

Studies on
Homosexuality
and the Church

by Erwin Buck



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Foreword

A. Getting Acquainted

This is a thoroughly revised and updated version of *Six Studies on Homosexuality*, which appeared in 1985. At that time homosexuality was hardly spoken of in our church. Relatively few gays and lesbians had ventured to come out of the closet. Most found the climate too inhospitable.

Today a number of distinguished members of our society are openly gay or lesbian. For instance in March 2000, a conference in Saskatoon brought together gays and lesbians with members of government and leaders in the field of education. The featured speaker at the event was Mark Tewksbury, a world-renowned swimmer and Olympic gold medal winner who had decided to come out after a lengthy and intense personal struggle.

Almost every city in Canada has an active PFLAG group (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). As the name suggests, it is the object of these groups to give support to people who have suddenly had to face the fact that a close relative or friend has declared himself or herself as a person of homosexual orientation. The stories that are told by parents and friends of gays and lesbians bear testimony to the enormous pain that is associated with the outing process.

Homosexuals and their relatives often reach the edge of despair. Many gays and lesbians, as well as their parents and friends are members of our churches. They are baptized Christians who claim their right to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This calls for pastoral care, for theological reflection, and for ideological reassessment.

B. Sharing Our Questions and Concerns

As we begin this series of studies, a good place to start might be a frank and honest sharing of our own experience with gay and lesbian friends and colleagues. What do you know about the subject? Do you have relatives or friends who have declared themselves as homosexuals? Has your attitude toward them changed as a result of their coming out, and if so, how has it changed?

When we gather for our deliberations, we need to realize that many people in our community are currently wrestling with the question of whether they themselves

may be homosexual. Others, who have already come to terms with the fact that they are different, have so far found it too threatening to share their self-awareness with the rest of us.

It is important to remember that the homosexuals about whom we talk may be present in the same room with us. They may wonder whether you and I can be trusted with their personal secret. As a matter of fact, you yourself, the reader, may be one such struggling participant in the dialogue. You may have experienced some strange stirrings of erotic attraction which bewildered you. You may have come to these studies to learn something about yourself.

Let us hope that as a result of our gatherings, we will build such a level of trust that we can share our heart-felt joys and pains as we continue to meet together in study, conversation, and prayer. May the Holy Spirit be active among us and allow us to experience the unity and love that characterizes the Body of Christ.

C. On the Use of These Studies

These studies leave a great deal of freedom to the group using them. It is not necessary to plan a single study session for each study, although some groups may want to do that. Each of the five studies is organized as a collection of smaller modules. These modules can be divided into a series of sessions according to the needs and interests of the group.

The sequence of the studies is deliberate, but should not be seen as restrictive. There is flexibility even within each individual study. Input, critical discussion, and devotion can be rearranged at will.

The studies attempt to cover the entire spectrum of questions related to the subject of homosexuality and the church. Biblical, historical, scientific, pastoral, and theological concerns all need to receive adequate attention. These areas are intimately intertwined, each affecting the other. Scientific data is an important consideration in theology and in pastoral care, and vice versa.

Interspersed throughout each study are selections of critical questions with which one must wrestle. The heading *What Do You Think?* invites the reader to wrestle with issues. For many of these issues, there is no one, correct answer.

By reflecting on these questions together, we hope to clarify what the real issues are and how one can begin to address them. In the process we will no doubt also come to understand better why people have different persuasions in some of these matters.

A *Glossary* has been placed at the end of this book for handy reference. Some members of the group may not be familiar with some of the terms used in this book or may not understand clearly what they mean. It may be useful for the group to begin by reviewing the *Glossary*. Or the group may simply want to refer to the *Glossary* the first time a specific term comes up in the group's study.

A *Bibliography* has been provided for those who wish to do further reading. The source material for quotations in these studies is included in the *Bibliography*.

D. A Study Covenant

It is well for us to begin by placing on the table some of our basic presuppositions and expectations.

1) *We are seeking the will of the Lord.* We are all here out of a sincere desire to know and do the will of the Lord. We are not facing off against one another. Rather, we want to search together for a better understanding of ourselves and of others. Most of all we want to gain greater certainty about God's plan and good will for humanity. As members of the church, we yearn to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2) *We do not have all the answers.* Sometimes we think we know so clearly what it is that God would have us believe and do. When we face unprecedented problems, we are prone to get confused and to lose our sense of direction. To gather for study and reflection is to acknowledge that we do not have all the answers we would like to have.

It is an honest and honourable thing to acknowledge our personal inadequacies. More than that, it is salutary for us to be reminded that our righteousness before God is not based on our knowing and doing, or even on our believing. We are saved by the grace of God, not by an act of our own believing the right things. We confess with Paul that we are often so confused that we don't even know how or for what we should pray (Romans 8:26-30).

3) *Every one of us is biased.* Bias is another word for "point of view." Everyone has a point of view. That, too, is not a bad thing. In fact it is unavoidable. Our point of

view is largely a result of our past history, our upbringing, and our past experiences within the community of faith.

Usually it is not appropriate to say that one point of view is right and other points of view must therefore be wrong. Of course, there are some biases which hurt our neighbour and cause suffering for the body of Christ. A racist or sexist bias is clearly irreconcilable with the gospel according to which there is no longer Jew or Greek, male and female (Galatians 3:28). Thus we need to examine periodically what our viewpoints are, how well founded they are, and how well they agree with the gospel.

In many cases it is not necessary that we all have the same point of view. For example, some of us have grown up with a strong liturgical tradition and have come to associate deep religious experiences with liturgy and organ music. Others find that sort of thing lifeless. Real worship, according to another view, is associated with clapping of hands, the strumming of a guitar, and extemporaneous, from the heart, prayer. Still others value silence and meditation as a primary part of their worship. Most of us will probably agree that none of these points of view is either right or wrong. Nevertheless each point of view exerts a powerful influence on our perception and emotion.

It is only fair that we identify the viewpoint from which these studies are written. We proceed on the assumption that the church is strengthened when Christian brothers and sisters acknowledge and honestly wrestle with their diversity of convictions "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Accordingly, we want to take a mediating position. We will try to present the various sides of the relevant arguments in as faithful a manner as we are able. In so doing, we want to help the partners in the discussion to take ownership of their own convictions and to identify the central questions which are at stake.

The purpose of these studies is not to convert people to our own point of view. Rather, we all desire to explore what our convictions and insights are and why we hold them. In the end we may see a need to modify our attitude on certain issues. Whether or not that is the case remains to be seen.

4) *We respect one another.* Our baptism into Christ has made us all one in Christ. As members of the one body we realize our dependence on one another. The Body of

Christ has need of eyes and hands, ears and feet, heads and hearts. Everyone has a gift to offer, a gift which the rest of the body needs desperately. We do get into one another's hair, at times. That is not necessarily a bad thing. We can see our debates not as evidence of alienation or hostility, but as a sign that we take each other seriously and want to learn from one another's insights as well as from each other's faults.

5) We use words with care. "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We know this saying is not true. Words can hurt, and hurt very deeply. If we do not want to offend or to be offended unnecessarily, we should pay attention to the words we use. It is not enough that we use words which feel right to us. We need to be sensitive to how words are perceived by others. If we want to make progress in our discussion, we need to use language which is precise and which does not devalue the other person. This applies equally to people on all sides of the debate. Let us remember that some of those gathered for discussion may be gay themselves, or they may wonder whether they might be.

Language changes constantly. Words which at one time were neutral can become offensive and vice versa. New words are created and old words acquire new meaning. While the *Glossary* at the end of this book attempts to provide some help, it will no doubt be outdated within a relatively short time. We need to be sensitive about such things.

6) We listen to Scripture. When Christians study any given subject in the hope of discerning the will of God, they ask God to speak to them through the Scriptures, through the witness of the Holy Spirit, and through the insight of Christian brothers and sisters throughout the ages.

These three things are inseparable: scripture, Holy Spirit, and Christian community. To discern the will of God, we need to listen to all three voices. Our Christian brothers and sisters play an important role in our listening to God. We need to hear how scripture and the Holy Spirit speak to them. The Holy Spirit works also in the people with whom we disagree. When we voice our disagreements, we come to a better understanding of what unites us. This is how the Council of Nicea came to agree on the Nicene Creed which has become a cornerstone of Christian doctrine.

God does not make things easy for us. However we have the promise of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be present among us.

It is very important in this process that we pay particular attention when our partner in dialog espouses a position which makes us uncomfortable. This applies equally to people on the left and people on the right of the theological spectrum.

7) We focus on the issues. To make desirable progress, it is important that we maintain the appropriate focus. We want to deal with issues rather than with personalities. We are not in competition with one another to determine who is right and who is wrong, who wins and who loses. We are together in our search for greater clarity. If we do our work carefully, we will all win in the end.

8) We enter into the fray with courage. The subject of homosexuality is sometimes hotly debated in the church and in society generally. Much is being written both in defense of certain viewpoints and as attack on them. Often emotion and our presuppositions threaten to get the better of us. Whatever our position, none of us is immune from making distorted claims and defending them tenaciously.

This can cause frustration. How is one to adjudicate between competing claims unless one is an expert in the discipline? It does not help that even the experts disagree on important points of research.

In our searching we can be sustained by the assurance of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be personally present (Matthew 18:20). We cling to the promise that God will send the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all the truth (John 16:13). We are on a difficult journey, but we do not walk in darkness.

9) We gain expertise. We need to keep an open mind, to watch developments as they unfold, to listen critically to dissenting voices, and to reserve the right to change our mind as we proceed.

Regular exercise builds stronger muscles and a healthier body. A physical workout produces not only a physically more fit heart, it also raises one's spirit and level of energy. This is true not only in the physical but also in the spiritual realm. Regular exercise of our mind, our emotion, and our faith also makes us stronger and more ready to take on still more demanding tasks in the future. By engaging in this series of studies we can expect to become more fit to tackle even more difficult ethical and theological tasks in the future.

10) We worship. We gain a proper perspective when we gather at the foot of the cross to worship. These studies are not a purely intellectual exercise. They are deeply interrelated with our spirituality. The group will decide when it is most appropriate to meditate and to pray during their study.

The Early Church experienced many internal tensions. In those struggles our Christian forebears learned to return to those things which are essential. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Study One

Information About Homosexuality

A. Getting Acquainted

1. Relating to minorities

Jesus went out of his way to connect with people whom society tended to marginalize for social, political, or economic reasons. The church, of all organizations, should be sensitive to the pains and needs of minorities, since the church has itself always been a minority in the world.

So, even if there were very few gays and lesbians among us, we would still be called upon to take the matter seriously. Wherever there is pain, and whenever the cry for justice is heard in the land, the followers of Christ are called upon to respond caringly.

It is estimated that between four percent and 10% of the population are homosexuals. Exact statistics are notoriously difficult to come by. "Some major researchers conclude that a true estimate of the incidence of homosexuality is probably not possible," says B. R. Simon Rosser in the Summer 1994 issue of *Word & World*.

That may be a blessing in disguise since identifiable minorities are usually more at risk of being maligned and persecuted. Suffice it to say that one can expect to find some gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered (GLBT) people in every walk of life, in every economic bracket, and in every congregation.

2. Sources of information and help

a) Organizations

Within every major church denomination there are now organizations devoted specifically to the needs and concerns of homosexuals. To name only some of the more prominent, there is Dignity (Roman Catholic), Integrity (Anglican), Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists, and Lutherans Concerned/North America which has a program called Reconciling in Christ.

In every city or town one is likely to find local support groups devoted to helping queers and their families come to terms with their identity and roles. Such agencies can usually suggest qualified speakers who would be

willing to answer questions and to let interested groups gain a first hand acquaintance with gay or lesbian persons. The telephone directory or the yellow pages usually contain entries under Gay and Lesbian Support Services or similar headings.

The number of printed GLBT publications is steadily growing. The Internet abounds in Web sites and discussion lists devoted to the spreading of relevant information and the airing of gay concerns. The list at the back of this book of Web sites dealing with gay issues represents only a selected sample.

"Homosexuality is not only out of the closet, it is coming right down the centre aisle and into the chancel," wrote Harold I. Haas in the April 1978 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*.

There is even an entire church body especially constituted for the purpose of proclaiming a gospel of inclusiveness. In 1983, *Time* reported that the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches was one of the fastest growing denominations, already numbering about 27,000 members and seeking admission into the National Council of Churches. In 2000, it had 42,000 members in 300 congregations in 16 countries and had received Official Observer status to the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991.

b) Films and videos

Films and videos can provide valuable additional opportunities for gaining insight into the phenomenon of homosexuality. There are a number of documentaries available which aim to present unbiased matter-of-fact reporting without moralizing or lecturing. A short list of useful films and videos can be found at the back of this book. Such resources allow the audience to see and hear for themselves and to draw their own conclusions. The viewing of a film or two, followed by discussion, could be the subject of an entire study session.

c) Caring Conversations

There is simply no substitute for meeting gays and lesbians face to face, hearing them talk about their experience, and having them respond to questions. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada has developed Caring Conversations as a model for building bridges between the gay community and the straight community.

Because this model can profitably be combined with our

series of studies, it has been included as an appendix to this book. At almost any point in this study, one or more meetings can be arranged for the express purpose of listening to gays and lesbians talk about their own identity and personal growth. This can also be an opportunity to learn from them how they experience the rest of society.

What Do You Think?

At this point, it may be helpful to share our present understanding of homosexuals and homosexuality. Some participants may have personal knowledge of someone who is gay or lesbian. Rather than talking in the abstract about homosexuals, it would be informative to share some actual experiences. Stories about a relative or long-time friend whose sexual orientation had not been known for many years would be valuable. Of course, we will want to be careful not to betray a friend's confidence.

How did you personally cope with the reality of your friend's status? Has the personal relationship between you changed as a result of the revelation?

B. Toward a Definition of Homosexuality

1. Attraction and behaviour

In sexual, as in all other areas of life, it is important to distinguish between "attraction" and "behaviour." This point is emphasized by practically every author who writes on the subject.

Our attraction to various kinds of food can be so intense that the mere smell of it causes our body to react physically. The sight of a piece of chocolate cake can make our mouth salivate. Broccoli may have the opposite effect.

But it is one thing to say that a person is attracted to chocolate. It is quite another to say that she is actually eating chocolate. If she values her health, she will rather frequently resist the temptation and refrain from letting her attraction result in over-consumption of the delicacy.

When it comes to matters of sex, the situation is very similar. One must make a "clear distinction between a man being sexually attracted to women other than his wife and the carrying out of that attraction by having intercourse with these other women," says James Burtress in the Summer 1994 issue of *Word & World*.

Attraction is largely involuntary. One does not choose to be attracted—one just is. Sexual stimuli trigger sexual arousal. One has relatively little control over such things. However a person who has been aroused can and should act responsibly by controlling their feelings and channeling them to result in acceptable sexual behaviour under appropriate circumstances. Behaviour is a matter of personal choice.

2. Sexual orientation

The advent of the discipline of psychoanalysis brought an awareness of something much deeper than sexual attraction at work in the human psyche. The technical term "sexual orientation" has been coined to express this newly-gained insight. While everyone experiences sexual attraction, such attraction manifests itself in two opposite directions. The term "heterosexual orientation" identifies sexual attraction between two people of the opposite gender, while the term "homosexual orientation" designates sexual attraction between two people of the same gender.

According to experts in the field, one's sexual orientation is not a matter of choice. It is normal for a heterosexual person to be attracted to a person of the opposite gender, just as it is normal for a gay person to be attracted to a person of the same gender. Both the attraction as well as the direction (orientation) of that attraction are understood to be matters over which a person has little or no control.

One cannot help feeling the way one does. A gay person cannot stop being attracted to members of the same sex any more than a straight person can stop being attracted toward members of the opposite sex.

On the other hand, behaviour is very much a personal responsibility. Both gay and straight can and should decide not to let their attraction lead to questionable behaviour. We will pursue this issue later.

Since the idea of sexual orientation has appeared only with the advent of the Freudian era, it is safe to say that in previous centuries, including biblical times, such an idea would have been incomprehensible. It was simply

assumed that every person was heterosexual by nature. Engaging in sexual behaviour with a person of the same sex could thus be variously regarded as unnatural, violence, insult, domination, etc., the result of a deliberate choice to “exchange” one role for another.

3. The range of sexual attraction

Dating back to Kinsey, the available evidence suggests that a person is not either homosexual or heterosexual, but that homosexuality and heterosexuality are a matter of degree. The Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University has developed a seven-point scale of measurement. At one end of the scale are people who are exclusively homosexual, while at the other end of the continuum are people who are exclusively heterosexual. Surveys have indicated that relatively few people fall at either end of the scale, and that most of us find ourselves somewhere in between the two poles.

This fact in itself is not surprising. Very few things in life are either all black or all white. They contain shades of grey. For example, at what point does a person deserve the designation of liar or gossip or slanderer? If as Matthew 5:28 says “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” then the percentage of adulterers has suddenly increased exponentially.

If it is true that homosexual and heterosexual tendencies are present in various proportions in most, if not in all of us, it follows that whether a given person is regarded as gay or straight depends largely on the criteria one uses for defining homosexuality and heterosexuality. What about a person who at one time or another has felt some attraction for a member of the same sex? Is such a person to be regarded as queer or as straight? At what point in the scale does one begin to be categorized as one or the other?

This leaves us with an additional conundrum. What are we to say about people who, according to the Kinsey scale, fall approximately at mid-point (point 3) between the two extremes? These persons are now called bisexuals. By definition, they can experience sexual attraction to either or both sexes.

These matters are too complicated for us to deal with in the context of these studies, although they require attention whenever one makes pronouncements about homosexuals. For purposes of our discussion, it would appear advisable to reserve the use of the term

homosexual for persons who feel little or no attraction for members of the opposite sex. However please be aware that the decision to do so will have implications for what is to be said later about the stability of sexual orientation.

4. The cause of sexual orientation

There is much debate among the experts regarding the origin of one’s sexual orientation. However the prevailing view now is that a person’s sexual orientation is a result of a complex combination of factors, some of which may be due to heredity and some to outside influence or experience.

In *Making Moral Decisions*, Paul Jersild says that, “it is clear that gays and lesbians discover their sexual preference rather than consciously willing to be homosexual.”

Gays and lesbians usually report that they discovered, by about the seventh or eighth grade, around the age of puberty, that they were not attracted to members of the opposite sex the way most of their friends seemed to be. At about the same time, they became aware that they were strangely attracted in a sexual way to members of their own sex. This discovery usually comes gradually, probably because it is often difficult to know what behaviour is within the normal range for gays and straight persons.

