



BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL CHURCH CONFLICTS OVER SEXUALITY

By Savitri Hensman

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1. Introduction

In various denominations, debates on sexual ethics and treatment of minorities have sparked heated international controversy. This is sometimes seen as a conflict between a 'liberal' west and 'conservative' south. But the reality is more complicated.

Both acceptance of, and hostility towards, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people can be found across continents and cultures. And, while those most opposed to celebrating, or even allowing, same-sex partnerships sometimes claim to be protecting their people from the influence of the west, their actions serve to reinforce global power imbalances and western domination.

This research essay explores the issues and looks at ways forward in response and understanding.

2. International divisions and a show of independence

In January 2014, Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan signed into law a draconian law targeting an already criminalised LGBT minority, along with families and friends. A mother who let her gay son live with his partner under her roof, or theologian putting forward a biblical case for accepting same-sex relationships, risked being jailed for ten years.

This was praised by various church leaders. The decision “not to bow to international pressure in the promotion of unethical and immoral practices of same sex union and other related vices is indeed a courageous one,” declared Catholic Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama.

He commended the president for resisting a “conspiracy of the developed world to make our country and continent, the dumping ground for the promotion of all immoral practices, that have continued to debase the purpose of God for man in the area of creation and morality, in their own countries.” Human rights defenders in Africa and internationally had pointed out that the new law would violate fundamental principles and persuaded western governments to distance themselves.

Later however, at an international Synod on the Family in October, he distanced himself from the criminalisation of LGBT people while still resisting recognition of same-sex partnerships. Though over 200,000 Nigerians die of AIDS each year, he condemned international organisations which “give us condoms and artificial contraceptives. Those are not the things we want. We want food, we want education, we want good roads, regular light, and so on” – as if these were mutually exclusive, and Nigerian anti-HIV activists had not sought affordable protection.

Several other supporters of the law remain unrepentant, including Anglican Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, who also praised the president, stating that those opposed to this law were rebelling against God. Okoh had earlier helped to whip up support for the bill, for instance spuriously claiming in 2010 that Nigeria was at risk from an “invading army of homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexual lifestyle” and that “The church in the west had vowed to use their money to spread the homosexual lifestyle in African societies and churches.”

In Uganda too, Anglican leaders had backed a punitive anti-homosexuality bill, when amended to remove the death penalty and requirement that clergy and professionals inform on LGBT people in their care. A spokesperson told the Christian Post in 2014 that “we support Uganda’s national sovereignty and our right to self-determination in establishing this law, and will not bow to international pressure to change that part of our culture that aligns with our biblical convictions.”

Such leaders have expressed unwillingness to be in fellowship with those who treat LGBT people equally, and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby told a Times interviewer in December 2014 that there may end up being “a sort of temporary separation” in the Anglican Communion.

While many opponents of full inclusion are less extreme, in other denominations such as the United Methodists too, international tensions have arisen over the issue of same-sex partnerships. Some explain such differences as the result of a cultural and spiritual rift between the south, especially Africa, and more liberal (especially western) countries.

“Revulsion against homosexuals is ancient, deep and, in its way, sincere, even if some of the politicians leading the backlash do so for cynical reasons,” according to an Economist leader on ‘The gay divide’. “Emerging countries in Asia and Latin America have generally grown kinder to gay people as they have grown richer, more open and more democratic. The hope is that as Africa and the Arab world catch up, they will follow suit... For those who cling to the notion of progress, it is hard to believe that tolerance will not spread.”

Yet almost half a century ago, UK parliamentarians were pondering why their own part of the globe was so much less tolerant than others such as the Arab world.

Homosexuality “is not a thing of advanced decadence, or something which has come to light only lately, in societies which have become over-civilised. It is something which all history has known,” the Earl of Huntingdon pointed out in May 1965, as the House of Lords debated whether gay sex should be decriminalised. “Some societies, such as the Arab or the Eastern, accept it; others react strongly against it.” This is a reminder of how quickly attitudes can change, both positively and negatively.

