

The most rewarding section of this volume is the third part, featuring essays by A. B. Caneday and Michael Horton that are helpful, persuasive and useful beyond the bounds of the question of open theism in particular. They respectively boil down to an exposition and defence of the anthropomorphic character of all biblical language about God and of the way of analogy. Undoubtedly, fellow-travellers on the theological road will take philosophical issue with them, but they arguably lay bare the hermeneutical heart of the debate with open theism. Both contributions are warmly recommended.

The politics of the debate in the United States, whose shadow engulfs the volume, has significantly moved on since the publication of these essays. 'Politics' can be taken as a pejorative term, but it also loosely signifies an entirely appropriate dimension of ecclesial concern, for the issues treated in this volume are not academic. It is important that the kind of discussion we find here should continue, provided that it is carried out in the right spirit. Here we should certainly agree with the principle sustained by the authors of *Beyond the Bounds*.

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### **At Variance: The Church's Argument against Homosexual Conduct**

Kevin Scott

Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh, 2004; 88 pp., £5.95; ISBN 1 903765 37 4

I have to confess that, having read so many books defending traditional teaching on homosexuality, I wondered what I would get out of this slim volume published with the support of The Scottish Order for Christian Unity. However, I knew its author – Kevin Scott – when he was curate at St Ebbes, Oxford and I was an undergraduate, almost 20 years ago. Among his fellow local clergy then was Richard Holloway, who subsequently was Kevin's bishop for many years in Edinburgh, and became increasingly strident against the traditional viewpoint. The book was short and I knew it would be readable and that's not true of all books on the subject.

It is, in fact, a masterly piece of polemic 'in that it takes a definite stance against homosexual conduct and hopes and expects to win the argument or, at the very least, aims to present to the reader points which will have to be answered before homosexual practice could be thought of as permissible' (p. 3). There is plenty of bad polemic in this debate and certainly many in the church will not like much of what is said here –

Kevin knows it may 'rise ire'. However, those who do not like it will need to address its central arguments if the church is to have any serious theological debate.

The book's focus is clear from its title – homosexual conduct not orientation or relationships or people. That in itself will frustrate some. Certainly its rigorous, detached, analytical and solid approach to its specific subject matter (you don't need the back cover to realise Kevin Scott's doctorate is in science) makes it open to the criticism of lacking pastoral sensitivity and I would be very cautious about recommending it to someone struggling in this area. Its treatment throughout is 'big picture' rather than the sort of detail one finds in something like Robert Gagnon's study. Although there is limited reference to such studies, there is obviously knowledge of these micro-debates and the book is clear and reasoned and not slapdash in its more broad-brush macro-approach.

Chapters 2–4 cover the biblical material in less than 40 pages. Rather than detailed studies of Sodom (which is not even mentioned) or Leviticus we see how Israel came to know God as the One who in creation establishes order in the face of chaos and then redeems a people from the disorder of sin and reorders their life by his law. The thinking is clear: among the chaos and disorder is sexual immorality and among sexual immorality is homosexual conduct: 'Sexual relationships that have neither sacramental coherence nor procreational function are, by Jewish and Christian standards, ruled out on the grounds of their disorder. Can there be any justification for acts which have no biological logic, no reproductive value, no sacramental significance, or which are incoherent with the orders of creation?' (p. 18).

Turning to Jesus and the Gospels, Scott shows how Jesus' ministry seeks to remove from Israel all that would keep her in exile and that sexual immorality was included within this. Again he is short and sharp in his discussion of Jesus' alleged silence on homosexuality and the relevance of his clear teaching on immorality (*porneia*): 'We cannot say that homosexual conduct is admissible while incest is to be deplored. Conversely, if we want to exclude incest, then homosexual conduct must go with it' (p. 29). He concludes with a helpful discussion of Jesus confronting us with the infinite demand of God, his infinite acceptance of us as sinners, and the sufficiency of Christ's reigning power (illustrated with reference to John chs 5 and 8) and the issue of defining our identity: 'We cannot define ourselves as gentile Christians, or Jewish Christians, far less as 'gay' Christians. We can only define ourselves as Christians, followers of Jesus Christ' (p. 35).

The discussion of Paul draws heavily on Richard Hays to see homosexual conduct as an ‘anti-sacrament’ – an outward sign of an inward rebellion – and rightly stresses this rebellion is not specific to individuals tempted to homosexual conduct but general to fallen humanity. After brief responses to attempts to silence or disregard Paul in this area, the stark challenge is put – with a powerful quotation from John Keble – that the church doesn’t like being unpopular and that ‘the effort to make homosexual conduct acceptable is driven, not by some new discovery that our understanding of Scripture has been faulty up till now, but simply by a desire not to offend, nor to be afflicted by, those who clamour for the change’ (p. 47).

The fifth chapter looks at the views of the Early Church which are clear: ‘there is a general verdict that homosexual conduct is not only depraved, but both diabolically and incomprehensibly so... it is self-evident to the Ancient Church that these practices are vile, degenerate and absolutely inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture and the logic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in which they stand’. He particularly focuses on the 4th century and St John Chrysostom’s Homily on Romans 1 which is reproduced as an appendix. The argument from nature is starkly and shockingly put to equate homosexual conduct (and approval of it) as a form of madness equivalent to a man who puts food into his ears, revealing perhaps the book’s (largely implicit) focus on male homosexual conduct and particularly anal sex.

