

3.4 A Balancing Act: Reflections on Being Bisexual in Church, Ministry, and Theology

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Being Bisexual

Bisexuality is a label of ambivalence, for me. It took me many years to find such a label helpful, when I wrestled with my sexual orientation and the attraction I felt for different people. ‘Gay’ and ‘straight’ often seem to be used to refer to polarisations of sexuality, absolute opposites of attraction. In reality, of course, many gay and straight people have more ambiguity in who they are attracted to, what emotions they feel, and their sexual desires. However, bisexuality – at least, for me – has always effectively captured the grey area in the middle. If one cannot *quite* pin down their attractions, if they feel ebbs and flows of desire rather than fixed ratios and percentages of same-gender attraction, then bisexuality is a helpful umbrella that encompasses much fluidity and ambiguity.

It is in this same way that I increasingly find myself coupling my identification as a bisexual with the word queer. Queerness, as a continually emerging term for those with non- or anti-normative sexual orientations and gender identities, helps encapsulate a diverse range of people, whatever the shape of their self-presentations, their relationships, their perceptions, and so on. Identifying as bisexual *and* queer helps summarise (if two words ever could) the fluidity and variability of my sexual orientation and how I name it. They help me, and others, grapple at something that often feels somewhat beyond sufficient description.

So, as a queer, bisexual man, I find myself in a balancing act in many ways. Not only am I a bisexual man, but I am a bisexual man married to a bisexual woman. I am a priest in the Church of England, ministering to the people and places in which I live. I am a PhD student in masculinities, trauma, and theology. I publish research and writing in the areas of gender and sexuality, and their intersection with theology and the Bible. My bisexuality shapes all of this – and all of this shapes my bisexuality. I find myself balancing different spaces, places, people, and opinions. Here, in this chapter, I offer some personal reflections on this.

Being Bisexual in Church¹

The problem with the definition of bisexuality I have offered above is that the description of fluidity and ambiguity has often amounted to bisexual people being understood as uncertain, unsure, and undecided on their sexual orientation. It is seen as a fad, a stepping stone of decision-making as one passes through heterosexuality towards homosexuality, or vice versa. Of course, this binary is not the reality for many bisexual people – including myself – who feel the push and pull of human desire for many different types of people, not remaining static or fixed in one direction or the other.

But such thinking has led to myths and misconceptions: bisexuals are ‘greedy’; bisexuals are ‘just going through a phase’; bisexuals ‘don’t really exist’. So many people who are bisexual, just like me, will have heard these ignorant bi-phobic phrases and have commonly experienced bi-erasure. The experience of what it means to be bisexual has been entirely misconceived and misrepresented, privately and publicly.

The Church, sadly, has often picked up and even fed these mistaken beliefs. In the Church of England’s principal authorised teaching doc-

1 Some of this section is re-produced with gratitude from Will Moore, ‘Being Bisexual in Church – A Balancing Act’, *Via Media News* (blog), 1 March 2022, <https://viamedia.news/2022/03/01/being-bisexual-in-church-a-balancing-act/>.

ument on sexuality published in 1991² (which held increased authority until it was discredited by the House of Bishops in 2023 as part of the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process, and consequently removed as authoritative in the discernment process by General Synod in only 2025), bisexuality is described as ‘ambiguous’ and goes further in saying that ‘bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful’. There is an assumption here that bisexual people cannot hold back their emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction and are always left unsatisfied. According to these understandings, bisexuals seem to experience some sort of greedy and lustful sexual attraction that is uncontrollable. But, just because bisexual people might have the capacity to fall in love with people of different genders, it does not mean that they are therefore proportionally attracted to more people or that they have more sexual desire that needs fulfilling. In the eyes of this teaching document, bisexuals are painted to be immoral, adulterous beasts that challenge the order of God’s faithful creation.

But surely the Church has moved on since then? Regrettably, not much. This document, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, remained the official teaching of the Church of England on sexuality for thirty years, though there has been some supplementary (but not authoritative) material since, most recently being *Living in Love and Faith*. (We, especially as clergy, are still waiting for pastoral guidance on relationships and marriage in place of *Issues*.) The Bishop of London (now Archbishop of Canterbury) was pressed on paragraph 5.8 of *Issues*, which derogatively addresses bisexuality, at meetings of General Synod in 2022, at which she dismissively responded that the document is ‘thirty years away’ from now – except, as an ordinand in 2021, I had to assent to live within the guidelines of this document in order to be considered to train to be a priest within the Church of England. Essentially, as a bisexual man, I had to agree to the premise that I am myself ‘ambiguous’ and will be

2 Church of England. (1991). *Issues in human sexuality: A statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*. London: Church House Publishing.

'inevitably [...] unfaithful' for simply being who God created me to be. Its repercussions are still felt.

