

SECTION A: OVERVIEW OF SOME OFFICIAL CHURCH PUBLICATIONS

Part 1: Anglican Voices

The Church in Wales

The 2014 Standing Doctrinal Commission report *The Church in Wales and Same-sex Partnerships* is by far the most detailed consideration produced so far. Prefaced by reflections on the history of marriage and scientific research on sexual orientation, the body of the report considers three options for the Church in Wales with respect to same-sex partnerships but does not commend any particular course of action. The first restates the traditional position, that marriage is a lifelong exclusive union between a man and a woman (paragraphs 56-77); the second option considers blessing of same-sex partnerships, a provision currently available in the Church in Wales (paragraphs 78-102); the third marriage contemplates marriage between a couple irrespective of sexual difference (paragraphs 103-136), the position currently being considered. The report concludes with thoughts on the shape of a pastoral response.

The report is available in [English](#) and in [Welsh](#).

The Church of England

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) is the name of a comprehensive, ambitious and far-reaching project in the Church of England to reflect on many issues relating to gender, sexuality and identity. Within its scope it includes biblical, theological, historical and scientific reflections as well as personal experience. An overview of LLF can be found [here](#) and the LLF learning hub accessed [here](#). The suite of resources includes podcasts and videos, as well as books and other documents.

The Scottish Episcopal Church

Since 2017 it has been possible for same-sex couples to marry in Scottish Episcopal churches. The key theological text to support this change is the report of the Doctrine Committee on *The Theology of Marriage* which is available [here](#). An earlier Doctrine Committee paper, *Marriage and Human Intimacy: Perspectives on Same-sex Relationships and the Life of the Church* (Grosvenor Essay No. 8) may also be of interest. It is available [here](#).

Part 2: Ecumenical voices

The Roman Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarises Roman Catholic teaching that marriage is between one man and one woman, a gift of God written within humankind's very nature (*Catechism*, §§1603-1605). Furthermore, the RC Church strongly disapproves of homosexual acts and, whilst stressing compassion and sensitivity towards those who experience same-sex attraction, as well as the need to avoid discrimination, calls them to chastity (*Catechism*, §§2357-2359).

The Methodist Church of Great Britain

Conducting same-sex marriages have been permitted – but not required – on British Methodist premises since 2021. The key underlying theological document is the report *God in Love Unites Us* and this is available in [English](#) and [Welsh](#), with a study guide in both [English](#) and [Welsh](#). The report focuses not just on reasons to expand the theological understanding of marriage to include same-sex couples but also considers issues such as promiscuity, chastity, fidelity, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, thereby affirming a more comprehensive Christian sexual ethic.

SECTION B: BOOKS AND PAPERS

The books which follow cover a variety of opinions on same-sex relationships, from those who strongly affirm the traditional Christian stance that marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman to those who aspire to extend marriage to all couples. Some of the books deliberately bring together those voicing divergent opinions so that they may present their respective stances for respectful, yet robust, critique by others. For this reason, it is not always possible to separate the volumes into distinct 'for' and 'against' categories for the works themselves often deliberately resist a single conclusion, thereby speaking into the current state of the churches on these contentious issues. In addition to contrasting opinions, there are differences in style, varying from the telling of often poignant personal stories to more academic perspectives, where theology is the main focus.

The books are arranged in alphabetical order, according to the author's surname, or that of the lead author / editor. The description ends with a brief categorisation of the stance and style of the work, but this is done at the risk of oversimplification. Thus, these labels should not be taken as definitive as no two 'traditional' books offer the same rationale, whilst two 'affirming' books may make quite different theological arguments, or make their case largely from pastoral concerns.

Isolating specific texts for particular recommendation is difficult due to the sheer diversity of arguments presented across the field. However, the following provide solid arguments for and against a change in the Christian theological doctrine of marriage in order to extend it to include same-sex couples. The books listed immediately below should be accessible to most, both in terms of theology and cost.

Affirming voices: arguing for a change to extend marriage to same-sex couples

Relatively short, the books by Andrew Davison and Adrian Thatcher focus on several aspects on human relationships short yet include affirmation of same-sex relationships and the extension of marriage. Susannah Cornwall's book provides a longer, broad-based introduction. Books by Mandy Ford, Clare Herbert, Jeffrey John and Karen Keen focus specifically on same-sex marriage, whilst others – such as Vicki Beeching, Jayne Ozanne and Jarel Robinson-Brown – additionally relate to personal experience.

Conservative voices: maintaining the traditional Christian understanding of marriage

Ian Paul's Grove booklet is short, accessible, direct and inexpensive, examining the key biblical texts cited in opposition to change. An acclaimed 'classic' defence of the traditional view is provided in one chapter of Richard Hays' classic book on New Testament ethics, though it should be noted that his recent book, co-authored with his son, Chris, nearly 30 years later, argues for an affirming position. Several others, for example Sam Allberry, David Bennett, Wesley Hill, Melinda Selmys and Ed Shaw, weave in personal stories of same-sex attraction whilst maintaining a traditional line.

