

Biblical foundations

Some years ago, the CEEC agreed its theological foundations with regard to issues of human sexuality. These can be read in full on the CEEC website (see the article 'Gospel, Church & Marriage Preserving Apostolic Faith and Life'), but in brief can be summarised as follows:

- Through his Son and by his Spirit, God is working within human history and across all cultures to rescue his creation from sin and to transform the lives of Jesus' followers so that we embody his positive, life-enhancing purposes for all people.
- The Church is God's gift, sign and instrument of the restoration of his creation, and is the foretaste of his new creation that is breaking in. This in turn requires us to consider what it means for the Church to have integrity as the body of Christ by remaining rooted in God's grace and being shaped by the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption and future hope.
- In awaiting the final judgment and the fulfilment of God's good purposes, the Church must – at all times and in all places – faithfully obey the apostles' teaching on the pattern of faith and life that we are called to in Christ. This includes their teaching on marriage and singleness which can be summarised by saying that the two alternatives are either faithful marriage to someone of the opposite sex or a life of singleness marked by sexual abstinence.

These define not just what CEEC thinks but, rather, the position of the historic Church of England and the global majority of the Anglican Communion. In short, this is what Christians throughout the centuries and across all cultures and continents have believed. It is also the case that no major biblical commentators disagree that this is what the Bible teaches—though they vary on whether they think the teaching of Scripture is correct.

A Tectonic Difference?

However, there are members of the C of E who see things differently and wish to see change. CEEC is convinced that the level of difference between their perspectives/aspirations and those who hold to what might be called an 'inherited' or 'traditional' view of marriage/sexuality can be described as 'tectonic'. In other words, these are not differences that can be 'papered over' or in which a simple 'agree to disagree' solution can be found. The differences between those who want to see significant change with regard to sexual ethics and those who want to hold on to the historic position of the Church of England are too substantial.

To recognise this is not divisive – rather, an honest starting point, and one of integrity. CEEC notes from the conversations it has had with change advocates that they appreciate the honesty of this assessment, since it truly recognises the direction and scale of their aspirations.

Can the situation be resolved by offering 'blessings' of same sex relationships?

Some people have suggested that it might be possible to introduce services of affirmation, commemoration or blessing (of same sex couples) without it endangering the position of the Church regarding marriage. However, CEEC is not able to endorse this as an acceptable settlement for a number of reasons:

- It would change the doctrine of the Church to state that sexually active relationships outside of heterosexual marriage are not contrary to scripture.
- Those seeking change would see this as only a first step towards full acceptance of same sex marriage
- Any who decline to conduct such services will be put under enormous pressure to do so.

A Radical Alternative

CEEC recognises that one evangelical response to the possibility of moving away from a biblical position is described for us by the apostle James as the need to 'contend'. However, CEEC believes that simply 'digging our heels in' and opposing/fighting every proposed change is likely only to lead to what might be described as 'attritional warfare' in General Synod (over the next 10 years or so) and a legacy of collateral pain, bitterness and division within the Church of England.

Another evangelical response would be for evangelicals to secede from the Church of England to form an alternative orthodox Anglican Church in England (which could also include networks such as the Anglican Mission in England and the Free Church of England). This is a position of integrity and may be necessary as a last resort, but it would lead to a great deal of disruption as it would almost certainly mean clergy having to resign their posts and all church property having to be handed over for the use of those remaining in the Church of England. It would also mean the loss of opportunity to continue to influence the Church of England and through it the nation as a whole.

Therefore, the kind of 'settlement' that CEEC is proposing is one of structural differentiation within the Church of England. In short (and there are more detailed accounts of this in papers available on the CEEC website) this is a proposal to reorganise the dioceses, provinces and episcopal leadership of the Church of England in such a way that evangelical leaders and churches can be part of dioceses whose doctrinal foundations remain true to our inherited biblical position on these matters, and whose bishops will be personally committed to that doctrine and supportive of the clergy/churches under their oversight.

