**Resources contributed by the FURY Task Group on Human Sexuality**

Members of a task group set up by the URC Youth Assembly in January 2014 draw our attention to the following resources. You will see that several of these are websites, the first being a pair of papers from the URC Consultation on Human Sexuality in 2011, by John Bradbury and Paul Stokes.

The one resource that is printed in full here is a personal reflection by an unnamed author, who has given her permission for this material to be used.

<http://urc.org.uk/images/Human%20Sexuality/towards_a_theology_of_same-sex_relationships.pdf>

<http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/couple-marries-uks-first-church-gay-wedding140414>

<http://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2012/10/on-love-and-freedom/>

<http://www.livingout.org/>

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I love the church: the beautiful, bumbling, stumbling Bride of Christ. She is strong, weak, courageous, confused, victorious and above all heartfelt. So it breaks my heart to see divisions rise up within her and with them hurt; like the threatened split over the issue of homosexuality. It’s a big issue, one many people feel strongly about, and not to be taken lightly. For me, it’s an issue that has threatened to tear me apart.

I am a lesbian. And writing that, just then, still made my heart beat a little faster and my breath come a little shorter. I am still nervous to say it, still scared to write it out. The only thing that gives me strength to do it – strangely, some will think – is knowing Christ. I’ve known Him since before I can remember – as far back as my toddler years, squatting in the wet sand at the beach making ‘pies’. He’s always been there, as much a part of my family as my parents and siblings.

So when, aged 13, I reached with no little bewilderment the realisation that actually, I liked girls in the way my friends liked boys, I found myself in a state of confused dread. I grew up in a Baptist church in Cornwall where homosexuality was only mentioned in lists of sin and shame and I knew, as everyone did, that gay people were weird and unnatural. To calm the rising panic, I grabbed hold of the line thrown around by every magazine, book and sex ed class: it’s a phase and I’ll grow out of it.

For three years I waited. Patiently, impatiently, prayerfully, anxiously. I studied the Bible passages with an obsession, and read up on all the various theological interpretations. Nobody seemed to know quite what was going on, which certainly didn’t help me: there were so many theories about Greek words and Roman fertility cults, lust, culture and all the rest that I barely knew where to begin. I’m no theologian and found myself utterly unqualified to discern what the truth behind the scripture was. At sixteen, I found my ‘phase’ excuse beginning to wear thin and the burden of not knowing who I was or what I was feeling weighed me down; with dread and desperation, I knew I had to battle this out once and for all, to discover who I was and what the truth was – above all, what the *truth* was.

I don’t know if there is anything comparable to coming out to someone for the first time. If you’ve ever done something really, really bad when you’re a kid, really humiliatingly naughty, and had to own up, that might come close. It’s that same cold sweat, sick to the stomach style confession, standing in front of the class with black heavy dread like a rock in your gut. You’re so afraid you think you might throw up. The five minute walk to my youth pastor’s house took fifteen, and I almost turned back three times. When I finally got the words out of my throat – which took even longer – I almost choked on them, though I knew them so well from rolling around my head for three years: “I think – I think I’m gay.”

To give her credit, my youth pastor didn’t, as anticipated, curse me as heathen and throw me out of house and church. Nor did she rush to my parents. She talked it over with me, mentioned the phase theory, and asked if I’d thought of healing.

Now, I’m not going to try to persuade anybody of any theological view in this article. I’m not qualified to, to start with, and I’m not sure enough myself to begin. All I can do is explain to you what it’s like to be a homosexual person seeking healing. I spent two years on my knees, with gritted teeth and tears, pleading with God, my friend, my Father, the God who had brought me up, to show me the truth. I begged Him to take away anything in me that wasn’t of Him. Whatever happiness I felt lay with women, and marriage to a woman, I wanted Him more than any of it; and I knew that anything He didn’t want me to have wasn’t worth having.

For two years, I received no healing, no theological direction, and no clue as to what to do. With nothing else to guide me, I decided to simply opt for the safe option, and reject all homosexuality – thoughts, feelings, all of it – as sinful. I may not be able to stop myself desiring women, but I could cut dead everything thereon.

They were long months. The burden of not really knowing who I was hadn’t been lifted and I was as confused as ever; but I had made my decision and I wasn’t going to let go of Jesus, whatever anybody said. Christ was mine, and I was His, and nothing, not least the church, who still threw around sermons like barbs and spoke of the ‘cult of homosexuality’ and the ‘homosexual lifestyle’, whatever that was, was going to come between us. I would sit in my seat and freeze, willing myself not to cry, as the people I had grown up with stood behind the pulpit and called me disgusting, filthy, Satanic, idolatrous. And inside my stiff, still body I would cling to Christ, desperate for Him.

It was a slow Saturday afternoon that He broke in. I was reading Tony Campolo’s *Speaking My Mind*, not thinking about much, when out of the blue, suddenly what felt like a deep bowl of peace, joy and love broke over my head and flooded me. It drenched me so strongly that my breath left my lungs, and I heard God say, “You’re gay and I love you. You’re mine, my daughter. I love you.”

Things were never the same after that moment. The joy that had flooded my heart drenched me so thoroughly that for a year all I had to do was think of that moment and my heart would swell with such joy and laughter that I thought it would burst out of my chest. In the highest heights of worship, I would cry in my heart, “I’m gay!” and the joy would come rushing up like a flood, welling out of my mouth and eyes in devotion to God.

I’m not going to offer any explanation for what happened that day; all I know is, the certainty it brought me as to my identity has never left, nor shaken, nor moved, not once in two years. The fruit of it has been greater confidence, unshakable joy, and increased closeness with God. I still don’t understand the theology; but every part of me knows that *I am gay* and *I am so, so, so loved by God.*

My identity is rooted in Christ’s love; and now I know who I am, grounded in Him, I don’t need the affirmation of other people, even Christians, although I love my church family and it makes me sad when they don’t give it. But what grieves me more is the dozens of people I know who have left the church because they cannot bear to hold their burden alone anymore. There is a community which has suffered rejection and humiliation in their workplace, friendships and families, people who have been turned away point blank by their parents and siblings, and these are the very people who feel they have no place in the church. And there’s no use making excuses; it’s because as a church, we have failed them.

This is not a distant, hypothetical issue. If you have a congregation of more than 30, I can guarantee there is someone in it who has or is struggling with this. And every time you say the word ‘gay’ and fix it in a sentence with sin and shame and Satan, another little part of them freezes. Every word you speak will hit like bullets, whether you see it happen or not. I’m not saying don’t be honest. I’m saying speak the truth. It is not enough, not ever enough, to say ‘you are a sinner’ – any sinner could tell them that. We are the Body and breath of Jesus, and it is our duty, role, delight, to tell the life-shattering truth that Christ has made it all alright and that nothing, *nothing* in all creation could ever come between us and God’s love. As a church we must turn to the broken, rejected, hurt community of people the world has turned their back on and get on our knees to ask for forgiveness, because we have not only not embraced them as Christ commanded, but we have added to their woes and laid burdens on their backs which have broken them. We have caused untold hurt by our words and our attitude – but the story is not over and it is not too late to write the final chapter; there is still time for us to turn around and begin to serve the lost and the broken with the heart-crying depths of love that drove Christ to the cross and us into His arms. There is still time for the story not to be the failure of the church to reach the hurting but a victory of grace, and for a generation of lost, outcast people to be ushered into new life in the arms of Christ’s beautiful, bold, broken, perseverant, but above all heartfelt, Bride.

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[www.gaychristian.net](http://www.gaychristian.net)

[www.christiansatpride.com](http://www.christiansatpride.com)