Voices in dialogue: listening across the divide

The collection of opinions edited by Preston Sprinkle illustrates well the 'to and fro' in argument and counterargument as does the collection of papers in the Anglican Theological Review which is downloadable for free. The Church of England's sixteen 'Living in Love and Faith' podcasts, available on most platforms, bring together the diverse and learned voices of Christian thinkers and leaders on issues related to sexuality and gender, including same-sex marriage.

The full list of books and papers follows, together with a short description to introduce the argument presented. In each case, a brief categorization of the basic stance and style is given, though these should be used with care as the arguments are sometimes nuanced or tentative rather than decisive.

Sam Allberry, *Is God Anti-Gay?* (New York: Good Book Co., 2013; second edition, 2023)

Sam Allberry is an evangelical Anglican minister who experiences same-sex attraction, yet is a staunch defender of traditional teaching on sexual ethics. His stance leads him to believe that he must live a celibate lifestyle. This book takes gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching on sexuality as its starting point and proceeds to consider what a conservative view of same-sex relationships means for same-sex-attracted Christians and the wider Church, set against wider societal sexual standards. The book ends with a consideration of oft-quoted biblical texts and a consideration of how the Church might live with diverse views. **Traditional, biblical, personal**

Vicki Beeching, *Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, and Living Free from Shame* (London: Collins, 2019)

Vicki Beeching has been acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic for her hugely popular Christian music, singing in some of America's largest megachurches and with a worldwide audience. Her decision in her mid-thirties to admit that she was gay was met with condemnation from some holding a staunchly conservative view of same-sex relationships and led to her losing her music career and livelihood. But, as she writes in this book, she found strength to live from a place of wholeness, truthfulness and peace, going on to campaign for LGBT inclusion and equality in the Church and in wider society so that people may "celebrate diversity, live authentically, and become 'undivided'". **Affirming, personal**

David Bennett, *A War of Loves: the Unexpected Story of a Gay Activist Discovering Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018)

As a young man who experienced same-sex attraction, David Bennett became a gay activist, championing freedom for LGBTIQ people whilst believing that Christianity was inherently repressive and finding instead a spiritual path in new age religions and the claims of French existentialist philosophy. Whilst at university, Bennett experienced several supernatural encounters with God and became a disciple of Jesus Christ in whom he found abundant, profligate grace and a way to reconcile his new-found faith and his sexuality. In this book, he describes the joy and intimacy found as a disciple of Jesus and how he has come to understand in love in a richer way whilst following a path of celibacy as a gay man. **Traditional, personal**

John Bradbury & Susannah Cornwall (editors), *Thinking Again about Marriage: Key Theological Questions* (London: SCM, 2016)

This collection of twelve theological, yet accessible, essays consider various aspects of marriage, with several reflecting upon same-sex unions, including the possibility of Christian marriage for two partners of the same sex and an assessment of issues relating to history, liturgy, law, vocation and generativity. Generally, the stance taken is more affirming of same-sex relationships than the collection edited by Noble, Whittle and Johnston (see below). **Varied, theological**

Timothy Bradshaw, *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*. 2nd ed (SCM Press, 2003)

This collection of thirteen essays, first published in 1997 and revised in 2003, responds to the so-called 'St. Andrew's Day Statement' of 1995 on 'Theological Principles affecting the Homosexuality Debate'. The authors come from a variety of theological and pastoral convictions – some affirming of same-sex unions, others less so – and their perspectives may seem rather dated in the light of more recent

developments, in science, law and the attitude of the churches. Nevertheless, there remains considerable value to the collection. **Varied, theological**

James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Re-framing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Eerdmans, 2013)

In this book, James Brownson examines in some detail the seven biblical texts traditionally cited as evidence to support a negative view of same-sex sexual activity as well as others less frequently considered. His goal is not to argue about the meaning of key words and phrases but to fathom the underlying 'moral logic' of the message presented, under headings such as patriarchy, complementarity, purity and impurity, honour and shame. Addressed originally to ancient cultures and norms quite different from the notion of committed, stable, loving lifelong fidelity of many same-sex partnerships today, Brownson finds reason to entertain an affirming view that is pastorally sensitive and scripturally honest. **Affirming, biblical, theological**

Sarah Coakley, *The New Ascetism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

'What is desire and how should it be channelled?' Sarah Coakley reflects on this fundamental question in conversation with St Gregory of Nyssa's theology in order to map a path between the false poles of sexual repression and libertinism. Coakley writes within our own, highly sexualised, consumerist society where physical gratification is prized, whilst the Church finds it hard to articulate a united theology of sexuality which is good news for all. Refreshingly (and surprisingly), she roots her chapter on sexuality on a reading of Romans 8:14-17, 26-27 and on an 'earthed' trinitarian theology of silent contemplative prayer in which human desire is preceded and held within God's desire for humanity and, even more fundamentally, in the eternal self-giving love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Contemplative, biblical, theological**

