

THE EVANGELICAL OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Is Christianity Responsible for Gay Suicides?

Michael Wagner, April 28th, 2017

A recent report issued by a religious charity in Britain claims that Christians who embrace the Bible's view of homosexual acts (i.e. that they are sinful) are to blame for the high rate of mental illness and suicide among homosexuals. It seems the purpose of this report is to argue that the biblical view be rejected in order to help homosexuals improve their self-esteem. This may be indicative of a new approach to undermining historic Christianity, namely, by arguing that Christian beliefs cause harm to other people.



The report is entitled *In the Name of Love: The Church, exclusion and LGB mental health issues* and it is written by Rev. Steve Chalke, Ian Sansbury and

Gareth Streeter. It was published by the Oasis Foundation of London in 2016.

Three main points are used to develop the argument that biblical Christianity is to blame for homosexuals' self-harm. First, homosexuals have higher incidences of mental health problems and suicide than heterosexuals. Second, those mental health problems and resulting suicides are the result of anti-gay discrimination, homophobia and anti-gay social stigma. And third, Christianity is largely to blame for the discrimination, homophobia and anti-gay stigma that causes mental health problems and suicides among homosexuals.

The report itself does not acknowledge that the Bible condemns homosexual behavior. Instead, it takes the heterodox view that since God is love He does not oppose homosexuality. The introduction states: "God is the great pastor – God is love. Therefore, any belief, any doctrine, any policy that causes destructive hurt and alienation cannot be born of a theology that reflects the God of the Bible" (p. 3). In this view, God would never do anything to alienate or hurt homosexuals, therefore homosexuality is okay from God's perspective.

Mental Health

The report provides statistical evidence that homosexuals are much more likely to suffer from mental health problems and engage in self-harm than heterosexuals. It then makes the claim that these mental health problems are the result of discrimination and perceived societal inferiority that result from negative views towards homosexuality. Those negative views, of course, emerge from the Bible's teaching that homosexual behavior is sinful.

The claim about homosexuals suffering disproportionately from mental health issues does not appear to be disputed by anyone. However, blaming those mental health issues on society's Christian-inspired negative views about homosexuality is controversial and is disputed by some experts such as [Dr. Neil E. Whitehead](#) of New Zealand.

Historic Christian View

Orthodox Christianity has historically opposed homosexual activity as sinful, and this historic position continues to be maintained by many churches. *In the Name of Love* states, "All but one of the major UK Christian denominations view homosexuality as in some way inferior to heterosexuality and generally place some bar on anyone in a sexually active same-sex relationship participating fully in the life of local churches" (p. 10).

Any denomination that follows the Bible must necessarily view homosexuality as inferior to heterosexuality (because homosexual behaviour is inherently sinful) and must bar practicing homosexuals from full participation in the life of local churches. From an orthodox Christian perspective, knowingly allowing anyone involved in sexual sin to participate fully in a local church would be scandalous. But according to the report, it is these kinds of church beliefs and practices that are harmful to homosexuals.

At one point the report summarizes its key argument and then suggests that the historic Christian view of homosexuality somehow undermines the Gospel. As the authors put it, "given the evidenced impact that exclusion and discrimination have on the mental health of gay and bisexual men and women, it is clear that the Church's stance on sexuality has resulted at the very least in anxiety and depression and in many cases in self-harm and even suicide. We would simply ask the churches to consider whether this represents the Good News of God's Kingdom" (p. 11).

Well, then, what is "the Good News of God's Kingdom"? In short, the Good News is that Jesus Christ died to pay for the sins of the world so that all who believe on Him can be forgiven of their sins and inherit eternal life.

The Good News and Sin

The Bible plainly teaches that all people are sinners. It does not single out homosexuals or any other category of people. Everyone is called upon to acknowledge their sin and turn from it. Homosexuals may feel bad that their sexual activities are condemned by the Bible, but everybody struggles with sin and everybody finds that they have urges, thoughts and actions (of one kind or another) condemned by the Bible.

This recognition that all people are sinful and therefore separated from God is an essential element of Christian theology. It leads to the “Good News,” namely, that Christ died to pay for sin so all those who believe on Him can be forgiven. Those who will not acknowledge their sin cannot have their sin forgiven.

To claim that something the Bible condemns as sinful is not actually sinful undermines the Good News. If the authors of *In the Name of Love* had their way, and Christians began to approve of things condemned by God as sin, then the Good News would be null and void. There would be no Good News because without sin there is no need for Christ.

The Church’s Negative Voice

Given that the Bible condemns all sexual activity outside of heterosexual monogamous marriage, it is not surprising that the report found "significant evidence to show that the Church is the biggest negative voice in the public, political and media discussion around the legitimacy of same-sex relationships" (p. 12). From a Christian perspective, same-sex sexual relationships are inherently wrong.

The authors of *In the Name of Love* want Christians to acknowledge their responsibility for the mental health problems of homosexuals. They write, "To accept the premise that a societal negativity toward LGB people negatively affects their mental health, potentially putting their lives at risk leads logically to accept that the UK Church is to a very

large extent, responsible for fuelling this narrative in today's environment" (p. 12).

In the view of these authors, it is the Christians' fault that homosexuals engage in self-harm because genuine Christianity maintains that homosexual behaviour is wrong. This leads to "societal negativity" which causes mental illness in some homosexuals. Accordingly, the implication is that Christians must change their doctrine to affirm the view that homosexuality and same-sex marriage are good, otherwise those Christians are, in some sense, guilty for the suicides of the homosexuals.

Argument or Threat?

It seems that what the report's authors are offering is not so much an argument as a threat: "Change your doctrine or people will die." Essentially, if homosexuals commit suicide then the Christians are to be blamed.

This approach is an effort to intimidate Christians into opposing the historic Christian position on homosexuality. The underlying point is that biblical Christianity is causing harm and therefore must be changed. If certain Christian beliefs are causing people to commit suicide, would it not be logical to outlaw those Christian beliefs? That seems to be the direction where this line of thinking could lead.

Conclusion

One of the benefits of a free society is that people can disagree on important matters without being threatened or punished. However, the line of argument presented by the authors of *In the Name of Love* could undermine the freedom to believe the biblical view of sexuality. By claiming that certain Christian beliefs cause homosexuals to commit suicide, it casts doubt on the legality of the public expression of those beliefs. At the very least, conservative Christians could be blamed for

some suicides and thereby pressured to abandon the historic Christian doctrine outlined in the Bible.

This seems to be a new and innovative way to undermine biblical Christianity. No racks, no thumb-screws, just plain old societal scorn.

