

Article reprinted from *Cross†Way* Issue Spring 2008 No. 108

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING OF ROWAN WILLIAMS ON SCRIPTURE AND SEXUALITY

By David Phillips

The teaching of Rowan Williams on Scripture and sexual immorality has been documented by a number of people including a substantial report entitled “*Rowan Williams and Scripture*” produced by SPREAD*. The following is a summary of their summary. It should be noted that Williams has been more coy about articulating his opinions since being appointed to the See of Canterbury but he does not appear to have been willing to distance himself from his earlier teaching which is much more forthright.

Text in italics is from the SPREAD report.

Williams began his efforts to overcome Scripture’s prohibition of same gender sexual relations and obtain the Church’s approval of such conduct some twenty-five years ago when he was a university professor. Williams explained in a newspaper interview in 2002 that he set about to do so when, during the course of his experience of “being the spiritual director to people of the homosexual persuasion,” he “did come to a point where” he “could no longer say that the Biblical account answers all of the questions we have or want to ask.”

*Williams provided in his writings a theological justification for the Church’s approval of same gender sexual relations, despite Scripture’s prohibition of such conduct. Williams began doing so in 1989 when he published *The Body’s Grace* in which he (a) propounded the thesis that committed and loyal same-sex unions are compatible with the Christian faith; (b) dismissed reliance on Scripture’s prohibition thereof as “an abstract fundamentalist deployment of a number of very ambiguous biblical texts;” and (c) called for “a fuller exploration of the sexual metaphors of the Bible...to teach us about a theology and ethics of sexual desire than will the flat citation of isolated texts.”*

*Williams went further in 1994 with the publication of a collection of his sermons and essays in the book, *Open to Judgement*. In *Open to Judgement*, Williams dismisses Scripture as a reliable source for discerning “the mind of God.” Williams contends therein that we should not read Scripture with “a kind of blind and thoughtless obedience to every word of scripture as if it simply represented the mind of God.” Williams then asserts that the reason we should not do so is that the “writers of scripture” were “caught up in the blazing fire of God’s gift yet struggled with it, misapprehend[ed] it, and misread it.” In short, Williams says we cannot rely on Scripture because the writers thereof did not correctly discern “the mind of God.”*

Williams is still committed to his teaching that the Church should approve of same gender sexual relations, notwithstanding reports to the contrary.

The SPREAD report goes on to argue that more recent interviews with the Archbishop have not demonstrated that he is changing his position despite what some have claimed. Thus they state:

Williams still: (a) teaches that the Church may ordain doctrine contrary to Scripture; (b) holds to the teaching that the Church should approve of same gender sexual relations; and (c) is committed to a process of discussion designed to permit the Anglican Communion to agree therewith.

The SPREAD document also shows how Williams has been at the heart of the creation of (Affirming Catholicism and The Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality) and support of (Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and Changing Attitude) organizations promoting homosexual activity and that they have in turn widely used his printed works. They assert a condition of membership of The Institute is the affirmation that same gender sexual relations are permissible.

SPREAD further documents some of the books Williams has praised and endorsed which promote same gender sexual relations.

Rowan Williams has been a leader in the movement to get homosexual conduct accepted within the Anglican Communion, including during his time as Archbishop of Wales. Since his appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury he has claimed publicly that he must abide by the mind of the Church expressed at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Nevertheless his actions have shown that he is unwilling to oppose those who are promoting homosexual immorality and this is clearly because at heart he shares their views. He has also used his position to frustrate those Primates who have called for clear action.

SPREAD also document, as others have done, that it is not simply on sexual morality that Williams is heterodox but also regarding Scripture. They state:

Williams's rejection of Scripture's authority became explicit when he published Open to Judgement, in which he said the writers of Scripture "misapprehend[ed]" and "misread" "the mind of God," and the Book of Revelation contains "page after page of paranoid fantasy."

In 2004 and 2005 Williams enthusiastically endorsed *Good As New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures* by John C Henson. Henson is very much involved in LGCM. SPREAD highlight the following features of Henson's book:

- (a) includes the "Gospel of Thomas;"*
- (b) omits Revelation and seven other books of the New Testament;*
- (c) eliminates the masculinity of God the Father and God the Son and makes the Holy Spirit feminine;*
- (d) treats the temptation of Christ as a solely human event without any mention of Satan;*
- (e) eliminates the existence of demons;*

They also show how Henson is very much involved in the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and this features in his perversion of Scripture in that he rewrites those parts of the New Testament which condemn homosexual practice and advocate celibacy in order to make them say precisely the opposite.

Whilst the Bishops of the early Church declared Marcion a heretic for his refusal to accept the canonical Scriptures, according to Rowan Williams the book by Henson should be spread in "epidemic profusion" within the Anglican Communion.

***The full text by SPREAD can be found on their website www.anglicanspread.org
The Society for the Promotion of Reformed Evangelical Anglican Doctrine is based in the USA.**

David Phillips is General Secretary of Church Society.