The Freudian interpretation held that homosexuality is the result of an arrested psychological development due to a domineering mother and a distant father. This view is still quite widespread, and it causes great anguish for parents who are made to feel guilty over the possibility that they might have done something to bring about their son’s or daughter’s homosexual orientation.

Those who experience strong homosexual tendencies are usually bewildered by their experience. They need the help of dictionaries and counsellors to come to terms with their struggles.

At this stage many contemplate suicide. B. R. Simon Rosser cites studies which report significantly higher rates of suicide attempts on the part of homosexual youth. This suggests that gays do not as a rule choose to be gays, but would be willing to pay quite a price to escape that reality. It also suggests that for many of them it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change their sexual orientation.

One must consider the possibility that homosexuality

may have a genetic basis. However this question has not been definitely settled. The nature/nurture relationship is notoriously difficult to unravel. One needs to ask not only whether there is a genetic cause at all, but also whether that cause constitutes a genetic variation (which affects such things as hair color, eye color, and left-handedness), or whether it is a case of genetic mutation (such as causes physiological defects like Huntington's Disease).

James Burtress suspects that these questions will not be answerable even when the human genome project is completed and all the DNA has been mapped. After surveying an extensive array of research literature, including the study of monozygotic (identical) twins, Rosser concludes, "Taken together, these studies suggest that genetic factors contribute significantly, but not exclusively, to sexual orientation development."

No absolute answers are available. However one thing is becoming very clear. For many people, homosexual orientation is not a matter of choice, just as for most of us, heterosexual orientation is not negotiable.

5. The stability of sexual orientation

Is sexual orientation subject to modification? That question is hotly debated. A number of organizations such as Exodus International have made it their objective to help people "escape from homosexuality." Many scholars and counsellors regard such efforts as misguided. Yet many therapists report a high success rate in their attempt to "heal" homosexuals and to help them to go straight.

a) Is homosexuality a disorder?

To begin we must address a fundamental question. Can homosexuality be regarded as a disorder? If one speaks of an "escape" or a "cure" or "treatment" of gays and lesbians, that assumes that homosexuality is an illness or a prison. This assumption is open to debate.

Many gays and lesbians are plagued with self-doubt and suffer from psychological trauma. While this should not be denied, we must remember that many heterosexuals also are plagued with self-doubt and suffer from psychological trauma. So we need to be clear about the essential question: Is homosexuality as such a disorder?

We must avoid stereotypes. Homosexuality is not to be equated with disorder. From personal experience many of us know or know about gays and lesbians who

are well-adjusted and highly respectable human beings and exemplary citizens. Often they are gifted artists and very bright intellectuals. So we must at least acknowledge that there are well-adjusted homosexuals.

In 1974, the Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of pathological conditions and mental disorders. They stated that "homosexuality per se implies no impairment of judgment, stability, reliability or general social or vocational capabilities." That decision was not unanimously accepted even by the general membership of the association. No group of scholars or professionals ever agrees 100% on anything.

b) Conflicting claims

There are many conflicting claims about the curability of homosexuality.

i) Changeable? Yes

In *Such Were Some of You*, Kevin Linehan, a homosexual, insists that he has changed and is convinced that others can change, too. There are also family counsellors who claim a high success rate with their gay clients.

John F. Harvey in his extensive book, *The Truth About Homosexuality*, issued with ecclesiastical approval, produces detailed arguments and a collection of case histories to explode what he calls "two popular myths," namely that sexual orientation is genetically caused and that it cannot be changed. He explains in detail that those devout Catholics who want to change, can. However he admits to a less than perfect success rate. He reports that those who "have not been able to change their orientation have been able to live a life of sexual abstinence by divine grace and group support."

ii) Changeable? No

"Can a same-sex orientation be changed? Experience does not encourage an optimistic answer," says Mary Borhek in *Coming Out to Parents*. Her comments are made on the basis of personal experience and after she reviewed the contradictory claims about the curability of homosexuality.

The Winnipeg Free Press reported that Dr. Gerald C. Davidson had developed an "orgasmic reorientation"

technique which at one time enjoyed a great deal of attention. However Davidson gave it up and called on others to do the same. Since he appeared to be unable to infuse in homosexuals an attraction for members of the opposite sex, he came to consider his treatment as tantamount to killing in them all sexual desire, something he regarded as dehumanizing, as a form of castration.

c) How can one assess these conflicting claims?

The matter is very difficult to address for at least two reasons.

First, sexual behaviour is a matter of choice and thus can be modified. If a person's behaviour changes over the course of time, shall one interpret such a change as a modification of behaviour or as an alteration of orientation? Can we be sure that when a "successful cure" is reported, it is the orientation that has been changed? What has been affected, the symptom or the cause? Has the cause been removed or simply camouflaged?

Second, if it is true that sexual orientation is a matter of degree on a continuum, can one ever be sure that a person who is reported as "cured," was exclusively gay in the first place?

Let us assume that a person who has had a series of same-sex encounters has consulted a counsellor who helped him to stop engaging in homosexual behaviour. Is it legitimate to conclude that his homosexuality has been cured? Is he no longer a homosexual? If one can get a gay man to refrain from homosexual behaviour, does this mean that his homosexual orientation has been altered or is alterable? How could we ever tell?

What are we to make of these conflicting claims? We wish we knew whether those people who are said to have changed are really "cured," or if they only had their symptoms arrested, and at what cost to their personal identity this has been accomplished. Are they now fully functioning heterosexuals, or have they been deprived of enjoyment of their sexuality altogether? If the latter is the case, does their "cure" in fact amount to castration?

Of all the reported interventions by all known methods, including chemical castration, neurosurgery, aversive techniques, religious conversion and deliverance "not one case has been found where reorientation was convincingly demonstrated," B. R. Simon Rosser reports about a 1992

study by T. F. Murphey. "While many of these techniques were able to demonstrate behavioural modification, none was able to change the deeper affectional orientation."

d) What about the high failure rate?

Sex therapists who endeavour to "cure" homosexuals, uniformly report a significant number of cases in which the cure has not been successful. Some therapists report a failure rate of as high as 50%. How does one interpret that? Is it possible that the persons who did not respond to treatment were precisely the exclusively homosexual people? Is it possible that those for whom a "cure" has been recorded were actually borderline homosexuals, those near the mid-point in the Kinsey scale? Further research is necessary before we can speak more confidently about these things.

e) Characteristics of promising candidates for "healing"

We would like to know what it is about the gays who were not cured that renders them unresponsive to treatment. One therapist claims that he can predict who can and who cannot be cured. Those who report no sexual stirring toward members of the opposite sex cannot be cured, he says. If this is so, it would indicate that it is precisely the exclusively gay persons (those who fall near the end of the heterosexuality/homosexuality scale) whom it has so far been impossible to change significantly. That, in turn, would suggest that those for whom treatment has been successful were not fully homosexual in the first place.

Rosser's survey leads him to conclude that "where a person is highly motivated, strongly religious, highly diligent, has some preexisting heterosexual feelings, and remains within the religio-social culture, some modification, at least short-term, may be possible. However for those with a predominant to exclusive homosexual orientation, anything beyond suppression of their "natural" attractions and modification of their behaviour to heterosexual is unlikely."

f) Homosexuality and spirituality

Sexuality is an important part of one's personal make-up and thus intimately linked with one's religious life. In the case of homosexuals, this is so as well. Many gays have grown up in the church and have a deep desire to continue in the social and worship life of their congregation. Some of them are children of pastors and church leaders, including bishops.

If such Christians are shunned or otherwise made to feel unwelcome in the church, they must make a painful decision. Rosser observes that when sexuality and religious teaching conflict, “most reject their religious background and identity in total, and thus’ the main effect of traditional church attitudes toward homosexuality is to alienate homosexually active men from their religious tradition.”

g) Conclusion

The matter is very complex. One cannot disregard the testimony of those who claim to have been healed from their “addiction.” One needs to acknowledge that some gays and lesbians want to and can be changed. Even so, what about those who can not be changed?

In any case, it does not follow that because some homosexuals can change, all could change, if only they would try harder. At the end of the day, there are a considerable number of gays in our churches who do not respond to reorientation therapy. Do we have any good news for them?

What Do You Think?

Can a person’s sexual orientation be changed?

Must we face up to the possibility that some (maybe most) gays and lesbians, although they can modify their behaviour, cannot alter their orientation, no matter how much they may want to or how hard they may try? Must we take seriously the probability that even the most expert professional help will not be able to change such a person’s orientation?

On the other hand, must we assert that people who have not responded to a healing program just haven’t tried hard enough and that they could change if they really wanted to?

6. Relationships

a) Homosexual behaviour

As is the case with minorities generally, the gay community is subject to much negative publicity. As one might expect, prejudice against GLBT (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons) abounds. There is

even a special term for the phenomenon of anti-gay bias: homophobia. Christians need to be as sensitive about homophobia as they need to be about sexism, racism, ageism and any other “-isms.” Bearing false witness violates one of the Ten Commandments. However this is not to say that everything in the gay community is as it should be. We all “fall short of the glory” which we should have in God’s sight.

When we assess the lives of gays, it is important not to contrast the best of the straight world with the worst of the queer world, or vice versa. Casual sex, promiscuity, rape, sexual abuse and other unsavory elements are as well represented among gays as they are among heterosexuals. The presence of perversion among heterosexuals and homosexuals alike is not an indication that heterosexuality or homosexuality as such are either good or bad.

In 1978, A. P. Bell and M. S. Weinberg reported that homosexual relationships tended to be relatively more short-lived than heterosexual marriages. Comparisons must be drawn with care. Given the fact that gays and lesbians have had to hide their true identity for centuries, it is only to be expected that the resulting stress renders homosexual relationships fragile. If anything, one could regard it as amazing that there is evidence of stable homosexual relationships at all.

One finds a “bathhouse” sub-culture among homosexuals, just as one finds widespread prostitution among the heterosexuals. Virtues and vices occur in every human group. The letters to the Corinthians bear ample evidence that in the church itself one finds situations which the secular world would find appalling.

Homosexual behaviour differs very little from heterosexual behaviour. It encompasses as wide a variety of acts as does heterosexual behaviour. Gays and lesbians may simply enjoy each other’s company and no more. They may cuddle, pet, fondle, engage in mutual masturbation, in oral sex or genital contact or even in anal intercourse. All of these are activities which heterosexual couples may practise as well.

It follows that what distinguishes homosexual from heterosexual behaviour in the final instance is that homosexual behaviour involves couples in which both partners are of the same sex. In other respects the two behaviour patterns are very similar.

A heterosexual male can choose not to act on his

impulses. He can decide to remain celibate for life. He may choose to engage in sexual activity with a woman or women. He may even choose to engage in sexual activity with a man or men. A homosexual male would have the very same choices open to him. So would a homosexual female or a heterosexual female. Sexual behaviour is a matter of choice, no matter what may be one's sexual orientation.

The one major difference between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour is that homosexual behaviour does not include vaginal intercourse which can lead to conception and procreation.

b) Are gays out to win converts?

There is no reliable evidence that homosexuals generally are motivated by a desire to win over heterosexuals. As a rule, what they do desire is to find a partner who shares their hopes and dreams and longings—just as straight people do.

Of course, the process of finding a life-partner is hardly ever smooth, no matter what one's sexual orientation may be. No one should deny the possibility that a person of one sexual orientation can be enticed to engage in behaviour which is characteristic of the other. The personal testimony of Dottie Ludwig in the Summer 1994 issue of *Word & World* illustrates how life's circumstances can have far-reaching undesirable consequences. Her early loss of a mother and her negative experiences with males led her (too far) in the direction of welcoming affection from persons of her own sex. Yet her story also shows how a person's true identity has a way of asserting itself. After some painful detours, Ludwig reports, she rediscovered her identity as a straight person.

c) Preoccupation with sex

Members of the gay community are sometimes amused, but more often saddened, by the way in which heterosexuals place the main focus of the discussion on the matter of the sex act itself. Sex is a minor element in the lives of homosexuals, gays insist. According to one gay man's description, there are other things in a gay person's life which are much more important than sexual intercourse. Companionship, mutual love and care, respect for the other person and commitment to the other person's health and wellbeing are said to be the chief values espoused by homosexual couples. Those values are also of primary concern in the lives of heterosexual people.

d) A personal story

Here is a personal story of someone who came to realize years later that he and his family had been neighbours and good friends with a homosexual couple.

"When we lived in Chicago, our next door neighbours were a couple of lovely elderly ladies. They had been school teachers and had now retired. They lived together in the trailer some 10 feet from ours—for economic reasons, we thought—and because they had been life-long friends. No other people in the trailer court showed any interest in us, but these two ladies befriended us and loved to talk with us. Devoted Roman Catholics, they were impressed with the theologian Hans Küng. They were people with a social conscience who showed a great deal of compassion for people in need. They liked music and the arts.

"They offered to babysit for us, and our children loved them. They never said or did anything to offend us, and they never spoke disrespectfully of others. They cared for one another deeply. Whenever we asked one of them about her well being, she would rather talk about the health and welfare of her friend. They seemed to be more concerned about each other than for themselves. We regarded them as exemplary Christians.

"That was decades ago. Only now are we beginning to realize that the two women were no doubt a lesbian couple. We have no idea what they 'did in bed,' if indeed they did 'do' anything. The subject never came up. Why should it have?"

C. Concluding Observations

This study has attempted to deal only with the data of scientific research. Theological questions are being addressed elsewhere in this series of studies.

The results of the research presented here are not conclusive. Research results seldom are. This study has attempted to be circumspect in the way in which the salient issues from the overwhelming mass of books and other publications currently available on the subject have been sifted and digested. Those results may turn out to be inadequate in the long run. Vigilance and critical awareness is always commendable. Most important, however, is a self-critical attitude.

Many of the questions addressed here lie outside of our competence. Few of us are social scientists, psychologists or mental health specialists. We have

no alternative but to rely on the evidence of those who have competence in these areas. Even so, vigilance is essential. In every area of human endeavour there are experts to be found on opposing sides of the important debates. How can a layperson navigate the troubled waters?

Often the best thing one can hope to accomplish is to accept the offered conclusions, at least provisionally, and to keep one's eyes open for new and more convincing findings.

Meanwhile, it is important to know what are the salient questions that need to be asked whenever the subject of sexual orientation is addressed. This study has tried to pinpoint those questions and to provide some guidelines for their perusal.

What Do You Think?

Is sexual attraction a matter of choice?

Is sexual orientation subject to modification or change?

Must one distinguish between orientation and behaviour?

Is the cause of orientation genetic or environmental?

How do the lives of gay people differ from the lives of straight people?

Is sexual orientation a matter of either one or the other?

How important is sex in a person's life?

Study Two

The Message From the Old Testament

A. Introduction

The Bible has little to say about the subject of homosexuality. Only seven passages address the matter in a direct way, four of them in the Old Testament (Genesis 19:1–26; Judges 19; and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13) and three in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Romans 1:26–27). This is surprising, since non-canonical sources indicate that the phenomenon was well known both in Old Testament and in New Testament times.

Two of the relevant texts in the Old Testament are lengthy narratives. One is the story about Lot's visitors at Sodom (Genesis 19:1–14). The other is a rather detailed description of what happened to a Levite from Ephraim who stopped at Gibeah on his way home from Bethlehem (Judges 19:1–30).

These two accounts are so much alike that scholars think that the Sodom story may have influenced the way the Gibeah story was reported. The two sketches follow an almost identical pattern. They even contain the same key words and phrases. In both stories the townspeople demand: "bring ... that we may know ...". Because of their close similarity, the two tales should be studied together.

B. Sodom and Gibeah

1. Reading the stories in context

a) Genesis 19:1–14

The encounter at Sodom is part of a larger cycle of incidents involving Abraham and Lot. To understand this particular segment, the reader should study it in its larger setting.

By the time we reach the end of chapter 18, God has already decided to destroy Sodom (Genesis 18:17–21). Before the decision is carried out, two messengers are sent to Sodom to see if there might be good reasons to reconsider (18:21).

The two messengers plan to spend the night in the street. Lot persuades them to be his guests instead.

Lot is not a citizen of Sodom. He is only a sojourner there himself, a resident alien (19:9). When the men and boys of Sodom become aware of the presence of the foreign visitors, they surround Lot's house like thugs. The mob insists that Lot "bring out" his guests so that they may "know" the strangers (19:5).

Lot is so upset over their request that he offers to let them molest his two virgin daughters, if only they will leave his two guests alone (19:8). When the crowd threatens to become violent, Lot's two guests intervene just in the nick of time. The messengers have seen enough. God's earlier decision to destroy Sodom will stand (19:12–13).

b) Judges 19:1–30

A Levite, escorting his run-away concubine back home to Ephraim from her father's home in Bethlehem, has to spend a night in Gibeah. He is prepared to camp out of doors in the open square of the city. An old man, himself a native of Ephraim and now a resident alien in Gibeah, invites his compatriot to be his overnight guest (19:15–21).

The peaceful scene is rudely interrupted when the men of the city demand that the old man bring out his guest to them, in order that they might "know" him. The old man is so upset about their request that he offers to let them molest his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine, rather than abandon his guest to the unruly mob.

The men of Gibeah persist until the man pushes the concubine out the door. They "know" her and abuse her all night. Next morning she is dead. The abomination (20:6) arouses such a furor that the people of Israel go to war against Gibeah over the incident (20:19–20).

2. Exploring the stories

What do these two stories have to do with the subject of homosexuality? That is the main question before us. But before attempting an answer to that question, we need to clarify two others.

a) What is meant by "to know?"

In *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition*, D. S. Bailey has come up with a novel reading of this biblical story. He first presents some convincing statistics. In the vast majority of instances (933 out of 943) the verb "to

know” (Hebrew *yād*) means just that “to know, to get to know.”

In only 10 instances does the verb “to know” refer to sexual intercourse at all, and nowhere does “to know” refer to homosexual relations, except possibly in these two stories. The men of Sodom and Gibeah, argues Bailey, did not demand sexual gratification at all. They wanted to know who these guests were. They wanted to determine whether it was appropriate to admit the foreigners to their town.

Bailey’s point is that Lot was not a citizen of Sodom, nor was the old Ephraimite a citizen of Gibeah. Both Lot at Sodom and the old man at Gibeah were resident aliens. As such the two had no right to admit strangers into their town. Yet these two Ephraimites had taken it upon themselves to offer lodging to other foreigners like themselves without first asking the permission of the citizens of the town.

