


Enjoying what comes naturally: The Church of England and Sexuality in the 1930s

Mark D. Chapman* 
University of Oxford

This article begins by outlining the changing approach in Anglican attitudes to contraception at the Lambeth Conference of 1930, where birth control was permitted for married couples and sex separated from the possibility of procreation. The logical extension of this teaching, as was noted by Bishop Charles Gore, was that other forms of sexual pleasure, including homosexuality, which was increasingly seen as a 'natural' condition, might eventually be sanctioned by the church. Later in the 1930s, a series of letters by Robert Reid to Cosmo Gordon Lang, archbishop of Canterbury, shows the beginnings of a campaign for a change of policy. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Anglican writer Kenneth Ingram published Sex-Morality Tomorrow, which pressed for full homosexual equality and provoked calls to William Temple to suppress the book. 1940 proved an inopportune moment for reform of church teaching on homosexuality, which continues to elicit widespread controversy.

This article seeks to show how the acceptance of contraception in the resolutions of the 1930 Lambeth Conference of the Bishops of the Anglican Communion revealed an increasing awareness among church leaders that sexual intercourse was both a 'natural' and enjoyable act in itself, even when divorced from the possibility of procreation. By drawing on hitherto unpublished archival sources, which have yet to be discussed in detail,¹ it goes on to show how the (albeit limited) acceptance of non-procreative sex proved significant for some

* Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford, OX44 9EX. E-mail: mark.chapman@rcc.ac.uk.

¹ In *Socialism and Religion: Roads to Common Wealth* (Basingstoke, 2011), Vincent Geoghegan discussed Kenneth Ingram's political thought in relation to his reflections on sexual morality and homosexuality: see esp. 53–84. The correspondence at Lambeth Palace is briefly discussed at *ibid.* 80–2.

pioneers within the Church of England who sought to explain the 'naturalness' of homosexuality, as well as the moral acceptability of some forms of homosexual activity. For some, including Charles Gore, former bishop of Oxford and a leader of Anglo-Catholicism, permitting contraception could be seen as the thin end of the wedge. It could be seen as marking a sexual revolution in which other forms of non-procreative sexual activity might increasingly be condoned by the church. At the same time, a greater scientific emphasis on the 'naturalness' of homosexuality led some members of the Church of England, including a number of those discussed in this article, to accuse the church of hypocrisy and of an ostrich-like mentality in its discussions of same-sex attraction. While the Second World War temporarily halted discussions in the Church of England about homosexuality, these were quickly to re-emerge in the run-up to the 1957 Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution chaired by Lord John Woolfenden.²

In May 1930, Dr Helena Wright (1887–1982)³ published *The Sex Factor in Marriage* which proved to be a bestseller, going through five editions by 1956.⁴ At the time, Wright was working as Chief Medical Officer at the North Kensington Women's Welfare Centre, where, between the wars, she became one of the key figures in promoting contraception. Perhaps surprisingly, Wright's comprehensive guide to marital sex, which advocates birth control, as well as mutual pleasure, begins with a lengthy quotation from a speech given by the (unmarried) archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang,

² See Graham Willett, 'The Church of England and the Origins of Homosexual Law Reform', *Journal of Religious History* 33 (2009), 418–34; Matthew Grimley, 'Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954–57', *JEH* 60 (2009), 725–41; Hugh McLeod, 'Homosexual Law Reform, 1953–1967,' in Melanie Barber, Stephen Taylor and Gabriel Sewell, eds, *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society: A Miscellany in Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Lambeth Palace Library* (Woodbridge, 2010), 657–78.

³ On Wright, see Barbara Evans, *Freedom to Choose: The Life and Work of Dr Helena Wright, Pioneer of Contraception* (London, 1984); Lesley A. Hall, 'Wright [née Lowenfeld], Helena Rosa (1887–1982), family planning practitioner and sex therapist', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2102/10.1093/ref:odnb/31859>>, accessed 14 July 2022.

⁴ Helena Wright, *The Sex Factor in Marriage: A Book for those who are about to be Married* (London, 1930). The book went through a number of editions, with the fifth and final edition appearing in 1956.

on 4 April 1930, a few months before the publication of her book, to the London Diocesan Council for Social Work. Lang had made the bold claim: 'We want to liberate the sex impulse from the impression that it is always to be surrounded by negative warnings and restraints, and to place it in its rightful place among the great creative and formative things'. It was crucial to discuss the subject since, he claimed,

I would rather have all the risks which come from free discussion of sex than the great risks we run by a conspiracy of silence. ... I notice how silence has given place to free discussion. In my judgment this is a great improvement. In the old days silence drove one of the necessarily natural instincts within. Nowadays people recognise sex as one of the great fundamental questions of human society, and all thoughtful Christians and citizens ought to take their part in discussing the great problems with which it deals.⁵

Lang was quite clear, however, that there should be 'no over-indulgence in the emotions and stimulus of sex without the withering of that life that God gave and Christ redeemed and His Holy Spirit could make so rich and full and joyous.'⁶

Wright was rather less judgemental: on contraception, she simply felt that it was a matter of conscience between couples, referring them to Michael Fielding's *Parenthood: Design or Accident?* (1928), which had appeared in the same series as her own book.⁷ Emphasizing mutuality and pleasure, she devotes a significant amount of space to women's enjoyment and the importance of clitoral stimulation and the female orgasm,⁸ as well as variety (and reversal) of sex roles and positions.⁹ Alongside the physicality of much of its content, the book retains a strong spiritual dimension, Wright even claiming that 'the sex-relation is one of the sacraments of life':¹⁰ 'Every happy marriage should be a living source of spiritual light, radiating warmth and love to all those who come within its circle'.¹¹

⁵ Cited in Wright, *The Sex Factor* (London, 1930), 8.

⁶ *Church Times*, 11 April 1930, 473.

⁷ Michael Fielding, *Parenthood: Design or Accident? A Manual of Birth Control with a Preface by H. G. Wells* (London, 1928).

