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I Guess It All Depends on What “Celibacy” Means?

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The Church of England is trying its best to avoid achieving a clear position on the issue of homosexuality, even for clergy. Yesterday, the church’s House of Bishops found itself publicly embarrassed by its own statements, even as it attempted to clarify whether ordained ministers of the Church of England could enter into homosexual “civil partnerships.”

The statement instructs ministers who enter into such partnerships to inform their bishop, and warns that they may be asked questions. The Church of England’s standing policy – often ignored by church authorities, according to conservatives – is that homosexual ministers must be sexually celibate. This already complicated matter becomes all the more complicated and obscure when the church seems to be confused about just what constitutes celibacy.

The statement released yesterday includes this passage: *The House of Bishops does not regard entering into a civil partnership as intrinsically incompatible with holy orders, provided the person concerned is willing to give assurances to his or her bishop that the relationship is consistent with the standards for the clergy.*

The Guardian [London] commented:

Publication of the statement appears to indicate that the church does share the assumption that civil partnerships are likely to be sexual. Its current teaching is that, while lay people may have gay partners, clergy “cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships”.

But if the clergy cannot adhere to church teaching the question arises whether they ought to be in Holy Orders.

It is not clear what would happen if a vicar did not tell the bishop about a “civil partnership”.

The bishop glowed pink when asked what would constitute a sexually active relationship and whether just kissing would qualify. He said it depended on the circumstances.

This particular form of moral convolution is the inevitable result of any attempt to avoid an honest assessment of homosexuality as a moral question. The alternatives are fairly plain. Either homosexuality is a serious and deadly sin that must be confronted as such, or it is not a serious moral matter at all. On this assessment, homosexual activists and conservative Christians can surely agree. The Church of England’s attempt to finesse the issue of homosexuality leaves it in this morally and theologically compromised state. There is good reason for its bishops to be blushing with embarrassment.

Once a biblical position on sexuality is abandoned or accommodated to contemporary mores, confusion and embarrassment will surely follow. Even worse, the church then becomes an agent of moral malpractice, abdicating its responsibility to teach biblical truth.

The House of Bishops statement can be found [here](#).