Susannah Cornwall, *Theology and Sexuality* (London: SCM, 2013)

Susannah Cornwall devotes an entire chapter to same-sex relationships, but the scope of the book is much broader. Cornwall presents a range of questions on the nature of human beings as intrinsically embodied and sexual and seeks to relate these diverse experiences to the central Christian belief that God took human flesh in Jesus Christ. She examines the meaning of love in its many dimensions (*philia*, *eros* and *agape*), celibacy and consecrated virginity, as well as the purpose of sexual acts, both those taking place within and outside marriage. Chapter 7 looks specifically at same-sex relationships, beginning with opinions that regard such unions as invalid, both from natural law and Scripture, with some consideration of how texts are interpreted, as well as biblical texts which some have claimed to offer a positive assessment of love between those of the same sex. Cornwall also reviews the teaching of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church on homosexuality, as well as 'queer theology' which affirms the experience and validity of same-sex relationships. **Biblical, theological**

L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (London: SCM, 2001)

The three keywords in William Countryman's intriguing title shape the book's three sections. First, he considers questions of purity, beginning with the Hebrew Law and first-century Judaism before proceeding to examine how these unfold in the Gospels, Paul and the wider NT. Secondly comes a consideration of perceived notions of ownership, and thus power, in the context of familial and sexual relations. These twin notions of purity and power thus form his sexual ethic, unfolded in the final section. First published in 1988, long before western nations began to legalize same-sex unions, Countryman's brief comments on homosexuality may seem obsolete and unsettled; yet his theology of marriage as

the indissoluble union of flesh, and the subjection of all human relationships to the reign of God, allow us to extrapolate principles for same-sex partners. **Historical, ethical, biblical, theological**

Andrew Davison, *Amazing Love: Theology for Understanding Discipleship, Sexuality and Mission* (DLT, 2016)

Andrew Davison, in collaboration with others, sets the debate about same-sex relationships within a broader context, including ideas about what it means to be disciples of Jesus, being fully human, being loving and being missional. He does so by reference to key biblical texts, scientific knowledge of sexuality, historical developments and current attitudes to homosexuality, both within the church and wider society. Based on scientific insight, Davison sets his views on the origin of same-sex attraction firmly on the 'nature' – rather than 'nurture' – side and, coupled with his theological conclusions, affirms the goodness of committed same-sex partnerships. **Affirming, biblical, scientific, theological**

Douglas Farrow, *Thirteen Theses on Marriage* (Published in the journal *First Things* in 2012 and available [here](#))

Written from a traditional Roman Catholic perspective, Douglas Farrow's thirteen theses affirm what is sometimes called heteronormativity, for the flourishing of society and ordered towards humanity's vocation to enjoy God as our ultimate end. Whilst Farrow's perspective is conservative and rooted in Catholicism's refusal to affirm same-sex unions, the theses are followed by responses by nine thinkers who come from diverse backgrounds, both in terms of religious affiliation and in attitudes towards same-sex partnerships. **Traditional, biblical, theological, philosophical – with diverse responses**

Mandy Ford, *God, Gender, Sex and Marriage* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018)

Church of England priest, Mandy Ford, provides an accessible introduction to the complex and intertwined questions of gender, desire, sex and marriage, leaning towards a progressive stance whilst taking into account contrasting voices. This makes it a good candidate for discussion groups where diverse opinions may be aired in a frank but respectful manner. The chapter on same-sex relationships is set within a wider discussion of the nature of desire and its relation both to God and to human partners. This leads into a discussion of marriage and the possibility that this institution might be opened to same-sex couples. **Affirming, theological**

Robert A. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Abingdon Press, 2003)

Robert Gagnon's central thesis is that the Bible unequivocally regards same-sex intercourse as sinful and does not believe that arguments based on questions of interpretation or context can relax or reverse this definitive position. Gagnon therefore argues that the Church should oppose homosexual practice on the basis of the Scriptural prohibitions which indicate that it is contrary to nature, as shown in the anatomical 'fittedness' of the male and female genitalia, both in procreative possibility and mutual pleasure. Only two sexual options are therefore permissible for human beings: either monogamous heterosexual marriage, or celibacy. **Traditional, biblical, theological**

Sherif Girgis, Robert George & Ryan T. Anderson, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense*, second edition (New York: Encounter, 2020)

Girgis, George and Anderson argue that marriage should be understood as a comprehensive union of one man and one woman which is ordered to family life and in which sex is coordinated towards a generative purpose, even though not every act of bodily union results in new life being formed. Furthermore, they contend that those who would affirm same-sex civil marriage erode the well-established norm of marriage as an exclusive heterosexual conjugal union, paving the way potentially

for the recognition in law of polyamorous unions and undermining the common good. **Traditional, theological, philosophical, social sciences**