⁸ Wright, *The Sex Factor*, 70–4.

⁹ *Ibid.* 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 97.

Despite her Polish-Jewish roots, Wright had been baptized into the Church of England and became a member of the Student Christian Movement. She had risen to such prominence in church circles that she was invited to address the Lambeth Conference in Westminster Hall on 15 August 1930 on behalf of the National Birth Control Council: 'I realised that, if not actually hostile, there was nothing to encourage the belief that the Anglican church was sympathetic to the birth control movement, but I thought I might as well try as I'd been asked to.'¹² Global Anglicanism had changed in its approach to birth control through the 1920s.¹³ Opposition to contraception had been made clear at the Lambeth Conference of 1908 which had resolved that contraception 'was demoralising to character and hostile to national Welfare'.¹⁴ Similarly, in 1920, despite lobbying from Marie Stopes (1880–1958) and other early campaigners for contraception,¹⁵ the bishops issued 'an emphatic warning against the use of unnatural means for the avoidance of conception, together with the grave dangers – physical, moral and religious, thereby incurred, and against the evils with which the extension of such use threatens the race'. It was clear, they reaffirmed, that 'the governing considerations of Christian marriage are the procreation of children and self control.'¹⁶

By 1930, however, things had changed, in part through the influence of Helena Wright, who drew on her practice in Kensington in her address to the bishops. She later reflected:

They seemed all to be white-haired, a mass of dear old gentlemen. One or two of them smiled when I told them they knew nothing about the people I was talking about, the women who had been my patients. These working-class mothers all had more children than they could

¹² Cited in Evans, *Freedom to Choose*, 139.

¹³ See Laura M. Ramsay, "'The Relation of the Sexes': Towards a Christian View of Sex and Citizenship in Interwar Britain", *Contemporary British History* 34 (2020), 555–79.

¹⁴ Resolution 41, in *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion holden at Lambeth Palace, July 6 to August 5, 1908: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops, with the Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1908), 56. See also Peter Sedgwick, 'The Lambeth Conferences on Contraception, 1908–68', *Theology* 123 (2020), 96–103.

¹⁵ Timothy Willem Jones, *Sexual Politics in the Church of England 1857–1957* (Oxford, 2013), 134–5, 140.

¹⁶ Resolution 68, in *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion, holden at Lambeth Palace, July 5 to August 7, 1920* (London, 1920), 44. See also Charlotte Methuen, 'The Lambeth Conference, Gender and Sexuality', *Theology* 123 (2020), 84–94.

afford. ... Each woman came in a state of wonderment. It was as if they had been told they could control the weather.

I had no idea if the bishops would listen, but as I described the changes I had seen in these women, and as the pictures unfolded I saw their expressions getting more and more human, and the transformation of the corporate feeling. One or two would look up, and I realised, 'Yes, he's taken it in. He sees something new.'¹⁷

While it is impossible to gauge the effect of her speech, after considerable debate the bishops resolved to change the approach from earlier conferences. After a number of revisions, Resolution 15 passed with a large majority:

Where there is a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, the method must be decided on Christian principles. The primary and obvious method is complete abstinence from intercourse ... Nevertheless in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used, provided that this is done in the light of the same Christian principles. The Conference records its strong condemnation of the use of any methods of conception-control from motives of selfishness, luxury, or mere convenience.¹⁸

Despite the less than enthusiastic tone, this meant that for the first time there was an explicit separation of sexual activity from procreation in the pronouncements of the Lambeth Conferences.

The idea of separating sex from procreation proved highly controversial, especially among Anglo-Catholics. Bishop Walter Carey of Bloemfontein (South Africa) left the Lambeth Conference in protest and others, including Bishop Mark Napier Trollope of Korea, absented themselves from the debate.¹⁹ Much hung on whether 'artificial' birth control was interfering with what was natural for men and women, which included the possibility of procreation, a line that has been maintained vigorously by the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Charles Gore was acutely aware of what he regarded

¹⁷ Evans, *Freedom to Choose*, 140.

¹⁸ Resolution 15, in *The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops, with Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1930), 43.

¹⁹ J. G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London, 1949), 350.

as the dangers represented by condoning non-procreative sex and placing increased emphasis on sexual pleasure. Where sexual activity was divorced from procreation and consequently contradicted what was ‘natural’, Gore held, it would not be difficult to regard it as leading to the permissibility of forms of sexual activity outside marriage that many regarded as immoral. In a pamphlet written for the League of National Life, established in 1926 to oppose the theory and practice of birth control and in response to the Lambeth Resolutions,²⁰ Gore felt that their ‘effect will be disastrous’ at ‘arresting the tide of sensualism’. He went on: ‘The Church has regarded Birth Prevention as sinful because, like other sensual practices commonly called unnatural, it is a deliberate enterprise taken in hand to separate absolutely the enjoyment of the sexual act from its natural issue.’ There could, he claimed, be no departure from the absolute demands of the gospel, or ‘second best’.²¹ Similarly, in another pamphlet produced for the League of National Life, where he discussed attitudes to birth control in other countries, Gore wrote: ‘every one who believes that Christ is really “the Way” for humanity must refuse to countenance, either in theory or practice, the truly and fundamentally unnatural, and in their general result licentious, proposals and practices of the falsely-called movement for “Birth Control.” It is “the enemy”.’²² For Gore, it would seem, all forms of natural sexual activity had to be open to the possibility of procreation: what went against nature was regarded as immoral.

Earlier, in a submission to the Special Committee of the National Birth-Control Commission, Gore had been clear that contraception, as an interference with nature, might have unintended consequences for other so-called ‘unnatural’ vices, including homosexuality:

There exists a great deal of what we used to call unnatural vice ... Now, those who are in favour of that vice are, of course, very much interested in the movement which is called birth control, and they say to me, or to

²⁰ See Lesley A. Hall, ‘Movements to Separate Sex and Reproduction’, in Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming and Lauren Kassell, eds, *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, 2018), 427–41.

