Dear Mr Editor,

I would like to respond to Archdeacon Will Strange’s contribution “Thoughts on Same Sex Relationships” which appeared in the August/September 2015 edition of Teulu Asaph. However much I appreciate his closing words that those persons who are “same-sex attracted” are “as welcome to Christ as we all are”, nevertheless I am concerned that his selective quoting of Romans 1 and the other Pauline texts only emphasise homosexuality as “cutting someone off from the kingdom of God” or as “a barrier to inheriting the kingdom of God.”

Romans 1 not only notes “dishonourable passions” between same-sex people, but also condemns covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boasters, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, and those who are foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Paul even suggests that those who commit “shameless (same-sex) acts” are guilty of every offence in the above list. The archdeacon also quotes 1 Corinthians 6.9-11, where he includes a similar if shorter list, “the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and swindlers, in addition to those “who practise homosexuality”, although the latter is an interpretation of a Greek word whose meaning is disputed. Some scholars suggest it refers to pederasty, others to sodomites or male prostitutes, thus suggesting the term refers more to particular practices than homosexuality itself – a word which in fact was only coined in 1869. 1 Timothy 1, 10 speaks of the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars and perjurers, though the same caveat applies to the use of that term “homosexuality” as noted above. Both the Roman and Corinthian texts state that all these activities will debar a person from the kingdom of God, while a leading evangelical, Tony Higton, suggests that even erotic homosexual fantasies come into the same category. (Sexuality and the Church, 1987, p. 73).

Why, however, single out homosexuality and ignore the other categories of condemnation? As far back as 1998 the Evangelical Alliance’s report, Faith, Hope and Homosexuality, mentions Romans 1 as presenting homoerotic sexual activity as a symptom rather than a cause of the fundamental sin of refusing to glorify God, and then states it “takes its place in a whole list of transgressions – a list which convict most, if not all of us.” The writer goes on to state of the other Pauline texts that “homosexual practice here belongs to a list of sins ….. This surely confirms that the Church is a community of sinners, and disallows the singling out of homosexual sin for special condemnation.” (pages 18-19).

But why is there such concern about homosexuality in certain circles? I sense the answer is not because of homosexuality as such, but because there is a real fear that at stake is the inerrancy of the Bible as the Word of God. If it is to be maintained that the various proof texts cannot be substantiated for our present age when we understand the context in which they were written, then for some people this is a denial of Scripture and they ask, where will this end? To be fair, some are consistent in denying the ministry of women as well. Gordon Wenham, a leading evangelical Biblical scholar, writing in Tony Higton’s book, wisely remarks, “to rely on a few proof texts or key words to establish a Scriptural
view of sexual intercourse may well lead us astray…” (page 17). I believe we can say the same about the passages believed to relate to homosexuality. Of course, the argument from creation will be offered with the statement that it underlies the whole of Scripture, namely that God has ordained marriage as the place of sexuality and for the purposes of procreation. I simply refer one to the example of Jesus, unmarried, who stated there was no marriage in heaven, proclaimed that his real family were his brethren rather than his natural family, and added that “if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Harsh words no doubt, but our Lord himself seems to have overthrown that so-called ordinance.

Sadly, to emphasise homosexual activity as an outrage against God and as the one barrier to inheriting the kingdom of God without placing these verses in their full context is to my mind not only selective but a form of homophobia. I wonder if those who do so also preach against the other sins mentioned in these texts?

ROGER L BROWN