Marcus Green, *The Possibility of Difference: a Biblical Affirmation of Inclusivity* (Kevin Mayhew, 2018)

Marcus Green is an Anglican priest who has served part of his ministry within the Church in Wales and in this book he writes of his experience of same-sex attraction in relation to his evangelical Christian faith. He considers some of the key scriptural texts often analysed in the debate, reading them not as isolated proof texts but as part of a bigger biblical story. Setting the contemporary sexual orthodoxy espoused by many alongside the harm done to gay and lesbian people, he calls the church to celebrate “the rather glorious possibilities of difference” in order to “become the fully equal children of God.”

Affirming, biblical, personal

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 1997)

This book is widely acclaimed as a classic biblical overview of the early Christians’ theological worldview on rightful ethical behaviour, written by one of the world’s most eminent New Testament scholars. Chapter 16 focuses on homosexuality. Whilst recognising that homosexuality is a minor theme within the Bible as a whole and that far more is said about economic and social justice, Hays nevertheless argues that Christian Scripture consistently and categorically condemns sexual intimacy between same-sex partners. For Hays, such action represents an infringement of nature, an affront to God’s creative design and indicates the fallenness of human beings within a sin-bound world. Heterosexual marriage is thus the only legitimate place for sex. Regarding the biblical witness as unanimous, Hays asserts that the prohibitions have special moral force, meaning that the same-sex-attracted should abstain from bodily expression of their erotic desires and that the Church should abstain from blessing same-sex partnerships: “though only a few biblical texts speak of homoerotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval” (page 389).

Traditional, biblical, theological

Christopher B. Hays and Richard B. Hays, *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality within the Biblical Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024)

Despite this clear statement of a traditional stance on same-sex partnerships Richard Hays has recently shown himself unafraid to articulate a radically different opinion. Written with his son, Chris, himself an Old Testament scholar, this new book examines ways in which the God of Israel consistently shows mercy to his creatures and shows this sometimes in changing his mind – for example, with respect to aspects of Hebrew law and customs and through including within his people who do not descend physically from Abraham and the ancient forbears. Moreover, the New Testament shows Jesus extending mercy to sinners and foreigners, the early church welcoming gentiles and highlights key individuals, such as both Saul and Peter, changing their minds on fundamental issues deemed settled. This may be, argue the authors, a movement of the Holy Spirit leading the Church “into all the truth” (John 16:13). Upon this biblical basis of the expansion of compassion, both human and divine, and the longing for inclusion expressed by gay and lesbian people, Hays and Hays conclude that “*the biblical narratives throughout the Old Testament and the New trace a trajectory of mercy that leads us to welcome sexual minorities no longer as “strangers and aliens” but as “fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.”* Full stop.” (Page 207; italics original).

Affirming, biblical, theological

Clare Herbert, *Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Marriage: Squaring the Circle* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2020)

The author, a priest of the Church of England, considers how the definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman has shaped the understanding of the sacrament. Weaving together insights from queer theology and the experience of committed same-sex love, she paves a path for a fuller, more inclusive definition of marriage which honours the genuine desire for holiness which same-sex Christians long to express freely and fully. Her goal is to “explore the possibility that Christian same-sex marriage may not fall short of the ideal, or simply be justified, but may also offer new understandings of God and human love.” (Page 17). **Affirming, theological**

Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian faithfulness and homosexuality, updated and expanded edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016)

Wesley Hill is a New Testament scholar and a priest of the Episcopal Church (USA). He has contributed his academic reflections to the multi-author discussion on same-sex partnerships edited by Preston Sprinkle (see below). In this volume, he takes a more personal approach, recounting his own story as a gay man and his Christian conviction that God says ‘no’ to same-sex sexual intimacy. He recounts three struggles, namely (i) the gospel’s clear call to gay and lesbian Christians; (ii) how best to respond to homoerotic desires and find relief amid loneliness; (iii) how those who experience same-sex attraction may best please God and experience his comfort. **Traditional, biblical, personal**

Jeffrey John, *Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-Sex Marriage*, third edition (London: DLT, 2012)

This small, yet influential, book contends that gay and lesbian relationships should be blessed by the Church, arguing that the self-giving love and steadfast commitment expressed in same-sex partnerships can and should meet the standards required in a heterosexual marriage. Considering the proposal from Scriptural, moral and practical standpoints, it maintains that such monogamous same-sex partnerships can have a theological, ethical and sacramental quality equivalent to marriage between a man and a woman. Christian same-sex marriage must embody the self-discipline and self-sacrifice which make a sanctified union a way of holiness. **Affirming, theological**

Karen R. Keen, *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018)