At that time LGBT people in the UK could be evicted or sacked and, if male, locked up, or pressured into undergoing one or other ‘therapy’ which was usually ineffectual and often deeply damaging. Extortion was rife: the law was nicknamed the ‘blackmailer’s charter’. Elsewhere in the west, things had got even worse.

Just twenty years before in economically advanced, technologically sophisticated Germany, gays and lesbians had been herded into concentration camps in terrible conditions, where some died. Those in charge thought this represented the pinnacle of science and morality.

Meanwhile in much of the world, people tended to be indifferent to same-sex relationships provided these were discreet or even, in some cultures, created space for those whose sexuality or gender identity was different from that of most others. (Examples include the ‘yan daudu’ among the Hausa of Nigeria and *hijras* of India.)

Some of these parts of the world have since become hostile. Elsewhere attitudes have become more accepting but a vocal minority continues to promote discrimination in secular as well as religious settings, at home and abroad.

3. Social change, clashes and a colonial legacy

Over the past few centuries, the forces of modernity wrought huge changes across the world, some life-enhancing and others destructive. A number of prominent figures championed freedom for and dignity for all, while others sought to exploit their neighbours more scientifically while devising elaborate theories to justify social inequality and sometimes violence. There were also people who looked back nostalgically to a more predictable, less impersonal world even if this perpetuated feudal privilege, or to a more distant romanticised past.

Unsurprisingly, Christians could be found on different sides of various conflicts taking place, and the number of churches grew rapidly. There was a sense of liberation in the message some conveyed that ordinary Christians no longer had to rely on clergy or rulers to tell them about God but could read this themselves in the Bible, translated into their own language. But new tyrannies rose when leaders demanded that their own selection of biblical verses, sometimes questionably translated, represented ultimate truth on particular topics.

Repression against people who had same-sex partners became more systematic, often at the same time as other forms of discrimination such as anti-Semitism, but at the same time sexual minorities were becoming more visible.

As Europeans conquered large swathes of the world, they were often shocked at the 'immorality' of the 'natives'. The versions of Christianity which accompanied expanding empires reflected their founders' cultural assumptions and reinforced the legal frameworks they introduced.

This generally including criminalising 'sodomy', sometimes described as the 'Oriental vice'. In Africa there were diverse traditions, some of which openly permitted sexual relationships between partners of the same biological sex, but this did not fit the new norms. The Bible was also quoted to try to justify racism and even the slave trade, though some Christians in the west opposed the worst excesses of colonial rule.

Colonial education "was a project of social engineering which aimed to inscribe superiority on sexual formations which aligned with colonial notions of 'good' identity. Civilized and 'proper' men were expected to behave like European men in everything including sexual conduct. Civilized and 'proper' women were those whose sexual conducts were in line with Victorian codes," wrote C. Otutubikey Izugbara in 'Patriarchal Ideology and Discourses of Sexuality in Nigeria, African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre, 2004. So "homosexuality, same-sex erotic desire, and relationships that do not clearly reinforce male control of life spheres" were treated "as 'improper' if not dangerous."

Yet Christian faith was inevitably reinterpreted to some extent wherever it took root, laws were not always enforced and repression met not only with conformity but also resistance. On the one hand faith was often entwined with the rigid notions of masculinity, femininity and propriety prevalent in the west, sometimes combined with local patriarchal traditions. On the other hand it could inspire struggles for justice and freedom.

In the early-mid twentieth century, anti-colonial movements gained ground across Asia, Africa and Latin America, often leading to ostensible independence. A generation of church leaders from these continents faced the challenge of separating what was most valuable in their faith tradition from alien cultural trappings while continuing to promote scientific progress. At the same time, along with other Christians across the world, they confronted the aftermath of horrific human rights abuses and the task of building a world where such atrocities were less likely to happen.

4. Thwarted progress, church divisions

Regrettably some of the widely-held hopes of that time, of people treating one another more justly and peacefully across social barriers and mutual cultural enrichment, were not fully realised. This was largely because those wielding greatest power internationally were unwilling to loosen their grip, for instance sponsoring coups against progressive southern leaders. But members of local elites who joined forces with them also played a part. Rivalry between western powers and the Soviet Union and its allies was also significant, as each tried to increase its influence in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Religion, along with other forms of culture, became a site of intense (if not always visible) struggle. Systems of belief and types of worship that bolstered existing patterns of wealth and privilege or distracted people from their often wretched living conditions were favoured, and attempts made to win support away from more radical Christian organisations and networks.