²¹ Charles Gore, *Lambeth on Contraceptives* (London, 1930), online at Project Canterbury: <<http://anglicanhistory.org/gore/contra1930.html>>, accessed 22 March 2023.

²² Charles Gore, *The Prevention of Conception, Commonly Called Birth Control* (London, n.d.), 32.

others, who speak with horror of their practices and tendencies: “yes, but you cannot any longer call it unnatural; for now everybody allows birth control, which aims at separating the sexual act from its connection with the production of offspring. If that is admitted, how can you condemn our practice, which is, according to our instincts, natural?”²³

It was clear to Gore that if the theory of ‘inversion’, as developed by the progressive sexologist Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), which saw same-sex desire as the natural state of a minority of people, was accepted, then the floodgates might be opened: ‘if contraceptives are in any circumstances permissible for normal married people, we, for our part, do not see how any adequate answer can be given to those who desire a safeguard in unauthorised connections, or to those who practise the most degrading forms of sensual indulgence’.²⁴ Gore’s logic was faultless: if the sphere of what was natural expanded, then eventually morality would have to be adjusted to compensate. Contraception could thus pave the way for further sexual reform and even justify what Gore called ‘the philosophy of homosexuality’.²⁵

While the issue of homosexuality had been raised at the 1930 Lambeth Conference in the context of a discussion on the grounds for divorce, with Bishop Herman Page of Michigan noting that ‘sex perversion’ was being recognized by psychologists as a type of insanity,²⁶ there was no further consideration of the topic. A medical approach to homosexuality was becoming more common among Christian ethicists, with Peter Green writing a textbook, *The Problem of Right Conduct* (1931), which advocated treating what he called the ‘unnatural’ vice ‘as one of insanity – as we should treat a homicidal maniac, or a kleptomaniac’.²⁷ Nevertheless, while the idea that homosexuality might be understood as natural remained

²³ Charles Gore’s evidence appears in the report: *The Ethics of Birth Control: Being the Report of the Special Committee Appointed by the National Council of Public Morals in Connection with the Investigations of the National Birth-Rate Commission* (London, 1925), 67–72, cited in Timothy Jones, ‘The Stained Glass Closet: Celibacy and Homosexuality in the Church of England to 1955’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20 (2011), 132–52, at 143.

²⁴ Jones, ‘The Stained Glass’, 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Cited in *ibid.* 142.

²⁷ Peter Green, *The Problem of Right Conduct: A Text-Book of Christian Ethics* (London, 1931), 225.

the preserve of sexologists and a handful of psychologists,²⁸ behind the scenes Archbishop Lang was drawn into an extensive correspondence on the subject later in the 1930s. It will become clear that Gore's slippery slope argument was put to use by some with quite different aims.

ROBERT REID AND ARCHBISHOP LANG

In 1937, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that John Clark, a scenic artist, had been remanded on bail, charged with conspiring with Robert Reid (1898–1983),²⁹ alias Rudd, a schoolmaster of Taunton, to procure a youth to commit grave offences.³⁰ The following month, Clark was sentenced at the Old Bailey to three years' penal servitude and Reid, who was headmaster of King's College, Taunton, from 1933 to 1937 and one of the first doctors of philosophy of Oxford University,³¹ was bound over and ordered to pay costs of 30 guineas, as well as to receive an operation and medical treatment at home. Reid, who had been in the Somerset Light Infantry in the First World War, had expanded numbers at King's College from seventy to two hundred. His defence offered medical evidence of a swollen thyroid gland as an explanation of his 'abnormality'. There was no evidence of any wrongdoing at the school. He was placed in the care of the Anglo-Catholic chaplain Mowbray O'Rorke, formerly bishop of Accra in the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Guardian of the Shrine at Walsingham.³²

Reid wrote to Archbishop Lang in 1938 after hearing that a committee was to be convened to explore the 'homosexual problem', enclosing a summary of a book he intended to publish 'in the hope of obtaining some relief for the unfortunate class of people to which I

²⁸ See Timothy W. Jones, 'The Church of England and Modern Homosexuality', in Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan, eds, *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2013), 197–217.

²⁹ See Hugh McLeod, 'Homosexual Law Reform, 1953–1967', in Barber, Taylor and Sewell, eds, *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society*, 657–78, at 659.

³⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 1937, 11.

³¹ His thesis explored 'Isomerism in Metallic Oxides' (1924). See *Oxford's First DPhil Students: The First 50 DPhil Students to graduate from Oxford, 1920–1924*, online at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/media_wysiwyg/TheFirst50DPhilScholars.pdf>, accessed 27 March 2023.

³² *Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 1937, 9.

belong.’ He wrote frankly: ‘With all due respect I am sure that Your Grace has little conception of all the misery and crime consequent upon the brutal attitude of the law and society, an attitude to which the Church by its silence acquiesces.’³³ In his brief summary,³⁴ Reid distinguished three views about ‘the invert’: they were usually classified either as ‘a criminal’, as ‘mentally unbalanced’ or as ‘a definite variation of the human species’. He was ‘convinced of the truth of this [third] view ... from personal experience, from knowledge of many homosexuals, and from the conclusions of the latest scientific investigators such as Hirschfeld’, who estimated that ‘from 2 to 4 per cent of all populations, animal and human are inverted, and that 80 or 90 per cent of men concerned are guilty of offences prescribed by the law.’ Speaking of the ‘Urgency of the Problem’, he noted that at ‘least 800,000 men are thus living in England in danger of arrest and punishment.’³⁵ He went on to suggest a solution:

It is only by imagining themselves in such a position that heterosexual or normal people can realise the untold misery and suffering endured year after year, the direct cause of mental troubles, and not infrequently suicide and murder. Most blackmail cases have their origin in homosexual offences. It may be the right policy for such respectable newspapers as the ‘Times’ and ‘Daily Telegraph’ to suppress such news, but this course gives a wrong impression as to the causes of blackmail.³⁶

