desire and deliberate effort to become "one flesh". Sex too is God's idea. But this picture of marital sex is so much more profound and mysterious than just the physical act.

The apostle Paul picks up that same, exact passage to say, "This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church." This mystery is God's big answer for our longings for good, eternal relationships. We will address this later.

For now, keep reading and you will notice that the Bible is a library of 66 books — all telling us one thing: the story of God and people. And you will see God's picture of one-man and one-woman marriage weaved through and through, from its first pages to the very last. Starting with the first book Genesis, that image runs through the entire *Old Testament*, through books like *Proverbs*, *Song of Songs*, *Isaiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Hosea* and into the New Testament, through *all* four gospels and letters like *Romans*, *1 Corinthians*, *Colossians*, *Ephesians*, *1 and 2 Timothy*, *Jude*, finally reaching *Revelation*, the last book, where the thread ends in a tight knot — a marriage celebration in eternity. All of these pages bind together what we saw on the first two: that picture of marriage as a blessed



union between one man and one woman only. It is set front and centre before our eyes and it runs in the background of the whole Bible like wallpaper.

This may feel like a cold shower to our same sex attracted friends. Let us listen to them. Here is Rebecca McLaughlin sharing her friend Rachel's story. They are both Christians who have favoured Christ over their sexual preference or orientation. "When Rachel was considering Christianity, she consulted a lesbian friend who was training to be a Lutheran minister. This friend assured Rachel that a monogamous same-sex marriage was not incompatible with Christian faith and gave her a book that made that case. Rachel read it ravenously and found it compelling. But when she looked up the Bible passages the book references, its arguments crumbled in her hands."<sup>5</sup>

Indeed the Bible is unequivocal about homosexual sex. Not only does it paint the picture of opposite-sex marriage as the only one God blessed, it also gives us unmissable "Do not do it" signs, across both the Old and the New Testament, calling us all to renounce homosexual activity (for example, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:26, 27). There is no room for us to "agree to disagree" on this.

Does the Bible then sentence same sex attracted Christians to loneliness? McLaughlin recalls a conversation with another lesbian friend about this. "I was reading the book of Acts at the time," she writes. "I observed that, while the first Christians faced every kind of suffering, even being stoned to death, there was one struggle they did not face: loneliness. If we reduce Christian community to sexual relationships and the nuclear family, we are utterly failing to deliver on biblical ethics."<sup>6</sup>

McLaughlin is touching the mystery Paul wrote about. We long for purely good, everlasting relationships because we were made for them. But it's not in marriage that we will be satisfied. Marriage is but a glimpse of what God has in store for his people. In order to understand this, we need to step into the big story of God and see it.

Like any real story, it starts with conflict. Right in *Genesis* chapter 3, you will see Adam and Eve dismissing God's word. They were seduced to make up their own rules, make their own "bibles". When they broke their relationship with God, somehow that brokenness crept into human nature itself. So, Adam and Eve are now you and me.

And *that* is sin — broken relationship with God that opened the door for brokenness in this world. When they cut the God-thread, the whole thing collapsed. From chapter 3 onwards, you will see misogyny, murder, and all sorts of malice spread around the world. The Bible is not violent or regressive; it is not endorsing any of that. The Bible is just revealing what happens in our world when we reject God's word. Sin breaks in and does much harm *through* us and *to* us.

The Bible "feels" uncomfortably true. It is revealing to us why we read the most terrible headlines on our BBC app every single day. It is telling us why marriage and parenting and

---

<sup>5</sup> MacLaughlin, Rebecca. "Confronting Christianity", page 162

<sup>6</sup> MacLaughlin, page 160

work can be so difficult — why we ourselves feel worthless, sometimes. It is revealing the deepest rupture in our own psyche. Both men and women are like broken mirrors of God. Once made to reflect God, now we can barely recognise God in each other. In fact, our sin-condition has made us completely vulnerable to evil. Sin is our own spiritual malaise and we can't just heal ourselves from this.

Yet God longs to restore us, and heal us, bless us again. That's the good news! That's why God sent us Jesus Christ. Both human and divine, the Bible says that Jesus is the perfect image of God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus never married. He was never in any sexual relationship. Yet he alone lived a perfect human life, reflecting all the beauty of God for us to see it. Download the Bible app<sup>7</sup> today and read the book of *Luke*. Jesus is simply sensational, totally fascinating.