In the eyes of an Israelite, Bailey points out, the demand of the townspeople was scandalous since it shows disrespect for visitors. It was an obligation in Israel to be generous to strangers. The inhospitality of the townspeople toward these sojourners constituted the supreme wickedness of the men at Sodom and at Gibeah. These two stories, says Bailey, have nothing to do with homosexuality. They deal with the subject of hospitality and the refusal of it.

In the ancient world, and especially in Israel, one of the most important social obligations was to offer hospitality to strangers. John Boswell illustrates this point by alluding to the story of the destruction of Jericho in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. According to Joshua 6, only one person was spared when Jericho was demolished, and this one person was a prostitute. Although prostitution is frowned upon (cf. Leviticus 19:29), the prostitute of Jericho was honoured and rewarded. For what? For offering hospitality to those whom Joshua had sent ahead to scout out the country.

On the other hand, the Amorites and the Moabites were later excluded from the assembly of the Lord. Why? Precisely because they had failed to act hospitably toward the Israelites who were passing through the region on their way out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:3–4).

Bailey is no doubt correct when he emphasizes how serious an offense it was in Israel’s eyes to refuse

hospitality to strangers. But one must ask whether hospitality was the issue in the two incidents we are examining.

Marti Nissinen is convinced that Bailey is on the wrong track. In *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, he writes: “Although Bailey’s interpretation of the verb *yāda*’ has met with some approval, the theory ultimately fails.” Nissinen’s chief evidence is this, “In this context the verb *yāda*’ is used with an explicitly sexual meaning—only a couple of lines after the previous similar use.”

One can also present the following observations that appear to contradict Bailey’s explanation. In both the Sodom and the Gibeah incidents, the host offered women to the mob which had demanded to “know” the male strangers. In Gibeah the Levite’s concubine was actually abandoned into the hands of the townspeople who promptly ravished her and abused her all night (“they knew her”). This suggests that what the men originally had in mind when they demanded to “know” the male guest was to have sexual relations with him. The verb has been translated that way in the *New Revised Standard Version* at Judges 19:22, but not at Genesis 19:5.

Not so, answers Bailey. The idea to offer sex with virgin daughters rather than deny hospitality to their guests originated with Lot and with the old man at Gibeah, not from the men at Sodom and Gibeah. Up to this point in each story the issue had to do with hospitality, not with sex. Lot at Sodom and the old man at Gibeah would have done anything rather than go back on their offer of hospitality. At that time the honour of a woman was not as important as the sacred duty of hospitality, the Jerusalem Bible explains in a footnote. This illustrates graphically how high a premium was placed on hospitality as a social and religious value.

Others are not convinced by Bailey’s line of reasoning. Marvin H. Pope concludes, “there can be little question that ... the Sodomites’ offense, like that of the men of Gibeah ... was the demand for carnal knowledge of a neighbour’s guests.”

In *The Bond That Breaks*, Don Williams agrees. He insists that the Hebrew word for “to know” must be understood in these places as a reference to sexual intercourse. He writes, “Word count proves nothing, the context proves everything.”

What Do You Think?

What does the verb “to know” mean in this context?

Do the townspeople in these two stories demand sexual gratification or do they object to the admission of foreigners?

Which position do you agree with? Why?

b) Why was Sodom destroyed?

According to Genesis 19, God had decided to destroy Sodom before the incident involving Lot and the citizens of Sodom. What had Sodom done to bring the wrath of God down upon itself? What sin had the people of the city committed? D. S. Bailey points to an amazing fact. Although the Old and the New Testament refer to Sodom’s wickedness in several places (namely Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:49–50; Matthew 10:14–15; 2 Peter 2:6–8), in none of those passages does one detect a specific reference to homosexual behaviour.

Bailey concludes that the sin of Sodom must not be identified with homosexuality. In any case, in the Sodom story, no homosexual intercourse actually took place.

Against Bailey one can argue that there is at least one place (Jude 7) where an oblique reference to homosexual behaviour can be detected. A literal translation of the Greek text of that verse states that Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities “went after other flesh.” Although this phrase is by no means a specific reference to homosexual behaviour, in the context of the Sodom and Gomorrah story such an interpretation remains at least a possibility. Nevertheless, it is true that wherever the sin of Sodom is alluded to in the other biblical passages, other evils, such as adultery, lying, pride, gluttony, prosperous ease, failure to aid the poor and needy, and haughtiness are given greater prominence.

What Do You Think?

What brought Sodom and Gomorrah down?

Was it any one thing or was it a combination of things?

Was homosexual behaviour at least part of the sin of Sodom?

Do the men of Sodom in our story actually engage in homosexual behaviour or do they only desire to?

Do these two stories betray a deep aversion against homosexual behaviour?

c) The relevance of Genesis 19 and Judges 19

Now we can return to the central question. What do these two stories actually say about the subject of homosexuality as we understand the phenomenon today? One thing is clear. These stories do not speak about a “committed relationship of love freely entered into by two gay or two lesbian partners.” In fact, such an idea would have been incomprehensible in antiquity. Certainly no one had ever heard of homosexual behaviour between equal partners, nor did they have any inkling of such a thing as homosexual orientation.

Many commentators have pointed out that, even if the men of Gibeah and Sodom were seeking homosexual gratification, they did not actually get the chance to engage in homosexual acts.

What is more, their potential sex partners were in no way willing subjects. This story has more to do with rape than it does with a committed relationship. Rape is a violation of one’s sexual partner and rape is rejected among homosexuals, just as it is among heterosexuals.

Martti Nissinen observes, “Gang rape of a man has always been an extreme means to disgrace one’s enemies and put them in their place.” This has nothing to do with sexual orientation or lust for erotic pleasure. “Rape—homosexual or heterosexual—is the ultimate means of subjugation and domination.” The stories are about hostile aggression toward strangers, not about sensual lust, to say nothing of a loving and caring relationship.

Richard Hays, who can hardly be said to harbour liberal attitudes toward homosexuality, goes even further. As

far as he is concerned, the story is “actually irrelevant to the topic.” The gang-rape illustrates the depravity of the people of Sodom, but “there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse,” he writes in *Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies*.

Furthermore, both biblical stories evidently assume what was commonly assumed at the time, namely, that all people are heterosexual (although there was no word to express that). The visitors to Sodom and to Gibeah, as well as the citizens of those cities, were evidently considered to be heterosexuals, not gays. Thus the stories are about people presumed to be heterosexuals willfully and perversely desiring to resort to homosexual acts.

The Gibeah story is really about heterosexual rape. The Levite is portrayed as a coward. In his eagerness to avoid getting raped himself, he pushes his concubine out into the street and so abandons her to the hoodlums who abuse her until she dies. Nissinen expresses surprise that this story is traditionally employed to condemn homosexual sex (which did not materialize in it) but no one seems to have used it as a basis for condemning heterosexual rape and cowardice, both of which feature prominently in the story.

Homosexual intercourse freely engaged in by loving homosexual adults is nowhere in view in either the Sodom or the Gibeah story. These stories are silent regarding the subject. One cannot extract from them either a positive or a negative comment about committed homosexual relationships. In fact, the society of the day would no doubt have scoffed at the suggestion that there could be such a thing as homosexual orientation.

Is there any evidence that homosexual behaviour on the part of people presumed to be heterosexual would have been approved? Absolutely, says John Boswell. On the basis of a thorough survey of Greco-Roman practices, he concludes that homosexual activity on the part of consenting adults was very widespread and readily tolerated in that society. Only cases of homosexual rape were ever taken to court. On the other hand, homosexual love was prized and extolled by poets, just as was heterosexual love.

In Roman law, says Boswell, it was not the gender of the parties which made a sexual act questionable. He goes even further, claiming that this Greco-Roman attitude is reflected in the societies of the Near East generally. We must not assume, says Boswell, that what

offends our Western sensibilities today would also have offended people then, or indeed would offend God.

One example will suffice to illustrate Boswell’s point. Although we today would find the practice of taking a concubine morally reprehensible, it was tolerated without qualms during Israel’s patriarchal period, in the age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and even later. Is it possible that homosexuality at one time enjoyed a similar status? By necessity, answers to that question are largely speculative.

This is not to say that homosexual behaviour on the part of gay and lesbian partners would have been approved. It is futile to speculate what people would have done if they had known what they did not know, namely that not all people are heterosexuals. All we can say is that in a world where all people are assumed to be heterosexual, every instance of same-sex behaviour will be seen as perversion.

What Do You Think?

Do these two stories deal with the subject of homosexual love?

What do these two stories contribute to the discussion of homosexuality?

C. Leviticus

The Book of Leviticus contains an extensive list of commands and prohibitions known as the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26). Some of the regulations in this collection are intended for the people of Israel generally (see 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 23:1; 24:1; 25:1), while others are directed specifically to the priests (see 22:1; 23:1). To catch the full effect of these injunctions, one should read at least Leviticus 17–20 in its entirety.

Two passages in this Holiness Code have been understood as specific rejections of male homosexual activity. Both forbid a man to “lie with a male as with a woman” (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).

Strictly speaking it is physically impossible for a man to “lie with a male as with a woman.” Since the biblical text would hardly prohibit something which is impossible in the first place, the meaning of this prohibition must be sought in an other than strictly literal interpretation of it.

The phrase is sufficiently imprecise to make one wonder whether it prohibits homosexual intimacy of any kind, or whether it is aimed at one particular kind of sexual behaviour, namely anal intercourse. Whatever the precise meaning of the phrase, such sexual relations are prohibited in both passages because they are an “abomination” (*to’ebah*).

This Hebrew word carries primarily cultic, rather than moral connotations. Actions which are identified as *to’ebah* are not necessarily morally wrong. Rather, the word refers to behaviour connected with the worship of other gods. The context helps to clarify the matter. Leviticus 18:3 reads, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.”

From this D. S. Bailey infers that the particular behaviour in question is condemned not because it is wrong in itself, but because it was connected with cult prostitution in the heathen temples. It represents lifestyle and worship of the Egyptians.

Bailey insists that we face a very different situation today. Homosexual behaviour as we know it is not associated with pagan religious ritual. Since it does not appear to have been rejected on moral grounds, it can now be tolerated.

Others consider Bailey’s line of reasoning as forced. Karl P. Donfried doubts that one can simply dismiss Leviticus 18 and 20 on the basis that these regulations are cultic. While it may be true that *to’ebah* carries primarily cultic connotations, it is by no means clear that this is consistently so.

Richard Hays observes that the Old Testament “makes no systematic distinction between ritual and moral law.” What is one to do with the prohibition of incest, for instance (Leviticus 18:6–8)? Hays poses what may be more than simply a rhetorical question, “Is that a purity law or a moral law?”

Some of the sexual behaviour forbidden in this context, such as lying with a neighbour’s wife, appears to be more of a moral than of a religious nature (18:20). Yet that behaviour, too, is covered by the term *to’ebah* (18:26 “... do none of these abominations”).

We are left with an uneasy but necessary responsibility. “In each case, the church is faced with the task of

discerning whether Israel’s traditional norms remain in force for the new community of Jesus’ followers,” says Hays. Many of the Levitical commandments have generally been disregarded by the church from the very beginning. In the case of circumcision and dietary practices, the biblical witness offers clear and unambiguous theological rationale for declaring the law obsolete. In regards to other matters, the verdict is not quite so direct.

As far as forbidden sexual relations are concerned, the Holiness Code presents a rather extensive collection. It includes the following: sexual relations with a married woman (18:20; 20:10); male homosexual relations (18:22; 20:13); bestiality (either male or female) (18:23; 29:15f.); sexual relations with one’s father’s wife (20:11); sexual relations with one’s daughter-in-law (20:12); marriage to both a woman and her mother (20:14); sexual relations with a menstruating woman (18:19); and offering of children to Molech (18:21). According to the second list (Lev. 20) all the sexual relations which are identified in it are punishable with death.

“Quoting a law from Leviticus, of course, does not settle the question for Christian ethics,” says Hays.

In antiquity such lists do not clearly differentiate between cultic and moral law. This makes it even more difficult to deal with the fact that we have embedded in the Holiness Code a straightforward and sweeping condemnation of homosexual and related sexual behaviour. The matter is further complicated when we observe that from the very beginning, the church has embraced some of these regulations while declaring others as null and void.

What Do You Think?

Which of the prohibitions in the Holiness Code are still in force and which are not?

How can we decide which of the prohibitions still apply and which do not?

Do these passages compel us to inflict the death penalty on homosexual behaviour?

Do these passages obligate us to treat homosexual behaviour with greater or with less severity than adultery?

D. David and Jonathan

The Old Testament devotes considerable space to the friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18–20; 2 Samuel 1). A perusal of the relevant chapters will help the reader appreciate the depth of the relationship between these two men. Nevertheless, until very recently no one seems to have suspected anything unusual behind this cycle of stories involving David and Jonathan. Even today many, if not most, readers see nothing more in these stories than reflections of a very close friendship between the two men.

However Tom Horner champions a very ingenious theory. In *Jonathan Loved David*, he insists that David and Jonathan were homosexual partners. Horner finds the strongest supporting evidence for his theory in the words of David's lament over the death of Jonathan, "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Samuel 1:26)

Add to that the observation that David took his farewell from Jonathan with the sort of tenderness which he did not display toward his wife—kissing and shedding tears—and one begins to appreciate why some might wonder about the nature of the relationship between these two males.

As far as Horner is concerned, an unbiased reading of the story suggests that David and Jonathan were homosexual lovers. Moreover, Horner feels certain that the nature of such a relationship would have been generally known and understood. The important point is that no one at that time seems to have raised an eyebrow or shaken an accusing finger against the pair, says Horner. From this Horner concludes that there is evidence in the Bible itself which indicates that at least at a certain period in history homosexual behaviour was tolerated in Israel.

In *David the King*, Gladys Schmitt adds that the story of David's seduction of Bathsheba implies that David was actually heterosexual or at least bisexual in orientation. According to these theories the sexual mores of the Davidic era were rather free, at least as far as the affairs of the king were concerned.

Other scholars tend to be skeptical. They feel that Horner is reading too much into the text. Peter Coleman is convinced that "no implication of a homosexual relationship in modern terms is made in the biblical narrative of the friendship between these men." In *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality*, he says that David's

words should be understood metaphorically. They should not be taken to imply that David preferred homosexual sex with Jonathan over heterosexual relations with women. One should rather conclude that David had a strong emotional attachment to Jonathan and that he valued Jonathan's friendship even more highly than he did sexual relations with women. Coming from a man like David, who found Bathsheba irresistible, this would be no small compliment to Jonathan.

There is no hint anywhere that either David or Jonathan had any sort of problem in their heterosexual sex life. David had a large number of wives and concubines (2 Samuel 5:13). Only toward the end of his life is he said to have suffered impotence (1 Kings 1:1–4). Seen from today's perspective, if the two males can be shown to have carried on a homosexual relationship, they would have done so either as persons of heterosexual or at best bi-sexual orientation.

Is there enough evidence to substantiate anything of the sort? Nissinen thinks not. He finds nothing to indicate that David and Jonathan slept together. Their relationship should not be regarded as homosexual but as homosocial in nature. What we see here is "an example of ancient oriental homosociability, which permits even intimate feelings to be expressed," he says.

Nevertheless, people in the gay community are often loathe to relinquish the David–Jonathan texts in a discussion of homosexuality. While they acknowledge that actual sexual intercourse is only a remote possibility in the David–Jonathan cycle, they value these stories as an indication that physical sex is only one and often only a minor part of the homosexual relationships. These stories honour the display of intense affection between two males. The role of genital sex is of lesser consideration in a love relationship. Gay relationships like heterosexual relationships find their true basis in emotional support and affection rather than in the sex act as such.

What Do You Think?

Are we focusing too much on the sex act when we think about intimate same-sex (or heterosexual) relationships?

Would it be more appropriate to think of a celibate homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan?

How would the public be able to distinguish between two males just being close friends and being involved in a celibate homosexual relationship?

Which theory seems more or less convincing to you?

Do you consider it possible that homosexual activity on the part of consenting adults would have been tolerated in ancient Israel? Why, or why not?

E. Ham and Noah

The intriguing little story of Ham who “saw the nakedness” of his father Noah (Genesis 20:29) has recently been explored by Martti Nissinen who pursued questions which no doubt occur to most of us when we read those verses. What Ham did seems so harmless. Yet the curse of his father is so severe! The contrast is all the more striking when one observes that the author of Genesis refrains from moralizing when he relates the story of how Lot’s daughters took advantage of their father and made him impregnate them in order to have descendants (Genesis 19:31–38). Why this double standard?

Nissinen suspects that to “see the nakedness” of someone is actually a euphemism which hides a thought the author does not wish to express. This is an expurgated version, Nissinen suspects. He explores other instances where someone sees or unveils someone’s nudity (i.e. genitals). He concludes that such expressions are “circumlocutions for sexual intercourse, as many translators (the *New English Bible*, among others) actually put it.” Clearly, Ham had had sexual intercourse with his father!

If that is correct, we would have here an instance not only of incest, but of homosexual incest. No wonder the condemnation of Ham, the offender, is so severe. Is there more one can say about this? Nissinen thinks that Ham acted not on the basis of a sexual orientation, nor out of lust, but out of a hunger for power. If this is

so, then the story really does not contribute anything to a discussion of a gay relationship characterized by love, respect, commitment, and devotion.

What Do You Think?

What implications does this story have in discussing sexual behaviour?

Can one be sure of Ham’s motivation, including his sexual orientation?

F. Ruth and Naomi

The beautiful portrayal of loyalty between Ruth and Naomi in the Book of Ruth has caught the imagination of readers throughout the centuries. The words of Ruth which express life-long devotion to her mother-in-law have sometimes become part of the wedding ritual. Although originally spoken by one woman to another, the words seem especially appropriate for a bride and groom to pledge their life-long devotion to one another. “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16b)

Robert Wood first suggested that Ruth and Naomi were involved in a lesbian relationship with one another, in “Homosexual Behavior in the Bible.” Few would press the text to yield evidence of physical sexual intercourse between the two women. Nevertheless, lesbians treasure this story and sometimes use these words of Ruth in a ritual in which two lesbians promise life-long love and devotion to one another.

The very real possibility that the relationship between Ruth and Naomi did not include sexual intercourse can serve as a reminder that sex in the narrow sense is not necessarily the heart and centre of a lesbian relationship, just as it is not necessarily the heart and centre of a heterosexual relationship. The essence of any marriage covenant is love, companionship, emotional support, and life-long commitment to one another’s welfare.