Inculturation (or indigenisation) – the inclusion of aspects of local cultures (if not at odds with core Christian values) in the way that Christianity is taught and understood – has been central to the spread of faith from the earliest times. As churches sought to become more authentically rooted in colonial and post-colonial societies, this took various forms.

On the one hand this approach could bring worship to life and enable the church to engage with the hopes and fears of parishioners, on the other hand it could reinforce rigid gender divisions and other forms of hierarchy when reactionary forms of Christianity coincided with existing social divisions. There was also a risk of oversimplifying ‘tradition’ and ignoring the varying forms it took and its dynamic nature, and of glossing over the issues of power and justice, so central to the Bible.

For example, to Kenyan theologian John Mbiti, in his 1973 work *Love and Marriage in Africa*, “having sexual intercourse or intimacy with a person of the same sex is immoral, abnormal, unnatural, and a danger to society” since “two people of the same sex cannot establish the kind of relationship which can only come from a husband and wife relationship”. He claimed that, from an African cultural and religious perspective, “It is on the creative dimension of marriage that you in fact become co-creator with God. In procreation you are fostering God’s creative work in the world.”

Procreation was, and indeed is, heavily emphasised in certain African and Asian cultures and childless women stigmatised. Nor is this unique to the south: for instance older Germans may remember a time when motherhood was emphasised as a social obligation. But if Jesus was bold enough to question such attitudes, which can be deeply oppressive of women and sexual minorities, even in first-century Asia (e.g. Luke 11.27-28, Matthew 19.10-12), his followers today might reasonably be expected to follow suit.

At the same time, amidst growing urbanisation, LGBT visibility was increasing. It was all too easy (and sometimes convenient for global powers and their local partners) for people in countries wracked by blighted hopes to take out their frustrations on their neighbours and scapegoat ethnic or sexual minorities or others ‘different’ in some way. This in turn met with resistance.

Meanwhile right-wingers in the west strove to undermine liberation theologies and Christians opposed to their favoured regimes (including apartheid South Africa). For example the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a right-wing think-tank, persuaded the makers of US television documentary series ‘60 Minutes’ to smear the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches for supposedly diverting funds from American churchgoers to finance revolutionary violence (a decision the producer later regretted). Images included a collection plate being passed round at a United Methodist service, Cuban leader Fidel Castro and a murdered missionary in Zimbabwe.

This and other propaganda efforts helped to undermine mainstream denominations, while IRD and other bodies backed by far-right millionaires proved skilled at tapping into disaffection among those churchgoers across the world who were worried about theological ‘liberalism’.

Such organisations were also adept at exploiting resentment among certain churches in the south at their dependence on western Christians for funding, as well as the condescending attitudes which some occasionally encountered. The notion that churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America, though materially poor, were spiritually richer than those in wealthier societies became popular. Some in the west who felt guilty about imperialism bought into this, stereotypical though it was.

5. Cry for life: following the Jesus of faith

A spectrum of views on sexuality, along with other issues, had developed among Christians in the south. In 1992 an assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, issued a powerful statement: 'A cry for life: the spirituality of the Third World':

The Third World cry for life is one multi-tonal cry. It reflects the various ways oppression assaults Third World life. It carries the cries of countries protesting economic indenture to IMF and the World Bank... It carries the cries of refugees, children, displaced people and those afflicted with AIDS, the cries against the discrimination of homosexuals, of those who suffer from economic oppression ... It carries the cries of Blacks against apartheid. It carries the cries of the dalits against the apartheid or caste oppression. It carries the cries of women against patriarchal dominance and sexual violence...

Our analysis of the global context is incomplete if we do not address ourselves to the growing divisions among our own people in the Third World and the violence committed on one another... Our elites perpetuate their dominance over the majority, increasing the misery of the poor. Among our religious institutions there are churches in most places which tend to be elitist, racist and sexist. By and large these churches have lost the moral credibility to respond to the cry of the world for life...

