

An extract from the letter sent to Bishop Sarah on 23 November 2022.

The situation as we see it

As we see it, there are currently three messages in the Church of England around the issue of sexuality. First, there is the message of the LGBTQ+ lobby, comprised of both Clergy and Lay people, who teach that homosexual practice in committed relationships is consistent with the holy life Jesus calls his disciples to live, and that a Christian message which prohibits homosexual practice is harmful to people who experience same-sex attraction. We are conscious that many Bishops do not personally subscribe to or teach this message in its extreme form, including Archbishop Justin. From our discussions with you Bishop Sarah, we have understood that you too would not subscribe to this first message.

Second, there is what we are calling the “adiaphora” message.¹ This message teaches that homosexual practice is neither clearly commanded nor clearly forbidden in Scripture and thus can be treated as a matter of “indifference”. It is reasoned either on the grounds that the Bible is not clear on the issue, or because the Bible is clear in different ways to different people and that God has allowed for ‘twin integrities’ or ‘plural truths’ to exist side by side. This message urges Christians to treat the issue as a secondary matter over which we must not divide. Both integrities can be held confidently within the Church of England, so long as they have been reached after much care and prayerful consideration. Under this banner, Clergy in open and active gay relationships are permitted to practice ministry, and Christians in gay relationships are encouraged to continue in them. This “adiaphora gospel” was the message of Archbishop Justin at Lambeth 2022 and is in our judgement the message of the LLF materials when taken as a whole.

The third is the biblical Gospel, which the Lord Jesus and the apostles urged on the early Church. The clearly stated warning of this true Gospel is that “everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Ephesians 5.5). We firmly believe that the Bible is clear about homosexual practice, namely, that it is outside of God’s design for sex and is *without doubt* sexual immorality (Romans 1.26-27, 1 Corinthians 6.9-11, Leviticus 18.22, Genesis 19). The orthodox biblical Gospel therefore includes the loving call to repent of all sexual immorality, including homosexual practice. Without such repentance a person cannot hope to be found as one of God’s true children on the last day.

Two major implications flow from this understanding of the situation. First, though there may seem to be three messages, we hope that you can understand that from our perspective there are really only two. Though the “adiaphora message” presents as a mediatory middle way, and indeed is in a sense more generous to the orthodox position, it is actually saying the same thing. Both the first and second messages propose homosexual practice as permissible for a godly Christian on their way to heaven.² Both messages ordain

¹ See also the *Communique by Orthodox Bishops* (Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches, GSFA), 2022, 5.8.

² As Archbishop Justin seemed to say when he quoted 1.10 as follows in his Lambeth Conference Address: “As I said in the letter, and I re-emphasise, there is no mention of sanctions, or exclusion, in 1.10 1998. There is much mention of pastoral care, as Lambeth 1.10 also states: ‘all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation are full members of the body of Christ’ and to be welcomed, cared for, and treated with respect (1.10, 1998).” (Archbishop Justin, Lambeth Address, 2022). Here, he seems to be using

sexual immorality. Both therefore are deeply unloving to the Lord's precious sheep, or would-be-sheep, who are encouraged by the Church on a disastrous course to eternity in hell (Eph 5.5). Both comprise a "false gospel", because they lead people away from the salvation that is theirs in Jesus Christ.

Second, we hope you can see that this issue is of a different order from the issue of the ordination of women as Presbyters (1992), or the consecration of women as Bishops (2015). While these issues were and remain matters of importance to many evangelicals, they have to do with what is the appropriate way for the church to be led and ordered. In contrast, ordaining sexual immorality is an issue of first importance for salvation and is therefore a "different gospel" (2 Corinthians 11.4, Galatians 1.6-8, 1 John 4.1, Revelation 2.20). And yet this "adiaphora gospel" is the message that is coming from the House of Bishops.

LLF encourages the adiaphora gospel

It will be helpful to come to our perspective on the LLF process and resources. Many of us have looked at the resources and decided that we cannot use them with our congregations. The reason for this is that, although it purports to be a neutral forum for discussion, we feel that it carries a clear message in its veins. The videos contain large sections of teaching which assume and insist upon the "adiaphora gospel" mentioned above. The language sets the clear expectation that the issue of sexuality is one on which we must agree to disagree as children of God. Snippets from the introduction to the second video include the following: "Living in love and faith is about celebrating God's gift to us of life, relationships, and sexuality...it's about learning to trust one another"; "We are all children of God"; "We're going to meet followers of Jesus whose experiences and beliefs concerning gender identity are different from ours"; "As we enter into conversations...our job is not to judge one another but to welcome one another just as Christ welcomed us".³ Many of these statements appear to be noble, but we hope that you can see that taken together, they disqualify what we have described as the biblical Gospel above, which makes clear that anyone engaging in ongoing unrepentant homosexual practice will not ultimately find themselves to have been a child of God (Ephesians 5.5). A Christian who believes the biblical Gospel, and who loves people of all sexualities, will not be able to refrain from calling people engaged in such relationships to repent in order to be saved, something that the LLF videos and resources seem to prohibit.