What Do You Think?

Is it appropriate to think of Ruth and Naomi as partners in a lesbian relationship? Why, or why not?

If one thinks of Ruth and Naomi as two women involved in a lesbian relationship, how does that affect one's definition of what is a homosexual relationship?

Since Ruth was eventually married to Boaz and had children, must one therefore think of her as a person with heterosexual orientation?

Assuming that Ruth was indeed a person of heterosexual orientation, is it impossible that she may have had a lesbian relationship with her mother-in-law?

Assuming that the relationship of Ruth and Naomi did not include a physical sexual act, is it possible to think of it as a lesbian relationship, nevertheless?

How would an outsider distinguish between a celibate lesbian relationship and a close friendship between two women?

G. The Creation Stories

Although the creation stories in Genesis do not have anything to say about homosexuality as such, they deserve our attention because they are foundational for the biblical concept of life together in family and in society. These are the passages to which students turn in their search to understand God's will for the ordering of the human family. One also finds the basis for talking about "natural" and "unnatural" in matters of sex and procreation in these stories.

1. The first creation story (Genesis 1:26–31)

Four features stand out in this story: the "image of God" metaphor; God's delegation of dominion to humans; humankind as male and female; and God's command to "be fruitful and multiply."

There is considerable discussion about what constitutes the "image of God." The consensus is that the image of God is not to be identified with sexuality. The biblical concept of God does not dwell on God's gender, be it male or female. Rather, God is the creator, and the one who wields dominion over all of creation.

In the creation story, God commits part of that dual

function to humankind. They are to have dominion over the earth, and as male and female, they are commissioned to have a part in the ongoing act of creation.

2. The second creation story (Genesis 2:18–25)

The second creation story dwells on the concept of partnership and complementarity of humankind as male and female. Their relationship is characterized by mutuality. Male and female are created for partnership and for intimacy. The two are of the same bone and of the same flesh. In fact, they come together to be one flesh. Sexual desire and longing for intimacy are so strong that in order to "cleave" to each other, the man will "leave" his former social group.

According to these stories, one should not think of the image of God in terms of sexual desire and procreation. Nevertheless the call, the vocation, of humankind has important sexual overtones. The exercise of that vocation provides for the satisfaction of two basic human needs: the desire for emotional and sexual fulfillment, and the desire for progeny. Companionship and procreation are thus two very important aspects of God's will for human beings.

These needs are normally fulfilled by one man and one woman in a committed relationship. Such an arrangement is, and will no doubt continue to be, the norm for the human family.

The question is whether deviations from that norm are permissible. It is evident that not all men and women procreate. The biblical story knows of many barren women. It was not known at the time that such barrenness may have less to do with the woman's than with the man's fertility. Be that as it may, while having children is considered a blessing, those who are denied that blessing cannot therefore be said to have reneged on their vocation. As a matter of fact, people like Paul can consider it their vocation, indeed their gift to remain single and to refrain from creating a family.

The question is whether emotional (and sexual) fulfillment is possible within a relationship between one man and one man or one woman and one woman. Can God's plan for humanity be realized in a gay or lesbian relationship? The creation stories make no provisions for such a possibility.

Some Lutheran theologians such as Gilbert Meilaender insist that what matters is not what is possible but what

God intended. God has not made any other provisions and for Meilaender that settles the matter.

What Do You Think?

How important is procreation for the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity? What counsel would you give people who cannot, or have decided not to have children?

Is it a violation of God's will for humanity when individuals decide to remain single or childless?

H. Marriage and Divorce

Having introduced the creation stories into the discussion of homosexuality, one is almost compelled to deal with all the other passages which have to do with marriage and the family. While this is not the place to pursue such questions extensively, what is written in the Bible about divorce is germane to our deliberations.

Faced with the reality of marriage breakdown, the law of Moses legitimated the possibility of divorce and provided for a process which protected the wellbeing and dignity of the partners (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

When Jesus' adversaries broached the subject of divorce, Jesus appealed to the creation story as an indication of God's original intention in the matter. He specifically quoted Genesis 1:27 and interpreted divorce (and remarriage) as a form of adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark. 10:11). Yet Jesus himself seems to have recognized the appropriateness of what Moses had done. Moses had made concessions to the hardness of the human heart (Mark 10:5).

What Do You Think?

Does the issue of divorce have anything to add to our discussion about homosexuality?

Do we need to learn to distinguish between God's plan for humanity and God's accommodation to human weakness?

Does this give us a clue about how to think and act appropriately as regards God's plan for human sexuality?

Study Three

The Message From the New Testament

A. Paul's Injunction to the Romans

The most important biblical text for the study of homosexuality and the church is Romans 1:18–23. This passage is “the only clear and direct” reference to homoeroticism says Martti Nissinen in *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. Here Paul denounces both male and female same-sex behaviour in the context of a lengthy theological argument.

1. Reading Romans 1:18–3:26 in its context

The first three chapters of Romans constitute a comprehensive, carefully-argued line of thought. Paul begins with a fundamental confession of faith (Romans 1:16–17): The gospel is the power of God for salvation. In it is revealed righteousness by faith.

Paul proceeds to explore what this signifies (1:18–3:26). God has been generous to all people, Paul asserts, but people turned away to worship other gods (1:20–23). To this human rebellion God responded by withdrawing. God “gave them up” (1:24; 1:26; 1:28). The result of God’s walking away from idolatrous humanity was that people became enmeshed in a life of doing things that should not be done (1:28).

As evidence of this alienation, Paul presents a long list of adjectives and nouns to describe human depravity, including “every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossip, slander, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (1:29–31). Paul warns that such vices deserve the penalty of death (1:32).

Just in case that the reader is beginning to feel rather smug about the fact that “they” (the Gentiles who worship other gods) incur god’s displeasure, Paul turns to the self-righteous reader, saying in effect, “you are no better than they.” Then Paul explains why this is so. When you judge others you condemn yourself (2:1–5). Thus all people must tremble before the God who “will judge the secret thoughts of all” (2:16).

The point of the whole discourse is that “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (3:10). For all people, Jews and Gentiles, there is only one avenue of escape: the grace of God, freely offered to people who have no claim on it (3:23–24). That brings Paul back to his starting point. The good news is that the grace of God is for all people with no exceptions. This grace of God is received through faith.

This is the message Paul wants to drive home. The heart of his sermon is God’s free gift to all who fall short. The real subject here is justification by grace through faith. Paul talks about morality only to make the point that every human being needs God’s grace.

In describing the human situation apart from God, Paul has evidently not given a complete list of vices. He has only picked some of the more glaring examples of human failure. Even so, Paul’s list is so comprehensive that his main point cannot escape anyone. There is absolutely no person who does not need this free gift of God.

Included in the list of godless humanity’s depravity is a reference to homosexual behaviour (1:26, 27).

2. Exploring the biblical text in detail

It is understandable that Paul does not describe explicitly what kind of sexual practices he regards as evil. He can assume that his readers in Rome know what he is talking about. However we are left to wonder whether Paul speaks about homosexual behaviour as such, or whether he takes aim at specific homosexual practices known to him.

Some scholars such as Robin Scroggs suggest that Paul was thinking of one particular same-sex relationship, namely pederasty. Others such as Richard B. Hays think he refers to sexual relations between adult males of equal status.

Pederasty involves two males of unequal status: an adult and a boy. It is a potentially abusive relationship in which the adult, the dominant partner, tends to take advantage of the youth. Martti Nissinen says that when the young lad reached maturity, he would usually marry and have children, and he might become involved in pederasty again, now as the dominant partner.

On the other hand, if Paul had partners of approximately equal status in mind, the particular relationship he addressed could have been one of prostitution or

promiscuity, or possibly an arrangement by mutual consent.

Nissinen says that in the Greek world, the phenomenon of same-sex relationships was widespread and appeared in many different forms. Approval and disapproval of these manifestations varied. Some were considered natural, some were tolerated, and others were regarded with disdain.

It is unlikely that Paul could have imagined that a same-sex relationship could ever be one of love, mutual respect, devotion, and life-long commitment. If we today understand homosexual relationships as loving, monogamous partnerships, then there is a real question whether Paul has anything to say about the topic at all.

In *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, Derrick Sherwin Bailey says that in the case of the women, the meaning of “exchange natural relations for unnatural” is not unambiguous either. It is not even clear that female–female relationships are meant. Bailey thinks that Paul has in mind those unconventional forms of intercourse between a man and a woman which Judaism generally rejected because they prevented, or were thought to prevent conception. If that is the case, then Paul may not refer to lesbian behaviour at all.

In the case of the men, there is no doubt that Paul was thinking of same sex relationships. The context in verse 27 makes that quite clear. Paul objects against “men committing shameless acts with men.” But are these men gay or straight?

Bailey was the first to argue that Paul should be understood to reject only that homosexual behaviour which constitutes exchanging of what is natural for what is unnatural. He argues that for a homosexual, it is natural to engage in homosexual behaviour, while it is unnatural for such a man to engage in heterosexual behaviour. For a gay man to exchange what is natural for what is unnatural would be to pretend to be straight. Thus, according to Bailey, Paul only rejects homosexual behaviour practised by heterosexuals.

Bailey is often accused of committing an anachronism. Bailey’s detractors insist that Paul would never have made such a distinction between gay and straight because this is a modern concept. It would never have occurred to Paul that a person could be gay by nature. Paul condemned every occurrence of same-sex behaviour as unnatural.

Precisely, answers Bailey. Paul cannot be expected to say anything positive or negative about a reality of which he was not aware. As far as Paul was concerned, the only natural sexual relationship is a heterosexual one. This only shows that Paul actually addressed only one side of the issue.

In *Making Moral Decisions*, Paul Jersild states the matter succinctly, “The passage in Romans clearly assumes that it is heterosexuals who are engaged in homosexual activity as the result of a perverted and lustful desire.” Paul clearly assumes that the men gave up natural relations with women. “Paul was not aware of what we today call inversion, or the fact that, for whatever reasons, certain people are constitutionally oriented toward the same sex in the expression of their erotic desire.”

The people Paul talks about are heterosexuals who engage in sexual relations with other heterosexuals. That is what Paul considers perverse. This means that Paul does not address the real issue in our discussion.

In any case, we need to remember that Paul is not really talking about ethical matters, either homosexual or heterosexual. The subject matter in Romans 1 is justification by grace through faith.

3. Two important reminders

First, the Romans passage, important as it is, is only one of a number of texts to be considered. Biblical passages must not be interpreted in isolation. What Paul writes to the Romans needs to be seen side by side with Paul’s other letters, with the entire New Testament—indeed with Bible as a whole.

Second, each biblical passage must first be interpreted within its own context. One needs to note carefully that the purpose of Romans 1–3 is not to establish how we are to deal with particular human behaviour patterns. The point of the immediate context is best summarized in Romans 2:1, “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others.”

What Do You Think?

How do you understand the term “unnatural relations” in the Romans passage?

Is Paul referring to lesbian or heterosexual relations, or both? What persuades you to think so?

Does your own careful reading of Romans 1:26f. in its context lead you to conclude that one should differentiate between “less sinful” and “more sinful” human behaviour?

Does such a distinction help or hinder an appropriate understanding of the Romans passage? Why, or why not?

If Paul had been familiar with Christian gays who have made a life-long covenant with each other to live together responsibly, do you think Paul might have approved? What makes you think that he would or would not?

Whether or not Romans 1 pronounces judgment against homosexual behaviour is “a painfully difficult question” according to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America study handbook *Talking Together as Christians about Homosexuality*. What do you think?

B. Paul’s Advice to the Corinthians

1. Reading 1 Corinthians 5:1–6:20 in its context

In these two chapters, Paul expresses his surprise and consternation over the fact that in the Corinthian congregation, there is evidence of immorality which would make even a pagan blush. For example, Paul has heard that a man is living with his father’s wife (5:1)!

Paul knows very well that the Corinthian Christians are a minority surrounded by non-Christians. Therefore they cannot avoid daily contact and dealing with immoral people (5:9f.) such as the greedy, robbers, and idolaters. Paul does not even consider it his business to judge such immoral non-Christians. That is God’s prerogative (5:12–13).

However standards should be significantly higher in the Christian Church than in the surrounding society. Paul advises the Corinthian Christians to expel from their congregation people who are guilty of immorality or greed, idolatry, drunkenness, or robbery (5:11,13). Paul also considers it a disgrace that Christians should

take legal action against other Christians before a non-Christian court (6:1–6). Ideally, he feels, Christians should not go to court at all against a Christian brother or sister. They should prefer to suffer injustice from other Christians rather than resort to legal process to procure justice for themselves (6:7–8).

Speaking in the first person, Paul affirms that Christians are free people. They are not subject to a law which commands them to do one thing and forbids them to do another. However liberty does not mean license to do whatever feels good. The Corinthian Christians should carefully consider what is beneficial (6:12).

Furthermore, Christians should remember who they are. They were washed, sanctified, and justified (6:11). Their bodies are members of Christ (6:15), temples of the Holy Spirit (6:19). Therefore they should shun anything that interferes with their close union with Christ. Paul warns the Corinthians specifically against consorting with a prostitute (6:16f.).

2. Exploring the biblical text in detail

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, Paul presents a list of the kinds of people who, he says, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Who is excluded? Bible translators evidently had a difficult time attempting to render the Greek text in adequate English terms.

When *Six Studies on Homosexuality*, the original material for this study, was published in 1985, the *Revised Standard Version (RSV)* was the English translation of choice. Since that time the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)* was published and adopted by the ELCIC for use in its study documents. A reader who is restricted to the use of translations may be puzzled to discover that the various versions paint significantly different pictures.

According to the *RSV* translation, Paul’s list includes “the unrighteous, the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers” (6:9f.).

However the *NRSV* translation of the list speaks of “wrong doers, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers.”

How is it that the *NRSV* translation speaks of “male prostitutes” and “sodomites” where “homosexuals” is used in the *RSV* translation?

a) Who are the “homosexuals?”

We are particularly concerned with two unusual Greek words. The word “homosexuals” (6:9) in the *RSV* translation actually represents two Greek words, namely *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) and *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*). There is considerable discussion about what these two words mean. Already the second edition of the *RSV* substitutes “sexual perverts” for “homosexuals,” and a comparison of other English translations shows how difficult it is to determine the precise meaning of the words in question. For example, the *New International Version* translates the two Greek terms with “male prostitutes” and “homosexual offenders,” respectively.

i) *Malakoi*

The first of this pair of words also occurs in Matthew 11:8 and Luke 7:25. In both places the word *μαλακοι* (*malakoi*) refers to soft clothing. In neither place can one detect any sexual connotation or overtones. Some scholars infer from this that in 1 Corinthians 6:9 the word is devoid of sexual implications as well, and simply describes some men (the adjective is masculine in this verse) as “soft.” However three observations speak against this interpretation.

First, is it conceivable that Paul would want to say that “soft” men will be excluded from the Kingdom of God? What is there so despicable about being “soft?” Surely, Paul is referring to something much more serious than a personality trait.

Second, it is well known that in every language most words can be used in more than one sense. A given word can mean one thing in one sentence and quite something else in another. One must pay careful attention to the context. In English, too, the word “soft” can carry widely divergent connotations. A soft heart is a compassionate heart, but a soft head is something quite different.

Third, in secular Greek literature the word *malakoi* can have sexual connotations and often refers to men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually. *The Jerusalem Bible* evidently understands the word in 1 Corinthians 6:9 in this sense when it offers the translation “catamites,” a word which *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines as “a boy who is having a sexual relationship with a man.”

The *NRSV* translates *malakoi* as “male prostitutes,” thus assuming that Paul was rejecting the commercialization of sex. According to this translation, the passage would address the exploitative use of sex. It would have little or nothing to do with a caring, loving, and committed homosexual relationship. In fact, this particular word might not refer to same-sex relationships at all.

ii) *Arsenokoitai*

The second of the Greek words in 1 Corinthians 6:9, *αρσενοκοιται* (*arsenokoitai*), does not occur in Greek literature before Paul. Literally it means “men-sleepers,” or “men who sleep (with men),” suggesting sexual intercourse, but without specifying the precise nature of the sexual behaviour that is meant. Boswell proposed the translation “active male prostitutes.”

The *NRSV* takes *arsenokoitai* to mean sodomites. In common language sodomy is generally understood to refer to a specific sort of sexual intercourse between males, involving penetration of one male by another. “Some suggest the apostle had in mind certain public spectacles, as when soldiers sodomized prisoners of war in public in order to humiliate the enemy,” according to Jersild. Nissinen documents the practice with pictographic and inscriptional evidence.

Richard Hays agrees with Robin Scroggs that the term *arsenokoitai* is created by Paul himself in deliberate allusion to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, two passages which in rabbinic literature are generally understood to refer to homosexual intercourse. From this Hays concludes that “Paul’s use of the term presupposes and reaffirms the Holiness Code’s condemnation of homosexual acts.”

Scroggs has sought to read the two Greek terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as references to pederasty, a practice in which an older male enjoys the sexual favours of a younger male. In that relationship *malakoi* is taken to refer to the passive younger person and *arsenokoitai* to the active older and controlling male.

Others have accepted this conclusion, observing that originally the practice of pederasty was tied to status, serving to initiate boys into adult society. According to this interpretation, Paul is warning the Corinthians against a sexual practice that is potentially exploitative

and degrading to young males. If what we today understand as a gay relationship is not a mode of exploitation but one involving adult consent, then, according to Scroggs and others, Paul's injunctions would not apply to it.

While William Petersen agrees that the term *arsenokoitai* was coined by Paul as a deliberate allusion to the two Leviticus passages, he rejects the RSV translation "homosexuals," as well as Boswell's translation "active male prostitutes." He argues that Luther's translation "Knabenschänder" (boy abusers) is fairly close to the mark, although an identification with pederasty should be avoided as well.

Petersen bases his argument on an examination of two patristic sources from the second and third century which refer to Zeus and his relationship with the shepherd boy Ganymede as the archetype of one who engages in *arsenokoitia* (this not the word *arsenokoitai* and means "sexual activity between males").

Of course, according to Greek mythology, neither Zeus nor Ganymede were homosexuals. Nor was their relationship one of prostitution. Rather, observes Petersen, "Zeus is the model of the healthy male in Greco-Roman antiquity who was sexually aroused by handsome boys and pretty girls alike," and who seduced both with equal relish.

