

Abstract

The Church of Ireland is currently engulfed in a debate about homosexuality. At the heart of the dispute is disagreement over the meaning of the biblical texts which address same gender sex. The purpose of the thesis is to explore these opposing views and present a model for constructive dialogue.

Hermeneutics is identified as the key issue in the debate as participants must learn to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion with regard to their own presuppositions. Detailed study of the central texts reveal that the debate is complex, with no simple black or white answers. However exegesis would suggest that although Scripture rejects the common expressions of homosexuality in the ancient world it does not address or condemn permanent, faithful and stable homosexual partnerships.

An exploration of Natural Law theory highlights the inconclusive nature of scientific knowledge about the origins of homosexuality. Traditionalist and revisionist views on Natural Law are contrasted and a mediating position is explored which acknowledges that homosexuality is not part of God's original purpose, but that monogamous same sex relationships are an acceptable response to human loneliness.

Closing suggestions are made for preserving unity and deepening understanding in the church. These include hermeneutical openness, the creation of opportunities for safe dialogue and listening, and a willingness to disagree in love.