

In about eighteen months' time, the church of England will announce that it intends to solemnise homosexual marriage. I have neither runes nor crystal ball, so how can I possibly know this? Because the Church has as good as announced it already in its recent publication *Living in Love and Faith*. Creditably there is no obfuscation in *LLF*.

It begins with an apology "for the damage and hurt caused to the LGBT community." It proceeds with the launch of a programme of "discussions and learning about gender identity" to be completed this year. The House of Bishops will then bring the process of "decision-making to a conclusion" and their conclusions will be put to a vote in the General Synod. This procedure appears to be no more than a polite charade for the presenter of *LLF*, Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry has already declared that the Church's teaching on marriage is "ripe for development." A cynic might comment, "Oh what a giveaway!"

When the huddling into groups has begun and the participants are embarked on their "decision-making," they will find a great deal of historical matter to help them towards what *LLF* refers to as their "discernment." For example, that both the Old and the New Testaments declare unambiguously that sexual relationships must be between one man and one woman for life. In particular, homosexual acts are prohibited: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind" (Leviticus 18:22). And St Paul condemns "Men who burn with lust one for the other" (Romans 1:27). Those words are so plain as to be not beyond the understanding even of a modern bishop.

But Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York who, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, introduced *LLF*, claims to know better than the Bible:

"What we can do is recognise that what we know now about human development and human sexuality requires us to look again at those texts to see what they are actually saying to our situation, for what we know now is not what was known then."

In other words, our contemporary mores and fashions may annul and supersede the clear teaching of Scripture. "What we know now" about human biology and psychology was knowledge not available to the author of *Leviticus* and the apostle Paul. As with Covid, the Archbishop is "following the science." Archbishops Rowan Williams and Justin Welby are at one with the present Archbishop of York in their frequently repeated assertion that "The Church has a lot of catching-up to do with secular morality." Once again, they seem to claim to know better than St Paul who wrote to the early Christians, "Be ye not conformed to *this* world" (Romans 12:2).

For the whole 2000 years of its history, the Church has unanimously upheld the Scriptural prohibition of homosexual acts. In 2022, the Church will repudiate this, and it will do so in the belief that we now know much more about human nature and human psychology than the Old Testament writers and St Paul. It is quite a claim to say that the Church has been in the wrong for two millennia and has had to wait for the present crop of bishops and synods to correct this history of error.

Still, the contemporary Church may be right. Moreover, there are good arguments to say that the Church has the authority to change its mind. For tradition is not a dead thing but, as St John Henry Newman demonstrated in his famous Doctrine of Development, it is the way God leads his people into fresh understanding.

That's fine, so long as when they announce their intention to solemnise homosexual marriages, they state their reasons clearly in a form of words something like: "We are doing this because we know better than the Bible and we are more compassionate and understanding in our attitudes than Moses, St Paul and all the Christian authorities from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century until the day before yesterday."

And the Church's decision will be accepted by the great majority of people because it chimes in with what they believe already. The C. of E. (Revised) will be at one with the *Zeitgeist*. And three Archbishops will be able to rejoice that, at long last, the Church has caught up with secular morality.