Thus Petersen concludes that the term *arsenokoitai* has nothing to do with gays on the one hand or prostitutes on the other. It refers to sexual activity between males who find it equally attractive and satisfying to have sexual relations with males as well as females. In antiquity the concept of sexual orientation was unknown. All "healthy" males were considered "naturally" attracted in both directions, says Petersen.

Such persons (most closely akin to those at the approximate mid-point on the Kinsey scale) would be classified today as bisexual or ambisexual. The Greek term would have little or nothing to do with what we today understand as homosexuality.

b) What is meant by "will not inherit the Kingdom of God?"

Paul warns his Corinthian readers that people who keep doing what these Greek words describe cannot hope to receive God's ultimate acceptance. Assuming

that the two Greek words mean homosexuals, a literal interpretation of the text would compel us to affirm that gays are unacceptable to God. A terrifying prospect, to be sure! Of course one dare not stop there. What is said about the queers applies equally to thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and others (1. Corinthians 6:9-10). The list can be amplified even further if we draw on Paul's letter to the Galatians which contains a similar list of offenses (Galatians 5:19-21) which exclude the offenders listed there from God's eternal favour.

A literal interpretation of these texts would create serious theological difficulties since Paul asserts again and again that we are justified not by what we do or don't do, but only by trusting in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:21-26 and elsewhere).

Furthermore, Paul acknowledges that although the Corinthians have been washed and justified and sanctified (6:11), nevertheless there is still a great deal of immorality to be found among them (5:1-6:20). Thus it is clear that Paul does not think of Christians as morally pure people.

The phrase "will not have a part in ... " is found in almost identical contexts in rabbinic literature quite frequently. Judaism was accustomed to the phrase "people who do such and such shall not have a part in the world to come." The rabbis said this sort of thing as a way of warning people not to engage in certain activities. This was their way of saying emphatically, "Don't do such and such. God doesn't like it!" The rabbis did not mean to imply that God saves people by works, nor that God would not forgive certain deeds, but they did mean to say that there are things God frowns upon.

Maybe we can deduce from this that when Paul says "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9), he means to say no more (but also no less) than, "stop doing these things! God does not approve!"

Obviously, Paul insists that such behaviour should not be taken lightly. Such things are not in keeping with life in the Spirit.

Paul's words "and this is what some of you used to be" (1 Corinthians 6:11) indicate that people guilty of all sorts of things on the list can and did successfully change their behaviour. Some interpreters claim

that according to Paul's own words, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* can and did change from their former way of life.

Even the most ardent promoter of homosexuality carefully distinguishes between homosexual orientation and homosexual behaviour, and agrees that the latter is subject to change. However the question is whether such a change is mandatory for Christians.

What Do You Think?

In 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 is Paul speaking about gays and lesbians at all? In what way can these verses apply to Christians who have committed themselves to each other in a same-sex relationship of genuine love?

Does 1 Corinthians indicate that in Paul's opinion gays and lesbians, drunkards and thieves can be justified? If so, does he specify how this happens? Does Paul regard *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as worse offenders than robbers and adulterers?

Why, do you think, are we expending such energy on exploring the meaning of *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* while giving so little attention to such terms as "wrongdoers" and "greedy" which appear side by side with those two Greek terms?

C. Instructions to Timothy

For a better understanding of 1 Timothy, it may be helpful to ask whether these words represent the word of God *as it came to the Church during the generation after Paul*. This may also caution us to allow for the possibility that God may not necessarily say the same things to every generation.

There is considerable evidence which suggests that the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) were not written by Paul but by someone from the Pauline school and that they originated some time after the death of the Apostle. While the matter is not of serious significance for our discussion, it would help to explain why in 1 Timothy, we find a viewpoint expressed that differs noticeably from that of Paul's so-called undisputed letters.

The writer of this letter takes issue with *teachers of the law* whose message is contrary to sound teaching. The

author maintains that the law is good and that it is intended not for the innocent, but for the lawless. The purpose of the law is thus to accuse and to correct the disobedient.

In 1 Timothy we find a list of vices similar to Paul's lists, but these vices are rejected, not because they are "unnatural" (Romans 1:26f.), but because they are "contrary to the sound teaching" (1 Timothy 1:10). Those who practise these vices are now threatened with the law (1 Timothy 1:9) rather than with exclusion from the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 5:21).

The list includes "the lawless and disobedient, ... the godless and sinful, the unholy and profane, ... those who kill their father and mother ... murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching" (1 Timothy 1:9–10).

It is the word "sodomites" which catches our attention. The English word "sodomite" is ambiguous. Often it designates persons who engage in anal intercourse, but it can also refer to bestiality or to homosexuality generally. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines sodomy as "anal intercourse performed between two males or a male and a female."

In our context it is not clear what precisely the word is intended to mean. It is noteworthy that the original Greek text has the same word, *arsenokoitai*, here as it does in 1 Corinthians 6:9, which has been discussed in detail above.

In *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, James B. Nelson emphasizes that in neither of these lists (1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10) are homosexual acts singled out for special condemnation. Profane persons, liars, perjurers, murderers and sodomites are all lumped together for equal treatment.

O. K. Storaasli, a former professor at Lutheran Seminary in Saskatoon, reminds us that "All people need the message of the grace of God, whether heterosexual, or homosexual, whether idolaters or worshipers of the true God ... all Gentiles are guilty before God and need his forgiveness, just as do all Jews also, and homosexuals are only one of many examples which are caught in the net ... Justification and new life is for all who through faith claim Christ as their "mercy-seat" or Deliverer.

What Do You Think?

Sodomy is mentioned side by side with vices which are relatively common, if not minor. If queer behaviour is indeed included in this list, is it regarded as one of the more or one of the less serious offenses? Should one be more concerned about gay and lesbian behaviour than about lying, for instance?

Do you think that Paul would insist that a homosexual can be justified only if he or she stops engaging in homosexual behaviour? Do you think Paul would insist that a gossip must stop gossiping before God would accept such a person?

Paul counselled the expulsion of a man who lived with his father's wife. Do you think Paul would have expelled practicing homosexuals from the church? Do you think Paul would have excommunicated people with a drinking problem? In these texts, what inclines you to think one way or the other?

If you think that all of the behaviour patterns in these lists are equally reprehensible, would you agree that we are today making too much fuss about homosexuality and too little about the others?

D. Jesus and Homosexuals

Experts in the history of culture of the Greco-Roman world inform us that homosexuality was an ever-present phenomenon. For instance, it is known that every one of the first 14 Roman emperors carried on an intimate homosexual relationship with his chosen male companion. The Greek and Roman poets extol the pleasures of homosexual love. It appears that homosexuality was accepted as a matter of course, although it was often regarded with amusement or condescension.

It was not at all unusual for a Greek man to have his "boy" and a young lad who had not been chosen for a lover by an older man might even develop feelings of inferiority and might come to doubt his own physical attractiveness. Paul Veyne, in *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, reports, "Nearly anyone can enjoy sensual pleasure with a member of the same sex, and pederasty was not at all uncommon in tolerant antiquity. Many men of basically heterosexual bent used boys for sexual purposes. It was proverbially held that sex with boys procures a tranquil pleasure unruffling to the soul, whereas passion for a woman plunges a free

man into unendurable slavery." However when a man married, he was expected to be faithful to his wife and to give up former homosexual relations.

Given such a state of affairs, it appears strange that Jesus is not known to have said anything about the subject. In the absence of concrete evidence, one can only speculate why this may be so. Several explanations have been suggested. For example, the subject may have been so distasteful to Jesus that he would not even mention it.

It could be possible that there actually was a story in oral circulation which told about Jesus and a gay person. Such a story might have been lost simply because none of the gospel writers picked it up. Something like this actually did happen in the case of Jesus and the adulterous woman (John 7:53–8:11). This story might have been lost altogether had it not been introduced into the gospel of John by a later editor.

According to that story, Jesus saved the adulterous woman from being stoned to death, the punishment prescribed by Moses in the law. He reminded her accusers that they themselves were not without sin. Turning to the woman he assured her, "Neither do I condemn you," and admonished her not to continue in her former way of life. Maybe Jesus would have acted similarly in the case of a gay person. In the absence of concrete evidence, we can only speculate.

1. The centurion's servant

The Greek word *παῖς* (*pais*) that is usually translated as "servant" often means "boy" in the original Greek. Tom Horner, in the Summer 1978 issue of *Insight: A Quarterly of Gay Catholic Opinion*, supposes that the servant of the centurion at Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–13) was the centurion's means for sexual satisfaction. Why else, Horner asks, would the Roman officer have been so concerned about the mere boy?

Horner suggests that Jesus no doubt would have been aware of the sexual liaison between the centurion and his "boy." Yet Jesus healed the boy without raising a question and so restored him to the enjoyment of the Roman officer.

2. The young man who ran away naked

In Mark 14:51–52, a lightly clothed young man was following Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus' arrest, and he ran away naked. Some

suggest that he may have been surprised in a same-sex encounter. Why else, these proponents ask, was he wearing only an outer garment? Others may well argue that the evidence is circumstantial and that there are simpler interpretations.

3. The beloved disciple

There are even suggestions that the relationship between Jesus and the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 19:26; 21:7, 20) had homosexual overtones. Those who suggest this admit that there is practically no evidence which hints at a sexual relationship between Jesus and this beloved disciple.

They emphasize that the physical sex act can be a very minor component of a same-sex relationship. As in a heterosexual relationship, other things such as love, care, compassion, companionship, respect and concern for the partner’s welfare are much more important.

This can remind us that homosexuality encompasses a wide range of behaviour. Not everyone who is involved in a queer relationship necessarily engages in sexual intercourse. Something similar applies in the case of heterosexual relationships.

Nissinen examines the various theories about Jesus’ marital status and possible sexual liaisons with such persons as Mary Magdalene or the beloved disciple and concludes, “There is hardly anything to learn about Jesus’ sexual life.” All the evidence is circumstantial and scanty.

E. An Early Church Decision

Those who claim that the Bible mandates the prohibition of gay and lesbian behaviour, sometimes cite Acts 15:28–29 as additional evidence. In that place Luke writes, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication” (Acts 15:28–29).

These verses seem much too ambiguous, however, to allow us to make any sweeping assertions regarding queer behaviour. The term πορνεία (*porneia*) is too general to be helpful in this discussion. While it has been translated as “fornication” in the *NRSV*, “unchastity” in the *RSV*, and “sexual immorality” in the *NIV*, it might also mean prostitution. The precise question before us is whether or not homosexuality, as we understand the phenomenon today, is to be regarded as morally reprehensible.

To be consistent, those who cite this passage as scriptural mandate against homosexuality, should be equally concerned about prohibiting the consumption of such products as blood sausage and the modern equivalent of “meat sacrificed to idols.” With regard to the latter, the Acts passage would need to be interpreted in light of Paul’s very different advice regarding the subject. As we know, Paul had no qualms about the eating of food sacrificed to idols, as long as such eating did not offend the consciences of weaker Christians (1 Corinthians 8).

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the silence of the Gospels with respect to Jesus’ attitude toward queers?

Are there enough clues in the text to suggest that the centurion at Capernaum was engaged in same-sex relations with his servant?

Do you think that these various passages taken together allow us to say what may have been Jesus’ attitude toward homosexuals? Why or why not?

From your knowledge of how Jesus dealt with prostitutes and sinners, with scribes and Pharisees, how do you think Jesus would have related to gays and lesbians?

Do you consider it possible that Jesus might have been easier on the homosexuals than he was on the self-righteous religious authorities?

Study Four

How Does One Apply Biblical Teaching?

A. Introduction

All Christians share the belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. We all turn to it to be challenged and inspired by it, and to expose ourselves to the divine perspective. For the church the Bible is normative. That is to say, the church places itself under the authority of scripture. But what sort of authority are we talking about? And how does the biblical authority impinge on our life?

In 21st century North America, we live worlds and ages removed from the time when the biblical writers addressed very specific problems and questions of their own day and within the setting of their own culture. When we discover that whenever God speaks God addresses a particular historical situation, we experience that as a stumbling block. One Old Testament professor from Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod used to call it “the scandal of particularity.”

It will not do for us to try to “play first century,” as Krister Stendahl put it. It would be futile to think that we can transport ourselves back in time by some twenty centuries or more, and pretend that the world has remained static throughout all of those ages. Not only do we speak a different language, we also follow different cultural conventions, and we espouse different social values.

When we have reasonably well established what a given Bible passage may have said to the people to whom it was first addressed, our task of interpreting the text is not finished. A major step remains to be completed. We now need to determine what that text has to say to us.

In order to do that responsibly, we must reflect carefully about the nature and purpose of the Bible, about revelation and inspiration, about law and gospel, about the purpose and authority of scripture. What does it mean to confess that scripture is inspired and the only norm for faith and life?

When we come face to face with a particularly vexing problem, we often discover that what we had thought were closed questions need to be reopened. We all believe that scripture is the norm for faith and life, but we do not all understand that concept in the same way.

1. What is the Bible all about?

In his characteristically quaint way, Luther likened the Bible to the cradle in which we find the Christ. We have deep respect for the Bible as the vehicle in which we find the Christ. But we do not worship the cradle. To do so would be “bibliolatry,” another form of idolatry.

Luther cautioned his contemporaries not to make Christ into a new Moses, and not to make the gospel into a new law. In this admonition Luther echoes the words of Paul himself. “Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified” (Romans 10:4). However it must be acknowledged that even within Lutheranism, there is no total consensus on what that may mean in practice.

The use of the Bible to address moral questions is far from an easy task. In his *New Testament Ethics*, Richard Hays reports about a conference held at Duke University in the Spring of 1995, at which some of the leading Christian ethicists tried to achieve a consensus about how the Bible functions in the life of the church when ethical issues are being discussed. Hays himself came away disillusioned. A consensus had not been achieved. Equally competent scholars had recently published impressive works in the area of biblical ethics, but their approaches and their methodologies differed so significantly that the scholars occasionally lapsed into acrimonious debate.

At the risk of oversimplification, basically two opposite views have commended themselves to honest and sincere students of the Bible. There are also various gradations between these two extremes.

At the one extreme, people think of the Bible as a collection of eternal truths which must forever remain inviolate. According to this view the Bible identifies moral absolutes. Because it tells us what is always right and what is always wrong, one can turn to the Bible in order to discover what is to be done under any given circumstance. The Bible is essentially a code of laws. Just do what it says!

At the other extreme, people contend that the Bible’s main aim is to assure us that God loves us as we are, warts and all, and that God justifies sinners. It does not deal in moral absolutes at all. It does not tell us what is always right or wrong. It is not a law. The Bible is essentially the good news of God’s grace. Just hear what it promises!

While most of us would probably not agree totally with

either one, there is a great deal of truth in both of these positions. Probably we would want to say that the Bible is a record of how God dealt with various people under various circumstances over a long period of history. It documents God's steadfast love to a wayward people, and it calls upon those people to express their gratitude in worship of God and in service to the neighbour. The Bible challenges those people to maintain high standards of responsibility.

It is clear that the message of God's grace goes hand in hand with ethical exhortation. What is not so clear, however, is how one becomes attuned to the tenor of that exhortation and how one picks up its tune. What is the *cantus firmus*? Where is the melody? Most of us will probably find ourselves somewhere between the two extremes of "do what it says!" and "hear what it promises!"

B. The Bible and Morality

All Christians agree that the Bible has a great deal to say about ethical behaviour. The prophets were deeply concerned with the welfare of the poor and the oppressed. They almost despaired of the heartlessness of those who wielded economic and political power.

Similar concerns are evident in the words and deeds of Jesus. He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25). Jesus' ministry was devoted primarily to the marginalized in society.

In *Making Moral Decisions: A Christian Approach to Personal and Social Ethics*, Paul Jersild identifies at least five different sets of presuppositions with which Christians have approached the Bible in their endeavour to pick up the tune of the Biblical mandate.

1) ***The Bible provides a moral code.*** Those who subscribe to this view generally hold that the moral imperatives in the Bible are clear, consistent, and comprehensive. One can appeal to the Bible for guidance on every conceivable situation in life. On any given issue, the Bible says the same thing everywhere. It is now the obligation of Christians to implement what the Bible says.

2) ***The Bible provides moral direction through the example of people of faith.*** According to this view, one must look for moral principles rather than for specific moral commands. One gleans these moral principles from reading the biblical stories about people of faith.

3) ***The Bible's moral impact flows from God's involvement in history as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.*** According to this view, it is the nature of God which provides moral direction. For guidance in moral dilemmas one does not search for individual biblical passages which may be relevant to the question at hand. Rather one asks what is the responsible thing to do for people who know themselves to have been created, redeemed, reconciled, and sanctified by God.

4) ***The Bible reveals God's plan of salvation, while our moral response depends on our particular church heritage.*** This view emphasizes that what one regards as morally responsible at any one point depends to a large extent on the deliberation of the church, based on the best exegetical insight of the day.

Arland J. Hultgren illustrates this claim by citing the 1925 ruling of the Augustana Lutheran Church on divorce and remarriage ("Being Faithful to the Scriptures: Romans 1:26-27 as a Case in Point" in *Word & World* XIV, Number 3, Summer 1994). He reproduces the relevant sentences from the 1925 document: "The Synod steadfastly adheres to the doctrine in the Bible ... that marriage cannot be annulled or dissolved except by death, adultery, or ... desertion" and "The Synod ... solemnly cautions its pastors against officiating at the marriage of divorced persons, except in the case of the innocent party, when legal divorce has been granted on the ground of adultery or ... desertion"

Since this ruling was initially formulated, the church has shifted a great deal in how one applies and implements this teaching of scripture. Today we are convinced that there is no such thing as an innocent party in marriage breakdown. We are all guilty and in need of forgiveness. Today's church is convinced that God not only grants forgiveness, but graciously offers the opportunity to make another attempt to create a committed and lifelong relationship with a new partner.

5) ***The Bible does not in fact give us a unified, coherent basis for moral life.*** This view observes that readers often use the Bible to confirm their own pre-conceived notions of what the Scriptures say about the moral life. One should recognize that at different times and under differing situations, not only does the Bible give differing moral directives on a given subject, but that morality is not even at the heart and centre of the biblical witness. The acknowledgment

of one's sinfulness and the assurance that Christ has died to reconcile sinners to God is more important than moral behaviour.

Jersild argues that none of these five views are either completely right or completely wrong. He maintains that the Bible is not primarily concerned with morality, although it does contain great moral substance.