To follow the Jesus of faith, first, is to follow one who is unrelentingly critical of the power relations in the structures of society that engender injustice and oppression. Second, it is to follow someone who believes that it is necessary to embody in community our vision of the new, more just society, as well as the discipline to work to realize our vision in this world. Third, following the Jesus of faith means following one who was dedicated to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and fighting for the liberation of oppressed people...

God is present to us in him...

He comes so that we may have life and have it in abundance; he comes that we may be one; he comes not to be served but to serve and to lay down his life as a ransom for many (John 1:10; Mark 10:45)...

Commitment might lead to harassment, marginalisation, ecclesiastical sanctions, arrest, torture or even death. To be committed means there is no cost too great when one joins God's mission to make the world a place where life is valued for all of God's creation...

The fullest democratic participation of all persons at all levels is a means of treating all persons and groups with dignity, of providing space for ethnic and cultural identity and spiritual development, of promoting relationships of mutuality irrespective of gender and sexual orientation, as well as of (at least) reducing exploitation, competition and waste...

It is the call of Jesus Christ to all disciples to take up our cross and go forward towards a more hopeful future for all.

The struggle of lesbians and gays against discrimination was here seen as an integral part of a wider movement towards a world freed from injustice of every kind, where destructive forces are confronted so that all have the chance to enjoy life in its abundance. That churches could be part of the problem as well as of the solution was also recognised.

'A cry for life' suggested that:

For many centuries the Bible has been interpreted from the point of view of a western patriarchal and dominant culture...

The people are now freeing the Bible from these wrong interpretations...

In the Bible itself one can see the struggle of people against the manipulation of scribes and the teachers of the law. The Bible teaches us to get over those texts which are oppressive in the new context. The Bible is self-critical and has the capacity to expose the oppressive elements in the lives, traditions and cultures of our people.

6. A new millennium

Some church leaders were more open to questioning the status quo than others. Famously, in 2005, in response to South African archbishops questioning why Anglicans were so focused on homosexuality when Africa faced pressing issues such as war, AIDS and poverty, their Nigerian counterpart Peter Akinola told the media, "I didn't create poverty. This church didn't create poverty. Poverty is not an issue, human suffering is not an issue at all, they were there before the creation of mankind."

This is not to say that such churches were not engaged in charitable activity. But (with some exceptions) seriously challenging the imbalances of power at home and abroad that led to so much wretchedness was a different matter, though the Bible had far more to say about social and economic justice than sexuality. The siphoning off of mineral wealth, manipulation of markets and exploitation of cheap labour profoundly affected all but the wealthiest in the south. However certain Christian leaders tried to make out that inclusive sister-churches were the real imperialists (though those attacked were not all in the west).

Some moderates bought into this, blocking progress in their own countries to placate these leaders while not expecting the same standards from them which might be required of westerners. For instance, anti-inclusive senior clergy from the south were not expected to engage in rigorous theological debate, just express their displeasure and quote a few Bible verses, or even to consult those local LGBT people who lives were profoundly affected by their pronouncements. Adopting such double standards, however well-intended, is itself a form of

racism. But not everyone bought into this approach and, in North America and elsewhere, several churches moved towards greater acceptance, triggering intensified opposition.

“US conservatives mobilised African clergy in their domestic culture wars at a time when the demographic centre of Christianity is shifting from the global North to the global South,” wrote Kapya Kaoma in ‘Globalising the Culture Wars’, Political Research Associates, 2009. “Traditionally, evangelical African churches have been biblically and doctrinally orthodox but progressive on such social issues as national liberation and poverty, making them natural partners of the politically liberal western churches.”

But in some instances “Right-wing groups have enticed African religious leaders to reject funding from mainline denominations – which require documentation of how the money is spent – and instead to accept funds from conservatives... Christian Right activists use rhetoric about ‘family values’ to foment homophobia in Africa with disastrous consequences.”

Meanwhile, some Anglican, Catholic and other churches in Uganda, Nigeria and beyond were benefiting from funding from the US government which, under George W Bush, was pursuing global dominance with renewed vigour. Through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and USAID, money was lavished on faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the USA and Africa to combat AIDS and its impact.