Attracted to women, yet committed to celibacy, Karen Keen experienced a change of heart concerning same-sex relationships, discovering a life-giving vision in Scripture. She begins by chronicling the church’s response to the gay and lesbian community and then considers attitudes to same-sex relations in ancient Jewish and Christian thought. Central arguments in contemporary debate on same-sex relationships are examined from both ‘sides’ and this is related in the subsequent chapter to the teaching found in Old Testament law on other sexual issues. She questions how we might discern right ethical behaviour and concludes that the ‘creation ordinance’ which lead many to reject same-sex partnerships needs to be read in the overriding requirement for discernment when human well-being is in question. Keen questions the requirement from conservative Christians for enforced celibacy and, extrapolating from Paul’s recommendation that those with strong passions should marry, entertaining the possibility that the church could affirm same-sex covenanted relationships. **Broadly affirming, biblical**

William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013)

This book represents a readable summary of a much bigger, five-volume, project which William Loader has undertaken into ancient Jewish and Christian attitudes towards sex and sexuality. Taking the

foundational accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 – and their various Jewish and Christian interpretations – as his starting point, Loader surveys how this plays out in the ordering of households, the respect and preservation of sacred space and the rightful regulation of persons and their passions so that healthy sexuality may be celebrated. Pages 131-140 summarise the negative judgement delivered on same-sex activity by writers such as Philo and Josephus. Elsewhere (for example in the volume edited by Preston Sprinkle described below), Loader has indicated his own more liberal and affirming attitude towards same-sex partnerships. **Historical, textual, theological**

Diarmaid MacCulloch *Lower than the Angels: A History of Sex and Christianity* (London: Allen Lane, 2024)

Acclaimed Oxford historian, Diarmaid MacCulloch, presents a long, detailed and fascinating story of the Church's attempts to understand human existence as embodied and sexual. Stretching back to Christianity's roots in the faith of Israel, MacCulloch traces not one unified story but many, a diversity which can speak into an age such as ours where huge life-changing and church-changing questions are asked about the equality of women and men, same-sex love, gender and trans identity. Alongside those who would champion a unified and unchanging theology of marriage the author exposes a host of complexities and contradictions, a variety which may speak into our highly-charged debates in church and society about human dignity and flourishing. **Historical, textual, theological**

Colby Martin, *UnClobber: Re-thinking our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006)

Colby Martin, a heterosexual pastor who was raised as a conservative evangelical, has come to question what he calls the 'clobber' texts, identifying six passages within Scripture used to justify condemn and reject same-sex practice. He seeks to combine theological insight with pastoral sensitivity to call the church turn from inaccurate assumptions and false Scriptural interpretation so as to know that we and *all others* are "a loved and fully accepted child of God" (page 175). **Affirming, biblical, pastoral**

Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006)

Dale Martin is a gay, Episcopalian biblical scholar who has gathered into this volume scholarly articles written several years. Within some he considers some of the 'hot-button' biblical texts often cited as prohibitions on same-sex intercourse. Key to his strategy – and contrary to more conservative scholars such as Gagnon and Hays – is the conviction that the text does not present a stable, timeless meaning which we are able to extract and then apply. Instead, he argues that "appeals to 'what the text says' actually serve to mask the very real interpretive agency of the human interpreter. Texts mean nothing until human beings interpret them" (page 34). **Affirming, biblical, personal**

Gareth Moore, *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* (London: Continuum, 2003).

The late Gareth Moore was a Dominican priest of the English Province and he takes his order's motto *Veritas* – truth – as a golden thread through this unashamedly theological book. He writes in the light of his own Roman Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexual relationships and acts, arguing in some depth against this official stance, both from the perspective of the biblical texts usually cited and also from natural law which affirms sex as legitimate only between a man and a woman within marriage. Moore also weaves in pastoral concerns, asking questions about purpose and happiness for those who experience same-sex attraction.

Questioning Roman Catholic teaching, biblical, theological, philosophical

Thomas A. Noble, Sarak K. Whittle, Philip S. Johnston, P. (eds.), *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2017)

This is a collection of sixteen essays on a variety of themes on a host of contemporary issues relating to sexuality, marriage, family life, singleness, same-sex relationships, violence against women, anthropology, gender and culture. As the subtitle suggests, these have an academic style but are generally accessible. With respect to the doctrine of marriage and same-sex unions, the authors take a theologically conversative line.