We are grateful for the clear work of the architects of LLF to include and give fair air-time to the orthodox viewpoint. However, we hope you can see that the Living in Love and Faith project actually stands in opposition to the Gospel that we love, cherish, and which has stood at the heart of the Church of England for centuries. Taken as a whole, it quietly insists upon the adiaphora gospel, which ordains sexual immorality within the church.

this quotation to say something different from the original intention. Namely, that people in the church who are engaged in homosexual practice are faithful, godly believers who do not need to worry about their eternal salvation.

³ Session 2: Identity

The action that we will be compelled to take in line with our consciences

We hope for better things, but our expectation is that the General Synods in 2023 will leave us with what we have at the moment from the House of Bishops – the “adiaphora gospel”. We long and pray that you Bishop Sarah, along with other Bishops, might stand up and call the church to repentance from all sexual immorality, including homosexual practice.

In our most ‘realistic’ moments, we regret that our expectation is that one of two possibilities will result from LLF. One is that nothing significant will change, the status quo will be preserved, and the message from the House of Bishops will continue to be one that ordains sexual immorality in the Church. As part of this, Clergy in openly gay relationships will continue to be able to operate freely within dioceses (including your own), and the message to the church and the world from the House of Bishops will continue to be that homosexual practice is acceptable for a disciple of Jesus.

The other possibility is that new provisions will be made which, though they may neither compel ministries to use them nor involve changes to the official rubric of the Church of England, will further legitimise homosexual practice within the church. We hope you can see that from our perspective there is no significant difference between these two likely outcomes. Either way, we will find ourselves needing to respond to a situation in which the “adiaphora gospel” has been confirmed as the message of the House of Bishops.

In this eventuality we need to make clear that we will be compelled, with heavy hearts, to take decisive action in order to remain faithful, as we see it, to the Lord Jesus and his Church. The Lord calls us to distance ourselves from those who “cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught” (Romans 16.17). Paul says “avoid them”. We do not see ourselves as causing divisions. It is the current leadership of the Church of England that is on the brink of causing divisions in the church by moving away from the historic Gospel to which the Church of England has always held. Paul urged the church to have no partnership with those who ordain sexual immorality, which has no place among God’s people (Ephesians 5.5-7). Jesus rebuked the church in Thyatira for tolerating ‘Jezebel’ who was seducing his people into sexual immorality (Revelation 2.20). Interpreting these scriptures with reference to the Episcopacy, Augustine said: “we should not obey those bishops who have been duly elected, if they commit errors, or teach *or ordain* anything contrary to the divine scripture”.⁴ In their *Communique* at Lambeth 2022 the Global South Bishops regret that they have found themselves unable to “walk together’ with the revisionist Primates and Bishops in the Anglican Communion”.⁵

As things stand we have no intention of leaving the Church of England, and will stay as long as we are able to. Again, in the words of the GSFA Bishops, insofar as the Lord allows we wish to be part of a “faithful remnant” rather than “separatists”.⁶ However, if there is no clear restatement of the orthodox biblical Gospel and a call to repent of all sexual immorality from members of the House of Bishops, we will be compelled to find a way to distance ourselves publicly from the current leadership of the Church of England. We long

⁴ Holloway, David. *The English Reformed Tradition* (The Latimer Trust, 2022), 19. (Our Italics).

⁵ *Communique by Orthodox Bishops* (Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches, GSFA), 2022, 5.5.

⁶ *Ibid.* 5.1.

that this should not be the case, but as we're sure you understand, our absolute priority is to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus and to his Word. We will therefore be seeking to work with others, including CEEC, to establish 'visible differentiation' from the House of Bishops. This visible differentiation will need to be of a different order from that already provided to some of us by the Bishop of Maidstone.

We long and pray that you, Bishop Sarah, might be willing to call sin 'sin', and to call the House of Bishops and the Church of England back to the true biblical Gospel. This would bring glory to Jesus' name, it would protect and love with a 'greater love' those who are same-sex attracted both within and outside the Church of England, and would mean that we could stand with you as evangelical clergy and laity within the Diocese of London.