

In answer to Bishop Graham Dow's "floods of moral degradation"

In recent weeks the UK has endured what is apparently the wettest June since records began, bringing with it devastating flash-flooding which has claimed lives. This is "because the world has been arrogant," the Bishop of Carlisle, the Right Reverend Graham Dow is quoted as saying in an article by Libby Purves of the 4th of July in *The Times*. Despite the growing importance of an eco-lifestyle most of us have probably made the odd unnecessary car journey or are guilty of leaving the television on standby after watching *Songs of Praise* so if the Right Rev. Graham Dow feels that I have a part to play in the devastating weather that has swept the country in the past few weeks, I stand guilty as charged. However, it seems that this is not the type of arrogance the Bishop has in mind when he speaks of the "moral degradation" of our society. It looks as if I'm off the hook – it's not my carbon footprint which is causing the bad weather – it's the gay people.

The Church of England has homosexuality on the brain. Indeed, it appears that some members of the Anglican ministry are far too concerned with the specks of dust in other people's eyes - from the beliefs of so-called 'Islamic fundamentalists' to what's going on between the nation's sheets – to notice the hypocritical plank in its own. I lose count of the number of times I've heard Leviticus 18:22 "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" quoted in response to an argument for the equality of hetero- and homosexuals. This is a prime example of a cherry-picked Bible passage: if the Bishop of Carlisle were to flick a few pages ahead in his Bible, to Leviticus 19 and to look at chapters 26 and 27 he might pass up the steak and chips being served up for dinner at the Palace that evening, and rethink the short back and sides. But the Right Rev. Graham Dow is an ordained Bishop of the Church of England; he is therefore, presumably not Jewish. Why then does he uphold a belief which focuses so heavily on the teachings of the Old Testament? There are 365 laws set out in the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament – and Jesus, being himself human was aware that our fallible nature makes it difficult for Christians to follow all of them all of the time. When asked by the Sadducees which commandment was the greatest, Jesus highlighted love of God and neighbour - "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets". Regardless of opinions on homosexual intercourse, surely our religious leaders should be encouraging, not denouncing love, even if they disagree with its consummation.

The situation puts me in mind of the story of Noah's Ark, found both in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, in the Jewish and Christian traditions, and in its most complete form in the book of Surah in the Qur'an. In both versions of the story the floods were sent as a punishment, like the recent floods if the Bishop of Carlisle is to be believed. The Ark in Genesis or the Ship in Surah is the solution. It represents solidarity in the face of adversity, it represents peace and unity – the scripture of Islam, Christianity and Judaism have a story which is fundamentally similar, with a common message of unity. It stands to reason that in these tempestuous times (both literally and metaphorically), we should be putting on a united front. We cannot expect good relations between East and West, when the Church of England is ostracizing homosexuals and driving a schism through its own fabric.

Author: Caroline Ardrey

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