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ST ALBANS - BEHIND THE WORDS.

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In supporting the appointment of the new Dean the Bishop of St Albans has used two particular arguments that on closer scrutiny simply do not stand up. His stance about the nature and locus of authority can be seriously questioned too.

Jeffrey John's lifestyle falls now within the guidelines laid down by 'Issues in Human Sexuality' (1991); his prior advocacy does not disqualify him from office

An appeal to 'Issues in Human Sexuality' as if it were authoritative is invalid. 'Issues in Human Sexuality' is a discussion document. The mind of the Church of England is defined not by 'Issues' but by the General Synod Resolution of 1987. This resolution is explicitly clear. It was carried by 403-8 with 13 abstentions, and it reads:

"This Synod affirms that the biblical and traditional teaching on chastity and fidelity in personal relationships is a response to, and expression of God's love for each one of us, and in particular affirms ...(3) that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion"...

The issue is not whether Jeffrey John is currently celibate (alongside his many other obvious gifts). Rather, the issue is whether he is penitent for previous immoral behaviour. There is no evidence that he is repentant.

The issue is also whether he teaches what coheres with the Church of England's official position, as defined by the Synod resolution. His assurances have proved empty, if the initial press conference is anything to go by. His *current* teaching clearly undermines orthodox Christian teaching on marriage.

His *present* lifestyle is hardly one that a bishop would tolerate if Jeffrey John's partner were a woman. Would a bishop accept one of the clergy living in a relationship that is regarded by those in the relationship as like a common-law marriage which was once sexual, but is now, so the bishop is assured, not sexual?

2. History is littered with Christian differences leading to splits; diversity of opinion legitimately exists; the challenge is to 'live together as Christians with sincerely held and well-founded differences of understanding.

It is true that history is littered with Christian differences leading to splits. This *is* an issue of how to live together as Christians with sincerely held and well-founded differences of understanding. But, and again it is a big but, there is the world of difference between 'well-founded differences of understanding', on the one hand, and what we are seeing in this instance. This novel revisionist understanding of the scriptures on homosexual sex and homosexual relationships runs counter to the near-unanimous testimony of interpretation, East and West, Catholic and Protestant, through 2000 years. That testimony is plain, that homosexual sex is abhorrent to God. The latest C of E report, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, sifts the biblical evidence and concludes that the bible reserves sexual intercourse for heterosexual marriage.

Most seriously, to insist that both interpretations on homosexual sex are valid, as Bishop Christopher has done by supporting the appointment of Jeffrey John and in subsequent letters, is

itself an authoritative interpretation. What is more, he has imposed it by naked authority without argumentation or persuasion. This act of power has been carried out under the cover of calling for restraint from everybody else. In his letter to the clergy of the diocese, he attempted to bind those who might disagree with him by confining their activities to prayer.

It is therefore *he* who has fostered schism, disunity and a breakdown in trust.

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