

## **SAVI HENSMAN**

### **Extract 1: Track 1: 8.31 – 11.11**

#### MY FAITH AS A CHRISTIAN AND MY SEXUALITY

There was also a growing body of work around faith and sexuality and that included both works that were explicitly theological and books that might bring in theology in a slightly different fashion like novels by Christian writers including, in fact, *The Well of Loneliness*, that is perhaps not the most encouraging portrayal of what it's like to be lesbian, but did flag up faith related issues. So, these helped me to reflect and think and learn, and I came to realise that there didn't have to be a mismatch between my faith as a Christian and my sexuality, and that it wasn't necessary ... it wasn't essential for me to spend my life being celibate, and that it was possible to form loving committed relationships which could fit into my framework of beliefs about human potential and seeking to reflect God's love in one's love for ... for one's partner and neighbour more widely.

I should probably mention that I came from a fairly diverse background. So my parents were Christian and quite a lot of my friends, but also got ... also have had and continue to have friends of various faiths and none, so it was ... I suppose the kind of Christianity with which I was surrounded as a child wasn't erm ... wasn't narrow I hope, but it was an important basis of my values ... of the values and framework around me, and it was a faith I embraced and hold to, so I think if I had continued to have seen a gap that could have been a serious problem but I became increasingly convinced that this wasn't something dreadful, that it wasn't something that meant I was cut off from the possibility of having a loving ... a loving relationship, and continuing to live out those values that I believed in.

### **Extract 2: Track 1: 18.13 – 23.20**

#### WORKING AT THE BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY CENTRE

S: I couldn't get a job in chemical engineering when I graduated, so I worked in a lab and then I did some ... gave some tuition and did proof reading and copy editing. I gradually became more out in work ... workplace situations, and then in 1985 erm, I came across, I think ... I came across an ad for er ... an opportunity ... I think it was an ad or notice about the opportunity to work for a new Black Lesbian and Gay Centre project. By this time, I was quite active in Islington and Haringey Gay Group who, again were very helpful and encouraging and I ended up on the committee of that and became ... had become involved in a growing movement to make the work of public bodies, especially local authorities more equal, both in terms of employment and service provision, to take account of and end discrimination against lesbians and gays, and this was regarded at the time as part of the 'Looney Left'! Along with such ideas as proper support for women who'd been sexually assaulted, and ending sexual harassment, and having Black people in prominent positions in local authorities and so on. It was all regarded ... at that time it was all regarded as rather scary and subversive, you know, and a lot of the press were ... reacted very negatively. You might remember those ... those days. A lot of us will, who are a bit older, though hopefully

for many younger people it might seem quite odd that ... that those things were thought of as odd at the time. But there was certainly a lot of resistance. So at about the time I started to work at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, having been lucky enough to be appointed as one of the part time workers ...

C: Where was that?

S: It started off in an annex of Tottenham town hall, and spent the first few years in Tottenham. Then we found a space in erm, Southwark, almost underneath Peckham Rye station. It was in a railway arch, because finding a ... finding a space that was affordable er, was quite a challenge so we ... we ended up in a railway arch, and I carried on working there until 1994, for about eight and a half years.

C: Can I ask you, were you involved in the beginning of it? The decision to have one?

S: No, that was I think largely the work of a growing Black lesbian and gay movement and in particular the ... what was initially the Gay Black Group. I think it might have been the Gay Asian group very briefly and then became a Gay Black group, and then a lesbian and gay Black group, that put in the application to the Greater London Council for funding for a Black Lesbian and Gay Centre and at that time the GLC was funding various good causes that others might not fund. There was also the problem about the abolition of the GLC coming almost immediately after we got the funding, but erm, I wasn't part of the initial funding bid. I was just one of the first, one of the initial set of workers to be appointed, and I carried on working there for most of the life of the project. I think I was the most longstanding.

C: What did you do?