Yet he was tortured and killed in public. When that happened, at great cost to himself, God was in fact breaking his own image, on purpose, just so he could pick up the divine pieces and use them to restore us. That's what Jesus wanted the disciples to understand in the Scriptures about him, written by prophets centuries before: (*italics my own*) “he was crushed *for our iniquities...* and by his wounds *we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:5) It was our own sin that crushed Jesus... and yet, somehow, when Jesus was raised back to life, his own divine nature became able to merge with ours.

That is God doing what only God can do: mending our relationship with him; consequently, our relationship with each other. It's like God opened up a repair shop to make us whole again. That shop is his church. And the shop is open 24/7 to everyone; *anyone*, really — Jesus says, “to whoever believes him” (John 3:16).

The Bible is not homophobic then. On the contrary, Jesus' calling, by default, already includes our LGBTQI+ friends and family. Human beings did nothing to deserve God's first blessing and the same is true now. Gay or straight, Jesus is calling us all into his shop to be made holy — made whole again. This is a calling for us all to “repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15); a calling for us all to abandon sin and be renewed, in order to reflect God more and more. This is much bigger than just our sexualities. This is actual closeness to God.

This is also bigger than just you and me. When Jesus prays to the Father for his church, he says, may “they be ‘one’ as we are one.” (John 17:11). This is the mystery. Just as God the Father is “one” with God the Son, so are we promised to be “one” with each other. That's miraculous reconciliation.

That's the real blessing! The church is God's big answer to our longings, not because we will find complete satisfaction within it, but because we will get to know God through it — by obeying his word. To obey his word: this is true love and faith. The Bible tells us a better story than the ones we see on Netflix. The big story of God ends with the promise of a blessed union between Christ and his church; a marriage celebration between the bridegroom Jesus and his bride. And it's all because of him.

---

<sup>7</sup> I recommend the Bible App YouVersion: <https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>

It's all about him. Sometimes Jesus is portrayed as a man of love, who is only inclusive but never demanding.<sup>8</sup> But that is only 50% true. Jesus is 100% the most loving and most demanding person alive. He said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I *command*." (italics my own). He says to the Father, "your word is true". (John 17:17). He is *commanding* us all to obey the word of God, even at a high cost. We do it because Jesus paid the highest price for us first. We love him because he loved us first.

Of course, obedience is not easy. Rebecca's friend Rachel grew up in a secular environment and became romantic with women in her teenage years, while Rebecca didn't, despite feeling the same attractions. "I once confessed to Rachel a sense of grief—envy even—that she had experienced all the intimacy with women I had grown up wanting, and more. I will always remember her response," writes Rebecca. "Trust me, all of that was nothing compared to knowing Christ."

Obedience to him is worth it. I too have experienced many delights in my own life so far, but absolutely nothing I have enjoyed compares to Jesus. My life is all about him. His Spirit is close and the Bible is true: his words have given me joy, refreshing the soul.

I hope the above was more than enough to help you say "No" to PLF. Nevertheless, I will open the PLF umbrella now.

---

<sup>8</sup> MacLaughlin, page 162

## **PART 2: A FAULTY UMBRELLA**

As a reminder, PLF stands for *Prayers of Love and Faith*. These are part of a much bigger project called *Living in Love and Faith* and were written as “resources in praying with and for a same-sex couple... as God’s blessing rests upon them”<sup>9</sup>. In December 2023, the House of Bishops authorised their use in public services.

I will now open the PLF umbrella and show you four different holes in it. It’s so uncomfortable for me to write this, but it needs to be done. If you care about due procedure in the church; and about unity and diversity; about young people in the church; and finally, if you care about Scripture at all, be prepared to be perplexed and disappointed at our bishops for proposing this to us.

Then use this survey to say “No” to PLF.

### **PLF is simply unlawful**

If you follow the link to the CofE website, you will see that PLF just means to bless same-sex partnerships. Some may ask me, “What is the big deal? It’s just a blessing.” That’s unfortunately not the case and even the bishops, perhaps inadvertently, admit it. You can listen to their discussion at the last General Synod. They make it quite clear: PLF is the little step on the journey and the final destination is same-sex marriage.<sup>10</sup> Yet even this “little step” is already unlawful.

I was truly shocked when I looked into this, but this is indeed a big hole. The process behind PFL is unlawful. And this is not little alien Jubi saying so. A vast and diverse network of Church of England leaders named “The Alliance” is denouncing the House of Bishops for bypassing something called “Canon B2”.<sup>11</sup>

Canon B2 is a fundamental rule of Anglicanism. It makes sure that any new form of service proposed by the General Synod (the equivalent of Parliament for the Church of England) does not depart from doctrine in “any essential matter” — like, for example, marriage. Anglican doctrine so far is biblically sound. Canon B2 ensures that new Anglican services remain... Anglican.

