

AlbertMohler.com

# When the Church Bows to the State: Gay Bishops in the Church of England

*American churches and denominations had better take note. When a church or Christian institution bows to the authority of the state on a matter of such direct biblical importance, it is destined to lose biblical fidelity.*

Wednesday, June 22, 2011

As if the Church of England does not have enough troubles, word is leaking out of Lambeth Palace that the church is about to allow the appointment of openly gay bishops, so long as those bishops remain celibate.

The news has emerged in the form of a leaked internal memorandum prepared for the Archbishop of Canterbury by the church's highest legal adviser. The legal guidelines are intended to bring the church into compliance with Britain's Equality Act of 2010, even as the church is considering new criteria for the appointment of bishops. That law prohibits discrimination on the basis of several characteristics, including sexual orientation. The Equality Act has already been used to force some British churches to hire youth ministers and other workers who are openly homosexual.



Back in May, Andrew Brown of *The Guardian* [London] described the church's predicament this way:

“The leadership of the established church remains tied in knots over how far it can comply with the Equality Act in its treatment of gay people. Church lawyers have told the bishops that while they cannot take into account that someone is homosexual in considering them for preferment, they also cannot put forward clergy in active same-sex relationships and, even if they are celibate, must consider whether they can ‘act as a focus for unity’ to their flocks if appointed to a diocese.”

Now, in light of that challenge, the church's legal authority has suggested guidelines that would call for the appointment of openly gay bishops, but would require them to be celibate. The logic of the legal guidelines draws a distinction that would allow the church to claim compliance with the Equality Act and also act in accord with the deeply held beliefs of many of its members.

The crucial part of the guidelines states the matter like this:

“It is not open to a crown nominations committee or a bishop making a suffragan appointment to propose someone who is in a sexually active same-sex relationship; it is not open to them to take into account the mere fact that someone is gay by sexual orientation.”

So the “mere fact that someone is gay by sexual orientation” cannot be taken into account. But, of course, sexual orientation is not a “mere” matter in any Christian consideration. It is a matter of tremendous moral, spiritual, and theological significance. Our churches are filled with highly gifted persons who are struggling with their own sexual

orientation, and many of these believers are living lives of faithful obedience to Christ.

But it is one thing to acknowledge and confess that one is struggling with same-sex attraction; it is yet another to announce and claim homosexuality as one's personal identity.

Consider this section from the proposed guidelines:

"A person's sexual orientation is, in itself, irrelevant to their suitability for episcopal office or indeed ordained ministry more generally. It would, therefore, be wrong if [during the selection process] account were taken of the fact that a candidate had identified himself as of gay sexual orientation."

This is a very dangerous statement, for it declares something as important as sexual orientation to be "irrelevant" to qualifications for ministerial office. It would be "wrong," the guidelines state, for sexual orientation to be taken into account.

At this point, the guidelines lose touch with theological sanity. Christians must acknowledge that, in a fallen world, people struggle with sexual impulses and attractions that fall short of the glory of God. That is not a new acknowledgment for the church. In some sense, this includes every human being since Adam. It also includes many whose particular struggle is with same-sex attraction. The Bible makes clear that even this attraction is demonstrable proof of human sinfulness. [See Romans 1: 18-32] The Gospel is our only rescue from sin, and this certainly includes the sin of homosexuality and the problem of same-sex attraction.

Thus, a believer confessing a struggle with same-sex attraction should not be condemned by the church, but brought under its care, discipline, ministry, and protection. In this sense, biblical Christians can understand sexual "orientation" to be a legitimate category that identifies a particular struggle with sin.

But the concept of sexual orientation that underlies the proposed guidelines for the Church of England is very different. In the context of Britain's Equality Act of 2010, a same-sex sexual orientation is something to be put on an equal status with heterosexuality, as if there were nothing wrong with such an orientation.

This is the fatal inconsistency of the Church of England's proposed guidelines. If a same-sex sexual orientation is not itself a problem, how can the church insist that homosexual acts are sinful? Again, these guidelines do not presume an individual who is just struggling with same-sex attraction, but one who claims a public homosexual identity. Understandably, the proposed guidelines are unlikely to withstand close scrutiny or to please either liberals or conservatives in the church.

Finally, a truly ominous issue is the Church of England's subservience to the state on the matter of the Equality Act. As an established state church, the Church of England is hardly in a position to reject the government's laws or to claim the high ground of religious liberty. Thus, it is in a trap from which it seems incapable or unwilling of extricating itself.

American churches and denominations had better take note. When a church or Christian institution bows to the authority of the state on a matter of such direct biblical importance, it is destined to lose biblical fidelity. The proposed guidelines for the Church of England should serve as an alarm to all churches concerning this real and present danger.

---

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at [mail@albertmohler.com](mailto:mail@albertmohler.com). Follow regular updates on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler](http://www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler)

"Choosing Bishops — The Equality Act 2010," the proposed guidelines for the Church of England.

Andrew Brown, "Church of England Tied in Knots Over Allowing Gay Men to Become Bishops," *The Guardian*, Wednesday, May 25, 2011.

Al Webb, "Church of England to Allow Gay Bishops, Sort Of," Religion News Service, *USA Today*, Monday, June 20, 2011.

Lesley Fellows, "[The Church of England Has Double Standards When it Comes to Gay Bishops](#)," *The Guardian*, Monday, May 30, 2011.

---

Content Copyright © 2002-2011, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.