

A Companion to
Some issues in human sexuality

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chapter 1

How to use *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* with this Companion

Some Issues in Human Sexuality (SIHS, Church House Publishing, 2003, ISBN 0 7151 3868 5) is an aid to engaging in prayerful study, reflection and discussion on issues of human sexuality. It aims, as stated in the preface, to offer ‘resources to engage with the questions in an informed way, enabling all of us to enter more deeply into the outlook and theology both of those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree’. It does not seek to change earlier statements of the House of Bishops. Rather than proclaim a position, it is designed to provide a stimulus to reflection and prayer.

SIHS offers material that explores the substance of the debate – biblical, theological, ethical and contextual. This companion suggests processes that may help people in their study and reflection on this material. Section 2 outlines the report and its structure.

Sections 3–7 of this companion are designed for individuals reading the report. The structure of the report is outlined, and cross references are provided. There are suggested questions for personal study and reflection. These invite readers to engage with the totality of the issues, by suggesting points at which they may wish to amplify, amend or challenge the analysis offered in *SIHS*. The numbers referred to are the paragraph numbers in *SIHS*.

Sections 8 and 9 offer some ideas to those wishing to discuss these issues in groups. Groups can, at their best, enable individuals to share personal experiences, and ‘listen to one another with genuine hearing and imaginative insight’. Such discussion will, almost inevitably, touch on experiences that are emotionally charged for some and which awaken sensitivities. Creating a ‘safe’ and calm atmosphere for such discussion requires careful planning. Suggestions to help do this are included. Section 9 offers possible outlines for group sessions hoping to develop attentive listening to others’ experience.

A brief guide to the report

In order to understand *SIHS* the key thing to grasp is that it is made up of three parts.

- The background to the current debate.
- The nature of the current debate.
- Responding to the current debate.

The background to the current debate

The first part is Chapters 1–3. It provides the historical and theological background to the issues covered by the report.

- Chapter 1, ‘The historical background to this Guide’, looks at the history of sexual ethics in the Christian Church in general and the Church of England in particular and then focuses on the development of thinking about human sexuality in the Church of England since the 1950s as the immediate context for this current study.
- Chapter 2, ‘The use of the Bible in sexual ethics’, looks at the status of the Bible as the primary norm for Anglican ethics and then goes on to explore how we can use the Bible responsibly when thinking about the subject of human sexuality.
- Chapter 3, ‘The theology of sexuality’, looks at the traditional Christian understanding of human sexuality in the context of our relationship to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It explains the traditional Christian belief that the proper context for sexual relations is within a permanent married relationship and that the only legitimate alternatives to marriage are either temporary singleness or permanent celibacy. It then goes on to look at how this traditional sexual ethic has been called into question by recent rereadings of the Christian tradition that have argued that homosexual relationships can be seen as a legitimate expression of Christian discipleship.

The nature of the current debate

The second part is Chapters 4–7. It looks in detail at the current debates surrounding homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexualism.

- Chapter 4, ‘Homosexuality and biblical teaching’, looks at the biblical texts that have been central to the debate about the Christian response to homosexuality and the question of how they should be interpreted. Having looked at the texts themselves the chapter then goes on to look at the broader issue of how we should respond to the biblical material, looking at five different responses and noting the strengths and weaknesses of each of them.
- Chapter 5, ‘Gender identity, sexual identity and theology’, looks at how the modern feminist, gay and lesbian movements relate to the discussions of human rights and sexual identity that developed as a result of the Enlightenment. It then goes on to look at how these discussions have resulted in the development of specific gay and lesbian theologies and the questions that are raised by this new theological thinking.
- Chapter 6, ‘Bisexuality’, looks at the question of what bisexuality is and surveys the current theological discussion of this matter and the questions that this raises.
- Chapter 7, ‘Transsexualism’, likewise looks at the nature and history of transsexualism, surveys the range of theological responses to this issue and explores the questions that are raised by the current theological debate.

Responding to the current debate

The third part is Chapters 8 and 9. It looks in detail at the current debate about the place of homosexual, bisexual and transsexual people in the Church.

- Chapter 8, ‘Homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals in the life of the Church’, sets out the teaching of *Issues in Human Sexuality* and explores the challenges that have been made to this teaching. The chapter also looks at the issues raised by transsexualism, noting the different approaches that are taken to the vexed issues of treatment, marriage and ordination.

- Chapter 9, 'Handling some current controversies over sexual morality', surveys the current diversity over issues of sexual morality within the Church of England and the Christian Church worldwide and suggests ways in which this diversity can be handled in a theologically and pastorally responsible fashion.