Reid spoke of the mental instability that came from the criminalization of homosexual acts, which would be ‘removed if they were given a proper and recognised place in society’, suggesting that the evidence of criminologists, judges, police and to some extent priests, who ‘came into contact with the more degraded and less virile section of homosexual people’ should be ‘disregarded’ because of its partiality. Similarly, those who sought ‘cures’ were likely to be attempting the impossible. Reid offered a personal example: ‘The writer, who was born with and retains entirely inverted sexual instincts, has also the hands of a woman. Is it suggested that a psychologist will give him a new pair?’³⁷ He felt the church’s failure to discuss homosexuality

³³ London, LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 166, Robert Reid to Cosmo Gordon Lang, 27 May 1938.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, fols 167–9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 267, Memorandum.

was deplorable. Pointing to the standard work on moral theology by Bishop K. E. Kirk of Oxford,³⁸ which did not even mention the subject, he noted: 'The Church has led and encouraged society in its policy of concealment. No information whatever is available'. Another book, *Sexual Problems of To-day* (1924), dismissed homosexuality in one line as 'too horrible to discuss'.³⁹ The church's 'attitude of the ostrich has only served to alienate honest lay homosexual people who try to work out a position for themselves'. The only official opinion that Reid had been able to extract was 'one prohibiting all homosexual thought and action as being wilful perversion of God given in-born instincts'.⁴⁰

Reid felt such advice to be useless since it 'serves to discredit what the church may say in other directions', since 'all homosexuals know perfectly well that they never possessed these instincts'. 'The majority of Church of England priests', he went on, 'left without guidance, seem to adopt the explanation of insanity, at the same time insisting on absolute chastity'. In turn, he continued with bitter irony, they 'apparently approve, by their silence, of mental invalids being thrust into gaol on charges involving life sentences – a curious treatment for insanity'.⁴¹ Finally, Reid goes on to discuss chastity, which he sees as marked by hypocrisy since often the priest, judge and those in other professions indulge in exactly the same actions for which others were imprisoned (as Reid had observed from close quarters). Such rank hypocrisy embittered less well-connected homosexuals to both church and state.

Reid wrote about his own discovery of a homosexual subculture after his conviction:

On my conviction I received letters of sympathy from inverters all over the country. I followed up these contacts in nearly all cases and so obtained an introduction to that homosexual underworld, the existence of which I was unaware. Here in an atmosphere of bitter hostility to authority, both religious and civil, these unfortunate people obtain the understanding of fellowship which is otherwise denied them.⁴²

³⁸ Kenneth Kirk, *Some Principles of Moral Theology and Their Application* (London, 1920).

³⁹ Mary Scharlieb, ed., *Sexual Problems of To-day* (London, [1924]), 7, 221.

⁴⁰ LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 268, Memorandum.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, fol. 269.

He went on to note that while chastity is undoubtedly a vocation for some, there is no sense in which it can be imposed on homosexuals. He asked the archbishop directly: if homosexuality was natural, then why was it that all homosexuals had to choose celibacy, even when they were not called to such a life? 'It may be that chastity is the answer but the Church will *never* obtain it by its present policy of almost criminal silence, but only by vigorous preaching, *open* recognition and reorganisation of the social life of inverters, and by backing its policy with reasons which will satisfy intellectual enquiry'.⁴³ He concluded with a simple question: 'Is there any hope that the evidence of those most concerned, the homosexuals themselves, will be considered?'⁴⁴

In his brief response to Reid, Lang noted that he had read the letter and memorandum with interest and 'with no little sympathy'. He went on to write of his own experience:

I am indeed only too painfully familiar with the problem ... as I have constantly to deal with clergy, some of them otherwise of high character, who have given way to instincts about which you write. But (1) I have known many others in like position with yourself who have by strength of will or by the grace of God been able to restrain these tendencies and I cannot bring myself to think that the position of those for whom you speak is so tragic as you would represent. (2) For many reasons into which I cannot now enter I am not at present prepared to suggest that offences of this kind should be put in the same order as indulgence of sexual instincts with the other sex. My experience shows me that this might be attended with the greatest possible dangers. I can only say that if you publish your book I shall read it with the greatest possible care and consideration.⁴⁵

Reid wrote back to Lang thanking him for his careful consideration. Although he would have liked to have had his points addressed, he did not wish to encroach further on the archbishop's time. He merely offered one comment to Lang's chaplain:

May I say just this in answer to his suggestion that I painted too tragic a picture. I can conceive of no greater tragedy, from a material point of

⁴³ Ibid. Italics original.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 270, Lang to Reid, 9 June 1938.

view, than that of a man ruined socially and financially, lying in prison, knowing that he may be sentenced *for life*. This happens at least every week and probably every day, and for ‘offences’ not concerned with force, exhibitionism, or young people. And the Church consents.⁴⁶

Lang’s chaplain, Alan Don, responded straightaway to say that the archbishop:

asks me to make clear that when writing to you he had in mind not those who have been sentenced by the law, but rather those who are prone to the tendencies of which you speak. His Grace asks me to say this in order that you may not misunderstand what he said in his letter to you.⁴⁷

There the matter rested: no committee was appointed before the war. Reid, who had set up home in Wells, would resurface in the 1950s as a more public campaigner for decriminalization.

KENNETH INGRAM

Shortly afterwards, one prominent Christian figure made a public contribution to the discussion of homosexuality. In 1940, shortly after the outbreak of war, Kenneth Ingram (1882–1965) published *Sex-Morality Tomorrow* with Allen & Unwin, the publishers of nine of his many books. Ingram, who had trained as a barrister, had been a prominent Anglo-Catholic layman and socialist, but in the early 1920s had gradually come to adopt a more modernist position, which accompanied his increasingly progressive views on homosexuality.⁴⁸ Developing an interest in sexual ethics from the early 1920s, he wrote a short book, *An Outline of Sexual Morality*, in 1922, which adopted the current theory which, while regarding homosexuality as natural, had also tended to pathologize the condition.⁴⁹ All people, he wrote, were a mixture of homosexual and

⁴⁶ LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 271, Reid to Lang’s Chaplain, Alan Don, 11 June 1938. Italics original.