S: I was an outreach and development worker which gave a fair amount of scope for going out there and meeting people. Part of our work was about supporting black lesbians and gays. Helping them to get together. There were a growing number of groups so part of what we did was offering support to other groups, publicising what they did, producing a newsletter. We also supported quite a lot of individuals who might be coming out or experiencing difficulties of one kind or another. Maybe referring them to where they could get more help or ... just being there at the end of a phone and reassuring them that they weren't alone, because at that time it could be very isolating for Black and minority ethnic lesbian and gay people. You could get the impression that you were the only one.

### **Extract 3: Track 2. 8.14 – 12.22**

#### THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY. BEING CHAIR OF LGCM (LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT)

There are a range of reasons why people hold the views that they do within churches. As I say some people have sincerely tried to see our perspective and still think that we're wrong and, you know, credit to them for making that effort, but I think that when people get very,

very agitated about sexuality then that question arises as to why that matters so much more to them than, you know, gross exploitation or you know, environmental damage that threatens the future of the planet that people of faith believe ... that Christians believe that God has entrusted to human care or, you know, scandals in the City of London that result in billions being squandered that could have been used on the poor. It seems economic justice is mentioned umpteen times in the Bible whereas sexuality only gets a handful of mentions, many of which are ... which are generally fairly obscure and open to ... open to different interpretations.

C: What is ... what would you say your role is in LGCM?

S: Well, I'm now the Chair. But...

C: I'm sorry, I didn't realise. I thought you were on the board ...

S: Yes, I've been on the board for a number of years. I finally got persuaded to join the board of LGCM I think about ten years ago, then became Vice Chair, and then finally Chair. I've been maybe active at a more grass roots level for a while, you know, from time to time. But ...

C: And what's their main, you know, your main intent?

S: For a while part of our focus was on working towards equal marriage and making sure there was a sort of a faith related voice in the call for equal marriage and now we've got that we continue to work to change social attitudes and raise awareness of the possibility of being LGBT and Christian and there not being a contradiction between those, but a lot of our work at the moment is about changing erm, changing views and practices within churches. There are a number of other groups working in that field as well so we tend to work with them, you know, we're working for a common cause, we're not competing so if somebody else is doing something well, we don't need to duplicate what they're doing, but I think part ... a lot of our work has been around shifting opinions and shifting processes, policies, statements, official views in churches, and there's been some success in that in churches in Britain that a lot of them now have opened up discussion on sexuality but actually getting that result in real change is ... still remains a challenge.

So part of what we do is support it, as we're supporting members and supporting people generally who might turn to us and, you know, want reassurance or want to be directed to places locally or elsewhere where they might get support, you know, supportive local churches or Christian ... or fellowships of Christians. But a lot of it is about achieving change in the churches and for instance in my own Church of England, my own as in being one of the millions of people in Britain to identify that as our church, there is a lot of discussion going on at the moment, so there are conversations with skilled facilitators taking place in various clusters of dioceses around sexuality issues, which is a positive development.

There's still an unwillingness on the part of the top church leadership to acknowledge just how much diversity of opinion there is, even in the ranks of senior church leaders, in particular bishops you know are under pressure not to come out if they're LGBT themselves, not to say that they're in favour of full acceptance of LGBT people. A handful of them, of the

bolder ones, don't let that stop them but it's ... there's still a lot of fear of alienating what's now a relatively small but very vocal minority of people who are not only strongly opposed to acceptance of LGBT, or rather of same sex partnerships and in some cases, you know, gender transition or people defining their gender identity in ways that don't match their biological sex at birth, but also think that this is some central issue for Christianity and that the church will lose what makes it distinctive if it accepts people for who we are and respects our relationships, you know, as long as they meet the same criteria as those for heterosexual people being, you know, even if love and commitment and faithfulness are ... are expected of opposite sex couples then the same might be expected of us, but not ... not creating unnecessary barriers; LGBT people to be part of the Christian family and to offer what gifts we have.