

A gift from God

activity which uses other people simply as means to an end is unacceptable.

So we affirm:

- the value of commitment and love in sexual relationships, as evidenced by the place of marriage in Christian tradition
- the need for children to be brought up in secure and loving environments
- that sex has a spiritual element, and that relationships can be “sexual” without being genital
- respect for the dignity of other people in all our sexual encounters
- that all people are part of God’s good creation, whatever their sex, gender or sexual orientation
- above all, that sexuality in its many forms is a gift from God, to be used by God’s grace responsibly for the enhancement of life “in all its fullness” (John 10:10).



About Modern Church

Modern Church is a membership organisation that promotes liberal theology. It encourages open, respectful debate and discussion of matters relating to Christian faith. It offers:

- conferences
- a theological journal *Modern Believing*
- a members' newsletter *Signs of the Times*
- an extensive website
- occasional other publications.

Modern Church was founded at the end of the 19th century as a Church of England society. Now it welcomes all who share its ethos.

Further information

For subscription options, resources in liberal theology, or to find out more about Modern Church visit:

www.modernchurch.org.uk



Telephone: 0845 345 1909
Email: info@modernchurch.org.uk
Registered charity no. 281573

formerly The Modern Churchpeople's Union

Modern Church

Sex & God

theological liberalism and issues of sexuality

www.modernchurch.org.uk

Christians and sex

It sometimes seems as though Christians talk about nothing but sex: gay marriage, cohabitation, contraception, divorce and remarriage, gender transition... the list goes on. We proclaim the goodness of God's creation and the reality of God's love, but find the details of ethical behaviour harder to agree on. What does theological liberalism have to offer to debates about human sexuality?

The Bible and tradition

We believe that the Bible and the Christian tradition have a lot to say today about human sexuality. But they are not the only sources of knowledge available to us. They are certainly not manuals in which we should expect to find answers to all our contemporary dilemmas, though they do contain principles for loving ethical behaviour. We can also draw on our own experience, and our ability to think rationally.

The way we live, and think scientifically about sex, has changed hugely since the Bible was written. The people trying to be faithful to God then were influenced by their times and cultures, just as we are now.

For example, during most of human history, infant mortality was so high that increasing

Times and cultures change

the population was top priority. Sexual behaviour which didn't lead to reproduction – such as masturbation, same-sex activity, and contraception – was therefore condemned.

Today, at least in the West, most children survive into adulthood. World population is increasing rapidly and there's a strain on resources. The Christian tradition still has a lot to teach us about sexual and parental responsibility. But non-reproductive forms of sexual activity are not the same kind of problems today.

Beliefs about the nature of men and women have also changed. Once people believed that women were inferior versions of men, just "vessels" in which male seeds could be planted. These beliefs influenced ideas about gender roles in marriage and church leadership.

Now, however, many people question whether the differences between men and women are really as "natural" as they seem, or are a product of culture. Even at a biological level, males and females may not be as distinct and "opposite" as they have seemed. So can it still be justifiable to teach that only men should be church leaders, or that husbands should be considered the heads of their wives in marriage?

Positive sexuality

Similar debates have taken place about homosexuality. The Bible certainly opposes abusive and exploitative same-sex activity, but what about when it is loving and mutual? Lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians believe that their sexuality is no more sinful than that of other people, but is part of the way God made them to be.

Theological liberalism: a positive approach

Liberal Christians welcome insights provided by theology, science, and the changing experience of sexuality in our culture.

We believe that God is a God of freedom, justice and love, and that women, homosexuals, transgender and intersex people have experienced particular oppression because of past Christian teachings. So we aim to explore what resources there might be in the Bible and in Christian tradition for formulating more liberating, egalitarian theologies of sex.

This doesn't mean that we uncritically embrace the whole contemporary sex scene. Sex can be abusive and damaging as well as life-affirming, many people use sex selfishly and thoughtlessly, and sexual