⁴⁷ LPL, Lang Papers 164, fol. 274, Don to Reid, 15 June 1938.

⁴⁸ There does not appear to be evidence that Ingram was open about his sexuality, although there are many accounts of homoerotic emotions and an idealization of close male friendships, including (chaste) relationships between men and boys, scattered throughout his works of fiction. See Geoghegan, *Socialism and Religion*, esp. 53.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Ingram, *An Outline of Sexual Morality* (London, 1922); more generally, see Jones, *Sexual Politics*, 172. There is a brief discussion of Ingram in David Hilliard,

‘normal’, which proved immensely important for social life. The desire to love, however, could have immense benefit for the community: ‘In the social sphere also, the place of this aspect of homosexuality is obvious. . . . it is no exaggeration to declare that few men can be successful in educational or philanthropic work unless they have some homogenic temperament in their nature.’⁵⁰

However, while Ingram did not deny the importance of same-sex desire and championed the idea of ‘homogenic’ love, including for younger men and boys (a view not uncommon at the time), he was clear at this stage that even where such same-sex friendship was intimate, ‘there can be no religious countenance for any physical sex-act outside the sacrament of matrimony’.⁵¹ In the end, and drawing on what was then the prevailing psychological theory, Ingram felt the human race would return to its true nature as the ‘bisexual species from which I believe it has come’.⁵² In his next substantial contribution to the study of sexuality, *The Modern Attitude to the Sex Problem*, published in 1930,⁵³ Ingram offered little to surprise the reader, despite devoting more space to the theory of the intermediate sex, as outlined by the early advocate of sexual liberation, Edward Carpenter (1844–1929).⁵⁴

By the time *Sex-Morality Tomorrow* appeared in 1940, however, Ingram’s opinions had changed significantly. The fact that he was writing about the future was important: like many others, he was already thinking about post-war reconstruction. He was to play a prominent role in the Malvern Conference of 1941 and was active in Richard Acland’s Common Wealth Party.⁵⁵ This allowed him greater opportunity to exercise his powers of imagination: ‘any attempt to deal with the problems of sex-life must therefore take into account a radically altered society which may produce an outlook

‘UnEnglish and Unmanly: Anglo-Catholicism and Homosexuality’, *Victorian Studies* 25 (1982), 181–210, at 203–5.

⁵⁰ Ingram, *An Outline*, 72–3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 72–3.

⁵² *Ibid.* 75.

⁵³ Ingram, *The Modern Attitude to the Sex Problem* (London, 1930).

⁵⁴ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London, 1908).

⁵⁵ Kenneth Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow* (London, 1940), 9–10. See also Geoghegan, *Socialism and Religion*, esp. 75–80.

on sex very different from that with which we are familiar'.⁵⁶ Ingram had come to see his earlier Anglo-Catholicism as a type of legalistic moralism and explored the idea that a loving relationship outside marriage – including between people of the same sex – could be preferable to a loveless relationship within marriage.⁵⁷ Homosexual practice appeared to be on the increase and was not simply restricted to the stereotypes of the 'effeminate male' or 'masculine female', but was also common 'among men of the virile military type'.⁵⁸ Although *Sex-Morality Tomorrow* was written before the outbreak of hostilities, the recognition that homosexuality was common among 'manly' men proved important after the war, especially in the highly public trials of Edward Montagu, Michael Pitt-Rivers and Peter Wildeblood in March 1954 for committing acts of indecency.⁵⁹

Ingram felt that while homosexuality may be 'contrary to the intention of nature' to reproduce the species, it was nevertheless natural,⁶⁰ which meant that the 'sex-morality of the future' would need to adapt itself so that the homosexual can 'reveal his nature as freely as if he were to acknowledge that he were left-handed or colour-blind'.⁶¹ Such an acknowledgement would allow reform of the archaic laws, with their potential for blackmail, and for homosexuals to lead a fulfilled life.⁶² Homosexuality was thus 'a variety of sexual temperament which has its natural place and its part to play in human affairs'. Most homosexual relationships were based on love and should be allowed to flourish in the public, rather than simply in the private, sphere.⁶³ Since the 'architecture of human society ... requires the existence of different types',⁶⁴ there was little, if anything, to regret in being

⁵⁶ Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 17–19; 30–3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 102.

⁵⁹ For a lengthy account of the trials, which were formative in homosexual law reform, see Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain* (London, 1996).

⁶⁰ Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow*, 103.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 105.

⁶² *Ibid.* 107–8. Ingram notes the role of the recorder of London, Sir Ernest Wild (1869–1934), in provoking blackmail cases: see Matt Houlbrook "'The Man with the Powder Puff' in Inter-war London', *HistJ* 50 (2007), 145–71, esp. 154; Christopher Hilliard, 'The Literary Underground of 1920s London', *Social History* 33 (2008), 164–82, at 175.

