



No condemnation

A Prayer for Wesley Day, 24 May 2018

On 24th May 1988, *Section 28* of the Local Government Act came into force. It stated that a local authority:

"shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

It represented for LGBTQ+ people our status as second-class citizens and legitimised homophobia in schools and colleges. Young LGBTQ+ people struggling to come to terms with their sexuality and identity were denied help or support for fear of falling foul of this law.

It would be wonderful to say that Methodists in Parliament resisted this law and spoke out for equality. Sadly, not all did, and some actively backed its implementation as an enforcement of Christian family values.

Clause 28 was finally repealed in November 2003.

24th May is a significant date in the Methodist Calendar, when we commemorate the Aldersgate Experience of John Wesley in 1738. From that date, we mark the beginning of the worldwide Methodist Movement and its message of liberation. Our own experiences of the Spirit of freedom at work means that we can echo the words of his brother Charles:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my
own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my
own.

For LGBTQ+ Methodist who lived through the period of Clause 28, we felt imprisoned in closets not of our own making. The intention to silence us in the Clause and not allow us to share our experience of love and relationships was, too often, echoed in the church. The fear that lay behind the law – that being LGBTQ+ was an infectious disease that could be 'caught' through discussion – is still present within some of us.

On this 30th anniversary of Clause 28, and the 280th anniversary of Aldersgate Day, we offer this prayer for use in Methodist services:

Let us pray.

Let us pray for those imprisoned in closets not of their own making,
and for those who hold the keys.

Jesus our liberator,
free our hearts.

Let us pray for those who still wear the chains of silence,
and sit in the darkness of ignorance and fear.

Jesus our liberator,
free our hearts.

Let us pray for those who have stood against the prisons of prejudice
and led others to freedom with the light of love.

Jesus our liberator,
free our hearts.

Spirit of freedom,
give us the light we need to find our way out of silence and fear;
give us the strength we need to embrace those who condemn;
give us the boldness we need to claim our place among your people.

Rekindle your light within us,

that we may dread no condemnation,
and that the gospel passion for love and justice
may fire us to fill your world with joy. **Amen.**



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