Often they did indeed care conscientiously for the sick and orphaned, but also benefited from the gratitude and dependence of those people forced to rely on them for help. And all too frequently, ideology took precedence over saving lives, for instance promoting abstinence and fidelity but withholding the option of condoms, and accurate information for men having sex with men.

To quote a 2011 paper by Comfort David and other researchers: ‘Comparing religious and secular NGOs in Nigeria: are faith-based organisations distinctive?’ published by the University of Birmingham, FBOs “believe that they have a responsibility” to spread their religion “and often see their humanitarian activities as a means to that end... FBOs display symbols of their religion in the dress of their staff, in their facilities and on their vehicles.”

Indeed a USAID 2013 memorandum on “whether the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda used the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) funds to support Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Bill” was inconclusive, finding that “USAID is paying for IRCU activities that are outside the scope of its agreement” though it was unclear what this included.

Though the centre-left government of Barack Obama (who is of part-Kenyan descent) placed more emphasis on human rights, to the anger of some church leaders, FBOs have continued to receive extensive funding. The bolstering of the status and resources of associated churches is a form of western ‘interference’ to which they do not seem to object.

7. Hope of a different world

At present, in much of the world, those strongly against inclusion may seem to have the upper hand. Yet bold people still organise for change, often seeing this as part of a wider movement for a more just and loving world.

In August 2014, over thirty African leaders from ten countries, meeting in South Africa with World Council of Churches support, issued the KwaZulu Natal Declaration, calling on all religious institutions – especially churches – to “care for the least amongst us as Christ has done” and “create safe spaces for encounter with the sexual diversity within the body of Christ”.

A WCC gathering later in the year in India, with delegates from across the world, focused mainly on economic justice and the environment, but the focus was on achieving an Economy of Life, “measured by the quality of life of those dwelling in the margins (Matthew 10:42)” and in which “all people – regardless of class, gender, race, caste, sexual orientation, indigenous identity and religion – have a voice and participate in decision-making at all levels.”

Ultimately, if the Holy Spirit is at work in even the bleakest situations, the fruits of the earth will be more justly shared and truth and compassion win out over scapegoating and prejudice.

THE AUTHOR

Savitri Hensman is a widely published Christian commentator on politics, welfare, religion and more. An Ekklesia associate, she works in the equalities and care sector and has written extensively on issues of biblical interpretation and debates within the churches about sexuality. She contributed several chapters to Ekklesia’s 2008 book, *Fear or Freedom: Why a warring church must change* (Shoving Leopard, Edinburgh: edited by Simon Barrow, foreword by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu).

RELATED READING AND RESEARCH

Edging towards accepting diversity: the Pilling Report on sexuality -
<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/pilling> (24 January 2014)

A Church of England working party on sexuality, chaired by Sir Joseph Pilling, has called for a more welcoming approach to lesbian and gay people, though not full inclusion. It recognises the current lack of consensus on the theology of sexuality, including what the Bible has to say, and recommends that clergy be free to hold services, though not weddings, for same-sex couples.

The report is a small step forward, though it is over-cautious and its handling of historical and scientific evidence is weak, this detailed analysis from Ekklesia suggests. It is also unbalanced, giving too much space to one dissenting member of the working party, firmly opposing any shift by the church towards a more pluralistic stance on same-sex partnerships. Yet it acknowledges

diversity, encourages openness to listening and growth, and may lead to further progress in enabling the church to value its lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) members and credibly witness in today's world to God's love for all.

Family as common wealth: a response to 'Men and women in marriage' - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19730> (Ekklesia, December 2013)

Love of God and neighbour are inextricably intertwined, and committed loving partnerships can nurture spiritual growth as well as bringing joy. Couples and their children (where present) are also called to care for others outside their own households. In Jesus Christ, men and women are invited to be part of a wider family whose love overflows to the needy and even enemies, Christians recognise. Barriers of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and status are overcome in this divine commonwealth of justice and mercy which is the new family created by Christ. Little of this vision comes across in *Men and women in marriage*, issued by the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission with the House of Bishops' approval in 2013 and commended for study. This document attempts to justify senior clergy's opposition to marriage equality while allowing pastoral "accommodations" for same-sex couples. Its approach to the Bible, tradition, reason and experience is inadequate, and it fails to do justice to many heterosexual as well as same-sex couples, with damaging consequences for the wider church's mission and ministry.