People of faith must struggle to find answers which are both faithful to scripture and appropriate to the needs of the present day. When the Bible does offer moral imperatives, these commands should not be regarded as the final word for today, says Jersild. For example, rules relating to male-female relationships need to remember that we are not living in the Roman Empire. The structure of the family, particularly the status of women, has changed greatly since then. Thus the Bible does not provide ready-made answers to all of today's problems.

We must recognize that there is no one perfect way for implementing the will of God. We deceive ourselves when we think that we can live in such a way that we "have no sin." One should not just pick and choose any one of these five approaches. Rather, one must be aware of the merit, but also of the inadequacy of all of these approaches.

What Do You Think?

Which view of biblical authority is closest to your own? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this position? What things in other positions do you think have some value and might be helpful?

C. The New Commandment

While it is rather simplistic to summarize the Christian life in terms of one concept, self-giving love certainly assumes central place in it. The great double commandment (Matthew 22:36-39/Mark 12:28-31) clearly states the essence of the law. Love God above all things and love your neighbour as yourself. According to John (13:34), the new commandment Jesus gives is "that you love one another." According to Paul (Galatians 6:2), the law of Christ is fulfilled when Christians bear one another's burdens.

The earliest known Christian confession (Philippians 2:5-8) presents Jesus as the one who embodies God's goodness and serves as an example of the God-pleasing life. Jesus freely relinquishes personal advantage and takes upon himself the pains and shortcomings of a fallen humanity. Care for one's neighbour assumes central place in the Christian life (Philippians 2:1-5).

1. Love and making moral decisions

The principle of self-giving love clearly delineates the ethical direction of the Christian life. However Jesus rarely gives specific instructions on what is to be done in any particular circumstance. Evidently the Christian community must find ways itself to determine what may be the most responsible course of action in any given moral dilemma.

Paul (Philippians 4:8) encouraged the Philippians to think about "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious . . ." The ethics of the gospel asks Christians to act in a way that promotes the welfare of the neighbour.

John of Damascus may be helpful here. He distinguished between the "antecedent" and the "consequent" will of God. In the case of divorce, the principle would affirm that God's (antecedent) will is that there be no divorce. Since the realities of life are inescapable, it is the (consequent) will of God that divorce proceedings be made as humane and as healing as possible.

2. Love and law in the Christian life

Christians cannot be content with a morality that is based on law. The law can only specify what are "the minimal requirements for civilized life," says Jersild. However to recognize the centrality of love in the Christian life does not mean that there is no longer a place for moral rules and regulations. Law "remains essential to the Christian life, even if it is not the distinguishing feature of Christian morality." It is the nature of love to be self-giving. As such, love "will often move the Christian to do more than the law requires."

In his commentary on Galatians, Hans Dieter Betz distinguishes between three kinds of ethics—the Jewish, the Hellenistic and the Pauline. He characterizes the first-century Jewish ethic as an ethic of avoidance. Here the object is to refrain from breaking the law. Betz calls the first-century Hellenistic ethic an ethic of

achievement. The object here is to strive to live up to the highest moral ideals.

By contrast, Betz argues, the ethic of Paul, and not only of Paul, is an ethic of grace, that is to say, an ethic of response. According to this ethic, the Christian life is motivated by gratitude for God's abundant gifts granted freely in Jesus Christ. The object here is not the meticulous observance of individual rules. Rather, it is expected that Christians who have received such good gifts from God's gracious hands will find ways to pass on the grace they have received.

Jersild says the challenge is that one responds in a way that is responsible. This means that for Christians it is both their opportunity as well as their responsibility to God and to their neighbour to express their gratitude in loving devotion to the neighbour.

D. The Spirit as Ethical Power and Norm

The Spirit provides the motivation as well as the energy and norm for ethical action. Paul distinguishes carefully between "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:18-21) and the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). In that context he makes it clear that the active agent is the Spirit, not human will or strength. If there is any good in what we do, it is to the credit of the Spirit who works within us, both to will and to do what is good.

Thus the Spirit opens up a whole new world of opportunity which the law cannot restrict (Galatians 5:23b "against such things there is no law"). Thus Christians are called upon to let the Spirit guide them and energize them to do what is appropriate under ever new conditions and circumstances.

The fruit of the Spirit has clearly recognizable features. The guidelines are specific without being precise. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22f.), these are the world-embracing parameters within which the Spirit's power unfolds.

Paul leaves it to the Christian community, guided as it is by the Holy Spirit, to decide what in any given circumstance may constitute the course of love and faithfulness. Paul can trust the Body of Christ to determine what in a given situation may be honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent or worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8).

Before one can hope to act in a morally responsible manner, one must have an adequate understanding of the facts of the matter. Only when one understands the situation can one hope to be able to determine the pastorally appropriate and necessary course of action. Christians need to inform themselves about all aspects of the subject before presuming to give a biblical as well as a pastoral response to the moral questions we face.

E. Facing Moral Dilemmas

Often Christians face moral problems for which there is no one right solution. They discover, as Luther's colleague Melancton did, that everything we do is sin. In such situations, Luther advised his friend to sin boldly, while praying even more boldly and trusting in the forgiveness of God. It is not required that we be right, but that we be faithful.

In Jesus' parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the man with one talent was not criticized for getting a less than perfect return for his money. Rather, he earned his master's censure because he chose to play it safe. He was so afraid of the hard master that he became paralyzed. The point is precisely that God is not a hard taskmaster. Therefore one can risk investing oneself and losing the investment.

F. What if There Is No Word From the Lord?

Sometimes we must face moral issues which the Bible did not address, most likely because they were not issues at the time. We look in vain for answers to the problems posed by genetic engineering, space travel, cloning, reproductive technology, and the like. In these matters the Christian community, guided by the Spirit, can deal with the new challenges in innovative ways which are more or less in keeping with the spirit of the gospel.

In our exegetical studies, we have considered the possibility (many would consider it a certainty) that when the Bible speaks about same-sex relations it is not talking about what we today understand by the term "homosexuality." If that is so, then we must grant that the Bible does not address the subject with which we are concerned today. If so, we have no word from the Lord on the questions that perturb us. What are we to do under such circumstances?

In an unpublished 1999 essay "Homosexuality: A Study Paper on Biblical/Theological Considerations," David Schroeder, a Mennonite theologian, points out that Paul

faced two situations which called for moral decision in matters that had not been adequately addressed in any of his sources. Neither the Old Testament, nor the known words of Jesus, nor the tradition of the Apostles, yielded the sort of directive that would be necessary to deal with some of the issues that arose in those early days after the resurrection of Jesus. Paul was compelled to deal with each situation in his own way. The way in which these two situations were handled may give us some clues about how the matter of homosexuality in the church might be dealt with today.

i) Application

In the first situation which called for the application of the gospel (1 Corinthians 8:1–13), Paul affirmed that Christians are free to eat meat sacrificed to idols. But he added an important qualifier. The Corinthians were to refrain from such eating if they found themselves in the presence of Christians who were likely to take offense at such an interpretation of the biblical tradition. Schroeder concludes that we are “to take the situation into account when applying the gospel to life situations.”

ii) New understanding

The second situation involved a new understanding of the nature of the gospel. On the mission field, Paul had received the special insight that “the nature of the gospel was such that it did not require Gentile Christians to be circumcised.” This was such a departure from tradition that Paul’s decision needed to be ratified by a special gathering of the church at Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15, Galatians 2) was called to deal with the issue. It can provide a useful model for addressing unanticipated moral dilemmas in the church. In this case the oral tradition about Jesus was insufficient and scripture was not clear. The church had to devise a new *modus operandi*. The matter was referred to trusted leaders of varying persuasion. These church leaders gathered and presented their various conflicting convictions. The assembly evidently listened, debated, and prayed, and eventually reached a consensus, confirmed by a handshake.

When the leaders published their conclusions in the form of a circular letter, they felt justified to say that the new ruling “seemed good to the Holy

Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). They were confident that the Holy Spirit had led them to reach the consensus which had materialized after what must have been a lengthy and heated debate.

Especially noteworthy here is the fact that the consensus left room for two practices to co-exist in the church. The council legitimized a “gospel of the circumcision” (which evidently allowed the Jewish custom of circumcision to continue among Jewish Christians) and a “gospel of the uncircumcision,” evidently legitimizing the practice of not circumcising new converts on the Gentile mission field.

In reaching this decision, the early church was in fact speaking a new word to the people of God. In his article “A new Word on Homosexuality? Isaiah 56:1–8 as Case Study” in *Word & World*, Frederick Gaiser suggests that the church may have the right and the obligation to speak in such authoritative fashion even today. Gaiser appeals to Luther himself who, in his *Theses Concerning Faith and Law* (1535) writes as follows:

52. For if we have Christ, we can easily establish new laws and we shall judge all things rightly.

53. Indeed, we shall make new decalogues, as Paul does in all the epistles, and Peter, but above all Christ in the gospel.

54. And these decalogues are clearer than the decalogue of Moses, just as the countenance of Christ is brighter than the countenance of Moses [II Cor. 3:7–11].

Luther realized, of course, that the church could be “torn to pieces” if various individuals or groups were to arrogate to themselves the right to speak for the whole church. Only the “universal church” can exercise such a function, Luther states in thesis 61.

Gaiser concludes: “Thus, from Luther, we learn of the possibility of speaking an entirely new word, against scripture, in the spirit of Christ, but also of the danger that ‘the church be torn to pieces’ through the exercise of this authority. Thus it is consigned by Luther only to the ‘universal church.’”

G. Are God's Laws Immutable?

We will probably agree that what is appropriate in God's sight at one particular point in time may not be appropriate at another. As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). At one time it is appropriate to kill, at another to heal. At one time it is appropriate to break down, at another to build up (Ecclesiastes 3:3).

God's word for humanity at the beginning of creation was "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). It does not follow that this command should be implemented in the same way today when the world suffers from overpopulation and from a shortage of clean air and pure water.

Paul commanded the women at Corinth to cover their heads when praying (1 Corinthians 11:5). For a long time, the church therefore insisted that women wear head covering in church, and in some churches that is still the unwritten rule. Most of us now think that, while there must have been a good reason why Paul considered it inappropriate for women to uncover their heads in church, such a reason no longer exists, so that women who today go to church without a hat do not need to fear God's displeasure.

Similarly, although Paul counselled the women at Corinth to keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34), most of us are convinced that today women should be welcomed to participate in the life of the congregation on an equal footing with men. For the majority of Lutherans that includes the option to be ordained into the pastoral ministry.

Let us take a few more examples in order to help clarify the issue. In Leviticus 19:11–19, we have a long list of commands and prohibitions. Most of us will agree that some of these are still in force while others no longer apply. We still regard it as wrong that a person should steal, lie, oppress the neighbour, slander or hate one's brother or sister. But we don't think that it is obligatory any longer to pay hired help before nightfall (19:13b). We see nothing wrong any longer with interbreeding horses with donkeys to produce mules, or with wearing clothing made of 50% wool and 50% cotton, all of which is clearly forbidden in Leviticus 19:19. While intercourse with a menstruating woman is clearly forbidden in Leviticus 18:19, few of us would call it a violation of God's will today.

One more example. There is a definite commandment to keep the seventh day of the week holy (Exodus 21:8–11). We think that H. W. Armstrong of *The Plain Truth* was correct when he kept pointing out to the churches that this commandment has never been officially abrogated by God. Our Seventh Day Adventist friends at the Lutheran World Federation consultation a few years ago made the same point, and they reminded us that for them the celebration of the seventh day is not negotiable.

However we disagree that it is therefore inadmissible for Christians today to celebrate Sunday rather than the sabbath. Lutherans and most other Christians contend that the early Christians were entirely correct when they recognized that in Jesus someone greater than the law had come and that Christians should celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection (the *first* day of the week) as far more important than the day of God's rest following the completion of creation (the *seventh* day). In his Catechism, Luther emphasizes that the Third Commandment is not concerned with the legalistic observance of a *particular day*, but with the joyful hearing of God's word *on any and every day*.

All of this now raises a difficult question. How does one decide which Biblical regulations still apply and which do not? By what right and on what principles do we say that Leviticus 19:19 (forbidding the interbreeding of different kinds of animals and the mixing of various seeds, as well as the blending of different fabrics) no longer applies, and that Leviticus 19:20 (requiring a guilt offering for intercourse with a female slave) applies only in part, at best? How can we argue that Leviticus 19:13a (against stealing and defrauding) still applies but 19:13b (paying labourers before sundown) does not? What allows us to say that Leviticus 19:18 (the instruction to love one's neighbour and not to take revenge) is still in force, but 19:26 (eating any meat with its blood) is no longer? We agree that one should not cause one's daughter to become a prostitute (Leviticus 19:29), but we disregard the instructions against shaving (Leviticus 19:27) and tattooing (Leviticus 19:28). It seems that we are just following our own intuition as we pick and choose to obey whatever commandment appeals to us.

It has been customary to deal with this conundrum by distinguishing between cultic and moral laws. It was said that the cultic laws, those which have to do with worship, are no longer in force, while the moral laws, those regulations which have to do with community responsibilities, continue to be obligatory.

By and large this is a useful distinction, but it is not always a helpful one. Very often cultic regulations have moral dimensions and moral laws have cultic implications. One cannot neatly distinguish between worship and moral life. Furthermore when we examine the list of commandments and prohibitions in Leviticus, it becomes clear that there are even some moral laws which we now regard as no longer binding. For example, we no longer insist on paying a labourer before sundown, as Leviticus 19:13b demands. We expect that people are able to budget so that there is no longer any need for paying the wage every day at quitting time.

What is more, the biblical writers certainly did not distinguish between cultic and moral laws. That is evident already from the way in which they mix the two categories of laws in almost helter-skelter fashion (read again Leviticus 19:11–19). Anyway, where is it ever stated that cultic law is abrogated while moral law is not? How useful are the adjectives “cultic” and “moral” when applied to rules for living? The terms certainly are not biblical. On what basis, then, do we declare some regulations in force and others not?

However the main point is that all of us do consider some regulations as still binding and others as superseded. Assuming that scripture prohibits homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), is this to be regarded as a timeless or as a temporally limited prohibition? While Leviticus 18:22 forbids homosexual behaviour, it also prohibits sexual intercourse with one’s wife while she has her period. Would anyone be prepared to argue that sexual intercourse before the completion of the menstrual period is still to be regarded as an offense against the will of God? If not, should one then be consistent and plead for the toleration of homosexual behaviour as well? The matter is far from simple.

In a 1973 article in *Christianity Today*, “Homosexuals and the Church,” Harold Lindsell is afraid that if you let one sin go, all sins will become acceptable. The Church must not admit those whom God excludes. Therefore Lindsell maintains that homosexuality must be rejected. To be logical he should also exclude such things as intercourse during the menstrual period and the interbreeding of horses and donkeys.

The other passage which rejects homosexual behaviour (Leviticus 20:13) also forbids liaisons which we would still avoid today, and it imposes the death penalty for all of these affairs (Leviticus 20:10–16). Yet even here very few of us would be ready to follow the regulations

to the letter. Hardly anyone today would still punish both the adulterer and the adulteress with death, in spite of the clear instructions of Leviticus 20:10.

Some conclude that if we begin to tolerate what formerly was prohibited in the Bible we are no longer faithful to the Scriptures. Others argue that these scripture passages were not intended to be applied literally at all times. Who is right? And what does all of this have to say about the question before us? What ought to be a Christian’s attitude toward gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons? Even if scripture does reject homosexual acts, does this mean that such acts must always and under all circumstances be rejected? How does one interpret the imperatives in the Bible? That is the question.

H. Toward a Principle of Interpretation

We need now to think anew about what principles are appropriate for the interpretation of scripture. For guidance we may turn to Paul. Paul certainly was not a libertine. He by no means advocated license. Yet he indicated with all desirable clarity that a person is justified not by works of the law, not by what one does or does not do, but only by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20; Romans 3:28). The righteousness and the promise of God does not come through the law (Romans 4:13; Romans 3:21; Galatians 3:18); we are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). The law cannot give life (Galatians 3:21).

An interpretation of scripture which focuses on the Bible as a deposit of rules for right and wrong living, is missing the point. At least that’s the way Paul sees it, and Lutherans have always had special admiration for Paul and for the Reformation doctrine which derives chiefly from his letters.

In “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality” in *The Christian Century* (1979), Walter Wink states boldly “There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period.”

1. Love sentimentalized

Of course, love can be sentimentalized and distorted beyond recognition. The result can be that there no longer are any objective standards left and anything

goes, as long as it is done out of love. Then love becomes little more than pleasure-seeking selfishness. One married man tried to legitimize his affair with his neighbour's wife by reasoning, "it must be alright with God, because I love her."

Indeed, love can be perverted into selfish lust, but that is no reason for desiring to go back to the law. Jesus interpreted the law in such a way that it served the needs of people who suffer and are persecuted. When he did so, he acted in a caring and loving way. A few years later, Paul did the same. By love both Jesus and Paul meant an ethically responsible love, a self-giving love which is motivated by what is helpful, by what is good for the neighbour (1 Corinthians 6:12). For Paul the phrase "bear one another's burdens" encapsulates it all.

One should not suggest, then, that there are no longer any rules or standards for Christian living. The law still has its usefulness, limited though that may be. However it is one thing to say that the law is still useful and it is quite another to maintain that the norm for Christian living is to be found in the law literally and rigidly applied.

No one has understood better than Paul—and Luther after him—that justification by grace through faith pulls the rug from under any kind of legalism. This insight rules out any kind of narrow or fundamentalist interpretation of scripture.

2. The weightier matters

According to Matthew, Jesus was quite sharp with those admittedly well-meaning and religiously deeply committed Pharisees who were so concerned about the meticulous observance of specific commands that they neglected the weightier matters of justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus interpreted the biblical injunctions in such a way that they served the health and well-being of humanity.

In doing this he diverged radically from the way the rabbis had interpreted the text. There is no denying that the rabbis were deeply sincere people who were thoroughly committed to obeying God's commandments at all costs. When the decalogue commanded that the Sabbath be kept inviolate, that no work be done on that festive day, the rabbis set to work defining in ever more minute detail what constituted "work" and what was permissible on the Sabbath. The large collection of Mishnaic (and later Talmudic) regulations bear witness to the deep desire of the religious establishment to build a fence around the law, a sort of protection that would serve to keep the people from even coming close to breaking the commandment.

By contrast, Jesus is known to have done things on the Sabbath which would be regarded as impious. Jesus defended his actions by affirming that the Sabbath was made for humanity, not the other way around.