These chapters articulate in a short, sharp manner much that can be found in more detail (and sometimes more gently expressed) elsewhere. For me, the last two chapters are the particular value of the polemic. In chapter six, ‘The Church’s Plight’, it is claimed that the church has experienced its own form of degeneracy similar to Romans 1; having abandoned orthodox faith and bought into a liberal reductionism that includes suspicion of Scripture and a quest for self-fulfillment (for all of which Feuerbach is particularly blamed), we should not be surprised if we are given over to acceptance of homosexual practice. Although the argument is sketchy (seven pages), its force is powerful and challenging.

This suggests why this issue is so significant and suggests – again rather colourfully – an internal logic: ‘We could have predicted this more than a century ago if we had been sufficiently astute. Once the inevitable connection is made between failing to give God credit and the discredited mentality which follows from it, the inward part of the anti-sacrament is in place. It is only a matter of time before the hideous logic of unbelief manifests itself in the outward visible sign of perversion’ (p. 62). It shows the need for more serious repentance: ‘Repudiating the outward

visible sign of this anti-sacrament will not be enough. The repudiation of the inward unbelief, which is its counterpart, is much more important and involves the whole Church, not just a few individuals' (p. 63). And it clarifies that although part of the issue is the unwillingness of the church to be 'at variance' with the world, the deeper problem is that 'the Church has long since ceased to think as the Church should'. The good news though is that 'if through penitence, the Church reverses the inward sign of unbelief, then the outward sign of sexual disorder will retreat from it and the anti-sacrament will be dissolved' (p. 63).

But what if there is not such penitence? The last chapter addresses where we find ourselves now in the Anglican Communion and is clear: 'there can be no easy fixing of the plight into which the Church has fallen, and certainly there can be no compromise, no 'third way' by which both sides of the argument can co-exist in one communion' (p. 64). Here Kevin Scott's insight and his skill at sound-bites (with all the strengths and weaknesses that skill brings) reaches its height as he points out the seriousness of what is involved: 'If we were to accept homosexual conduct as right and valid, we would necessarily break our fellowship with all the saints and Christians of history' (p. 67). The Cross itself is at stake 'if we were to make any sin not a sin any longer'. Furthermore, 'all Christians in the past who confessed that sin were wrong to do so, were not absolved, and wasted their spiritual energies in penitence and in striving against the temptation' (p. 69). Practically, to change the church's teaching here means that for many the church 'will cease to be a safe haven and become a moral snare. The effect would be exactly the same as on married people if adultery were to be legitimated.' The church would be dissolved and 'any right-thinking person would have the duty to avoid it' (p. 70).

Finally, Scott shows that hard though this sounds, this is the truly pastoral approach. The language of being 'pastoral' relates to Christ the Shepherd and 'the pastoral ministry is not established by some consensus with the flock, adjusted appropriately here and there according to the preference of the sheep, but it takes its bearings from Jesus and the Apostles. In this way, the good of the flock is guaranteed, their safety procured and their needs met' (p. 74). If the church ceases to proclaim and live out the good it has learned from Christ, it would mean, in the book's closing words, 'the flock would inevitably become scattered and prey to the wolf' (p. 74).

Polemical essays are a particular genre of theological work. As a genre they are poor at sympathetic engagement with one's opponents and can slip into attacking caricatures and making statements with minimal

justification. They are therefore not generally conducive to facilitating listening and dialogue. All those features can be found in this work and many will therefore strongly dislike it. However, good polemic – and this is good polemic – also strengthens people to stick to their beliefs and oppose error, and challenges those who disagree to respond to the gauntlet thrown down. As yet, revisionists have consistently failed to do that when challenged, relying on social and political pressure and ‘pastoral concern’ rather than serious theological argument to advance their cause. Let’s hope that Kevin Scott’s ‘no-holds-barred’ approach to them provokes such a response, whether in a return polemic or a more careful rebuttal of his serious charges.

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## **20 Controversies That Almost Killed a Church: Paul’s Counsel to the Corinthians and the Church Today**

Richard L. Ganz

P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2003; 259 pp., £7.95; ISBN 0 87552 790 6

*20 Controversies That Almost Killed a Church* is a popular study of problems faced by the church in Corinth, and which continue to be of relevance to the church today. The homiletic style of the book suggests that it originated in a series of sermons preached by Dr Ganz, who is the senior pastor of the Ottawa Reformed Presbyterian Church in Canada and President of the Ottawa Theological Hall within the RPCNA.

The book consists of twenty chapters each of which focuses on a specific theme of 1 Corinthians, and include themes such as ‘Divisions in the Church’, ‘Lawsuits against the Church’, ‘True Spiritual Behaviour’ and ‘Is There Meaning to Life?’. Most chapters include highlighted portions of the text to be expounded. There are series of study questions and a Scripture index – but no introductory material or even a basic bibliography or suggestions for further reading.

Ganz’s exposition contains some acute observations on issues which continue to concern the church. With respect to divisions in the church he notes, ‘So often... the church is run down most by the people who should be building it up’ (p. 19). In commenting on marriage he remarks, ‘[Paul] crushed the idea of sexual promiscuity, the idea of having as many sexual partners as you please. But he also crushed the idea of a lacklustre sex life within marriage, because the Scriptures, in condemning immoral