Key essays relevant for conversations relating to same-sex marriage include Katherine Smith's 'Ordered Relationships in Leviticus', David Instone-Brewer's 'Evidence of non-Heterosexual Inclinations in First-Century Judaism', A.T.B. McGowan's 'Human Sexuality and Christian Anthropology', Oliver O'Donovan's "'One man and one woman': the Christian doctrine of marriage'; Andrew Goddard's 'Covenant Partnerships as a Third Calling' (a critique of Robert Song's defence of same-sex unions – see below), Andrew Sloane's 'Male and Female he created them'? Theological reflections on Gender, Biology and Identity'. **Traditional, biblical**

Jayne Ozanne, *Just Love: A journey of self-acceptance* (London: DLT, 2018)

Jayne Ozanne chronicles her own Christian journey, her encounters with people of faith in various parts of the world and of her own significant contribution to the life of the Church of England and wider society. She describes movingly the struggles she faced to come to terms with her own same-sex attraction and the ostracization she faced when she decided to come out. Committed to working for the full inclusion of LGBTI Christians within the life of the Church, Ozanne's personal story speaks to a church struggling to find a common voice on contentious issues. **Affirming, personal**

Ian Paul, *Same-sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 2014)

This short and accessible booklet offers a reading of key texts in both the Old and New Testaments which have been cited by some as presenting prohibitions on same-sex unions, specifically Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-24 and 19:5; Judges 19:22; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Matthew 15:19; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. In each case, Ian Paul presents a traditionalist reading, as well as considering revisionist interpretations which could support a more liberal stance on same-sex unions. In conclusion, Paul supports the conservative line, arguing that in Scripture "where same-sex activity is mentioned, it is universally and unequivocally rejected" (page 27). **Traditional, biblical**

Jarel Robinson-Brown, *Black, Gay, British, Christian, Queer: The Church and the Famine of Grace* (London: SCM, 2021)

Jarel Robinson-Brown describes himself as "a Black Queer British Christian minister of Jamaican and Cuban heritage" (p. 1) and is currently serving as a parish priest in the Church in Wales. Personally aware of discrimination in various guises, he writes powerfully and poignantly about the nature of grace, self-worth and inclusion, with a challenge to a church which "invests much of her time proclaiming that God's love is 'for all' and that 'all are welcome', whilst simultaneously practising a form of drip-down grace-onomics, dividing God's children between those who can immediately bask in the joy of God's love and those who need to change and transform before the love of God can *truly* be theirs" (p. 2). Drawing a broad array of Christian writers, past and present, he writes that "grace for LGBTQ+ people is only really grace when it reaches into our love, our Blackness and our same-sex desire with gentleness, affirmation and love" (p. 29). **Affirming, theological, pastoral, personal**

Eugene Rogers (editor), *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

As the title suggests, this a wide-ranging collection of theological writings from many periods of Christian history, asking questions such as ‘What is the body for?’ ‘What does marriage mean?’ ‘What is the purpose of Christianity?’ and ‘What does God want with sex, anyway?’ It is arranged in nine sections which, in turn, cover: (i) how to think theologically about the body; (ii) liturgical resources; (iii) classical resources, from the Church Fathers to the twentieth century; (iv) contemporary philosophical perspectives; (v) the meaning of marriage; (vi) Roman Catholic perspectives; (vii) Trinitarian models for relationships; (viii) our understanding of Christ and of humanity; (ix) implications for church practice.

Roger’s edited volume includes Rowan Williams’ celebrated paper ‘The Body’s Grace’, a hugely influential essay, hailed by Rogers as “the best 10 pages written about sexuality in the twentieth century.” In Williams’ own words:

The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ’s body tells us that God desires us, as if we were God, as if we were that unconditional response to God’s giving that God’s self makes in the life of the Trinity. We are created so that we may be caught up in this, so that we may grow into the wholehearted love of God by learning that God loves us as God loves God. (pp. 311– 12).

Various perspectives, theological

David Runcorn, *Love means Love: Same-sex Relationships and the Bible* (London: SPCK, 2020)

The author argues that Scripture, far from declaring a ban on same-sex partnerships, can offer support within the light of the unfolding plan and purposes of God. Responding to the shock of God’s transforming love, the church discovers – and is sometimes scandalized – when it discovers holiness, goodness and divine life in unexpected people and places. Along the way he considers the possibility of sexual abstinence and celibacy and the connection between sexuality and the sacred. Ultimately, Runcorn comes to a simple conclusion: love means love. “Our sexual, erotic energies awaken in us far more than passing moments of physical or emotional satisfaction. There is a passion to be fully engaged, a search for deeper unity of being and of belonging.” **Affirming, biblical, pastoral**

Melinda Selmys, *Sexual Authenticity: An Intimate Reflection of Homosexuality and Catholicism* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2009)

Melinda Selmys writes of exchanging her former life as a ‘secular lesbian’ for the Catholic faith, drawn by the sheer beauty of Jesus Christ and thus resolving her own inner conflicts. Having journeyed into a believing and celibate life, Selmys addresses the complexities surrounding sexual identity with compassion and provides a reading of the celebrated *Theology of the Body* developed by Pope John Paul II during his pontificate. It seeks to promote the Roman Catholic church’s teaching on sexuality whilst speaking with compassion to those who experience same-sex attraction. **Traditional, theological, personal**

Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem: Same-sex attraction and the Church* (Nottingham: IVP Press, 2015)

Ed Shaw is a pastor who experiences same-sex attraction but is resolved to adhere to the Church’s traditional ethical teaching. He writes of his own experience as a celibate man by responding to what he recognizes as nine related ‘missteps’ in popular perception, related to issues of identity, biological predisposition, intimacy, godliness, celibacy and suffering. The book ends with two biblical appendices, the first affirming a traditionalist understanding of the Bible’s teaching on sexual relationships and the second critiquing certain revisionist stances. **Traditional, biblical, pastoral**

Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-sex Relationships* (SCM, 2014)

Crucial to Robert Song's theological argument is a sense that the advent of Christ changes the way in which we should think about relationships, including sexual ones, for in the light of Christ's rising the world is now directed towards the future resurrection life. So, as we live between the inauguration of this new paradigm and its fulfilment at the end of time, marriage is transformed from being a state in which procreation was expected and inherent, to a state which is itself 'in transit', awakening a new possibility, a state which Song describes as 'covenant partnership'. Hence, for him, the key division is not between heterosexual and homosexual relationships but between those which are procreative and non-procreative. It is on this basis that he proposes that "Might it be that same-sex couples could also form covenant partnerships? Could they also bear eschatological witness to the goods of faithfulness, permanence and fruitfulness, and thus participate in the corporate ecclesial discernment of vocation, in which some are called to bear witness to the goods of creation, others to creation's fulfilment in the coming Kingdom? (Page 36) **Affirming, theological**

Preston Sprinkle (ed.), *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

This book brings together four scholars to present their own perspectives on Scripture's attitude to the same-sex-attracted, two of whom – Wesley Hill and Stephen R. Holmes – argue for a traditional understanding whilst the others – William Loader and Megan K. DeFranza – express an affirming view. Each writer presents his or her case and this is followed by a response from each of the others and the section concludes with a rejoinder from the original author – a 'response to the responses'. In the light of these rich, divergent and respectful contributions, the volume concludes with a helpful reflection from the editor to consider possible trajectories for future discussions on faith and sexuality.

Various opinions, theological

Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021)

Darrin Snyder Belousek's own Mennonite tradition has faced considerable disagreement due to differing stances on same-sex unions. This volume seeks to speak into that theological divide by examining the debate not primarily from the biblical texts deemed by some to undermine the validity of same-sex partnerships but from the fundamental question 'What is marriage?' He considers the witness of Scripture and tradition, which has tended to support those espousing a conservative understanding of marriage, as well as biblical and historical precedents which might allow for innovation. Snyder Belousek speaks to a church in a process of discernment which seeks to be theologically faithful, interpretatively responsible and pastorally sensitive. **Balanced, theological**

Adrian Thatcher, *Making Sense of Sex* (London: SPCK, 2012)

This short, yet incisive, book, expounds the purpose and significance of sex from a liberal Christian standpoint. Beginning with an examination of how best to use the resources of Scripture, tradition and reason, as well as experience, conscience and wisdom, Adrian Thatcher considers how our desirous, embodied, differentiated human existence relates to sexual expression. Chapter 5 considers how we might move 'from disgust to delight' when reflecting on same-sex partnerships and reorder marriage 'from patriarchy to partnership'. Advocating that marriage should be open to all couples, he provides a sevenfold image of Christian partnerships, involving (i) a communion of persons; (ii) a gift of bodies; (iii) a covenant; (iv) an image of the New Covenant; (v) a mutual ministry; (vi) a unity of heart, body and mind; (vii) an anticipation of the end of all things, remembering that the Bible ends with a nuptial feast of joy, praise and delight. **Affirming, biblical, theological**

Various: *Same-sex Relationships and the Nature of Marriage: a Theological Colloquy Anglican Theological Review*, Volume 93, Number 1.

In Winter 2011, this theological journal of the Episcopal Church (USA) devoted almost an entire edition to addressing this contentious question. The main contributions are twofold and can be summarised as follows.

First comes a paper from conservative scholars (John E. Goldingay, Grant R. LeMarquand, George R. Sumner, Daniel A. Westberg) who advocate a traditional Christian understanding of marriage. They begin with an assessment of the divided state of the Anglican Communion on same-sex issues and in the second part consider key biblical texts, including those normally cited in opposition to same-sex activity, whilst seeking to read them within the broader scriptural perspective. The third part questions the scientific consensus that homosexuality is innate and unchanging, before going on to consider evidence of God's purposes in creation and the role of sex as both to generate new life (its procreative function) and to afford its members joy and companionship (its unitive purpose). Given the conservative reading of the biblical evidence, the pastoral conclusion involves strongly commending celibacy to those who experience same-sex attraction.