Thus, two principles of biblical exegesis confront each other. The rabbis focus on the meticulous observance of the commandment. Jesus is more concerned about human welfare and knows how to interpret the law in such a way that it serves that end.

What Do You Think?

In what ways could the examples of Paul's dealing with two new situations be applied to dealing with homosexuality?

Can we be faithful to scripture and yet not carry out all its injunctions to the letter?

In your estimation, what does it mean to love your homosexual neighbour as yourself? How would that love for the homosexual work itself out in helpful action?

Study Five

Where Do We Go From Here?

A. Introduction

We stand at a crucial point in the history of our church. The internal conflict over the issue of homosexuality is very deep. There are large numbers of hurting people who will be significantly affected by what the church says on these matters. This calls for cool heads and warm hearts.

In a brief, but incisive article “Homosexuality and the Church,” Timothy Lull gives advice to our divided community.

Lull congratulates the progressives among us for their courage to speak a word of hope for the many who suffer. He cautions the progressives to remember that not all change is for the better. What is needed is not condescending language but humility of spirit.

Lull congratulates the conservatives among us for their caution and even their stubborn tenacity in their endeavour to honour the tradition of the church. He cautions them to think of the church not as a dead monument but as a living movement.

Lull urges the great majority, those who are not eager to study and discuss such issues, to live faithfully and creatively as all of us seek the authentic gifts of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

It was not the purpose of our sessions to propose a formal course of action, nor even to develop a consensus on the matter before us. These issues are just too complex for that. But no doubt each one of us has moved somewhat from their original position. Some of us may have come to a greater appreciation of gays and lesbians in their struggles. Others may have become more confused about the whole thing.

What Do You Think?

At this point it may be helpful to reflect on the road we have travelled together. One approach would be to share with each other what has happened to you personally in the course of our studies. What has impressed you? What has caused you anguish?

What resolutions, if any, have you made with regard to your own way of relating to friends and strangers who may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered?

What options are open to the church at this time?

What struggles lie ahead as we come to terms with a movement that is not likely to go away?

B. Point and Counterpoint

We have encountered a bewildering variety of opinions competing for attention. On the one hand, there are strong voices clamoring for full acceptance of homosexual relationships. On the other hand, there is an equally persistent plea to deny such recognition. While it is not likely that we can come up with solutions that satisfy everyone, we can at least hope to be able to reach something better than what we have had.

1. Rejection of violence

It should not need to be said that violence against anyone, including gays and lesbians, cannot be condoned. Yet, we know that violence against queers is more common than we care to admit. People suspected of being gays or lesbians are more likely to be attacked on the way home from school or from a night out with friends. A mother of a gay son knows what it is to worry whether or not the young man will be safe. Her fears are often justified.

There was a time when gays were persecuted openly and executed publicly, often by burning (hence the abusive term “faggot”). Today no respectable theologian or church body any longer resorts to this sort of extreme. However our careless use of inflammatory language can have unfortunate consequences.

The shocking story of Matthew Shephard serves as a reminder that among the North American populace, the threat of violence follows gays like an ominous shadow. Although leading anti-gay activists do not advocate violence, one may wonder to what extent our rhetoric

is responsible for inciting or at least for tolerating such violence. A literal fundamentalist interpretation and application of certain biblical passages such as are found in the Levitical Holiness Code (see Study Two) can easily lead to atrocities.

What Do You Think?

How can we reduce the threat of violence toward gays?

Reformed theologian Greg Bahnsen affirms unequivocally, “What God commands is always to be obeyed and what God forbids is always to be rejected.” Would you agree with this statement? What, if any, difficulties can you foresee in trying to implement this rule?

Jesus warned that the days will come when those who persecute his disciples will think that they are doing God a service (John 16:2). Is there a lesson in these words? If so, for whom?

2. Eucharistic hospitality

J. F. Harvey, writing with ecclesiastical approval, advises Roman Catholic priests to request persons who are not prepared to leave an active gay relationship, to absent themselves from the Lord’s Table. This amounts to an inducement to opt for voluntary excommunication.

Lutherans will no doubt oppose the use of the sacrament as a weapon to enforce morality. We practise open communion. We cannot speak for all Lutherans everywhere, but in most of our ELCIC congregations the pastor announces that all baptized Christians are welcome to partake of the sacrament. Those who are hungry and thirsty are invited to come and eat and drink, freely, without money and without price. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we understand it.

What Do You Think?

What does it mean to be worthy to receive the sacrament?

Presumably there are gays and lesbians in many congregations. They participate in the worship service, join in the confession of sins, hear the absolution, and receive the Lord’s Supper. Is it appropriate to say that they are still sinners in ways in which the rest of us are not?

3. The biblical norm

Many are concerned that the increasing acceptance of gay relationships may become a threat to the traditional norm regarding sex and the family. Some popular preachers warn that family values will be compromised if it becomes respectable to be gay.

The biblical norm for sexual unions is most clearly expressed in the creation accounts in Genesis. These two texts are often understood as a mandate which declares the union of a man and a woman to be the only acceptable expression of God’s will for human sexual relationships. The fact that Jesus himself pointed to that account, when he spoke about divorce, is often seen as confirmation of that point.

As we have seen in Study Two, there is general agreement that such a one man–one woman relationship exists not just for purposes of procreation and the perpetuation of the human race (Genesis 1:28 “be fruitful and multiply”). Rather, the focus is on companionship and complementarity. The two persons are made for one another; they are fitting, appropriate partners. A man “leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife” (Genesis 2:24) so that the two can become “one flesh.” One might say that ideally, the two are to become one soul and one spirit, one mind and one body. They are intended to share their life together and to find joy in losing themselves in each other’s intimate company.

We do not need to fear that men and women will cease to be attracted toward one another. Queers are in the minority. Heterosexual relationships far outnumber any alternative relational pattern. Gays do not expect that their homosexual relationships will become the social norm. Gays want a place in the sun, not the whole beach.

Donald Faris expresses the fear that a homosexual lobby is out to infiltrate and conquer society. The very title of his unabashedly polemical book—*Trojan Horse: The Homosexual Ideology and the Christian Church*—conveys that theme with flamboyant rhetoric. But even Faris stops short of claiming that heterosexual relationships are in danger of passing into oblivion.

The retention of the man/woman relational pattern as the norm for the human family is not on the negotiating table. However the question is what exceptions to that norm can be tolerated. “Can we recognize the normative character of heterosexual relationships and also recognize that the person who discovers he or she is homosexually

oriented will expect, appropriately, to relate to others as a gay person?” asks Jersild.

What Do You Think?

How would you define family?

When you think of the biblical and societal norms for the family, do you visualize a rigid pattern into which all must fit, or do you think of a rather more flexible range of relational models?

4. Sin

There is considerable disagreement on what, if anything, is to be regarded as sinful in the context of homosexuality. As we have seen in Study One, there are those who see nothing wrong with either the homosexual orientation or homosexual behaviour. Others argue that both orientation and behaviour can and must be modified, while still others welcome persons of homosexual orientation but ask them to desist from homosexual behaviour.

Timothy Lull reminds us that, at least since Luther, our ethical tradition has urged us to ask not just what is sin but also why something is sinful. We are not called upon to obey arbitrary commandments. “It will not be persuasive just to assert that ‘everyone knows it’s wrong.’ One should try to spell out more coherently what it is about homosexuality that makes it sinful,” he writes.

Some consider homosexual sex irresponsible and sinful because it allows for the enjoyment of sex while eliminating its natural consequence, pregnancy. To be consistent, people who hold this view should also reject the use of contraceptive methods such as vasectomy and tubal ligation.

Commenting on Romans 1:18–32, Richard Hays emphasizes that “we all stand without excuse before God’s judgment. Self-righteous judgment of homosexuality is just as sinful as is the homosexual behaviour itself.” Yet Hays contends that there is something different about the sinfulness of homosexuality, since the Scriptures without exception condemn homosexuality, whereas on other ethical issues one finds “internal tension and counterposed witness” (“Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies,” *Sojourners*, July 1991.)

However in terms of emphasis, Hays observes that

homosexuality is “a minor concern, in contrast, for example, to economic justice.” It follows that “any ethic that intends to be biblical will get the accents in the right place.” Hays makes an important point. “Homosexual acts are not ... specially reprehensible sins; they are no worse than any of the other manifestations of human unrighteousness” (as listed in Romans 1:29–31). They are “no worse than covetousness or gossip or disrespect for parents.”

This is an important reminder to non-gays. However gays will likely not be convinced that they have been vindicated by this reminder. They would say something like, “I repent of homosexuality in the same way that you repent of heterosexuality.” To this the straight community will likely answer, “But heterosexuality is not something one needs to repent of.” To which the gays will respond, “Then, neither is homosexuality.”

The *Social Statement on Sex, Marriage and the Family* (1970) of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) maintains that “persons who engage in homosexual behaviour are sinners only as are all other persons—alienated from God and their neighbour.” Many take issue with the word “only” in that sentence. The LCA statement seems to say that gay and straight persons stand on equal footing before God.

According to a Quaker statement on the topic, homosexuality itself is no more sinful than is heterosexuality. What is sinful is not homosexuality as such, but exploitation of the other person. Such exploitation is equally sinful in the case of heterosexual relationships.

What Do You Think?

Is there a mandatory connection between the enjoyment of sex and the bearing of children?

All of us confess without reservation that we are “by nature sinful and unclean,” and we regularly ask for forgiveness of sins, both “known and unknown.” What is gained by labelling homosexuality as sin? Do we want to say that gay people are more sinful than straight people?

Are we in a deadlock? Can we agree that all of us, gay and straight alike, need to repent of our sins in matters of sexuality, since we all idolize sex and use it in selfish and hurtful ways?

5. Welcome

A goodly number of churches have gone on record to say that they welcome gays and lesbians. What does such an invitation mean?

At the 2000 graduation ceremonies at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, Bishop G.W. (Lee) Luetkehoelter invited the congregation to think of a person who has been invited to a friend's home for dinner. As the food is passed around, the host dumps a big dollop of broccoli on our friend's plate with the words "it is good for you!" Several more times during the evening, the host makes such decisions for the "good" of this invited guest. Is our friend welcome in this house? On whose terms? Does the invited guest feel welcome?

In Batchelor's *Homosexuality and Ethics*, Muehl puts it this way, "[Homosexuals] have as much place in the pews as all the rest of us sinners. And as long as they recognize it as a problem and are prepared to seek help in dealing with it, there should be no arbitrary limits placed upon their full participation as leaders in the Christian fellowship."

Since that statement requires gays to see their identity as a "problem," they will find it difficult to feel welcome under these terms.

What Do You Think?

After many years of clinical and pastoral experience, Harold Haas raised some agonizing questions. What would you say to a young member of your congregation who has been baptized, confirmed, and has had the benefit of a fine Christian upbringing, but now must face the fact that he is gay? Would you tell such a friend that he is perverse or immoral or sick? Would you tell him that he must remain sexually unfulfilled for life?

How would you answer these questions?

C. Current Issues

1. Celibacy

If homosexual behaviour is unacceptable, and if it is true that homosexual orientation is not a matter of personal choice, then we face a problem. What shall we say to a male who cannot help feeling attracted to

men the way most men feel attracted to women? If he cannot change his orientation, and if he is not allowed to act on his homosexual impulses, then the only alternative open to him is to remain celibate.

Celibacy is an honourable option, of course. Evidently Jesus remained celibate. So did Paul who counselled others in Corinth to remain celibate, too, if they could, and not to create families and raise children (1 Corinthians 7:25–28).

However Paul knew that celibacy is possible only for those who have that special gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). Thus celibacy was not a requirement for Paul. Accordingly, Lutherans have consistently rejected the Roman Catholic stipulation that their clergy be celibate.

At the Seventh Biennial Convention of the ELCIC in Regina in 1999, delegates were reminded that in 1989, the Second Biennial Convention, meeting in Saskatoon, received the Declaration of the Bishops that states that "A self-declared and practicing homosexual person is not to be approved for ordination and, if already ordained, is not to be recommended for call."

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) document *Vision and Expectations* contains a clergy celibacy clause for gay and lesbian persons of the ELCA which says, "Those who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships."

Potential candidates for the ordained ministry frequently point out the inconsistency that results when a church welcomes gay and lesbian people but rejects their gifts of leadership in the ordained ministry.

Richard Hays and J. F. Harvey do not see this as a problem. They contend that gays can find happiness and blessing in a celibate life. Speaking about celibate clergy, Hays observes, "... there are numerous homosexual Christians—like my friend Gary and some of my ablest students at Yale—whose lives show signs of the presence of God, whose work in the ministry is genuine and effective."

If a straight person's ministry is not jeopardized by marriage and sex, it seems appropriate to ask why the same does not hold in the case of a homosexual person's ministry. Would the ministry of gays be less genuine and effective if they did not have to sacrifice their sexuality in order to be allowed to exercise that ministry? In his celibate homosexual friend Gary, Hays saw "a symbol of

God's power made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Would that symbol have been diminished if Gary had been permitted to live out his sexuality?

All of us are required to exercise self control in sexual matters. To different people this means different things. Restraint comes to a straight male in the form of saying "Not now, not with this woman!" For a homosexual who is allowed to live in a committed relationship with another male, restraint will come in the form "Not now, not with this man!" However if homosexual behaviour is forbidden, then restraint for a gay male would come in the form "not ever, not with any person!" That means that such a gay male would be required to kill his sexual feelings while a straight male would only be asked to channel his sexual urges in the context of a committed relationship.

What is in question here is nothing less than the place of sexuality in human life, says Timothy Lull. Is genital sexual expression "an optional or essential part of human nature?" If it is an essential part of human life, then the advice to remain celibate may be cruel.

Paul Jersild wonders, "Can the church in good conscience say to its gay members that the only religiously and morally acceptable life is one of sexual abstinence?" Jersild's own opinion is that to force abstinence on anyone, including gay people, is to deny these people the right and freedom to be who they are. It is a rejection of the whole person.

Richard Hays takes the opposite view. In his opinion "sexual gratification is not a sacred right, and celibacy is not a fate worse than death." He points to New Testament passages (Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7) which "clearly commend the celibate life as a way of faithfulness." One might reply to Hays that these passages do commend celibacy, but they do not require it. Paul, himself a celibate, knows that celibacy is only for those to whom it is given. The others, those who "burn" (not with lust, as in Romans 1:27, but with love, as in 1 Corinthians 7:9) should marry.

In support of Hays, one can point out that heterosexuals, too, must learn to cope when they cannot find a partner to marry or when they lose their spouse. Those are the hard realities of life. Must we not say to homosexuals that, while we can give them our sympathy, they must simply learn to bear their plight?

In *Ordinary Saints*, Lutheran theologian Robert Benne calls upon Christians of heterosexual orientation to

practise sexual abstinence, "sublimating their sexual energies into other pursuits." He considers such abstinence to be a "heroic" response. Such sacrifice, claims Benne, has always been honoured by the church.

Others object to this kind of advice. Homosexuality is not one of those handicaps about which nothing can be done, they assert. Why should only heterosexuals be permitted to fall in love with each other, to share their life with each other in a responsible way, and to "find joy in each other," as our marriage service puts it so beautifully? Does the gospel of Jesus Christ demand that homosexuals suffer loneliness and deprivation?

What Do You Think?

If it is not justifiable to require celibacy of a heterosexual person, can it be justifiable to require it of a homosexual person? If so, on what grounds?

Do we practise a double standard? Does a gay lay person get pastoral counsel and advice, whereas clergy are subjected to required celibacy? If so, is that appropriate?

2. Same-gender unions

Inevitably the question arises whether homosexuals should have the privilege of getting married and of having their same-sex unions recognized as fully as heterosexual marriages are. It is argued that such an arrangement would be beneficial not only for gays and lesbians, but for society as a whole. This would "help bring to the gay community a stability that until now has not been possible," says Paul Jersild.

This suggestion commends itself as a rather pragmatic solution. The alternative is not good. By forbidding open relationships, society forces gays and lesbians to resort to furtive and covert behaviour, in which promiscuity and exploitation thrive. Jersild suggests that "by establishing social structures that expect and encourage responsible, monogamous relations between two homosexual persons society could create a more healthy sexual environment."

During the spring of 2000, several ELCA synods passed resolutions to allow the recognition and blessing of same-gender unions. Some see these resolutions as a call to continue the process of deliberation to discern where

the Spirit of God may be leading the church. That the resolutions sometimes passed with a narrow majority indicates that there is still considerable disagreement among those who with equal fervor and devotion study the scriptures and seek the will of the Lord.

By same-gender unions these synods understand committed relationships characterized by love, faithfulness, monogamy, respect, and mutual upbuilding. When recognition and blessing of such unions is advocated, it is sometimes spelled out that this would happen only after counselling with their pastor.

What does a marriage ceremony for heterosexual couples really do? Most pastors can tell stories about performing wedding services for people whose union had little chance of succeeding because people sometimes get married for entirely the wrong reasons. What was the function of the church wedding in those instances? Did it fix the difficulties or approve the union? Or did it serve as an assurance that God and the assembled Christian community could be called upon for support if and when the going got tough?

Why should the same provisions not apply for queer couples? Two people, aware of taking a major step in their lives, appeal to God and to the assembled community to be their source of strength and comfort as the two partners express their commitment to act responsibly along the way.

What Do You Think?

What are the issues in considering the blessing of same-sex unions?

Could the liturgy for a marriage apply to same-sex unions? Why or why not?

D. Facing Reality With Confidence

1. Living with diversity

Whatever we do, gays and lesbians, as well as bi-sexuals and trans-gendered people are part of the social fabric in Canada and throughout the world. They will become more visible. Provincial governments are beginning to turn to the courts to determine the constitutional and civil rights of such minorities. Privately or publicly, we will all have to decide how we will relate to this group of

people who are not out there, but right here, beside us in our pews.

It is to be hoped that the church could provide some leadership in this matter. What sort of leadership might that be if the church cannot even achieve consensus within its own ranks?

Democratic secular government is built on the conviction that a country is better off when there is an effective loyal opposition in parliament. People are better served when the minority position is valued and taken seriously. When brothers and sisters honestly express their disagreement and work together for the good of the church and the world in spite of their differences of convictions, can we see this as a sign of health in the church, too?

Paul celebrated the diversity of the members of the body. Hands and eyes and feet and ears need each other for the healthy functioning of the whole. Can this concept of diversity be extended to cover a healthy diversity of convictions? Is it possible for people of opposing convictions to not only co-exist, but to love one another as Christ loves them all? What would such a church look like? Let us brainstorm.