Think of it this way. What would be a “canon” of football? That fundamental rule ensures football remains foot-ball. Now imagine that FIFA ignores that canon and decides that from now on British footballers can also use their hands to score goals. Would that be good news to the world of sport? Would football still be football? We could run a little survey to decide whether or not to adopt the new rule locally, but that would still be

---

<sup>9</sup> The Church of England. “Prayers of Love and Faith”. Accessed September 19, 2024.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/prayers-love-and-faith>

<sup>10</sup> The Church of England. “General Synod July 2024”, at 3:50:57. Accessed September 19, 2024.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=q\\_oP63WGqwx&ab\\_channel=TheChurchofEngland](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=q_oP63WGqwx&ab_channel=TheChurchofEngland)

<sup>11</sup> The Alliance. “Response to Bishop of Oxford”. 4 July 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024.

[https://alliancecofe.org/letters/ResponsetoBishopOxford\\_040724.pdf](https://alliancecofe.org/letters/ResponsetoBishopOxford_040724.pdf)

ridiculous. It doesn't matter that FIFA authorised it. The rule would disfigure football itself, it is unlawful. FIFA would need to be challenged.

Of course that's a ridiculous illustration, but the situation calls for it. In order to use the PLF prayers, an Anglican vicar would have to trample underfoot Articles 7 and 20 (of the famous 39 articles), Canons B2 and B30, the Book of Common Prayer, and a host of other ground rules that form Anglican doctrine. Rather than accepting these changes, we should challenge the House of Bishops by joining the Alliance.<sup>12</sup>

That's the first hole in the umbrella. Here is another one that results from the first.

### **PLF damages the Anglican Communion**

As you'd expect, churches and clergy are already turning away from Canterbury. The "blessings" are literally a tear ripping apart the Anglican church in the UK and all over the world — a serious tear.

Since 2015, attendance in the Church of England has declined 29%, and since 2019 the number of people coming forward for ordination has dropped 40%.<sup>13</sup> This is not a coincidence. As the Bishops move away from Anglican doctrine, trust in the leadership is broken. Many called to full-time ministry feel unable to pursue that calling.

And this tear stretches all over the world. Fellowships like GAFCON<sup>14</sup> have gathered Anglicans from Australia to America, from Chile to Canada, who represent 75% of global Anglicans — all rejecting Canterbury. It's an exodus like none other in Anglican history, especially in the global south where the church is growing. If PLF was designed to increase diversity, it's already seeing the opposite effect: we are more white, more Western, less diverse, and emptier already.

But some may think, "That's the global south... they are just homophobic."

Then let me tell you what I saw in Brazil in 2018. "They kept the buildings, the cathedrals, the equipment and we had to start from scratch!", Bishop Flávio Adair told me. Brazilian Anglicans have already split the church over same-sex marriage in the last decade. Bishop Adair had opposed the "Brazilian PLF" based on his Anglicanism, not homophobia. "We had to rent the ugliest warehouses far away from town," he said, "just so we can continue to preach the gospel."

---

<sup>12</sup> The Alliance. "Statement Following the General Synod". July 2024. Accessed 19 September, 2024. <https://alliancecofe.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. "Response to the Bishop of Oxford". July 2024. Accessed 19 September, 2024. [https://alliancecofe.org/letters/ResponsetoBishopOxford\\_040724.pdf](https://alliancecofe.org/letters/ResponsetoBishopOxford_040724.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> GAFCON. "Gafcon Stands with the Alliance." July 16, 2024. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://www.gafcon.org/news/gafcon-stands-with-the-alliance>

Then I visited the vast, beautiful and imposing cathedral of the Episcopal Anglican Church in Curitiba, my hometown, on a Sunday morning. I entered the building and found seven people at the service: two same-sex couples and three elderly people.

I talked to them all after the service. They served me great coffee (of course) and typical "Maria" biscuits. The couples I spoke to were already Christian before they joined that church. The elderly had been there for a long time. Then I asked the vicar, "What do you think is most distinctive about this church?" He answered without hesitating: "Our church is progressive and inclusive."

When I left, I went back to my car wondering: "Yes, but where are the people?" Bishop Adair had already let me know that in less than three years, his out-of-town, ugly warehouse was already full to capacity.