Church views on sexuality: recovering the middle ground - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19512> (Ekklesia, November 2013)

It is clear that Christians hold a spectrum of views on sexuality and marriage. However, the popular idea that there are two warring blocks that may be labelled 'traditionalists' and 'revisionists' is simplistic and can be misleading as well as unhelpful. Current tensions could be reduced and reframed significantly if more church leaders acknowledged the extent of common ground in the middle of this continuum, allowed limited flexibility of practice, and enabled their communities to develop practices of discernment oriented towards the "grace and truth" (John 1.13-15) that lies at the heart of the Christian message. In this paper, Ekklesia associate Savitri Hensman identifies seven widely held positions on sexuality. She suggests that those with supposedly diametrically opposing views often have more in common than they may at first think. Equally, she argues, in Christian terms, that coexistence among those sharing a 'middle ground' is not about weak compromise, but instead reflects an approach *both* deeply rooted in Bible and tradition *and* open to change as a living community led by the Spirit.

Journey towards acceptance: theologians and same-sex love - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/17246> (Ekklesia, 27 October 2012)

There are too many Christians today – both for and against full inclusion of partnered LGBT people – who have little awareness of the debates that have taken place in theological circles over the past sixty years, and the process by which so many theologians today have come to support greater inclusion. Some seem to believe that calls for acceptance in the church are based on embracing society's values (at least in parts of the world where same-sex relationships are by and large accepted) and ignoring those aspects of the Bible and church tradition that do not fit. This is regarded as a mark of either faithlessness or progress, depending on people's own views on the subject.

However this does not in any way do justice to the considered work of most theologians who have argued the case for greater inclusion, drawing deeply on the witness of the Bible and the church through the ages, to discern how God has been and is at work in a complex and constantly changing world. Moreover it makes it harder to find common ground to enable fellowship and dialogue among those with different views, and promote mutual understanding even if disagreement persists.

This paper gives a detailed overview of some of the most significant affirmative theological work on same-sex love and the Christian tradition. She demonstrates the unhelpful and simplistic positing of a straightforward 'conservative versus liberal' divide on these issues, and draws on Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Quaker and Anabaptist/Mennonite thinkers.

Should equal marriage be rejected or celebrated by Christians? - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/17245> (Ekklesia, 27 October 2012)

The possibility of opening up marriage in Britain by law to same-sex couples has been criticised by some Christians but welcomed by others. One of the more thoughtful critics is theologian John Milbank, who has eloquently expressed some common arguments against change. This response suggests that, while he raises important issues, his analysis is ultimately flawed. Taking into account such topics as tradition, sexual 'complementarity', childbearing and sacrament, there is a strong case for equal marriage.

Using and misusing St Paul: wisdom, gender and sexuality - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/17247> (Ekklesia, 27 October 2012)

This essay focuses primarily on the use and misuses of St Paul in fractious contemporary church debates about sexuality and gender. It can also be read in parallel with the growing body of theological and historical work on re-understanding one of the key figures in the history of Christianity, suggesting that Paul's project was to create a new community and dynamic which was capable of re-energising the suppressed radicalism of Torah religion in a dangerously imperialistic setting.

What future for marriage? (Simon Barrow and Jonathan Bartley, Ekklesia, June-July 2006) - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/research/papers/rethinkmarriage>

In recent years the Christian churches have set great stall by 'family values' and the institution of marriage. Yet the form of marriage we know as such today is a relatively late invention out of something that once had much more to do with solidifying dynastic power. And most commentators agree that it is going through a tough time – with more people choosing not to marry, opting to forge different (often informal) partnerships, and getting divorced in increasing numbers. This paper sets out a fresh approach, which proposes changing the law on marriage in its current form to distinguish between civic and religious unions.