⁶³ Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow*, 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 121.

homosexual.⁶⁵ While recognizing that some homosexuals gathered in 'queer' spaces, he felt that this was simply an act of solidarity that was provoked by their being 'the victims of universal odium'.⁶⁶ The future, however, should be different, because sex was not principally about procreation, but about what he called the 'love-relationship', which meant – and here Ingram makes the direct link that had been so feared by Charles Gore – that 'homosexuality can no more be condemned than ... contraception'.⁶⁷

In his final chapter on 'Bisexuality', Ingram outlined a future in which there would be an equalization in relationships so that men and women would be true partners and the 'love-experience' would not be conditioned solely by a sense of sex differentiation: 'when I fall in love, I fall in love with a person: the attachment is personal, not radically sexual'.⁶⁸ Although he continued to use the term 'bisexual' to describe this approach, he had departed from his earlier biological explanation, which saw human beings as a blend of the masculine and feminine.⁶⁹ He now saw homosexuality less as an identity that was based on a balance of supposed feminine and masculine characteristics, and more in terms of relationships defined by the object of desire.⁷⁰ They were to be validated by an equality between the parties and by what he called the 'love-motive':

The more the love-motive is absent the less moral the sexual relationship, whether that relationship has received the sanction of marriage or not. ... Here we reach the ultimate issue which must divide the sex-morality of tomorrow from the orthodox tradition ... Can love under any circumstances be immoral? ... if the love is mutual and the desire for consummation is mutual, on what moral principle, as distinct from legalistic regulations, can the sexual consummation be evil?⁷¹

⁶⁵ Ibid. 128–30.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 124. On queer space, see Dominic Janes, *Visions of Queer Martyrdom from John Henry Newman to Derek Jarman* (Chicago, IL, 2015), esp. 1–29.

⁶⁷ Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow*, 122.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 164.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 154–73.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 161. This transition in understanding homosexuality is an important aspect of Matt Houlbrook's discussion in *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* (Chicago, IL, 2005), 140–3, esp. 163.

⁷¹ Ingram, *Sex-Morality Tomorrow*, 172–3.

As he contemplated the future of sexual morality, so Ingram came to be an advocate of non-domination and equality in relationships, which for him implied a degree of sexual diversity and pluralism:

the love-motive is the only legitimate basis on which a positive sexual morality is likely to be built. Wherever there is love, wherever the desire is genuinely mutual, there can be no immorality in sex. Whenever in such circumstances prohibitions are introduced, they are artificial regulations. Love is the test of sexual morality. Sex divorced from love, whether it occurs in a union which is officially designated as lawful marriage or not, belongs to an altogether lower level.⁷²

In short, he concluded: ‘love, and usually love of the most complete kind, is the substance of the vast majority of homosexual relationships, and where love is sincerely mutual it is immoral to devalue it’.⁷³ At the same time, however, and here he was to prove most controversial and least prescient, Ingram’s sense of the morality of the future also led him to suggest that forms of pederasty ‘can probably be countenanced’.⁷⁴ Ingram’s general call for liberalization of homosexual relationships was obviously likely to provoke those who sought to limit sexual relations to those within a monogamous marriage.

RESPONSE

Ingram’s book provoked a strong reaction, from members of the general public to leading figures in the Church of England. In 1942, Miss Lettice A. MacMunn (1872–1951) of St Leonards in East Sussex, an erstwhile suffragist and art teacher,⁷⁵ who had been director of Queen Anne’s Studios, Chelsea,⁷⁶ wrote to William Temple, now archbishop of Canterbury, claiming that ‘there was never a time more unpropitious for such pernicious stuff to set before our young people’. Noticing that Ingram had been invited to speak at Malvern, she felt that the archbishop might ‘be able to influence him

⁷² Ibid. 168.

⁷³ Ibid. 119.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 153.

⁷⁵ She advertised art classes for ladies in *The Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, 3 February 1917, 1.

⁷⁶ On MacMunn, see Elizabeth Baigent et al., ‘Women Geographers at the University of Oxford’, in eadem and André Reyes Novaes, eds, *Geographers: Biobibliographical Studies* 38 (2020), 45–136, at 63.

to withdraw' his book.⁷⁷ Temple responded, noting that Ingram had 'developed what seemed to me extremely unsound and dangerous views of this subject, but I am afraid I should have no influence whatever with him in any suggestion that the book should be withdrawn. I am writing to him but I do not expect to produce any effect'. At the same time, he went on to note that it would not be possible to prosecute the book with any success. With a degree of subtlety, he wrote that the book was:

[a] serious discussion of important questions and we have never checked, and I think we should do more harm than good if we could succeed in checking, such expressions of opinion, but there is a high price to be paid for liberty and the degree [of liberty] contained in this book are [*sic*] part of this price. The best that can be said is that it is a clearer expression of what is now a prevailing attitude than has I think appeared, and so far it helps us to see what we have to meet and devise a statement of our own case accordingly. I have not the least doubt that Mr Ingram represents an extreme swing of the pendulum. Some swing was inevitable and in my judgment desirable, but as usual his has gone to another extreme, worse in itself though I think probably less dangerous in its effect than the Puritan extreme from which it is a reaction.⁷⁸

Temple promised to respond to her again, should he receive a reply from Ingram which might be of interest to her.

Temple wrote to Ingram the following day. While noting that there was a 'good deal in *Sex-Morality Tomorrow* with which I sympathise and from which some good may result', he also made a direct request to Ingram which amounts to a very Anglican form of censorship. There was, he felt,

a great deal that seems to me entirely pernicious in effect though I know not in intention and due to an intellectualist handling of the matter which involves ignoring some of the deepest factors. I am afraid I think that the main result of the book must be very great damage and because of our co-operation in certain ways in the past I am writing to ask whether you can consider withdrawing it. I should be very sorry to advertise a breach in the ranks of those eager for social progress on

⁷⁷ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 85, Lettice MacMunn to Temple, 3 July 1942.

⁷⁸ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 85, Temple to MacMunn, 4 July 1942.

Christian lines by taking any step myself to make public my dissent from much of what you say, but I might be very easily driven to this because your being one of the Malvern speakers tends to make people associate what you say in some degree with myself. Will you consider this and let me know? I am quite aware that I am asking a very big thing.⁷⁹

Ingram wrote back asking for some time to think over the archbishop's request, also noting that he would have to consult his publishers.

