

A Church at War – Anglicans and Homosexuality by Stephen Bates.  
I.B Tauris 2004.

Stephen Bates is a fine journalist whose work has adorned several important national newspapers. Latterly, as religious affairs correspondent of The Guardian he has had the opportunity to observe at close quarters the events that have convulsed the Church of England in recent years, over the ordination of women and, more significantly, over Homosexuality.

A Church at War is a masterful survey of the way that this issue has affected the Anglican Communion world-wide over the last 20 years and more; how the debate on sexuality has been handled and mis-handled, and of how the issue has been used, abused and misused by various sections of Anglicanism.

This is an excellent book, well-written, entertaining, amusing, but the story it tells is disturbing and in many places deeply depressing.

Bates has spoken to representatives of all sides in the debate, and one warms to the views of those with whom one agrees depending on the position one takes on the issue. Nevertheless, what characterises many of the standpoints is not their clarity but their bigotry, narrow-mindedness and lack of charity and compassion. It has often been said of the issue of Homosexuality that one should 'hate the sin but love the sinner': sadly, many of the opponents' views are characterised by what seems to an outsider to be a hatred of the sin and a loathing of the sinner.

Bates hints at his views throughout without ever stating them, but he does express his opinion of his interlocutors both honestly and amusingly. His prognosis is not encouraging and one is left with many questions about where Anglicanism will be able to go in the future. Indeed my overwhelming impression having read A Church at War is that a split (probably a multiple split) in the Anglican Communion would be much more honest, and constructive in the long-term than the current state of mutual hostility and contempt between liberals and evangelicals.

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