



Pastor's Page

A Difficult Journey

Many years ago a friend and I set off from Oldham, Lancashire for the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland to find Paul McCartney! We drove all day in my trendy mustard Simca car, and eventually arrived at Cambletown on the Kintyre peninsula at about six o'clock in the evening. We looked around for Paul McCartney for a while, couldn't find him so decided to go for a meal instead! After we'd eaten it was too dark to carry on the search, so we focussed our attention on finding somewhere to stay for the night. However, this turned out to be as hard as the search for the Liverpudlian rock star and by 11.00pm we were getting desperate. Suddenly we spied a small cottage just off the beaten track with an illuminated B&B sign in the window. "This is it" we said "we're in!" We knocked on the door of the bungalow to be greeted by a gentle but slightly anxious looking lady. "Hello" we said in Scottish, "have you got any spare rooms for the night?" She quickly looked us up and down and said, "sorry I've only got one spare room and that's got a double bed in it" "That'll be great" we said, just desperate to get a roof over our heads for the night. A look of horror came over her face as she said, "I'm really sorry but you can't stay here tonight". Walking away despondently we heard her shout "Lads" (which we were at the time) "yes" we said, turning around, "I have a small camp bed that one of you could sleep on if that's any good" "Great" we said "that's brilliant". That night as well as 'Beatle Talk' we speculated on the reasons for the woman's initial refusal to let us stay at her B&B.

I'll never know for sure but it seems more than likely from the nature of her solution that this lady had assumed (wrongly) that we were homosexuals, and on that (false) basis wouldn't allow us to stay. This incident came back to my mind this week as I thought about the very recently passed Sexual Orientation Regulations (SORs) Act by the House of Lords. These regulations have been introduced in order to protect gay or lesbian people from discrimination in service provision. In other words hotels or B&B places would not be allowed by law to refuse accommodation to anyone on the grounds of their sexual orientation. The fear that many Christians have is that their Christian values will now be criminalized. For example, if an Hotelier refused to allow a practising homosexual couple to have a room for the night due to his Christian conviction he could be charged under the Sexual Orientation Regulations Act. The Baptist Times reports; "*Christian registrars have recently been sacked for being unwilling to celebrate same-sex civil partnerships. Joe and Helen Roberts were visited by the police for asking their local council to display Christian literature alongside literature promoting gay rights*". It does seem impossible today to speak out against the practice of homosexuality without being labelled 'homophobic' and accused of prejudice and discrimination. Is it therefore possible and biblical to "love the sinner and hate the sin" or is this just a convenient cliché used to justify bigotry against homosexuals? The most important question is; "what would Jesus do?" Well He spent time with prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, Zealots and even counted them as his followers. He engaged with people, he accepted people and he loved people. He loved people enough to accept them just as they were, but he loved them too much to leave them as they were. We need to pray for God's wisdom and compassion in these days of complex human rights, so that we may lead people towards Jesus rather than turning them away.

20th January 2007