***It is important to understand that the word 'settlement' is not meant to suggest either a compromise of our biblical convictions, or a fudge. Rather, it is an appeal to legal language and refers to the situation in which contending parties seek to find if there is any common ground that is acceptable to both of them.*

Unity through differentiation

Whilst some might see this as a divisive proposal, CEEC believes that this is not so. To the contrary, differentiation might enable a degree of unity to be maintained that would otherwise be in jeopardy.

The Church of England, like other churches of the Anglican Communion, is made up of provinces. These two provinces of Canterbury and York retain the right to govern themselves through their own convocations (clergy bodies), even though the current default is to work together with the other province in the decision making structures of the General Synod. Rearranging or adding to these provinces (and the constituent dioceses/episcopal leaderships) would simply be a development of this existing structure.

In CEEC's view such a restructuring of the Church of England would guarantee the highest possible degree of continuing unity in the Church of England for orthodox Christians upholding catholic faith. This would mean, for instance, that people could continue to go forward for ordination with confidence that they could minister in churches and dioceses that will continue to uphold the teaching of the apostles with regard to human sexuality.

What's Next?

- It's obvious, but it's also crucial, that we **pray**; for our bishops as they seek to discern a way forward, and for CEEC engaging with the decision-makers in regard to these matters.
- In **evangelical parishes** up and down the country, it is crucial that leaders foster **good discussion** about these important issues. The film series 'God's Beautiful Story' (available free to view on the CEEC website) is one way that church leaders can introduce the topics to their wardens, PCCs and congregations (perhaps via house groups). Downloadable notes are available on the CEEC website to help churches do this.
- Diocesan Evangelical Fellowships** are working to build support and communication between evangelicals in individual dioceses – and if you are not yet a member of the DEF, can we encourage you to join as soon as possible. If you don't know who to contact, try making contact through the
- CEEC Ebulletin** - If you do not yet receive our regular e-bulletin please sign up on our website so that we can help you keep up to date with developments..

In Conclusion

No doubt you will have heard people say 'Why are evangelicals always talking about sex?' In fact, the current discussion about sexual ethics in the Church of England has not been launched or requested by evangelicals: it is those seeking change who are keeping it on the agenda.

CEEC would prefer to see the current teaching of the Church of England endorsed and the energies being invested in this discussion to be redirected to mission and evangelism. One way of making that possible is to help us avoid the current debates and confusion continuing for years to come by supporting the CEEC proposal for structural differentiation. Then we can give our whole attention to our mandate to mission with Jesus : *'the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'*

Further papers

Please see the 4 papers listed under 'CEEC submission to the Next Steps Group' on LLF webpage : www.ceec.info/living-in-love-and-faith.html

'Why issues of sexuality are not adiaphora'
Why it's not possible to accept a positive view of sex outside of heterosexual marriage.

'Gospel, church and marriage: preserving apostolic faith and life'
A summary of CEEC's theological position regarding issues of human sexuality.

'Guarding the Deposit'
An exploration of the case for and examples of models for differentiation.

'Visibly Different '
A detailed consideration of the proposal for provincial structural differentiation (including an 'introduction' and an 'updating addendum')

After LLF - What Next?

This short leaflet is produced by the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) further to a large number of conversations with evangelicals across the dioceses of the Church of England.

CEEC is pleased to affirm the Church of England's current teaching that marriage is a lifelong exclusive commitment between one man and one woman, and that sex outside of that should be met with a call to repentance. Recognition and acceptance of sexual same-sex relationships would change the Church's doctrine.

In the face of requests within the C of E for this position to change, CEEC also notes that no church anywhere in the world has found a 'compromise' solution which has kept both 'sides' happy and which has not led to a fundamental split in that church.



A large number of church leaders (ordained and lay) have indicated to CEEC their concerns as to what might happen as we emerge from the Living in Love and Faith initiative.

This leaflet outlines CEEC's perspective on the current position in brief form. As such, it may not answer all the questions that readers will have, and if that is the case, you are invited to look at the further papers on the CEEC website, as outlined at the end of this leaflet.