Could a church such as the ELCIC recognize that there is considerable division in this church regarding matters such as homosexual behaviour, and yet affirm that in this church people of divergent persuasions are accorded equal dignity, realizing that we all fall short of the glory of God? Can we say that in this church, sinners of every persuasion are not only welcome, but are regarded as an integral part of the whole?

Living with diversity may become a present necessity rather than a future possibility. Lutheran churches in Europe, notably the Lutheran Church of Denmark and the Lutheran Church of the Netherlands, recognize and bless same gender relationships.

Closer to home, as of June 2000, 17 synods in the ELCA had declared themselves as Reconciling in Christ (RIC) synods. At least two ELCA synods support same-gender union blessings, but do not require their pastors to perform them. Some ELCA synods requested their church to develop a rite of blessing for committed relationships and even to allow gay and lesbian clergy to live in committed same-gender relationships, despite the fact that the ELCA does not allow the ordination of sexually active gay and lesbian candidates.

What Do You Think?

Diversity is here. How can we best live with it, and how much of it can we tolerate?

2. Learning from experience

Timothy Lull laments that our Lutheran church seems to be out of practice in dealing with thorny theological and ethical problems. He says we need the ability to live with freedom and order, unity and diversity, and the skill to make decisions about deeply divisive issues without splitting the church.

There may be something in our not too distant past that can give us a clue about how such issues can be handled. Perhaps in 2001, we are at a point with the subject of homosexuality where we were with the subject of the ordination of women not so long ago.

In our church at that time, there were considerable differences of opinion regarding the ministry of women. Conflicting theological and biblical mandates were brought forward to support opposing positions. Some read the biblical passages in one way, others in a diametrically opposite way. Some quoted Luther and the Confessions in support of the ordination of women. Others quoted the same sources as grounds for rejecting the ordination of women. Some focused on some texts, others on others.

At the Saskatoon Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC) in June 1976, the matter came to a head when the question was asked, "If we vote for the ordination of women, does that mean that every congregation must be willing to accept a woman as their pastor?" The answer given was a clear "No." While the church would authorize the ordination of women, it was explained that each congregation calls its own pastor. Church authority and congregational autonomy can co-exist.

This willingness to live with a reconciled diversity enabled the church to take a bold step forward. With a comfortable majority, the church convention decided to ordain women without forcing individual congregations into a straight-jacket.

Subsequent experience of the gifts which many women pastors have brought to the ministry of the

church has led most of us to conclude that the Holy Spirit has indeed guided our church to embark on a new venture. The Holy Spirit has blessed that work. Our church is blessed with effective female pastors. Yet congregational autonomy is upheld. Congregations which have theological reservations are not obliged to call such a pastor.

Of course, there are people in the church who are unhappy with the fact that women are not always equally welcome everywhere. There is even some serious question whether the rejection of qualified individuals on the basis of gender does not constitute discrimination and injustice. Diversity can be uncomfortable, even when it is a reconciled diversity. We live in uneasy tension with those differences, but we do live, and we are committed to one church, one ELCIC.

Can a church with that experience now risk welcoming lay people and pastors who promise to live in a monogamous committed same-gender relationship, and to pattern their life and ministry on the Christ who gave himself for us all (cf. Philippians 2:1-5)? And can such a church allow each congregation to follow their own conscience in such matters?

It needs to be noted that Richard Hays and others object to the suggested parallel between the women's ordination question and the toleration of homosexuality in the church. They argue that the ordination of women is not explicitly prohibited whereas homosexual behaviour is.

What Do You Think?

Does the church's experience with the ordination of women provide a model for dealing with homosexuality? Why or why not?

3. Maintaining the unity in love

How can we deal in love with this potentially divisive matter? Responsible church leaders of the stature of Timothy Lull and Wolfhart Pannenberg have warned that the threat of schism looms ominously over the church. Pannenberg writes, "Whoever pressures the church to alter the normativeness of its teaching with regard to homosexuality must be aware that that person promotes schism in the church" ("Maßstäbe zur kirchlichen Urteilsbildung über Sexualität").

While these words must be taken with utmost seriousness, there is another side to be considered. What do we say about those Christians—many of the youth of the church—who are leaving the church because they do not find in it the affirmation that they are accepted on the same basis as all the other Christians are, as sinners who have been forgiven for Christ's sake? These are people who have received the promised Holy Spirit in their baptism and who are eager to share their gifts with the church which has nurtured them.

What Do You Think?

Are we caught between the threat of one schism and the reality of another?

How can we live up to Paul's ideal to be all things to all people for Christ's sake?

4. Pastoral care

Theology is inseparable from pastoral care. Christian people are encouraged to stand up for what they believe, but they also know that they are fallible human beings and that even their most dearly held convictions may become the cause of injury to a neighbour, and thus may not be in accord with God's will.

With this in mind, Christians not only act boldly, they also pray humbly for forgiveness in case their theological convictions may lead them to wrong their neighbour either willfully or inadvertently. Such a neighbour may be a gay or lesbian person as yet unknown to you, or a member of this study group who adamantly champions an opinion in conflict with yours.

Every pastor knows that ministry does not give one the luxury of dealing with things as they should be. One has to work with what is. It is fine to tell people that premarital sex is immoral. But every pastor has to deal regularly with couples who come to be married after years of sharing the same address. Timothy Lull writes "Here the gap between church teaching (or silence) and behavioral reality is staggering."

Theologians need to do a reality check now and again. An impeccable theological argument or a faultless exegetical piece of work may lead us to conclusions which drive people into despair.

What about divorce, sexual abuse (even by clergy!)

domestic violence, and all the rest? Having to deal with such issues in society can make your head swim. "No wonder many pastors feel a tension between the firm ethic that they preach and teach and the more flexible pastoral care that they provide in this realm," writes Lull.

Robert Benne, who has called for "heroic" abstinence on the part of queers, acknowledges "It would be naive to argue that this can be the church's only response." Rather, the church must face the reality that some Christians of homosexual orientation will almost inevitably engage in same-gender sexual relations. As a sort of concession to that reality, Benne suggests that the church "discretely support those who try to maintain the bonds of fidelity."

Many will be unhappy with this suggestion. To some it will seem like a two-faced approach, appearing to uphold high standards on the one hand while caving in to cultural pressure on the other. Gays are asked to act in heroic fashion and abstain from sexual relations—if they can. But if they cannot, then the next best thing, namely a committed relationship, will be acceptable.

But is not this precisely how Paul discharged his ministerial role? On the one hand, he encouraged his parishioners to refrain from marriage, but if this proved impossible for any one of them, Paul would encourage such a one to marry. And did not Jesus do the same in relation to the divorce question? God's intention is that there be no divorce. Yet for those who encounter marriage breakdown, there is a message of grace and there are provisions for a new and more faithful relationship to flourish.

Over the course of its history the church has learned to live with human imperfection. Says Benne, "The church accepts many less-than-ideal arrangements among its members—divorced clergy—for example." Maybe now the time has come to give pastoral support to those gays and lesbians who are willing to commit themselves to a loving and monogamous life style. Benne thinks that it should be possible in this way to uphold both the normative tradition of the church and the dignity of gays and lesbians who enter a covenantal same-gender relationship.

This option, both Benne and Jersild agree, would be preferable by far over what is presently in place. A bond of same-gender fidelity "is certainly a lesser evil than the promiscuity practised by part of the homosexual community," writes Benne.

Given the fragile nature of humanity and the pervasiveness of sin, the choice in pastoral ministry is rarely between what is right and what is wrong. Usually it is a matter of deciding what is the lesser evil and the greater good.

So here we are, ministers of the gospel, trying to bring healing. Whatever we do as a church in relation to queer and straight, conservative and progressive, offender and victim, our response must come from a pastoral heart.

What Do You Think?

On the basis of what you have learned in these studies, what are the possible pastoral responses that can be made to those who are seeking pastoral care because of homosexuality?

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Film and Videos

- Inclusive Faith*. Video. 19 minutes. Lutherans Concerned/North America.
- Lutherans Reflect on Human Sexuality*. Video. ELCA Division for Church in Society, 1993.
- "*May We Talk ?*" *A reflection on human sexuality by the Bishop of the Church*. Video. ELCA Department of Communication, 1994.
- Out of the Past: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Rights in America*. Film. PBS documentary. A-Pix Entertainment, 1997.
- School's Out: Confronting Homophobia in High-School*. Film. National Film Board of Canada.
- Stories of Gay People and Family Members: Talking Together as Christians about Homosexuality*. Video. 88 minutes. ELCA Division for Church in Society.
- This is My Story*. Video. 22 minutes. Lutherans Concerned/North America.
- Two Ethical Perspectives: Talking Together as Christians about Homosexuality*. Video. 90 minutes. ELCA Division for Church in Society, 1999.

Web sites

Affirmation (Mormon) <www.teleport.com/~affadmin>
American Baptists Concerned <www.rainbowbaptist.org>
Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (BMC) <www.webcom.com/bmc/welcome.html>
Bridges Across the Divide <www.bridges-across.org>
Coming Out Stories <www.comingoutstories.com>
Dignity USA (Roman Catholic) <www.dignityusa.org>
Eagles' Wings Ministry <www.ewm.org>
Exodus International North America <www.exodusnorthamerica.org>
Extraordinary Candidacy Project (ELCA) <www.extraordinarycandidacyproject.org>
GayCanada <www.gaycanada.com>
GayChristians <www.gaychristians.org>
Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network <www.glsen.org>
God's Love is Our Witness (GLOW) <www.glow.cc>
Integrity Canada (Anglican) <www.kapn.tap.net/integrity/>
Lutherans Concerned/North America <www.lcna.org>
Lutheran Lesbian & Gay Ministries <www.llgm.org>
More Light Presbyterian (USA) <www.mlp.org>
National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality <www.narth.com>
New Commandment Task Force (Episcopal Church-USA) <members.aol.com/newcmdment/>
Ontario Consultation on Religious Tolerance <www.religioustolerance.org>
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) <www.pflag.org>
Planet Out <www.planetout.com>
Reconciling in Christ Program <www.lcna.org/ric.html>
Reconciling Ministries Network (United Methodist) <www.rcp.org>
Soulforce (Interfaith) <www.soulforce.org>
Transforming Congregations (United Methodist) <www.transformingcong.org>
Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) <www.ufmcc.com>
Whosoever (GLBT online magazine) <www.whosoever.org>
Wingspan Ministry <www.stpaulref.org/wingspan.htm>

[While every effort was made to ensure that the addresses for these Web sites are accurate, readers may discover some changes since publication because of the nature of the Internet. They were last confirmed on January 4, 2001]

Appendix One

Guide for Caring Conversations

Origins of the Caring Conversation Model

In March, 1999, the National Church Council passed a motion stating that the ELCIC would strive to create an environment which would enable the church to develop policies and ministries that will lead to a more inclusive and welcoming place for gay and lesbian people. At the 1999 National Convention in Regina a model for Caring Conversations was piloted. The convention took action to affirm that Caring Conversations be recommended to all ELCIC synods, conferences and congregations. Since that time, numerous Caring Conversations have occurred throughout the ELCIC.

What Is a Caring Conversation?

A caring conversation is an opportunity for members of the ELCIC to listen to the experiences of gay and lesbian people and their families. The Christ-like qualities of respect, empathy and care are important components of the conversation. Divisive, argumentative and judging behaviour is inappropriate and unwelcome. In listening to one another, there is hope that the ELCIC and its congregations will begin to extend a genuine welcome to those sisters and brothers in Christ who are lesbian or gay.

Suggested Format for a Caring Conversation

After introductory remarks each guest is given 10–15 minutes to share their story. Depending on the number of guests, this portion will be approximately one hour in length. When all the stories have been heard, a question period of approximately 30 minutes gives listeners the opportunity to ask questions. These questions are of a clarification or elaborative nature. Finally a shorter time (15–20 minutes) is slotted for the important work of reflection on the conversation, usually in small groups.

- 1) Welcome.
- 2) Devotions: suggested text Philippians 1: 27–2:11.
- 3) Summary of the origin of the model.
- 4) Explain the format for the Caring Conversation (an agenda/outline on a flipchart may be helpful).

- 5) Review the ground rules.
- 6) Introduction of and presentation by the panel of guest speakers (approx. 15 min.).
- 7) Questions from the listeners for clarification (approx. 30 min.).
- 8) Small group reflection (15–20 min.).
- 9) Wind up, thanks.

Ground Rules

- 1) The focus/intention of the conversation is the stories. Our work is to listen carefully, sensitively and empathetically, maintaining a Christ-like attitude.
- 2) Debate, criticism, analysis, advice-giving will not be permitted. The role of the facilitator is to ensure that a caring atmosphere is maintained. The facilitator may interrupt, ask for clarification on the part of the questioner, or call a brief time out if necessary. The purpose of the question period is clarification of what has been shared.
- 3) The facilitator will serve as moderator of the conversation, ensuring that everyone who wishes to speak has an opportunity. The facilitator will encourage the listeners to phrase their questions in a simple and straightforward manner.
- 4) If at any point in the conversation the guest panelists feel uncomfortable, they will indicate same to the facilitator. This may arise unintentionally. Regardless, the guest panelists may decline to respond to any question that they are not prepared to answer.
- 5) No interruptions.

Small Group Reflection

Groups of 3–4 people meet to discuss what they have learned in this experience. Use these questions to facilitate the discussion:

What new insights have you from this conversation?

What have you learned?

What was valuable?

Pre-Conversation Checklist

In preparation for a Caring Conversation the following steps are recommended:

- 1) Identify a sponsoring congregation.
- 2) Identify a facilitator with an understanding of the issue and an ability to respond in this setting with sensitivity, caring and objectivity.
- 3) Identify a target population.
- 4) Develop publicity to describe the goals of the Caring Conversation.
 - to listen to the stories of those living with issues of homosexuality
 - to attend prayerfully with a desire to discern the will of God for themselves and their congregation
- 5) Set out the ground rules for the event.
- 6) Identify possible outcomes.
- 7) Identify guest speakers who will serve on the panel.

The facilitator will recruit guest speakers to serve as panelists. Presenters can be identified through the facilitator's own personal network or by contacting the National Office of the ELCIC or Lutherans Concerned-Canada.

It is important that the facilitator meet with the guest panelists prior to the Caring Conversation to establish rapport and build trust. It is also useful for the panelists to meet each other and clarify names and agree on an order for presentation of the stories.

Wind Up

This is a time to say thank you to those who have shared their stories and also to those who have listened. As a church striving to be a more inclusive and welcoming place for gay and lesbian people, all in attendance need to be commended for their participation.

Debriefing

The facilitator is encourage to meet with the panelists immediately following the conversation to debrief participants about the experience.

Glossary

Bisexual Having a bisexual orientation. A man or woman having emotional and physical feelings of affection and attraction to both men and women.

Celibate, celibacy Living in a state of singleness. Refraining from sexual relations.

Chaste, chastity Living a life of moral and/or religious purity in thought and deed.

Closet (to be in the) Being secret about one's sexual orientation.

Coming out Accepting one's sexual orientation and telling others. See also: **out/outing**.

Crossdresser One who desires to wear the clothing of the other gender. The term does not refer to sexual orientation.

Dyke Offensive term referring to a strong woman.

Faggot Offensive term referring to homosexuals.

Gay A person who has a homosexual orientation. A man who has emotional and physical feelings of affection and attraction for other men. In the case of women, the preferred term is lesbian. The term "gay" is also used as an inclusive term to describe anyone who is not heterosexual.

Gender Male and female. The term does not refer to sexual behaviour.

Gender identity A person's basic conviction of being male or female.

Gender role Social expectations associated with being female or male.

GID (gender identity disorder) The condition of feeling out of place in one's gender of birth.

GLBT Acronym for the inclusive catch-phrase "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered."

Healing, Therapy The use of various treatments (including drugs, electric shock, psychological conditioning, aversion therapy, etc.) to bring about a change in sexual orientation. See also: **Reparative therapy**

Heterosexism Discrimination against homosexuals. The assumption that all people are heterosexual.

Heterosexual, Heretosexuality (medical term) Someone attracted primarily to persons of the opposite sex. Having emotional and physical feelings of affection and attraction to people of the opposite gender. See also: **straight**

Homophobia Irrational fear and intolerance of homosexuality and gays. Also used to mean any discomfort with homosexuality.

Homosexual, Homosexuality Having emotional and physical feelings of affection and attraction for people of the same gender. Term coined by Hungarian doctor Carl Maria Benkert, 1869. See also **Queer**.

Lesbian A woman having a same-sex orientation. A woman who has emotional and physical feelings of affection and attraction to women.

Out/Outing Revealing to others the secret of one's sexual orientation. A verb, used in such phrases as "Don't out me!"

Queer A friendly umbrella term, embracing many kinds of sexual and other minorities. A term more inclusive than GLBT. Queer Theology is beginning to take its place beside Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology.

Reparative therapy Any type of counselling which aims to help men and women move away from unwanted homosexuality or lesbianism. The expression is offensive to gays. They have come to accept their identity as wholesome and healthy and do not see any need for repairing or healing it.

Sexual behaviour What persons do as an expression of their sexual orientation, but not always in keeping with it. A person can determine to manifest behaviour that is not an expression of his/her orientation.

Sexuality Erotic feelings, attitudes, values, attraction, arousal, and/or physical contact.

Sexual orientation The deep-seated physical, emotional, and affectional direction of one's sexual response toward partners of the same sex (**homosexual**), other sex (**heterosexual**), or both sexes (**bisexual**).

Sexual orientation identity A person's self-identification as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.

Straight A person of heterosexual orientation.

Transgendered People who manifest characteristics commonly associated with persons of the other gender. An umbrella term, referring to the whole range of ways in which people express their sexual identity by transgressing traditional gender norms. Transgendered persons may be homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual in orientation. Some distinct types of transgendered persons are crossdresser, bi-gendered, persons born with ambiguous genitalia, persons choosing surgical change of gender, transsexual, transvestite, male/female impersonator, etc.

Transsexual Men and women who consider themselves to be members of the opposite gender and desire to rid themselves of their primary and sexual characteristics and live as members of the other sex.

Transition A transsexual's move from one gender to another after sexual reconstruction surgery and hormonal therapy.

Transvestite A person who dresses in clothing of the opposite sex. Usually a heterosexual man dressing in women's clothing. More commonly **Crossdresser**.