When I wrote that book I was anxious mainly to be sincere and to state without any equivocation what I felt about that subject. From that angle I should not want to do anything which would imply that I had not the courage of my convictions. But I am certainly very anxious not to persist in any line which will embarrass my friends, and I fully appreciate what you say in that connexion. Also, I realise that it is very easy to be misunderstood and that on some points in that book I have been misunderstood.⁸⁰

Temple had also forwarded a copy of Ingram's letter to Hugh Cecil (1869–1956), recently ennobled as Baron Quickwood, a former Conservative politician, prominent member of the Church Assembly and provost of Eton College, asking for his views. Cecil responded that while he could not say anything from the point of view of those supporting the Malvern movement, since he was not in sympathy, he did not feel that it was 'the "socialist" side of Ingram's mind that has led him into these lamentable errors'. He was 'not the enemy of the family, at any rate directly', but was instead 'the enemy of chastity'.⁸¹ He went on to offer his assessment of the changes of the inter-war years before criticizing Ingram:

This rejection of chastity, though not often pressed so far as Ingram presses it, has spread far and wide in varying degrees in the last 20 or 30 years. Christians have in all ages been accustomed to accept as a revealed and unquestionable dogma that every sexual act or relation, except lifelong marriage, is, in very different degrees, sinful, because unchaste. This has been corroborated by considerations of social welfare and, in some points, of health; but essentially it is a revealed dogma

⁷⁹ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 84, Temple to Kenneth Ingram, 4 July 1942.

⁸⁰ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 86, Ingram to Temple, 7 July 1942.

⁸¹ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 88, Baron Quickwood (Hugh Cecil) to Temple, 11 July 1942.

as much as the Trinity or the Incarnation. When I was young no one disputed it; but in my life-time it has far and wide been ignored or even expressly renounced. Ingram, no doubt seeking the sincerity of which he speaks, has attempted to rationalise and to press to all logical conclusions, a conception of sexual relations which casts out chastity altogether, and indeed does not seem to recognise that such a thing exists.⁸²

For Cecil, the main problem was the novelty of regarding love as the basis for human relationships: because Ingram 'as he says strove to be sincere', he 'therefore formulated as best he could a new theory of sexual relation which had nothing to do with the revealed dogma of chastity, of the existence of which he hardly seems to be conscious'. Consequently, as 'a person who sincerely rejects chastity', Ingram could 'scarcely be called a churchman'. Cecil went on to remind Temple that Bishop Hubert Burge of Oxford had 'refused the Duke of Marlborough the status of a communicant because his guilt of adultery put him outside what was meant by communicant'.⁸³ While admitting that this might not have been good law, he felt it was 'sound religion; and it seems to me that Ingram may similarly be said to be outside the church so long as he holds the opinion that the rule of Christian charity does not govern sexual relations'. Consequently, he felt, Ingram should not be given the opportunity of 'explaining himself or correcting misunderstandings; for, as I see his opinions, they are not merely wrong in one respect or another but are the total negation of the church's teaching about chastity'.⁸⁴ Cecil went on to make his recommendation to Temple:

What should be the practical consequences is of course entirely for Your Grace to judge. It seems obvious that if you deal with the matter at all you should make it clear that you do hold the Christian doctrine of chastity and that you cannot recognise anyone as a faithful member of the church who does not. What degree of withdrawal or association with Ingram this might mean is of course quite beyond my power to judge. But I do not think the mere withdrawal of his book would do

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ This notorious case had partly been the cause of the dissolution of Marlborough's marriage to Consuelo Vanderbilt in 1921.

⁸⁴ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 88, Quickwood to Temple, 11 July 1942.

much good. The point is that he does really and sincerely reject Christian chastity.⁸⁵

For Cecil, freedom of thought for Christians on matters of dogma, which included sexual relations, was simply not possible, at least in public.

Temple responded to Cecil, agreeing that 'he starts from a completely non-Christian principle. One's line of approach to him will rather vary according to whether he decides to withdraw the book or leave it on the market'. If Ingram withdrew the book, then he would try to 'get a talk with him about the whole subject and see whether I can make him understand the Christian position in the matter'. However, if 'he does not withdraw I shall have to tell him that I regard it as having put himself outside the pale'.⁸⁶ Temple also noted the practical difficulties of such a policy:

The whole position in the Church of England about anything like excommunication is so confused that I do not think one could profitably embark upon that. I should tell him that in my own judgment, which I express not only personally but officially this book does inevitably place its author out of fellowship with the Church. But if he were to withdraw it that would be so far a submission to the judgment of the Church that I should not want to take that kind of step and it would give me some hope of getting him to see what is really involved.⁸⁷

Cecil wrote back, suggesting that if the book were censured in convocation, it 'would only enormously increase its circulation, which would be a pity'. 'However,' he went on, 'I do think the Church ought to make some declaration on the whole question somehow. I am one of those who thought that the treatment of these subjects by the Lambeth Conference was a disaster'.⁸⁸ Here again, there is an explicit linking of the issue of contraception with the question of homosexuality. Temple replied to Cecil, outlining his decisions. If Ingram withdrew the book,

I shall approach him as an obviously erring member of the Church of England and try to bring him to another mind. I shall at any rate try to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 89, Temple to Quickwood, 15 July 1942.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 90, Quickwood to Temple, 16 July 1942.

balance his present view with the contrary one by showing the immense weight of tradition as well as of moral sanity which is to be found in the Church's doctrine.⁸⁹

However, 'if he does not withdraw the book, I should have to tell him that I regard the views which he expressed as quite incompatible with practising churchmanship.' All this, however, was to happen in private, since 'it would be a great mistake to do any of this publicly because [it would], as you say, just advertise the book'. He concluded: 'More particularly anything so rare and, to the lower type of Press man, so exciting as a condemnation by Convocation would only add to the sales.'⁹⁰

In the event, Ingram wrote to Temple that he did not wish to withdraw the book since it might imply that he did not have the 'courage of my convictions'.⁹¹ In addition,

it would in some respects let down the several correspondents who have written to me to say that they have found the book to be a help to them in their various problems: I have to think of them. Moreover, I doubt if a withdrawal of the book would really satisfy those critics who might approach you, unless the withdrawal were accompanied by a confession that I had changed my views.⁹²

Instead, Ingram suggested that he would insert an explanation outlining the purpose of the book and the nature of love in all copies still in hand. He would also ensure that there would be no future edition (even though, because of the paper shortage caused by the war, this was unlikely). He went on: 'I hope that you may consider this to be a satisfactory course, but, if not, I shall quite understand and not resent in the least any condemnation of the book which you may feel obliged to make.'⁹³ He also observed that conditions had changed significantly since the book was written:

I am anxious to save you and any other of our friends any possible embarrassment, and I would gladly do anything to help in this way, short of any course which would involve me in insincerity. I would

⁸⁹ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 91, Quickwood to Temple, 20 July 1942.