Further, by agreeing to living within these measures, I was concurring with the sentences that follow, which recommend heterosexual marriage, abstinence, and even counselling as 'guidance' for bisexuals. These suggestions dangerously resonate with the motivations of conversion therapy, something that General Synod as well as the British Government has promised to ban. Many, like me, have agreed to *Issues in Human Sexuality* through gritted teeth, hurt by the words that refer to people like us, but as nothing more than a player in a tragic love story of dedication to the Church and its ministry. Although it seems the Church may finally be moving on after LLF and thankfully turning a new page on *Issues in Human Sexuality*, the damage and pain it has caused – especially to ordinands and clergy after the demands it placed on them – cannot be undone. The trauma of disrupting one's own complex identity in order to fit neater boxes that satisfy the Church's image is something that does not go away. In fact, the suppression and compartmentalisation of people's lives – for the sake of the Church's image – has caused brokenness beyond repair for many individuals and communities.

Being Bisexual in Ministry

However, ministry on the ground in churches across the country is very different. There are many queer people, lay and ordained, who are living out their calling and vocation in response to God, serving their communities and living their lives whilst flourishing in their identities.

A big part of my ministry in the people and places that I serve as a priest is to be a visible sign of hope and acceptance, especially for LGBTQIA+ folk. Society is becoming an increasingly toxic place, especially for trans individuals. So, as I put on my clerical collar, I often sport my progress pride flag (or bisexual flag) pin-badge too. I know how much damage and trauma the Church has caused to many and how triggering the sight of a clerical collar can be. I pray, that in these small efforts, those I encounter might be heartened to see that inclusion is a

part of my ministry and calling. This does not undo the harm caused by the institutional Church, as well as local churches, but it does demonstrate efforts to build bridges where these have been burnt. I pray, in the living out of my own vocation as a bisexual priest, I show signs of queer hope for Christians.

I know, of course, I can do this with some privilege. I am a bisexual man, married to a (bisexual) woman. People often misperceive me as an ally, rather than a member of the queer community. But, in some circumstances, this affords me more privileges to be listened to and to have constructive conversations, without seeming like there is anything 'personal' on the line. Of course, I have less to risk and less to lose because of the relationship I am in and how society (and the Church) perceives me/us. So, it is with that in mind, that I know it is part of my vocation to minister to those who have been broken, excluded, and traumatised by churches and their (often abusive) teachings on sexuality and gender. I am one of them, even if people do not perceive me as so.

Much of this calling hearkens back to a small church group I attended in Cardiff, Wales during my time at university. The Gathering met in the upper room of a local church and consisted of many LGBTQIA+ people who felt a connection to the Christian faith but had experienced hurt and confusion at the hands of churches and Christian communities. Here, instead, queer people were welcomed and encouraged. They had the chance to let out their anger and frustration, as well as ask their questions and concerns. At The Gathering, people's wounds were attended to and they had a chance to sit, breathe, and find God in it all. I remember once, coming home from a worship session at The Gathering, sitting down with a God-feeling in my gut and thinking 'I've got to do more'. The deep sense of vocation to my fellow LGBTQIA+ Christians has burned on inside of me ever since then. The Gathering in Cardiff still exists today and I am so thankful for the beautiful work my friends there do, and how they helped and inspired me.

Being Bisexual in Theology

When I am not in ministry, I do theological work. Not only do I publish regularly (from trauma theology and violence in the Bible, to gender and queer theology in *Barbie!*), but I am completing a PhD that looks at how masculinities have shaped theologies and what liberative possibilities there might be in a reimagining of their relationship.

One of my certain beliefs is that theology is produced through us and our bodies. The ways in which we think and talk about God are constructed because of who we are, the world we are in, how we see others, and how they view us. That is not a bad thing to recognise, although it obviously comes with its limits and biases. However, this means that aspects of our identity need to be noticed and acknowledged in order to understand how they inform our theological thinking, or ‘God-talk’. For example, I am a man. I am White. I am cisgender. I am able-bodied. Just these few social locators help track what might influence how I talk about God, theology, and the human life.

As I talk about queer identity and queer theology especially, my own queerness and bisexuality come to the forefront. The way in which I do theology matters because of the experiences I have had, the love I have felt, the people I have met, and the communities I have been a part of. It also changes because of the discrimination I have experienced, the hate I have received, and the feelings of fear I have known deep in my soul when walking through a town centre holding the hand of another man.

My bisexual identity has certainly shaped much of my theological thinking. Bisexuality does not sit in one camp or the other, nor can it be easily defined. It has helped me realise the limits to understanding the world through dualisms, an either/or framework. Instead, I am much more comfortable to sit in the grey areas, to not have answers to my questions, because I know my own identity does not comfortably sit in any camp. There is wonder in the unsurety, beauty in the messiness, potential in the chaos. Being bisexual helps me take an approach of generosity, of ambiguity, and of unknowing. Perhaps it is OK to say we do not know everything about God, about the world, and about ourselves. It is in the unravelling – the *revelation* – of the mystery that we find holiness.

In queer people's unravelling of their own self-knowledge, they unravel the mystery of God's image and beauty too.