You will hear the same story again and again from the Anglicans in North America,<sup>15</sup> from the established churches in Scotland, in Wales, even from the Methodists in the UK.<sup>16</sup> Everywhere you look the orthodox churches teaching the historic doctrine of marriage keep growing, whereas the long-established, now progressive churches are growing less diverse and emptier.

Why is this happening? For now, let me admit it: progressive churches in the West are well meaning. They want to appeal both to the young and certainly to those who have felt unwelcome before, for being same sex attracted.

But we want our same sex attracted friends and family to walk into a church that is fully alive, growing as it should, not to a church that is depleted, declining and dying. But if the historic record worldwide can teach us anything, please say "No" to PLF. I would hate for us all to look at St Mary's in five years' time and read this with regret!

We have seen two holes in PLF so far. Let us look at two more. This next one might come as a surprise.

### **Young Anglicans Do Not Care For PLF**

Perhaps contrary to expectations, our youngest Anglicans are orthodox.

A recent study on the Church of England surveyed the 33 churches with the largest number of under-16s in their congregations. The study discovered that none of the 33 churches and none of their leaders supported PLF.

---

<sup>15</sup> The Living Church. "When will the ACNA overtake TEC?" October 13, 2023. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/when-will-the-acna-overtake-tec/>

<sup>16</sup> Premier Christianity. "Does allowing same-sex marriage result in church decline?" 17 June 2022. Accessed September 19, 2024. <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/does-allowing-same-sex-marriage-result-in-church-decline-heres-what-the-numbers-show/13282.article>

We suspect that PLF will appeal to the young. But according to the data, this is a myth. The youth who care about church do not care for PLF. <sup>17</sup>

This is also true for twenty-somethings. "I and my fiancé have never had sex. We are convinced in accordance with Scripture that the doctrine of this church is that God's calling for us and for everyone seeking to follow Jesus is to live this way," confessed Sophie Clarke, one of the youngest members of Synod, aged 27, when she challenged the bishops. "I believe that Jesus tells the world a better story about sexuality, relationships and marriage, a story which is for our good and flourishing. We need to make a choice, Synod. Does the church still have a better story to tell?" Please listen to her speech online. <sup>18</sup>

Let's turn now to the largest and ugliest hole in the umbrella.

### **PLF Dismisses the Bible**

Marriage has become controversial in the West, but this is not at all the first time this happens. The religious leaders of Jesus' own time challenged him on this. And what did Jesus do? He pointed them to the first pages of Scripture, to that indelible picture of one-man and one-woman marriage, with God's signature on it — which we have already seen.

But if some bishops of the Church of England could travel back in time and be right there in that moment with Jesus, perhaps they would have had him interrupted, and silenced. Apparently, Jesus is “not living in love and faith”!

Would any of us want to join those bishops? If we did, we would dismiss God's word all over again. We would blatantly ignore and misunderstand the obvious in Scripture, and on purpose. We have already leafed through the many, many pages where the Bible commends God's design for marriage. In order to use the PLF prayers “authorised by the bishops”, we would have to tear those pages out of the Bible and shred them! We would end up with a lighter Bible, yes, but a heavy conscience.

No wonder progressive churches worldwide are dying. When leaders hold up a lighter Bible, they are no longer upholding the whole truth. The danger is that the Holy Spirit of God, the one inspiring the Bible —the “Spirit of Truth”, as Jesus called him<sup>19</sup> — departs their church and leaves those leaders preaching to themselves.

Anyone who cares about the Bible should not think twice about rejecting this. Please say “No” to PLF. I am finally shutting that umbrella and throwing it away.

---

<sup>17</sup> Christian Concern. “Churches with the largest under-16 attendance teach conservative views on sexuality”. 3 February 2023. Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://christianconcern.com/ccpressreleases/churches-with-largest-under-16-attendance-teach-conservative-views-on-sexuality-study-shows/>

<sup>18</sup> CARE: Christian Action, Research and Education. “A Better Story for the Church?”, Sophie Clarke. February 9, 2023. Accessed September 20, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbowM5IDpQA>

<sup>19</sup> Read John 15:26.

