

290 *Will this split the church?*

I want to try (difficult, given my strong views) to provide some factual information about the current situation on gay marriage. My experience is with the Anglican (CofE) church, but I have had some input from a church leader in a free church in the UK.

Background: If you are divorced then, in the Anglican church, you can't get remarried in church, although you can marry in a Register Office and then have a service of blessing in a church. And the situation is now similar for gay couples: what the bishops have recently agreed (following the lead of some of the free churches) is that vicars are allowed to offer a service of blessing to couples who are already in gay civil partnerships.

My guess is that many are ambivalent on this issue, saying that if it's what gay people want then why should they be not allowed to do so? But there is a strong anti movement among so-called Orthodox Anglicans.

A friend sent me a link to a web article¹ written by Cornelius Harding, a member of her own church homegroup (my previous church). It basically says that if we really love 'our LGB friends', we should hold to the traditional teaching:

...issues of human sexuality are a salvation issue, and so that without repentance those who engage in same-sex sexual relationships will be damned rather than saved.

and later

For Orthodox Anglicans to fail to continue with the apostolic teaching of the Church is an act of hatred which allows those who identify as LGB to be condemned to damnation.

You can see why he's so concerned – it's about the immortal souls of a large proportion of society, of church members, and of a growing proportion of the clergy – because more gay people seem attracted to the caring profession of church leadership.

So is this issue going to split the church? My previous church has already written to the bishop threatening to withdraw financial support from the diocese if they don't *reverse* the decision on blessing gay partnerships; they are also talking about leaving the CofE altogether, though there are then issues about the legal title to their churches, into which they (we!) have ploughed quite a bit of money.

All I'm saying today is to urge any who haven't really thought about this to do so. It is an issue of increasing urgency; it is an issue of church credibility. How many people do you know who have turned away from the church because of its condemnatory attitude?

But if God condemns gay couples unless they repent – and presumably split from their life partners – then that too is important to know.

Paul Bev. 25.10.23

¹ <https://anglican.ink/2023/09/28/when-your-head-is-in-the-tigers-mouth-a-heartfelt-plea-to-orthodox-anglicans-in-the-cofe/>