Of course, theology has been dangerously weaponised towards many bisexual and queer folk. The Bible has been used as a tool to police gendered and sexual boundaries, and bisexual people are some of the biggest affronts to that regime because we do not conform to certain expectations. In other words, who knows what we are up to? That's what people wonder anyway (even if we are quite boring, in reality!). The perceived unknown and ambiguity of bisexuality is seen as a threat to theologies of gender and sexuality that seek to restrict and control people's bodies and relationships. As discussed above, it is often expected that bisexual people should not act on their desires and, instead, they should resort to the 'right' way of living: marriage between one man and one woman.

Instead, doing theology as a bisexual Christian, I am willing to wrestle with open-endedness, flexibility, and flux. If we truly recognise ourselves as God's good creation, made in the image of God – even us bisexual folk – then we have to recognise that what we feel and experience might reveal to us something of God and a way to do theology. There is generativity in a lack of answers; there is helpfulness in ambiguity; there is confidence to be found in unsurety. These are some of the values I hold as someone bisexual doing theology.

Being Bisexual in Life

I am a queer, bisexual man married to a bisexual woman. In life, we have often wondered – worried, even – that we are perceived as a heterosexual couple (something, of course, we are not!). We pride ourselves on our queerness, even if we *appear* to some as heteronormative.

When I first came out as bisexual, after an emotionally abusive and toxic relationship with a woman, I received a mix of responses. Some family members accepted me, fully without question. Some welcomed me, but couldn't quite understand why I was not just gay or straight. Others could not understand it at all. However, overall, I was very lucky with my coming out experience. Whilst there were only a couple of reactions

of resistance and discomfort, I was not rejected nor ostracised from my family or communities.

I have struggled since then, however, to work out my place in the LGBTQIA+ community as a bisexual man, especially when dating women. Am I still queer? Have I succumbed to the 'straight agenda'? Even the ways and wills of the Church? Do I need to give back my 'membership card' to the queer community and concede?

Almost ten years later, now married to a woman, and proudly and actively speaking for bisexual people in theology and the Church, I have realised the queerness of being bisexual and its various shapes and forms. I am bisexual, which means (to me) that I can be attracted to any person, regardless of their gender. That means there has been the potential for me in my life to be in a romantic and sexual relationship with men, women, and trans folk – people of all different identities. And (not but!) I am married to a woman. My relationship is monogamous and that is where my loyalty, and indeed my love, lies. That is not to contain or restrict my attraction or desire (in other words, that is not for my attraction for non-women to cease existing because of my partner's gender), but to show commitment to one person. Commitment does not change sexual identity, nor does it inhibit forms of attraction. My identity of bisexuality does not stop or cease because of who I am with, who I am date, or what I am doing with my body. Sexual identity is much more complex than simply 'active' relationships or practice.

There is something queer in that then, isn't there? I am not, for clarity, in a 'heterosexual relationship' – I am still bisexual, and so is my partner. Yet we are somewhat *straight-passing*, which means many might see me as upholding and perpetuating heteronormativity. Bisexuality often brings with it a fragility. Too often have I been accepted into rooms, spoken to as part of a community, with the awareness that I am in a relationship with a woman; too often have I then been ignored, as well as looked upon and spoken too differently, once I vocalise my queer identity underneath what sometimes seems to some like a disguise. Yet this uncertainty of queerness or not, when I present as a queer man and yet talk about my wife, brings with it a resonance of what being queer and bisexual means. That fluidity, that fluctuation, *disables* people from being able to decide

and assign my sexuality themselves – and that’s exactly the point. This is a queer relationship, because whilst seeming to be operating within the structures of binaries, our identities resist this. It is for this reason that I will not cease to identify as queer and bisexual, because it is doing the work of challenging heteronormative patriarchy, even from within our so-called ‘straight’ marriage.

Being Bisexual: A Balancing Act

Being and identifying as bisexual is an odd experience. Sometimes it perfectly articulates who I am and where I am at. At other times, I feel it is entirely insufficient. But, understanding bisexuality as a balancing act, something moving and unsettled, ongoing and in process, helps me recognise the unfixed state of my own identity and sexuality. And that’s OK. For now, labelling myself as bisexual, seeing myself as queer, will do.

In my teenage years, I gained an interest in LGBTQIA+ Christian stories and experiences. Everyone around me thought I was just passionate for justice; of course, I was coming to terms with the fact I was realising I was not straight. In reading *119: My Life as a Bisexual Christian*, written by Jaime Sommers³, I felt something of my own experiences; namely, the balance between being attracted to men and women, and indeed others beyond that spectrum. It was Sommers’ book, accompanying this scared and curious teenager in the quiet of my bedroom, that I was able to come to terms with the pain and potential of what it means to be a bisexual Christian.

So, I want to close this chapter by writing directly to those bisexual people who may not yet be sure of themselves yet, or sure of how to come out, or even be sure of God: You are loved. You are precious. And no one in this universe is made quite like you. May you settle in the ambiguity, may you cherish the grey areas, and may you find love and acceptance in yourself so that the rest of the world can see you shine. This balancing

3 Sommers, J. (2019). *My life as a bisexual Christian*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

act is one that takes time, that takes effort, that takes emotion – but it is beautiful, and it is worth it, and so are you.

This chapter reflects the personal experiences, memories and interpretations of the author. Names and identifying details have been changed or omitted for privacy.