⁹⁰ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 91, Temple to Quickwood, 20 July 1942.

⁹¹ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 92, Ingram to Temple, 24 July 1942.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

add that I wrote and agreed to the publication of this book at the end of 1939, before Malvern was on the horizon. Had I foreseen these developments I might have hesitated to publish a book of so controversial a character concerning an issue which had no direct relevance to the much more important issues of religious-social reconstruction.⁹⁴

In his reply to Temple, Ingram included a typescript of his proposed explanation: alongside addressing some specific points, he answered his critics by suggesting:

Most of the critics whom I have provoked have failed, I suspect, to pay sufficient attention to the conclusion which is fundamental to my own standpoint, that (p. 173) 'the real problem for us to solve is the nature of love. We have to disentangle more effectively than we have as yet succeeded in doing pure love from the impulses for selfish satisfaction'. Far from approving, I should hold that, where real love is absent from a sex-relationship, sexual intercourse denotes a failure to achieve the moral standard which I have advocated.⁹⁵

Responding to Ingram, Temple thanked him for the 'way in which you are trying to meet me', yet also noting that he was 'bound to say that the result from my standpoint is to leave matters very much where they were'.⁹⁶ He did not feel that the proposed preface really addressed the question of the abandonment of chastity, which, in Temple's view, remained the only option for Christian homosexuals:

Whether you insert such a Preface as you have suggested to any new edition or reprint of your book you must yourself decide; but it would have to be for making clear your own position. It would not really affect the attitude which I, and still more passionately many more Church people, would feel obliged to take up. Fundamentally the trouble is that your book gives the impression of abandoning the Church's insistence upon the obligation of chastity. That involves a departure so great as to seem in my own mind quite incompatible with practising Churchmanship. I do not think there really can be any doubt that this is your contention. There are many passages in the book which tend that way and some are almost explicit in

⁹⁴ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fol. 92, Ingram to Temple, 24 July 1942.

⁹⁵ LPL, Temple papers 30, fol. 93, Ingram to Temple, included with letter of 24 July 1942.

⁹⁶ LPL, Temple Papers 30, fols 94–5, Temple to Ingram, 28 July 1942.

repudiation of that obligation unless it is interpreted as only a general self-control and avoidance of sheer licentiousness. ... I am very sorry that there seems no doubt about our having reached this complete divergence on this subject but I find it quite impossible to doubt that the point has been reached and that I am obliged therefore to put this matter before you as I have attempted in this letter.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

There the correspondence ended. Ingram's book was not withdrawn; he was not publicly censured; and no new preface was inserted. While Temple was clearly opposed to any further liberalization of sexual ethics, both he and Cecil were astute enough to realize that any publicity would have simply added to the sales of the book. Ingram too noted that such negative publicity about somebody associated with the Malvern Conference might prove a distraction from some of its more far-reaching programmes for social reconstruction. In the end, the book, which was the most radical statement about homosexuality from a British Christian thinker written between the wars, sank almost without trace,⁹⁸ and the publishers Allen & Unwin failed to recoup their investment.⁹⁹ Wartime circumstances, it would seem, meant that the book had little immediate effect. Nonetheless, the twin premises that sex could be practised purely for the pleasure of the couple, as implied by the condoning of contraception, and the idea that homosexuality was simply a natural and normal condition among a minority of people, led Ingram to redefine the nature of Christian relationships.

It took another seventy years or so for Ingram's ideas to be realized in English secular legislation, with equal marriage entering the statutes in 2013. However, while the Church of England came to play a prominent role in the reform of the legislation on homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s, arguments about the 'naturalness' of homosexuality, and of the importance of distinguishing between what was

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ There seem to have been just two very short reviews of the book: Alec Craig's in the *Eugenics Review* 32 (1940), 91; and an anonymous review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1940, 523, which concluded dismissively that Ingram had nothing 'startlingly novel to contribute to the problem'.

⁹⁹ The business correspondence with Kenneth Ingram from Allen & Unwin on the publication of *Sex Morality Tomorrow* is included in the Allen & Unwin papers: Reading, Reading University Special Collections, Allen & Unwin Papers, AUC 89/15.

lawful and what was sinful, frequently set out on the path taken by Ingram, but they never reached the same conclusion. The Church of England's official teaching on marriage and sexuality did not change to accept the equality of mutually loving relationships, even if it increasingly adopted a more pastoral approach to homosexuals.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, through the 1970s and 1980s, the shape of the debate came to be dominated by arguments from Scripture, rather than from nature and from science, which led large numbers in the Church of England away from further liberalization. The legacy of Charles Gore, Hugh Cecil and many others, which regards celibacy as the only Christian option for sex outside heterosexual marriage, continues to affect significant quarters of the Church of England to the present day. At the same time, many others continue to level the charge of hypocrisy (as did Robert Reid in the 1930s) at a church that claims to recognize the importance of natural law and scientific knowledge, while failing to draw out their implications for sexual morality.

¹⁰⁰ See also in this volume, William Whyte, 'OutRage! Hypocrisy, Episcopacy and Homosexuality in 1990s England'.