For their part, the liberal scholars (Deirdre J. Good, Willis J. Jenkins, Cynthia B. Kittredge, Eugene F. Rogers, Jr.) frame their argument that the church should extend marriage to include same-sex couples on the twin premise that marriage is both a discipline and a means of grace for sinners, an important forum to proclaim God's saving work in Christ and the Spirit and thus an instrument for mission. Whilst the New Testament describes marriage as between a man and a woman, it also testifies to other forms of relationship that are life-giving. Marriage provides more than a place for procreation and family life but also speaks of mutual joy, sanctification and maturation in the life of Christ, a set of qualities that a same-sex marriage could also manifest, remembering also such unions can themselves be generative. An individual should aspire to be married to someone of the *apposite* – but not necessarily *opposite* – sex and thus Christian same-sex marriage, through mutual self-giving love, should open out from mutual self-enclosed desire to a Christlike charity visible in the world.

Each set of scholars responds to the paper of the others and the edition concludes with personal responses from eminent theologians: Sarah Coakley, Joseph D. Galgalo, Thomas W. Gillespie, Mark D. Jordan, Margaret Kim Peterson, Janet Trisk, Kevin Ward and Ellen T. Charry. The entire collection is available [here](#) (open access). Adrian Thatcher, in the volume noted above, summarizes well both the traditionalist and liberal stances presented and critiques them both (Thatcher, pp. 56-65).

Various opinions, theological

Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

Robert Gagnon's interpretation of the Bible's view on same-sex relationships as altogether negative is outlined above and presented afresh in this volume.

Dan Via argues against Gagnon (and also Hays' original 1996 view), observing that human existence, which is inescapably bodily, is defined (to some degree) by sexuality. Via argues that sexual orientation is divinely given, not chosen and so "why should the homosexual...be singled out as not having the moral freedom to actualize the only freedom he/she has?" (p.33). Every human being's bodily, sexual life thrives within God's plan for all to enjoy fullness of life and experience shows that committed same-sex relationships, as much as those between a man and a woman, can be life-giving for others. This

apparent contradiction of traditionalist views suggests that biblical interpretation can open to fresh insights.

For his part, Gagnon argues that it is invalid to argue that affirmation of same-sex relationships is akin to changes with respect to slavery, women's ministry and the remarriage of divorcees. Furthermore, Jesus's emphasis on love of neighbour does not mean condoning immoral behaviour; neither does it allow us to override the first and foremost command – namely, the love of God – or neglect to take seriously Jesus' teaching on the need for repentance and the inevitability of judgement. Gagnon goes on to consider St. Paul's ethical teaching as well as relevant narratives in the Old Testament and Jesus' teaching, including his affirmation of Genesis 1:27; 2:24, in texts such as Mark 10:6-7. For Gagnon, the overarching male-female paradigm which Genesis presents from the outset cannot be undermined.

The volume concludes with responses from each author to the perspective of the other.

Various opinions, theological

Matthew Vines, *God and the gay Christian: the biblical case in support of same-sex relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014)

Nurtured as a conservative evangelical Christian, Matthew Vines' realization that he was gay made him to reconsider the traditionalist position on homosexuality with which he had been raised. Taking as his interpretive 'lens' the teaching of Jesus on how good fruit comes from a good tree (Matthew 7:15-20), he ponders whether same-sex relationships, too, can be regarded as good on this basis. Troubled by the attempts of some to alter sexual orientation (almost exclusively without success) and by traditionalists' calls for the same-sex-attracted to endure mandatory celibacy, he considers key texts in the Bible, examining what might actually constitute 'the real sin in Sodom' (Genesis 19; ch. 3); 'the abominations of Leviticus' (ch.4) and 'excess passion and unnatural acts' (Romans 1; ch.5). Vines crafts a theology of same-sex marriage, arguing that it can mirror the union of Christ and his Church (cf. Ephesians 5) in a "covenant-keeping relationship of mutual self-giving that reflects God's love" and in reflecting on what it means to become 'one flesh' emphasises that "as the greatest form of bodily self-giving, sex should be combined with the greatest form of emotional self-giving: a lifelong commitment to a single partner."

Affirming, theological, pastoral

Alan Wilson, *More Perfect Union? Understanding Same-sex Marriage* (London: DLT, 2014)

The late Alan Wilson served as Bishop of Buckingham and consistently spoke in favour of same-sex marriage. He begins the elucidation of his views by reflecting on shifting attitudes to same-sex attraction in church and state, from views which questioned its naturalness to a growing move towards equality in marriage for all couples. Two chapters deal with the biblical texts which some regard as condemnatory, observing that these constitute around 0.02% of the Bible whilst 10% are about economic justice. Writing as same-sex marriage was legalised in England and Wales, Wilson argues that such widening will enrich society "[reflecting] equality in diversity and a genuine reciprocity", showing "the gold standard for human relationships [as] self-giving love" (p. 163-4).

Affirming, sociological, biblical, theological