

“Die Matie kiss”: a Christian response

The recent picture of two men kissing on *Die Matie* front cover has caused a considerable stir locally and throughout the country. Because of its public nature and the many responses in national newspapers and radio stations, we deemed it necessary to present a brief Christian response. I think we can say three things.

The first thing to say is that, in one sense, we have nothing to say about “the kiss” as such. One of the UCT students involved commented that it was a good kiss and that it was worthwhile coming all the way to Stellenbosch for it—I'm glad he enjoyed it. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?” In other words, we don't expect people who make no claim to be Christians to live by our ethical standards. And more than that, we are aware that the publication of a picture like that was deliberately controversial and we are weary of fuelling controversy simply for its own sake.

Having said that, however, I think we are secondly compelled to say something about the burning issues this publication raises. The open portrayal in the public media of homosexual relationships is often a plea not only for tolerance, but for unconditional social acceptance and legitimization of homosexual lifestyles and behaviour. Along with such legitimization, of course, come questions about gay marriage, gay adoption and gay rights in general.

These are all issues which have a public bearing and affect our common life. And in a democratic society these are issues which all individuals and groups, including the church, have a right to address. Christians often feel great pressure not to bring their so called “religious values” into the public sphere. But what we need to see is that everyone is bringing their faith assumptions into the public sphere. We all have some committed beliefs about what constitutes human flourishing which we cannot in any strict sense prove.

One of the key battle grounds in terms of sexual ethics is the whole concept of “nature” and what is “natural”. Many secularists argue that there is no fixed natural order, that everything is in flux, and that sexual identity is therefore constructed by the individual rather than a given. This argument flows from a view that nature is fundamentally changeable and indeed purposeless in itself. We construct our own purpose. But you can't prove that. Why should that view of humanity and ultimate reality have preferential bias in governing our public life?

In fact, I find the secular view quite problematic in grounding the human rights they so often appeal to. I struggle to see how a view of human beings as purposeless and chance accidents of history gives them a fundamental dignity and worth to be respected. In the Christian view those rights are grounded in every person being created in the image of God. The violation of those rights, therefore, such as the shameful treatment of homosexuals and the violence done to them in the past, is morally reprehensible.

To say more about the role of Christians in public life would embroil us in complex questions about how Christians are to relate to the broader culture which we cannot explore further here. It suffices to say that Christians in public life should seek to serve and work towards the common good rather than grasping at power.

The final thing we would want to say is that, in spite of cultural pressure, we must in this area remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to his Word. The gospel must inform what we say and how we say it in our own ministry and in our engagement with the broader culture.

The gospel significantly begins with creation, a fundamental aspect of which is our creation as sexual beings — as male and female. But the gospel goes on to remind us that, through turning away from our Creator, we are all fundamentally flawed. Those flaws touch every aspect of our

being, including our sexual nature. According to Jesus, we're all sexual offenders (Matt. 5:28). That is true of heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. One of the benefits of the gay liberation movement is that they have pointed out how the church has in the past often singled out homosexual practice as especially grievous. When we examine the New Testament evidence, however, this is not so. Homosexual practice is simply seen as one among many sins (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

But sin nevertheless it is. In spite of some attempts to show that the Bible's condemnation of homosexual practice is culturally relative, the texts are quite clear that such practice is contrary to God's original created order and purpose (Rom 1:26-27). This remains true regardless of the predisposition or orientation of the individual. In fact, in many of our actions, we remain culpable regardless of whether or not we might in some sense be predisposed towards them. But finally the gospel offers us not only complete forgiveness for past failings, but a new status before God, a new identity, and a new power to change. Ultimately Jesus' resurrection from the dead points us forward to a new creation and resurrection bodies, completely liberated from all disordered desires.

To our gay friends who say to us "I can't even think about Christianity or go to church until they accept me as I am", I think we should answer by pointing them back to the big gospel issues. First investigate Jesus and his claims. Did he really rise from the dead? If he didn't, it doesn't matter what he taught about sexuality. But if he did, go to him as you are. That's what we all do. Work things out from that point.

Much more could be said in all these areas, but that's a framework with which we can begin to engage on this issue.