## **Conclusion: Just Give Them Jesus**

I presented to you both a faulty umbrella and the Bible. On the one hand, we had PLF. We have seen the great damage it has caused already. It is disfiguring the Church of England and Anglicanism itself, causing division from Synod to Parish, from Canterbury to the whole Anglican Communion, division which we feel even in our own village church. It has not attracted the young or the same sex attracted Christians who are resolved to obey Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we have the Bible. We have seen it affirm itself as 100% God's word. We have seen what it reveals about God's blessing, marriage and human life, and perhaps it felt as true to you as it does to me. We have met Jesus, the most loving and most demanding person alive and now I wonder: would you like to know him better?

I am launching a podcast for this village, just so we can do that together. Please visit the website [aboutHIM](#) and sign up. And now we can turn to our first question and give it an informed answer. How can we respond to a same sex couple who enters our church expecting a blessing?

My friend Adam Curtis, who is also same sex attracted, says this, "Give them Jesus". He explains: "What same sex attracted people need is truth and love. We need to hear what God has to say and we need to hear it in such a way that demonstrates God's great love for us. In short, what we need is Jesus."<sup>20</sup>

So let us just give them Jesus.

*Parishioner of St Mary's Church, PCC Member, Youth Leader*

*September 2024*

---

<sup>20</sup> Living Out. "Give Them Jesus." Adam Curtis, March 8, 2021. Accessed September 30, 2024. <https://www.livingout.org/resources/posts/23/give-them-jesus>



# The Survey

Thank you for taking the time and opportunity to read and reflect on both points of view.

## A Prayer

Lord,

when our brothers and sisters in Christ  
come to a view which is contrary to our own,  
we pray that our love for our fellow Christians  
will overcome potential division.

We pray that this love will support our fellow parishioners  
through the pain caused by issues  
which appear to undermine tenets of fundamental beliefs,  
yet also conquer the deep pain which has been felt by many,  
both through personal or second-hand experience.

We ask that you hold in love in your hearts those who hold other views  
and give us that same understanding.

In your name,  
Amen.

## Useful Contact Details

Parish Office	<a href="mailto:office@wargravechurch.org.uk">office@wargravechurch.org.uk</a>	0118 940 2300
Mark Puddy	<a href="mailto:mark.puddy@wargravechurch.org.uk">mark.puddy@wargravechurch.org.uk</a>	07876 065 118
Sue Witney	<a href="mailto:sue@wargravechurch.org.uk">sue@wargravechurch.org.uk</a>	07769 704 647
Revd Steve Turville	<a href="mailto:steve.turville@wargravechurch.org.uk">steve.turville@wargravechurch.org.uk</a>	0118 901 6720
Jubi da Silva	<a href="mailto:jubiracy@gmail.com">jubiracy@gmail.com</a>	07950 623 209

## **Introduction**

Though important in the process for the appointment of our new vicar, we believe that there are many more important qualities we would like to see in our new Vicar; that they should be Christ-centred, preach the Gospel of Jesus with joy, enthusiasm and relevance, to communicate well to the wider community – particularly to young families, be willing to innovate and initiate pathways for all parishioners to grow in faith.

We would like to know the range of opinions held by the members on our Electoral Roll, and to gauge if there are differences between those who attend regularly and those who come less frequently. We also feel that it important to assess the number of people who have not yet reached a clear view on this matter, as well as those who have decided that this is not a matter on which they want to express a strong opinion one way or the other.

The result of the survey will help us in compiling the Parish Profile, and will be considered by the PCC when they express their views.

## **Online Votes**

For those of you who have received this document electronically, please follow the link to Survey Monkey, where you will be able to register your view. You will need to enter your email address as part of this process to validate your entry as someone on the Electoral Roll. There is not a link from those who have downloaded the document from the QR Code; to access the survey, please use the document which you received by email.

## **Shared Email Addresses**

As it will only be possible to count one response per email from each survey submitted electronically, if you share an email address with other people on the electoral roll, and want to complete your own response, please contact the office. Let them know via email or by phone if you need to have the whole document printed off, or (as the whole document is rather long, and in order to save paper), just a paper survey form.

## **Postal & By Hand Votes**

For those who have received the document as a paper copy, please return the completed form to the Parish Office, or leave it in the letter box for the Parish Office in the Lych-gate at the entrance to the Churchyard. Each printed entry has an anonymised but unique code on the form, which will ensure that we know that the paper responses will be representative of those who have replied by this route.

Thank you very much for the time you have spent reading and praying about this and for letting us know your views by completing the Survey.

**Please ensure you submit your reply by Wednesday 16th October.**

We will be letting the Parish know the outcome of the Survey once it is completed.

**Mark Puddy & Sue Witney**

*Churchwardens*