Fruitful love: beyond the civil and legal in partnerships (Ekklesia, December 2011) - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/15884>

An emotionally and sexually intimate partnership is, for many people, a school of love, writes Savitri Hensman. This is not as romantic as it might sound: fearfulness, selfishness, rivalry and other negative traits may surface, and hard work may be needed to overcome these. Yet this can be a path to spiritual growth, which may manifest itself in small ways or through acts of heroic altruism. Such relationships, whether between opposite-sex or same-sex partners, can help to bring forth good fruit.

Sex, orientation and theological debate (Noel Moules, Ekklesia, March 2010) - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/11195>

This is a paper written by Noel Moules for the 'Body & Soul' weekend which took place in London on 27-28 March 2010, run by Ekklesia partner Workshop (<http://www.workshop.org.uk>). The document explores Christian approaches to sexuality and sexual orientation, as well as looking at how appropriately to handle the theological tradition and biblical texts which relate to the debate. The author spent his formative years in India and has studied (and taught) theology and

education. Through Workshop, which is open and evangelical in its grounding, with a particular concern for Anabaptist and peace church perspectives, "learners and teachers work to discover God amid uncertainty, mystery and paradox. We are sensitive to the differences between the various traditions of the church, and aim to increase understanding about the reasons behind the sincerely held opposing views."

Wrestling biblically with the changing shape of family (Deirdre Good, Ekklesia, March 2007) - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/4844>

In an excerpt from her groundbreaking book *Jesus' Family Values*, a New Testament scholar explains why simplistic appeals to scripture distort its meaning, and why for the Gospel family is built on magnanimity not exclusion.

Listening and learning in the sexuality debate -
<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6971> (Ekklesia, March 2008).

As part of the 'listening process' in the Anglican Communion over the extensive disagreements about human sexuality, Ekklesia associate Savitri Hensman prepared a paper on *Learning, Listening, Scripture and Sexuality* which seeks both to take the conversation forward and to affirm the role of lesbian and gay Christians as active and baptised members in the church, in accordance with a faithful and interpretatively sensitive reading of its the texts and tradition.

Contrasting church attitudes on human rights for all (Ekklesia, February 2009) - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/8492>

Many faith communities are officially committed to human rights for all. Yet in practice, some of their leaders may be strongly opposed. Since 1948 Christians have played a significant role in extending personal and societal respect for human dignity. At the same time, church leaders have also questioned and denied rights-based precepts and practices in a number of instances. In church contexts, arguments about sexuality are significant because they highlight the extent to which protagonists are, or are not, willing to extend equal recognition and rights to those who are 'other', or with whose lifestyle they disagree.

Binding the church and constraining God -
<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/6737> (Ekklesia, February 2008)

In a paper carefully analysing the popular use and misuse of biblical and doctrinal language about God and Church, Savitri Hensman shows that inflexible, one-sided, naïve or ideological conceptions of God in sections of the Christian tradition can reinforce domineering models and practices in the Church – which is in fact supposed to be a creative vehicle of Jesus' broken body in the world, not a defensive fortress. God is not confined by rules set by humans and our institutions, she argues, however powerful they may be by earthly standards. In the biblical tradition, God is at work outside as well as within institutions, including those that claim to be about God's business. Liberation, reformation and healing will continue to happen even if, at first, they are not acknowledged by the authorities (ecclesial and otherwise); and in time truth will break through our illusions. This paper is highly relevant to issues being discussed in and beyond Anglicanism, concerning its disputed future, and in other sections of the worldwide Church. It makes specific reference to the debate about an Anglican Covenant in the run-up to the Lambeth Conference 2008. It may also give those outside the Church a better understanding of how language and tradition is being applied and misapplied within very diverse Christian communities during a time of considerable upheaval and anxiety, both inside and outside the Church

Ekklesia submission to the Consultation on the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill - <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/18209>

The Scottish Government's consultation on the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill ended on 20 March 2013. In its submission, Ekklesia backed the proposal to introduce same sex marriage and religious and belief registration of civil partnership - while emphasising that our overall preference would be to distinguish legal marriage as a civil provision from religious or belief blessings and recognition.

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